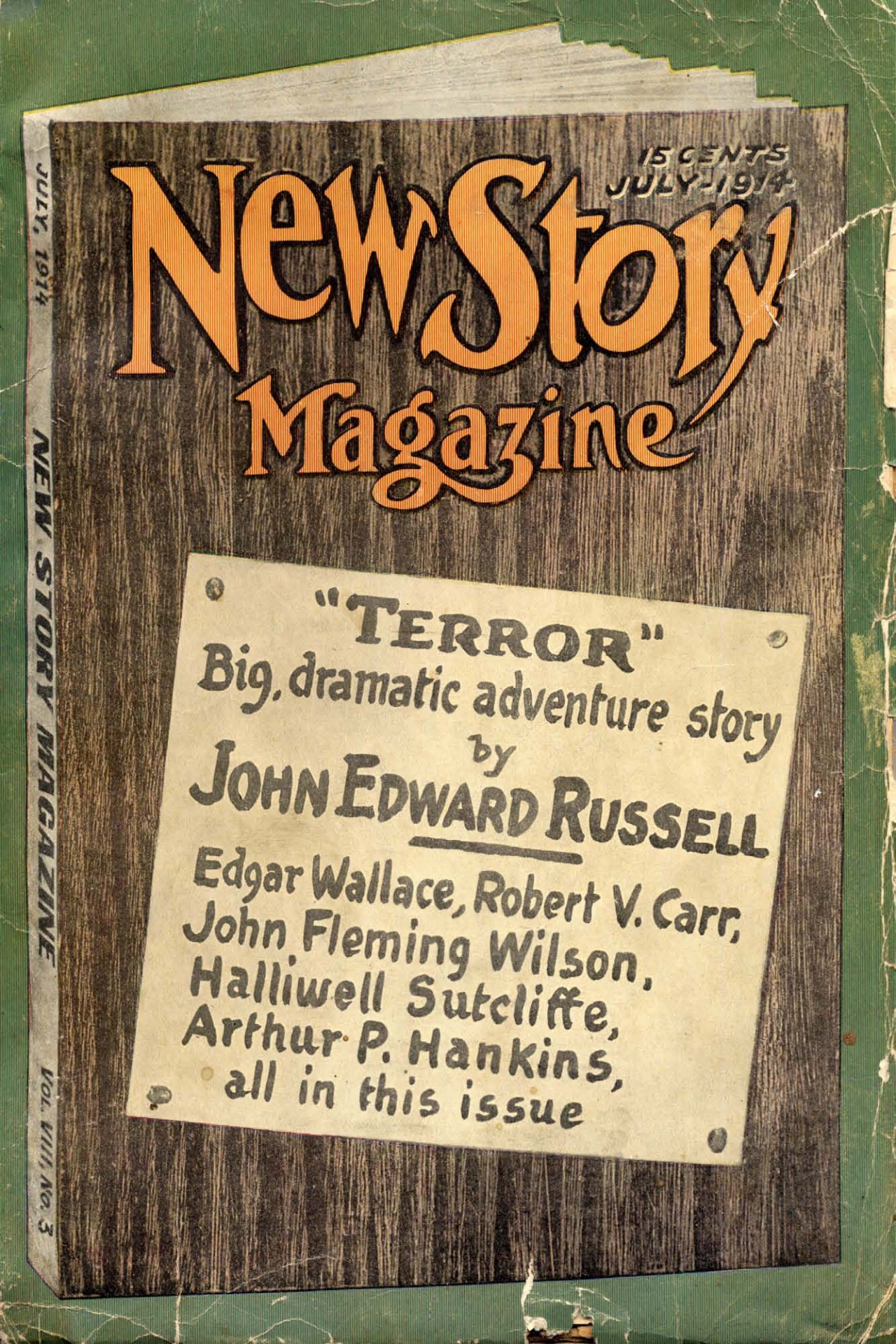
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New Story Magazine
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all in this issue
JULY, 1914 NEW STORY MAGAZINE VOL. VIII, NO. 3

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NEW STORY MAGAZINE

Volume VIII
No. 3

CONTENTS

JULY,
1914

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AMONG

John Edward Russell is one of the contributors to the **New Story Magazine** whose work has helped, perhaps as much as any other one thing, to give the magazine its wholly distinctive character.

His short stories have impressed many readers of discriminating judgment as having a peculiarly vital and virile quality.

It is only a little while ago that a distinguished author, now living abroad, wrote to us expressing himself as being "amazed at the quality of certain of the stories in this magazine," and mentioned a number of Mr. Russell's tales as possessing a "psychic intensity of treatment." He added, by the way, that the keynote of the **New Story** is peculiar.

You will probably easily recall such stories of Mr. Russell's as "The Last Thing," "The Keeper of the Doors," and "The Exit of Johnny Fing," to mention only three, which will bring back to your mind vividly the strange, almost inexplicable "grip" with which these stories seized upon your interest.

The quality of Mr. Russell's work that, to us, is most conspicuous, is what we would call, for lack of a better term, its psychic virility.

It is a strange, impalpable thing, hard to define, chiefly because it is something personal to the author—this color or atmosphere, which qualifies and distinguishes everything that is written. Every one who writes imparts to his writing, in greater or less degree, something of his own personality and this is what gives to the work what is called "atmosphere"—a much abused and little understood term.

But there are only a very few authors, especially of fiction, who are gifted with the ability to make this vital in their stories.

Joseph Conrad is one who possesses it to a very extraordinary degree.

John Edward Russell is another.

This peculiar quality of Mr. Russell's work has never been more vividly displayed than in his new novel, "The Terror," which we begin in this number of the **New Story.**

It is one of the most remarkable stories we have ever read, if for no other reason than for the sustained and consistent "atmosphere" which pervades it from beginning to end.

OURSELVES

In almost every tale of eighty to a hundred thousand words there is apparent, at certain stages, a falling away of interest, places where you are conscious of a wandering of your attention.

It is usually due to the author's own lapse of interest, or fatigue. And so there is a disturbance in the story's atmosphere.

Nothing of this kind is noticeable in "The Terror." It's color is solid and fast.

Now, when, in addition to this you have a story with plot, action, incident piled upon incident, the drama that involves possible catastrophes to the characters, you have material for the sort of story that human nature is always longing for.

These things Mr. Russell has brought together in "The Terror."

It is frankly and undisguisedly an adventure story, and while it is of the type of Stevenson's "Treasure Island," and Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," it is as far from being an imitation of either of those men as it is from the work of George Eliot or Edith Wharton or Mrs. Humphrey Ward.

It is a story of treasure-seeking within the Antarctic circle, in the gray, bleak, lonely regions within fifty-three degrees south—an appropriate setting for the sort of adventure that is pictured on the steamer *Colleen Bawn* and later on "Leftover Island."

Mr. Russell has revived the tradition of the Port Boys, one that was, for years, current among the traders of the South Seas, an association of "the vagabonds of the beaches, the drifting outlawry that used to ship and desert, to rob, loaf and take native wives as the occasion served." It was an organization of sea tramps that manned the *Colleen Bawn.*

"The Terror" is a story of twentieth-century buccaneers.

This story is a long novel, but we propose to give it to you in four installments so that you will have, in each number, a generous portion of the whole story. Twenty thousand words at a time.

Edgar Wallace's story, "Angel Esquire," which has brought out many enthusiastic letters, is concluded in this number.

We have planned something for the August issue, to supplement this aborbing yarn that we know will make a great big hit with you.

So be on the lookout for the new feature as well as the second installment of "The Terror."

NEW STORY MAGAZINE

Vol. VIII JULY, 1914 No. 3

A Discord in Avalon.

By H. Bedford-Jones.

CHAPTER I.

"ONE to Avalon. Thanks."

Allan Quentin plunged from the ticket window and at a half run made the gangway of the waiting *Cabrillo* just as the plank was being hauled in. With a laughing nod to the men, he was across the gap, drew a breath of secure relief, and started forward to obtain a seat.

There was the usual confusion of the usual last moment, with every one debating as to the best seats, and the possibility of finding any seats at all dwindling with alarming rapidity. The frown that had drawn Quentin's black brows together deepened when he observed that most of the passengers shared his dislike of the sunny side of the boat, but his quick eye caught a vacant place forward.

He beat a shivery little man to it, settling down with a sigh of huge satisfaction, and laughingly advised the refrigerated gentleman to take the sunny side and thaw out; whereat the other grinned and obeyed. Quentin ran a quick eye over the rest of the passengers, observed no one who attracted his notice except one very large, bull-necked man in blue clothes and blue derby, and thereupon cast out everything from his mind save sky and sea and the blue-ridged Catalinas ahead.

It was his first outing in three years, and he was enjoying it with his whole soul—though he subconsciously noted that the bull-necked man had very high blood pressure, and that two of the tourists were undoubtedly "lungers." For, though Quentin had left his office and practice behind, he could not leave his profession likewise.

He had promised to meet Tommy Wells and Bunt Green, for a three days' fishing trip down the coast, but it was with some difficulty that he had gotten away. While he was a young surgeon —as surgeons go—he was both strong of jaw and well established in Los Angeles; having buried a few wealthy patients and cured at least one, he was made both financially and socially. Tommy Wells and Bunt Green were social lights who had more money than horse power, and who confined themselves chiefly to the Country Club at the Catalinas, where they lived a languid existence on golf and fishing and

Scotch and kindred pursuits. Quentin had cured young Green of fever impregnated with too much golf and Scotch, and, while by no means intimate with the pair, he saw no reason why he should not enjoy himself at their expense.

He gave his shoulders a little shake, looking back at receding San Pedro, and flinging off all worries. Men said that Allan Quentin was a good surgeon but too hardened for his age; yet this was because they noted his cold gray eyes, tight mouth, and rather aggressive carriage, and utterly failed to note the deftness of his fingers and the level brightness of his smile.

Thus far, he had taken no notice of the occupant of the chair next to his; but now his attention was attracted by an unusual movement on the part of the man in the blue derby, whose eyes were fastened at his side. Quentin eyed the man, sized him up as a detective or plain-clothes man—then shivered slightly at a light contact. He glanced down to see a hand stealthily approaching his coat pocket.

It was a woman's hand, slender and well shaped, perfectly manicured and with unexpected dimples over each knuckle. Its white perfection was unadorned by rings, although he noted a circle on one finger which told the tale of a ring recently removed. Then he glanced at the owner of the hand.

She was leaning forward in her chair, her eyes fastened on the ocean, while a look of faint anxiety was evident in her features. Her whole attitude was one of strained concern, uncertainty; but even as he looked down at her, the hand left his coat. With a little sigh of relief, the girl settled back into her chair; the look of half-fearful worry vanished from her face, and her hand dropped into her lap again.

Quentin was thoroughly puzzled. His first thought was that she was a pickpocket, for the Catalina boats made an excellent place in which light-fingered gentry could ply their trade upon tourists; also, the bull-necked man in the blue derby was unquestionably a detective, and seemed to be watching the girl.

He looked down at her more keenly, for women whose hands went exploring were not apt to resent obtrusive stares. But she seemed to have lost all interest in him. It was as though that quick, light touch on his coat had sent flying some wandering uneasiness—and yet the notion was absurd.

His gray eyes softened as he watched her. The face was not beautiful, and still it bore an expression of patience which lent it indefinable sweetness. To Quentin it seemed that this expression might have been born of much suffering, though she had no appearance of ill health, in spite of the frailty of her throat and arms. Her oval face had a broad brow around which rippled a cluster of golden-brown waves of hair, and Quentin suddenly found it hard to eye her with his usual indifference to things physical.

She had removed her hat and the sea breeze was lifting her hair gently, loosing it and sending stray strands playing about her cheeks. A smile curved her lips and she tossed her head backward with a deep breath, as if she could not get enough of the salt-scented, sun-filled air.

Then their eyes met—or Quentin thought they did. And upon that, his conceit received a sudden shock, for he perceived that she was staring through him, past him, as though he did not exist. He thought at first that she had noted his detection of that stealthy hand, yet her face was quite calm and unflushed.

"Well?" he said quietly, coolly forcing the issue. "Your hand is a very light one, but I happen to be somewhat sensitive to touch."

He received another glimpse of eyes

that met his quite frankly and yet evaded him. They held a peculiar quality in their violet depths—a quality that caused him swift remorse at his own words, and sent unwonted sympathy into his face. Then she gave a quick little rippling laugh and responded:

"Oh, you caught me? Well, I had to see what kind of person you were!"

Quentin was anything but prepared for such frankness.

"Yes—but——" he hesitated.

"Why was I feeling your coat? Isn't that what you want to know?"

"Why, if you don't mind—it really doesn't matter, you know," he stammered, feeling suddenly that he had blundered. She reassured him, laughing softly:

"You see, I could tell from the feel whether you were a gentleman or not."

"Sorry you couldn't tell from my face," he smiled, amused. She turned half away, a little flicker of pain crossing her own face. "And how did you class me?"

"Well," she hesitated, still looking away, "of course, I might make mistakes, but I can often tell by the cloth. I have studied it——"

"But why?" he insisted, wondering if she were trying to lie her way out of a difficulty. If so, it was a poor effort, he thought.

"Can't—can't you tell why?" She turned swiftly, her face to his. Again he felt that swift quality of her eyes, and he leaned back with a catch of his breath.

"Forgive me," he said quickly. To himself he added bitterly: "And I call myself a surgeon!"

The girl was blind.

However, he had little chance to reflect on his own brutality, as he termed it, for she leaned forward confidingly.

"Let me look at you."

Her fingers ran lightly over his face, then she settled back without comment.

"Well?" he urged, smiling a little.

"Guess!" She rippled out a laugh.

Upon that, Quentin began to make himself agreeable; she seemed to be glad to get away from the topic of her blindness, and yet she appeared to sense the quick sympathy in him which was hidden from most eyes. His quiet poise had its effect, and soon she was chatting and laughing with him, listening to his description of the mountains behind and the sharpening outlines of the Catalinas ahead with unalloyed delight.

It puzzled him. What was she doing on this trip, purely a sight-seeing one, if she was blind? She was absolutely alone also, as he found by delicate questions which attained their object; yet she was well dressed, and evidently a girl of high intelligence and strong character—and he was undeniably puzzled.

More than once he found the eyes of the man in the blue derby fastened now on the girl, now on himself, in an oddly irritating fashion. Quentin reflected that the man was doubtless a policeman or detective on vacation, and was not above seeking prey in the shape of an unprotected girl. For he did not think it hard to see that the girl was blind.

The two hours' trip sped by rapidly, and long before Avalon Bay opened out he had quietly determined to see that she was cared for, unless friends were at the boat to meet her.

"You explain everything so clearly," and there was a hint of sadness in her tone when he had told her of the wharf ahead and the boys swimming about the ship and diving for coins. "And you don't seem to weary of it!"

"Well, you're an admirable listener," he smiled. "How is it that you're alone?"

She looked away, and, reproaching himself instantly for a brute, with some

fear that he would be misunderstood by her evidently sensitive nature, he swung to the subject of the boys around them. The chatter and calls which floated up from the youngsters were amusing in the extreme, and speedily drew a rain of small change from the passengers.

"Aw, come on, sport! Don't be a piker! Loosen up, old man!" shouted an urchin at Quentin, who laughed and tossed out a quarter. There was a rush after it, a storm of spray, and one grinning youngster came up with the coin in his cheek and a yell for more.

"Come it again! You didn't throw straight, mister!"

"I do wish you could see all this!" laughed Quentin in the girl's ear.

"Thank goodness, I can hear it," she answered delightedly. "Oh, throw out some more money! I love to hear them yelling and splashing!

"Did he get it?" she added quickly, feeling the sweep of Quentin's arm.

"You bet he did—caught it in his mouth and was yelling for another before I got my arm down," he chuckled. "But here we are at the wharf—may I help you through the crowd?"

"Is—is there a crowd?" she faltered, suddenly relapsing into timidity.

"No, except on the gangplank. There's a rule here in Avalon, I understand, that all on shore must stay behind chalk lines until the steamer passengers are unloaded and have a chance to decide where they want to go. Are your friends to meet you?"

"I—I—no, I think not," she replied, her hands twisting at her handkerchief. Then she had turned lightly to him, laughing again. "Oh, I've so longed to come here! Do take me ashore, if it won't be too much trouble."

"I'll be delighted," he replied gravely. He wondered, however, why she was so delighted at the trip; perhaps her overacute senses gave her some perception of the things about her, after all. "Come!"

He guided her to the rear of the crowd, which was streaming thinly down the gangway. Ahead of them were the clamoring guides and touts and fishermen, staying well back of their chalked lines, while beyond these were the narrow streets rising against the hill, with the sun-blue sky and bay striking back the gorgeous hues on every hand. He looked down at the girl's face, and saw it quivering with delight; it was as if she actually felt the color of everything, and the hand that rested on his arm was trembling.

"Would—would it be imposing on you"—she half turned to him—"if I asked you to take me to the Metropole? After that I'll be all right, for my friends did not expect me, you see——"

"It's a pleasure," he reassured her, admiring her nerve in making this trip by herself. If she had friends at the hotel, she would soon be in good hands, though he felt a little thrill of disappointment at the idea of not seeing her again.

A burly form shoved past him, and he saw it was the man in the blue derby, who was making his way out to the end of the plank. Quentin and the girl pressed forward in his track, and a moment later were standing at the edge of the throng.

Since there was no mistaking the big hotel, he took her arm and they started toward the gate. There, however, he saw the man in the blue derby standing, watching them, and his anger began to rise. If the fellow was trying to enjoy himself, Quentin decided that he would get a lesson shortly. On the other hand, he suddenly thought the man might have been set to keep watch from afar on the girl; her friends might like to give her the impression of freedom, yet keep a careful guard over her.

As they came to the gate, however, Quentin lost this impression quickly.

The detective, if such he was, stepped forward with a sharp glance at Quentin, and caught the girl's arm.

"Just a minute, miss," he said roughly. "I'd like to know your name."

CHAPTER II.

Quentin caught the man's hand and flung it off curtly.

"What does this mean, my man?" he asked, his gray eyes very cold. The other flushed, then nodded his head at the startled girl.

"No offense, mister—I'm Bert Osgood, from Los Angeles headquarters. Is this young lady a friend of yours?"

"Yes," replied Quentin, seeing that he had misjudged his man.

"Let me have your names, please—I'm on a little job over here, but if I've made a mistake I ain't meaning no offense."

There was evident hesitation in the detective's manner, and he had spoken so softly that the girl had plainly heard nothing beyond that first startling sentence. Quentin thought swiftly; he did not know the girl's name, but through his mind raced one that he had heard on Dolly Burlington's lips, and he seized on it to be rid of the man.

"This is Miss Enid Elsmere, and I'm Doctor Allan Quentin, of Los Angeles. It's all right, officer—I guess you dropped on the wrong party."

The detective's black eyes swept across his face, then the man nodded and drew back with a gesture of apology. Quentin took the girl's arm again and quietly led her through the crowd.

"What's the matter?" she asked, looking up at him. "Who was that man?"

Quentin searched desperately for some answer that would satisfy her without causing her needless alarm.

"Just a beggar," he lied easily, and his voice was convincing. "It's all right."

He motioned the crowding touts away, and when they had passed beyond the mob he found her gazing at him with apparent wonder on her face.

"But how in the world did you know my name?" she asked simply.

Quentin gasped: "*Your* name?"

"Certainly. I heard you tell——"

"I said your name was Enid Elsmere, for lack of a better. My own name I gave."

"Then you *are* Doctor Quentin?"

"Why, of course!" he laughed, for there was wonder in her face. "But you don't mean to say that your name is really Enid Elsmere?"

"Yes," she said softly, then drew closer on his arm. "But can't we get to the hotel, and then talk? This is too—too public," and she glanced around, or seemed to do so, nervously. "You have helped me, and I feel that I owe you an explanation—and I would like more help——"

"Come along," he said briefly, and determined that she was the best liar he had ever met. He did not know who the real Elsmere girl was, except that she was some acquaintance of Dolly Burlington; but if this blind girl had been in fear of a detective, if she had really been exploring his pocket——

"Rot!" he said to himself, looking down at her face. "This may be the long arm of coincidence, after all."

He guided her up the steps into the big building, waving off the clustering bell boys, and led her across the palm-strewn lobby to a rather secluded corner, where he placed her in a chair and dropped into another at her side.

"Now," he began quietly, "tell me who Enid Elsmere is, please."

He saw that her hands were twisting nervously at her handkerchief again.

"Are you a friend of Doctor Burlington, please? Have you heard him speak of me?"

Quentin looked hard at her, startled in turn.

"No, Miss Elsmere. I know Hall Burlington slightly, but I know his daughter Dolly quite well. I have heard her speak of an Enid Elsmere as an acquaintance, that is all."

"Oh!" There seemed to be relief in her tone, which puzzled him. "Does Dolly call you Quent?"

"She does," he replied in new wonder, and she hesitated again. What could it mean? Why had he never heard of Enid Elsmere except in such a superficial way that the name had never provoked a question?

"Then you are——" She stopped with a furious blush, and he laughed out:

"No, Miss Elsmere. I'm sorry you've heard gossip, but Dolly is really in love with another man, and we're just playing the game to keep Mrs. Burlington contented pro tem. Dolly's a good chum, and I'm helping her out. But you haven't told me who you are."

"I'm Doctor Burlington's niece," she answered in a low voice.

Quentin felt his suspicions revolve again. He had known of Burlington for years, first as an indifferent physician living on indifferent means, and later with wealth from some unknown source, leaping into prominence socially and professionally—a quiet, heavy-jawed man who talked little. Mrs. Burlington, he knew well, had huge ambitions for Dolly, which he was helping Dolly to defeat. But he had never heard of a niece.

"I did not know he had a niece," he said quietly. "Miss Elsmere, if you are in any difficulty, I wish you would allow me to help you. Why are you over here alone? Surely the Burlingtons, who live at Long Beach, would have been glad to meet you?"

There was trouble in her sightless face, and she hesitated again.

"I—I have lived with them for three years," she said slowly. "If you were not a friend of my uncle's, I would be more ready to trust you."

Quentin stared at her, thunderstruck. It occurred to him that she was clever; she might have known of the Burlington family, she might have seized at a straw and made it into a rope—but it was hard to believe. Surely there was nothing about Hall Burlington to inspire those last bitter words of hers.

"My dear girl," he said finally, "I am merely an acquaintance of—of your uncle. If you are in any trouble, you may tell me in professional confidence."

"Even if I said that I hoped never to enter his door again?" she shot out with swift and passionate intentness.

"By Jove!" whistled Quentin to himself. "This is getting in deep!" Aloud, he reassured her briefly: "I make no reservation, Miss Elsmere."

"I will trust you, then, if you will see that I am taken to Mr. J. M. Mathews, who has a summer residence here on the island, and if you will promise not to reveal my whereabouts for at least two months. Will you?"

"Where such a promise is necessary it is seldom safe to trust," he responded. "None the less, I promise, and I will be very glad to help you."

Her hand fluttered to his arm in relief, then fell to her lap again.

"Then I will tell you," she said, simply as a child. "Three years ago I was left in care of Doctor Burlington. He is not really my uncle, though I have always called him so; I think he was a college mate of my father's. When I was orphaned, it was arranged that Doctor Burlington should have the use of my income, and should bring me up as his own daughter.

"This went well for the first year, but after that conditions grew insupportable, Doctor Quentin. I am of age, yet he controls my money unless my sight should be restored, which he assures me is impossible. He has kept me secluded, and although Dolly and I

love each other dearly, not even she is allowed to mention me to visitors. People understand that there is an invalid in the house, perhaps, but no more. Even Dolly seems to think that her father is acting for the best—oh, it is terrible!"

She paused, her voice breaking. Quentin was biting his lips in helpless bewilderment at this strange story, truth of which seemed patent in her face and voice; his doubts had vanished utterly, and as he thought of Burlington in this new light, the thing began to assume probability.

"The Mathews," she went on, "are the only people who take any interest in me, for they were friends of my father's also. Doctor Burlington has assured them that my sight cannot be restored, but I intend to make a fight for it—Mr. Mathews will help me, when he understands everything, for he's a very fine lawyer. But you are a doctor—do you think——"

"I do not know, Miss Elsmere," replied Quentin very gravely. "I am not an eye specialist, and Burlington is really a good physician——"

"But don't you see?" she burst out. "He wants my money—as long as I am blind he'll have the use of it, and he'll *keep* me blind!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Quentin. "Look here, Miss Elsmere, this thing can't——"

He paused, for the dumb anguish in her face convinced him. He found his hand trembling, and shook himself together; recalling Burlington's sudden wealth and consequent rise in the world, he began to believe her.

"I can't tell you anything without a careful examination," he went on slowly. "But have you no proof of this thing?"

"None," she shook her head, "except my own convictions and things my uncle has let drop from time to time—but nothing definite. When I slipped out of the house this morning, I met some man in the street who steered me to the electric station, and helped me on a San Pedro car. The rest was easy. But Mr. Mathews will take care of me, and I do wish you would look at my eyes! I feel that I can trust you——"

She broke off, and he patted her hand quietly, soothingly.

"Later, Miss Elsmere, I promise you that I will do so. For the present the main thing is to get into touch with these Mathews people, and I'll soon see about that. I am to meet a couple of friends at the Country Club this afternoon, so as it's barely noon now, I'll find out where the Mathews people are. We'll have lunch here; then, after the Mathews take care of you, I'll be off to the club. J. M. Mathews, isn't it?"

"Yes, James Mortimer."

"All right. Wait here a moment."

He walked over to the desk and smilingly waved back the pen shoved at him by the desk clerk.

"No, I'll only be here for lunch, and we don't care to register. Do you know where a J. M. Mathews lives on the island?"

"Yes, sir—you'll find it quite a little walk, but easy to locate, just off Buena Vista Park. If you walk, the path's pretty steep, but you can go up by the incline railway just as well. It's the only residence up there, and Mr. Mathews only built last winter, after giving up his legal work in the city. Anything I can do for you?"

"No, thank you. I merely want to know where the house is."

Quentin turned, but as he started across the lobby he saw the burly form of Osgood, the headquarters man, come up and lean over the counter, talking to the clerk. He saw the latter fling a quick look in his direction, but it was improbable in the extreme that they were speaking of him, so he re-

turned to his charge. It was agreed that, as she was tired, he would leave her at the hotel after lunch while he brought Mathews down to take care of her, since he could meet his friends at the club any time that afternoon.

So, without forebodings, he passed in to a very happy luncheon.

CHAPTER III.

After lunching, Quentin obtained a room for his charge, and left her at the elevator, in charge of a maid. Then, getting a telephone booth, he called up the club, found that both Tommy Wells and Bunt Green were on the links, and left word that he would arrive about five. Whereupon, with the afternoon before him, he left the hotel and walked down Crescent Avenue with no more worry upon his mind than Enid Elsmere.

She, however, provided worry enough. When he had passed the public gardens and the Greek theater, and had swung aboard the little railway car which would lift him to the park above, he had almost reached the conclusion that her incredible story was a lie.

He had known Dolly Burlington for years, but the intimacy between them had been only a firm friendship. Yet it seemed impossible that he should not have known—hold on! Had not Dolly written him while he was in his senior year at Stanford that her father had been appointed ward of an invalid girl? If she had, the memory was hazy, but once it had lodged the thought could not be shaken off.

He had spent a year in Europe, partly in study, partly in care of a wealthy paralytic, and it was possible that these changes had come about in his absence. In the two years since his return he had been fairly busy establishing himself in Los Angeles, had had little time to spend with the Burlingtons at Long Beach, and Dolly had been too much occupied with her own love affair to do other than accept a situation to which she must have become accustomed—providing Enid Elsmere's story was true.

Upon that the car had stopped. Quentin, who had never visited the Catalinas before, in common with most people who lived close by, obtained his direction from the conductor and made his way along the edge of the Buena Vista grounds.

Presently he came upon the place he sought—a snug home built in Swiss chalet style on the mountainside and having a goodly private garden, even though it was set so near the park grounds that it seemed almost a part of them. Observing that a wide veranda opening off the hillside had as much the appearance of a front entrance to the house as the stone steps which led up from a lower level of walk, Quentin chose the former route, walked the length of the veranda, and rang at the side door.

His ring brought no response, and he pressed the bell again and again. At length he was just turning in disgust when there came a shuffling step, the door was opened, and a wizened old man looked at him curiously.

"Well?"

"I'd like to see Mr. Mathews," answered Quentin.

"Not to hum, sir."

"Mrs. Mathews, then," he said, wondering if there were a Mrs. Mathews.

"No, sir. They ain't nobody to hum, 'cepting me."

"Well, where are they, then? I've got to see Mr. Mathews or one of the family as soon as possible." Quentin felt an absurd impulse to laugh at the little old man, who was plainly impressed with the importance of being left in charge of the place.

"I'm right sorry, sir," and the caretaker scratched his head, "but I ain't sure when they'll be back. Both on 'em

went in on the eight-o'clock boat this mornin', and if they stay over in Los Angeles for a show to-night they ain't liable to git hum right sudden. May be back to-night, mebbe to-morrow. Sorry, sir."

Since there was no help for it, Quentin beat a retreat in no little consternation. This unexpected turn of affairs left him somewhat up a tree, he reflected. As planned, the fishing expedition was to leave Avalon that night for a point thirty miles down the coast, where three days would be spent fishing. He decided that he would go up to the club later in the afternoon, arrange to meet the other two men when they came down to embark, and trust to luck that Mathews would be back.

"If he isn't," he thought, "I'll have to chuck the fishing trip, that's all. And I guess I'd better do it anyhow; I'd sooner spend a few hours with that blind girl than with a couple of boozing millionaires, even with the fishing thrown in."

Reaching the Metropole again, he went direct to the girl's room, and the maid admitted him. He reported the issue of his mission briefly.

"Now," he concluded, in his cheeriest professional tone, "would you like to rest this afternoon? Or would a trip to the submarine gardens interest you?"

"Oh, by all means!" Her suddenly eager face fell. "But I must not detain you, Doctor Quentin. It's been very good of you to——"

"Nonsense!" he laughed. "My dear Miss Elsmere, I have positively nothing on hand more than a run up to the Country Club later in the afternoon, and we'll be back before three, as the tourists must catch the last boat back to Pedro. So come along, if you're sure you don't need rest."

"Rest!" she cried, a passion of longing in her voice. "Anything rather than this uncertainty! It seems as though I'd done nothing but just rest for years and years, and if you'll tell me about the gardens I'll be perfectly happy!"

That settled it to Quentin's entire satisfaction. Ten minutes later they went down, but as they crossed the lobby to the street stairs, Quentin saw the figure of Osgood leaning against the desk once more. Reflecting that the detective was no doubt waiting for the afternoon boat home, he dismissed the matter altogether.

Together with a crowd of sight-seers, they piled into one of the sunk-bottomed launches, and were soon on their way. Quentin found that his task was a light one, since the spieler called out through his megaphone what the objects were beneath the glass cockpit, and the surgeon had only to amplify what was said. They passed Sugar Loaf and Moonstone Beach, and Quentin realized, to his own surprise, that the intent eagerness of the girl beside him was drawing him on into a color phrasing of words that he had not known he possessed.

She impressed him strangely, as she sat with her sightless eyes fixed on the glass square beneath them. The cramp in his own neck as he leaned over the railing was becoming pronounced; why, then, did she assume the same position which was of no value to her? With that, however, he remembered the sensitiveness of the blind, and wondered no longer; she merely wished to attract no attention or comment.

He considerately kept his voice lowered as he leaned beside her, and while a few of the other passengers undoubtedly took them for a honeymoon couple, Quentin's hard gray eye cured them instantly of any knowing smiles that might have lingered.

"What are the abalone shells like?" she asked, as a diver went over the bow.

"Concave shells, iridescent and glittering. They are beautiful enough be-

neath the water, but lose most of their color. Here, I'll take two of those!" he added, raising his voice as the diver came up, dripping, almost beside him, with four or five shells for sale among the tourists.

Her childlike glee over the wet shells, and the way she clapped one to either ear touched him strangely. She had all the frank gayety of a child, yet she had told him that she was twenty-one; and when he looked at her and saw what little impress her affliction had upon her, Quentin began to feel a slow anger rising against Doctor Hall Burlington. Suddenly, while she kept the shells over her ears, entranced, he became aware of two men talking at his side, and the first words gripped him.

"Yep—blind as a bat if any one catches her. Slick dodge, ain't it? They say she's the slickest dip ever kept out o' court, too. She's been workin' the Catalina boats off and on, but I expect they've put the cops after her too late, as usual. She's prob'ly beat it—by jolly, ain't that pretty now?"

The speaker leaned over, silent for a moment as the boat passed over a vale of feathery, swaying blue sea violets, interwoven with feather-boa kelp and shells and the flicker of darting fish. But Quentin sat motionless, his mind in a whirl, until the second man took up the thread of conversation. The girl still listened to her shells.

"Does the pitiful 'help-the-blind' stunt if she gets caught, eh?"

"Not by a blame sight! Dresses like a lady, they say—if a guy nabs her, she's made a mistake and that's all 'cept the apologies."

"Some class, eh?" commented the other. "Well, there ain't any blind game going to work on me, that's sure. I ain't got much, but I need it more'n other folks——"

"Where are we passing now?"

Quentin heard the murmur at his ear, and turned to find the girl waiting for him to continue his talk. With a tremendous effort he forced his mind free of what he had heard, but the beauty of the trip was spoiled for him, and he was glad when at length they turned back to Avalon once more.

None the less, although he managed to maintain his usual attitude, there was an undercurrent running through his brain which it was hard to quell. What had that conversation meant? There was one way to find out, and when they had reached the hotel again he took it. Promising to return for dinner, he left Enid at her room and visited the desk clerk, bluntly asking him if it was a fact that a woman pickpocket was "working" the boats, and if she played blindness when detected. The clerk eyed him a little queerly, he thought, then nodded with a laugh.

"Of course, we're keeping it dark, sir. But I think that there's no more danger. She's not known by sight, but the bulls have a good description, and unless she beats it pretty quick they'll nab her. This is on the quiet, you understand, sir."

"Certainly; thank you," nodded Quentin, and passed out on his way to the Country Club, his mind a whirlwind of conflicting doubts. Was Enid Elsmere the pickpocket?

She had heard that name from his lips, and had promptly related a most incredible story concerning a man of unblemished social and professional standing; what was more, he had swallowed it whole. With but a slight knowledge of Hall Burlington's family she might easily have fabricated the whole thing. And over against this he could only set his knowledge of human nature, the appeal of her blind face and her whole manner—but was she blind?

"By heavens," thought Quentin, his lips tightening, "I'd stake a good deal on that face of hers! And yet——"

The doubt crawled and twisted like a maggot, and he could not down it.

If she had seen the detective on the boat, she might have played a desperate hand to win; but he was forced to admit that it had been magnificently played, despite the craziness of her story. What would her ultimate intent be in that case?

It was not hard to guess. At present she was vouched for by him—though he was unknown on the islands—and had found shelter at the hotel. If his doubts were well founded, she would remain there until the afternoon boat back to San Pedro, then she would quietly slip off and "beat it."

"All right," decided Quentin, as he swung up the last few yards of Metropole Avenue, passed the tennis courts, and on to the Country Club, "I'll not return until the boat has gone back. It'll be pretty good proof that she's told the truth, if I find her waiting; we'll leave the matter on the knees of the gods until then."

As he turned up the steps of the clubhouse he felt in his hip pocket for his bill fold and cardcase which contained the greater part of his money. Then he stopped suddenly, and went through his other pockets.

The wallet was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

There came a rush of feet, a vociferous burst of voices, and Quentin was hilariously pulled up to the cool veranda by the two men who had rounded the clubhouse walk, golf bags in hand.

"You're a nice one to give us the slip like that!" cried Bunt Green, forcing him into a Singapore chair, while Tommy Wells sent a steward clattering away after drinks. "Think you're kind of privileged because you've a few initials after your name, eh? Cut it out, doc, cut it out—do you get me?"

Quentin forced himself into coherence. He saw that the pair of them had been dividing punishment between golf balls and Scotch, according to their wont, and he felt suddenly as if he had stepped into unclean waters.

"Not by about umpty miles, Bunt," he returned, looking at his challenger with the calm deliberation of one who understands his fellow man, even though he misses the drift of things. "Sorry I missed the early boat, fellows——"

Green interrupted him with a roar of laughter, while Tommy Wells, with the flabby chops on either side of his double chin dancing with mirth, leaned over the table and howled. Wells was a bit past the talking stage, but Bunt Green winked in a wisely understanding way and slapped Quentin on the back with another roar.

"Zow-wee! Did you get that, Tommy? Don't he look like an innocent little lamb, though? Just like little Willy when he says 'I didn't did it,' and wipes the jam off his nose."

"You—you'zh make him flush wish—wish shame," blurted Wells thickly, but it was resentment and not shame that drove the red into Quentin's face.

"Come across, boys," he urged easily, making the best of it. "Throw me a line, for I'm on the rocks."

He felt there was something behind this that he could not understand.

"Innoshence abroad—hic—innoshence——" began Wells, then slumped back in his chair as the steward brought the drinks. Quentin waved him away impatiently.

"Say, what's the matter with you chaps?" he inquired calmly. "Wells, you'll go off with a snap one of these days; I've warned you already about drinking as you do, with your high blood pressure."

"Oh, Tommy's all right," grinned Bunt Green, lighting a cigarette with an unpleasant twinkle in his eye. "Innocence abroad is right, doc. Didn't suppose that we might take it into our heads to meet that boat, did you? They

do say this is a great little ol' place for a honeymoon."

"Who's—who's zhe skirt?" inquired Wells heavily, leering.

In a flash Quentin understood—and the comprehension was sickening to him. The mere thought of Enid Elsmere, pickpocket or no, in connection with these sodden scions of wealth was repulsive to him.

"I think you'd better explain yourselves," he said, dangerously quiet.

"Still playing the game like a little man," complimented Bunt with mock ceremony. He made a wabbly curtsy which drew another howl of laughter from his friend, waved his cigarette somewhat unsteadily, and winked again. "Oh, don't bother to explain, old man. You see, we met that boat—and that's all."

"Sure, tha'sh all," repeated Wells vaguely, spilling half his Manhattan over his white flannels, and laughing again at himself.

Quentin had tried to contain his anger, but the half-veiled inference drove his gray eyes hard and cold. He regretted his hasty acceptance of the invitation to this visit from men he hardly knew, yet he could not have foreseen this exact occurrence.

"I think you two chaps had better get a couple of brain dusters instead of more whisky," he said coldly. "If we're going to——"

"Look here," and Green drew himself up with the swift exasperation of a good-natured man more than a little under the influence, "do you mean to insinuate that I'm not sober, doc?"

"No," returned Quentin bluntly. "I mean to insinuate that you're just about plain drunk, Green. If you're going fishing to-night, you'd better get to bed for a few hours and get a bit sobered up. Same to you, Wells."

Wells laughed vacantly, but Green flung his cigarette over the railing and got shakily to his feet, anger in his face.

"You're drunk yourself, doc. You're blind drunk, and I'm going to put you to bed——"

"Shut up, you fool!" broke in Quentin roughly, as another party of golfers passed their table with curious glances.

For answer, Green caught the whisky bottle from the table and swung it full at him. Quentin rose from his chair, caught the wildly swinging arm, saved the bottle, and then very determinedly flung Green down into his chair, where he lay gasping for air. He turned to the hurrying stewards.

"You'd better take care of Mr. Green and Mr. Wells at once," he said quietly, then turned and walked off.

"Wait!" implored Wells, trying to rise. "Wait, doc—I shay, ol' man——"

Quentin strode back to the street, unheeding, and drew a long breath. He felt as though he needed cleansing before going back to Enid Elsmere.

The thought stopped him like a blow. What was he to do? It seemed to be a cold certainty that she was not only the pickpocket in question, but that she had neatly "touched" him for most of his money. He had ten or twelve dollars left, but no more.

"By George, though, I can't believe it!" he cogitated, walking slowly along. "Yet the thing fits together so damnably! Her hand was at my coat pocket when I first noticed her, and if she had been stalling to remove my suspicion she couldn't have done it better than she did. Then she caught at the name I gave Osgood—and it sure took a lot of work to get the story out of her! She either made it up on the spot, which seems most likely, all things considered, or else she was telling God's truth. I'm blest if I know what to believe!"

With that, he sat down on a bench to think it over. Glancing at his watch,

he found that he had half an hour before the last boat left for the mainland. Unless he was to catch it, he must stay overnight, and twelve dollars would hardly stand the strain of two rooms at the Metropole. Yet, if his doubts were correct, she would not wait for his return—and then there was the Mathews affair, which might have been a lie also.

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned, dropping his head and staring at the ground. "What kind of a balled-up ruddy mess have I stumbled into? If I convict her in my own mind, and skip out for home, my conscience will prick forever after. If that impossible tale of hers is true, she needs help mighty badly. I think I'd sooner be taken for an easy mark, though, and lose a little coin in the process than be scared out of helping a person who might be in need of me. Well, what do I stand to lose, anyhow?"

His money was gone in any case. In half an hour he could return to the hotel, and if the girl had slipped away he would simply take her room till the morning, for he had enough money left to cover it. If she was still there it would be a fairly sure indication that his suspicions were unjust, for she would hardly remain to meet the Mathews unless she was sure of her ground. In which case, Mathews could foot the bills.

Quentin shook his head hopelessly as he remembered that his only means of identifying himself should need arise lay in that missing bill fold that contained his cards, money, and letters. However, he had nothing worse in prospect than an overnight stay on the island.

"I'll do it," he said, rising at last. "I'll let the gods decide. If she's at the hotel, I'll give her eyes a test or two and abide by the result. And I'll go the limit, too—I'll neither think wrong of her nor say wrong of her, and if that confounded bull shows up again I'll give him something to think about."

With that he flung back his shoulders—and found the detective, Osgood, coming toward him with calculating eye. Quentin paused, angry at himself and at the man, but Osgood nodded coolly and confidently.

"Sorry to trouble you, doc—say, is that Miss Elsmere with you a blind lady?"

"She is," returned Quentin coldly. "She is also a relative——"

He stopped suddenly. If the girl's story were true, no word must get out of her relationship to Hall Burlington, at least until she had been placed with friends. Osgood stared at him curiously.

"Yes?"

"She's a relative of friends of mine, and in my care professionally," continued Quentin. "Why are you interested in her? Do you take her for that woman pickpocket?"

"Well, I'd take her in all right if it wasn't for you," grinned Osgood. "O' course, your word goes with me, doc. You ain't got a card with you?"

Quentin laughed despite himself, and reported the loss of his pocketbook. To remove any possibility of suspicion remaining, he went on to say that Miss Elsmere could be identified by Mr. Mathews, at which the other nodded.

"All right, sir; all right. I'll report that pocketbook of yours—sorry you got stung, doc. It was prob'ly on the launch, while you was looking over the rail. Well, much obliged, and sorry I troubled you."

Quentin nodded, then wondered how Osgood had known he was on the launch—unless the detective had been trailing him. He looked after the man, who was going on up the avenue, and then thoughtfully continued his way down the hill.

The last steamer of the day had gone, and it was with no little suspense that

he requested the desk clerk to call up Miss Elsmere's room with his name.

"Go right up, doctor," came the answer, and Quentin walked to the elevator with a song in his heart. The die was cast—a simple test or two, and he would doubt no more.

She greeted him with outstretched hands, her maid remaining in the alcovelike bedroom, and the frank delight in her face was so wholly unassumed that Quentin's heart smote him. He found that she was tired, and preferred talking quietly to going forth upon the island again, and she was genuinely glad to hear that his fishing trip had been "unavoidably" called off, and that he could remain with her.

So, dismissing the maid, he took her down to the palm-shaded corner in the lobby, where they sank into the soft chairs and talked. He not only made one or two simple tests, such as passing his finger close before her eyes, but he also told her of the loss of his pocketbook and frankly asked if she had any money. Her childish ripple of laughter disarmed his last suspicions, and she smilingly replied that she had ten dollars, which satisfied Quentin that for the night at least they would be able to pull through.

While they talked, during the hour that remained before dinner time, she told him more of her story and of her life under the roof of Doctor Burlington. The fact that she was of age mattered nothing, for as a dependent the physician had been given the custody of her person and the use of her income; while an appeal to the courts would of course result in her release, she had been kept in rather gilded seclusion, Burlington evidently knowing nothing of the clear, incisive brain which lay behind her broad brows.

"I wonder now that I had the courage—or rather, that I never had the courage to slip away before," she said finally. "It is so good of you to help me—and I am so sorry that I must be such a burden upon you——"

"Never mind that," returned Quentin soothingly. "We'll take a stroll to the Mathews' cottage to-night, and if they haven't come back I'll leave a note telling of your presence here. Unless they return to-night or in the morning, we're apt to have trouble, I fancy. Burlington will trace you here easily enough, through the men who helped you at Long Beach and San Pedro—but don't worry," he added quickly, as her face shadowed over, "I've three days of freedom; I'll wire my housekeeper for money to-night, and we'll soon tumble your worthy uncle off his high horse."

So, having quite restored her cheerful optimism, he tucked her hand under his arm, and they went in to dinner together—for dinner clothes have little place in Avalon.

"Well, what will you have to start with?" he smiled, picking up the *carte*.

"Anything plebeian and understandable," she retorted. "You order, please."

"Certainly," he answered, mentally thanking himself that he had learned the trick of ordering for a fair companion. Dolly had been wont to assure him that a woman could not help adoring a man who could order fittingly without questioning her—and he smiled to himself at the thought. He was beginning to wish that Enid Elsmere could take a lesson or two in adoration from Dolly Burlington.

Having ordered, he laid aside the card—and looked up to see Bert Osgood calmly sitting three tables away, apparently paying them no attention whatever. But it suddenly occurred to Quentin that if this blind girl were in reality afraid of justice, she could find no better refuge than the Hotel Metropole, sheltered as the patient of a surgeon of some little repute.

With a little shock, he crushed the thought down sternly, and a song rose once more in his heart at the smile

of the girl-woman who sat across the table and gazed at him with eyes that saw not.

CHAPTER V.

More than once it seemed to Quentin that the girl was on the point of making some confidence—hinted at by the fleeting expression of her face, not by any words; more than once he saw her glance in the direction of the detective's table as though she sensed the presence of some disturbing factor.

"I hope we'll find Mathews there tonight," he said finally, when dinner was all but finished. "Burlington will be over by the morning if he's traced you."

Swift alarm shot into her face.

"Then—if I dared——"

"Well?" he smiled, as she paused abruptly. "Is there anything you have not told me, Miss Elsmere?"

"Yes—I—no," and the struggle in her face was gone. "No, doctor; I must play out the game——"

"What do you mean?" He leaned forward, wondering what lay behind those words. "You can trust me absolutely, Miss Elsmere."

"Oh, it is not that, indeed! But my —my uncle must not see me."

"He shall not, believe me," and Quentin settled back in his chair. After all, her agitation at Burlington's name was quite natural, he told himself; yet —what if Burlington should prove to be in the right? If the girl had a brain tumor, it was possible that her sight could be restored, but as he watched those violet eyes Quentin found it hard to believe that Enid Elsmere was either so afflicted or was even blind. At times the fixed, vacant expression was lost in her face, and in those moments the violet eyes seemed to be scanning him, reading his very thoughts. It was uncanny, and to quiet his doubts he rose.

"I must send a telegram and get a room here, so if you'll wait I'll be back in a moment, and we can start out for the Mathews place."

She nodded smilingly, and Quentin departed to the lobby. Here he registered, got a room not far from that of Enid, and sent a wire to his housekeeper, instructing her to wire him twenty dollars that night without fail. So, with his immediate future provided for, he returned to the dining room, and in ten minutes left the hotel with Enid on his arm.

As he helped her into the car at the incline, he forgot that conversation on the glass-bottomed launch, the loss of his pocketbook, and his fleeting doubts. She settled near him with a shivery fear as the car began to lift.

"Why, it seems like—like some of me was missing!" she gasped. "As if it had suddenly left me alone and I wanted it right back!"

"What a queer child you are!" he laughed joyously, holding her arm in his.

"How—am I different from other girls?"

She laughed a little, as though the idea were not half unpleasant, and Quentin wondered. It swiftly occurred to him that such a thought should have been terribly jarring on the sensitive nerves of a blind girl—or so at least he would have supposed.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed mentally. "Here I am doubting again!" He resolutely cast all doubts from him, and answered her question with a confident pressure on her arm.

"You're different, Miss Elsmere, and I'm glad of it. You can give cards to all the girls I ever knew, and then beat them; the only thing they have on you is sight, and that you may regain, I trust."

"Do you think I can?" She turned her face to him eagerly, and Quentin saw that her eyes were wide set, as though she were looking through and beyond him. It struck him to the heart.

"I do not know," he made earnest answer, careful not to raise any false hopes. "I know of only one cause for such blindness, and that would be a small brain tumor, which could be removed easily. Only a very careful examination can determine."

With that the car stopped, and he helped her out. He paused a moment, holding her hand in his.

"Please promise me one thing; that you will take the thought of regaining your sight very quietly, Miss Elsmere. By upsetting your nervous system you can impair any good I might be——"

"I thought you said where it was necessary to extract a promise it wasn't safe to trust?" she asked, laughing a little. He saw that her poise had been regained, and smiled at the way she had turned his words on himself.

"Surely," she went on, more gravely, "I will do all I can to help, doctor. It is entirely to my own interest to do so."

He could not help wondering at her calmness, and he admired her the more for it. At the edge of the park they paused while he stood looking down at the moonlit view beneath, and described it to her. The curving bay with its white-sailed yachts and other swarming craft, the little city of Avalon with its gleaming lights, and farther on Sugar Loaf and Bachelor Point. She responded to his words as if she felt the utter beauty of the scene, then caught at his arm suddenly.

"Listen! There is music!"

He turned, and caught the first notes of the band concert floating up from the Greek theater in the valley below. It was "La Paloma" they played, and Quentin suddenly decided that the air was not so hackneyed, after all; indeed, this girl on his arm seemed to him not a little like a helpless dove—and to curb the sentimental influence of the night and the thought, he led her to a seat close by.

"Physician's orders—moonlight and music," he laughed. "Ten to one the Mathews people will be doing likewise, if they've come home. If not, there's no hurry."

She did not answer; he saw that she was content to rest and listen to the music, and he himself was far too well satisfied to disturb her. The moonlight softened her face remarkably, deepening its shadows until he could see only the strong curves of brow and nose and chin.

Hardly speaking, they sat for a short half hour while the moon rose higher and lost its warm, early glow. Quentin's reverie was interrupted suddenly when she laid her hand on his arm without turning to him.

"Come!"

He looked down at her wrist, and caught the glint of a silver bracelet watch, with two initials set over against the dial in brilliants. He stiffened suddenly, then spoke:

"Why are the initials 'M. P.' on this bracelet, Miss Elsmere? They are not yours?"

She started, but turned a perfectly calm face to his.

"No—the bracelet was given me by a friend, Mary Palmer, three years ago. She set her own initials in it so that I —I would not forget her."

Despite the quiet words, Quentin had a helpless feeling that the explanation was lame. But he savagely forced down the thought, though he stored away that name in his mind, and without comment led her along toward the Mathews cottage.

As they drew closer to it, he saw, with no little dismay, that the house was dark and seemingly empty. Turning in at the gate, he led Enid up the path, though he found that she was wonderfully apt at evading trees and bushes even without his warnings. When they reached the side entrance, Quentin pushed at the bell in vain, though he could distinctly hear the faint

answering ring. There was no doubt of it; the Mathews had not returned.

Nor was the caretaker in evidence. Quentin usually carried a small pocket electric flash lamp, and after seating the girl in one of the porch chairs he drew it out and flashed it swiftly over the door. No, all was closed and screened, and the sight of the girl's silent despair when he told her the result caused him to do some swift thinking.

The failure of Mathews to return home was annoying in the extreme, he cogitated, and it might easily prove much more. Burlington was not apt to have great difficulty in tracing the girl, and he could either take the regular morning boat to the islands or else he would get a launch from Long Beach and come over. In that case, every moment would count.

"I can bluff Burlington or lead him off the trail," he reflected, "but I'd better leave a note here telling Mathews to get down to the hotel on the jump. He might gain time by coming over in one of the Long Beach boats, since he's coming from Los Angeles. I guess I'll do that."

So, taking the girl's hand in his, he placed the flash lamp in her palm and set her finger on the button.

"If you'll hold that just so, I'll write a note to your friend and leave it, and we can get back to the hotel," he said, and since it was necessary for her to hold the light steady he was slow in loosing her hand—quite unaccountably so. In fact, the contact thrilled him very pleasantly. Then, with the thought that he was taking advantage of her implicit trust, he stepped away and explored his pockets for paper and pencil.

Finding an old prescription blank, he scribbled a hasty note, merely telling Mathews that his presence was urgently needed at the hotel by Miss Enid Elsmere and asking him to lose not a moment in getting there. Signing the paper, he read over the note to the girl for her approval.

"That will do nicely," she said with a decisive nod. "Where will you put it? Is there a mail box?"

"Nothing doing in that line," he chuckled. "The mail box is back at the front gate. I'll open the door, or else slip it under."

Taking the light from her, he flashed it over the door again, but found the outer screen door fastened. As the opening was tight, he drew out his pocketknife and without trouble inserted the blade so that the catch raised, and he swung the screen back.

"If my friend Osgood could see me now," he chuckled inwardly, "he'd be apt to run me in on general principles, I guess!"

As he expected, he found the inner door locked. So he stooped over and slipped the note inside, and rose with a feeling of relief. After all, Burlington might not be over in the morning, and Mathews would be easily able to handle the legal difficulties of the girl's situation. In any case, he himself had three days to spare, and he could remain and take care of Enid, if necessary.

"I feel unaccountably like a thief," he laughed under his breath, as he flashed the light across the door again and closed the screen.

"It does feel silent and deserted." She shivered a little.

He put away his flash lamp and was just turning to take her arm when another stream of light shot full into his face, blinding him. He stood in astounded surprise, and involuntarily his hand went to his pocket in search of his own light again. But a deep voice halted him abruptly:

"Hands up, there—quick!"

Protruding across the ray of light, Quentin saw the ugly barrel of an automatic, with the hand holding it. The sharp light blinded him to all behind.

"What's this—a holdup?" he demanded hotly, but obeying the command.

"Maybe. You two crooks will go back with me *now,* I guess!"

And into the moonlight stepped the burly figure of Osgood, the detective.

CHAPTER VI.

In a flash Allan Quentin realized the damning incrimination of his position. Were it not for the girl, it would be laughable; Enid had risen with a stifled cry, and Quentin saw that she must now be told all.

He himself had nothing to fear beyond some humiliation, for if Osgood took him back to Los Angeles he would speedily be cleared. But it was another thing with Enid Elsmere. Mathews was the only man who could keep her from Burlington, thought Quentin, and were she to be forced from the island it might go hard with her.

"Confound you, Osgood!" he cried angrily, as the girl came to his side and put her hand on his shoulder appealingly. "I've done nothing to be arrested for! What's the meaning of all this, anyhow?"

"None o' your back talk," growled the detective, his former suavity completely vanished. "Step down here, you!"

"Not on your life!" returned Quentin. "What for?"

"For housebreaking, you fool! That's one thing, and I've got more if you want 'em. You're a slick one, you are! Not slick enough to fool me, though."

Still standing at the top of the steps, Quentin forced himself into calmness, and attempted to argue with the man, feeling at the same time that he would more cheerfully plant his fist on the heavy chin. He explained his business at the cottage to the extent of saying that he was leaving a note for Mr. Mathews, and stated that the note beneath the door would be proof in his support, if it could be got at. To his renewed dismay the detective only laughed scornfully.

"Look here, doc, you pretty near put it over on me to-day, all right. I had you framed up as a galoot pure and simple, but I guess I had it wrong. You prove your identity and do it in a hurry, unless you want to feel the bracelets."

Quentin's chest heaved in helpless anger. He knew that he was undone, for his lost pocketbook held his cards, letters, and check fold; yet this charge was so ridiculous that it irritated him beyond endurance. It occurred to him that there would be a wire from his housekeeper at the hotel for him, and with new confidence he set forth this fact.

"Nothin' like that goes here," laughed Osgood heavily. "You might's well give up that game, bo. I'll take in the lady dip over there for housebreaking, and you, too; also, I got a charge of assault against you. By the time headquarters shakes you down a bit, I guess we'll get your record yet."

"Eh! Say, are you crazy?" exclaimed Quentin. "What kind of a charge are you faking up, anyhow? You'd better go slow, Osgood."

"Come off, come off!" grinned the detective, snapping off his electric torch as Quentin descended a step in his amazement. "You made a bad job up at the club to-day, and you'll do time for it. The town constable got a report on it, and I knew right off who the guy was—and it's you."

"Great Scott!" gasped Quentin. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh, beat it!" exclaimed Osgood disgustedly. "Didn't you assault a guy named Green up there this afternoon? Anyhow, he's laid a charge against you, and you're it, doc. So trot along lively now, and the lady as well."

With that it all flashed over Quentin, and he emitted a groan of dismay. His two psuedo-friends had put up a fine joke on him in revenge for his action of that day; he could picture the drunken glee with which Wells and Green had framed up the charge, and then had doubtless gone off on their trip. If he went in to Los Angeles to answer it, as he must do, and if Enid were to be cleared by the only means possible—that of establishing her identity, Burlington would at once assert his legal rights, and she might have to endure no little mental suffering before her friends could get her away from him.

The girl was standing on the top step still, in silent consternation; she seemed to be leaving it all in his hands, for she must have understood what was passing. Did she believe all this rigmarole? He groaned again at the thought that this absurd affair might have ruined him beyond repair in her ears—for she could know only what she heard. He broke out in desperate earnestness:

"Why, man, that was only a joke put up on me by a couple of men who had been drinking a little too much! You can phone over to the city and get my description and establish the whole thing——"

"Look here," broke in Osgood roughly, "I ain't going to spend all night talking to you. I got a charge or two against you, and you're going to answer it, that's all. You can do your jawing to headquarters in the morning."

"But, you idiot, this lady is blind and is in my care! We're going to be at the Metropole to-night, and you've nothing against her that can stand. You go slow on this thing, Osgood, or you lose your star. I'll go back with you to-morrow, if you wish, when Mr. Mathews has returned and can take care of Miss Elsmere here. But don't you try any bullyragging with me, or you'll be sorry. I'm no hobo——"

"Oh, I've got your number," and Osgood laughed as he pushed up the automatic in the moonlight. "Step down, doc. Good alias you got there, eh?"

Quentin saw that there was no help for it, and slowly descended the steps. Enid followed him, her hand still resting on his shoulder for a guide; her fingers tightened suddenly, and he knew that it was a silent expression of confidence in him. Slight as the thing was, it steadied him and buoyed him up wonderfully.

At the same time it served to remind him that she was utterly dependent on him. The whole miserable tangle resolved itself in his mind; he knew only that this girl's entire future depended on him and on his extricating them both from the toils cast about them by the detective.

As he gazed at the man, who was fishing in his pocket for something that jangled, while at the same time keeping his automatic carefully in place, Quentin sensed the wild anger that was surging up in him. It was so unreasonable—that this brute should hold Enid Elsmere's future in his thick hands and never know it! The self-assurance, the confident power of the detective's whole manner flecked Quentin on the raw; the thought of being handcuffed was too much altogether.

"You're not going to handcuff me, my man," he asserted flatly. Osgood glanced at him, noted the ice-cold gray eyes and the quivering nostrils, and promptly shoved his automatic against Quentin's breast.

"No games, now," he warned threateningly, menace in his heavy face.

"I made you a fair proposition," said Quentin, forcing himself into calm. "I'll go along with you, but Miss Elsmere is under my professional care,

and she's going to remain at the Metropole——"

"Cut it out!" snapped Osgood, his left hand fetching out a pair of handcuffs, glinting bright in the moonlight. He shoved his jaw forward in ugly fashion. "I've had enough jaw out o' you, bo. You'll march down to the hotel, and if she's still keeping up the blind game she can have you for guide, see? Now stick out your mitts, you two—your right to his left, girly!"

He chuckled at his own jest as he dangled up the handcuffs. Until that instant Quentin had not realized that Osgood meant to iron the girl. He heard a little frightened gasp break from her lips, and the hand went from his shoulder. For a second he gazed at the detective, incredulous.

Osgood read his startled unbelief for fear, and grinned. But a flame of rage had swelled up in Quentin's brain as he comprehended the detective's intent. Iron this helpless girl! A mad fury settled on him—but it did not destroy his caution.

He lowered his left hand, half turning as if to bring down the hand of Enid with his right. At all costs he must prevent this outrage, and the greater danger to her that lay behind it, he felt. So, as Osgood lowered his automatic and reached out with the open handcuffs, Quentin swiftly struck down with his open left hand and knocked the weapon a dozen feet away.

Osgood was taken completely by surprise. He ripped out one savage oath, then Quentin's fist drove into his mouth and sent him staggering back. Quentin followed him with a leap, in desperate fear lest he draw another revolver, but before the detective could recover himself he had landed a second blow to the mouth.

He missed the chin, but Osgood was goaded into rage, and rushed at him with a shout of fury. Instead of avoiding the rush, Quentin stepped into it, took a glancing blow on the cheek, and brought up his right from the waist with all his force.

There seemed little power in the blow, so swift was it; but the detective's arms flew out, his head rocked back, and, with a single groan, he fell in a crumpled heap over Quentin's feet. It was a clean knock-out.

Quentin's mind worked fast in that instant. A glint from the gravel path caught his eye, and he stooped quickly to grasp the handcuffs. He knew that he must get this fellow out of the way and silenced, at least until a few hours had passed. How he was to manage it he did not quite see, but with the irons on him Osgood would at least be beyond making any more mischief for the present. He well knew that this whole affair would mean future trouble for himself, but he would manage to get out of it somehow, and the main thing now was to put Osgood where he would be safe for a time.

So without hesitation he brought the man's wrists together and snapped on the handcuffs. Then he straightened up—and saw Enid Elsmere standing just beside him, the automatic held in her hand.

For a moment he stood paralyzed with astonishment. He had knocked the weapon into the bushes, he remembered; if she was blind, how had she secured it? Was she blind, after all?

"Where—where did you get that gun?" he panted hoarsely. "How could you know where it——"

"I heard something fall," she said simply. "I found it—oh, what has happened? Why don't you tell me what you've done? I can't see! I can't see!"

Her wail of despair smote him, and, as she dropped the weapon with a little cry, he caught her and held her for a moment, thrilled out of himself by the clinging softness of her arms.

"It's all right, Enid," he exclaimed

quickly. "That was a detective who tried to arrest us. He thought we were thieves, and I knew that he must not take us back to the city. I had to knock him out, little girl—keep cool, please do!"

At his explanation he felt the swift contraction of her muscles, the sudden convulsing fear that seized her.

"Oh, it is terrible!" she cried chokingly. "I—I had not meant this—I thought it was all for—I was afraid you were a——"

And with that she fell in a limp faint, and Quentin lowered her to the steps. He straightened up, mopping the perspiration from his brow, and looked from one to the other of the two silent figures in blank consternation.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed softly. "Now I *am* in a mess!"

"Well, I'm dummed! Say, what's goin' on here?"

At the voice, Quentin whirled about and saw the old caretaker standing a few yards away. Too late—the thing he had feared most of all had happened! Quentin leaned over and picked up the automatic, quietly shoving it into his coat pocket as he faced the amazed caretaker.

CHAPTER VII.

The caretaker's face was a battleground for fear and curiosity and suspicion, with the odds about even. Quentin drew a little breath of relief as he saw recognition join in the conflict, and smiled.

"Any word from Mr. Mathews yet?"

"Not yet, sir. What's all this goings-on?"

Curiosity had won the battle, for the caretaker craned forward to stare at the white form of Enid, and looked up again in awe. Quentin watched the little old man with wild incoherence in his brain.

"She ain't—ain't dead, sir? Who's this here man?"

Of a sudden a desperate plan flashed on the surgeon. Thinking over his first meeting with the old caretaker, he could not remember having given the fellow his name; and, as coherence came to him, he swiftly weighed the chances. When Mathews came all would be well—if Enid's story was true!

"Get some water to revive this lady, and get it quick!" he ordered, making a plea for time. "I'll explain when you get back. Hurry up, man! She's fainted."

"Law!"

The little old man's face shot from wonder into sympathy, and he shuffled past Quentin, who stood motionless.

Should he take the risk? He was staking everything on the girl's story, even to his good name. When this thing came into court, as it seemed like to do, he would have to stand or fall by her; if she was not blind, but was the woman pickpocket using him as a screen——

He recalled that revolver incident. Not even the sensitive ear of the blind could fully account for her swift seizure of the weapon in the moonlight. Quentin glanced down at her face, and its pure beauty, its womanly appeal, sundered all his doubts once more and drove him to quick decision.

"I'll do it," he thought grimly. "The lie will make me or break me. I've got to hold every one off until she gets into touch with Mathews, and if she's lied to me, then God help her!"

There came a glare as the old caretaker turned on the house lights, and Quentin plunged forward to his knees over Osgood's body. The whole scheme had come to him now; it would hold things off until the morning, at least; and, while it would eventually cause a worse muddle than ever, it promised to save Enid Elsmere—which was the main thing just at present.

Swiftly going through the detective's clothes, Quentin found a number of cheap printed cards and letters, which he transferred to his own pockets. The money in the man's pockets he left untouched, but unpinned the star from his vest and fastened it inside his own coat.

Satisfied at length that Osgood had no means of identification left, he started to rise; on second thought he completely emptied the man's pockets of money and all else, determining to make a thorough job of it. Osgood was breathing heavily, and Quentin rose at length to find the old caretaker shuffling excitedly from the open front door with a cup of water in his hand.

"All right; thanks," he said, and knelt beside Enid. "Hold up the lady's head and pour some of this on her face."

While the old man obeyed, Quentin swiftly opened the close-fitting neck of the girl's dress to give her air and loosen her throat. A little locket of gold fell out into his hand; as he replaced it, he noted instinctively that it bore the letter "M" inset with brilliants. His lips clenched grimly; it was not too late yet to——

"For pity's sake, don't wash me away!"

Her hand caught at his, and with that his resolve clamped down hard.

"Wake up, it's raining!" he cried, forcing a laugh. She pulled herself up.

"You may think it's fun to be ar——"

"Don't talk now," he exclaimed swiftly. "Here, lean back against the steps, and keep quiet."

With the words, he pressed her hand hard; whether she caught his meaning or not, she obeyed him, and a second later he rose and found the old caretaker watching him curiously.

"Well, I suppose you're wondering about all this, eh?" he smiled easily. "Here's my card."

With that he handed over one of the detective's cards, at the same time flinging back his coat to display the borrowed star. The old caretaker's jaw dropped, and he looked up from the card with a blank stare. Quentin gave him no chance to speak, but touched the still-unconscious Osgood with his foot.

"Miss Elsmere and I came up to see if Mr. Mathews was home, and we found this fellow trying to break in. In the ensuing discussion the lady fainted. Will your master be back in the morning?"

"Why—why, yes, sir," gasped the old man. "Gosh, a thief on the Catalinas! Who'd 'a' thought of such a thing! We ain't had no such thing happen for 's long 's I can bring to mind——"

"Well, I want you to take care of him for me," and Quentin smiled at the quick alarm which the old man manifested. "He's handcuffed—don't worry. If you have a bit of rope, I'll tie his legs and leave him. Have you got a shed around here?"

"Yes, there's a shed in behind yonder, but—but—gosh! Let the constable——"

"No, this is my affair," broke in Quentin quickly. "Also, Mr. Mathews will want to see the man himself."

The caretaker, visibly impressed by this argument, went shuffling off after his rope. Quentin turned to the girl, and, catching her hand, raised her to her feet.

"Don't say anything now," he spoke swiftly. "I've taken the only course possible, and I'll explain later."

She nodded. Remembering the note, and fearing that the caretaker would read it and discover the signature, Quentin darted up the steps, found the paper on the floor of the hall, and with his pencil quickly rendered the signature illegible. He stepped down to find the caretaker returning, and exchanged the folded paper for the rope the old man bore.

"Give this note to Mr. Mathews the moment he returns. I'll come up in the morning and take care of this fellow."

With that, he stooped over Osgood and bound the man's ankles firmly. The caretaker picked up the hapless detective's feet, Quentin lifted his shoulders, and with much labor they bore him around the corner of the cottage to a small shed. As they set him down, the thump fetched a groan out of him, and Quentin made all haste to be off. When they stood outside in the moonlight again, he laid his hand impressively on the old man's arm.

"You'll have to bring him some food and water in the morning, my friend, but don't believe any yarns he may try to tell you. He may make out he's a policeman himself, or any such thing, but you let me and Mr. Mathews deal with him."

"Sure I will!" retorted the old man fervently, and when they reached the side entrance again Quentin hurriedly bade him good night and led Enid down the path.

"Do you feel all right, Enid?"

"A little mussy—and very foolish," she laughed shakily. "I'm sorry I deserted you at the very worst moment!"

"Oh, tell me something!" he exclaimed, pausing as they reached the inclined railway. "You started to say that you were afraid of something that I was, when you went off. What did you mean?"

"I don't know," she replied, her head turned away. "If you don't mind, doctor, I wish you'd take me right back. I—I feel rather shaken."

Cursing himself for a brute, yet unable to forget her words and the sight of that locket, Quentin said no more as they returned. But that letter "M" reminded him of the bracelet; he wondered grimly if Mary Palmer had also given Enid the locket by which to remember her!

This thought grew on him, and when he recalled what he had just done for her sake, how he had staked his whole reputation on the truth of her story, doubt rose in him and gripped him. When they entered the hotel, he made up his mind; instead of seeking the elevator, he led her to a chair across the lobby, and quietly seated her.

"Now," he began, his eyes on her face, "I saw that locket about your neck, Miss Elsmere. I do not want to appear suspicious, but I robbed that detective of his credentials and locked him up. He suspects that you are a pickpocket who is known to play at being blind if detected. This afternoon some time my pocket was picked. Your name does not tally with the initials on your jewelry. All this means nothing to me, believe me. I have promised you my aid, and even if you have lied to me, even if you were a thief, I would be only too glad to lend you my assistance. All that I ask of you is to tell me the truth. If your story was the true one, I apologize, for I really want to aid you."

He saw the swift struggle that shot into her face, and as her eyes rested on his, it seemed that they must indeed be looking at him, for that fixed stare had vanished abruptly. But, despite the torture evident in her features, despite its reflection on his own heart, he said what he had meant to say, and waited.

Her hands twisted in her lap, and against all reason Quentin felt a mad impulse to cover them with his own. Then she calmed herself with a quiet effort, her face pale.

"I can only say that when we see Mr. Mathews you will be forced to believe me, Doctor Quentin," she said quietly. "I am sorry for all this dreadful affair that has come upon you; I do not want you drawn into my troubles——"

"Say no more, please!" he cried, with a little laugh, rising. "I was a brute,

and I am sorry myself. Now come to the elevator, and I'll say good night."

No more words passed between them, but at the door of her room their hands met in silent parting. Then Quentin returned to the office, obtained a large envelope, and sealed up the money and papers he had taken from the detective, writing the other's name across the flap.

"Kindly take care of this," he said to the night clerk. "Mr. Osgood will call for it to-morrow, unless I do myself."

This settled, he visited the telegraph desk and found a message awaiting him. Ten minutes later he sought his own room, supplied with money, a most undesirable alias, and a police star whose magnitude appalled him.

"This bit of nickel is going to get me into a bad fuss," he thought, gazing at the thing. "Well, I may be able to bribe Osgood to shut up, if the thing gets straightened out in time. If it doesn't, I know a rising young surgeon who is going to be in dutch! But I only wish Enid hadn't slipped me that Mary Palmer yarn. That gets my goat."

Think it over as he would, he could arrive at no conclusion. Finally he phoned a call for eight in the morning and went to bed, wondering if the awful muddle would leave him any chance to sleep. But, contrary to his own expectations, the memory of Bert Osgood trussed up in his shed merged into the lap of the waves under the hotel windows, and Allan Quentin ended his first day in Avalon in greater peace than he had passed it.

CHAPTER VIII.

At eight-twenty Quentin was drinking in the fresh air of the new morning from the wharf, as Enid had promised to breakfast with him at nine. The situation seemed not nearly so bad as it had appeared the night before; Mathews would be over in the morning boat to relieve him of his charge, and it seemed less probable that Burlington would be able to track Enid by the one or two men who had helped her at Long Beach.

However, her manner worried him. There was a good deal that lacked explanation, and Quentin began to fear that her blindness was in reality due to a brain tumor; after all, she had only put him off when he had set the matter frankly before her last night. The thing that forced him to believe in her was her appeal to Mathews, for by quiet inquiries Quentin had found that the man was a retired lawyer of some prominence and of high repute. Yet it was a bitter job to quell his forebodings and compel himself to belief; his greatest aid in this was the remembrance of the girl's face. It haunted him, and filled him with strange longings—what a pity she had this affliction, he thought!

He roused himself at sight of a trim launch cutting in around the headland, and caught the words "Long Beach boat" from a group of boatman lounging near by. As he made out the two figures sitting in the launch, Quentin started; it seemed as though a cold hand had gripped suddenly at his heart. Well he knew that erect, precise figure which had as usual retained its frock coat and silk hat, even on a launch trip.

As the boat drew in to the wharf, Quentin's sudden fear passed into exhilaration. He noted the rather flaccid face, the quick-darting blue eyes, the massive jaw under the crisp gray mustache, and laughed. Since Doctor Hall Burlington had come, Enid must have told him the true story, after all! He forgot all else in that swift thought—even to the bound detective who lay in the shed behind the Mathews' cottage; and realizing that he must get Burlington off the track, he stepped forward to meet the launch as it drifted in.

"Hello, Burlington!" he called easily. "Got a hurry call?"

Burlington's quick blue eye picked him out, and the other waved a hand in reply. The launch drew up, Burlington seized Quentin's hand and mounted to the wharf, then tossed a gold piece to the boatman in payment.

"Morning, Quentin—you're just the man I want to see," and he took the younger man's arm. "Come along—are you on vacation?"

"Partly," responded Quentin, falling into step. He noted that Burlington's manner was not wholly free of agitation. "What's up—an operation?"

"No," and the other glanced around, then halted. "Are you free to help me a bit, Quentin? Professional confidence, understand."

Quentin met his eye and laughed lightly.

"I guess so, Burlington. I've a patient at the hotel, but my time's my own. You must be in a devil of a hurry, to come over in a little launch like that, man!"

"I am," and the other grimaced, then fell to mopping his brow. Gazing at him, Quentin felt sudden dislike of the man; to him Burlington had always seemed rather formal and precise, but now it was as though a mask had been stripped away. Quentin no longer doubted every word of Enid's story, and his mind raced desperately. He knew that at all costs he must keep Burlington from seeing that hotel register, and he suddenly resolved on a bold course.

"Did you come over yesterday?" The blue eyes shot into his suddenly.

"Yes—I brought over a girl from Los Angeles. Why?"

"You didn't happen to notice anything of a blind young woman on the boat, did you?"

"Sure," and Quentin laughed again, holding the blue eyes to his. "My patient is a young woman, and blind. What's the matter, Burlington?"

"Her name!" The other gripped his arm, his face flaming a dull red. "What's her name, Quentin?"

"Why—Miss Palmer," lied Quentin, as the name flashed into his mind. The older man's hand fell away, and he mopped at his face again with a sigh of relief.

"I beg your pardon, Quentin—I'm a little overwrought, I fancy." At the pause Quentin chuckled inwardly; his bold ruse had worked, and it was evident that the other man held no suspicions. Burlington hesitated, then laughed harshly, taking Quentin's arm again.

"I'm in rather a hard position, Quentin. I had charge of a girl—a blind young woman who's unfortunately afflicted with flightiness." He was getting back his usual precise air by this time.

"Yes?" encouraged Quentin.

"As I say, she is addicted to melancholia and odd conceptions—imagines that she's an abused heiress and all that. Nothing dangerous, but a very interesting case, no doubt due to a brain tumor. I'm hoping that an operation will fix her up first rate. But yesterday morning she got away—we had her under observation, you understand. From various persons I found that she had got to a San Pedro car and had been inquiring about the islands, and there seems to be no doubt that she came over here yesterday."

"Well, that's easily fixed," suggested Quentin craftily. "A word to the constable here and he'll be able——"

"No, no!" Burlington cried suddenly, halting him again with evident haste. "She is very sensitive, and anything in the nature of a scene might throw her into hysteria, Quentin. It's a matter for me to handle personally, and if you'll give me your help I'll be very glad indeed."

"Certainly, I'll do whatever I can,"

and Quentin's cold gray eyes and resolute face gave no hint of the double meaning in his words. "How's Mrs. Burlington and Dolly? Have you had any breakfast?"

"No—they're all right," came the confused answer. Quentin had a hazy idea of getting Burlington off to one of the smaller hotels for breakfast. "You'd better take a day off and run out before long, old man; you look rather run down. By the way, I think we had better go up to the Metropole and start inquiries there, and I'll get a bite to eat."

Quentin's heart leaped. This was the very thing he had feared. If he could only keep Burlington away from the Metropole register, he might be able to waste time until the morning boat came in. And if Mathews did not come then, he would simply have to make an open break with Burlington and take Enid under his own protection—though he had a very hazy idea of the law in such cases. However, the main thing was to keep the two apart for a time.

"What was the girl's name?" he temporized, wondering how to manage things.

"Elsmere—Enid Elsmere," came the answer, and his last doubts of the girl fled away. "Still, she might not use her own name, Quentin. The easiest way to track her will be by her blindness."

"Well, look here," and Quentin halted in desperation. "I'll run up to the Metropole and arrange to get away, and also make inquiries. You cover the Stamford and Hermosa, and I'll meet you at the latter place for breakfast. How's that?"

Burlington drew a hand across his heavy lips and nodded.

"All right, Quentin. Hadn't you better have a description of the young woman?"

"It might help," smiled Quentin, thinking that he needed little description of the person in question. He glanced at his watch and found that he still had fifteen minutes to spare. "There'll be no trouble in locating her, though."

"Hope not," grunted Burlington, the blue eyes darting around them until Quentin felt some uneasiness lest Enid come forth for a morning stroll. "However, I know exactly the clothes she wore when she got away. She's a rather small young woman, about twenty-two in appearance, though in reality she's not so old; black-haired and gray-eyed, wearing a deep red dress of some soft stuff, with a dark-gray wrap."

"Eh?" Quentin suddenly felt as though his entire structure had been riven asunder. "Just go over that again, if you don't mind."

The other repeated his description, but Quentin was only sparring for time, trying to keep his amazement concealed. Those few words had staggered him, swept him out of his depth.

"Good heavens!" he thought, groping after some fragment of sanity in the wild mix-up. "Enid is violet-eyed, brown-haired, and has a white dress—and she's pretty near as tall as I am! Am I crazy, or is Burlington?"

There was nothing but the most precise earnestness in the other man's manner, however. He would have no reason to give a false description of the girl, reflected Quentin; but this thought led him into a new maze of probabilities. It was unlikely in the extreme that there would be more than one blind girl out of the lot, for that would be stretching coincidence too far. Yet the detective had been after a blind girl, his own charge was blind—or said she was blind, and here Burlington was after another one!

So far, the only one of the three who had materialized was his own girl. She had claimed to be Enid Elsmere; but was she? She did not answer Burlington's description, and Quentin felt a swift and horrible doubt of her. Was she the woman pickpocket, after all?

Had she deliberately builded on the name of Enid Elsmere, with some knowledge of the state of things in Burlington's household on which to base her structure of lies?

The only other possibility was that Burlington had given him a false description, and this seemed utterly improbable, out of the question. There was no reason for it, and Quentin looked up with helpless struggle in his eyes.

"Go ahead to the other two places, Burlington. I'll meet you and we'll either breakfast at the Hermosa—or come back to the Metropole."

The other strode off with a curt nod. Quentin's last words had been born of a desperate idea, a frantic effort to cut this whole weird Gordian knot at one blow. If Burlington had given him the true description of his ward, then the girl at the Metropole was posing under an assumed name.

In that case, a meeting between them would only serve to show her that Quentin had pierced through her deception, and it would undoubtedly provoke a straightforward explanation between them.

On the other hand, if Burlington had lied in his description and she was the real Enid Elsmere, the thing would come to a show-down then and there. Burlington would be taken in his own net, and if he attempted to claim the girl, Quentin decided that he himself could then step in with some semblance of right.

"Just the same," he thought, as he leaped up the hotel steps, "I'll stick by her. If she's a pickpocket, I'll be a whole lot mistaken; but whatever she is or does, I'll give her one more chance to come across with the truth. By George, I can't believe that she has been deliberately acting a part all this time!"

Prompted by a sudden thought that he might find two Enid Elsmeres registered, he strode over to the desk only to have the hope destroyed. Also, the day clerk made a reference to the envelope waiting for Osgood which showed that he was inclined to be suspicious, and Quentin hastily assured him that the detective would call for it that day. He turned to the elevator, wondering miserably how he was going to get out of the net that he had tangled around himself.

At Enid's door he found her waiting for him, and her quiet poise, her air of utter confiding trust in him, almost shook him from the resolution he had taken. Yet—at sight of him did a shadow of alarm flit over her face, as though she read the conflict in his eyes, or did she merely sense it subconsciously?

He laid this to his imagination, however, when he took her hand and answered her greeting, trying to keep his voice level. As he led her from the elevator across the lobby, toward the dining room, he spoke lightly.

"If you don't mind, I'll get you seated, then I'll run over to the Hermosa and bring back a chap I want you to meet, Miss Elsmere."

Try as he would, he could not keep his voice quite firm, and the glance she flashed him only heightened his self-accusation. Then she nodded and smiled.

"Certainly—I'll be glad to meet any of your friends."

"We won't call him a friend," laughed Quentin uneasily, beginning to reproach himself already. "Anyway, you sit down here and I'll be right back. Oh, yes—I think that I'll introduce you as Miss Palmer, too. Your absent girl friend won't object to that, I trust?"

"As you please, doctor," she replied, seating herself.

Quentin hurried away, a little chilled by those final words. He found Burlington waiting for him on the steps of the Hermosa, precise and dignified as

ever, but with uneasiness resting in his never-quiet blue eyes.

"What luck, Burlington?"

"None, so far. You did not find her at the Metropole?"

"No, but my patient is waiting to breakfast with us. Come on over, and after breakfast, if nothing has happened, we'll soon locate *your* patient."

Burlington nodded, his eyes resting on Quentin for a second; then with a rather patronizing manner which was peculiarly offensive to the younger man, he took Quentin's arm, and they walked back to the other hotel.

The next five minutes would take him out of the labyrinth, thought Quentin—in one way or the other.

CHAPTER IX.

"By the way," asked Quentin, halting on the steps of the hotel and determining swiftly to see just where Burlington stood, "from whom did your patient escape? She was not confined, I suppose?"

The other shot him a quick glance, but Quentin's face expressed only interested curiosity and sympathy.

"No. She was—er—being taken care of by friends who lived at Long Beach. It was not thought that she would try to get away, for her mind has never run to violence or anything of the sort. She merely slipped out alone, got a man in the street to help her on the car, and that was an end of it. Her friends wanted to call in detectives and all that sort of thing, but I happened to find the man who had helped her, and that made all straight. She's over here somewhere, and should be easy to locate."

That clinched the matter in Quentin's mind. He tried to recall any girl answering the description of Enid, on the boat coming over, but could not. In fact, he had been too much absorbed with his own blind girl to watch other people.

"Well, my friend and professional brother, you've lied neatly," he thought grimly, as they entered the hotel. The thought halted him mentally, however. Had Burlington lied to him, after all?

He had doubted Enid's story in the first place, though she had substantiated it by her seeming knowledge of Burlington's family. If her story had been true, Burlington had just now lied to him; yet Burlington had described an entirely different girl as the one for whom he was searching, which would rather tend to back up his own story.

"I can't make head nor tail of it," groaned Quentin to himself. "I'll simply introduce 'em, and that will put the whole thing on the knees of the gods. And I feel blamed sorry for the gods!"

Pleading that there was no time to waste on formalities, he steered Burlington past the desk without registering, they left their hats at the dining-room entrance, and he led the way toward the table at which Enid Elsmere still sat. He reflected that if she had lied to him, it would be poetic justice that he should introduce her by the name of Mary Palmer.

Before they reached the table, Quentin had found the answer to his mental questionings. He saw Burlington's eyes fall on the figure of Enid, then flicker on without any change to the next table. The girl had not been recognized.

This settled one doubt, only to raise another; how could she have known of the blind girl in Burlington's care? The physician's presence proved that there had been such a person, and Quentin had no more doubts that the girl's story had been a true one, whether true as regarded herself or not. However, a moment later they had reached the table, and there was no time to reflect on the situation.

"Miss Palmer, allow me to present Doctor Hall Burlington—Burlington, my patient, Miss Palmer."

Burlington bowed in his precise manner, but the girl's face suddenly flamed scarlet, then became dead white; Quentin could almost have sworn that there was sight in the violet eyes that went from one to the other of them.

"You are now breakfasting with two famous professional men, Miss Palmer," he went on, forcing a laugh. Now that he had found out what he wanted to know, he refused to torture the girl further. If she was a pickpocket—well and good; it was still to be explained how she had known of his own intimacy with Dolly Burlington.

"But it is the gentlemen who are honored," added Burlington, with heavy gallantry. "You are a native daughter, Miss Palmer?"

"No," she faltered, but with an evident effort regained her self-control. "No, I am an Eastern girl, Doctor Burlington. I am merely spending a few months with friends—in Los Angeles."

With this the waiter bustled up, and the girl had a chance to recover, which she did slowly. Her manner gave Quentin no doubt of her evident shame and distress, but at thought of his own simple-minded faith in her story, Quentin felt little remorse at his action.

None the less, he steered Burlington into a line of talk which he could keep up indefinitely; the Long Beach physician had bought heavily in real estate during the past year or two, and consequently was a "booster" of the most virulent type. He talked at length until breakfast was served, Quentin and the girl having only to throw in a word here and there to keeping him going.

Another crisis was coming from a source which Quentin little suspected, however. Before breakfast was half over, a waiter brought him in a note which he tore open with a word of apology to the others. It was a very brief and curt request that he visit the office. Wondering what was up now, he excused himself, and went out to the desk, finding there the clerk with whom Osgood had been talking on the previous day. The clerk nodded at him and led him into the interior office.

"Doctor," he said challengingly, "you left a package here for that bull, Osgood, last night. Osgood had reserved a room here, and he's not shown up. I'll have to have an explanation—I may as well tell you frankly that he suspected that lady with you of——"

"Go easy," warned Quentin, and at the icy flame in his eyes the clerk drew back. "Where Osgood is isn't my business or yours, either. As for that lady, she's a patient in my charge, and if you know Doctor Burlington, of Long Beach, you'll find him at breakfast with us now, and he can identify me. You've made a mistake, young man, and you'd better back water pretty hard, and do it quick."

The clerk tried to stare him down, but the result was only to send him into a stammering apology, and Quentin knew that his bluff had gone down. None the less, he insisted on sending for Burlington, and when that individual arrived and identified him in some surprise, Quentin promptly closed the incident.

"Merely a matter of cashing a check," he explained to Burlington as they returned to their table. The other waved his hand loftily, sat down with a pompous air which ruffled Quentin afresh, adjusted his cuffs, and fell to his breakfast. Quentin smiled at the girl and was astonished to see a little color rise in her cheeks—as if she had seen the smile and took it for an assurance. From that moment he was convinced that she was no other than the pickpocket, and that she was no more blind than he was.

The delicate irony of forcing Burlington to help him out made him chuckle again, but he longed for Mathews to

show up that the tangle might be complete. Certainly this girl had been confident in her appeal to Mathews, and Quentin wondered if every one who came into contact with her was to be drawn into some wild imbroglio. Osgood had certainly suffered therefor, and just at present Burlington seemed to be in for future trouble also!

"Now, Miss Palmer," he said finally, "Doctor Burlington and I are going out to look up a professional case, into which he has drawn me on consultation. You won't mind if I leave you for an hour or so?"

"Of course not!" She smiled up at him with a rather pathetic effort at brightness, he thought. "But you'll take me to my room, first?"

"By all means!"

Burlington shook hands with her in his most precise air, and Quentin led her from the dining room, keeping up the farce. She said nothing until they had stepped from the elevator, then Quentin turned her around gently.

"Well, Enid Elsmere?"

She put out her hand to his arm impulsively.

"Doctor Quentin, you made a promise to Enid Elsmere to help her to escape from her guardian. You gave me to understand that your promise was ironclad. Do you wish to be released from it or not?"

Quentin was taken aback by her firm voice, and as he searched her face he found it impossible to believe that this girl was a shamed, discomfited thief. She was making no plea; she was merely asking him a direct question.

"My dear girl," he said softly, his hand closing on hers, "please let this matter drop until I can get back for a talk. I know very well that you have not told me the truth, but that does not affect my willingness to stand by you; even if you are a thief, as the detective believed yesterday, my promise stands. When I met Burlington, and he told me about the girl he was seeking, I saw from his description that it was not you he was after; now, do you want to see Mr. Mathews, or shall I stave him off also?"

"No," she returned, with a half-sobbing laugh. "Oh, if he were only here now I would be able to tell you everything! Come to me when you get through with Doctor Burlington—I will explain to you then if I can. Please—please continue to trust me!"

"Look up at me, Mary Palmer," he said, and her head came up; but if the vacant, fixed stare in the violet eyes was assumed, he could not tell. "Now, under the circumstances—if you'll pardon my language—wouldn't any man who granted that request be nothing short of a damned fool?"

She flushed. Then, to his amazement, a laugh flickered across her face.

"Yes—but I still make it."

"All right—it's granted," he smiled cheerfully, unable to resist the charm of her. "I'll be back as soon as I can shake Burlington, and get straightened out. I don't know whether you're blind or not, or whether there are three blind girls wandering around Avalon, or whether your name is Enid Elsmere or Mary Palmer—but I'll bank on you, and you can depend on me to the limit."

Her face changed—confidence and regret and perplexity following each other in swift succession. Quentin saw that the violet eyes had lost their fixed expression, but that might have been because of the tears that glittered in them.

"Oh, I—I wish I could have known that yesterday!" she faltered. Then, pushing him back as she averted her head to hide her tears, she left him quickly and entered her own room.

Quentin flung back his shoulders aggressively as he returned to the elevator. So, then, the whole matter was at last out in the open! She was the pickpocket and no other—yet for the

sake of her indefinable appeal, for the sake of her smile and the touch of her hand, he was going to help her elude justice at the cost of his own good name and reputation, it might well be.

"Then I'll be a damned fool to the limit," he reflected bitterly. "But I won't believe her a thief until she has told me so herself."

Fate had not yet finished with him, however—or rather, he was still serving as a shuttlecock between fate and Nemesis. As he left the elevator, he saw the desk clerk, Burlington, and another—a pudgy man in policeman's clothes—talking quietly together and evidently waiting for him. The clerk turned to him with puzzled deference.

"Here he is now. Doctor Quentin, this is the island constable, Mr. McBean. I'm sorry, sir, but you seem in hot water all around to-day!"

"What's the matter now?" smiled Quentin, wondering if his fight with Osgood had become noised abroad. The pudgy constable eyed him in hesitation.

"Why, sir, I didn't know exactly what to do—you see, a couple of gentlemen at the club yesterday——"

"Oh, that!" Quentin laughed again in relief. He remembered that Osgood had said something about the constable in connection with the reported assault. "You're looking that up?"

The pudgy constable, whose lack of duties made his office a sinecure, nodded doubtfully.

"Yes, sir. Doctor Burlington says that you're all right, though——"

"Of course, I am," laughed Quentin, and at that he explained exactly how the affair at the club had come about, and stated that it was no doubt a joke perpetrated by Green.

"I guess that's right, sir," said McBean, grinning. "I've been talking to the people up there, and Mr. Green was a little off color, I'm afraid. He's gone off fishing, so if Doctor Burlington will vouch for you we'd better let the thing hang over. It won't do to give the island a bad name, you know."

"Of course, of course," broke in Burlington, in evident haste to be off after his quarry. "I'll answer for Quentin, my man—any one in Los Angeles knows him. Now come along, Quentin. We can't waste any more time."

So for the second time Burlington had extricated him from a difficulty! Quentin grinned inwardly as he followed the other to the steps; he saw a good many more difficulties ahead, notably that of Osgood. But these could all wait, and now he put himself at the disposal of Burlington with a very cheerful heart.

They discussed the affair in hand, and, after a brief talk, decided that they could do nothing except make a canvass of the half dozen smaller hotels. In order to save as much time as possible, they divided these between them, and Burlington strode away with the tourists sending amused glances at his formal attire and shiny "topper."

As Quentin had no intention of wasting his time on a search to which he felt that Enid Elsmere—or Mary Palmer—held the clew, he promptly sat down on a bench and prepared to report failure on Burlington's return. He preferred to postpone his talk with the girl until he had Burlington off his hands.

"Well, I'm in good and deep," he reflected ruefully, biting the end from a cigar and settling down. "Now let's get cleared up. My Enid is probably named Mary Palmer, and appears to be a woman thief whom Osgood is after. Osgood is locked up in Mathews' shed and therefore may be eliminated as a factor. But what about Mathews? If the worst comes to the worst, I can hire a launch and skip out with Enid—or whatever her name is—and get home and wait for arrest.

"If I was a hero of romance, I'd

probably lure Burlington up to that shed and pile him in with Osgood. By George, though! If he hadn't backed up Enid's yarn by his own errand here, I'd find it hard to believe of him! I can't pretend to like him a whole lot, but it doesn't seem exactly probable that such high-flown villain stunts could be put over outside of a dime novel. Anyhow, I'm getting to be a beautifully finished liar myself!"

This last admitted of no dispute, and the outlook seemed dismal in consequence. He saw now that he had made a mistake in taking Osgood's identity on himself with the old caretaker, on the previous evening. That in itself might lead to undesired complications, unless Mathews arrived in time. And what would happen then? Since the girl's story had been untrue, where did Mathews come in except as another disturbing factor.

"If I don't go mad first," he laughed hopelessly, flinging away his cigar, "I am due to catch it from all concerned! Well, there's Burlington's silk tile coming down the hill, so now for another bunch of lies, I suppose."

It flashed over him, as he stood waiting, that Mary Palmer no doubt had his pocketbook for him. That must have been what she meant by her final exclamation: "If I had only known that yesterday!" Her explanation, then, would take a very material form; and the sooner made the better, for when he had plenty of ready cash in hand he could visit Osgood and undoubtedly bribe him off his private revenge. Even though Osgood had arrested him falsely, there might be trouble in prospect.

"Well, any luck, Quentin?"

He turned to find Burlington once more mopping his heavy face, with his pompous air somewhat dissipated.

"Nothing doing," returned Quentin briefly, eying his confrère. "Seems to me you're a whole lot excited over the matter, Burlington. By the way, I just recalled the fact that I'd heard that girl's name before—seems as though Dolly had mentioned an Enid Elsmere to me."

Burlington's cheeks flushed slightly, then mottled. He forced a harsh laugh.

"You're twisted, Quentin. It's rankly impossible. Now, I'm sure I don't know just what to do—a house-to-house canvass is absurd, of course."

"Had Miss Elsmere any friends here?" asked Quentin craftily.

"No, no, of course not!" exploded the other testily. "Since she's not at the larger hotels, we might as well start systematic inquiries along the water front. She can't have got very far without being seen."

Quentin nodded, thinking rapidly. He might as well accompany Burlington and keep him occupied in the quest, since there really was an Enid Elsmere, and since the physician was plainly in no little mental distress over the disappearance. Also, he determined to probe Burlington's mind and make sure of his ground on the heiress question before he committed himself to any definite break with the other. But first he must telephone the girl and let her know why he could not return immediately.

"I'll step into the drug store here and call up Miss Palmer," he said. "I'd better let her know that this thing is apt to take all morning."

Burlington nodded and dropped on the bench, while Quentin strode to the corner store, and got the Metropole on the telephone. When he inquired for Miss Elsmere, he found that she had gone out; and in response to his amazed questions the operator switched his friend, the desk clerk, on the wire.

"Yes, doctor," explained that individual, with a touch of malice in his voice, "a message came for her just after you went out with Doctor Burlington. She also went out."

"What—alone?"

"Yes, sir—and blindness didn't seem to bother her much, either."

"Good Lord!" gasped Quentin inwardly. Then, aloud: "Didn't she leave any word?"

"Yes; she said she'd be back in an hour or less, sir. Oh—by the way, did you lose a pocketbook yesterday, doctor?"

"You bet," uttered Quentin weakly, wondering if she had left it for him. "Why?"

"It was just turned in a minute ago—one of the boatmen found it yesterday in his launch, looked your name up at the hotels, and left it for you."

"All right," said Quentin. "Get his name, and I'll reward him. Good-by."

He staggered out into the sunlight, too dazed to do more than rejoin Burlington and allow himself to be patronized without protest. After extracting that promise of trust from him—the girl had skipped out! It was the last straw.

CHAPTER X.

"A blind girl? Why, no, Doctor Burlington! You haven't lost one?"

"Oh, no—no, not at all—she is with friends, and I was merely looking them up," and with this Burlington backed Quentin away from the information bureau at the pier, and made all haste to flee.

Quentin chuckled.

"He was more interested in asking questions than answering them, Burlington! I guess the best thing to do would be to chuck the whole thing into the hands of the police. They'll find your blind girl soon enough."

"Heavens, no! My reputation, my standing——" And Burlington rumbled on with more confusion than coherence, until at length he pulled himself together. The quick and vivid interest manifested by the officials in his questions had entirely disconcerted him, and Quentin had not assisted greatly in restoring his composure.

Since that telephone conversation with the desk clerk, indeed, Quentin had grown beyond fearing anything. While they wandered along, he had kept a sharp lookout for Mary Palmer, but without success; also, he had managed to probe through a good deal of his companion's pompous and precise air, to find a growing dismay underneath it.

"I can't see your objection to the police," and Quentin baited him coldly. "The girl is nothing to you except a patient; it doesn't reflect on you that she got away, since she was not confined in your house. Of course, if she was insane or something of that sort, and you had kept her hidden away, it would be different."

Burlington hunched his heavy shoulders in something like a shiver, though it was a very warm day, and his face remained mottled; his blue eyes were darting about in desperate fashion, and Quentin was beginning to pierce to the real man underneath the mask so constantly presented to the world.

Nor did he find it good. Burlington's usual restraint and calm precision were shattered, and as the time dragged past with no result from their quest, the older man's anxiety and terrific earnestness were increased tenfold, dominating all else, and Quentin's merciless jabs, the more merciless because of their apparent innocence, drew blood.

"Well, it looks as if Mary Palmer had ducked to let me take what's coming," reflected Quentin. "I guess I'll drag down another honorable physician and surgeon, just the same; Burlington's a heap more of a crook than Mary Palmer, I'll bet a dollar!"

As they passed the Metropole while making the rounds, Quentin stepped inside and secured his lost pocketbook, which he found all intact. His suspicion that the girl had left it for him

had been shattered; there was no doubt that he had lost it aboard the launch the previous afternoon, and with no little relief he peeled off a ten-spot for the boatman, found that the girl had not returned, and rejoined Burlington outside.

It irritated Quentin that he should be spending his time on this aimless search when he had more important things to concern his energies. So Mary Palmer had had a message! From whom? Was it possible that Mathews had—but he could not see just where she had any connection with Mathews, despite her anxiety on the subject. So he gave over thinking of it, and endeavored to drive the whole affair from his mind.

"Here, sit down and rest a bit," he exclaimed, when another half hour had gone by without result, save that Burlington's "poke" collar was going down fast. Quentin's quiet coolness irritated the older man.

"Confound it!" he returned, though he obeyed the order. "You're a cold-blooded beast, Quentin!"

"I don't see the necessity of getting worked up over this," said Quentin calmly, seating himself beside the other. "By the way, Burlington, what became of that ward of yours? Didn't I hear something about your being given the guardianship of some one, two or three years ago?"

Burlington started slightly, and his blue eyes settled on Quentin uneasily.

"Eh? Why—did Dolly tell you that?" he exclaimed savagely.

"I don't remember where I heard it," answered Quentin lightly. "I'll have to ask Dolly about it some time."

"You needn't bother," grunted Burlington. "Yes, the story was true, but I got rid of the responsibility immediately afterward. I had almost forgotten it myself. Here, have a cigar?"

Quentin accepted the weed, enjoying to the full the other man's nervous and abrupt demeanor. That Hall Burlington was a scoundrel he no longer doubted.

"It's a cinch that all the crooks aren't in the rogues' gallery," he told himself, as he watched the mottled and uneasy features of the erstwhile pompous physician. "I guess I'd sooner be in my shoes than his, right now."

Upon this he remembered that he had something coming to him when Mathews arrived to release the imprisoned detective, and asked Burlington about the boat. To his dismay, he found that the first one over from San Pedro was that on which he had come—the noon boat, which meant that he had two hours to wait. As Burlington noticed his surprise, he stated that he expected to meet a Mr. J. M. Mathews, and inquired if the other knew him.

"By mere name only," returned Burlington nervously. "A lawyer of some reputation, I believe. I trust you're in no legal difficulty, Quentin?"

"Oh, no—merely a personal matter," laughed Quentin, and chuckled inwardly as Burlington rose with an oath.

"I can't sit down any longer, Quentin. Come on—I'm going to find that young woman—I've got to find her! This confounded anxiety is going to make a nervous wreck of me if it isn't settled."

He seemed to be that already, thought Quentin as he rose. Since they had already covered the larger hotels—or at least Burlington thought they had—and the chief places of interest along the curve of the harbor, they struck down toward the canvas city. More than once a splash of dark red among the crowds lured them in vain pursuit, and the farther they went the more Burlington lost of his precise air and dignified pose. He had plainly counted it a small task to locate Enid Elsmere in Avalon, and Quentin managed to forget his own troubles in watching Burlington's poise grow beautifully less.

He had never liked the older man particularly, for Burlington's cold manner was not calculated to attract men to him. Now that this was stripped from him, Quentin liked him even less; underneath the mask lay a sheer brutal violence which was somewhat of a surprise to him, while it bore out the story told him by Mary Palmer—though he could not see how she had become aware of it. That was a problem which Quentin resolutely shut out of his mind, however; in some way the girl had learned how things stood, and since she had skipped out in order to avoid an explanation, he was determined to probe Burlington to the depths.

Finally they ran across Constable McBean, and in helpless despair Burlington called in his services to find Miss Elsmere; since McBean's principal duty was to keep anything in the nature of a disturbance under cover, he nodded solemnly in pledge of secrecy, and bustled off without delay.

"Good God!" breathed Burlington hoarsely, mopping at his face as he watched the retreating blue form. "I can't stand this suspense, Quentin! We should have found that girl without any trouble—I wonder what could have happened to her?"

"Perhaps she found friends," suggested Quentin cruelly, and the other groaned.

"No. She—she was practically unknown." Burlington glanced around wildly, and Quentin made haste to get him out of the sun. The older man looked startlingly close to apoplexy, he thought.

"If—if she gets hold of people, Quentin—she'll play on their sympathies and make all kinds of trouble for me. Confound it, I'll have her examined for insanity if we get hold of her——"

"Eh? I thought you said she was nothing to you?" broke in Quentin mercilessly.

"She's not." Burlington wrenched at his collar, and his heavy jaw shoved out as he glared suspiciously at the younger man. "What are you trying to insinuate, Quentin? You'd better watch your words——"

"Come, come, keep your self-control, Burlington," said Quentin sternly. "I'm not insinuating anything—you're the one to watch your words, I guess."

"I beg your pardon," muttered the other, trying to collect himself. "I'm a bit worked up, old man; you'll have to overlook what I say. Come on, let's get up to the Metropole and sit down a bit in the cool. I'm afraid I'm getting old, Quentin."

The younger man laughed, and started along beside him to the hotel. A moment later, however, he suddenly caught sight of a hatless figure a short half block away, and stood paralyzed. There was no mistaking the heavy, undershot jaw, and the burly form—and worse yet, the other had seen him. He must have left the key of those handcuffs somewhere in Osgood's pockets, Quentin thought. Nemesis had come upon him!

CHAPTER XI.

"I guess you'll have to identify me again, Burlington," said Quentin coolly, watching the detective bearing down upon them. "Here comes a chap who took me for a housebreaker last night when I was up at Mathews' cottage. I had a scrap with him and left him tied up."

"You seem to be making the most of your holiday," grunted Burlington, stopping.

Quentin laughed a little. Fairly breathing forth rage and vengeance, Osgood came striding down on them; his face was purple with suppressed fury, his clothes were torn and awry, and he looked anything but prepossessing. Quentin quietly reached for his

pocketbook, extracting a twenty-dollar bill, and stood holding it unostentatiously as the detective raged up with fists waving.

"You—you—you——" gasped Osgood, choked by his own vehement anger.

"Hello, old man!" chuckled Quentin pleasantly. "Been detained?"

The detective managed to emit an oath, but he was unarmed and plainly had not any great desire to taste Quentin's fist again, without the requisite backing.

"You come along with me, you dirty crook!" he stormed, careless of the passing tourists who paused to watch him curiously. "I've got the goods on you now, all right, and I'll land you for ten years——"

"Here, what's all this row?" demanded Burlington with some asperity. He had managed to regain some of his customary air; which, in conjunction with his silk hat and frock coat, impressed the detective to the point of giving definite and coherent answer. "You can't go on like this in the street, my man. What does this mean, anyway?"

"It means that I'm a headquarters man," returned Osgood truculently, transferring his attentions to Burlington, who instantly ruffled up. Quentin reached up, took the star from his vest, and silently folded the twenty-dollar bill under it. "Don't you come any of your gay stuff on me, or I'll pull you along with this pal of yours. What's your name?"

"My name is Burlington, my man—Hall Burlington, M. D., of Long Beach," stiffly answered the other, his ire restoring all his pompous air. "A little more of your impertinence, sir, and I'll have the officials deport you from the island."

There was nothing weak about Hall Burlington. For all his rage, the keen-eyed detective gave back before the other's bristling dignity; accustomed to judge men, Osgood was sobered down on the instant, being placed on the defensive.

"No offense," he blurted out. "Only you're trailin' around with this fellow, and he's playing the doctor game likewise."

"I take it you're a detective?" queried Burlington. Quentin saw that his bullying instincts were fully aroused, and chuckled to himself.

"I am that," retorted Osgood bluntly. "And if you're what you say, show me. I ain't aiming to be offensive, doc, but I'm goin' to run in this guy and do it prompt."

"I fancy not," exploded Burlington. "This gentleman is Doctor Allan Quentin, and is very well known to me; if you have any doubt as to my character, sir, you may make inquiries of any of the officials here. Now explain the meaning of this outrage, or I shall take this matter up with your superiors. I don't fancy being made the butt of a crowd of people by a bull-headed plain-clothes man."

As he spoke, Burlington glared around at the curious tourists who had assembled; some of these moved on hastily, others gave him brazen applause, which was as a red rag to a bull. Osgood flung a black look at Quentin.

"Doc, you're the goods, I guess; since this guy is your friend, I'll put it up to you, and you can come over and go bail for him if you want to."

With that, Osgood gave a succinct description of what had happened on the previous evening from his point of view, briefly prefacing it with his tale of the pickpocket and concluding with the story of how he had gotten away from the shed.

"My name was on my gun belt, and when I made that old fool of a caretaker understand what was what, half an hour ago, he unlocked me, and here

I am. Now, doc, I ain't got my gun, but if your friend here wants to start anything, I guess he'll get all he's after. This thing is kind o' balled up, but I know what assault is, all right."

Quentin stepped forward, holding out the star and smiling a little.

"Here's your badge, Osgood. You might need it."

The detective gave him another black look and reached out; as his hand closed around the star and he felt the folded bill, he glanced down quickly. The black look vanished, and Quentin drew out his pocketbook, telling of how it had been located.

"Now, Osgood, here are cards and papers to establish my identity," he laughed easily. "As for our little scrap, you forced that yourself, but I'm quite willing to make it right with you. I told you the exact truth last night when I said that I had put a note under the door for Mr. Mathews——"

"I know that," interrupted the other, shoving the bill into his pocket with a furtive grin. "I seen it this morning after I'd got free. Now if the other doc here will step over to the pier, we can fix this thing up with the officials, I guess."

Quentin grinned to himself. Great was the power of money! That twenty-dollar bill had changed the detective's whole outlook on life in a flash; from a blustering, vengeance-seeking minion of the law he had become a person very anxious to oblige. Of course, Burlington's aid had been all-powerful, and the production of the pocketbook had substantiated the story, yet at the back of the change in Osgood had been that folded bill under the star. After all, one's point of view largely depends on the cash in hand, thought Quentin.

He reckoned without his host, however. At this instant the detective paused and directed a puzzled look toward him.

"Say, I clear forgot about that girl! Maybe the other doc here can straighten that up, too—I mean that there Miss Elsmere you was toting around."

"Eh? What's that? Miss Elsmere?" Burlington halted suddenly, his heavy jaw falling as he stared at Osgood.

Quentin's face went white. Now the fat was in the fire, indeed! Suspicion had darted swiftly into the detective's face once more, Burlington was staring from one to the other of them in bewildered surmise, and Quentin saw that the show-down was imminent with no sign of Mathews in guise of rescuer. However, since Mary Palmer had disappeared, it did not matter.

"Never mind this chump, Burlington," said Quentin hastily. "He's a bit twisted about things——"

"Not much!" exclaimed the physician savagely, his ugly jaw shoving out. "This detective has been in touch with the young woman, and I intend to find out about it. Now, my man, I want to know where you heard the name of Miss Elsmere."

Quentin subsided. The game was up, indeed, and he would need all his energies if he was to come out of the thing decently. He suddenly perceived that Burlington would be an exceedingly ugly customer to deal with.

"I don't know a whole lot, doc," answered the detective slowly. "This here friend of yours can tell you more than I can. I was sent from headquarters to nab a woman thief, like I told you. I spotted a blind girl with this guy on the boat, yesterday, comin' over from Pedro. I butted in and asked the skirt's name, this guy answers up that it's Miss Enid Elsmere, and says who he is, so I thinks maybe I've made a mistake. That's all I know about the lady, except what come after, like I told you."

During this brief recital Burlington's face became black with suspicion and suppressed rage. When Osgood finished, he whirled on Quentin; but for

all his anger there was a hint of fear in the darting blue eyes.

"Quentin, you met Miss Elsmere on the boat?" he exclaimed, forcing himself into calm. Quentin, seeing that he still held a lash over the older man, smiled slightly, although his eyes hardened.

"I did not," he returned flatly. "Nor did I see anything of her."

Burlington gasped, and took a step forward with outstretched fist, baffled fury in his face.

"Don't lie to me, Quentin!" he stormed. "I'm no——"

"Look here," and the cold acid of Quentin's voice bit through his vehemence and quieted him. "I don't propose to be called a liar by you, Burlington. This thing can be explained, but I want an apology from you for that word, and I want it now."

Osgood grinned furtively as he listened. The steely note in Quentin's voice, which had failed to warn the detective on the previous evening, had its effect on Burlington, whose eyes rested on Quentin's. The younger man's icy coldness pierced Burlington's rage and sobered him on the instant.

"I didn't mean to be hasty, Quentin," he retracted. "But there's something behind all this, and I'm going to get to it. Have you been trying to play with me, sir? Why have you been concealing your knowledge of this young lady, and pretending to help me in seeking for her?"

Osgood suddenly remembered his personal property, and the effects of the twenty-dollar bill faded out. He pushed forward, facing Quentin with swift truculence.

"Say, where's my money and the stuff you took from me, hey? This thing ain't been squared up yet——"

"Oh, shut up!" broke out Quentin, and at the flame in his eyes Osgood retreated a pace. "Your stuff is at the hotel desk, waiting for you. Now get out of this, and let me settle matters with Burlington. Your injuries are wholly personal, and you'll find your money all safe and sound."

He impatiently shoved the burly detective aside, but Burlington had not yet done with the man. Catching his arm, he whirled him about.

"See here, Osgood—what was this blind girl like whom you saw with Quentin on the boat?"

The detective gave prompt reply.

"She had fluffy brown hair, wore a white, tailored suit, and was neat as a pin. The dip I was after had played the fine lady, so——"

"What? You're sure her hair was not black! Was she tall or short?"

"Tall, doc. Tall and fair."

"Good heavens!" Burlington took a step back, brushing a hand across his eyes in bewilderment. Osgood's tone was too positive to admit of doubt, and Quentin laughed shortly.

"You see, Burlington, the girl Osgood saw with me was Miss Palmer and no other. Now let's get out of this—we can go to my room at the hotel, and I'll have it out with you if you want it."

"Wait!" cried Burlington hoarsely, staring at him. "Why did you give her Miss Elsmere's name? How had you heard anything of Miss Elsmere? If her name was Palmer, why did you lie to Osgood about it?"

"By thunder, that's right, doc!" blurted out the detective, whirling angrily on Quentin. "So you gave me a bum steer, eh? I guess we ain't out of the woods on this thing yet, bo! Now come across lively, or there'll be trouble."

Quentin gave him a contemptuous look. The gathering crowd irritated him, for he had no mind to expose his hand in public, and since the thing had to come out, he determined to take the aggressive before Burlington had a chance to do so.

"All right," he said shortly, facing Burlington. "If you want it straight, my friend, you can have it. I've been doing a heap of lying this morning, Burlington, and it ends right here. I happen to know all about Enid Elsmere, your villainy in connection with her, your keeping her hidden away in your house, and all the rest of it. What's more, you've got to move mighty softly if you're going to side-step the biggest scandal that ever woke up this part of the world."

His quiet but intense words had all the effect for which he could have wished. The big physician's bloodshot face went white as he listened, then became mottled again; he breathed stertorously, and there was terror in his wild stare, but it was the terror of desperation. His square jaw clamped shut swiftly, and when Quentin had finished he seemed suddenly to regain the air of masterful poise which had been stripped from him.

Seeing that transformation, Quentin knew that it boded trouble. Burlington was desperate; the fact that Quentin knew his secret meant exposure and disgrace for him, and social ruin at the least. For a moment he did not reply, while the amazed Osgood stood looking from one to the other in questioning conjecture. Quentin's abrupt change from defense to attack had set him all adrift.

"Let's get out of this," exclaimed Burlington, once more becoming aware of the crowd. His sudden calm was anything but reassuring. "Quentin, we can't settle this thing here in the street. Come along to your room at the hotel."

"Here, I guess I'll trot along," broke in Osgood, as Burlington took a step away. Quentin hesitated.

"This matter is between ourselves," he began, but the physician swung around with a savage oath.

"No, by—— Osgood, you come along with us and see this thing through. I fancy I'll have some use for you in a mighty short time."

And, catching his malevolent look, Quentin led the way to the hotel with foreboding in his heart. He could not fathom Burlington's intent, but he saw that the man was dangerous—terribly dangerous, and the more so for his forced calm.

CHAPTER XII.

There was a strained silence on all three of the men as they strode into the hotel lobby. Osgood went over to the desk, and Quentin followed him; while the detective was getting the envelope containing his personal belongings, Quentin made inquiries after the girl. He found that she had not returned, and doubted no longer that she was the pickpocket and had seized the chance to get away. Osgood looked up at him with a grin.

"Well, doc, I ain't got any hard feelings; I guess you're square, after all. But what's the row between you and the other doc?"

Quentin glanced across at Burlington, who was waiting by the elevator, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Come along and see. If I'm not much mistaken, you'll be able to make an arrest yet, Osgood."

As they crossed back and rejoined Burlington, Quentin determined to force the issue squarely. What the points of the law were, he did not know; but he fancied that he could at least make a charge against the Long Beach man which would force the matter into the courts. There was no doubt that in some manner Mary Palmer had learned Burlington's secret, perhaps through the under channels used by crooks to obtain such knowledge; the thought that she was indeed a thief struck Quentin hard, but he knew now that the story was true enough.

With tense silence still prevailing

among the three, they reached Quentin's room. Burlington dropped into a chair, smoothed back his graying hair in his most precise fashion, and faced Quentin.

"Now, sir," he said, breathing hard, but forcing himself into self-control, "you will kindly explain your veiled charges against me. I am bitterly surprised in you, Allan Quentin, and unless you make a satisfactory explanation, you shall suffer for it."

"I do not intend to explain," returned Quentin coldly. "That will come from you. I suppose you will admit that Enid Elsmere is your ward, and that owing to her affliction you have the use of her income?"

"Yes, you scoundrel!" burst out the other, quivering with rage. "I'll not only admit it, but I'll make you admit where you got that information!"

Quentin smiled.

"By your own words you confess that you have kept the matter quiet, Burlington. Your friends know nothing of her being in your house; you've deliberately attempted to keep her sequestered so that you might enjoy her money; you've lied to her about her condition, and since you told me this morning that the girl you were after had a brain tumor, a simple operation would have fixed her up. The courts may have given you control of her, Burlington, but I doubt whether you'll keep it long."

With that, he turned to Osgood, who was chewing an unlit cigar.

"I don't know what charge covers this case, Osgood, but I guess you understand enough of the situation. Now, I demand that you arrest Doctor Burlington there on my charge, and I will appear against him; the girl has escaped from his hands, and she'll be located quickly enough when this thing gets into the open."

Osgood reached down into his pocket and produced his handcuffs hesitantly.

"Well, doc, I ain't quite sure myself, but I'll take a chance——"

"Not so fast, there!" Burlington leaped to his feet quickly. "I intend to lay a charge here myself. Osgood, you saw Quentin with a presumably blind girl yesterday, whom he passed off as Miss Elsmere; since you've heard what has passed between us, you know that Miss Elsmere was my ward by legal right, and if I've thought fit to keep her secluded, that's my affair and not yours. I've been trying to cure her without an operation——"

"And you've been three years doing it," broke in Quentin hotly.

"Confound you, shut up!" roared Burlington. "Osgood, arrest that man! I charge him with conspiracy and attempted blackmail; he and that pretended charge of his, whom he passed off on you as Miss Elsmere and on me as Miss Palmer, are in this thing together. I charge them with kidnaping my ward and getting her out of the way, in a conspiracy to extort money from me. I'll fix you, you damned scoundrel!"

Quentin's mouth tightened into a set line as he faced the other, longing to plant his fist on the big jaw. Burlington acted out his part well, helped by the furious rage which consumed him; the young surgeon saw that Osgood was wavering, and perceived at once that Burlington had managed to turn the tables on him very neatly.

Also, he knew what the others did not—that Mary Palmer had slipped away, that she was the "dip" for whom Osgood was looking, and that when this complication came out the charge made by Burlington would be tremendously strengthened. On the whole, things looked pretty black, he thought.

The others did not know this, however, and there was still a chance to bluff his way through safely. Burlington's charge was also bluff, but with skill it could be turned into a thing of

reality; Quentin alone knew how real it might be when the facts about Mary Palmer were brought to light.

"Look here, Osgood," he said, fighting for time, "Doctor Burlington has been going all over the island this morning hunting for Miss Elsmere——"

"Thought you said that skirt with you was the lady?" put in the detective bluntly.

"I did—but her real name was Mary Palmer. I knew that Burlington would be after his ward, who had escaped. and I merely wanted to lay a blind trail that might deceive him. In that way, the girl would have time to reach friends. Now, there's the situation. By his own words and actions, Burlington has proved that he's been attempting malpractice; I'll add that to my charges as well, if it'll do any good."

"You scoundrel!" flamed Burlington, taking a step toward Quentin, his fists waving threateningly. "You needn't try to get out of your scrape by laying charges against me! Officer, either arrest that fellow, or I'll have you broke!"

Osgood grinned slightly.

"I guess not, doc—it'll take more than a pair of you to break Bert Osgood. One of you guys has to be arrested, I guess, but as far's I can see, the odds are even. Why don't you toss up a coin and settle it? The only thing I can see is to pull the both of you and let you scrap it out with the desk sergeant!"

Quentin laughed, as his sense of humor awoke to the occasion. Burlington, however, was only maddened the more.

"Confound it, do I have to arrest him myself? I'll call in the officials here, unless you act at once! Get hold of his woman accomplice, and do it lively; if you refuse to arrest him, I'll take care of the scoundrel."

"That suits me," and Osgood rubbed his jaw with a reflective grin at Quentin. "That's a good idea, doc. Where's that lady pal of yours?"

Quentin gave up. Osgood's keen perception had pierced to the nub of things —which happened to be Mary Palmer —and there was no use putting off the inevitable any longer.

Had not Burlington interfered at this junction, Quentin would simply have placed the whole affair in the detective's hands, and let things take their course. But at Osgood's exclamation, Burlington hastily turned toward the door, with savage determination in his features.

"I'll attend to her myself!" he declared hotly. "You take care of Quentin, and I'll bring the woman here——"

With this, Quentin's cold restraint gave way. Deciding instantly that he would at least have the satisfaction of putting Burlington in his place, he darted forward and whirled in front of the door with a swift push that sent Burlington staggering back.

"That's enough from you!" he cried, his eyes flaming. "You're not going to bully any more women, Burlington—unless you do it inside State's prison."

The other leaned against the table a second, glaring and panting heavily. In that instant Quentin knew that he must subdue or go under; Burlington's powerful face expressed determination to silence him at whatever cost. The whole future of each man depended upon the outcome.

Yet in Burlington's face Quentin read a swift cunning that he could not fathom, a purpose which was hidden from him. He was soon to learn its import, however.

"Get away from that door, Quentin!" snapped the older man, stepping forward once more. "Bear witness that I'm only trying to get out of this room, Osgood——"

Goaded beyond endurance, Quentin wasted no more words. Burlington came at him, and, without hesitation, he drove out his fist; the blow caught the

other on the cheek and sent him reeling, but Burlington attempted no return.

"Arrest him—for assault!" he gasped, clinging to a chair. Too late, Quentin saw the plan, but he gave Osgood no chance to intervene. He had played into his enemy's hand, but he determined to do it thoroughly while he was about it.

With a swift step forward, he sent his fist crashing into Burlington's mouth, and the larger man bent back across the table. He writhed away, but again Quentin's knuckles found him, this time for a clean blow under the ear. Burlington shot headfirst into the corner, and Quentin found the burly detective gripping his arms.

"Easy does it, doc—easy does it!" exclaimed Osgood firmly. Quentin looked him in the eye, half wrenched away, then the cold flame of anger died out of his face, and he laughed shortly.

"All right, Osgood. I'll not touch you or him, either. Let go!"

"You're under arrest, sir," said the other quietly, stepping back. "Now let's see what you did to the big doc. Say, you've got a great little kick in that right of yours! Look at him!"

Quentin looked down at Burlington, who was slowly gaining his feet, and noted with great satisfaction that the three blows he had landed would leave their marks for some time. The detective pulled up the fallen physician, and shoved him into a chair, but Burlington staggered up, still furious.

"By ——, put that man under arrest!" he foamed, beside himself with rage. "He's assaulted me——"

"I've got him under arrest, doc," said Osgood, forcing him back into the chair. "Now, you sit down and cool off a minute."

"I'm cool enough, my man," retorted Burlington. "You'd better get hold of the woman and arrest her also on my charge."

"You'd better not, Osgood," put in Quentin calmly.

The detective coolly disregarded him, and stepped to the wall telephone.

"What name does she go under here—what's her alias, doc?" he asked, turning toward Quentin. The latter gave up the struggle.

"Miss Elsmere."

While Osgood was communicating with the office, Quentin stared disgustedly at the floor. He had made a fine mess of things now, he reflected. He had virtually forced himself under arrest, the hand of circumstance had clutched about his neck, and Burlington would have little difficulty in making good his charge of conspiracy when the whole miserable story had been dragged into court.

After all, what had he on which to base his own charges? Nothing but the word of a woman he did not know, and who was herself a fugitive from justice, combined with some trifling circumstantial evidence which Burlington could easily explain away. Still, there would be court records of Burlington's guardianship, but unless the real Enid Elsmere was to be produced as a witness against him, Burlington would have an easy time squirming out of Quentin's charge—especially when the latter had been placed under arrest for assault, and might be facing a hatched-up conspiracy charge.

"Say," exclaimed Osgood, turning from the telephone with a black look, "I guess you done me out of pinching that dip after all, doc. She went out o' here this morning, about as blind as I am."

"What!" roared Burlington, leaping up. "Is she gone?"

"Gone is right, big doc." Osgood was far recovered from the influence of that twenty-dollar bill by this time, and showed it plainly. "But I got this guy, and I got him right now. Doc, slip out

your wrists for the bracelets, and no fooling."

Quentin, beyond words, put out his hands as Osgood came up. There was a clink and a click, and the handcuffs were upon him. At this instant the telephone bell rang, and Osgood answered it.

"Sure!" he said quickly. "Send 'em up."

He hung up the receiver and turned with a grin.

"It's all right, doc," he said, addressing Burlington. "That there woman we're after just came in, and she'll be up here in a jiffy. We'll nab 'em both at once."

Quentin looked up, then dropped his head with a groan. The whole thing had been useless—Mary Palmer had returned, only to walk into a trap, and he was powerless to save her or himself from the toils that he saw fast closing about them both.

A moment later there was a knock at the door. Burlington started up, but the detective waved him back with a confident grin, and moved over so that he was in position to grip whoever entered.

"Come in!" he cried, and the door opened.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Yes'm, you're pinched," grinned Osgood, with his hand on the shoulder of Mary Palmer. She faced him, seemingly without surprise, and Quentin saw that she had given over all pretense of blindness.

"On a charge of conspiracy, young woman," thundered out Burlington impressively as he came down the room wagging his forefinger. "Officer, I shall appear before both of these persons——"

"I don't think you will, Burlington," came a voice from the doorway. And then silence fell suddenly, and Burlington stood as if paralyzed.

Looking at the doorway, Quentin saw there an elderly man of commanding presence, whose Southern goatee fairly bristled with indignation. One arm was about the shoulders of a girl—and Quentin emitted a gasp as he saw that she was clad in red, with black hair that flew over her shoulders.

"Come in, Uncle Jim," said Mary Palmer quietly. "This is Doctor Quentin, who seems to be once more under arrest!" And she flashed Quentin a bright smile. "Doctor, this is my uncle, Mr. Mathews. And this—is Enid Elsmere."

Burlington said no word, but collapsed into the chair behind him, his fingers clawing at the table, and his face suddenly gone to a mottled hue.

"And this," went on the girl, motioning toward the detective, "is the Mr. Osgood of whom I told you, uncle."

Quentin rose, smiling.

"Sorry I can't shake hands, Mr. Mathews," he said, and the tension was broken.

"Take those handcuffs off Doctor Quentin, Osgood!" ordered Mathews, putting Enid Elsmere behind him and advancing. The girl stood, weeping, her face in her hands. "I think you know me, sir?"

"Why—yes, Mr. Mathews," gasped the detective, with unexpected deference. "I didn't forget that murder case, sir——"

"Then do as I say!"

"Sorry, sir," and Osgood shook his head. "This gentleman assaulted the big doc over there, and I had to pinch him whether I wanted to or not."

Mathews whirled on the crumpled figure in the chair.

"Withdraw that charge, Burlington, and do it quickly!"

At the cold menace in his voice, Burlington shivered, gasped, and nodded at the detective. A moment later Quentin rubbed his wrists, and Osgood stood

with the handcuffs dangling, looking from one to the other in perplexity.

"Arrest this man Burlington," went on Mathews, but before he could finish, the other sprang up with a choking cry:

"No—no, for God's sake, Mathews! Not that!"

"Sit down—shut up, you hound, or I'll thrash you myself!" exploded Mathews, and Burlington crumpled up again, utterly unnerved. "Now let's get this thing straight."

Mary Palmer had her arms about the blind girl, and as Quentin stepped over and glanced into the latter's face, he knew that here there was no deception. Then he looked at Mary Palmer—and found the violet eyes smiling into his.

"What does all this mean?" he asked slowly. At the question, Mathews turned to him and motioned Mary Palmer to speak. The girl laughed happily, glancing from Osgood back to Quentin, and addressing both at once in her rather confused explanation—which was perfectly clear to both, however.

"Why, my uncle—Mr. Mathews here—was to meet me in Los Angeles, on my way from Phoenix to visit him. I missed him and came on alone. At San Pedro I found poor Enid here, afraid to speak to any one, and when I asked her what the matter was she burst into tears and told me the whole story—just as I told it to you, Doctor Quentin. I did not know what to do, but the poor girl was helpless and in distress, and said she wanted to find my uncle, who would protect her. She was afraid that Doctor Burlington would come after her, so I found a policeman and asked him if he would take care of her.

"He happened to know my uncle by sight, and had seen him that morning—yesterday, but now it seems a year ago! He promised to take care of Enid and to hand her over to my uncle when he came back after having missed me, and I went on the boat to go on to the island. Then I saw you, Mr. Osgood, and you looked at me so hard that—that it made me afraid, and—and——"

"And so you made up to me and played blind, eh?" laughed Quentin. Suddenly he understood the whole thing. Mathews had arrived at San Pedro on his way back, had been met by the policeman and the real Enid, and had hastened over to the island. That explained the message which had come for Mary Palmer, and why she had gone out. Upon meeting Mathews, she had brought him back—and what about the pickpocket? Quentin whirled on the detective, smiling.

"I guess you lose out on your lady dip prisoner, Osgood! Kind of bad on your reputation, isn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know," and the detective rubbed at his chin as he cast a glance at the crumpled figure in the chair. "As near's I get you, Mr. Mathews, I'm to pinch the big doc over there, eh?"

Weeping unrestrainedly, the blind girl loosed her arms from around Mary Palmer and turned, with a little pleading gesture that was terribly pathetic.

"No," she cried, her voice choked with sobs. "Please, Mr. Mathews, please don't——"

"All right, little girl; all right," and Mathews gathered her in his arms for a moment, comforting her. Then, as he lifted his head and gazed across her streaming black hair, his voice bit into the crumpled figure.

"Burlington, get out of here! This guardianship shall be turned over to me by the courts, unless you do it of your own will inside of three days. Now—get out, and do it quick!"

The big man rose heavily. Despite his anger, despite the swift attempt to

ruin him, which had so nearly succeeded, Quentin felt a thrill of pity as he looked on the man's ghastly face; Burlington appeared utterly crushed, and the terrific mental agony stamped in his features was too much for the younger man. Quentin took an impulsive step forward.

"I don't think any of us want much publicity out of this, Burlington. For the sake of your wife and Dolly, I'll see that the whole thing is kept quiet."

The other did not reply. With a pitiful effort at self-possession, he tried to recover his old pompous manner, failed dismally, took the silk hat handed him by the grinning Osgood, and the door slammed. Mathews looked over at Quentin with a twinkle in his eye.

"You seem confident of your ability to hush this thing up, young man!"

"I am," retorted Quentin, "provided that Osgood will keep quiet——"

"Oh, I'm satisfied," murmured the detective easily. "I'm used to keeping my head shut, doc. But you can't always tell about a lady——" And he glanced meaningly at Mary Palmer.

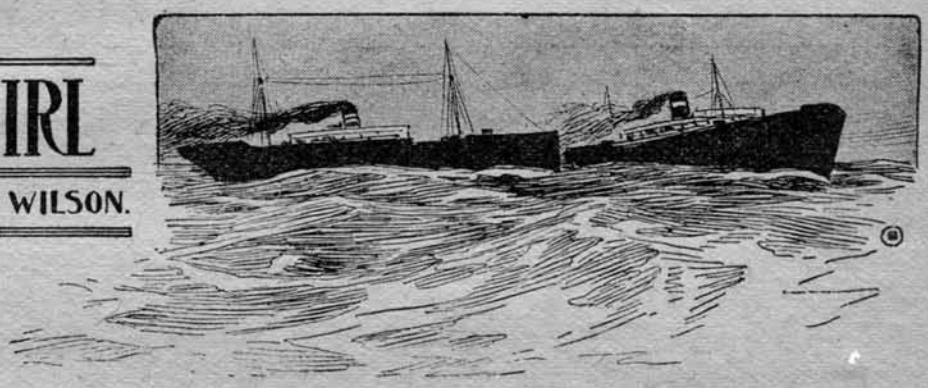
"No," she added merrily. "How do you propose to shut my mouth, Doctor Quentin?"

"Well," and Quentin smiled into her eyes, "I do know one very effective method of doing it; but I've only known you one day—and there are other folks around——"

"Don't mind me, doc," exclaimed Osgood hastily, and the door slammed again.

THE GIRL

BY JOHN FLEMING WILSON.



WE had met on the little launch that runs across the channel from San Pedro to East San Pedro and we were glad to see each other, for it was cold and lonely and neither of us knew anybody in the port.

"I'm just in from Shanghai," Murray told me. "I brought the schooner *Seahome* over."

"Good voyage?" I asked, glancing at his freshly shaven, brown face.

"Fair," he returned. "She's a good old packet. I hoped to meet the girl again. But she's gone."

"The girl?" I demanded. "What girl?"

"The girl that was in love with Tantor Martin," he replied. "She was so good and kind and beautiful I really hoped to see her again."

"I never heard of her," I returned. "I believe I did get a hint that that pirate was in love with some woman or other—after hating all women—but I didn't hear enough to startle me."

Captain Murray looked at me gravely. "It was really an affair," he remarked, getting to his feet as the launch swung up to the float. "Funny you never heard of it. Come on over to the *Hanalei*, and I'll tell you about it. I did hope to see her."

Presently we were in his little stateroom on the steamer, and Murray lit his pipe. He bore an expression of sadness that touched me, I, who had known him for many years as a carefree sailor. I saw that he was deeply moved.

"Yes, Tantor Martin forgot all his hatred of women because of this girl," he said simply. "I wish she had loved me. And yet I don't regret the affair. It was quite beautiful."

"I shouldn't expect that brute to have been concerned in anything that one might describe as beautiful," I commented. "He was born to be a pirate. The man was a savage."

"And the fine part of it all is that he was a pirate in a good cause and made others of us pirates," Murray said quietly. "Listen."

You remember that Tantor got into trouble with the owners of the *Tam O'Shanter* for holding up poor Captain Dare, of the *Mildmay,* for five thousand dollars when the *Mildmay* was off the rocks up at Cape Blanco. It was plain brutality, for Dare was incompetent and his ship was a sure loss unless Martin gave him a hawser and towed him out. Tantor despised Dare, and as it was the *Mildmay* was in the breakers when Tantor finally put a line aboard and hauled him out to sea. Dare signed for five thousand. Plain piracy on Tantor's part. His owners wouldn't stand for it.

They gave the *Tam O'Shanter* to Richardson. Martin shook his fist in the boss' face and swore he had made five thousand for him, only to be cheated of his share. You know he was a rough customer, Tantor. You remember the time he was mate of *The Gleaner* and nearly got ten years at hard labor for beating the captain? Well, he told his owners that he would make them sorry.

"Some day I'll take my five thousand back," he said. "I made it fair and square, and you accept it, and then discharge me because Dare makes a fuss. He was going to lose his hundred thousand dollar ship. I save it for the poor wretch. And you listen to the papers and let me go."

As a matter of fact, I met Tantor an hour later and gave him a job—mate of the *Witch of Endor,* when I was skipper of her and we were in the coastwise trade to Puget Sound. Good mate, Tantor. I got to appreciate him. And when he'd been with me six months this girl wanders down to the wharf while we're lying here in San Pedro, and Tantor sees her and the affair begins.

She was a lovely creature. Name of Laws—Gertrude Laws. From up the country, she was. She'd been to school and had come down to Los Angeles to study to be a teacher. One afternoon she thought she'd like to see a ship, and took the trolley down here. The *Witch of Endor's* masts are sticking up into the blue sky and she traipses down to see her. Tantor was sitting on the wheel box telling me that ships and women were the two evils in life.

"I'll never speak to a woman again," he growls.

"Please, may I come and see your ship?" says a voice from the wharf.

I looked over and there stands a big, handsome kid of a girl, with her hair blowing about her face, and one brown hand holding on her cap.

I don't know just what made me do it, but I jumped up and told her to come aboard.

"Keep 'em off the ship," says Tantor, not lifting his eyes. "Twenty years ago a woman turned me down and I never——"

The girl tripped up the plank and stopped to stare up at the yards. I saw that she was about eighteen years old and innocent as a baby.

"Please," says she, as frank as the

wind, "I've never seen a ship. Where are the sails? All the pictures of ships have sails!"

"Madam," says Tantor, in his ugliest voice, "you mean that the ships you see in pictures have sails."

She paused and looked at him. I could see her eyes light up with a little twinkling gleam, like the firelight on your wife's eyes. "I never can get my grammar and my curiosity to fit in together," she said. "Isn't that terrible for a girl that's going to be a school-teacher?"

Tantor turned those hard, grim eyes of his on her and got up. I could see that he was suddenly changed. I don't know just how you'd explain it, but there was something about the way he looked at her that told me she'd altered his point of view. He went down on the main deck with her and showed her all about the *Witch*. I could hear 'em talking, and now and then there'd float up to the quarter-deck, where I was sitting, that little, tinkling, pretty laugh of hers.

Thinks I, Tantor never behaved that way before. And when they came back to the quarter-deck, and I saw him smile in answer to her smile I felt that something had happened.

It wasn't a week before Tantor Martin came to me, and said he was going to marry Gertrude Laws.

"You!" I roared at him. "That girl's as clean and dainty as a morning-glory, and you're nothing but a hard-fisted, mean-tempered, bad-livered sailor." Honest, it got me for the moment. I'd seen quite a bit of the girl, and I—I liked her. She was as fresh and wholesome as a breeze across an orchard, and she was beautiful, too, with that strange loveliness that changes and has little shadows of sadness about it, and little lights of passion and all very girlish and natural and innocent.

"Yes," says he, "I'm going to marry her. I'll try and get another ship. Or live ashore. But I think I can get a ship."

"Well," I returned, "if she agrees and her people agree, I s'pose nobody else has any say."

"Her people?" he says quietly. "She hasn't any—only an aunt. She's all alone in this world, and you and I know it's no place for a lone girl."

"When are you going to be married?" I asked.

"I haven't asked her yet," he told me slowly. "I just wanted you to understand. I'll ask her to-night."

You know perfectly well that Tantor Martin wasn't a man to laugh at. He was mortally in earnest, and I kept my mouth shut.

"She's going to the show with me to-night," he went on. "And I'll bring her down here for supper. She thinks there ought to be some third person when we eat together, so I told her you were skipper of the ship and you'd eat with us."

"Thanks," says I, actually forgetting to call him down.

"And if anybody thinks he can make any remarks about her," he goes on, "I'll show him something."

"The only remark I have to make is that you have enough nerve to stock a battleship," I returned. "Tell the cook to give us a good spread."

"Nothing to drink, you know," he continued. "She don't like it."

"Sure," I told him.

"And no rough language about."

"You're still mate of this packet and that's up to you," I remarked.

And that evening just about sunset she came down with Tantor striding alongside of her. It was a pretty sight: big, coarse Tantor with a new look on his face, and the girl laughing up at him, and glancing at the shipping and the sky and the crisp water with bright eyes.

We had a supper fit for a king. Old cookee certainly outdid himself and

waited on us with such officiousness that Gertrude simply had to shake hands with him over the dessert. The cook nearly died of pleasure.

When it was full dark I took Tantor and Gertrude up on the quarter-deck, and he showed her all the harbor lights while I smoked my pipe. Then I told 'em to enjoy themselves on deck—it was a fine night—and went over to visit Captain Nelson on the *Beaver*.

Nelson and I had a yarn, and then I wandered back to the *Witch of Endor*. I could see the watchman's lantern burning under the break of the fo'c's'le head and the glimmer of the lamp in the cook's room amidships. I stopped under the bulwarks a moment to look at the stars and wonder why a sailor's life is so lonely. I heard voices. It was the girl and Tantor, above me on the quarter-deck.

"I want to teach school!" she was saying in her fresh, girlish voice.

"And you've got to marry me," says he, quite gently for him.

"But," she protested, "I don't want to get married!"

"Yes, you do," Martin puts in. "And I'll tell you why: because I love you and I can't bear to see you alone in the world, and I'm strong enough to look after you."

Well, I stepped away for a while, and when I came back Tantor was just coming ashore with the girl on his arm. He was happy. And she was happy, too. They merely called good night to me, and hurried off to catch the trolley.

We had to lie in San Pedro for a long time that trip, waiting for a cargo for Seattle, and all that time Tantor worked and acted like a man who'd thought himself in torment and suddenly found that he was in heaven. Gertrude used to come down to the ship every afternoon, and they'd sit on a stringer and talk. I knew that trouble was coming, but what business was it of mine?

You see Burton of the *Hazel* saw all this and he fell in love with the girl, too. You knew him—a smooth, quiet, dangerous fellow. He was awfully nice to Gertrude, and she, being that kind of girl that likes everybody and knows no evil, took him for what he professed to be. And she made Tantor Martin smile at him. Tantor even forget his old grudge against Burton, though he remembered that Burton had been no friend of his during the time they were thrashing out the little matter of the *Tam O'Shanter* and Captain Dare.

Then Burton began openly to make love to the girl. She suddenly found out what he was doing, and I've never seen such a pitiful sight.

"Oh, you're in love with me!" she cried out one evening when Tantor and I were busy in the cabin over some papers, and she was enjoying the air on the wharf.

At the sound of the words, Martin leaped up.

"Keep still!" I warned him. We both listened.

"It is so lovely to be in love and so terrible to be in love wrong," she went on. I could fairly see the tears in her lovely eyes. "And you're in love with me, and I can't help you at all. I'm so *sorry!*"

"Sit still!" I told Tantor. "Remember that every man's love is his own affair. Leave it to her."

So we sat there—forgetting the papers—and listened. I suppose Burton's black heart really beat for her, she was so pure and kind and gentle. At any rate, he was in earnest and went away at last in silence.

"Now," said I, "go and don't let her understand that you overheard. She is sorry for him."

Martin left, and I heard her run to him and ask him to take her back to Los Angeles. A moment later they were gone.

All the next day Tantor brooded over the thing. He went about his work much like he had done in the old days—with curses on his lips and ugly looks for those who crossed him. That night he told me she wouldn't come down that evening.

"Natural," I said. "My heavens, do you expect the girl to be here every night? I don't notice you calling where she lives."

"It wouldn't do," he told me. "She's living at some woman's hotel where men can't call without getting the matron down on them. She doesn't know it, but I do, and I wouldn't have anything happen to make her even think of the wrong things that so many people think." He looked at me with those grim eyes of his and added: "So long as I live she'll never even have to listen to suggestions of what life can be made when one is wicked."

He was right and I said nothing. He was protecting the purity of her love for him, the gentle and pure affection that was like an altar candle in her heart. Tantor Martin was decent. He wasn't even urging her to marry him quickly because he was afraid. The girl—the woman one loves—is sacred—even when one marries her—I understood Tantor.

But Burton's love for her had turned to something infernal. It showed that Martin was right in hating him. He went to the girl and told her—stories. He invited her on board the *Hazel* and she went, like a friendly child. There he said more, the things that burned and scorched the girl. She said nothing but went to her boarding place in Los Angeles and confided in the matron. Some good women unlock the doors of hell without knowing it. She dragged the whole story of Gertrude's engagement to Tantor out and said the single thing: "You have compromised yourself. No good girl would go down to a ship and meet a sailor without being a bad woman. Pack your things."

It was a cruel thing to say under any circumstances. But women don't understand other women, I guess. That excellent matron did not know that Gertrude wouldn't, couldn't go to Tantor. She had put the stain on their pure and lovely relations. The girl was sickened at the thought that she was unworthy of Tantor—that she had soiled the pure character she must have to be his wife. She thought—it's the way women think—that what that matron had said was true: she was not fit to be the wife of a good man.

She went to Burton.

Was it because she knew him to be a beast and a scoundrel? Was it because she thought that she was sinful and no other course was open except to go to people stained like herself? Or was it because she wished to forever shut herself out of the heaven she had forfeited? You and I can't tell. But she went down to Burton and told him what the matron had said, and he smiled and then frowned and told her that though every one else turned her down, he loved her and she could come to him and be protected.

He sailed that night for Honolulu.

It was four o'clock in the morning when Martin kicked my door in and told me. He had been up to the boarding place and the matron had informed him of what she had said and done. Tantor listened and cursed the woman. Then he came back to San Pedro and found Burton had sailed and that the girl was on board.

"I'm going for her," he told me.

"How?" I demanded.

"This packet won't do. The *Hazel* can steam twelve, and Burton's making time offshore, I know. The only packet in port that can catch him is the *Tam O'Shanter*. Come with me. We'll take her."

I sat up and argued with him. I

told him plainly that he hadn't money enough nor had I to charter that steamer for a wild-goose chase.

"And she belongs to the men who kicked you out," I added.

He glowered on me. "Will you come with me to save the girl? I hear her crying out there."

He waved his great hand toward the Pacific, and it seemed as if I did actually hear a woman sobbing.

I tried to do something with him, but he was mad. The end of it was I dressed and we went down the water front to the *Tam O'Shanter,* which was lying with steam up, ready to sail in the morning.

Luckily the captain was ashore, else we would have had more trouble. As it was, Tantor raged aboard, got the engineer into a blue funk, and himself cast off the lines while the mate and deck hands—who knew him of old—feebly protested.

It was as plain a case of piracy as ever you saw. We simply seized that ship and went to sea in a dark mist that filled the channel with murky shadows that made the course to Dead Man's Island a mystery. Tantor was at the wheel. We barely missed the government dredge and tailed on the bar—we were beyond the islands an hour after sunrise.

It was noon when the crew of the *Tam O'Shanter* wakened to the fact that they were in charge of a skipper who had no business on their ship and that they were bound for Honolulu instead of Puget Sound. The mate and the chief engineer put their heads together and tried to reason with Tantor. I am ashamed to say that I backed him up—there was no more trouble. The *Tam O'Shanter* made a good fifteen knots an hour with double watches in the fireroom. Martin kept the wheel.

Late that night we saw the stern light of the *Hazel,* a mere flicker of flame on the horizon.

"I knew I'd catch him," Tantor said hoarsely. "I used to make this old packet log sixteen knots. When I dragged old Dare out of the breakers off Blanco I had fifty pounds more than allowed in the boilers. And I knew what course that Burton would take. Keep the wheel while I see about a boat."

"What do you intend to do?" I demanded. "Burton won't stop for you. You're absolutely crazy. All you can do is follow him."

"*Is* that so?" retorted Martin. "Watch me. I leave you in charge of this packet. I have work to do, and I'm going to do it."

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, we crept up on that little light that marked where the girl was crying. At four in the morning it was less than a mile ahead. Tantor had been raging up and down the decks, using his fists and his tongue to such effect that the mate of the *Tam O'Shanter* had taken to his room and refused to come out.

It was a raw, dark, misty morning, such as one gets off the lower coast of California once in a while. The sea was running along in great, smooth rollers that seemed to stream in endless array out of the blackness and hasten toward the invisible shore. The *Tam O'Shanter* was shaking to the tremendous thrust of her engines.

"In half an hour we'll be up to them," I told Tantor.

"I'll take the bridge then," he said. "Understand, obey my orders to the word. When I'm done, you take charge."

We surged along, and I caught once in a while the glint of the white water under the counter of the *Hazel.* At other moments I would catch the shadow of fresh smoke against the lowering sky. By her masthead light and the lights along her starboard side, I could see that she was heading up, evidently

trying to make us buck the light sea that was running.

"In fifteen minutes I'll show you something," said Tantor, thrusting his head in at the wheelhouse window.

For the first time I studied the man's face. You've seen him. He's a pirate, as you say. I fancy Columbus looked as he did when his crew mutinied. Captain Columbus was a pirate. They don't say it in the schoolbooks, but a man who'd seize a whole hemisphere must have been some person. And Tantor Martin was seizing a whole world just then. I stuck to the wheel.

"Keep to starboard of him," he told me grimly.

I did.

I think that Burton realized at the last that Tantor was after him. I suppose he was afraid, anyway, and when he had first seen our lights he had put on more steam. But now the *Hazel* simply leaped through the long, purple swells. I could see the glimmer of the water breaking over her bows. And down below in the bowels of the *Tam O'Shanter* the firemen wielded shovels and slice bars so vigorously that I could hear the clang of them in the wheelhouse.

It was nip and tuck for the next hour. Then the *Hazel* began to slow down and we forged up. I steered in toward her. Tantor banged the weather window open and said: "Keep away to starboard."

"But you want to get alongside!" I protested.

"You do what I tell you," he said, glaring at me. I did. We kept to the nor'ard.

It was in the gray of the dawn that we passed the *Hazel*. It was clear as water that Burton thought he had been wrong and that we weren't after him. He slacked down his engines, and, as the sun rose, we were a mile ahead of him. I could hear Tantor raging back and forth on the bridge overhead. Then the trap hatch opened, and he called down: "Starboard your helm!"

I put the wheel over slowly, and the *Tam O'Shanter* rolled around till the swells that were running out the northwest were broad on the bow. The *Hazel* was then on the port beam and coming slowly along. I heard the jangle of the engine-room telegraph. As I steadied her on the new course I saw that we were going to cross the *Hazel's* bows. Then the telegraph rang again and the throb of the machinery ceased. The *Tam O'Shanter* rolled slowly in the trough of the sea.

I think that nothing of what was to happen entered my head. I think I still heard vaguely the sobbing of a woman. It seems as if that was the general impression I got while I waited. I think I also heard the tramp of Tantor Martin on the bridge.

The thing that stands out most clearly in my mind is the sudden realization that the *Hazel* was steaming along within a quarter of a mile and that we were slowly but steadily making toward her, we rolling in the hollow of the sea. It suddenly occurred to me that we were going to cross her bows if the engines started. Tantor was taking chances.

And then came the sharp clang of the telegraph—*full speed ahead.* The answer came from the chief and I felt the vessel slowly regain her speed. I eased the wheel, wondering whether we should pass astern of the *Hazel* or range alongside.

You must understand that it was a beautiful morning; the sun had risen and burned up the mist; the swell rolled eastward with a slow and powerful sweep; the sky above us was clear and crystalline. There was not even a circling gull to catch the eye.

I eased the helm a little more. The *Hazel* was drawing closer and I could see Burton's figure on the bridge. He had his glasses fixed on us. It was per-

fectly clear that he was puzzled. I saw him turn and consult his mate. Then he leaped to the center of the bridge and pulled the whistle cord. Before the plume of steam had vanished in the pellucid air, I heard the sound of the warning blast.

Instantly I was shaken by the bellow of our own siren. And then I understood. That sound throbbing upward into the beautiful air was the call of a man to his mate. I caught the roar of Tantor's voice, telling me to keep my course. I did.

I can still see the great, blank, black side of the *Hazel* as she gave us her unprotected flank. I can still see the *Tam O'Shanter's* powerful bows thrust downward and into her heart. Then came shouts, the ringing of gongs, the slow, steady pulse of the engines beneath my feet. With our stem deep in her vitals, the *Hazel* slowly died on the sea.

I think that there was little time between the instant of our impact and the wild leap of Tantor Martin to the upper deck of the *Hazel.* Where he found the girl, I don't know. But he reappeared amidst our gesticulating crowd, and she was in his arms. He regained the bridge, and I heard the harsh clang of the gongs, signaling full speed astern. The *Tam O'Shanter* slowly backed out, and the other steamer lurched drunkenly as the water poured into her hold.

"You're drowning people!" I bawled up through the trap hatch.

And the only answer I heard was the sobbing of a woman.

So we left the *Hazel,* sinking into the clear, pure sea, into the dark depths of the Pacific, while her crew fought at the boats and leaped downward like nuts falling from a tree. We left her swiftly, without looking backward. And on the bridge Tantor Martin stood with his grim, cruel eyes fixed on the figure of Captain Burton, who was on the starboard side of the after deck, yelling for the single boat that had got away to come back for him. The girl clung to the railing, blind with tears.

Of course, I got a man at the wheel and watched the whole affair. But I confess that I said nothing. I picked up what men of the *Hazel's* crew I could, and then I allowed the *Tam O'Shanter* to speed on her course.

Burton went down with his ship, a yelling maniac, a coward in death as he had been in life. As the *Hazel* plunged downward at the last, I saw the smoke of five revolver shots. He was firing wildly into the men on a life raft. So he died.

We reached San Pedro, and Tantor Martin got the lines ashore and came down to me, who was again in the wheelhouse.

"I'm responsible," he said to me. "You'd best say that you were kidnaped."

"The girl?" I said.

"The girl? I hope for no other warmth in this world than the warmth of her breath, no other sweetness but that of her lips, no sky but that of her eyes, no shelter but that of her arms."

Queer speech—wasn't it?—from the pirate. He'd killed men and wrecked a ship for the sake of a girl. You know he was a brute. But he took her to himself. They were married the morning we got in.

I wish I could see her again.

She was very lovely and adorable and——

THE TERROR

BY CHARLES EDWARD RUSSELL.

CHAPTER I.

I SUPPOSE I might say it began with the marlinespike. My part, I mean. When events reached out and caught a perfectly harmless supercargo by the slack of his thirty-four jacket, and crammed him into the works.

I was that supercargo, by title and sufferance. Just about as important as the office, and that was not at all. A curious little chap. Rather crablike. Without much interest outside a few books and plenty of quiet and a vague tradition of sickliness. Spectacled. Inclined to the ingrowing grouch so easily mistaken for melancholy.

My folks had sent me to sea for my health. Eighteen months of browsing around the palm islands and the China ports on Captain Kendrick's little tramp trader hadn't bothered it much. Meanwhile I had acquired profanity in six native dialects and a kind of beachcombing pose of world-weariness and indifference.

I never was very good at that last. You need years to get the right flavor. Years of gin pickling where the sun swings among the coconuts and the trade winds say grace for you while you lie along and wait for the morning roll to drop off the breadfruit tree.

That sort of thing appealed. Or I thought it did. Nothing had ever happened to me. I didn't want anything to happen. Rot, of course. Altogether a gloomy and rather morbid young ass, with perhaps just a touch of liver. And altogether the unlikeliest man in the world for the grim, vivid business of the *Colleen Bawn*.

Events are always turning these queer tricks, you know. Or fate, if you like. Or chance. Always grabbing some tag end of a creature out of his feather bed and slinging him into the turmoil of things, just to see what he looks like when he comes through, I suppose—if he ever does come through.

Up to the particular moment of which I write I had taken no part. Grievances, of course, I had. I was very hopelessly in love, for one thing, and that's the worst of grievances. I resented the cruise because I didn't understand it. I disliked the crew because they were strange to me and a bad lot. I hated the shouting seas and drumming gales of the great, cold South because I was softened to putty by tropic heats.

But the net result of all these matters had been only to drive me further into sulky retirement. And I should never have known, or cared, any more of them probably—if the marlinespike hadn't missed.

You see, I have reason to be grateful to that marlinespike. For missing, of course. Incidentally for shocking me out of my doze, so to speak, and sending me along into the mill with my eyes open.

It came as I was crawling down into the warmer depths of the vessel, seeking comfort in the cuddy hole. I was just beside the coaming of the after hatch on the lower deck when it whipped out of the darkness somewhere, whanged into the wooden sheathing of the bulkhead, and stuck, quivering.

Now, for a chunk of cold iron to make a flutter past a man's ear it has to come pretty close. There was a chill upon me, due to no outer temperature, as I sprang for the companion with a yell. Popping through the scuttle, I almost fell over the stowaway, up to his elbows in grease at the donkey engine.

"Hey!" I bawled. "Did you do that?"

Silly enough question. But I was rather flustered. The man's ferrety face turned up at me under one arm.

"What, mister?"

Nobody had had a guess at his nationality since Machan had dragged him from the coal bunkers, five days out of Sydney, too late to ship him back. Matthew, he called himself. A good enough name, as wrathful Captain Kendrick assured him, to hang by. He had paid for his temerity, name and all, in driven, slavish labor. But I couldn't imagine what under the sun he might have against me. I had never had three words of him.

"Did you heave that spike? Did you? Let me see your hands?"

He held them out, full of dirty cotton waste and garmed with oil. It seemed scarce possible. And yet——

He observed me quietly. Never a start of surprise at my sudden charge. Too curiously calm for innocence, I thought. But still not under pressure. Not withheld. Impersonal, rather. That was it.

"See anybody about just now?"

"I seen nobody, mister."

"Ducking down this scuttle, maybe——"

"Only you, mister."

His detachment was perfect. I could find no strain of guilt in him. I could find nothing to trust, either.

"You been here all the time?"

"Right here, mister."

"And you didn't—— Oh, hell——"

I gave him up, and flung away down the companion again. What was the use? Another unexplained and apparently inexplicable hap on a voyage that had been one dim string of perplexities from the start. I didn't know what it meant. For the instant I didn't care. I swaggered openly past the hatch in reckless invitation.

In the passage I met Bane, the mate.

"And how is your good health standing this climate, Mr. Keating?" he asked suavely. "Snappy weather. Snappy."

Shaken as I was, I would have sworn the question was a jeer. I glowered at his smooth, full-blooded face, with the strange eyes, green as jade and played upon like the polished stone with twinkling lights. There was a coolness between the mate and me. Sullen on my side. Nursed for a dozen reasons that seemed sufficient. But chiefly for this way of his that I could never tell when he was making me a mock.

He smiled in amiable concern.

"Pretty poorly, thanks," I growled.

"Oh, you'll come on," he nodded. "You'll make a good finish in the antarctic yet, or thereabouts."

He said it heartily, a singular phrase.

"We'll have you spry as ever soon—and keeping Miss Kendrick company on deck all day, I shouldn't wonder. She must miss you."

Now the man knew very well she did nothing of the sort. He knew Ellen Kendrick kept nobody's company past mere politeness. He had tried it himself, and rather more, and been sent to the rightabout for his pains.

So he was only fleering at me, after all. But I shrugged it aside. There was a new and pressing need on me, due to the marlinespike.

"Mr. Bane," I said abruptly, "where in God's name are we headed for? What's this we've come to do? Tell me that."

He pulled a lip, and cast down his lids with a manner he had.

"You know now, Keating—I'm only the mate. That's not my business. Strictly not. Captain Kendrick is a great disciplinarian. You must have noticed——"

And so mocked me again, with such a word of our little bounceball of a skipper and the overwrought petulance he had come to these days.

"Sealed orders, my son," smiled Bane, bracing easily against the swing of the vessel. "We're under sealed orders, so to say. But you might ask him."

I cursed the man in my heart.

"I'm asking you," I cried. "It all began with you—when poor Applebone disappeared in Yokohama and you took his billet. What's it about? What's it damn well *for?*"

He shook his head.

"Don't take it so hard, Mr. Keating," he soothed. "Health, you know. Very bad for the health. What do you want to know for?"

As if some one had whispered behind me I became suddenly mindful that he and I were alone in that dark passage. Call it what you like. Nerves. Premonition. The start of the marlinespike. Or the curious, green smile of him. We were very much alone.

I moved away.

"It worries me," I mumbled. "I thought—— But it doesn't matter. Do ships often put to sea without a port ahead, Mr. Bane?"

"Oh, that isn't so," he answered quickly. "You'll find it in our papers. Cleared for Colombo and Coromandel coast—all serene."

"That's the reason, naturally, why we're headed for the Antarctic."

He shrugged.

"A side jaunt. Say a little side jaunt—for a change of air. Most ordinary thing, a skipper changing his course. A tramp, you know, is governed only by her master's whim. Oh, to be serious, of course he's going to pick up a cargo somewhere. Trust him. Don't you trust him?"

"I—I really never thought of that. But now you mention it——"

I was getting on my way as speedily as might be without seeming to run from him. Already I was appalled at my outburst.

"You'll like it, Keating. Make you develop, man. You'll thrive on it. Make you forget all these foolish notions."

"All right," I murmured. "I've no doubt it's all right. I'm—I'm not quite well, you know."

He did not stir after me, but stayed, wagging his head, smiling down the passage.

"We'll look after that, my boy," he called. "You'll see. You're sure to like it, where you're going. Be easy."

And with that friendly assurance ringing after me I got away. Friendly, indeed. Almost paternal. But I found myself tensed and unnerved as at a most ominous and fateful warning. I was only grateful I had not broken out about the marlinespike.

"All right," I called back. "All right—and—thanks."

Simply craven, that was. And my hand shook so when I took out my spectacles that they fell and smashed.

CHAPTER II.

Down in the cuddy I hugged my trouble to myself miserably. I should not go to Captain Kendrick, I had al-

ready decided that. A sullen kind of pride held me, suspicion as well. Born of the many slights he had put upon me, his exaggerated secretiveness of late, and Bane's ascendency over him.

He knew the answer to all the sinister transformations that had been wrought aboard his craft. He was responsible. He might even have ordered the throwing of that spike. In the evil change that had come upon him these last weeks I believed him capable of anything.

I yearned upon the past. The sleepy, idle months of tramping among the islands, where life was soft as a lullaby of the coral reefs, where folk were simple and mild, and daily interests scarce drew the languid trader from his shaded hammock. I could have gone on so forever.

What madness had suddenly driven us from such pleasant paths to these far limits? Wrenched us from our peaceful ways, banished our gentle Kanakas, overrun us with a crew of scowling, fierce-eyed strangers? What curse was on us that we should have to lie and juggle and skulk—and dodge murderous marlinespikes?

Bill Machan nodded when he saw me there, huddled in a corner against the vessel's swooping plunges, knees braced to the table.

"How d'ye like it now? Not such cheer as maybe ye thought, this ramdamnin' around after the south pole. What?"

Mac himself stood stark in his tattered old pajamas, unless the grease from his beloved engines might count an extra covering. He took a lurching line for his private locker. Three fingers he measured himself carefully, one of bitters and two of gin. And looked at me furtively as he drank.

"Can ye see me in fur rugs? That's for the rest of ye. For mysel', I'm chief kettle tinker of a hot-water trader and too old to change. Kendrick can put skates on her and go explore the frozen hell if he likes—it's his ship. But me—Bill Machan'll stand by the main steam where he can sweat as he likes—send we're not split on an iceberg."

And now observe me beginning to play politic. Cunning, even.

"It's perishing cold," I agreed.

"It'll be colder. Man, d'ye know we're droppin' latitude off our stern with the log line? Fifty south, if we're one degree. And naught ahead but the Victoria Quadrant and the bottom of the earth."

I dragged up a grin.

"Not so bad as that, Mac. Kendrick's no fool. He'll find a cargo hereabouts soon—trust him."

"Snowballs?" he queried, settling his oil-soaked cap at a wise angle and lowering his voice. "Or icicles? To be sure, there's the blind, cold sea snakes. Aye—and other things a body'd not care to meet, maybe."

He blinked at me across the tiny space, his loose bulk swaying easily to meet the tilt of the deck. It was four-drink time, or he would never have said so much. Just now those last three fingers were plucking at his tongue. My chance, I thought, with quickened pulse. He knew something.

"But he must be on some sea track," I ventured. "Others have surely traded this way."

"Aye," he nodded; "there was Bilboe, I've heard."

I stared at him, absolutely uncomprehending.

"Bilboe. You mean the old blackbirder?"

"If that was all. Aye, him. The thievin' old devil that went twenty time unhung back in the bad days. Seal pirate, pearl snatcher—slaver—worse, belike. With his bloody Port Boy gang."

I was groping wide for any clew in this, groping——

"Why, Bilboe dropped out of sight years ago, if there ever was such a man. Though some say the Port Boys have kept a kind of vagabond fraternity—— Bilboe? What do you mean by that, Mac? It's a fable."

He lurched away to lock up his glass.

"A fable? Well—perhaps. They say he went into hell by way of the cellar door. We're in the basement oursel's. What's this I'm making. Some drunken argle-bargle of the beaches. God help us all to a better understanding."

He had tried to tell me something. But I was no good at these blind leads.

"Mac," I said, "be plain with me."

"Plain? The plainest man afloat, Mr. Keating. Just daffin', sir. Just plain Bill, daffin' at his bit drink."

"I'm in the dark," I pleaded.

"So am I. So are we all. It's everybody for himself, that's the sad fac' in this world, Mr. Keating."

He shuffled for the door and glanced at me sidelong.

"Give me a word, Machan. We've come to strange doings. Do you know where we're headed, for one thing?"

"Not I?" he cried sharply.

He peered into the passage and looked back.

"Strange doings!" he muttered. "Aye. A sober, God-fearin' little tramp sent reelin' madwise across the empty polar sea. A canny tradin' captain turned explorer. A brand-new mate, come from Heaven knows. A double allowance of hands—what for? Passengers, belike. Not to speak of a stowaway. And a woman—there's a ship's company. Besides——"

He spoke as of the supernatural, hushed and solemn.

"It's a fac', Mr. Keating; I've not had a slicing bar alongside the head of one man since we left Sydney. Heard ye ever the like?"

"Wait, Machan," I cried. "You've said too much. What's a fellow to do? Speak out!"

"How should I know? Except go wary. Aye, a lad could do that. Keep shy of dark corners, and his glims peeled."

"Would it surprise you to learn there's been murder tried on board already?"

"Sirs, sirs!" His hand went up, trembling. "It's not so. Stevens was not murdered. Never say it."

"Stevens!"

I remembered, then. That was the name of a man we had lost overboard in a heavy blow two days before. A stoker who had come up for a breath of air and been swept off by a great sea, so the story went. I looked at him, and my lips were hard bitten. He had told me more, far more, than he thought.

"The man was careless," he said.

"As I was—very nearly," I added unsteadily.

He shot me a glance from the edge of the doorway which I may have misread, but which to me meant pity.

"And what's to be your own part, Mac?" I demanded.

"Me? Why, below, of course," he answered hastily. "Tinker Bill, d'ye mind? Everybody's friend that makes the engines go. Engines have to go, whatever. There's one or two good boys have been with me many a year. We'll stick by the engines, where we belong. For mysel'—I'm a man that has a family."

He jammed his cap lower.

"I've said nothing, Mr. Keating; remember that," he whispered. "Not a word, sir. Mum!"

So he left me, wedging up and down there in the cuddy corner, with the creak of labored beams for company, to take what comfort I could from their manifold confidences.

I had his answer. Nothing could have been plainer. For the sake of

twelve a month and the job he meant to play safe, come what might. He and his little personal group below decks. We were close upon the time evidently when every man aboard the *Colleen Bawn* must set himself right, or at least neutral, with the secret purpose now driving her.

I knew nothing of that purpose, could guess nothing. Outwardly, the daily life of a tramp trader held its wonted course with us. The new crew went quietly about their duties. Orders were obeyed—even the stokehold was being run without a fisted slicing bar.

But I was awake now. I perceived that the very smoothness of routine heightened the tension under it all. Tension that comes between hidden intent on one side and unanswered questioning on the other. Tension that rises from contradictory shifts and changes with no reasons assigned.

The *Colleen Bawn* had become a floating mystery. And the little supercargo was to be counted out.

CHAPTER III.

Came to me then the larrikin. I raised my head from my arms at the table where I sat brooding, and as I looked up he was there. But I had not heard him come. And anything more disconcerting than the sudden sight of him so was not in my experience.

"Tyke my word," he said, with a tinkling giggle like a cracked nickel bell. "Tyke my word, I thought you was asleep."

It was as if a cold breath had fanned the back of my neck and up into my hair. I gazed at him, much as a sheep at the rings might gaze.

No thief caught with his fingers in the till ever looked such a picture of detected guilt. He stood resting awkwardly at the table edge, a spasm of sly embarrassment on his hatchet face, his brows working, his glance fugitive, and bent toward me. Bent toward me with one hand hidden in his jacket pocket.

"What do you want?" I managed to ask.

"Why, I was just hoping you'd wyke up, sir," he whined. "Thinks I, if he's asleep I won't rouse him. Not the likes of me. I know my plyce, sir. I was just going aw'y when here you duck up and find me. Funny thing, 'int it?"

He giggled again with an assumption of ease, and drew his hand almost ostentatiously from the pocket, empty. And presently I felt better. I was no strongarm, goodness knows. But, face on, I was a match for this chap, at least.

Perrin, he called himself. A straw-limbed, sunken-chested creature. A typical Sydney water rat of the kind that has given the Domain such unsavory fame as its habitat. As long as my back was to the wall I need not fear him greatly. The less since the surprise had set him apparently all abroad.

"You've no business in this part of the ship," I challenged.

"No, sir. Not at all, sir. I was only looking for you—tyke my word——"

"What for?"

His pale eyes jumped here and yon. He had no yarn ready, was scarce equal to one. I pressed him.

"Come, what is it? Spit it out! Something to tell me?"

"That's it, sir," he cried, and grabbed the cue—almost gratefully, I could have sworn. "Now you tyke me. Something to tell you—and a clever young gent you are, sir."

He leered, and waggled his simian brows.

"Thinks I, here's this Mr. Keating. Thinks I, that's the gent for you. Go and tell him, Perrin, what you got on your mind. And here I am, sir."

Behind his vast assumption of craft

I could see him struggling for some lie that might pass muster. It was the measure of his mind that he thought me quite deceived if he could find the excuse.

"This is confident, sir. Strict confident. You'll remember. I know *you*, Mr. Keating. I know a gentleman, sir, when I tell him something he don't go to give it aw'y to nobody. Not him, sir."

Altogether such an admixture of shallow fraud and native loathsomeness as filled me with contempt. An actor himself, capable of any crime, I thought, who undertook, with transparent and superfluous cunning, to play the stage conspirator for my benefit.

"Go on!" I said curtly.

He shifted an elaborate glance around, and cupped a hand, hesitating.

"Why, sir, you're a young gent as notices quick, I'd s'y. Looka here, sir. Did you ever happen, like, to see a—a black wallet kicking about anywheres on board? Oilskin, it would be. A goodish size—big as your two palms together."

I could have laughed in his face to see the eagerness he threw into this absurdity. I wondered how far he would go.

"A black wallet?" I repeated.

"Ah, that's it!" he cried, with bated breath. "Black oilskin. Now I'll tyke my word you've seen it somewheres. Keeping of the ship's pypers and all, the w'y you do."

"And what about this wallet?" I asked.

He launched then into a rambling tale of how this precious wallet had been stolen in Sydney and a reward offered for its return. How one of the hands, "an old lag," had brought it aboard with him. How it was since missing and had possibly been "shoved aw'y somewheres by a cove as didn't knows its value."

"Now, sir," he wheedled, "it might be worth a good bit to you, that wallet. Likely you've seen it. Maybe in the captain's berth. Just you tell me where you saw it, sir, and you'll get your share—tyke my word!"

I had the utmost scorn of him now, a luxury that was close to costing me dear. Such was my inaptitude at this kind of thing, I had not noticed his edging nearer and ever nearer throughout his discourse.

"I never saw any wallet," I said snappily. "What's more, I don't believe there is one. Do you think me any such fool——"

I turned from him with a gesture of impatience.

In the flash he was half over the table again, his hand whipping to his pocket, his colorless eyes drawn to points.

"Keep off!" I yelled, scrambling back. I had the sense, or the inspiration, to grab for my own hip.

He shrank as swiftly, cringing.

"My word, you're hasty, sir," he whined. "No offense. I was only telling you—— But if you s'y you never saw it——"

"You get away from me!" I cried, of a tremble. "You get out of here. I'm ready for you! By God——"

I actually took a step toward him, and he slid away like the rat he was.

"Yes, sir. Quite right, sir. Thank you, sir——"

He slipped into the passage, still whining, and was gone like a demon through a trap. And I—I fell upon the bench again in a jangle of nerves and helpless wrath.

That he should so nearly have overreached me, after all! Almost he had made good the bungling of the marlinespike. I could not doubt that that was his errand. The same will that had urged the first attempt had sent him to knife me quietly here in the cuddy. The slimy assassin! With his mounte-

bank tricks that I had thought so obvious.

What was to be done about it—under Heaven, what could I do? No friend. No single soul to turn to. I thought of Kendrick again despairingly. I could not believe, in soberness, that he was for having me murdered. Yet he was involved somehow with these men. He was part of the mystery. I its victim.

It was a settled thing. Twice I had survived. But the next attack—or the next! I was to vanish. As Stevens had vanished—in some moment of fatal "carelessness." How long could I postpone that moment? How fight a shipful of prowling dangers?

And why? Why should any one wish me dead? The supercargo. I could think of none I might have offended, save possibly Bane. And would even Bane go to such lengths for such a cause—and in such a way? No, it went deeper. Far deeper.

You see me there huddled in the cuddy, and the case to which I had come. Bewildered. Angered in a futile way. Untrained to action; unequipped, save for a certain doggedness. Torn from my customary supports, and struggling with the incomprehensible. A kind of dishoused snail.

I looked about me and found no hope. None. I was in the dark, baited. Knowing not wherefore, nor whence, nor by whom. Knowing nothing of the whole dark game.

A foot padded softly outside in the passage, and I stood tense, with the breath caught in my throat. At the doorway slid to view a calm, brown face.

"Mass' Ken'rick want to see you top side, him cabin, Mass' Hugh."

I drew a long sigh of relief. Only Maheyo. Here, I might believe, was no enemy. He was the sole remaining member of the *Colleen's* original Kanaka crew. A faithful fellow and a right sailor. A Loyalty Islander born, long a wanderer among the pidgin ports. Kendrick had kept him on as carpenter and handy man. It was no unusual thing for him to carry messages, and I feared no treachery in this. Knives and marlinespikes were not Maheyo's style.

"Captain wants me?"

He nodded, and I followed him out and along the passage without question. We met no one. The way was clear as we climbed to the thwartship corridor under the house. That was what decided him, perhaps. At the very top of the companionway he peered over, swung back, and gripped me by the arm.

"You no say, s'pose I tell you some-t'ing, Mass' Hugh?"

I looked at him, with the crinkle of nerve I had learned of late. Never had I heard the big native use that tone. He was a warrior, fearless, come of fighting stock.

"You're in this, too, Maheyo?" I breathed, dismayed.

"No!" he shot back, low-voiced. "Maheyo no can do—that bobbeley. You hear?"

I wondered what mischief it was he could not do. Some bidding of those who hunted me, doubtless.

"Yes."

"You 'member that time Maheyo sick for die—goddam sick? You 'member that time you give Maheyo one piecee med'cine?"

I remembered. A touch of fever when we were down off Dutch Papua, months before. I had looked after him somewhat. He had never spoken of it since, and indeed it was a small thing. But a big thing now for me, by all seeming.

"Well?"

He drew me nearer.

"Mass' Hugh," he whispered, "you know them Port Boy—them feller?"

I stared, with startled memory leap-

ing to seize the word. The Port Boys? Everybody who ever drank with island outcasts had heard of them. From Fiji to the Aleuts the beaches knew some rumor of them. A kind of secret order, organized by deserters in Papette years ago to control the recruiting of crews, which later ran like a pestilence through the pearling and sealing fleets. At least three mutinies, several murders, a dozen stolen cargoes, were laid at their charge before the skippers who would not join their ranks finally crushed them out. But the whole thing was a sort of Robin Hood tale now. Some denied their very existence, and Bilboe, the flower of their flock——

Strange to hear that echo again!

"Well," I said stupidly. "Port Boys? That's an old story, Maheyo. Been dead these many years."

He caught my hand.

"Mass' Hugh, s'pose them muchee bad Port Boy come live—s'pose some feller talkey you Port Boy—you shakeum all same, *so* fashion!"

His fingers slipped around mine, closing them in a curious manner, and I winced at a sudden pressure of doubled knuckle on my palm. And then his meaning flashed upon me. He was giving me a secret grip, driving it into my hand so that I should not forget.

"Maheyo!" I cried. "What's this mean——"

But he shook his head and pulled me up to the top step, then steered me for the starboard door.

"You go that way," he said. He released me swiftly, and bounded down the companion.

"'Member!" he called back.

"Wait!" I begged. "Maheyo! Tell me more. What's the damned thing about? Where are we going——"

But he was gone. No reply came up to me but the hollow ring of my own voice.

Walking unsteadily, in a kind of daze, I left the house by the side to which he had sent me. I had to throw all my weight to the door before I could force it open against the wind and struggle out to the sloping deck.

CHAPTER IV.

The *Colleen Bawn* was squattering and plunging in a steel-blue bowl, chill and bare. Not a cloud above, not a sail below. Only the torn steam plume of our escape and the sheeting sprays driven white to the funnel across that glaring emptiness. Above, a hard sun like a yellow pebble that gave no warmth in the long afternoon of polar summer. A devil's searching blast behind the ground swell that ran out of the south.

For a week we had been battering through continuous storm. This was comparative calm, though savage enough to me.

Clinging to the rungs, I fought my way up the starboard ladder. I sickened to see the foam-ridged hollows down which we swooped, to watch the whole foreshortened bulk climb up as if to trip upon the bowsprit and fall away again in a shuddering rush. The wind stabbed me with icy lances, mocked me, shrieked madness in my ear.

I did not know this sea. It was fierce and vast and lonely. I hated it and feared it. For a panic moment I hung upon the ladder, cowering like a child. I felt my weakness. I felt I could only yield abjectly to the dangers of this wild cruise. My will to face the welter slacked away from me like loosened strands, until——

Until, looking aloft, I caught a glimpse of a vivid little figure braced against the canvas dodger of the upper bridge. Blue clad, with a bright, laughing face keen against the wind, and back-blown hair that threaded golden under the tilt of her tam.

She saw me, nodded, and called some

careless greeting that was lost on the gale.

Ellen Kendrick——

The blood went leaping through my veins, tingling, as at the urge of some subtle wine, merely to see her so. Here, at last, was strength, even for a shivering rag of a supercargo. I drew it from her. She was vital. She was the love of life. She was life itself. Worth all sacrifice, all effort. Only to hope to serve her without favor was reason enough——

For she was with me in this sinister mystery. Forgotten? No, I hadn't forgotten it. But the thing struck new upon my new knowledge, my new apprehension. She was here, surrounded by these strangers, walking among these secret perils, blithe and carefree and unknowing while the vessel swept on upon its fateful, covert mission.

Her father's ship—yes. But murder stalked the decks unchecked. Helpless folk were being hunted for their lives. Evil shadows lurked about, shadows of crime, of lawless men, of unguessed, lawless possibilities. The very motive that guided our rudder was shrouded in dark suggestion. What was to become of her with such powers afoot? Who was to watch for her, protect her?

I might do something. Feeble and harried though I was, the time might come when she could use me. A fanciful hope, perhaps. But it gave me one solid grip. It gave me courage to go on—and, oh, I needed just that.

Heartened, keyed to action, I sprang up on the bridge and started aft for the captain's cabin. Midway I stopped, with a curious notion on me. I turned back to the chart-room door and tried it. It was locked.

The chart room aboard the *Colleen* was the whole narrow section through the forward end of the bridge house. Passing around the bridge, and noting that the room was not occupied, I came to the larboard door. It was open, set on the brass tongue.

I stepped to the rail, lest some one be spying.

Aft of the bridge deck, on top of the house, a little knot of sailors was busied about some task. At one of the two great surfboats, I thought, which were bedded down on either side of the funnel. But presently I saw that they were all grouped along a stout and heavy spar, such as is used for fending the boats off.

Perrin was there, a bearded ruffian known as Farralone Jim, another chap with a dirty, blue canvas turban bound around his head, and my late acquaintance, Matthew. Their care it was to keep the spar neatly balanced near the edge while they crouched, peering below.

It jumped to my mind, suddenly, that they were posted just over the port end of the thwartship passage. The way by which I should have blundered out, all unsuspecting, if Maheyo had not sent me to starboard. Any one coming out there must stand below them. They were watching—with the spar ready—waiting——

I knew, then, how a cornered animal feels when the foes have driven him the last inch, have all but reached him. This was the third time! I could have snarled, spite of the sagging at my knees. I crept back to the chart-room door unperceived. None of them had looked up.

I slipped the fastening, and darted through; tiptoed across to the wide cabinet where the charts were kept. The third shallow drawer showed an edge beyond the others. I tried it first. A plotted chart of the Indian Ocean was the topmost—the regulation chart, laid out in checkered blue, with currents and soundings curled and dotted in mazy designs. Our course was marked across it in lead pencil, shooting down from Sydney with a pin prick at every noon

observation. But the line ran off the bottom of the sheet at forty-five degrees south!

I think I had my first clear notion in that moment of how far, to what strange limits, we had come. We were beyond the pale, outside all regions of ordinary human experience, down among the waste ends of the earth.

I tried another drawer, and another. The second gave up the prize, my supreme discovery. No navigating chart, but a simple geographical map, apparently torn from some book, showing the Great Southern Sea and its adjacent lands, without depths or movements or any of the information a careful sailor requires. Merely a makeshift on which Captain Kendrick had continued to plot our progress.

My finger followed the line again. The last recorded position, deep in the blue and dated that day, February 3, was ninety-six degrees, thirteen minutes east, and fifty-two degrees, twenty-eight minutes south.

Eagerly I cast forward along the indicated direction, seeking a destination, seeking one ray of light amid all the crowding enigmas. We had traveled from Sydney to the south by west. We were still traveling. Where? To what point?

The answer caught me like a fist between the eyes, for of all the amazing details that had clustered so far about the cruise of the *Colleen Bawn* certainly this was the most startling, the most improbable. The whole lower map was empty. The whole stretch was as blank as the back of my hand. Not a dot. Not a reef or a shoal. Between Cape Leeuwin and the vague mass of the polar continent itself—nothing!

A dizziness took me. I was a man tottering on a fearful brink where sight and sound and sense were lost beyond —beyond——

I closed the drawer and leaned against the cabinet, dumfounded. In that black instant I felt my clenched fingers stung by cold metal. I glanced up, scarce consciously, and caught a point of glitter on the top of the cabinet. Reaching, I plucked from concealment there—a revolver.

I snatched it to me as the starving snatch a crust, or the drowning a straw. A weapon, this. No ordinary seagoing pepperpot, but a gun. Forty-four, with magazine fully charged. A gun to put heart and backbone in a man, only to feel its heft. A gun to trust.

Furtively, but without hesitation or scruple, I accepted this single boon of fate. When I left the chart room an instant later, I carried that bulldog in my right fist, and my fist inside my pocket.

CHAPTER V.

I invite no man's judgment on the acts and emotions to which my plight henceforward carried me. Let him who has never been snatched from out the safe and pleasant gardens of life and hurled into its bramble pit hold off his frown from me. He can't know the bitterness, the savagery, the horror that dissolve the settled constituents of a nature and precipitate them anew in strange and unsuspected forms. He can't know the possibilities suspended in himself and what they might show under the terrific chemistry of events. Well for him, perhaps, if he could.

You see me as I came to the captain's cabin. Never was framed, I suppose, a less belligerent creature, one with fewer martial attributes. I never had struck a blow in hot blood. I never had gone armed in my life, nor considered, even idly, the injury or death of any human being.

And yet here was I ready for a fighting show-down, gripping a gun in my pocket like any desperado, resolved, even fiercely intent, on killing the next man who should lift a hand against me.

Two ideas possessed me wholly. To

know the meaning of our nightmare of a voyage, and to know whether Kendrick and Bane were truly concerned in some general conspiracy of which the attacks on me had been but incidents.

I still had hopes of them, one or both. I might still possibly look for aid and protection. Spite of all seeming, the thing might prove no worse than a grudge, the vicious malice of some obscure seaman. The third attempt had convinced me at last that I must know definitely how the commanders stood.

Captain Kendrick bounced about in his chair at the little shelf table and glared at me. His puffy hands had knotted with a start amid a litter of papers.

"Hey! 'Fore God, what're you doing here? When I want to see that slab-sided figgerhead of yours I'll send word."

Three hours before I should have yelped promptly. Now I waited, alert, knowing quite well he could never quit with one phrase.

"Don't remind me you're a kind of a horse marine on my ship," he bawled. "I won't have it. No privileges. Not a damn one. Ain't your private saloon, is it—this cabin? I'll have no one nosing around. Clear!"

He flung back to his desk, grumbling.

Still I waited.

The changes of weeks were measured by that greeting. During our long tramps among the islands I had, indeed, made free of his cabin as my own. But what held me, what had sunk upon me deeper at each encounter with him of late, was the shocking change in himself.

From a rosy, little pudding of a chap, rather futile and weak and heavy-witted, but stuffed with good cheer—from this he had fallen to a sickly flabbiness like a wrinkled balloon, petulant and suspicious, with gray pouches for cheeks.

It was a recent habit with him to slip into curious abstractions. So he did as I watched him, fumbling with the papers, his outbreak forgotten.

"Damn it all, Keating," he protested feebly, "we got no time for weak sisters. Can't favor nobody. It's a job for men; Bane said that. White men—tough swabs. I ought to left you at Sydney, like he warned me. And the girl, too, if I'd a pinch of sense. Only, she would come. Couldn't tell her *why* not, could I——"

His voice fumed away and sparked again, like a running fuse.

Not the first time I had heard him maunder so, you may imagine. But the first time I had caught the pathetic significance.

The pity of it knocked on me. I gave up my half-formed plan of beard-ing him outright. I had blamed him. He had been irritable, secret—criminal, perhaps. Even now I could not doubt some folly of his had prompted the mad voyage which had brought us all to this pass. But I saw the wreck that folly had wrought. He could not live long to suffer its results. Dupe or guilty agent, the business was nearly over for him. He had death in his face.

I looked around the comfortable cabin, the place I had known so well. The books, the lounging bunk, the rice-paper paintings, a grinning Papuan totem, a native dancing wig, a Pickwick lithograph looted from some trading station, a blue print of Ellen—wherein I had studied her sweet face many a drowsy evening and so came to love it before ever I saw her—another of his sister's cottage out Manly way, where the motherless girl had lived before this evil cruise, the yellowed clippings from *Punch*, the padlocked rack for his three repeating rifles—treasured relics of seal-hunting days. All the homely and

familiar trifles of his nautical housekeeping.

I recalled the many hours we had beguiled here together—over one of the queer mixtures he delighted to evolve from a well-stocked liquor cabinet; to his spinning, it might be, with a fat chuckle, of endless dull tales of cargo windfalls and high freights along the yellow coasts.

And now to see him as he was!

He sat babbling while the whole company of us swung on toward some dim and monstrous catastrophe—babbling; plucking at scraps of paper; impotent and obsessed; with what siren fancy luring him on; with what wild hope, desire, lust, crawling like maggots in his troubled brain? Her father!

"Captain Kendrick," I said impulsively, "tell me! Only tell me what the wretched thing is. Let me help——"

He jumped like a bladder on a string.

"*Where* it is?" he almost screamed, turning on me. "I'll see you damned! Tell you *where*—I——"

He checked, stared at me, seeming to recognize me anew. But when he went on, his face was distorted with anger and suspicion.

"Now, 'fore God, is it you still hanging about? Are you here to spy on me? Are you?"

One more mystification. It seemed I never was to get a hold on anything tangible and sane again.

"I'm asking you to let me in——"

But that was worse.

"Let you in!" he stuttered. "Let you in! Well, damn your greedy soul! Hey! Why should I? Isn't it mine? Is every Tom and Jake to grab a share off me? The brass gall of you! And wanting to know *where*——"

"Captain," I cried, "I mean no harm——"

"How did you hear of it at all?" he demanded, in another furious twist. "Is it common gab about the ship? It is! 'Fore God, I feared so. Everybody knows—and there's an end of it——"

He broke off to knot and wring his hands with a revulsion of anxiety as bewildering to me as his rage.

"I only want to be set right," I begged. "I don't know what you're talking about. I've done nothing. Only to be near crazed—near murdered. Captain, you've got to tell me—you've got to—if there's any hope for me here. Is it by your orders I'm to be killed? Tell me that!"

He blinked at my distress.

"No, no," he said craftily. "That's all cute pidgin. Tricks, to draw me out. There's nothing to tell. Killing? What's such talk? Not unless—'fore God, unless some swab tries too much on me!"

I had to steady myself a little against the cabin wall. It was hard to deal with this without breaking—hard. I had a fleeting vision of myself as a small boy trying to tug a gutter drunkard to his feet and getting a smash between the eyes for my pains. The stupor of helplessness—of unfairness——

Yet somehow I had no anger. Only a sinking at the dead futility of it all. He was in some hideous void of his own, wrestling with phantoms, striking out blindly.

"Quiet, be quiet, captain! Do I look like tricks? You trip me on a word. All I want is to understand—can't you tell me——"

It was no use. In his obsession he thought me only cajoling. I could not get past his barrier.

"Nothing to tell. Don't know where the thing is. Haven't got it. I never had it."

I made a final desperate plea.

"Kendrick, what are we doing at fifty-three south?"

He blenched. And the impact of that

simple question stiffened him in his chair.

"Clear!" he said with difficulty, moving a finger at the door. "Clear! You'll be sent for when wanted."

I held my ground.

"I was sent for."

"What?"

"Ordered to the bridge."

"Hey? Who——"

"Maheyo."

"Said I wanted——"

"Yes."

"That ain't so?" he gagged, staring. "Tha' ain't so.

"Well," he added, "it must have slipped my mind. Perhaps I did—anyhow——"

"A slight mistake, sir," interrupted a smooth voice from the doorway. We both whirled around at Bane, who had come like a shadow.

"Maheyo must have got the message wrong. It was I sent for Mr. Keating, myself. Very sorry. Sorry."

The skipper bounced again. A fresh suspicion had pricked him.

"You sent for him here? At my quarters? Damn it, sir, I won't have it. Ain't a common meeting place, is it—this cabin? Suppose I don't know it's been searched twice already? Ransacked? 'Fore God, I'll have no one hanging about the place. No one."

I was startled. But the mate only smiled, with his superior green glance.

"Oh, I didn't call him here, sir. I wanted to meet Mr. Keating—in the chart house."

He turned the twinkle of his eye on me.

So he knew what I had learned just now, or failed to learn, in my visit to the forward compartment. I wondered if he knew what else I had found there, and what a difference it had made to me, and that I held it trained on him through my pocket as he stood. If he did, he gave no sign.

"I fully intended to meet Mr. Keating at the chart room," he went on, in that suave manner. "But I missed him there—through his coming up the wrong way. Unfortunately missed him."

CHAPTER VI.

I wonder if I can give any notion of the immensity with which the man loomed upon me in that moment. My last disappointment had left me unnerved. He seemed to know everything; to be everything; omnipotent; calm and sure. And I a fool youngster stalking bugaboos with a popgun.

With his strange, compelling eyes on me I wavered. He was strong. So much the strongest of us, to think to dicker or fence with him appeared merely childish. I had an impulse to throw it all aside, confess all my terrors, surrender the whole tangle to his will and order. An abject temptation to placate him, at any cost.

"What's your business with Keating?" demanded the captain, with a brooding frown at his second.

"I wished particularly to offer Mr. Keating an exchange of berths," was the ready reply. "Not well, you know. He's not chipper at all. A fact we all regret, I'm sure. It occurred to me—here's my own cabin right by your own, sir. Plenty of light and air. Why shouldn't he have it? Bunking is no hardship to me."

I might have been his cherished chum, the way he spoke. He seemed friendly. Plausible and hearty. I wanted to believe he meant to be friendly.

"You'll give him your cabin?" queried the skipper, blinking.

"Oh, at his convenience, of course," said Bane easily. "When we get better weather. No hurry. I've no wish to hurry him. Just a suggestion of mine for his future comfort. Fact is, I've been worrying a good deal to-day about Mr. Keating's comfort."

I came back with a start. Why, the whole thing was false. A cloud of words to cover my unexpected arrival at the bridge. A bit of the diabolic mockery he so affected.

My comfort!

He knew. Of the marlinespike, of Perrin's knife, of the spar, waiting over the passage like the fall of a trap. He *knew*. And it suited his cynic humor to put his wiles upon me. To persuade me, almost——

"Thanks," I stammered, breaking the spell of his green gaze; marveling at my own weakness and at his power.

I had never fathomed Bane since the day his spare, lithe figure and smiling face topped our rail at Yokohama. Applebone, our old mate, had been bludgeoned in some obscure waterside brawl we couldn't seem to get the rights of. It was so Bane came to us, on the heels of tragedy, ill-omened. An unlikely figure for such a job. More like a society yachtsman than a common salt jack, with his neat rig and close-cropped, sun-bleached hair and mustache. But his papers were in shape, he impressed Kendrick, and he got the ticket in an ill hour for us.

His personality had drawn and repelled me in about equal degree at first. A man of forceful qualities. Magnetic. Of an intellect. Yet with that curious mocking reserve that could cut deeper than any gibe—and a taint, somehow. The taint that clings about certain South Sea outcasts, as of something buried—one ceases to be sensitive to it after a while. But it's there. Something buried—and not quite deeply enough——

Still, I had failed to connect our new officer with the skipper's deplorable transformation, which began to overtake him about that time. Until we reached Sydney. Until Ellen joined us. Then, his sudden fancy and pursuit of the girl, which went unrebuked by her father, revealed the influence he had gained. Then, I began to fear him. Perhaps not fear, so soon. More what the French mean by *"redouter."* That. He was redoubtable.

And now I saw him in another phase. Master of chicane and trickery. Playing with my torment. Playing with Kendrick's suspicions. The whole rotten puzzle as a game between his powerful, corded hands.

The captain struck me in this instant of perception as one plucked two ways, by Bane's compulsion, and by his secret grievance.

"Well, there you are, Keating," he mumbled. "And be thankful of the chance."

His tongue ran on with him, as usual.

"Bring you clear of living near these swine we got aboard. That ought to be a comfort to you. Damn the low-flung lot of 'em!"

Bane stepped quickly inside the cabin.

"Ah! Has Mr. Keating been complaining of the crew?"

I knew what he meant. He thought I had been blabbing. It rejoiced me I had done nothing of the kind. And it braced me further to see the skipper still had a kick left in him.

"No, sir," he flared. "I complain. They're a damn ugly outfit. More like a gang of convicts than decent fool sailormen. I ain't used to such. That Farralone now, that gallowsbird—I sent him aloft this morning, and 'fore God I thought he'd heave the slush bucket in my face. I did. I lammed him good. Twice I've had to knock a swab down reaching for a knife. Call them sailors?

"That ain't all. I can't tumble out but I fall over one of them. Sneaking around. Spying on me. I won't have it. I won't!"

"Oh, you must imagine that, sir," soothed the mate. "They may be a bit rough, but they're the best we could get at Sydney, you'll mind."

"I mind you said so," cried the skipper. "You got 'em, cursed if I know

how. Must ha' swept the dustbin. Yours they are, all but one or two I signed at the dock head. And Keating here, and a couple of Machan's. And a damned old fool I was to let you ship 'em. I see that now!"

Bane made a little gesture as he stood looking down. Of a sudden something seemed to whip Kendrick's raw nerves. He blinked and ducked away at his table, like a hermit crab scuttling. His defiance melted.

"Maybe I've lost the knack of white hands," he admitted querulously. "Damn if I don't find myself thinking twice afore I boot 'em."

"You supply the boots, and I'll guarantee the rest."

"I—I'd done better to keep my Kanakas."

Bane shrugged, with smiling assurance.

"You agreed yourself that whites were necessary for the climate—and the work."

Conceive if I was listening! They were verging toward the secret. I scarce breathed for eagerness, awaiting the next phrase, on tenterhooks, when suddenly——

The mate turned and saw me. For the first time in my knowledge of him I got his frown. And it was not pleasant.

"Ah, Mr. Keating, we needn't keep you. You won't find it comfortable to change cabins to-day, I should think. The glass is falling fast. We're close to dirt. Remind me of it some other time."

He waved me off, turning to complete the suppression of the captain's little revolt. But this was where I surprised him. I understood well enough he had never meant I should have his cabin. For that reason, and because I could have wished no better scheme for getting nearer to Ellen, I meant to have it.

"Thanks, I'll move," I answered. "If there's nasty weather ahead I'll certainly appreciate the better quarters. I'll move right in—with thanks to you."

A refusal would have meant a break right there, an open avowal of bad faith. He didn't want it, I saw that. But the glint in his eye damned me to a future reward as he searched my face in a pause.

"Do you know, I find you improved already, Keating, my boy," he purred. "That's interesting. You seem to be coming on quite handily."

"Yes," I said, with my first thrill of aggression. "Yes, I've been getting treatment. Rather heroic. I'll take that cabin."

His glance widened on me. Then, with a little fleering bow——

"Oh, invalids must be served," he decided. "Call the steward to shift my truck. I hope your first night will be comfortable."

A more evil-sounding wish never rang in an unfortunate's ear. The bite of it! I stumbled out upon the bridge deck. There I stayed, clutching the rail hard, while I called all my faculties to the issue.

I had part of my answer. Both of them were tangled in the affair past any appeal of mine. The crew was Bane's, his own picking. That the captain now mistrusted them was no aid. It was too late. He was at Bane's mercy. As we all were, it began to appear. As we all were. Bane, the ace, and all the trumps. With the supercargo a lone card against the pack.

Ellen! To go to her. To bring her safe. She was wandering about in this nest of villainy alone, at her whim. Anything might happen. These fiends were everywhere. Bane's men. And she had kept him at arm's length until now only by evasion, by subtle parry and check of his advances. I had seen much——

How soon might he tire? How soon might the whole impending suspense

crash upon us? I could not endure to think of her so far away. Her place was near her father. Some little protection, at least. The best she had. Her one defense from these wolves——

I swarmed the ladder to the upper bridge, her name on my lips. She was not there. I missed the flash of her tam along the length of the ship. A black-avised fellow known as Dingo was holding the wheel. He scowled at my query and shook his head. I caught the revolver again in my pocket and scoured down to the decks like a man possessed.

CHAPTER VII.

I found her at last, after a breathless search. If any marked me as I tore aft I do not know. But none tried to stop me. I came up upon the poop, and there she was, pacing a strip by the taffrail. As far from the bridge as she well could get.

It need have been no great task, I suppose, to warn her, to put her on her guard, and that not too rudely. No such task. But for me——

I can only plead the urgence, my state of mind, and the burden of inadequacy under which I still labored. As I saw it, I must see her to the bridge and get her instantly under cover. I must. It came to that absolute point. And I went after it with about the finesse you'd use to drive a tenpenny nail.

She paused at seeing me, and I stood mumchance, still without the word, and so until I blundered into speech by sheer desperation.

"Miss Kendrick," I blurted, "do you think it safe to be so far from the bridge house?"

She leaned on the taffrail, balanced easily to the dizzy swing and plunge of the stern. Hair round swept and wish lashed above her level brows, and with eyes straight as a man's.

However I may have showed in this affair, make no mistake about her. A trim, competent, dainty little figure in her sailor jacket and navy cloth suit. No doll. No finicking creature of quirks and moods and drooping glances. Sanity and vigor in her fresh skin, soft colored like a heart petal, her full-rounded youth, her gray glance, clear and deep as the shadow in a wood spring.

"Safe?" she repeated. "Why you wouldn't call this more than stuns'l weather, would you? You ought to get out more into the spray and whistle of it, Mr. Keating. It's glorious."

A huge wave shouldered up and up beneath us till the screw raced. She laughed.

"That makes her angry. Now she'll just wiggle her ears and jump for the next one."

I did my feeble best.

"I meant safe—aboard. You—you're out of call, so far aft. And sight, too."

The hint of a line drew between her brows as she looked at me.

"What of that, Mr. Keating?"

"You shouldn't be. You—you musn't be. I mean—isn't the bridge a better place?"

"Not when I want to come here."

"In—in the teeth of the wind, you like that. And—you're out of the grime and confusion up there. Isn't that so?"

"Why, it may be——"

"You see!" I cried. "Of course it is. Now if you'll only walk forward with me——"

She couldn't have been very much impressed.

"I think I prefer to stay here," she said, quite naturally.

"You can't! There's danger. You're the length of the deck away from help."

Her gaze quickened on me.

"Help! Against what?"

I spun around. A sailor was at work by the starboard quarterboat not far

away. I thought I detected a stealthy watchfulness upon our meeting.

"Against—anything. An accident, perhaps. Pardon me, I'm clumsy. But you can think what you like if you'll only come forward—now."

"Danger——"

She didn't approve of me. A disordered oddity with roving eye and chalk-smitten cheek who broke upon her with such a word. And still she hesitated, as if it vibrated with some unacknowledged tension of her own. She looked off over the froth-tangled seas.

"There's a tiny bird of some kind out there," she said. "Do you suppose it's a cape pigeon, this far from land?"

"Do you know how far from land we are? Or where we are headed?"

"My father hasn't told me——"

The line was deeper between her brows.

"That bird is the lucky one," I said. "No cormorant has him in his clutches. He can go as he wills. He's—free——"

I turned away and hung at the rail, staring out upon the vast, unkindly expanse of the waters.

"What do you mean?" she asked, with a little pulse of feeling.

"I'm waiting, that's all. Till you get ready to go forward. And then I'm going with you."

She had made no game of her nature—this girl. No lending of it for the shabby counters and small change of trickeries and pretense. It was there, unwasted by the tawdry dishonesties of sex and sentiment. Of the sun and the air and the open spaces, true as the southeast trade. In its purity she had become for me something infinitely fine—remote——

And yet baffling as the zephyr in her charm, in her lighter play of word and thought, of gesture and laughter. I knew that, too, who had followed the lure of her without hope. Warm with youth, dear and desirable. And sweet-tempered with it all. No spark of malice.

When she spoke, she was trying to give me the best of it, as she always did with every one, as it was her impulse to do.

"Something has worried you, Mr. Keating," she said hesitantly. "I don't believe it can be as bad as you think. I'm sure of it. Wouldn't it be better if we talked more simply?"

"I can't," I answered. "It's my own trouble so far, very largely. I—I'll just wait. Don't mind me."

Some thought checked her. Her eyes softened, though she drew away a bit.

"I seem to have heard—you haven't been altogether well lately, have you, Mr. Keating?" she said, with all gentleness. "I—I'm sorry."

I stepped close. Constrained at last to lay some smirch of this thing upon her.

"Listen! Please believe I'm not mad. You must have wondered yourself about this strange trip—the restraint upon us all—the power that's been raised upon us. Your father's moroseness—for one thing. I can't tell you what it all means, Miss Kendrick, though I've been close to death——"

She stared at me, the color waning in her face. I had driven her fairly back upon her own doubts. For doubts she must have had, I saw that.

"This is my father's vessel, Mr. Keating."

"Are you so sure? I wish I were sure—and of what he means to do. Are you?"

She winced.

"It is true I hardly know my father," she said. "I've scarcely seen him since I was a child. He only took me this time because my aunt had died, and I couldn't live with strangers any longer and——"

She paused, a bit unsteadily.

"What his ways or his secrets or his—difficulties may be, I can't judge.

He has never told me. He shuts me out. But—he is my father."

Because she had doubted—for that very reason——

It was inevitable she should meet my effort so. Despising me. And yet I could see no better. How say her father was hurling us all over the rim of the world to the unknown? How explain the ominous power of the mate, the malevolent crew, without seeming to condemn the author of it all?

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

And, as frankly, I told her.

"Go straight to the bridge, stay by your father, talk to him, get through his reserve. See if you can rouse him to a sense of what he's doing, has done. Question him. Keep clear of the mate. And trust nobody on this unhappy ship from this moment."

"You think it's necessary, all that?"

"I'll tell you one thing I think. I think that about the one chance a certain victim has is your loosening the clutches on him."

"It's not so serious——" she murmured, looking away.

"And you?" I pressed. "Haven't you felt it? Are you quite at ease—satisfied?"

She would not yield.

"With my father? Absolutely, thank you——"

"And with—Bane?"

Her color flooded back.

"I avoid Mr. Bane. I'm capable of attending to that without direction. Really, Mr. Keating——"

"The crew?" I insisted. "This gang. You are easy among them? That pirate over there by the boat, for instance. And you here alone."

And then she laughed again. With a touch of vexation, perhaps, but with whole-hearted relief. She had found what she sought, a break in the strain I was building. To her, in her innocence, the whole thing must have seemed overwrought, an access of ranting fantasy. So far was her conception from the grim and monstrous reality.

She laughed, and at the moment I was taken full aback. For I, with what I knew and feared and had undergone, was equally removed from her own view.

"Are these your terrors?" she cried. "That pirate, as you call him, is my very good friend. Why, it's Carl!"

She was not angered. Only gladdened and relieved to prove me wrong, to quell her own misgivings, it may be.

"Carl?" I repeated, amazed.

"See how absurd you are."

"You trust this—Carl?"

"I would absolutely—if there were any occasion. So would any one, I think. Poor lad—to make a horrible example of him!"

It was my turn to stare.

CHAPTER VIII.

The matter of Carl stands apart in my mind, a chapter often skipped by thumbing recollection. It will not bear thinking of a great deal, and indeed I might readily pass its details but for the baleful light it threw upon the *Colleen Bawn* and the extremity of our peril aboard her.

I can never say I appeared in it with any especial credit. No exploit, nor to be presented as such. Merely one of those vivid human flashes that come athwart a big experience. They happen in life, and a chap goes on. But they would be fatal to the complacent poise of your conquering hero, so they don't happen in books. Which is one reason why fiction is so much stranger than fact, perhaps.

I descended forthright upon Carl. He was one of the hands I had never noticed particularly. A great, sprawling lout, I thought him. Misshapen by the drudgery of the sea, with a tangle

of light hair, huge hands, and a dull face like the end of a butter firkin. Not so dull, however, but it showed a sullen uneasiness when I strode toward him.

I had a great notion of caution in this. It was altogether likely there were watchers forward. I had no mind to draw them any nearer, and when I sat on the edge of the hatch cover it would have seemed I was only idly interested in observing the long climb and fall of the vessel before me.

The fellow Carl continued at his work, stripping the tarred canvas cover from the quarterboat and stowing it away. Another time I might have wondered to see him so employed. I spoke sidelong at him, gauging my voice to his ear:

"You big, flap-eared Swede, you! What the hell do you mean by annoying Miss Kendrick!"

He was half kneeling on the deck by the rail break, wrestling with a section of stiff canvas. Amazement opened on me two eyes as wide and watery blue as oyster shells when he slumped around.

"Huh? The little lady——" he stammered.

"You've been speaking to her. You've been bothering her. You stay still and answer right there—what's your little game?"

"I never——"

"Don't tell me! What've you been hanging around her for? Who put you up to it?"

Squatting there on his canvas, he twisted his great hands, and as I watched, an expression of the most helpless dismay spread upon his broad features. His chest heaved once. I remember how the faded letters on his old blue jersey, a relic of service aboard some British India boat, stood plain for an instant. Then:

"I don't bother," he cried, in a perfect gale of protest. "No, I never! That lady, she been gude friend of mine. Always she been so kind. 'Gude morning, Carl.' 'Gude morning, miss.' Don't you say I bother her. If anybody bother that little lady, by Gol I smash him!"

I was as upset as he. Checked in full tilt by an emotion that belittled my own, that condemned me on the spot for a meddling truculent. Why, the ridiculous creature was actually at the point of tears. I felt like one who has stupidly wronged a child.

"Does *she* say I bother her?"

"No, no," I said hastily.

He subsided, turning a timid glance aft toward where I had left her. And I sat looking down at the clumsy bulk of him in what was very close to consternation. Here was anticlimax to my ferment, if you like. A villain who turned out to be a sentimentalist. A Caliban who could weep!

"You signed on at Sydney?" I charged, making what recovery I could.

He nodded.

"You're one of that lot?"

His face was blank again.

"I got no lot. Don't been with any lot."

"It was the mate got you your job?"

"No," he answered, "Cap'n Kenrick."

I began to understand partly. This was one of the few men on board who were not of Bane's choosing. Taken on the dock head by the skipper himself before that precious outfit was herded up the gangway. An outsider, like myself.

"Then you didn't know your shipmates before?"

Anger suddenly rumbled in his throat, and I got one wild spark from those colorless eyes.

"No! By Gol, no—I never. Don't want to know none of them now!"

"And they—have they left you alone?"

"Better they do."

He wiped a fist across his mouth awkwardly and stared at it, doubled like a ham.

"You've had a run-in already."

He began plucking at the canvas again.

"Messed one up, maybe?"

"Two."

I understood still better. This man, this extraordinary misfit, had been living in the forecastle at bared fang with the whole bunch. I had some faint idea of what that life must have been.

"Did they want you to join them—take part in some scheme?"

He said nothing, hitching the canvas free and going on with his work, closing up like a clam now that his burst of denial had been made.

"They're up to something and wanted you along?" I persisted. "Or—maybe they only warned you to keep your mouth shut."

That drew a sullen glance from him.

"Come," I urged. "There's deviltry. You know it. I know it. What are they up to?"

He shook his head. He would not speak. It was the stubbornness of a rock, of a man with one thought. Likely he had held it from the start. I began to fear he would hold it still. With me as with them.

"Look here, Carl. Here's the little lady. She's in danger. You must know that. You've been watching over her?"

I saw that it was so. I wondered how much we had to thank the dogged, silent giant that disaster had been warded off so far. We could not know. We never did know.

I made one more trial of him.

"Carl, I'm trying to take care of her, to keep her from harm. She's not the kind to find trouble, that little lady. She won't listen. Will you speak to her? Will you help me?"

Came the rumble in his throat again.

"If anybody touches the little lady, I smash him," he said, with a heavy iteration of purpose that marked its limit.

For such was the curious end we came to. Beyond that he would not go. Neither betray the doings or plans of his fellows, who were also his enemies. Because he was made that way, with that strange streak of loyalty. And having chosen his course he would stick, through threats or blandishments.

He crouched there at his work. A great, lumbering hulk of a man. Turning a shoulder to me as to some buzzing pest. Deaf. Locked again with the one red flower of emotion that flared in the dim chamber of his mind. Unheeding, aloof——

"Very well."

I got up and went to Ellen, and with a gesture led her down past the quarterboat. She did not understand. But the man did, and I saw the tips of his ear flush as he bent over his task.

"Carl," I called aside, as we came up, "what do you say now?"

He squirmed, he fumbled at the canvas with huge, wandering hands. We paused there. While the deck tilted up and down again. While Ellen's glance questioned me mildly. While the unseen watchers forward, I suppose, craned to see what we had to do with the man who didn't belong. Without so much as lifting his head, he spoke, and this was the astonishing thing he flung at us:

"Run on—run on, f' Gol' sake, miss. Don't you see them been spy'? You do what he tells you, that little faller!"

And so we left him, kneeling there by the break in the rail. For Ellen, without a word, and with a face gone white as the spray, turned forward with me.

"Gude morning, miss," he mumbled, touching his ragged cap.

"Good morning, Carl," she answered mechanically.

The last I saw of him he was sprawl-

ing at the canvas, a huge, loutish figure. Doggedly at work. Sullen. Alone.

CHAPTER IX.

We went slowly, not to seem in any alarm. Down from the poop, picking our way along the deck. It was a journey to strain better nerves than mine.

I saw the turbaned rascal slip by on the other side—a Frenchman, that chap, with a ticket to Noumea stamped plain as print on his hangdog brow. My pussy-footed friend, Perrin, ducked from somewhere and favored me with a sneaking grin. There were more of them near. Lurking for some chance, it might be, some order. Ringing us with sly surveillance. But none of them spoke, nor hindered.

Suspense dragged upon our steps like shackles—mine, at least. Ellen seemed calm, though very pale, I kept my revolver close to hand——

In all, I suppose we took three minutes to reach the bridge. Certainly not more than five, for we were not much minded to linger any great time. We paused by the rail once and again when the vessel lurched wide. Five minutes, say. But within that space the thing had happened.

We had just topped the ladder and were turning for the house with a first easier breath when the yell started, rocketing from aft, mounting the keen blare of the gale, long drawn and mournful. A sailor tumbled past below through the alleyway from the fore deck. Others popped from the foc'sle.

"Ma-an o'rboard!"

Hammer of feet, hoarse clamor of voices, split by the shrill of the bosn's whistle. The ship boiled with sudden excitement. As if a stage wait had ended with a clap of hands that sent the company breaking from the wings.

It was a singular thing to me, even as I stood there, how the impact glanced from me. Surprise and apprehension, I felt, but no throb of conviction, of the eager pity and resolve men know at that cry. The running and shouting figures had the sham effect of ill-trained actors who overplayed their parts. For the impression, I might have been in a balcony looking down over the footlights coldly.

I watched the bearded face of Farralone Jim leap by beneath me, uplifted, bawling, with little red-rimmed eyes, bright as jet. I got the flash, somehow, of repulsive burlesque, as of a wide, slack mouth grinning behind the heavy beard——

Came Captain Kendrick, bouncing like a flabby purple ball, but lashing orders with rapid-fire precision. He was real, at least; I caught the thrill from him. The man was rejuvenated for the moment. Whatever his flaws, he was still the skipper, keying to command at the call.

Some one had signaled the engine room, with a jangle of bells.

"Throw that back!" he roared to the upper bridge. "Full ahead, there. Put her a-stabbord! Jam her over——"

He took one slide of it by the ladder to the deck.

"Clear away that stabbord boat. Lively, you swabs—get aft!"

When I turned again, Ellen was gone from my side. She had slipped from me and was following her father. Too late to catch her. There was no help for it, and indeed it might still be best that she should be near him. I could not tell, in the whirl of the emergency. But I could, and did, race back after her to the poop deck where a swarm clotted about the quarterboat.

Even to my lubberly eye they seemed rather vigorous than effective, crossing and hustling each other, hauling and shouting with unnecessary uproar:

"Bring her up—lift her. Downhaul there—slack away——"

A squat ruffian with thin, hairy arms

blundered back against me as he tailed at a rope and I was crisped to hear a harsh chuckle of "Oh—he—yo! Cheerly, men!" from his lips. Some new devilment was up—some cynic villainy—I scrambled to reach Ellen——

Kendrick fell into the thick of them like a bolt of wrath, striking out with fist and boot.

"Avast! Clear that tackle! Are y' all gone soft-headed? You and *you!* Swing her out—y' pithless sons of ditch diggers! *Swing!*"

For the first time in my seeing it looked open revolt. One ripped an oath at him, his arm flailed, and the hairy chap went flat to the deck like an unhooked flounder. There slid a sudden hush upon the turmoil—the insuck of a wave before its foaming—I dragged Ellen out from them, seeking to get our backs to some barrier.

There never yet had been a moment in which the cabin guard offered such easy prey to any outbreak. We were in the seething mob of them. It was a trap, I believe, in a stinging flick of anger. A trap for me alone, perhaps—or for all of us. The waited climax of disaster—the crash that had hung suspended so long——

Bane arrived, out of nowhere, apparently.

Two words and a gesture and it was over, the men turning obediently to their ropes, all murmurs suppressed, the boat being swung handily outboard. And there stood Kendrick roaring on with his orders and the mate quietly at his side.

His doing, of course. Why, I could not know, save that it suited him. But how—I had seen that. With the ease of sure control, as if he held a string on every will of them, and had simply to tighten his fingers. One instant, a mutiny at the crest. The next, a prompt and busy crew. This was the kind of man who was running the *Colleen Bawn.*

He drew the skipper a step.

"Can she live in that sea, sir, do you think?" he asked respectfully.

We all stared out over the clambering blue slopes where the wind, now risen to fury, winnowed its spume. At every plunge the *Colleen,* falling off slowly now in answer to her helm, lay like a chip on the breast of an avalanche. At every lift we saw her whitened trail tracked away over hilltops in thin loops—nothing more.

"A man went overboard, I believe," said the captain, hard-lipped.

"Somebody heaved him a life ring," soothed the mate.

"I'm bound to make a try."

"Of course, sir. I don't question—but wouldn't it be better——"

"Well?"

"We're coming 'round. If he's afloat we'll see him. Time enough then, I suggest."

He had his way in the end. The boat was held on the blocks, and we waited while the ship labored her long circle. It seemed to me she must have traveled miles since that cry. For myself, I was not seaman enough to know the right of it. A terrific sea. The little craft would hardly have weathered it. Bane was plausible——

I think I had not realized until that moment why we were all come. My skepticism at the start, our own peril, had blurred the raw surface fact. A man was missing. Some poor wretch was fighting for life out there with the chill combers. So they all said. So it must be. I wondered at my curious unbelief.

The skipper sighted the life ring. Far away to starboard, as we ran down, a dot of red and white pricked out and as speedily erased in the smoking welter. We saw it again presently, and quite plainly, tossed against a darker patch——

Empty. Searching of eye or glass discovered nothing else afloat.

"Never reached it," said Kendrick gruffly.

"I'm afraid not, sir. The water is very cold. Must have crumpled him up."

I moved off from them to the rail where I could look out beyond the end of the suspended boat. The hands stood apart in a little knot, now, whispering among themselves.

The man was gone. Blotted in that immensity. A man I had seen. Had spoken with, perhaps. Some man——

"Who was it?" I heard Kendrick ask, at last.

The answer came just as my eyes dropped to the deck before me. Came in Bane's quiet, incisive tones like a blow, like a blinding spark in darkness:

"That young Swede, Carl."

I put out a hand to push Ellen away. I heard her gasp behind me. I moved back, like a sleepwalker wakened at the edge of a precipice. The place before my feet was the exact spot at the break in the rail where we had left the man Carl some minutes before.

"Anybody see him go?"

"Lost his balance off the bitts, they tell me, sir."

It was a lie. A damnable and guilty lie——

I still tried to push Ellen away—to shield her. But when I touched her quivering body, I knew I had not been quick enough. She had seen. She, too, had seen. The mute evidence. The terrible trace at the edge of the planking there, where Carl had knelt. Crimson splashed on the yellow teak—— New crimson——

Desperately, then, I snatched her to me. With rude hand stifled her cry. Wrenched her away.

"Say nothing!" I implored, whispering. "Unless we're all to go the same way—— Brave—be brave!"

And so, somehow, got her back to the house without drawing attention, while the murderers played out their tragic farce behind us.

CHAPTER X.

This was the manner of my meeting with Carl, and of my losing him. Nothing that happened on that fateful voyage, not my own narrow escapes, our subsequent suffering, threw me to such a profound and paralyzing depression.

Afterward I had the lift of action, the urge of a known issue. Here I reached the depths, without understanding, hope, or support of any kind. The black imps of the unknown could drag me no lower.

I fought it out in the early watches of the night, and if I did not succumb it was because I never should succumb to any earthly torment of mystery and fear. I fought it out, and I found that I could still go on.

Bane had made no move to withdraw the offer of his cabin. I had profited accordingly, and it was there I lay, fully dressed on the bunk, staring with wide eyes at the shift and loom of shadows thrown from the swinging candle light.

The mate's quarters aboard the *Colleen* cut in between the chart room and the captain's large double cabin on the starboard side. To port the corresponding section was part of the captain's suite, ordinarily held for a possible passenger and now occupied by his daughter.

It was some little comfort to me to be so near her, in the ship's natural fortress. She was just behind the fore and aft partition. Asleep, I could wish, after the heavy shock of the day.

Immediately on getting her to the bridge I had prevailed upon her to retire to her berth and remain there. Bewildered and terrified, she had promised. And that was well, for one look at her face would have told Bane that she had learned something of the horror. She had seen no one since, save

possibly her father, to whose quarters she had access by an inner door. I trusted she might find rest.

For myself, there was none. The phantoms flocked about me, and I struggled with them there, hour by hour, the sweat standing on my face, the nails driven in my palms. Seeking vainly to draw coherence from the whirl of the ghastly enigma.

The murders—of Carl and the stoker Stevens. And I, marked for a third. Outsiders, all three, with the crew. For that very reason, apparently. They were auditing the roll with a big, red pencil, crossing off the undesirables in ferocious, deliberate strokes.

But why? Do men kill in a pack for the number of a mess or the address of a crimp? Why should they have to be rid of us—harmless and common folk? Fear or greed? Were any other motives thinkable? Greed or fear? Greed that was coolly cutting down the list of possible sharers in some enterprise? Or fear that would tolerate no witnesses to some great crime?

Perhaps you see where my thoughts were already tending—piracy. Aye, I had come to that. Before me always was the bulking question of our strange cruise for which I had yet found no answer. Piracy was the only word dark enough to cover the thing.

But who ever heard of a steam tramp turned pirate, even in the South Seas where so many wild improbabilities survive, these days of Lloyds and twenty-knot cruisers, of cables and coast surveys, of brass-buttoned fussiness and international patrols? And in the name of all the rovers from Bartholomew Roberts down, what pirate ever sought loot in this empty end of the world?

Bilboe, Machan had said. But there all inquiry slipped like grasping fingers on a sheet of glass. Bilboe was vanished these many years. Bilboe was a myth, anyway. Bilboe and his Port Boys——

I dwelt on that. I had not overlooked the insistence with which the hint had cropped. Our crew, it appeared, might bear some relation to that old lawless fraternity. Ruffians and sea scamps, all. Banded in some sinister agreement. Recruited in a body and by the same man, held in leash by his authority alone. But supposing it was so, I was no nearer the light, no nearer understanding their intent, or Bane's, or the skipper's——

There was the marvel. The skipper. The man of secrets whose secrets had become his disease. He had started it all. He had submitted to Bane's management. Now I found him mistrustful of every one, even his master. Trying to exorcise the power he had raised. But why? And what made him to start at a shadow? And why had his cabin been searched, as he said? And if he was at odds with the crew, why had he not been killed ere this?

Bane, himself. The spider at the center of the web. I could make nothing of him whatever. He had gained the captain. He had filled the ship with his creatures. Now he was in virtual command, able to do as he pleased.

Were the murders by his order, or only without his prohibition? Was it only a whim that kept him dallying with the situation? A stratagem in sheer mockery? Ellen, perhaps? Some notion of fending the crash until he had won her by subtler arts? It would be like him—but how much longer would he be content to hold his passion within bounds?

You figure me there, drawn and strung like a man on the rack. Fighting with the terror, while the sea noises and the tiny tongues of the ship gibbered in my ear and the dim shadows writhed above on the roof plates. The same, helpless little supercargo—I wonder.

I wondered even then. For the half

of a day I had been the battered toy of events. It was curious to find that emotion no longer ran singly in the groove of self-pity. That I felt and thought and saw so much outside my shrinking little defects, my troubled little weakness. With the reserve faculty of a tortured sleeper in his nightmare —I wondered——

It must have been along about two bells of the middle watch that my painful vigil ended. The motion of the steamer had moderated sensibly during the night. And through the lessened murmur of sound came voices. My gaze fixed upon a small square ventilator at the top of the partition above the bunk. The close grating showed a gleam of light from the captain's cabin. I drew myself to my feet on the bunk, but could distinguish nothing beyond the hum and return of two speakers.

I had no compunction in what I was about to do. Only the great need to know, to catch a thread that might lead me one step in the maze. There had been a time when I should have shrunk. From scruple—from lack of the mere will. That time was long past.

With the thick blade of my knife I began to work at the screws of the grating. The clumsy tool slipped, scored my hand, snapped—— I toiled on with the stump.

Inside of five minutes I was clamping to the shelf, one knee on a chronometer bracket, thrust up through the opening toward another grating on the captain's side.

CHAPTER XI.

And these were the first words that drifted up to me, in the unmistakable quaver of Kendrick.

"Who told 'em of a black wallet? Hey? Who told 'em such a yarn? 'Fore God I'll give up nothing. Where'd they get the notion I kept a wallet?"

I heard, and yet could scarce believe I heard. The instant reflex was swift suspicion of another trick. A wallet? A black wallet? Perrin's shallow, incoherent tale——

The smooth accents of Bane cut across, smooth, and edged, like a crescent blade:

"You make me weary, old man—weary. Does a fellow go fifty-three South after butterflies? Or human hair? Do you suppose they wouldn't know what you were after, quick as they learned your course? Why, it's been common drift from Pitcairn to Thursday any time these ten years—that story."

"What story?"

"The bos'n that lived to get back. The bos'n, you know. Picked up somewhere in the Amsterdams. Sitting on a rock in a kelp surplice, howling hymns at the sea gulls. But he had the wallet. Oh, he had the wallet, right enough. And he came back *with* the wallet. Where it's traveled since would make queer telling. Anyway, it takes no Solomon to guess you've got it now."

"I never saw the damn wallet!" shrilled the skipper. "I come on a tip. Just the bearings, no more. I told you that a hundred times."

"So you have. But you wouldn't start on any less a tip than the whole. Not you. For a fat, contented old chap like you—— Oh, dear, no!"

"Wouldn't, hey? Didn't that gang on the *Eliza D. Smith* start out two year ago on the word of a swab who'd only seen it—only seen it? A Chinee cook that couldn't even read. Scratched the figgers on a copper boiler, and *that* was enough for them. I'm doing the same, that's all. It's a tip—Applebone, my mate that's dead, tipped me off."

"Applebone brought you the wallet," corrected Bane. "He nipped it up somehow in Yokohama—and when he passed out next day, it wasn't on him."

"Hey? What d'you know about Applebone?" shrilled Kendrick.

"Oh, nothing," came the mate's sardonic answer. "Only—I happened to be on the trail of the black pocketbook myself just then. And he beat me to it——"

Above them there at the ventilator I clung and listened in amazement. That after all the bewilderment my first real clew in the tangle should revert to the one thing I had most surely discarded—the larrikin's whining excuse. Nailed for a motive, he had spoken part of the truth. There *was* an incredible black wallet——

"None of that's any good, Kendrick," the mate was saying. "No good. They know you have it. I'm all for peace myself—always for peace and order and discipline——"

I could picture the exact veiling of his smile upon the cowering victim below.

"I'd leave it with you all proper. All square and proper till the business is done and everybody paid off, as we agreed. But I tell you plainly—there's no holding them much longer. Not much longer."

"A lie, or you wouldn't say it. They don't breathe, 'cept by your leave. Flat mutiny, that's all. You want to hold me up—for what I ain't got. Damn it all, Bane, what could you do with the wallet s'pose I did have one?"

"It's the men," soothed Bane. "You know the kind. They're bound to see it, smell it—bite it, if you like. Bound to handle it for themselves. Mad with the notion. Think what it means, all these years with their tongues hanging out at the thought. Besides, you've no manner of claim better than theirs. No better."

I heard the skipper throw himself back in his chair.

"White hands! Ship a white crew. They'll take their wage and do their work and never know the differ'. That's what you said—and I let you go ahead. Your own gang—— Good God in Heaven look down on me for a poor, damn fool!"

There was a moment's silence within.

"The way it stands now they're all in, Kendrick. You've got to share all around, anyhow."

The chair creaked. Kendrick's voice came feebly, yet with a certain slow dignity:

"Mr. Bane, you know me, I believe. Since seventy-five, I been master on my own vessels. I've made one big mistake, it seems—I tell you fair, Mr. Bane. Before I give up anything with a hand on my throat, I'll destroy whatever information I've got. Destroy it, so you, nor me, nor nobody will ever be the wiser—— So help me——"

Came a faint clicking in the cabin behind me. I snatched around to look at the door. The swinging candle glim was reflected streakily from the brass hand knob. Its image wavered. Very slowly the knob was turning—the bolt took up gently as a weight was urged against the panels. An instant later a furtive hand tried the fastenings of the port——

I dropped softly from the bunk, took out the revolver, and spun its cylinder once. As the compact weapon nestled in my hand, a shimmery little tangle of blued points and surfaces, I felt that there might yet be a good fight in me.

Pinching out the candle, I drew the catch of the door without a sound. It came open on the velvet blue haze of the night, an insert against the black. I started low with one arm raised and leaped out clear across the bridge deck, swinging my gun——

Nothing. No stealthy prowler waiting with lifted club. No ambuscade of knives and spikes. But the man could not have gone far. I crabbed aft to the ladder. Just in time, peering below, to see the deck door of the house open on a blur of light and a figure flit through like conjuring.

My one thought had been to break

out of the cabin before I was pinned there, caged. But I was started now, roused to the chase. I slid the ladder before the alleyway was dark again and entered on the heels of my visitor.

Quick though I had been, the thwartship passage was empty when I came through. A dim lantern guided me to the head of the companion. Some one was crawling away before me there like a rat on a cellar stair. Down I went then into the dark belly of the ship, with teeth hard set on my resolve and the big revolver fisted.

The steps turned aft into the little orlop to starboard of the engine room. They hastened, and I jumped to command the tunnel.

"Stand!" I shouted. "Who's there?"

The hurry feet stopped dead. I moved forward, the pulse beating thickly in my throat.

"Who goes?" I demanded. "Pipe up, or I'll fire!"

I had a curious feeling of a breath on my cheek, but when I fended my knuckles crashed on woodwork. With fumbling fingers I found a brimstone match in my pocket. Flicking it from me, I lighted it on my nail—a bit of schoolboy magic happily remembered. The head fell some paces away and flared saffron upon the figure that crouched beyond with distended eyes of alarm——

The man was the one who had brushed me at the lifeboat rasping a chantey under his breath, a chap hailed about the decks by the name of Sachs.

I ran upon him before the flash failed, grabbed his collar, and haled him back to the passage below the companion.

"Once too often," I told him, and jammed the weapon into his neck. "What were you after at my cabin? Talk fast!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

TRIPLETS AND TROUBLE

BY ROBERT V. CARR

I'VE always held that a man kin stand anything if he will jes' put his mind to it. It's jes' beyond me how some poor angleworm-backed critters kin have so little pride in theirselves as to holler as soon as they're scratched or feel a little pain. Take me, and, if I do say it myself, no matter what's ailin' me I suffer in silence. None of this groanin' or gruntin' fer Jack Jetts—jes' suffer it out. I'm like steel when it comes to endurin' pain—yes, siree, like chilled steel.

But them triplet brothers of mine are diff'rent from me—can't stand the least thing, neither of them. Take the time Jeb got a crick in his neck. Joe claims Jeb got that crick in his neck

from lookin' at the girls the last time we was in Miles City. Jeb don't pay no 'tention to Joe's slurs, jes' groans and rubs his neck with some hoss lin-'ment.

Yet, after a spell, Jeb has to have his little whine.

"It jes' seems," he sniffles, "when I go to look at something, the world has done come to an end."

Joe laughs a cruel laugh.

"I warned you," teases brother Joe. "You would be a-snappin' your head at them Miles City fillies. You'd no more than see one pretty maid than you'd jerk your head around to see another. If you could think about something besides skirts once in a while, maybe you wouldn't be gruntin' around with a Charley hoss in your neck. Foller my smoke? You never hear me botherin' my head about girls."

"Oh, no," growls Jeb, as full of sarcasm as a rattler of pisen. "Oh, no, you *never talk* about the girls! Well, I never heard you talk about anything else. You're always rainbowin' about some piece of calico."

"There's where you don't understand your dear brother," Joe joshes him, fer that same Joe kin be a cunnin' devil at times. "Take us lit'rary fellers and we got a sacred right to dream about the little maids. All I has to do to have thoughts of music, as the feller says, is to think of some girl with the roses in her cheeks and the sunlight in her eyes."

"Pass the mush, mother," growls Jeb. "You can't slip any of that suds and sunshine down my neck, Joe Jetts. When I think about the girls I think right, and it's how much they've cost me. Take a girl and all she thinks of is what you're goin' to bring her. If you ain't got nothin', fog on, pretty boy, fog on. That lit'rary stuff reads all right, but it's fur from the trooth."

Then Jeb turns his head all of a sudden, and his neck hurts, and he cusses something frightful.

Then I breaks in.

"Jeb," I tells him like a true friend and brother, "no real man will grunt like you do over a little pain. You cer-tin-ly make me ashamed that I'm related to you. A little crick in the neck, and you a-whinin' like you was nigh to kickin' out."

"That's what I say," chimes in Joe, fer a wonder takin' sides with me. "A man shows what he's made of by the way he endures pain. Take us lit'rary fellers, and we never holler under no con-dition."

I gave Joe a quick, sharp look, but said nothin'; he was on my side fer once, and I couldn't afford to ree-fer to some things I knowed about him.

"Take me," Joe goes on, widenin' his loop, "take me and grind me up in a machine, and I'll never whimper. Though I has a ree-fined nature, I kin suffer, as brother Jack says, in silence. You has many good points, Jeb, but standin' pain ain't one of them. I ain't a word to say agin' you as a brother, but when it comes to standin' pain you fall a little short, Jeb—jes' a little short."

Jeb, seein' that we're both agin' him, don't try to fight—jes' groans and holds his neck. And so we lets up on him. Later in the day I feels like spurrin' brother Jeb some more, and makes a few ree-marks about a full-grown man a-babyin' around with a crick in his neck.

Jeb comes up close to me, and looks me fair in the eye.

"Jack," he says, and there's no mistakin' the look in his eye, "don't drive me too fur. I'm in a terrible con-dition, as any man kin see. I think you're lackin' a whole lot in kindness to hurraw a suff'rin brother."

"That's all right, Jeb," I comes back, "but it's fer your own good. When I git anything the matter with me and

whine or show the white feather, you kin hurraw me fer all you're worth and never a word will I say."

"You have stated my views to an ant's whisker," agrees Joe. "I makes the same offer. If something happens to me and I whine, jes' you trot out all the cruel ree-marks you kin think of. I'm thinkin' you'll never have the chance, fer, like Jack, I'll suffer in silence."

"Fer gosh-a'mighty's sake, keep still, you two!" howls Jeb, all of a sudden; "you're drivin' me loco with your gabblin'."

Joe titters, and begins hummin':

"Jeb, Jeb, poor old Jeb,
He got a crick in his neck.
He snapped his head at some cal-i-co,
And now his life's a wreck."

Jeb then reaches fer his gun, and we leave him be.

Well, after a spell, between the hoss medicine and cussin', Jeb finally gits the crick out of his neck and is his old self ag'in.

About that time Joe begins to look a little sad, and sort of set around alone. By and by, he admits that he's the makin's of a boil under his collar. Jeb grins a little, and insists on lookin' at Joe's boil. I take gappin's at it, too; it's a daisy, and growin' fast.

"Joe," I advises him, after he'd been awake two or three nights with his boil, and kept us jumpin' sideways with poultices and other truck, "that there young mountain on your neck is ripe fer carvin'."

Jeb is lyin' on his bunk, readin' a love story, but he sets up and joins right in with me.

"That's the idee, Joe. That there little raise on your neck should be slashed. Always heard that when a boil comes to a head the proper deal is to stick it. We'll slash her with a razor."

I must say that Joe hasn't whimpered much; but, when we go to talkin' razor, he looks kind of sick.

"All you have to do, Joe," says Jeb, cruel as a wolf, "is to suffer in silence. Recollect what you said when I had a crick in my neck. You made up a piece of po'try about it even. Why don't you make up something on a boil?"

"Jeb is right," I tells Joe. "A boil is nothin'. Be a man, Joe, and let us carve her. It will all be over in a second. One slash and it's good-by boil."

By that time Jeb has got the razor and is stroppin' it and testin' the edge. Joe looks at him like a dyin' calf.

I goes over to Joe, sayin' to brother Jeb over my shoulder, "I'll hold his head."

Now Joe Jetts is a game fighter, and afraid of nothin' that walks. Besides, he is a top cow-puncher, and will crawl on to any outlaw that ever sunfished, but when it comes to havin' cold steel laid across a boil——

Joe looks up into our faces as pitiful as a lost child.

"Boys," he whimpers, "you couldn't be so cruel to a brother what has always been good to you. You couldn't carve me—you couldn't carve me!"

"It's fer your own good," says the hard-hearted Jeb, and I'm forced to agree with him. Jeb flourishes the razor and rolls up his sleeves.

"I'll give her the cross slash," Jeb hands it out to Joe. "One slash north and one slash east; that will fix her."

"I wonder," moans Joe, "if there's a drop of licker on the place."

"That ain't fair," decides Jeb, mighty short. "A man stands up agin' the steel without the help of licker. Your time has come, Joe—your time has come. It's up to you to show what you're made of."

"Maybe it ain't come to a head yet," says Joe, prayin' fer time. "You hadn't ought to stick it till it's blossomed."

"Don't worry about that," I braces him, and gittin' a good grip on his head. "She's ripe, all right, all right. Come on, Jeb, with the steel."

Poor Joe, seein' that he's gone, goes limp under my hands. Then Jeb, with a wink at me, makes a few false motions with the razor, and then, *kazooric!* he slashes the boil.

Joe peeps twice, and falls back in my arms. In spite of all I kin do, I has to laugh. Jeb jes' whoops and hollers.

When Joe comes to, and gets squared around, he takes a good look at me and brother Jeb.

"Have all the fun you want, but let me tell you there is no livin' man what won't holler if you twist him hard enough."

"Well, you sure hollered," I reminds him.

"Yes, and he was the boy who was tellin' me how to stand pain," Jeb rowels him.

Joe is feelin' fairly good now, and he begins to take up the talk ag'in.

"Suppose," he says, and he's got a imagination like an old maid, "suppose the Injuns captured you, Jack. First, say, they pulls your toenails, and then trims your ears—swallowforks both your wind fans. Then, say, they lay a red-hot ramrod across your eyes. Then, suppose, after that they take off an inch of your hide at a time. What do you reckon you'd do under them con-ditions? Don't you figger that you'd holler?"

"Never a cheep out of me," I tells him flat. "I'd look them red devils right in the eye and die game as a white man should."

"Joe," complains Jeb, "don't go into details about Injun torture ag'in. You got a way of dee-scribin' a thing that gives me the jerks. That toenail-pullin' idee starts my mind to millin'. I'm free to say that, when they went to work on my feet, I'd yell till you could hear me in Omaha. I was always ticklish about the feet."

"Them's my sentiments," declares Joe, who is jes' as likely to argue fer a thing one minute and agin' it the next. "About the time they lifted my hoof, you could hear me holler on t'other side of Jordan."

I am com-pelled to laugh. I see that I has about all the cold nerve of the Jetts family. Jeb got whiny with a crick in his neck, and Joe let a boil make him white around the gills. I'm all that's left to keep the name of Jetts lookin' like it belonged to nervy white men.

I tells them boys jes' exactly how I would come through that Injun torture—game to the last, askin' no mercy, a white man and a stayer. They see that I had 'em, and jes' shut up. People that have whined about a little crick in the neck or a boil ain't much to say about what they'd do in Injun torture. 'Bout all they kin do is to keep still while a real man tells 'em where to head in.

In a day or two we're headed fer the stage station to git the mail. We never got no mail, but we always went fer it.

I don't know why I never noticed it before, but that mornin' I got a little suspicion that my left jaw was beginnin' to swell. As we rode along I begin to see that I was kerrect in that there suspicion. 'Bout a mile from the stage station one of my left-hand grinders begin to r'ar and charge and speak pieces.

I'm forced to tell them brothers of mine, jes' in a careless way, that I think I'm due to have the toothache.

Jeb looks at Joe, and Joe looks at Jeb. Both of the miserable hounds grin like they'd jes' thought of some joke.

"Well," advises Jeb, who, when you come to know him, has the nature of a devil, "jes' hang on to your nerve. A

toothache is nothin' aside of havin' your toenails lifted. I'm surprised you even mentions it. What's toothache as agin' Injun torture?"

"That's what gits me," breaks out Joe. "A man of Jack's nerve mentionin' a triflin' thing like the toothache! Queer, very queer!"

Say, and I know I hadn't ought to talk about a brother this way, but that Joe Jetts, regardless of his lit'rary ways, has one of the cruelest natures this side of the jump-off. He has a cunnin' cruelty, Joe has.

By that time that grinder has got a collar-and-elbow holt on my brain, and is beginnin' to hang and twist—hang and twist. I pets my jaw with my finger; it's swelled some.

"All I got to say," laughs Jeb to Joe, "is that I hope we don't meet no pocket gophers. They might take Jack fer a brother of theirn; he sure looks a lot like one."

"That's what," Joe agrees. "Sure a strong family resemblance between Jack Jetts and a pocket gopher."

I'm in no shape to take up their insults. I now sees that my only hope is to beg, borrow, or steal some whisky at the stage station, and be durned soon about it, too. I'd always heard that whisky was good fer the toothache; anyway, I was willin' to try it. Every minute the old bean masher was a-pitchin' harder and faster. By the time we racked into the stage station she was jumpin' seven ways fer Sunday and comin' down hard.

'Bout half crazy, and a-packin my face in my hands, I runs around tryin' to locate some licker. But my luck was agin' me; not a drop in the place. Plum' discouraged, and all in, I set down on a wagon tongue and try to con-trol my jaw. I had to hold it tight with both hands or it would 'a' jumped out of my face.

Jeb and Joe both come up to me, grinnin' like hell cats.

"All you got to do," advises Jeb, in a slow, draggy, irritatin' voice, "is to show the red devils how a white man kin suffer and die."

"You have spoken a great trooth, or words to that effect," adds Joe.

I looks up at them, and then, hangin' on to my jaw, ree-marks, cold and desp'rate:

"Remember the limit, boys. Men have kicked out with their boots on fer less than you two have said to me. Anyhow, it will all be over in a little while. I can't live this way much longer."

They grin, but don't say nothin' fer a spell.

Finally Jeb suggests: "Why not go to town and have it yanked out? You can't stand that pain much longer."

"That's the idee," Joe trails in right in after Jeb. "Go to town and have the condemned thing jerked out." Then, with a wink at Jeb: "It hadn't ought to hurt more than a crick in the neck or a boil. It hadn't ought to take as much nerve to have a tooth yanked as to have a boil carved. I never had a tooth pulled, but they say it don't feel no worse than havin' your brain scraped with a garden hoe."

"I've heard tell," Jeb explains, nice and cheerful, "that havin' a tooth pulled is a whole lot like havin' your head weatherboarded. But Jack wouldn't mind a little thing like that. Them nervy devils like Jack jes' set right down and let one of them tooth jerkers yank out every nipper they got, and crack jokes while he's doin' it. Of course, you and me, Joe, would cheep a little, but take Jack, and I'm here to say he'll suffer in silence—suffer in silence."

Fer some derned reason Joe smoothes a grin off'n his freckled face—the homely son of a gun!

I see plain enough that them scoundrels have got it in their heads that I ain't the nerve to waltz into town and

have that tooth jerked. They require to be shown, and I'm the boy that kin show 'em.

I ties a handkerchief around my jaw, jumps my hoss, and yells out of one side of my mouth:

"Come on, you two cold-hearted coyotes! I'm goin' to show you what a nervy man kin do. Some day you'll want a little sympathy from me, and you'll git nothin' but sneers and insults."

They laughs backward and forward, like they has a great joke between 'em, but don't say nothin'.

We fogs it fer town.

Now and then I am com-pelled to stop fer a sup of hot water, although I inquires fer whisky all along the trail. One feller had some wood alcohol, but my brothers thought I'd better ask a doctor before tacklin' that stuff. Not a drop of real licker in the country; it was a killin' ride.

Before we reaches town my old grinder had quit her reg'ler pitchin' and got down to fancy buckin'. She'd go up in the air, whirl twice, hit the ground all spraddled out, and throw herself over nine sections of land. Then up she'd come ag'in, fall backward fer eleven miles, and land on her ear in a pile of rock. Sometimes she'd sail, turnin' over and over, and then, all of a sudden, fall fer days, sickishlike. Once she took a run and jump and batted out her brains agin' a stone wall. Anyhow, that's how it felt.

"Jumpin' Judas H. Priest, boys!" I am com-pelled to ree-mark, "ain't there nothin' in this suff'rin' world you kin do fer me? I'll go crazy in a minute."

"Nothin'," replies Jeb, and I'll leave it to you if you ever heard of a crueler man bein' allowed to live, "but call your attention to them ree-marks of yourn con-cernin' Injun torture."

Joe is softer-hearted than Jeb, and tries to jolly me along. But there is nothin' you kin say to jolly a man with the toothache. All he kin do is to hang on to his jaw with both hands and pant fer air. All a real friend kin do fer him is to take a club and knock him in the head and put him out of his misery.

In seven hundred and fifty-four years, nine months, seven weeks, five days, twenty-three hours, forty-nine minutes, and fifty-eight seconds we gits in sight of town. I know jes' how long it took us, fer I put in my time figgerin'.

I'm fer headin' into a saloon and drinkin' it out of house and home, but Jeb won't let me. He's appointed hisself round-up boss, and I'm too miserable to fight him. I'm so crazy with pain that I'm willin' to admit anything. I sure overlooked the jumpin' toothache when I took that stand on Injun torture. Injun torture is a shampoo as compared to the pitchin' toothache.

We rides up to the buildin' where a dentist has his death trap upstairs. I lets go all holts and falls off'm my hoss. With a brother supportin' me on each side, I stumbles up the stairs.

Then a funny thing happens. Bury me alive fer a liar, if that tooth don't ca'm right down and quit achin'. It's the ca'm after a storm, soothin' and quiet.

I stops in my tracks, and laughs. It weren't no full-grown laugh, but it was a laugh jes' the same.

"Boys," I tells my brothers, mighty relieved, "she's done quit achin'. No use in goin' further. Let's head back to a saloon, and drink to my recoverin' from a little spell of illness, as the feller says."

Jeb laughs his old heartless, cruel laugh.

"That old dodge won't work, Jack Jetts," he sneers. "You can't pull nothin' over us that-o'-way. That's what all the chicken hearts say when their nerve bogs down. Come on; the red devils are waitin'."

Did you ever notice how easy some folks kin say, "Come on," when it's the other feller's funeral? Jeb Jetts is one of them kind of inhuman devils.

I tries to lay back in the traces, but they pull me up the stairs.

We see a sign on the door. "Walk in," it says. Jeb and Joe "walk in," but I drag in.

As we enter that place, a feller—say, he was the cruelest-faced man I ever laid eyes on—stuck his head out from another room and says, in a cold, sneerin' voice:

"I'll be ready fer *you* in a minute."

That's jes' the way he said it, like he had a grudge agin' the world. No mercy in that feller—nothin' but a deesire to hurt and pain.

We set down. I hung my face in my hands, while Jeb and Joe looked around as cheerful as hound pups. While we're a-settin' there, we hears a deep, dyin', save-me-I'm-gone groan come out of the room where the dentist puts the kibosh on his victims. That cruel gobbler has got some poor yap down, and is pullin' his soul out by the roots. I never heard such a sound come out of a mortal. There wasn't enough hope in it to grease the mainspring on a flea's watch.

"He's sure got that gobbler where he wants him," Jeb observes, grinnin' like he was lookin' forward to something pleasant. "When a man unhitches a cry like that, he's hurt where he lives. That's mighty nigh the death rattle."

"You have sure stated a fact," agrees Joe. "When a man jerks a groan like that out of a feller mortal, he has certin-ly penetrated his inner nature."

Sweet, encouragin' talk, if you don't care what you say.

Pretty soon we hear a lot of flounderin' around, and some more of them down-in-the-well groans.

"He wound up his little ball of yarn that trip," laughs Jeb. "Nothin' left now but to carry out the remains. I wouldn't give a cent fer what's left of that poor gazabel. Plain case of murder in the first degree."

"Boys," I cheeps, tryin' to locate the door, "I'm goin' after a drink. I'll be back directly."

They grab me, and slam me down in the chair.

"None of them old dodges, Jack Jetts," warns the heartless Jeb. "If you don't know enough to pertect your health, me and Joe will have to take charge of you. You've made your brags, too, and, fer the sake of the Jetts' name, you got to come clean. Don't try any of them old ketches or drives on us; they won't work. We're jes' a little mite too cute fer you. There's no way you kin escape."

"But, Jeb, fer Heaven's sake——"

Jes' then the poor feller that the dentist had had down broke away and bolted past us, talkin' hog Latin and whirlin' his eyes. I would have went with him, but Jeb and Joe caught me as I was climbin' his coat tail.

Then the dentist come out and looked us over. Seems that something—a little bird, maybe—tells him I'm the next to be dragged up to the fire and branded and ear-marked. He lays a moss-agate eye on me. Had the eye of a murderer that detnist had—a dead eye with no light in it. And a long, cruel face that showed no sign of mercy, love, ner kindness.

He crooks a long, capable finger at me. I try to git up, but my feet have fell asleep and I seem unable to move. Jeb and Joe help me up, and, after a little wabblin', I head the death march. It was sure a sick'nin' outlook.

The dentist don't have much to say. I've always noticed that them natural-born murderers are short on conversation.

With the help of my brothers he slams me down in a sway-backed plush chair and begins sortin' his tools. I

look around at Jeb and Joe, pleadin' fer help, but they stand off from me like they is ashamed to acknowledge we're related.

The dentist takes out a young monkey wrench, a posthole digger, a hoe, and a pair of wire nippers. Then he scratches his head like he'd overlooked something, and dives down in his tool chest and brings up a brace and bit, a crosscut saw, a bootjack, and a hackamore.

I begin to see that that dentist feller is a man who believes in bein' prepared fer all deals.

He makes a third dive fer more tools, but by that time I've made it to the door and am on my way back to the open range. But there's no gittin' by Jeb and Joe. They circle me and throw me back into the chair.

"Now," says the tooth jerker, cold and tiredlike, "let's have a look at it."

I opens my mouth, and he looks in as fur back as the kitchen.

Jeb and Joe take a look, too.

"Huh," exclaims Jeb, "I thought fer a minute somebody had opened the door."

"He ought to take that trap down to the harness maker's and have the corners stitched up," says Joe, thinkin' to be cute.

I can't say nothin' back to them scoundrels, fer by that time the dentist feller has crawled inside and is persnippercatin' around with a young crowbar. He finds the right grinder all, all right. When he found it, I slid down on my neck, but that didn't bother him. He jes' follered me on down, gougin' and diggin'.

After a sweatin' spell he gits off'm me, and says to my brothers: "Have to extract it."

They yank me up in the chair.

The dentist reaches fer a pair of tongs.

"It won't hurt much," he tells me, about as comfortin' as a rattlesnake in a dark room. Then to the boys: "Hold his hands!"

"Wait, please wait!" I begs. "The derned thing ain't achin' a bit."

"Hold his hands!"

My brothers grab me, and the dentist gits up on my chest. I can't even blat.

Then down come those cold tongs on that tooth till they dip right into the jumpin', quiverin' center of where I live. As soon as he's sure he's fastened, he begins what the feller calls a rotary motion. He begins twistin' my face the same as a woman twists the lid on a jar of preserves.

My stomach come on up in my neck, my heart flopped over.

"There it is," says the dentist feller, holdin' in front of me what I first thought was a cottonwood stump. "One dollar, please!"

It was some time afterward that I noticed a pair of boots stickin' out from a clump of sagebrush. On lookin' closer I see that them boots belonged to Jeb Jetts. Joe was near the jug, and the jug was empty. We must have had quite a time, fer we was miles from town.

When we gits all squared around, and lined out fer the ranch, Jeb looks at Joe, and says:

"Speakin' of Injun torture——"

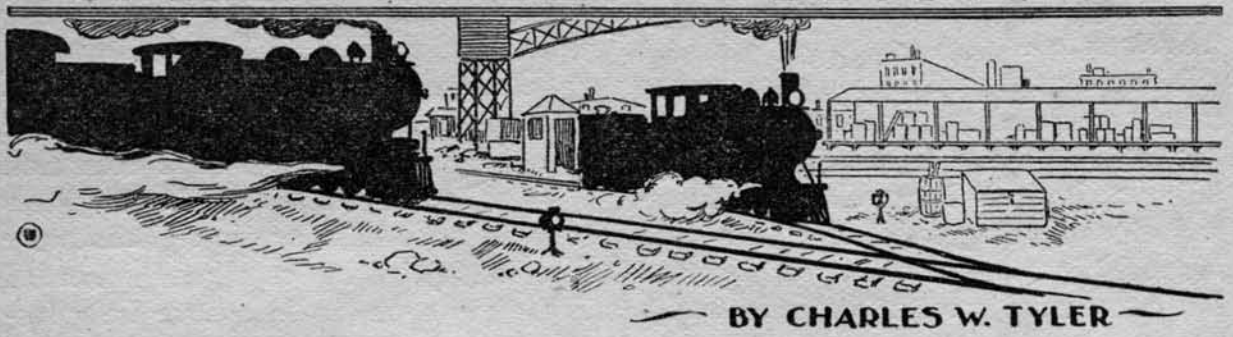
"Enough said," I cuts him off sharp; but I can't stop Joe from singin' when the spirit moves him.

I even join in the chorus when he lets go all holts and warbles:

You can't tell what a man will do,
Till he does it, till he does it;
You never know if he'll come through,
Till he does it, till he does it.
Fer talk is cheap and hot air, too,
And that hits me, and likewise you,
No man alive knows what he'll do,
Till he does it, till he does it.

And so, with the understandin' that the best of men has their little weak spots, we fogs across the good old range.

A MOUNTAIN DIVISION MAN



BY CHARLES W. TYLER

HIGH in the Rockies two big, throbbing Pacific type passenger engines, coupled ahead of a long train of dimly lighted Pullmans, were rushing Number Three, The Empire Limited, west over the Continental Divide.

For nearly five hours the powerful locomotives had battled the heavy grades of the east slope. Climbing steadily up through the long, winding, rockbound defile in which the two bands of steel, which form the main line of the Great Southern Railway System, creep over the tortuous miles of the Mountain Division. Up through the treacherous Black Cañon of the Rio Chelan. Up over the lesser grades and around the long reverse curves, west of Riverton, and on toward the summit of the Rockies.

At Summit Spur, that isolated telegraph station, ten thousand feet above the level of the sea, the helper engine was cut off.

Thirty minutes behind her schedule, Number Three began the descent, and not until the train was roaring down through the pass, west of the Broken Bow, did the engineer close the throttle and latch of the big Johnston Bar down on the quadrant.

Enveloped in the cloud of dense, black smoke which poured from the stack, back over the rapidly moving train, the Limited began rolling swiftly down the crooked iron trail. Down the west slope toward Castle Rock, which nestles in the barren foothills, on the prairie's edge, far below. There another purring monster waited to replace the mountain racer which was whirling the Empire Limited over the last stretch of her night run on the Mountain Division.

Dave Marion was the engineer in the cab of the Limited's engine that night. He was young in years, scarcely thirty-four, but old in the service of the Division, and all that goes to make up a good railroad man was his. He was cool, careful, fearless, and his nerves were like finely tempered steel. He was big, clean, and wholesome; and when he looked at you his coal-black eyes, like diamond points, seemed to penetrate to your very soul.

He knew the railroad game and he loved it. He loved the great, grimy freight pullers. He loved the graceful, black, shining locomotives that daily wheeled the overland trains swiftly, east and west, over the division. He loved the long, fast runs out through the mountains. He loved it all; it was a part of him.

But great as was his love for the railroad game, there was a slip of a girl at Castle Rock who held him with a stronger love—the love of a good woman. She was Betty Maynard, an engineer's daughter. And, as the life of the game pulsed through the veins of Dave Marion, just so it gripped and thrilled the girl, for she loved it, too.

Leaning over his levers, as the Limited swung clear of the pass, Marion

glanced at the duplex air gauge. He then swung the handle of the brake equipment into service. Immediately there was a backward tug as the brakes gripped the wheels. Everything was all right. He pushed the small, brass lever into full release; and then back into running position. They were off on the last lap of the long run.

"Keep your eyes open, son!" he called to the fireman, who, after covering his fire had half opened the automatic door and climbed to his seat on the left. "We're going to roll her in on time!"

"I'm with you till she heads for glory!" the fireman shouted back.

The Empire Limited was a first-class train made inferior to opposing trains by time-table designation. But as no superior trains were coming against her, even though she was late, the dispatcher had not given other trains time on her schedule. Therefore, everything on the main line should have cleared for her fully five minutes before her regular scheduled arrival.

Knowing that no train order had been issued to the effect that Number Three was to run late, Dave Marion, leaning from the cab of the big engine, nursed the Limited along for every second that could be gained for her. Flying through the night, thirty minutes late, the big engineer had that six-hundred-ton train responding to his every touch as though it were a part of himself.

With the sweep of the wind through the gangway, with the lurch and roll of the big engine, with the thunder of the racing drivers, with the roar of the swaying coaches behind, Number Three was, every minute, creeping back to her schedule. With sinking, sickening, terrifying lurches, the big locomotive rushed down over the west slope. And, during every instant of that flight, the two men in her cab sat silent, staring out ahead, straining their eyes against that wall of blackness, alert for the first, faint, glimmering dot of red.

With a last dizzy, breathless swerve, the Limited shot, from the narrow defile of Red Rock Cañon, out into the foothills. The speed became terrific as Number Three began dropping the miles behind her—one every minute.

Frequently the even whir of the train was broken, as with a sharp, rattling clatter they tore over the switches, where green tail lights of long, multi-colored freight trains shimmered at them from the safety of passing tracks. Again, for an instant, the men in the cab would catch a momentary glow of brightness, as the solitary eye of some schedule freight blinked at them from a lonely siding.

Like a weird, phantom finger, the Limited's headlight swung, from the shining bands of steel ahead, to right and to left as the train curved and twisted around the jutting crags of monster buttes, went winding through high, gray-walled cañons, or wound in and out among the steep, saggy hills. And in quick, all-seeing flashes of light many fantastic shapes were thrown into relief, as the rugged foothills flashed past them like the flight of a wonderful picture film on a screen.

When the Empire Limited swung out onto the high trestle over the Big Stillwater, and went purring across the dizzy structure leaving behind a vibrant hum of the steel framework, she was eight minutes behind her schedule, and Castle Rock was a little more than twenty miles away.

Billy Parker, the fireman, dropped to the deck, and, with the long iron hook, broke up his fire preparatory to the short, sharp climb west of Helper. With the glaring light from the fire pit still dancing before him, he stepped back to his seat and strained his eyes for the home signal which would show first on his side as the train took the long sweeping curve.

There was no distant signal by which the approach of the train might be regulated. But with Number Three due, everything should have been safely in the clear.

For just an instant Marion eased the train off with a touch of the air in service.

"White eye!" The fireman called across the cab, as he caught a glittering bit of light far down around the curve.

"White eye!" repeated the engineer, as he released the brakes, pulled the throttle wide open, and, reaching for the whistle cord, sent a long, screeching wail through the night. And then, as Number Three clattered over the outlying switches of the yard at Helper, there rose above all other sounds the voice of Billy Parker; a sudden, wild cry:

"Red eye!" He staggered toward the engineer. "My God, Dave, it's red!—The target's red! Something's out against us!"

At nearly forty miles an hour they swept by the home signal, from which, glittering high on the mast, a tiny dot of red challenged the rushing train.

Close ahead an engine's headlight stared at them from the main line; straight in the path of Number Three. A light helper engine was crossing, from the helper spur, over onto the second iron where an eastbound live-stock express awaited the passing of the Limited.

Since the beginning of the railroad game, it has happened; and so, in all probability, it will until the end. And, in pretty nearly all cases the action of the men in the cab has been the same. Sure, swift, and quick, they have done all in the power of man to check the speed of their train. Their thoughts have been only of the passengers, who, sleeping through the watches of the night, trust their lives with the men on the engine.

Many times quicker than it can be related, Dave Marion closed the throttle, swung the handle of the brake valve away around into full emergency application, snapped the independent brake to the right as far as it would go, opened both sander valves, and pulled the big reverse lever into the back motion. Then he had done all in his power, and the fate of Number Three was in the hands of a higher being.

"Billy," he called to the fireman, "jump, boy, we're into them!"

An instant later the fireman disappeared from the gangway out into the night. And Dave Marion, with one foot against the boiler butt, braced back in his seat to wait.

II.

Because the Limited had been reported thirty minutes late, to gain time for the live-stock train, the helper had been ordered to cross to the second iron and couple on ahead of the freight that there might be no delay after the passing of Number Three.

Protected by the fixed signal, which was set at danger, there would have been no wreck that night had the engineer watched for the signal himself, but he had trusted his fireman. And Billy Parker, whose eyes, fresh from before the dazzling glare of the fire, played him a grim prank, thought he saw white at the masthead when instead it was red. And then, a moment afterward, all too late, he saw his error.

Only two men were killed in the crash at Helper. One was the flagman, who had been riding on the pilot of the helper engine. Dazed and held by that strange, horrible charm, which grips people in times of sudden danger and holds them incapable of the action which will save them, he had been caught between the two engines.

The other man was George Maynard, the engineer in the cab of the helper

locomotive. He was Betty Maynard's father.

But though he himself was not even badly hurt, the tortures which gripped Dave Marion's soul were a thousandfold more than death, in all of its grim horrors, could have been.

The cold, merciless fact that he was responsible; that his engine had killed; that he had caused the death of two men, was a savage tragedy that tore the heart from the man. The fact that, through his own quick action, not a passenger on his train received so much as a scratch did not lessen the torment that raged within him.

During nine years on the right side of a locomotive cab, his engine had never before killed a man. It had been a record of which he had felt justly proud. And then—then came the night at Helper, and Betty Maynard's father was one of his first victims.

Dave Marion didn't blame his fireman; he was too big a man for that. He was strong enough to face his own errors of omission and commission. He realized that the sudden change from the glaring firelight to the inky blackness of the night had, probably, been the cause of Billy Parker's calling the signal wrong.

There was no coroner's inquest afterward, out there; there was no arrest; there was no manslaughter charge. They took Dave Marion's engine away from him. That was all. They set him back firing.

And Dave Marion was not a quitter. In all probability, he would have gone back to the left side without a murmur, he would have taken it as part of the game, but for one thing.

It wasn't the ruling of the powers that proved the biggest blow—the blow that broke him. It was not the loss of his engine. It wasn't that. It was the girl—Betty Maynard.

She was the court—the judge, the jury, and the executioner. She it was who rendered the final judgment on Dave Marion. It was her verdict that broke him.

Hers must have been a terrible grief, else she would never have turned him away as she did. It must have been a frantic passion that blinded her love for the man.

Perhaps if he had waited; perhaps if he had not taken the task of death messenger upon himself; if he had waited, only a little while, it might have been different. But in his heart he had felt that she would need him the most in the hour of her sorrow.

It was in the cold, gray hours of the dawn when he broke the news to her. He told her as gently as he could. And he did not spare himself.

At first it had seemed as though it was more than she could comprehend. Then her mind slowly cleared. "There had been a collision—her father was dead—Dave Marion had been at the throttle of the engine which had taken his life——"

In the throes of a grief which was beyond emotional expression, Betty Maynard faced the engineer—the man she loved. Her clear gray eyes were tearless. Her voice was ominously calm and low, but it cut like the savage lash of a whip as she hurled her accusation at him.

"You!" The words came slowly; deliberately slow, each sentence piercing him like a blade of cold steel. *"You* killed my father! *You,* a railroad man, ran your signal! *You,* in the cab of the Empire Limited! You admit your blame! *You're a murderer!"*

And then, with a dry sob, she gave away to the wild grief that surged within her.

As Dave Marion listened to the girl, Father Time, resting a long, mythical finger on the engineer, suddenly transformed the confident, clear-eyed, steel-nerved man, who so short a time before had been the absolute master of a great,

swaying, snorting mass of iron and steel at the head of the Empire Limited, into a man quickly grown old. A man whose face showed haggard and gray in the early light of morning. A man whose eyes had lost their brightness. In a scant five minutes, he had aged years. Slowly he turned away. Turned and went out into the crisp, dew-touched air of a new day. Without a word he left her; for there was nothing he could say.

III.

While the humiliation caused by the loss of his engine, the loss of the trust that had been placed in him, was great, the railroad blood was strong in his veins, and Dave Marion would, probably, have soon regained that which he had lost on the division but for the woman.

His love of the pulsating life of the rail was strong, but his love for her was stronger; and when, in the moment of sudden grief, her love had turned against him with all of the vehement passion which Kipling has accredited the female of the species, it turned the man against himself and all of his kind.

While Betty Maynard, in the suddendenness of her wild fury, killed the good in the engineer, she also aroused all the evil—the demon in him. He became a great, snarling, snapping brute—a frequenter of the filthy, drinking, gambling, hell holes in Castle Rock. Even the drunken, brawling, gutter wrecks became his associates. Men came to fear and hate him. A month later he disappeared.

He sulked in solitary places. He caroused in the reeking, rum-soaked atmosphere of the underworld of Western cities. He drifted up and down the Pacific coast; San Francisco, Portland, Seattle—all were visited by the man that had been.

Like a water-soaked piece of driftwood, driven aimlessly about by wind and tide, Dave Marion wandered from city to city. He rode the blind; he rode the rods; he decked the overland trains, and in these rovings the bitterness in his soul ever increased.

And the woman? She, in the sudden loneliness of her life mourned the loss of her father—and her lover. And, in penitence, she suffered through the long, weary days of terrible emptiness, which filled her life, alone with her love and her regret.

IV.

It was a clear autumn night a year and four months after Dave Marion ran his signal at Helper. A long, shadowy freight extra was noisily pounding its winding way down the west slope of the Rockies, east of Summit Spur.

At seventeen minutes of twelve o'clock, with many shrill protestations from gripping brake shoes, and many bumping jolts of drawbars, it came to a stop just below the station at Riverton.

A grimy engineer, in the cab of the big freight puller, at the head, carefully consulted his watch in the yellow light which shone through the partly open fire door.

"We can't make Black Cañon Siding ahead of Number Six," he called down to an equally grimy figure, who, lantern in hand, was waiting expectantly on the low step below the cab. "She's due here in twenty minutes; we'd better pull in."

A moment later a switch lamp, twinkling in the shadows, changed from white to red, a lantern was raised and lowered in a go-ahead motion, there was a hiss of air in the cylinders back along the train, a rattle of couplings as the brakes released, the slack ran up on the engine, and Extra 2704, in a long, weaving line of many-shaped freight cars, headed into the second

siding at Riverton to await the passing of the Oriental Limited—Number Six.

As the tail lights, shimmering dots of red at the rear of the extra, passed over the siding switch, and the train straightened itself on the passing track, another overall-uniformed toiler of the rail swung to the ground, closed the switch, locked it, and hurried back to where the freight was slowing to a stop, well in the clear. He turned the markers so that they showed green to the rear and side, removed the red platform lanterns, and disappeared through the door of the caboose.

Wearied by many long hours on duty, many miles of halting, laborious progress on the heavy grades of the west slope, many meetings and passings of schedule trains, the eyes of the extra's crew, in engine and caboose, were quickly closed in sleep.

Only the slow, spasmodic breathing of the pumps on the engine and an occasional hiss of escaping air from a faulty train-pipe connector broke the stillness.

Far above, rugged, snow-capped crags and needlelike spires glistened in the moonlight. The scenic grandeur of night in the Rockies became enhanced a hundredfold as a great yellow moon, creeping high in the heavens, threw its rays far down into the shadows of the mountains.

At midnight, away above and to the westward, a flash of brightness, from a locomotive's powerful headlight, revealed the coming of Number Six. Sweeping around the long S curve like a great, weird serpent, she rushed down toward Riverton.

At three minutes past twelve, she thundered past the station—on time to the dot.

A sleepy operator, dozing with head close to the sounder of his train wire, drowsily opened his key and "OS'd"—reported her by—and then immediately resumed his slumbers.

With a momentary pinching, grind of brakes, in hurried deference to switches, with a purring plume of steam which hummed from her engine's dome, with a dull, reverberant roar that came with the clash of the closeness of her passing, the *First Section* of the Oriental Limited rolled swiftly by the silent freight and its slumbering crew.

But, mingling with, and muffled by, the noisy rumble of her going, there came a long, droning wail from her whistle immediately followed by two quick, sharp notes—a long and two short.

Their senses numbed by sleep, the crew of Extra 2704 heard the last sucking rush of air, and glimpsed the two twinkling dots of red that marked the passing of *First* Number Six, but neither enginemen or trainmen, in their sudden awakening, caught the whistle signal which had been sounded by the *Limited.*

A long and two short. "To call the attention of yard engines, extra trains or trains of the same or inferior class or inferior right to signals displayed for a following section." Such is the designation as applied to rules which govern a single track.

And, while the First Section of the Oriental Limited was fast vanishing in the night, the extra was preparing to follow her down through the Black Cañon of the Rio Chelan. For no man of the freight train's crew had heard the warning note of the whistle, which told of the Second Section to follow.

The engineer and conductor of the extra, glancing at their watches, knew that it had been the passing of the Limited that had aroused them. But that was all.

A lantern swung over and back, as a brakeman flashed a "high ball"; a switch lamp showed red, and the freight again resumed an interrupted journey eastward.

Feeling sure of their right to proceed,

the crew of Extra 2704 did not know, as their train moved out onto the main line, that it was creeping along in the path of the Second Section of Number Six, which, in a short ten minutes, would come tearing down upon them like a hurtling demon of destruction.

Only one man knew of the tragedy which was swiftly forming out there in the mountains. He was a gaunt, hollow-eyed tramp who, from back in the shadows of a grimy, gray water tank, had watched the passing of First Number Six. *He* had heard the warning screech of the whistle—had seen the glittering eyes of green which shone from the front of the flying engine.

He knew what the ghastly result would be, should the heavy, slow-moving freight, rolling carefully down the steep grade well within its restricted speed limit, be suddenly overtaken in its going by Second Number Six rushing along on a running schedule which was marked up close to the margin of safety.

A ragged, wandering wreck of a man; and upon his action hung the destiny of a trainload of human souls. The fate of men, women, and children rested with him—for life or for death.

A straggling ray of moonlight, for an instant, fell upon his face. The haggard features showed hard and cruel. It was a face that reflected a terrible bitterness in his heart—the face of a man who had renounced every particle of good in his soul. He was Dave Marion.

There was no thought of passengers or railroad men in his half-crazed mind when he caught a low hand iron and swung himself up between the second and third car ahead of the caboose.

Surging through his brain was only one idea: Somewhere, in the Black Cañon of the Rio Chelan, there was going to be a wreck! There was going to be a crunching, grinding crash! On that narrow shelf of rock, on which the track wound, great dark human-freighted coaches would merge their black shapes with shattered box cars! They would crumple together like paper; and then go toppling into the black depths far below! And he would be there beneath them! He would go with them!

Months of dissipation and sullen brooding with his bitter thoughts had made the man a half-demented demon —a devil.

Minutes passed! The freight clicked its crooked way down around the face of the brown and gray rock walls which towered hundreds of feet above! And the man, still clinging between the clattering cars, waited!

As he waited, he timed the coming of that train behind.

"Down below the Needle!" he muttered, half aloud. "The worst stretch of iron on the Great Southern System —on the whole Mountain Division! Down on the Devil's Whip! They'll be into us, all over, before there's chance for——" His rambling mutterings suddenly ceased. A new thought flashed through his mind: "What about the boys? Who would be at the throttle—who would be running Second Number Six?"

He knew what would take place, there in the cab! He had been there! He knew the man on the right would cross the Great Divide with his hands still gripping his brake lever, there in the narrow confine beside the great boiler head! Dave Marion knew it!

Nearly ten minutes passed. The long train swung out onto the high trestle which crosses the Rio Chelan to the opposite wall of the cañon. In about four minutes it would come; that for which he waited, possibly less.

He leaned out and looked ahead. A yellow-tinged bit of white showed against the black wall of rock. The faint pur of the safety valve came to his ears. He glanced above him. There,

towering like a great airy spirit, the spire of the Needle glistened, some two thousand feet from the cañon's bottom. And then—a strange thing happened.

Something stirred Dave Marion; perhaps it was the faint yellow-tinged bit of white which waved above the 2704's dome; perhaps it was the mighty grandness of the sparkling Needle's peak; perhaps it was an unseen power. But, be that as it may, *something* aroused him.

Deep in his heart there remained one tiny drop of long-dormant red blood; the blood of the man that had been—the red blood of the railroad game. And now something had suddenly aroused it.

It was like a bit of virile life! It shot through his veins, purifying the sluggish, rum-soaked slime that flowed there, as it went! He felt the grip and thrill of the railroad life! He thought of the woman; and of her charge: "You, a railroad man, ran your signal!" And he a railroad man—a Mountain Division man—had planned to let one of the boys and his great black pet, with its trainload of humanity, pile up in a snarling mass of wreckage, there on the Devil's Whip, to slide into the black waters of the Rio Chelan, a hundred feet below.

Once a railroad man, always a railroad man! You can't get away from it! It's in the blood! And the mouth of Dave Marion shut in a thin, determined line.

As swift as had been the coming of that strange awakening in his heart; just as swift was his action. He knew that every moment meant much. His brain had suddenly seemed to clear. He was fully awake to the fact that every second had its ugly possibilities—the coming of Second Six.

Fearing to lose time by going over the tops of the two cars to the caboose, he chose another course of action.

He swung to a low hand iron between the moving train and the cañon wall, which was so close that it seemed nearly to side-swipe the cars. Hanging with one foot on the step, he snapped a housing box open, and, diving his hand into the oily packing, pulled forth a stringy mass of grease-soaked waste.

The next instant he swung low and dropped. The force of the moving freight hurled him against a sharp rock and he fell on the very ends of the ties, while the trucks and wheels rattled and whirred less than a foot from him.

With the passing of the caboose, he staggered to his feet. He put one hand to his head, for it felt strangely light and he was a little dizzy. His hat was gone, and his hair was wet and matted. But he thought little about it, for the fingers of his other hand still clutched the oily waste.

Unsteadily he stumbled over the ties. Half walking, half running, he hurried back toward the trestle.

Two red tail lights were disappearing around one of the treacherous curves of the Whip, behind; while ahead, far up the cañon, a bit of light flashed.

Dave Marion started to cross the trestle; took two or three steps, and a foot dropped between the ties. He felt a numbing pain, and when he tried to straighten up, his left leg crumpled helplessly beneath him. He heard a rumble to the west and he tried to see, but his eyes blurred as a warm, sticky something blinded him.

Half stunned and fast losing control of his senses, he was but a dark blotch between the rails.

He fumbled frantically for a match. It was with difficulty that he finally got one from his pocket. In his haste to light it, it broke and was lost.

He could hear the vibrating click from the rail growing louder every instant. With a desperate effort, he reached for another match. He scratched it on the shining band of steel

beside him, but then it fell from his limp fingers and burned uncertainly, close beside the guard rail.

With painful care he moved the hand that gripped the oil-soaked packing over the dying flame. Then suddenly it caught a straggling strand of the greasy thread and ran quickly into the thicker mass above. There was a flickering flash and then a blaze of fiery brightness.

Feeling woefully weak, he swung the burning waste back and forth. The flesh of his hand burned and became ugly with discoloration. But there was no feeling, no pain, as he swung the flaming signal from rail to rail.

To Dave Marion, it seemed minutes, hours, ages while he waited; in reality the time could have been counted in seconds. And then, there came to him the most welcome sound man ever heard—two short sharp blasts of a locomotive's whistle. His signal had been seen! A clear-eyed engineer had caught sight of that strange bit of fire which moved in a stop signal, ahead on the trestle; and with his hand quickly reaching for the whistle cord he sent a reassuring answer, echoing within the walls of the Black Cañon.

With every wheel of her train in a mighty grip, with wheels locked and sliding over smoke-rimmed rails, with wheels circled by spitting streaks of fire, with streams of sand spurting from sander pipes, with the powerful mechanism of the engine struggling against the back motion of the reverse, with a gritting, crunching thunder, Second Number Six, straining against herself, slid onto the trestle, and, with a last quivering jar, stopped with her pilot less than ten feet from a strange, black shape that still moved a blackened hand back and forth.

Dave Marion was muttering vaguely when he realized that a flaring kerosene torch was being held close to his face. He heard voices and exclamations, but they seemed to be at a great distance. He thought he heard his name. Something or somebody lifted him carefully. With an effort, he tried to speak; but somehow his voice failed him miserably. He tried several times before he finally forced the disconnected words from between his lips:

"An—an extra—an'—they're—out—out—on your—your time!" He stuttered brokenly, and fainted.

It was over a week before Dave Marion's scattered senses had sufficiently returned for him to realize that he was not still waving a burning piece of waste in the path of Second Number Six, on the Black Cañon trestle.

He next realized that everything was wonderfully quiet and peaceful. Looking back on many black, tormenting months he couldn't remember a single instance when anything had seemed as alluring, with its restful cleanliness, as the room in which he found himself.

An old longing seized him. Scarcely above a whisper, he murmured his first coherent thought, as he uttered one faint word: "Betty!"

It was a magic word; like a princess in a fairy tale, for Betty suddenly appeared before him. She stood looking down at him.

She leaned over him and stroked his forehead. Her touch was cool and refreshing. She readjusted the bandage on his head; and then, kneeling beside the bed, she took his one good hand between her two strong little palms. "Dave," she said softly, "let's make our mistakes our stepping-stones."

There is a distant signal on the curve at Helper now. And Dave Marion pulls Number One west and Four east—the two crack trains of the road.

The blood of the game is strong within him, for he is a Mountain Division man—and his wife is a Mountain Division woman.

CONFESSION?

BY KEENE THOMPSON.

TEMPLETON paced his cell in the death house. It was midnight, he knew. That meant five hours more—only five hours! To and fro, to and fro he tramped the narrow confines of that cage of iron bars and concrete.

It was all over with him. This was the finish. Templeton's face was haggard, as he confronted the realization that he had come to the end of his rope—the law was going to have its way with him, after all. There was nothing now that could save him.

Five hours left. Something like a groan escaped him. Three hundred minutes—and already one of them had gone. On the silence, the measured tread of his own footsteps rang loudly in his ears. But what was the matter with them all? His fellow prisoners caged about him, and the guards in the corridor outside, all asleep at a time like this? Didn't they know he was "going away"? That, in just a little space of time, a human being was to die against his will? Then it flashed upon him: they were not sleeping. Outside, there, a score of ears were straining expectantly to catch the first hint of his breaking down. That was the true explanation of the silence.

The clasp of his hands behind his back tightened till the knuckles showed white. He wanted to meet their expectations. To scream out, beating the walls around him—to give way utterly to the panic he felt rising within him. It seemed that he *must* cry aloud to some one to come and let him out of this trap—to stop the machinery of justice that was inevitably, if slowly, grinding toward his doom.

A mistake was being made. Didn't they know that? Couldn't they *see* it? Unless a halt were called soon, now, before it was too late——

He set his jaws against the impulse to shatter the nerve-racking silence with a shrieking out of his inward terror. No. No, by Heaven! That "Templeton iron nerve," of which the newspapers had made so much during the weeks and months of his trial, he would keep to the end. That is—as long as he could hold out. As it was a certainty that he had to go, it might as well be gamely. This, he told himself, would be a fitting climax to the fight he had made.

And yet to die!

His brows met. Was there no way out, still? Back over the ground he had covered a thousand times before his mind went, seeking a single possible loophole of escape. He began with the day of his arrest. His employer, the millionaire whose lawyer he had been, found dead in his chair in the library of his home. There was a small round hole in his forehead, where a thirty-eight bullet had gone. And the police, when they came to search Templeton's rooms, had found a thirty-eight-caliber revolver there. This, with the circumstance that he, John Templeton, had been the last one seen with the old gentleman on

the night of the latter's death, had been sufficient to cause the detectives to lead him away to jail.

Circumstantial evidence—that was all it had been. With a plea of "not guilty," he had entered upon the trial with every confidence of an acquittal.

And—they had convicted him.

Then the real battle had begun. In a signed statement—which the papers had been only too glad to print—he had sworn to his innocence again, and promised the public that he would prove the fact, too. An appeal had been made for a new trial. After due deliberation, the right had been denied him. He had next appealed to the governor. In vain—and there died his last hope.

And yet, a second time, he had implored the executive to make a more thorough investigation of his case. He was innocent—a sifting of all the evidence of the crime with which he was charged must surely reveal that at best he ought to be given the benefit of the doubt, which would make only an act of common justice of another trial. On every oath under high heaven, he vowed himself guiltless—the victim of persecution and mistrial.

And still the governor had refused to intervene. Only that morning—the day set for his execution—word had come of that official's flat refusal to interfere in any way in the matter.

It was the end. There was no chance for Templeton left after that—he knew it. Surely as the rising of the sun, he was going to be led down that corridor outside, accompanied by two or three guards and a priest, to the little door which would open and close just once behind him. But, oh, for a chance, a single ghost of one chance more!

Abruptly Templeton swung round in his tracks to face the door of his cell.

The rattle of a key in the lock had drawn his attention there. And now, before his eyes, the door swung slowly open. Into the cell stepped a man, a stranger to Templeton.

This individual's appearance was decidedly quaint. Short in stature, with a bulging forehead, and a pair of eyeglasses riding far down on his long, thin nose, he bore a striking resemblance to the mental picture that is summoned up whenever one hears of an aged scientist or student recluse. The man's clothes were ordinary—indeed, shabby, on the closer inspection which Templeton gave to this odd visitor.

But if the latter was aware of the existence of this cell's occupant, he gave no sign of it as he moved across the tiny apartment to the iron cot and silently seated himself.

Still utterly ignoring Templeton, from an inner pocket of his threadbare coat the little man drew a packet of papers, taped and sealed. These he proceeded to arrange on top of the cot beside him with businesslike precision.

Then, for the first time, he looked sharply up over the rims of his glasses at Templeton.

"Your name," said the stranger curtly, "is John Templeton?"

How this man had been able to get in here, at a time like this, when all communication with the outside world was denied him, Templeton did not stop to question. His heart was beating wildly—yes, with a sudden hope!

"That is correct," he replied to the other's question.

"Member of the New York bar?" went on the little man, snapping out the words. "Late of two hundred Nassau Street? Adviser in the legal affairs of the late John C. Price, millionaire cotton broker, murdered on the night of the twenty-fourth of August last?"

Templeton steadied himself by drawing in a deep breath.

"I am the man," he said simply.

"Placed under arrest"—here the visitor paused for the fraction of a minute, while he consulted one of the

spread-out papers beside him—"on September second, charged with the willful homicide of the aforesaid Price, your employer? *And* convicted eight months later, to a day? Appeal for retrial denied? Date of execution set for the week that began two days ago?"

Templeton leaned forward.

"I am the man," he repeated tensely. "And, now, your business?"

The caller leaned back. He cradled one knee in his clasped hands.

"And to-day you die," he said matter-of-factly. "At sunrise, which is less than five hours away."

Templeton swallowed audibly over the rising lump in his throat. His hands were working at his sides.

"Are you ready to die, John Templeton?" asked the little man bluntly. "Do you *want* to die?"

To the last question the answer came decisively:

"No!"

The stranger nodded. "Then I was right," he said. "I thought you might be glad to see me. And I guess you are. For I have come—to set you free!"

He leveled a long, angular forefinger at Templeton, who stood speechless and gaping before him.

"John Templeton," he went on impressively, "in five hours you are going to die. You know, as well as I, that you stand not the remotest chance of escaping the chair down the hall outside there. You are done for—to speak frankly. Well, what would you say if I should tell you that there is still one way in which you can get off?"

Then it was true! Now the beating of his heart all but shut off Templeton's breath. A way had been found at last, some new point of evidence had turned up, and this man had discovered it, he had come to get him off. But was he dreaming? No, it was true. That was what the man himself had just said!

"For God's sake, tell me!" blurted the prisoner. "What is it? A new suspect found by the police, to make another trial of the case necessary? Oh, speak out——"

Seriously the little man shook his head.

"Nothing like that," he said.

Templeton fairly panted:

"Then a pardon from the governor; he's changed his mind——"

"You are wrong," put in the other. "You are on the wrong track altogether. I will explain. No one—nothing—on the outside has anything to do with your getting off. That rests entirely with you. Do you understand? The means of gaining your freedom is in your own hands. Now, perhaps, you know what I mean."

A moment Templeton stared down at the odd figure before him, undecided whether to doubt his caller's sanity or his own.

"No," he said dully. "I don't—don't follow you."

"It's like this," the other went on. "You do not want to die, you say. You want to leave here free, your own man. I tell you it is all up to you whether you do so or not. You have only to do one thing—that is all."

Templeton drew himself up.

"One thing!" he repeated. "What is it?—don't keep me in suspense. What have I got to do?"

The stranger regarded him in silence over the rims of his glasses for a moment or two.

"Tell me the truth," he replied.

Templeton bowed quietly. He stood at attention.

"Are you guilty of this crime," asked the little man, "or innocent?"

"I am innocent," Templeton answered.

The caller leaned back, taking his knee in his hands once more.

"You understand that you are standing in the shadow of death," he remarked. "That this is no time to palter

with the truth. And now, once more —the truth itself this time."

"I tell you," cried Templeton, "that I am innocent—innocent!'

The little man was looking him through and through with his sharp, light-blue eyes.

"You didn't murder the old gentleman?" he said slowly. "You weren't after the legacy he had put you down for in his will, as was afterward brought out at the trial? You didn't want his money? Not at the price of an employer, and benefactor's, life?"

Templeton's teeth could be heard grinding as he held himself in.

"I tell you again," he grated, "I am innocent!"

Once more there was a pause.

"I'll give you one more chance," announced the stranger on the edge of the cot. "For your life—tell me the truth. Now, which is it? Guilty or innocent? Remember—this is your last chance."

Beads of perspiration were rolling down Templeton's face. His lips twitched; into his eyes had crept a hunted look, akin to the light of madness, as he hesitated before his inquisitor.

Then he burst forth:

"In pity's name, put an end to this! I am innocent—innocent! Would I lie at a time like this? Do you think I am a fool? I take you at your word. You say you can set me free if I tell you the truth, and I *have* told it to you—three times. What more can I do than that? I never killed him. I am guiltless as you are yourself. I swear it!" He gasped for breath. "Now, get me out of here! And quick, before I go stark mad. Time is slipping by. There's not too much of it to spare as it is. How do you get me off?"

But the little man, gathering up his papers from the cot, had risen, preparing to depart.

"I thought," he said, stopping to throw another one of his piercing glances at Templeton's face, "that I might be of service to you. I see now that I was wrong. Unless——" he hesitated. "If I asked you again, would you tell me the truth this time?"

Under the strain, Templeton's overstrung nerves at last gave way.

"Innocent, you hear?" he shouted. "That's what I swear—I'll stick to it! Innocent! Innocent!"

And then the little man began to laugh. Silently, mockingly, as he stood before the condemned man. He shook from head to foot with his inward mirth. Staring at him, abruptly Templeton threw up his arms against the stone wall, burying his face on his sleeves.

"All a trick!" he groaned. "There is no hope. It was all done just to mock me. Oh, the cruelty——"

There was the sound behind him of the iron door opening. He wheeled quickly, to find that he stood alone in the cell. The queer little man had vanished as though the floor had opened to swallow him!

A guard stood on the threshold.

"We're ready for you," he said simply.

Beyond the turnkey in the corridor showed the first gray of the coming dawn. Templeton's time was up—and his visitor, the man who had come to save him? Staring wildly round him, suddenly the prisoner fell upon his knees. He stretched out his hands past the waiting guard in the doorway.

"Come back!" he cried. "I'll tell you the truth—I did it!" His voice rose to a shriek. "I am guilty! Come back! For God's sake—come back and save me from this. I'm guilty, guilty——"

He raved on. His mind, broken down from the strain of protesting his false innocence all through the months that had followed his arrest, had now given completely away. Babbling half incoherently, he knelt there, appealing to

the strange little man—who had never existed outside of his shattered imagination. The phantom conjured up in his overburdened brain before its final snapping.

The guard was used to seeing them "take it hard" at the end. He stepped back into the corridor, and, beckoning to two of his fellows, brought them into the cell. They dragged Templeton to his feet by main strength.

And so they led him away down the shadowy hall, his cries growing fainter and fainter, until at last the little door at the corridor's end closed noiselessly behind him.

THE LAW OF THE WOODS

BY CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS

IF one law don't get a man that sins, another will," said Hinman. "That ain't original with me. The minister, my brother-in-law, sprung it on me when I told him the story of Bad Jim Henderson. I'm going to give you Jim's story, and you can figure it out for yourself better than I could very likely."

Spring had come again to Hinman's farm, on which he was spending the peaceful days of his middle age. Leaf and vine had stirred to a living green. The crops were planted. The air was soft on this Sunday morning and the sunshine was like wine. The old earth had been reborn, and the miracle was no less wonderful because it had been wrought so many times before.

We sat on Hinman's front porch after breakfast. He had mused for a space before he had spoken.

"There used to be a law in the lumber woods that no man should ever squeal," he went on. "The law obtained from the foreman down. Often a sheriff would come to camp looking for some bad man. The foreman would take him to his shack and let him look over the pay roll. That was always a bluff, for offenders never give their real names when they stick the foreman for a job. If the foreman thought he had the man the sheriff was lookin' for, but under another name, he'd never peep. It was the sheriff's business to find his man, not the foreman's business to lead the sheriff to him.

"The law of the books has been cheated many a time because a foreman and the jacks kept still when a sheriff tried to pump 'em. A man got this protection so long as he didn't lie or steal or kill in camp. That was the other angle of the law. You'll see how Bad Jim transgressed and what came of it.

"Toward the fag end of September a lumber camp is ready for business. The contractor has named his foreman, and the foreman has gone up into the woods and got his set of camps put up and has hired his crew. Sometimes they cut all through the winter if the

snow isn't heavy, but in the old days it wasn't often they didn't have to stop on account of the heavy fall.

"About the time snow flies the camp is pretty much set in its ways. The work is bein' rushed and the men have got each other sized up, had their fights, and made their friendships. Anybody driftin' into camp after things is runnin' smooth is naturally a person of some interest.

"I spent one winter after I was married in the woods of the lower peninsula. That winter we had three such interestin' events. First come a man who called himself Bob Hart. The foreman give him a job handlin' a cant hook on the skids. He was green, and, as usual, the foreman took him in hand very patient, and showed him how to handle his hook. He was a big, strong man, and pretty soon he could do his work as well as the next. For a while he was an object of interest, but he was a silent man, never speakin' unless he was spoken to, and sometimes not then. He seemed to want to be left alone.

"We noticed one peculiar thing about him, though. He seemed to take a real likin' to the foreman. Evidently he had expected to be cussed when he showed he was a green hand. I noticed when he first come that he had a hard, bad eye, but I saw him watchin' the foreman many times and that look was gone entirely. He was like a great, shaggy dog that's ready to lick its master's hand.

"Well, by the time the camp had assimilated him and he didn't create no more interest than anybody else, along comes another stranger. He was a big man, too. And, like the first man, he didn't know nothin' about handlin' logs. But seems he had been used to horses, and the foreman put him in charge of a team, haulin' logs. It is some task to handle a team on the icy roads. They're like glass after the sprinklin' carts has passed over them in the night and the water has froze on them. But this man could make the horses put their stomachs to the ground and pull together. That was sufficient.

"After a bit, the camp took this man in, too, and then the third man come. He also measured up big among big men. They was a good deal alike in stature—those three. And since it was a day when men wore beards—especially that worked out of doors the way the jacks did—there wasn't an uncommon difference in their appearances.

"The second and the third man become pals almost off the bat. They didn't pay any attention to the first man, though the first one and the third one worked side by side with cant hooks on the log piles.

"Well, you can't fool a jack much about an officer of the law, and pretty soon there was whisperin' in the bunk houses nights after the day's work was done. The second man—Dan Holmes, he called himself—was picked to be a sheriff. If he was a sheriff, the men knew mighty well that he was after somebody, and since nobody ever asked questions about any of the others, they didn't know what any man had done in the past.

"But one thing was sure—an officer was not welcome among them. Not that they would harbor a criminal or condone a crime quicker'n anybody else, but it was the law that nobody squealed. And an officer was looked on as a man who would like to have somebody squeal to him.

"What comes now I got from the foreman later. He had come over to the bunk house, and had ordered the crew to turn in. It was the rule that all noise should cease when he give that order. The men had to have their proper rest to do the work required of them.

"The men began to turn their wet socks and shirts on the wires before the big stove, and then they began to

amble off to their bunks. All but the man callin' himself Holmes. He walked to the door behind the foreman.

"'Like to speak with you a minute,' he says.

"'Come over to the office,' says the foreman none too politely, for he hadn't been deaf to the whisperin' that had been goin' on.

"They went over to the office and sat down.

"'Got a man here named Jim Henderson?' Holmes asked. 'Known over the Canadian line as Bad Jim Henderson. Wanted in Montreal on a charge of robbery. Been smugglin' some, too, from Sarnia down to Hamilton.'

"The foreman opened his desk and took out a pay roll. He held it out to Holmes. Holmes shoved it aside with a laugh.

"'Henderson wouldn't be givin' you his own name,' he said. 'Who's this fellow callin' himself Gibbons?'

"'You ought to know more about him than I do,' says the foreman. 'You been his pal since you've been here.'

"Gibbons was the third man who'd come to camp after the season had begun. The foreman could see now why Holmes had played up to him.

"'Well,' says Holmes, 'I think Gibbons is Bad Jim Henderson. I got a warrant for his arrest—a Canadian warrant. I have no extradition papers, though. I was wonderin' if you would give me a hand to help me get him over to Canada.'

"The foreman rolled the pay roll up in his hands, and then unrolled it. He let his eyes wander along the tarred paper that made the roof of his office.

"'I'm runnin' a lumber camp, mister,' he said at last. 'I'm not an assistant sheriff. If the man is here, why, you can just tote him away with you—if you can.'

"'Suppose,' says Holmes, 'that I deputize you in the name of the law?'

"'And suppose,' the foreman comes back, 'that I bang you over the head with a club that has the Stars and Stripes nailed to one end of it? Suppose, also, that I tie a can to you and whisper to the boys that your absence will be more desirable than your presence? It has been dull in camp. Maybe a little devilment wouldn't go amiss with the boys. Understand?'

"Holmes sized the foreman up for a spell. Then he grinned a little. I guess he thought he might as well grin and bear it.

"'Well,' he said, 'we may as well forget this little talk. You won't tell anybody what I've told you?'

"'I'm gettin' out logs—or tryin' to,' said the foreman. 'I have no time to carry tales.'

"Holmes went back to the bunk house. The foreman started to get ready for bed, dismissin' the matter from his mind. Then he heard a rappin' on his shutter. He goes to the door and looks out. A man is crouched beneath the window.

"'What do you want?' the foreman asked.

"The man stood up, bending a little at the waist, and starin' first over one shoulder and then over the other.

"'I want to see you,' says the man.

"'Why in hell don't you come to the door then?' says the foreman, who was gettin' out of temper with his visitors in the night. 'Come in.'

"The man goes in. It was him who called himself Bob Hart. He was in the foreman's office for ten minutes. Then he come back to the bunk house. I'd seen him sneak out after Holmes, and I watched for him to come back after Holmes returned. When he passed my bunk, I was struck by the look on his face. If a big, whiskered, tough-lookin' guy was ever near cryin', Bob Hart was that night. Some more about him in a minute.

"Well, things goes along without incident till it got time to send men down

to the banking grounds to get the logs started down the river to the mills. That was before the time of handling logs by railroad, and the logs used to be piled twenty feet high on the river slopes. Then, when the ice went out, they would be made into rafts in the river and sent down to some lake port where there was a mill.

"About the first of March spring seemed to have busted the earth wide open. On such a day as this almost we were all on the banks of the Black River, waitin' to put the logs in to send 'em down to Port Huron, where there was a mill on the St. Clair River, just at the mouth of the Black River. But the night after we got there the weather man pulled off a stunt that was not uncommon in those days. He sent a real, old-fashioned Michigan blizzard sweepin' down on us. It began with an icy rain about sundown, and in an hour the air was thick with snow. Then this blew out and a freeze started. The world went like iron under the starlit sky. By morning the river had started to freeze, and in five days the ice was three feet thick.

"Well, there was nothin' the men could do, and the foreman had his hands full, for they all had money comin'. Port Huron was not far away, and in those days there was many invitin' places along old Butler Street. The men had pictures of the inside of a saloon with a fire roarin' in the big stove and plenty of booze and hot water on tap. The result was feverish stomachs and cold skins. But the foreman went among 'em and got 'em lined up in fairly good order.

"In the meantime the boys had been interestin' themselves and killin' time by watchin' the man who called himself Holmes. They were more than ever convinced that Holmes was an officer, because he began to seem to want to get away. He had not mentioned his wages to the foreman, either.

"On the night of the sixth day the foreman routed me out of bed. I judged it was about ten o'clock.

"'Get dressed,' he says, 'and come outside quietly.'

"In a few minutes I joined him. My, but it was cold. Even the stars seemed to be froze, the way they glittered. The earth rang beneath a man's feet. The river lay still below us, black where there was no snow on the ice, and white where there was. Nobody was stirrin' and everything was very still. The lights of the nearest town made a frosty glow in the sky.

"'There is somethin' doin' between this man Gibbons and this man Holmes,' said the foreman. 'I want to see what they're up to. I haven't any idea of pittin' myself against them alone, and I want you to go along with me. I guess you'll keep up your end. You're husky enough—I gave my word to a man a while back that I would help him out if he got into a hole. I guess I was a chump for doin' it, but I got to keep my word. These two are plannin' something against him, I think. Step back here into the shadow.'

"We crept away from the bank and stood waitin' for somethin' to happen—what, I didn't know. There was no wind, but the icy air ate into a man's insides. I had to clamp my teeth shut to keep 'em from chatterin'.

"'Holmes and Gibbons are goin' up the river and across the St. Clair to Sarnia,' said the foreman in a whisper. 'Holmes said he wanted to smuggle a suit of clothes over on the ice. That's bunk, I know. Holmes don't have to smuggle a suit of clothes to save five or ten dollars. He's some kind of a Canuck officer. He's layin' for one of the men in camp. The man ain't Gibbons. He and Gibbons have been pals, and I don't see what he wants to get Gibbons out of the way for.'

"We had been standing by a bank of logs twenty feet high. We was dressed

in dark clothes, with our caps pulled down over our faces. When Gibbons and Holmes passed us on their way to the river, they weren't ten feet from us, but they didn't see us. They slid down the bank to the river, and started toward Port Huron. We followed, keeping a respectable distance between us.

"'Is the St. Clair frozen so's they can get over?' I asked the foreman.

"'So Holmes says,' the foreman replied. 'A lot of big ice came down from Lake Huron when the thaw was on, and it choked and jammed, and then froze solid. I've seen teams go over when it wasn't any colder than this.

"It was three o'clock in the morning when we drew toward Port Huron. We passed under the two footbridges and came to the railroad bridge just where Black River empties into St. Clair. The two men climbed up on the abutment of this bridge and started along the track.

"'Mebbe they've changed their minds,' said the foreman. 'We'll follow them.'

"'More'n likely they've gone to get a drink,' I said.

"We kept them in sight till they came to Butler Street. Then they turned off the track. By the time we got to where we could look down the street they had disappeared.

"'There's a saloon a few steps up here,' said the foreman. 'We'll have a look.'

"We came to a hallway with a light burnin' dimly at the far end of it. We went down this hallway and come to a door. There was a shade on the door, but it was only half drawn. We looked inside. Holmes and Gibbons was standin' at the bar, havin' a beer apiece.

"'Come on,' says the foreman.

"We returned to the street, crossed over, and stood in the doorway of a building.

"'I don't quite get this,' the foreman said. 'Each of those fellows has a gun on his hip. I can't figure what they're up to.'

"Pretty soon Holmes and Gibbons came out. They started for the river. As they passed under a light I saw each man feel stealthily for his hip pocket.

"We edged along in the shadow of the buildings till we came to the Butler Street dock. Holmes and Gibbons was standin' there, lookin' down at the ice. We stood in the lee of the passenger-boat building.

"'It's solid, all right,' Holmes said. 'Are you game to go over?'

"'I wouldn't back out for anything,' said Gibbons, and we could hear him snigger.

"They let themselves down on the ice, and started for the lights of Sarnia, a mile away.

"'Come on,' said the foreman.

"We dropped down to the ice quickly, keepin' our eyes on the two men. But they had put their faces into the wind and were plodding along, only thinkin' of reaching the other side.

"'Keep below 'em,' said the foreman. 'The wind is from the head of the river, and if they look around they'll come into the wind. No danger of their seein' us that way.'

"That wasn't exactly the kind of walk a man would take to get an appetite for breakfast. As the foreman said, the wind was comin' down from the head of the river, and out where there was nothing to stop it, it was strong enough. The going was fierce, too. Great blocks of ice from Lake Huron had crowded against each other and upended and frozen solid. We had to climb over those that we couldn't crawl around. Holmes and Gibbons kept steadily on ahead of us. I couldn't help but feel admiration for 'em for the way they kept at it.

"Pretty soon the dock on the Sarnia side showed black against the white and

blue of the frozen river. Holmes and Gibbons climbed up on it. We slunk down the river a quarter of a mile and got up on the dock there.

"'If they're as cold as I am, they'll beat it for the first saloon,' said the foreman. 'It's about half past five, and everything will be open by now.'

"We climbed the hill and came face to face with a saloon. The foreman looked it over a bit.

"'I been in most of these places,' he said. 'Let me see. Yes, that's the one. There are two back rooms. Holmes and Gibbons are in the last room or else in the bar. Us for the first room.'

"We entered a side door, and came upon a hallway like the one in the Port Huron place. We crept down the hall and came to the open door of a little room. As we sat down, we could hear voices beyond the thin partition. The foreman touched a bell, and a porter came. We ordered something soft to drink and sat and waited.

"Holmes and Gibbons had been talkin' commonplaces, stopping now and then apparently to sip at their ale. Then all of a sudden a chair scraped like a man was gettin' up in a hurry. Gibbons' voice came to us through the partition:

"'What in hell are you tryin' to pull off, Henderson?'

"Then Holmes' voice, strident and quick:

"'Henderson, eh? Well, Bad Jim, I guess I've got you. Just keep your hands up, if you please.'

"The foreman jumped up.

"'We'll go in there,' he says. 'This is too rich.'

"I was at his heels as he got to the door of the other room. There was Gibbons with his back to the wall and his hands above his head. Holmes had him covered with a big gun. It was as pretty a stick-up as ever you see.

"Both men turned their eyes on us as we stood in the doorway.

"'Mornin', men,' says the foreman, sarcastic. 'Havin' a little gun play?'

"'Put your gun on this man,' Gibbons yells. 'He's Bad Jim Henderson, the Canuck smuggler and thief, wanted at Montreal.'

"'Don't you let him put anything over on you,' said Holmes quietly, but with a dangerous look in his eyes. 'He's Henderson himself. You know, I spoke to you about Henderson in your office, foreman. This is the man I was referrin' to. You wouldn't help me out that night. Now, keep your hands off. I've got him where I want him—on Canadian soil. You,' he said to Gibbons, 'take off your coat and pull down the collar of your shirt. I want to see what kind of a tattoo mark you got on you.'

"Gibbons stared at him as if he thought he had gone crazy.

"'I ain't got any tattoo mark, you damn' fool,' he said.

"'Show me,' said Holmes grimly.

"Gibbons peeled down to the skin. It was as bare of a tattoo mark as yours is.

"Holmes dropped his gun hand, his mouth and eyes wide open. Gibbons made as if to put on his coat, but instead he pulled his own gun with a move as quick as a flash of lightning.

"'Now just throw up your hands!' he said.

"Holmes couldn't do nothin' but obey. He seemed to think it was useless to appeal to the foreman and me.

"'Let's see your own markin's,' says Gibbons.

"Holmes peeled down just as Gibbons had done. He hadn't a mark on him, neither. Then the two of them stood and stared at each other.

"'I'll be cussed,' said Holmes. 'What kind of a sucker am I? I've spent the best part of a winter playin' up

to you, thinkin' you was Bad Jim Henderson. Who are you?'

"'Graham is my name,' said the man who called himself Gibbons. 'I'm from police headquarters at Detroit. Who might you be?'

"'Oh,' said Holmes bitterly, 'my name is Clarkson. I'm connected with the police department in Montreal.'

"'You were after that two thousand they offered for Henderson dead or alive, eh? So was I. I'll buy you a drink. Will you join us, gentlemen?'

"Half an hour later Graham and Clarkson took a train for Windsor. The foreman and I set out across the ice for the American side. The two policemen had decided that it was too late in the season to take up their search again. They had told us how they had hunted Bad Jim all through the Michigan woods. When they met up each saw that the other was not a lumberjack. Their beards, which they had let grow, pretty near covered their faces, and they measured up to the general descriptions of Bad Jim. So they become pals, each thinkin' he had landed his quarry.

"'I knew neither of them was Bad Jim,' said the foreman as we trudged along. 'I know Bad Jim. Holmes had been tryin' to pump me off and on, and last night I hinted I wouldn't be surprised if Gibbons was his man. Holmes had told me about the tattoo marks, and I see Gibbons washin' up a short time ago. I knew it would do no harm for Holmes to nab him. I wanted to see what would happen. I was lookin' for a double cross of some kind for Bad Jim. Them policemen is clever. The sun is comin' up red. Shouldn't wonder if we got a thaw.'"

Hinman paused to light his pipe. He gazed out at the fields beyond the fence which bordered the road.

"The thaw came," he went on. "In a few days the weather was a good deal like this again. We got our logs down and were paid off. It was dark when we finished, and most of us decided to lay over till mornin' and then light out for wherever we were bound —some of us to our homes and some of us to lake ports lookin' for jobs on the boats.

"And it was that night that Jim Henderson got his. We had all met up in a hotel near the Main Street bridge. There was a good deal of drinkin', and some of the boys was feelin' fine.

"All evenin' Bob Hart had been wanderin' around the hotel. Once or twice he put his foot on the stairs, as if he was goin' to bed. But then he wandered to the door or a window, and stood lookin' out. About closin' time the foreman came over to where I was sittin'.

"'I'm of a mind to have a little Scotch whisky—just a little—before I turn in,' he said. 'Will you join me?'

"'Not in the Scotch,' I said. 'I'll have a glass of milk, though.'

"We went into the barroom through the side door. The porter closed it and locked it after us. There were probably a dozen of the boys in the room—nobody else.

"As the foreman poured out his Scotch there came a rap on the door. The porter drew aside the shade.

"'It's one of your men,' he said to the foreman. 'Shall I let him in?'

"The foreman nodded. The porter opened the door, and in came Bob Hart. I knew for a certainty that Hart hadn't had a drink all evenin', but he acted as if he had a fair-sized load on. His face was white, his eyes bright, and he seemed unsteady on his pins. Everybody noticed it, and they stood starin' at him, glasses in hand. Hart put one hand on the bar rail and looked them over.

"'Boys,' he said slowly, 'they's something I want to tell you—something you

ought to know. 'I'm Bad Jim Henderson!'

"Well, his announcement aroused only a mild kind of a curiosity. The boys thought he was makin' a little drunken spiel. Nobody cared much whether he was Bad Jim Henderson or the Old Harry himself. That's the way it was among the jacks.

"'There's somethin' more,' said Bad Jim. 'Last fall the officers had me nearly run to earth. They had chased me clear from Montreal to Buffalo and along to Sarnia. I got away from them and crossed over. It was in September, and I made for the woods. I wandered about a good bit, gettin' nothin'. Then I come across the camp we just broke up.' He let his eyes rest on the foreman a minute.

"'This man was the foreman. You mind that night Holmes said he wanted to speak to him? Well, I went to his office after Holmes left. I told him who I was. I swore I had never stole and never smuggled a thing in my life. I said the officers had hounded me because I had been in prison once when I was a kid. I told him I had never knowed my father or my mother. He was sorry for me—the first man that had ever been sorry. He shook me by the hand and said he would give me a chance to be a man. He said he not only wouldn't squeal, but he'd keep a lookout for any move toward me on Holmes' part. He give me my chance, and I've tried to be a man. I've worked, and I've cut out the booze. Here to-night I been burnin' up for a taste of red licker, but I ain't took it. That's what this man done for me. But what I told him was bunk.'

"The foreman started as if he had been hit in the face by Bad Jim's open palm. The red crept up to his face and his eyes got hot.

"'It was bunk,' Bad Jim went on. 'I was a thief an' I was a smuggler. I had as good a father and mother as any man ever had. I broke their hearts. I been in jail a hundred times. I was a bad egg. But this man showed me what it meant to be on the level. So I made up my mind I wouldn't go on handin' him the bunk no more. And I made up my mind I would speak my little piece out where everybody could hear me.'

"He turned to the foreman and put out his hand. 'Here before all of them I want to apologize, Mr. Foster,' he said. 'You been the truest friend a man ever had. I want to be on the level with you.'

"The foreman stood there for a minute, lookin' Bad Jim up and down. His face was twisted with loathing or hate or contempt or something, I don't know what. Anyway, he was good and sore that Bad Jim had put it over on him and then had let the boys see he had put it over.

"'So,' said the foreman, and, Lordy me, his voice was like a rusty file, 'you been a thief and a smuggler, and you turned liar. You took my help after you'd made a monkey of me, hey? I wouldn't cared what your past had been. But a liar among honest men—just to save your dirty hide. Pah!' He looked like he was goin' to spit on Jim. 'To hell with you,' he says; and he turned, sprung the lock on the door, and stamped out.

"Bad Jim Henderson stood there before the bar, holdin' his hand out in front of him just as he had extended it to the foreman. Pretty soon the hand fell to his side. His eyes traveled over the gang. They was grinnin' at him like a bunch of devils. To them it was a big joke. Over Bad Jim's face came a look I never want to see again. Evil and hate welled up in that face, chasin' out of it whatever good had come into it while Jim had been keepin' straight, as he thought. He turned to the barkeeper.

" 'Licker!' he said, and his voice was thick.

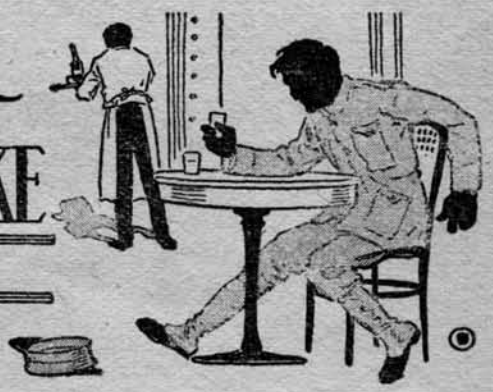
"He spilled a glass full of the stuff, and some of it slopped over on his tremblin' hand as he carried it to his mouth. When he had downed it, he turned away from the bar, walked to the door, sprung the lock as the foreman had done, and paused. His eyes traveled over the men again.

" 'You bunch of rats,' he says. 'Look out for me if I ever meet up with any of you.'

"Then he was gone, out of the barroom, out of the hotel, and into the streets."

THE MAN BULL PELLUM BROKE

BY ARTHUR PRESTON HANKINS



WHO organized this bloomin' army, anyway?"

Old First Sergeant Bowman, of K Company, had lowered his newspaper, and was looking at me over the top of his steel-bowed glasses.

I clasped my hands back of my head and settled comfortably in my chair in K Company's orderly room, ready to encourage the old veteran in any direction his fertile thoughts might wend.

"Perhaps George Washington," I ventured.

"Couldn't 'a' been. George Washington never told a lie. C'n you imagine a man who never told a lie actin' as a recruitin' officer?"

"Oh," I said, "I don't imagine Washington was ever on actual recruiting service."

Sergeant Bowman's eyes twinkled contemplatively. "Don't take it so serious," he advised. "I was just wonderin' at what period in the history o' this man's army certain recruits took on. To-day they're the oldest soldiers in the service. They never retire. And I don't know that it took any stretchin' o' the truth to get 'em to enlist, either. They seem to like soldierin'."

"You're enigmatical to-day, sergeant," I complained. "To whom do you refer?"

Bowman tilted the front legs of his chair and slid his blue-striped cap to the back of his bald head.

"Well," he said, "there's old Sergeant Temptation, for one. And Corp'r'l Curiosity. Prominent among 'em—perhaps the fella who carried the descriptive cards and was in command o' the draft—was one who's now known as Sergeant Major Ego. I could name twenty, I'll bet, if I was to set me mind to it."

"I am acquainted with all these personages," I laughed. "But, do you know, I always imagined they were civilians?"

"To prove to you that the last mentioned, at least, has been in the army for many years," Bowman returned, "we'll cut out the Pilgrim's Progressin' and dwell for a time on the man Bull Pellum broke.

"Bull Pellum was cap'n of an outfit

I once infested in this man's army. Bull Pellum was his commonest title; but sometimes they called um 'Breaker' Pellum, or 'Reformer' Pellum.

"He was a spare, soldierly-lookin' man, of middle height. His complexion, as we say in the army, was black. Black hair, black eyes, black military mustache as stubby as a revolver cleaner, and dark, scowlin' face. He had a sour way, and a deep, slow, bellowin' voice, and he rolled his eyes till the whites showed, like a bull does. If he'd 'a' been offered a dollar a word for talkin' he'd 'a' finished in the bread line.

"Bull Pellum's hobby was reformin' incorrigibles. A derelict that he'd reformed was the only man that had a chance with um. A slipshod soldier Bull would just tolerate as a matter o' course. And the naturally good soldier was likely to meet the same treatment, if he wasn't ignored altogether. But let a man become a guardhouse bum, a drunkard, a regular out-and-out son of a gun, and he had a chance. That is, if he was willin' to let Bull reform um. Once reformed, and the path to the heights lay unobstructed before um.

"I guess 'break' is a better term, after all, than 'reform.' 'Reform' has a kind of a soothin' sound, pleadin', and patiently pointin' out human errors, and tearful, and reproachful. I never noticed any o' these attributes in the way Bull Pellum went at an incorrigible. The long and short of it is that, to reach the happy state mentioned, the incorrigible had to be literally scared into bein' good by Bull. Therein lay Bull's content. The old ego in um had been satisfied. See? It was his hobby.

"Well, to get down to the demonstration, there came to the company one day a lone recruit named Lewis Cantenwine. We were stationed temporarily at the Presidio o' Monterey, down the coast from Frisco. Detailed there to act as markers and scorers at the division rifle meet. There was a vacancy in the company, and Cantenwine had been sent down from the Frisco recruitin' office to fill it. He was pickled to the eyeballs when he arrived.

"I turned um over to the q. m. sergeant, and he fixed um up, and, bein' a good scout, put um to bed for the rest o' the day. Next mornin' I had um in the office.

"'Kid,' I says, 'just a few preliminary words before you start on your career as a doughboy in old Bull Pellum's outfit. Not that I give a particular whoop, you know. But, bein' first sergeant o' this organization, and a man o' considerable look-see in this man's army, I feel called upon to relieve me chest when I see a new bud about to expand.'

"I looked um over. He was a good-lookin' kid, and had been well dressed about two weeks before. He had savvy in his face. He wasn't a dub.

"'Kid,' I went on, 'perhaps you're laborin' under a common delusion. You look to me like a man o' the seen-better-days variety. I think, too, that you took on because you're broke. Has me experience told me the truth?'

"He nodded, and scraped his feet.

"'It generally does,' I says. 'It tells me, further, that you and this Old Man Booze got on rather intimate terms. That maybe you lost a good job because you associated with this person. That maybe you gambled a little. That this and that kept pullin' you down till you threw up the sponge.

"'"I'm no good to anybody," you says. "I'm the scum o' the earth. I've reached the bottom. No, not quite, either. There's the army left." How 'bout that?'

"'You seem to be a mind reader,' he says, in a low, sarcastic voice.

"'A recruit reader,' I corrected. 'I've studied 'em by thousands.

"'So,' I went on, 'you made the common mistake o' thinkin' the army was the bottom—the dump heap for human refuse—a place where a derelict would be welcomed by his kind who had gone before—the one place where you could continue bein' a bum, and get a home and pay for it.

"'I'm aware,' I says, 'that such is the common belief among many on the outside. But you're a soldier now, and the sooner you forget it, the better. Learn your mistake before it's too late. Most recruits who've gone ahead with that idea are now in Alcatraz or Leavenworth. Ever hear o' those places? They got bars on the windows as thick as your wrist.'

"'Why are you tellin' me all this?' he flared up. 'Who told you I had any such idea o' the army?

"'Kid,' I says, 'Old Man Experience told me. You got a job in the army. You went to that job stewed to the gills. If you'd 'a' got a job at anything else on earth, the last thing you'd 'a' done would be to go to it the first day drunk. But you thought this job didn't count. The army was just pleadin' with booze fighters to come into the fold. Perhaps, even, you thought you'd make a hit with this grand entry. Well, you didn't. Go on, now, and learn which end of a gun you look into to see if it's loaded. And don't forget!'

"Well, I was up to me ears in office work about that time. Redneck Wells, me company clerk, had been discharged only a week before. He'd got tired o' the doughboys and was gonta re-up in a wagon-soldier outfit back East. The end o' the month was close, and the pay rolls and muster rolls were starin' me in the face. And there wasn't a man in the outfit that I could 'a' made a decent pen pusher out of in the remainder of his enlistment.

"So, glancin' over this recruit's descriptive card after he'd left the office, I saw a ray o' hope in the indication that his occupation was bookkeeper.

"A little later, when old Bull comes in to look over the mornin' report, I says:

"'Cap'n, this recruit, Cantenwine, is a bookkeeper. I would suggest that the cap'n permit me to try um as company clerk—temporary, at least—till the month's end work is off me hands.'

"I had me doubts about the boy, but I said nothin' to the old man about his failin'.

"'Sergeant,' says Bull Pellum, 'that's one o' the greatest mistakes to be made with a recruit. Put a recruit in the orderly office right off the reel, before he knows a soldier's duty, and you generally ruin um. He gets the impression that the army's been just barely strugglin' along till he arrived. He thinks a company clerk ranks somewhere close to a brigadier general. It'll ruin ninety-nine out of a hundred, sergeant.'

"'I agree with you, sir,' I says. 'But will the cap'n tell me what we're to do? If Lieutenant Bowles will help me out, perhaps I c'n get along.'

"'Lieutenant Bowles has other matters to attend to, sergeant.'

"I may say right here for your enlightenment that Lieutenant Bowles shouldn't 'a' had other matters to attend to. It ain't generally known, I reckon, that the second lieutenant attached to an organization is, in reality—when you get down to the fine points o' the Blue Book—the company clerk. He's supposed to work in the office under the first sergeant, so's he c'n learn company papers. In me nineteen years' first sergeantship I've never had a shavetail under me. Hope I will have before I retire.

"'Well, then, cap'n,' I says, 'I have no further suggestion to offer. But the cap'n knows I'm representin' the company at the meet. I have hopes o' makin' the division team. Which shall I neglect, sir, the shootin', or the rolls?'

"'Neglect nothin' while you're *my* first sergeant,' Bull rumbled.

"'Then, shall I——'

"'Run this office! You know what you need. Don't bother me with trifles. And see that you don't spoil any recruits, either.'

"So when he'd gone I sends for Cantenwine again.

"'Cantenwine,' I says, 'I'm gonta have you detailed as company clerk—perhaps only temporarily. It all depends on you. If you make good, and don't get the swell head, you c'n probably hold down the job. Later, it may mean a corp'r'lship, then a sergeantship. It's in the direct line o' promotion from the jump. Many a sergeant major and noncom staff officer began as a company clerk. But I reckon most of 'em could handle Old Man Booze. A word to the wise! Here's your desk. Find a pen to suit you, and I'll initiate you into the mysteries.'

"He gasped a little at first, then sat down with a kind of a smirk o' satisfaction—a kind of an I-told-you-so grin.

"'I guess old Bull was right,' I says to meself. 'This is gonta hurt this kid. But I got the rolls to get out. When they're off me hands, I reckon we'd better put this rookie to soldierin'.'

"Well, I wanta tell you that, so far as work was concerned, I never had a better man in the office. He wrote a beautiful hand. In those days typewriters weren't used a great deal in orderly offices, and a good penman was at a premium. He was the most accurate man I ever saw. Seemed like when once a thing had been pointed out to that kid he never made an error. And he grasped details in no time. Some firm lost a crackajack office man when this fella got to be a sport.

"Well, I clung right to um, o' course. Why shouldn't I? Siftin' the situation right down to facts, what did I care whether this fella could come to right shoulder arms or not? He could tend to me work for me, and I could leave everything in his hands while I went out with the gang. I was an old soldier, and old soldiers must be worked for by recruits. It's an unalterable law in the army. I needed Cantenwine, and what a man needs it's human nature for um to hang on to.

"I didn't make the division team. I fired like a devil up to the six-hundred-yard range, then I went all to pieces. Me eyes were beginnin' to get too old for the long ranges—see? Six hundred used to be me long suit. But, anyway, I fell down, and didn't go with the team to Chicago. When the meet was over, the company was ordered back to straight duty at Riley, Kansas, and I went with um.

"Says Cantenwine to me, as him and me were arrangin' our office fixtures in the new quarters at Riley: 'Sergeant,' he says, 'd'ye remember the little talk you give me the next day after I come to the company?'

"'I do,' I says.

"'Well,' says he, 'how 'bout it now?'

"'Cantenwine,' I told um, 'you're doin' fine. If you're havin' any dealin's with this booze person it's in his private office. I'm no temp'rance lecturer, me son,' I says. 'I occasionally wrastle with the old party meself. But if he ever gets me on the mat you c'n bet the audience is mighty slim, and there's no duty claimin' me. That's the point in this man's army. You c'n drink all that's made, so long as you c'n do a soldier's duty. It may not be a temp'rance code that will stand the test o' the abstemious multitude, but it suits the army right well.'

"He hadn't listened closely after I'd got past what I said about him doin' so fine. His eyes were dreamin', and lookin' out the window across the parade ground.

"'Bowman,' he says finally, 'd'ye

s'pose the old man'll make me a corp'r'l soon?'

"It was the rawest question I ever heard a private ask of a top soldier. It got me goat.

"'Go ask um!' I snorted.

"'Oh, I wouldn't like to do that,' he says, innocent as a four-year-old. 'But you might feel um a little on the subject, Bowman.'

"I wonder if you, a civilian—I pretty near said 'a damned civilian'—know how rank that was? It made me so hot I could hardly find words to bawl um out. Because I knew I couldn't make um see. Understand? Is there anything so completely gets your goat as to have it up to you to hand a scathing rebuke to an upstart, and know your best efforts will slide from um like water offen a duck?

"But I tried it.

"'Kid,' I says, 'this job will be your ruination. You ain't associatin' enough with the rest o' the men. I believe that because this job was handed to you the second day o' your enlistment you think you're above the rank and file o' this man's army. If you'd been on a common footin' with the straight-duty men you'd 'a' learned long ago that what you just said should bring a blush to the face o' the dumbest old roughneck in the company. It looks to me like common decency would 'a' made you bite your tongue when you felt those remarks stealin' out. The way to be promoted—and the only decent way—is to soldier, and keep your mouth shut. The other way is by handshakin'. It won't work on Bull Pellum, so you c'n discard that. Kid, as the quartermaster's teamster said when the mule kicked um in the belly, I don't think as much of you as I did.

"'And, furthermore,' I says, 'you quit hangin' about this office when your work's done. You sit here all day and read. After this you'll get out and associate with the men. Why, you're no more an army man than the day you come!'

"He didn't retort. Just laughed low and sarcastic.

"'I'll fix you,' I says to meself. 'No more o' this please-dear-cap'n-make-me-a-corp'r'l business.' And I spit right on the clean floor as if I'd bit into an ultra-embalmed chunk o' transport beef.

"To Bull Pellum that afternoon I says: 'Cap'n, the cap'n was right in regard to Recruit Cantenwine's bein' detailed as company clerk. Cantenwine ain't makin' a soldier very fast, sir. But he's the best man I ever had in an orderly office. Me suggestion is that he be made to do regular duty, along with his office work. When the office work gets heavy, the cap'n c'n have um excused. But I'll see that this don't occur too frequently.'

"'Go ahead,' says Bull. He didn't add, 'I told you so,' but he rolled his black eyes till the whites showed; and that was his bullish way o' lettin' it be known that he felt like it.

"Late that afternoon I come in the office and found our clerical prodigy seated, with his feet on me desk, readin' a book, as usual.

"'Cantenwine,' I says, 'go and polish your shoes and put on your Berlin gloves, and be ready to stand retreat.'

"Down come the front legs of his chair. 'Stand retreat!'

"'Stand retreat,' I repeated. 'And to-morrow mornin' you'll stand reveille. After breakfast you'll help the company police up about the quarters. After that, fix up your bunk for daily inspection. I'll have something for you to do in the office then till drill. After drill——'

"'After *drill!*'

"'After drill,' I goes on serenely, 'come in the office till mess call. In the afternoon, from one to two, you'll drill again. Then——'

"'But, sergeant!'

"'Yes?'

"'Why—why, what does this mean?'

"It means that Bull Pellum has decided to make a soldier outa you, Cantenwine.'

"'And I must do this every day?'

"'With the addition o' kitchen police and room orderly and guard duty, when it comes your turn. But guard won't begin, o' course, till you've been turned for duty.'

"His jaw dropped. He blew out his breath. 'Why, sergeant,' he says, 'this is fierce! I've gotta do regular duty and act as company clerk while I'm restin'—and all on private's pay. I'll see you da——'

"'Stop! Say that, and I'll lam you in the mill, Cantenwine. It's about time you were learnin' that a noncommissioned officer is not to be seen damned by a recruit. I've let you grow too familiar, I see that. You've got the swell head. Now I'm gonta take it outa you. If you make good, all right. If not—well, then it's up to you.'

"'Don't get sore, now, Bowman,' he says. 'I beg your pardon, I'm sure. But, darn the luck! what does old Pellum mean? This is fierce! Why, I Company's clerk is a sergeant. He doesn't do a thing but office work.'

"'He was soldiern' for twelve years before he went into the office,' I remarked. 'He's got his soft job because he earned it.

"'Now, looky here, Cantenwine,' I went on, 'nobody's got anything against you. Neither the old man nor me. Your record's clear. I'm free to say you're the best clerk I ever had in me office. This double duty ain't gonta kill you. In fact, it's gonta make more work for me. Get out and learn to be a soldier. You're anxious for promotion. Suppose you were promoted to a corp'r'lship, then had to do straight duty for some reason or other. You'd be a laughingstock. Now, I tell you you got the chance of a lifetime to go as high as you like. You're educated. You c'n make a commission, even. But first and above all you must be a soldier. Now, you got just about time to shine your shoes for retreat.'

"He went out, with a bitter look on his face.

"He stood retreat that night and reveille next morning. At drill I had Sergeant Meade fall out and drill um alone. After drill, he worked at the company papers. At one o'clock, Sergeant Meade came for um, givin' me a growl, you may be sure.

"'Drill, Cantenwine,' he says.

"'What does this mean?' says Cantenwine. 'There's only one drill a day.'

"'Two for recruits,' I says. 'Go on.'

"Well, he stood it two weeks. Then one mornin' Corp'r'l Bush, in charge o' quarters, reported um absent from check the night before. But he said 'here' at reveille. After breakfast I asked Bush: 'Did you report Cantenwine absent from check roll call to the officer o' the day last night?'

"'No, Bowman, I didn't,' says Bush. 'It was his first offense, you know, and I——'

"'That's all right, Bush,' I says. We were an outfit of old-timers, and we had a few regulations of our own. 'Glad you didn't. Pass the word to report um next time, though.'

"When Cantenwine showed up in the office before drill his eyes showed drink.

"'Don't miss check again, Cantenwine,' I told um—just like that, never lookin' up from me work.

"A week passed. Cantenwine was silent and dark. Then it was time to make out the pay rolls. I excused Cantenwine from all regular duty, per cap'n's orders, and put um at the rolls. Then I went with the company on a three days' hike. When we come back the corp'r'l left in charge o' quarters reported that Cantenwine had been absent since the day we left. I went to

the office. The pay rolls hadn't been touched.

"By golly, I was hot! I got a dumbhead to help me, much against his will, and we went to work to clean up the rolls. It was a big job, but we finished it in time. On the day they had to go off, as we were comparin' 'em, Cantenwine sauntered in, bleary with booze, and sullen. Old Bull sprang to his feet.

"'Get outa this office!' he yelled. 'Sergeant Bowman, confine this man in the guardhouse awaitin' trial.'

"So in the mill goes Recruit Cantenwine.

"Bull had um tried, and the summary court officer give um ten-ten. When Cantenwine's ten days were up he reported in the office. He found, sittin' at his desk, the fella who'd helped us on the rolls.

"'Report to Sergeant Meade, Cantenwine,' I says.

"'But—but——' He stared at the private at his desk. 'Isn't there office work to do?'

"'There is,' I says, 'but the company clerk will attend to it. You're a straight-duty man from now on.'

"He clenched his fists and gritted his teeth and stamped out. He'd thought to teach me a lesson—see?—by goin' absent when the rolls were due. He'd thought to impress his great value upon me and the cap'n. But I was whippin' my raw man into pretty fair shape; and, anyway, I'd 'a' done every scrap o' the work meself before I'd 'a' let the recruit into that office again.

"Well, that was the beginnin' of it. Cantenwine started down the line, and in six months he was the company bum. Before his first year was in he had a bobtail hangin' over um like the sword of What's-his-name.

"Then Bull Pellum awoke to the possibilities.

"'Sergeant Bowman,' he says, 'this man, Cantenwine, has a terrible record —terrible.' And he rolled his eyes like an old Durham bull.

"'He has that, sir,' I says. 'Five summary court-martials. He's spent the greater part of his first year in the guardhouse.'

"'I won't have such a man in the organization,' he says.

"'The cap'n won't have um long,' I remarked. 'I imagine the next summary will——'

"'Not without my approval, sergeant,' he interrupts. 'I'll attend to this case meself. I'll break this man. It's a disgrace to me company. I'll make um soldier, or go over the hill. Send for um at once.'

"But Cantenwine wasn't in the post.

"'Never mind, sergeant,' says Bull thoughtfully. 'On second thought, I'll say nothin' to um about it. But I'll begin on um at once.'

"This to me alone, o' course. Me and old Bull understood each other pretty well.

"That night I met Cantenwine down in Junction City, in a saloon. Him and a cavalry recruit were tankin' up at a table in the barroom. Cantenwine had reached the conversational stage, I judged.

"'Bowman,' he says, 'come have a drink with me.'

"Nothin' loath, as the fella says, for time had washed out our difference, I went over and sat at the table.

"''Bout three fingers o' conversation fluid,' I told the bartender.

"Before me drink was on the table the cavalryman left us.

"'Bowman,' says Cantenwine, squirmin' low in his chair, 'I wonder what you're thinkin' o' me, anyway.'

"Well, you gotta be kinda careful in sayin' the truth to the fella that's buyin' the drinks. 'Thinkin' o' you—how's that?' I evaded.

"'You're thinkin' you'll soon be seein' me in one o' those places where the bars are thicker'n your wrist, ain't you?'

"I ordered another pair of drinks, and when they were on the table, I felt free to hew a little nearer to the truth.

"'Cantenwine,' I says, 'I shouldn't wonder if you've made a five that shot. Your next break'll turn the trick. But I doubt if it'll be Leavenworth. I think they'll hand you a straight kick. You're not bad enough to be confined—just worthless.'

"'They're out to hand it to me, eh?'

"'They are.'

"'Bowman,' he says thoughtfully, 'I wonder who'll be fooled the worst when this conspiracy fails to work.'

"'Meanin'?'

"'That there's nothin' doin'. I begin soldierin' to-night. I've changed me mind about bein' a bad man.'

"I didn't say all I thought. I says: 'Yes? Well, there's nothin' so restin' as changin' your mind now and then.'

"'You're sarcastic,' he says. 'Really, Bowman, I didn't expect sarcasm from you. I had you sized up as the kind to give the under dog a lift.'

"'Well, Cantenwine,' I says, 'show me a handholt.'

"He dumped his barely touched schooner o' beer into the cuspidor under the table. 'There she is,' he says. 'Now take holt.'

"'You're quittin'?'

"'I have quit.'

"I studied um. No, it wasn't booze heroics. He was sober enough and serious enough.

"'You mean quittin' for to-night?' I says.

"'For all time,' says he.

"I guess I smiled a little, for he says:

"'Seems you've heard that said before.'

"'About a million times, more or less,' I told um.

"'Well'—he got to his feet—'you said show you a handholt, and you'd help. I've showed it to you. All the help I ask is that you, as top soldier, forget the past in our future dealin's.' He started out.

"'Come back, Cantenwine,' I says. And when he stopped I went on: 'Cantenwine, is it a woman?'

"'It is not.'

"'Is it religion?'

"He shook his head.

"'I know,' I says—and it must 'a' been exasperatin'—'you're naturally a clean man, and well raised. You don't wanta be kicked outa the army as useless. You're a bum and a drunkard, and for you there'd be the lot o' such. There'd be no clean sheets and good grub and warm, decent clothes without hard work. And you couldn't work and hit up the booze. So you've decided that the creature comforts o' the army are worth more to you than the life of a hobo. Is that straight talk?'

"'It certainly is,' he says, without anger. 'In a way, you're right. But the reason you've mentioned is only a part o' the whole. I'm reformin' because o' me personal pride, Bowman. Everybody thinks I'm no good. They've forgot that you said I was the best office man in this man's army. How easy people forget! Why, Bowman, on the outside I—— But we'll forget that. The long and short o' the present deal is that I realize what me bunkies think o' me, and me pride won't stand for it. I'm gonta reverse the opinion.'

"'Kid,' I says, 'I hope you mean it. Takin' it all in all, it's a mighty good reason for reformation. It's more practical than melodramatic. Go to it!'

"'Thanks, Bowman'—and he was gone.

"I ordered another jolt, and dropped into deep musin'. It wasn't till then that I remembered what old Bull Pellum had told me that very day—that he had decided to break Cantenwine.

"'Now,' I says to meself, 'here's crossed wires again in this man's army. Bull will be breakin' a man that's already decided to break umself. Bull

will begin the inquisition, and Cantenwine his own reformation, at one and the same time. Neither will know the other's hand. I won't tell either of 'em. If Cantenwine c'n weather the gale, he's built o' that stuff men are made of. If, when Bull tightens the screws, Cantenwine throws up the sponge in despair—well, if he does, I reckon I'll be tempted to stick me own beak into the thing. It'll be a royal test!' You see, Cantenwine had convinced me that he meant business.

"Now, though Cantenwine had been handed five summaries, his progress along the downward path had been pretty smooth. Once a man gets to be a guardhouse bum, confinement don't bother um a great deal. Bull had paid no attention to um till he awoke to the knowledge that he was lettin' a possibility slip away from um. He'd pay some attention to um now, believe me!

"Next day was Saturday. We had inspection at nine o'clock. Now, Bull was a cap'n that generally looked on inspection as a farce—which it is. He'd walk along the line, takin' rifles in an absent-minded way, and slam 'em back without a look. We were in the main an outfit o' careful, clean soldiers, and Bull knew it, and let it go at that. Now, Cantenwine, since he'd started the incorrigible stunt, had been the most careless soldier in Fort Riley. But Bull had never noticed um.

"Comin' out of me office at drill call, I met Cantenwine on the veranda. I stopped and stared at um.

"He had on a new, clean uniform that fit um like 'de paper on de vall.' His buttons were glitterin'. His bayonet scabbard had been polished till it shone. You could see your face in his shoes. His tin cup, hangin' on his haversack, had been scoured till it was a shame to touch it. O' course, I didn't examine his piece, but it was safe to bet it was in a class with the rest o' his equipment.

"His eyes twinkled at me as I started movin' on, with an apologetic cough.

"'Don't forget that handholt, Bowman,' he says, in a low voice.

"'I won't, me boy,' I says. 'You look like a soldier to me. Keep it up, in spite of everything, and you'll win out.'

"'I mean to,' says he.

"Twenty minutes later old Bull Pellum, passin' along the line in his inspection, stopped before Cantenwine.

"'Stand up like a man!' he bellowed.

"I heard the snap o' wood and metal as Bull took the kid's piece. Outa the corner o' me eye I saw Bull slam it back at um.

"'Present that piece properly!' he roared.

"I heard it click as it changed hands again. Then came a long pause. Then:

"'First Sergeant Bowman, give Cantenwine ten days' extra kitchen police for havin' a dirty gun.'

"'Very well, sir,' I replied.

"The piece snapped back, and Bull moved on down the line.

"Bull spent ten minutes in me office after inspection, but never opened his mouth about Cantenwine. He started home, and was barely outa sight when there come a knock at the door. Cantenwine entered, with his rifle.

"His eyes were flashin', and his lower lip, where his teeth were set into it, was white. He marched straight to me and held out the piece.

"'Bowman,' he choked, 'look at it. Look at it! Take it to the light. There ain't a cleaner gun in this battalion!'

"'Cantenwine,' I says, refusin' to accept his piece, 'this ain't military. Your piece may be clean; but d'ye propose that I examine it, then tell the cap'n that he was wrong? Leave the office.'

"'But, Bowman'—and the despair in his eyes fairly made me sick—'it *is* clean. I worked on it for three hours. And—and—— He never called me down before! I've gone to inspection

a sight. And here I worked so hard, and—and I was proud, Bowman.'

"'Leave the office, Cantenwine,' I said coldly, and he went staggerin' out.

"I had um begin his ten days' extra kitchen police next mornin'. He came out to drill with a sullen look on his face.

"Now, the daily inspection don't amount to a whoop. The company commander usually just walks round the company, and that's all there is to it. But this mornin' Bull started from the right o' the company and walked past twenty men till he reached Cantenwine. There he stopped short.

"'Put your heels together!' he bellowed.

"He took a step, and snatched Cantenwine's rifle.

"'You haven't touched this since yesterday! Sergeant Bowman, give Cantenwine ten days' extra kitchen police for neglectin' to clean his rifle for drill. And, Cantenwine, take your rifle to the first sergeant every mornin' before drill till you learn what a clean piece looks like.'

"Bull snapped the rifle back, and walked on round the command, not stoppin' at another man.

"I didn't see Cantenwine again all that day. Next mornin', ten minutes before drill call, he knocked at the door and come into the office.

"His face was red with humiliation, and his eyelashes hid his eyes. Without a word, he come straight over to me and passed me his rifle.

"I took it and went to the window. I shot open the bolt and examined the chamber and the inside o' the bar'l. Then I looked her over from muzzle to butt piece. Me own rifle, after an hour's work, wouldn't 'a' matched her. She was clean steel, and no mistake. I wished Bull Pellum had found some other means o' breakin' Cantenwine.

"'I pass it,' I says to um, and handed it back.

"Cantenwine turned on his heel and left the office.

"At drill Bull stopped before um again and took the piece.

"'Did you show this to Sergeant Bowman?' he roared, after a pause.

"'I did, sir.'

"'Sergeant Bowman, you'd better have the doctor examine your eyes!' Bull bellowed up the line at me. 'This piece is rusty—filthy! Clean it, Cantenwine, and keep showing it to the first sergeant before drill. Ten days' extra kitchen police for Cantenwine, Sergeant Bowman.'

"'Very well, sir,' I replied.

"Back snapped the rifle. Bull passed on round the company.

"The followin' mornin', as I passed along the veranda a little before drill call, I heard somebody bawl out:

"'Time to take your gun to Bowman, Cant!'

"There followed a roar o' laughter from a dozen throats. I knew how that would cut. The ridicule o' the men would be worse than all the extra duty Bull could hand out.

"Ten minutes later, as Cantenwine stood before me in the office, there was a tear in each eye as he passed me his piece. I ain't a hard man; it ain't in me. I nearly give in at sight o' that. However, I believed the inquisition would do the boy a world o' good. The army ain't a nest o' feathers, and Cantenwine hadn't learned it yet.

"'Well?' he asked, as I handed back the rifle.

"'I pronounce it fit for any inspection,' I told um.

"'Then Bull *knows* it's clean,' he ground out.

"'Ask um,' I says, and turned to me desk.

"He come closer to me. 'Bowman,' he says, 'what's the matter with you? Have you got it in for me?'

"'Not at all,' I says. 'I pronounce your gun clean. I'm not responsible

for Cap'n Pellum's opinions, Cantenwine. He's cap'n over me as well as over you.'

"'Why is it,' he says, 'that he didn't worry his head about me till I made up me mind to turn over a new leaf? The minute I begin to soldier he begins ridin' me.'

"'Have you thought,' I asked um, 'that maybe you're just beginnin' to get what was comin' to you all along?'

"'I paid for what I did in the guardhouse,' he says. 'Now I've turned over a new leaf—I oughta be given a chance.'

"'Well, I'm not in it,' I told um. 'Take your troubles to the cap'n.'

"Things run along about that way till Saturday come again. Cantenwine now had forty days' extra kitchen work starin' um in the face. As usual, he come to me with his rifle before drill call.

"'I want you to examine me entire equipment, Bowman,' he says; and I did.

"'All O. K.,' I says, and looked um over from head to foot.

"'We'll see,' he says, and went out.

"He got five days' fatigue for a 'dirty' belt buckle!

"Two days later was pay day. Cantenwine drew his money and went back to the kitchen to finish the day. After the supper dishes were done he dressed up and started walkin' fast for the hack line.

"'I'll go, too,' I says to meself. I kinda wanted to see if Cantenwine was gonta take his troubles to Old Man Booze.

"I missed the hack that he caught, but followed in another fifteen minutes later.

"Downtown, I mosied along from saloon to saloon, takin' an occasional drink, and lookin' through the pay-day crowds for Cantenwine. I didn't find um. Finally, in a blind pig which our outfit infested in those days, I heard some one say he'd seen Cantenwine buyin' a ticket for the show.

"Cantenwine was at work in the kitchen at breakfast time, with a clear eye, and steady arm under the piles o' dishes.

"'This kid's got metal,' I says. 'Luck go with um!'

"Six months followed, at the end o' which the duty roster showed that Private Cantenwine had a hundred days' extra kitchen police ahead of um. How old Bull Pellum had ridden the boy! And how the boy had stood it! Every day for um meant drudgery in the kitchen, except when he was on guard. Four times, I think it was, he got orderly at guard mount. That means that the officer o' the day picked um to be orderly to the commandin' officer because he was the cleanest and most soldierly-lookin' man to mount guard that day.

"Once, though, when Bull Pellum was officer o' the day, he threw Cantenwine out as not fit to mount guard. Cantenwine was for goin' to the commandin' officer, but in despair, I reckon, he backed out. Always he soldiered, clean as a whistle and right to the dot. Always Bull Pellum turned his best efforts into mockery.

"One day I met Cantenwine in a saloon downtown. He was sittin' at a table with a half-empty whisky glass before um. I sidled over and dropped into a chair.

"'Havin' a little quiet jolt?' I asked.

"'Yes,' says he—'several of 'em. Bartender, take Bowman's order.'

"I ordered a whisky, and threw it home.

"'You ain't drinkin',' I says to Cantenwine.

"He was sittin' settled low in his chair, in deep, broodin' thought.

"He took a sip, and set the glass back on the table.

"'I've had several,' he says.

"'Thought you'd quit?' I says, after a little.

"'I was afraid you weren't goin' to say that, Bowman,' he retorts.

"'Oh, I'm a bromide, I reckon,' I laughed.

"'You're a deep devil,' he remarked, a little later. 'Tell me what you're thinkin'.'

"'I'm thinkin',' I says, 'that somebody in this man's army quit drinkin' and braced up simply because of his personal pride.'

"'So I did,' says he. 'But what's the use?'

"'What's the use o' personal pride, you mean?'

"He looked at me sharply, then lowered his eyes. For a minute he didn't speak. When he did, he says:

"'Bowman, you're right. I *did* quit and brace up simply because o' personal pride. I didn't do it to satisfy Bull Pellum nor anybody else in this army. And, by golly, Bowman, Bull Pellum nor nobody is goin' to down that personal pride! I'll soldier like a man, because in so doin' I satisfy Private Lewis Cantenwine. There's no reward but me own satisfaction. Bull Pellum may ride me to the end o' me enlistment, but he can't ride the pride outa me!'

"I grabbed at um as he sprang to his feet. I was ready to tell um all about it. But he hadn't seen me. He'd hurried outa the saloon.

"Next mornin', when Bull Pellum come into me office, he found Cantenwine's record for the past seven months laid out for his inspection.

"'M'm-m!—m'm-m!' he says. 'Pretty good—pretty good. You think I've broken um, do you, sergeant?'

"'I think he's *broke,* sir,' I says.

"'M'm-m—send for um!'

"A little later Cantenwine stood before um. From head to foot the old man looked um over.

"'Cantenwine,' says Bull, 'I've been lookin' over your record for the past seven months. It shows quite a change in you, I'm proud to say. I won't have a poor man in me company, Cantenwine. I'll make um or break um.'

"'Me *record,* sir!' says Cantenwine bitterly, and laughed a short snort.

"'There are two records of you,' says Bull. 'One is me private record; the other one is in this office for any one to see. This one is clean for seven months. I'm gonta let up on you now, Cantenwine. D'ye think your personal pride c'n keep you decent for the rest o' your enlistment?'

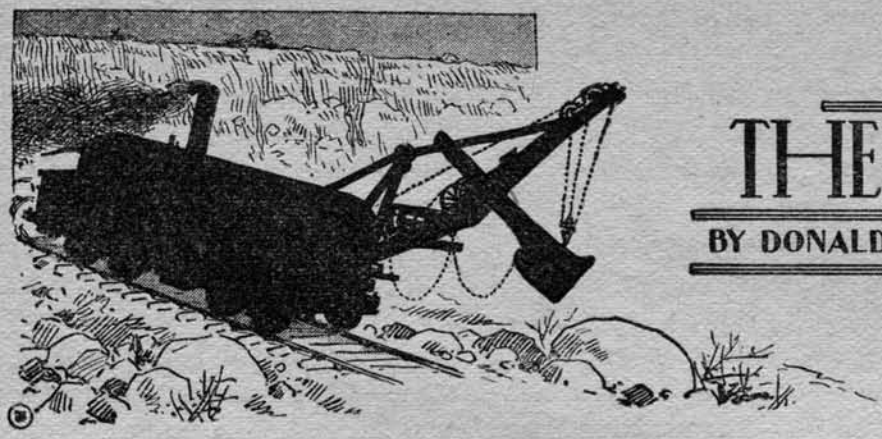
"Cantenwine stared slowly from Bull Pellum to me. In a flash he saw it all. I got busy with me papers.

"'It will, sir,' he says to Bull.

"Bull Pellum leaned back, with a broad smile on his face. Before um, he thought, stood a sample of his handiwork. It pleased um. A few last, lovin' touches here and there, and it would be a masterpiece.

"'Sergeant Bowman,' he rumbled, 'scratch off all extra duty against Private Cantenwine. Relieve Thompson, and detail Cantenwine as company clerk. Make out a warrant appointin' Private Cantenwine corp'r'l, dated today. Make out another one, dated tomorrow, promotin' Corp'r'l Cantenwine to sergeant. That's all, Cantenwine.'

"Once more Cantenwine staggered out o' me office—this time blind with bewilderment and unbelief. Bull Pellum sat at his desk and rolled his eyes like some old king o' the range—and smiled and smiled and smiled."



THE SCAB

BY DONALD FRANCIS McGREW.

THE streets of Duluth are no place for thin-blooded people in the fall of the year, and especially those narrow thoroughfares along the water front. They reek of labor agencies and are overshadowed by near-by, monstrous ore bins; in the evenings the rays from the windows of the many saloons give forth but little light and warmth.

However, I had been told that in one of them I might find Barney O'Shaughnessy, labor agent of parts, and possessed of a huge thirst, so I hurried down one of the unkempt streets and pushed open the door of the first saloon.

My entrance, you might say, was propitious; that is, if you are a lover of the art *la boxe* staged in the manner of a battle royal.

As I opened the door, sounds of an argument reached my ears. I had been told that many steam-shovel men were wont to rub elbows here, men who are prone to grow both loquacious and pugnacious. The reports were fully verified. Just as I turned the screen, I saw several men, evidently mechanics, rush a lone man at the bar—a young man, a six-footer, whose chief claims to notice were a cheerful grin, a shock of red hair, and a pair of wide, nervous shoulders. They fell on him fore and aft, front and flank, expressing the most arduous of intentions, blotting him from view like a storm smother.

However, their supremacy was but momentary. Of all the casual, well-glad-to-meet-you gladiators I have ever seen, that redhead took the bunting.

It was like removing nickels from a blind man. The assaulting army stopped, tripped one another, disintegrated, and did rigadoons on their ears, leaving triumphant he of the grin and the lightning fists. He looked round the room, still grinning sarcastically.

"Well," he said, "any one else want to get their feet wet?"

Evidently waders were not numerous now; and his eyes fell on me.

"Do *you* think the Rawhider is a scab?" he demanded of me.

My answer was both instantaneous and tactful. "I don't know the gentleman," I said. "Have a drink?" And in the interests of peace I included the room.

Those on the floor picked themselves up, while the deft and impartial individual behind the bar whisked several foaming tankards into sight.

"We never knew you was a friend to this guy, the Rawhider," one of the men explained in a conciliatory tone. "Else we wouldn't have chewed the rag about 'im. Ain't you a union man?"

"I am that," declared the conqueror heartily. "And a good one. International Brotherhood of Steam Shovel and Dredgemen, that's what I belong to. About me bein' a friend of this Rawhider now——"

"Pardon me," I interrupted. "Who *is* this Rawhider?"

"He is a shovel runner, friend, from Chi'. Name's Callahan. French descent, but Irish by looks. They call him the Rawhider because he can drop back and forth through the pit as fast as the next one, see, and he generally does it.

"As for me bein' a friend o' the Rawhider's, some would say I wasn't and some wouldn't. But you guys listen to me. You as wasn't up there ain't no call to label him a scab. No, sir. He ain't no scab nor he ain't no hero, either, like the trust papers called him. He's just a shovel engineer that did his duty by his employers and bust a strike that wasn't right."

The red warrior paused, inhaled the appreciative silence, buried his nose in the tankard, and went on:

"No, sir, he wasn't no scab. You fellows listen to me while I warble.

"In the first place, this Rawhider, shovel runner by profession and game by nature, he's up in Hibbing hunting a job, the same sad state of affairs being traceable to the failure of Jones Brothers at Colerane. That's because they try to buck the iron range with two old fogy supers who think they can dig this range overburden without shooting.

"So the Rawhider sashays up to the office of one Silvery Mike Monahan, the same who, for the benefit of our Boston friend here, I'll explain holds down the office of secretary to Local Number Seventy-six, International Brotherhood of Steam Shovel and Dredgemen—and all the leons and accouterments, and graft pertaining thereto.

"Now, this Mike's a character. Biggish man he was, but small. A medium-sized man, about two hundred pounds. He has a Chicago alderman smell to 'im, and the same way of wearin' a cigar, and no artist can paint any soul into that catfish physog. He ain't got none.

"Says our hero: 'How's chances to get out, Mr. Monahan?'

"'No good,' says Mr. Monahan. 'We have all we can do placing our local members. You fellows from the Grand Lodge oughta look to Chi' and Tom Dolan.'

"'But I hear there's a crew needed at the Kinney Mine for that contractor, Foote,' argues the Rawhider. 'You ain't got no crews in, so what's the matter o' me takin' it?'

"'Well,' says Silvery Mike then—quite judicious he was and at the same time ready to slide on the other side of the fence—'well, it might be fixed.'

"Getting out from under brick houses ain't no lost art to a bachelor of perceptions. Our subject, he pulls out a ten-spot of the realm—the last in his kick.

"'Will this fix it?' he asks, sweet and ingratiating.

"Silvery Mike, he reaches for that ten; but that's as far as he gets. Our hero reverses.

"'Any time,' he says, 'that I have to kick in to a jellyfish like you for a job—me that's paid my dues since I tallowed on the Drainage—well, I guess not. Mr. Monahan, it's us to the floor!'

"Friends, it was scandalous. I mean the way Mr. M. Monahan fades from the scenery. Our Lochinvar never had a chance.

"'You'll never get no job on this range now unless you scab!' yells Silvery through the keyhole of the closet door.

"'Won't I?' was the pree-sidjus retort. "Take it from your uncle, I'll hike up there and nab that job to-day!'

"But friends, things don't look as rosy as that bluff when the Rawhider gets down on the street. No. The Oliver Mines are full up, and the Mahoning, and all the big contractors—Winston-Deere, Drake & Stratton,

John Butler. Too, there's a good chance that he'll be eatin' snowballs on a tie-pass special if he squanders part of that ten goin' to Buhl. Maybe Monahan has dug up a crew, or some one else has copped, and there'd be our little gosling about four months' walk from God's country—which is Chi—and nothin' in the exchequer but hopes and 'Oh, hell!'

"So he's hiking toward the Great Northern depot, his feet gettin' slower, when somethin' happens.

"There's a noise stirs up close by. It's in a jewelry shop. A prospective shindy bein' always interestin' to the party of the first part, he strolls in, thinkin' maybe he'll buy a folderol maybe, or a bonmot.

"There's a young fellow in there, gettin' his from the squint-eyed jeweler.

" 'I tell you,' squeaks the last-named animal, 'I don't care *who* you are. Them's my sentiments. Cash or nothing. You can't take my watch unless you *pay* cash.'

" 'But I offered you my check," says the young fellow, like a man who ain't used to havin' his paper sniffed at.

"But he don't budge that jeweler. 'Makes no difference,' he says. 'That check's on the Ruhl bank, and you say you're not acquainted here.'

" 'My word!' the customer exclaims. 'This is damnably exasperating.' And he frisks himself again to see if he can't rake up enough loose change to make up what he owes. You can see he wants that watch pretty bad.

"Friends, you never can tell by looking at a barn door whether there's a mule inside or a horse. But this fellow, he's thoroughbred. A big lad he was, with mackinaw, high-topped shoes, corduroys, and a cap with automobile goggles. Dirty he was, but *clean*. Stubble o' beard on his face, but clean shaven. You've seen that kind of a guy.

"So our hero, bein' a man o' insight, he sees this. He acts by impulse, and he says to the jeweler: 'How much does this man owe?'

" 'Seven dollars,' says the jeweler—just that quick, you know, like he's the most insulted man in the world.

"Well, then, our Samaritan he produces the ten-case note. 'Take it out o' this,' he says, 'and quit the jewelry business. You need some one around here to polish the ivory.'

" 'But I say,' the young fellow breaks in, 'I can't allow this. You don't know me.'

" 'Your face is good,' was the answer. 'You can give me the check. I've got friends around here will indorse it. What's the name?'

" 'My name,' says Mr. Thoroughbred, 'is Ronald T. Foote.'

"Fellow citizens, you could've knocked our friend Callahan over. Yes, it was him, Foote, the young contractor, who wants the crew. He'd never been in Hibbing, nor met Monahan, doing business by mail or over the phone, so that little favor saved him some little inconvenience presenting credentials to the secretary. He had rushed into Hibbing for some small castings.

"To make it short, I ask you—did the Rawhider get that job? Answer—he did. That's how he and his craneman come to be in the big buzz wagon that evening heading for Buhl, with the boss every now and then pressin' a nickled dingus that chimed out 'Mary Ooch.'

"It don't do Silvery Mike any good to kick. 'If you raise any hell,' says the Rawhider to him over the phone, 'I'll put Tom Dolan wise to you, and your name's Pee-ronius Mud!'

"Which quiets M. Silvery Monahan for the time bein'.

"The next night the new crew is out on the big Buck, slamming away. Two weeks later, when T. Foote sees what

kind of an organist R. Callahan is on that little toy, R. C. is on the day shift at one seventy-five per month. The extra fifty being slipped to him on the Q. T., understand, because the scale all over the range is one-twenty-five and a bonus of forty per at the end of the season to engineers, and Foote don't want to get in bad with the Kinney people, who are only paying their crews standard and don't want to go higher."

I motioned the bartender, and the narrator paused long enough to hide his face in the foam.

"Friends," he continued, with a sigh "that was a steam shovel! She was as spanking a ninety-five-ton Panama type Bucyrus as ever come outa Milwaukee. Set way down in a forty-foot lift, she was, with one hundred and sixty feet of bank shoving up to the sky on the next bench to the south; and nighttimes she coughed her sparks clear to the top. Six dips a minute she could make, if you made her, and fill the bucket—say, boys, she was a baby doll.

"Well, things went pretty smooth for a time. Maybe you've seen the Kinney Mine. They figured the ore lay in a long, narrow strip, so they went straight down instead of working in circles, like the Mahoning. Result, a long hole two hundred feet deep, an eighth of a mile wide, three quarters of a mile long at top, and a quarter mile long at bottom. There's two approaches at either end about a quarter mile long for the ore tracks and the dump tracks, both standard gauge.

"When this Kinney outfit hit the ore, they found after a bit there was about as much taconite in spots as there was ore. It was a case of strip wider. They didn't want to take one of their two shovels outa the ore during the rush summer season to do the stripping, so they let it to Foote, with a reserve clause sayin' that he kicks back with a big daily forfeit if he don't clear the bases by a certain day in November.

"That was the big bur under his saddle. Foote, he was worrying quite a bit about that forfeit, 'cause it seems he ain't due to make any too much on this job anyway, him being new to the range and having taken the job at a pretty low figure. Cave-ins from that big back on the second lift had laid him out quite a little, not to speak of guys who'd only taken jobs on his machine to make a stake.

"But pretty soon after our subject appears, things commence to tune up better. With a well-shot forty-foot bank and standard-gauge dumps under you all the time and a ninety-five Buck with her tail in the air—well, I claim a shovel man ought to go some, and that shovel runner did. He hit the ball.

"So, as I say, things got to looking pretty good, when—zingo—M. Silvery Monahan throwed in from right and put the whole side out at the plate.

"Bing! It was a peach heave. What did that bay-windowed grafter do but call a general strike on the range!

"Yes, sir. For the benefit of our New Yawk friend here, I'll eloocidate. As I told you, the standard on the range was one-twenty-five per month with a bonus of forty payable at the end of the season for shovel engineers, and ninety and thirty for cranemen. The trust set that standard, and everybody follows suit on the Mesaba.

"Now, that scale is higher than the union standard throughout the country —one-twenty-five and ninety, flat. The boys ought to've been satisfied. But what did Silvery Mike do but get them to kick for that bonus every month, and when the trust bucked, he called a strike.

"Were they fools for walking out? You get me. You can't buck that trust in the long run. Furthermore, they'd been perfectly fair and aboveboard.

"The thing would never've happened if Tom Dolan, general secretary in Chicago, had known of it before it was too

late. He didn't, though. The boys did the same fool stunt when they tried to buck the United States government on the Panama Canal without consultin' him, or *that* strike would never have happened. Tom Dolan is the headiest, squarest piece of machinery handling union men to-day, and if any one says he ain't, I'll bust his konk.

"That's the way the Rawhider explains his view of the lay of things to his boss, Foote.

" 'Well,' says Foote, sighing, 'the two Kinney crews and my night crew are going—and us about ready to dig out and back up, too, on this cut! What do *you* intend to do?'

" 'Why, me for you,' says our hero.

" 'And me, too,' his craneman chimes in.

" 'It isn't just because I'm paying you higher wages?' intimates Foote.

" 'Naw,' says the Rawhider. 'It's principle, and—other things. I won't get you in bad with the Kinney people by tellin' you raised wages.'

"With that, they struck hands, growin' maybe a little sentimental around the dong beater, so to speak. That young Foote was the original candy.

"However, it was different sorts of sentiments which the Rawhider expresses to Silvery Monahan when he calls up.

" 'I hear you ain't a-goin' out,' says Monahan.

" 'I ain't,' says the Rawhider.

" 'Are you gettin' your bonus every month?' Monahan demands.

" 'That's none o' your damn business,' was the retort.

" 'You scab,' yells Monahan, 'I'll have you blackballed!'

" 'You'll lay golden eggs,' says our hero, 'when you eat regular. I'll stay on the job!'

"That's the way our shovel man Finneganed to Monahan.

"Take it from me, though, you never can tell by lampin' a cloud whether there's rain there or merely a tornado. Foote and his shovel runner figured they'd put a silver linin' on theirs by promotin' the day craneman to the job runnin' nights; but M. Monahan he promulgates a new think.

"You see, he'd tied up the trust pretty well for the time bein'. They had to put clerks and straw bosses on their steam shovels, and you know about how much they batted. One-seventy-six, minus. Besides that, Monahan had talked all the Finns and Austrians into hittin' for two-fifty instead of two bones a day. So the trust was forced to look to independent companies like the Kinney for ore. The Kinney had hired a couple o' pretty good nonunion crews to take the place of their shovel men who had struck, and Monahan knew that if Foote kept the stripping ahead of them the Kinney was goin' to make a good bid to help the trust hang on. That is, in company with the rest o' the independent companies.

"Consequently, the morning Foote's crew dug out and the Finns were busy blockin' and tampin' the track to back up on, M. Monahan takes an embellishin' swing at the pill and burns it clear over the center-field fence.

"He does that.

"What does he do but come up to the Kinney that morning and talk our Finns into hoistin' the banner of anarchy and hydrophobia for undyin' principles and two dollars and fifty cents. The same bein' some of the rhetoric Mr. Monahan molts to the pie-eyed Finns.

"Do they fall for it? Inference—they hit the ground ahead of time. Finns and independence is brothers, and what Eye-talians Foote has is easily persuaded to join. Bein' only about ten in number, them Eye-talians takes the line o' least resistance, urged by British-government tactics and Finn brickbats.

"Well, now, wasn't it some dirty tie-up? You win. It was. They say a guy named Mark Antony moved the Frenchies to tears once when they was goin' to 'lectrocute Henry, the Eight', but he couldn't 'a' moved any ore from that pit. Not even spirits was movin'—'cept those o' rebellion and John Barleycorn.

"It like to broke Foote up. He was gray around the gills.

"'I'm willin' to compromise on two-twenty-five,' he says to Monahan. 'But I can't go higher. It'll break me.'

"'Two fifty or nothin', for you and the Kinney both,' says Silvery; so there they were.

"'Maybe,' says Foote to the Rawhider, 'I can dig up enough Eye-talian labor at Hibbing to-morrow to go on with this work. The Kinney's figurin' to ship some in if they can get 'em, too. But it's a long chance,' and he sighs. There's no strike clause in his contract and he's due for the grand toboggan if things don't brighten up real quick.

"'One thing,' says the Rawhider, 'there's nothin' to prevent us backin' up this afternoon. She's out on the track and all ready.'

"No sooner said than done. Right after dinner our hero and his craneman, with the tallow and Foote, they go up to the Buck, knock out the clamps, loosen the jacks, and get ready to move back."

"Just a moment," I broke in here. "How did you expect to propel it?"

He of the red crown stared at me. "Oh, I forgot," he grinned then. "You're from Bar Harbor. Or maybe Byrn Mawr. Them things——"

"The governor of North Carolina ——" I hastened to interrupt here, and my aid-de-camp with the apron came into prominence once more.

"Keno," said the narrator. "Now I'll resume.

"A steam shovel, Mr. Harvard, is moved, not by instinct, but by steam. There's hoisting engines to hoist the bucket, and swinging engines to swing the boom, and crane engines to thrust the sticks, to which the bucket is fastened. To move a mill, you have propelling chains running over sheaves on the truck axles to sheaves on a propelling shaft underneath the car body. This is thrown in and out o' communication with the hoisting engines by means of a clutch, and when you're diggin' this clutch is out, and when you want to move you throw it in."

"I see," I nodded profoundly.

"Yes," said Red. "I learned that out of a book. But to resume.

"They loosened the jacks—hold on, I'd better explain what them is, too. Jacks is big steel casting braces on either side of a machine, in which some thoughtful man with a college education figures they'd better put big jackscrews to keep the machine from tippin' over when the boom swings. These are screwed down tight when you're diggin' and loosened up to allow you to move. Yes. That guy was a thoughtful man.

"Now, don't get impatient, you shovel stiffs. Colleges ain't educated up to shovels yet, but maybe if some one was to ask you what repartee was, you'd think it was some kind of a flower. It ain't. It's something to eat.

"To resume. Our hero of this bunch starts to back up, goin' down the west hill from clamp to clamp without any mishap. Up to this time no Finns had appeared, but when the Rawhider opens up to walk her along the level stretch, them Finns show up along the bank. You can see the chief assets in their repetoree is scowls and medium-sized bowlders.

"Friends, that don't look so good. There's houses over them shovels, but them Finns is numerous and bilious. Some one of 'em's liable to sift a donick

through the window and make a three-cushion carom off your nut.

"But nothin' like that happens. Instead, Mr. Monahan he comes walkin' into the pit by himself.

" 'I won't stand responsible for what them Finns might do if you try to dig,' he tells Foote.

" 'We're just backin' up,' says Foote.

" 'Well, if that's all,' says Silvery, 'I guess I can hold 'em back.' And he starts as though to go away, then changes his mind. 'Could I get up and talk with that engineer of yours?' he asks.

" 'Sure,' Foote tells him. You see, Foote's got confidence in his runner.

"All this time, remember, they're rollin' back and rollin' back, with Foote, the tallow, and the craneman walkin' alongside to watch the joints and the flanges; so when Monahan gets on, they're startin' up the east grade.

"Silvery deposits himself at the head end, alongside of where our subject is at the levers front of the bulkhead, on the right-hand side. He's so oily and intimate he don't even want to stand on the runnin' board and talk through the window. No. He comes inside, so's no one can hear him.

" 'Callahan,' he says, 'you're makin' a big chump of yourself. The boys'll have you blackballed for this.'

" 'Swell chance,' says Callahan. 'I'm gettin' standard wages—one-twenty-five and forty bonus.'

" 'You're *not* gettin' standard wages!' Monahan declares. 'The new scale on the range is one-sixty-five a month.'

" 'That's what you say,' is the retort.

" 'Now don't be uppish,' Silvery comes back. 'If you'll just stop and reflect, you'll see that you're dead wrong. You ain't doin' justice to your union oath, nor yourself, nor your fellow men that's being held down in slavery by the enemy of the masses!'

"Huh! Reflect! If M. Monahan had known just what R. Callahan was reflectin' on then, he would've got right off that shovel, and gone away, and died.

"But M. Callahan don't let on. He keeps his eyes on the teeterin' boom, joggin' the swingin' lever now and then to take the weight off this or that side; and he keeps frownin' while the machine keeps backin'—frownin' like he's reflectin', you know—and finally he says, sparring for time:

" 'Well, how *is* it I ain't doin' justice to my fellow members? I ain't afraid of gettin' my bonus.'

" 'Look here,' Monahan says. 'You're one of the keynotes o' this strike. I got this place tied up temporarily, though he may call on the governor and get militia to keep the Finns away from men he brings in. But with all the men in the world what's he going to do without a shovel runner? All the scab crews are lined up now with the exception o' those already working. He'll have to make one. If you come in with us he can't keep his stripping ahead of the ore shovels—and—well, do you see the result?'

"The Rawhider did. An honest employer busted over a bonehead strike. And a chance, maybe, for M. Monahan to gouge employers for hush money to arbitrate. That's what the Rawhider sees.

"But he sees something else, too. He sees he's walkin' that ninety-five up the grade without the craneman to help him with the bucket, which is held up by blocks in the shipper-shaft pinions above the track; he sees he's gettin' along up near the top and that he's movin' over a mighty good solid track; and he sees also inward visions that are both outrageous and delicious.

"So he keeps frownin' as the machine keeps chugging back; then, just as she rolls onto the last easy grade, and the men on the ground quit put-

ting clamps on the rail, that being an apparently useless precaution now—well, then Mr. Callahan looks at Mr. Monahan, and he says, real low: 'How much of the velvet is there in it for me if you hold Foote up to arbitrate?'

"Silvery, he draws a quick breath; but he shows his hand. 'Twenty per cent,' he says, real quick.

"Pause—to let the situation soak in, as it were.

"Friends, can you see it? They're near the top. Ahead o' that Buck is about a mile o' track which drops down straight into that pit and up the other side. It was good track, too, as shovel tracks go, for it had been laid piece by piece and tamped and fairly well ballasted by an experienced track gang that laid it right along behind the shovel as she dug. Besides, it had been settled by the shovel backing over it; otherwise our hero might not have taken a chance. And there were no curves in it, either, which he likewise noticed.

"Backin' up a hill that way, you generally have a tie dragging along in front of your trucks to catch you if you start slipping a little.

"Well, back of the machine a little knob shows up at which the Rawhider lets her stall. He tried to take the slack ahead and can't, because the tie gets him; so he calls down to Foote: 'Please take that tie away—I want the slack.'

"Then he turns to Monahan. 'Make it forty per cent,' he says to him.

"'You hog, do you want the earth?' Silvery grunts; but friends, he never gets no answer.

"Them fellows had stepped clear with the tie, and, as the Rawhider throws over the reverse lever into the forward motion, he slips, maybe by accident, and his hand hits the hoisting throttle.

"Jee-roos-a-lem, Jones! There never was a man fell out of a shot tower quicker than that Buck started for the bottom of that pit!

"Query—did she roll? Oh, mamma! She *rolled!* In four turns she's makin' thirty and in eight about seventy-six, and Mr. Monahan, caught inside without a chance to jump, he comes along.

"Was he *scared?* Step right up to the end of the class, Scranton. Mr. Monahan sprouts thirty-seven gray hairs the first jump, and a case of D. T.'s.

"He had reason to. He'd been a shovel runner. Well he knew them ninety-fives. They ain't any wider than the smaller shovels, account of the standard gauge, and their booms is twice as heavy. A little jog to the right or left, especially going the way they were, and there they'd be bouncing themselves off the scenery and the shovel on top of 'em like a mass play. Also, if she jumps the track, which is a good one, but not meant for a limited, there ain't much left for those aboard her but high mass and bouquets. You shovel stiffs know that all a runner can do in a case like that is to hang onto the swinging lever, tryin' to keep her from tippin', and pray to the good Lord she stays on the track.

"So there they were, our hero froze to the swinging lever, Monahan clutchin' his shoulder, and that rockin', roarin', grindin' avalanche hurlin' itself toward glory in a hand basket."

Our conjurer paused here, leaving me hung in mid-air and picturing marred hillsides, mangled bodies, and a pile of scattered scrap iron; but he must have read my thoughts.

"No, Boston," he resumed, putting down his glass; "it don't end that way. I'll admit that that's what oughta happened, maybe, to a guy that takes them kind of chances with his employer's property and one *worthless* life in the interests of a square deal versus M. Monahan, grafter. But I guess they wasn't due to execute any acrobatic marvels over the landscape.

"What did happen was this—and it

happened P. D. Q. plus, faster than I can tell it. With the machine a-rockin' and the bank a-whistlin' by, that screechin' tornado reached the bottom level stretch before Mr. Blue Funk let go the clamps on Silvery's jaws; then, with a dyin' man's squeal, he yells: 'For God's sake, stop her! Drop the bucket—reverse her—do anything—only stop her!'

"Friends, it was delicious.

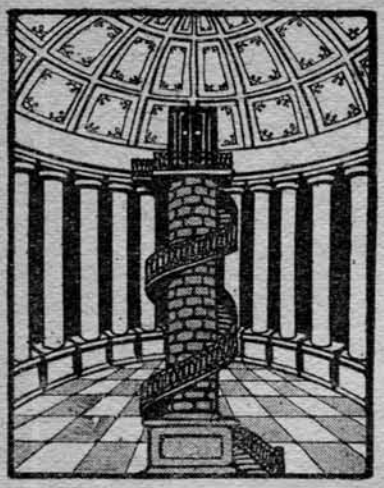
"The Buck was then makin' one-ninety-five an hour, or thereabouts. However, there's that level stretch, and Monahan knows here's a good chance to ease her up and stop the parade on the west hill. That's what he figures the Rawhider'll try to do, as maybe it ain't percolated into his cranium yet that this is a cold deck; but right away he sees, for our hero, he cuts loose of a sardonic grin, scared as he is, and he reaches for the hoisting throttle, which, of course, he's closed, and he yells out above all that roar:

"'Send back the Finns at two-twenty-five, or I'll open her up again!'"

A sigh of appreciation ran up and down the line of listeners; and this time the bartender needed no prompting.

"Well," concluded the narrator with a seraphic smile, "that's the way Mr. Callahan put the hooks into Monahan. He arbitrated. He arbitrated so thorough I had to help him off the machine when I got her stopped, a miserable, shakin' wreck.

"What? You ain't guessed it was me? Surest thing you know. The newspapers has a spiel of how the machine gets away and I saves her and the two lives by sticking at me post of duty and keepin' her from upsetting. You fellows saw what the papers said; they called me a scab hero, but I ain't. I'm Red Callahan, the Rawhider, windy at times but game by nature; and I ain't no scab, and I ain't no hero, but, by God, I'm a *man!*"



ANGEL ESQUIRE

BY EDGAR WALLACE

THE WORD OF SIX LETTERS

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Reale, an aged millionaire, who has made his money through his gambling houses, has all his property converted into money and placed in a specially constructed safe at the top of a spiral staircase, in a building specially erected to hold it. The combination to the safe is a puzzle, the key to which is held by his lawyer, Spedding. Jimmy and Massey, two men who have been his gambling partners, go to Reale to force him to divide his wealth. In a quarrel Massey kills the old man, and is himself killed. Angel Esquire, a man high up in Scotland Yard, is put on the case. Connor, another gambler, and one of the "Borough Lot" gang of criminals, kidnaps Kathleen Kent, named in Reale's peculiar will, but she is rescued by Jimmy and Angel. After the reading of the will, Jimmy, who has become deeply interested in Miss Kent, offers to help her find the puzzle word. He makes a secret call on Spedding, who has designs on the fortune for himself and has withheld certain information; the lawyer attempts to kill Jimmy, but the latter escapes, and he and Miss Kent with Angel work together in opposition to Spedding and Connor and the Borough Lot. They find that the missing word is in some old book, what or by whom they do not know. Spedding meantime has discovered that a half-witted old professor, "old George," kept by the Borough Lot as a caretaker, at one time knew Reale well, and knows the name of the book, but cannot recall it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT ATTEMPT.

THERE are supercilious critics who sneer at Scotland Yard. They are quite unofficial critics, of course, writers of stories wherein figure amateur detectives of abnormal perspicuity, unraveling, with consummate ease, mysteries which have baffled the police for years. As a matter of fact, Scotland Yard stands for the finest police organization in the world. People who speak glibly of "police blunders" might remember one curious fact: in this last quarter of a century only one man has ever stood in the dock at the Old Bailey under the capital charge who has escaped the dread sentence of the law.

Scotland Yard is patiently slow and terribly sure.

Angel, in his little room, received a letter written in a sprawling, uneducated hand; it was incoherent, and stained with tears and underlined from end to end. He read it through and examined the date stamp, then rang his bell.

The messenger who answered him found him examining a map of London. "Go to the record office, and get E. B. ninety-three," he said, and in five minutes the messenger came back with a thick folder bulging with papers.

There were newspaper cuttings and plans and dreadful photographs, the like of which the outside world do not see, and there was a little key ticketed with

an inscription. Angel looked through the dossier carefully, then read the woman's letter again.

Vinnis, the man with the dead-white face, finishing his late breakfast, and with the pleasurable rustle of new bank notes in his trouser pocket, strolled forth into Commercial Road, E. An acquaintance leaning against a public house gave him a curt nod of recognition; a bedraggled girl hurrying homeward with her man's breakfast in her apron shrank on one side, knowing Vinnis to her sorrow; a stray cur cringed up to him, as he stood for a moment at the edge of the road, and was kicked for its pains.

Vinnis was entirely without sentiment, and, besides, even though the money in his pocket compensated for most things, the memory of old George and his babbling talk worried him.

Somebody on the other side of the road attracted his attention. It was a woman, and he knew her very well, therefore he ignored her beckoning hand. Two days ago he had had occasion to reprove her, and he had seized the opportunity to dissolve summarily the informal union that had kept them together for five years. So he made no sign when the woman with the bruised face called him, but turned abruptly and walked toward Aldgate.

He did not look round, but by and by he heard the patter of her feet behind, and once his name called hoarsely. He struck off into a side street, with a raging devil inside him, then when they reached an unfrequented part of the road he turned on her.

She saw the demon in his eyes, and tried to speak. She was a penitent woman at that moment, and hysterically ripe for confession, but the savage menace of the man froze her lips.

"So," he said, his thin mouth askew, "so, after what I've said an' what I've done, you follow me, do you? Showing me up in the street, eh!"

He edged closer to her, his fist doubled, and she, poor drab, fascinated by the snakelike glare of his dull eyes, stood rooted to the spot. Then, with a snarl, he struck her—once, twice—and she fell, a huddled, moaning heap, on the pavement.

You may do things in Commercial Road, E., after "lighting-up time" that are not permissible in the broad light of the day, unless it be Saturday, and the few people who had been attracted by the promise of a row were indignant but passive, after the manner of all London crowds. Not so one quiet, middle-aged man, who confronted Vinnis, as he began to walk away.

"That was a particularly brutal thing to do," said the quiet man.

Vinnis measured him with his eye, and decided that this was not a man to be trifled with.

"I've got nothing to say to you," he said roughly, and tried to push past, but an iron grip was on his arm.

"Wait a moment, my friend," said the other steadily, "not so fast; you cannot commit a brutal assault in the open street like that without punishment. I must ask you to walk with me to the station."

"Suppose I won't go?" demanded Vinnis.

"I shall take you," said the other. "I am Detective Sergeant Jarvis, from Scotland Yard."

Vinnis thought rapidly. There wasn't much chance of escape; the street they were in was a cul-de-sac, and at the open end two policemen had made their appearance. After all, a "wife" assault was not a serious business, and the woman—well, she would swear it was an accident. He resolved to go quietly; at the worst, it would be a month, so, with a shrug of his shoulders, he accompanied the detective. A small crowd followed them to the station.

In the little steel dock he stood in his stockinged feet while a deft jailer

ran his hands over him. With a stifled oath, he remembered the money in his possession; it was only ten pounds, for he had secreted the other; but ten pounds is a lot of money to be found on a person of his class, and generally leads to embarrassing inquiries. To his astonishment, the jailer, who relieved him of the notes, seemed in no whit surprised, and the inspector at the desk took the discovery as a matter of course. Vinnis remarked on the surprising number of constables there were on duty in the charge room. Then——

"What is the charge?" asked the inspector, dipping his pen.

"Willful murder!" said a voice, and Angel Esquire crossed the room from the inspector's office. "I charge this man with having, on the night of the seventeenth of February——"

Vinnis, dumb with terror and rage, listened to the crisp tones of the detective as he detailed the particulars of an almost forgotten crime. It was the story of a country-house burglary, a manservant who surprised the thief, a fight in the dark, a shot, and a dead man lying in the big drawing-room. It was an ordinary little tragedy, forgotten by everybody save Scotland Yard; but year by year unknown men had pieced together the scraps of evidence that had come to them; strand by strand had the rope been woven that was to hang a cold-blooded murderer; last of all came the incoherent letter from a jealous woman—Scotland Yard waits always for a jealous woman—and the evidence was complete.

"Put him in number fourteen," said the inspector. Then Vinnis woke up, and the six men on duty in the charge room found their time fully occupied.

Vinnis was arrested, as Angel Esquire put it, "in the ordinary way of business." Hundreds of little things happen daily at Scotland Yard in the ordinary way of business, which, apparently unconnected one with the other, have an extraordinary knack of being in some remote fashion related. A burglary at Clapham was remarkable for the fact that a cumbersome mechanical toy was carried away, in addition to other booty. A street accident in the Kingsland Road led to the arrest of a drunken carman. In the excitement of the moment a sneak thief purloined a parcel from the van, was chased and captured. A weeping wife at the police station gave him a good character as husband and father. "Only last week he brought my boy a fine performin' donkey." An alert detective went home with her, recognized the mechanical toy from the description, and laid by the heels the notorious "Kingsland Road Lot."

The arrest of Vinnis was totally unconnected with Angel's investigations into the mystery of Reale's millions. He knew him as a "Borough man," but did not associate him with the search for the word.

None the less, there are certain formalities attached to the arrest of all bad criminals. Angel Esquire placed one or two minor matters in the hands of subordinates, and in two days one of these waited upon him in his office.

"The notes, sir," said the man, "were issued to Mr. Spedding on his private account last Monday morning. Mr. Spedding is a lawyer, of the firm of Spedding, Mortimer & Larach."

"Have you seen Mr. Spedding?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Spedding remembers drawing the money and paying it away to a gentleman who was sailing to America."

"A client?"

"So far as I can gather," said the subordinate, "the money was paid on behalf of a client for services. Mr. Spedding would not particularize."

Angel Esquire made a little grimace.

"Lawyers certainly do queer things,"

he said dryly. "Does Mr. Spedding offer any suggestion as to how the money came into this man's possession?"

"No, sir. He thinks he might have obtained it quite honestly. I understand that the man who received the money was a shady sort of customer."

"So I should imagine," said Angel Esquire.

Left alone, he sat in deep thought, drawing faces on his blotting pad.

Then he touched a bell.

"Send Mr. Carter to me," he directed, and in a few minutes a bright-faced youth, fingering an elementary mustache, was awaiting his orders.

"Carter," said Angel cautiously, "it must be very dull work in the finger-print department."

"I don't know, sir," said the other, a fairly enthusiastic ethnologist; "we've got——"

"Carter," said Angel more cautiously still, "are you on for a lark?"

"Like a bird, sir," said Carter, unconsciously humorous.

"I want a dozen men, the sort of men who won't talk to reporters, and will remain 'unofficial' so long as I want them to be," said Angel, and he unfolded his plan.

When the younger man had gone, Angel drew a triangle on the blotting pad.

"Spedding is in with the Borough Lot," he put a cross against one angle. "Spedding knows I know," he put a cross at the apex. "I know that Spedding knows I know," he marked the remaining angle. "It's Spedding's move, and he'll move damn quick!"

The assistant commissioner came into the room at that moment.

"Hello, Angel!" he said, glancing at the figures on the pad. "What's this, a new game?"

"It's an old game," said Angel truthfully, "but played in an entirely new way."

Angel was not far wrong when he surmised that Spedding's move would be immediate, and, although the detective had reckoned without an unknown factor, in the person of old George, yet a variety of circumstances combined to precipitate the act that Angel anticipated.

Not least of these was the arrest of Vinnis. After his interview with old George, Spedding had decided on a waiting policy. The old man had been taken to the house at Clapham. Spedding had been prepared to wait patiently until some freak of mind brought back the memory to the form of cryptogram he had advised. A dozen times a day he asked the old man:

"What is your name?"

"Old George, only old George," was the invariable reply, with many grins and noddings.

"But your real name, the name you had when you were a—professor."

But this would only start the old man off on a rambling reminiscence of his "munificent patron."

Connor came secretly to Clapham for orders. It was the night after Vinnis had been arrested.

"We've got to move at once, Mr. Connor," said the lawyer. Connor sat in the chair that had held Jimmy a few nights previous. "It is no use waiting for the old man to talk; the earlier plan was best."

"Has anything happened?" asked Connor. His one-time awe of the lawyer had merged in the familiarity of conspiratorship.

"There was a detective at my office to-day inquiring about some notes that were found on Vinnis. Angel Esquire will draw his own conclusions, and we have no time to lose."

"We are ready," said Connor.

"Then let it be to-morrow night. I will withdraw the guard of commission-

aires at the safe. I can easily justify myself afterward."

An idea struck Connor.

"Why not send another lot of men to relieve them? I can fix up some of the boys so that they'll look like commissionaires."

Spedding's eyes narrowed.

"Yes," he said slowly, "it could be arranged—an excellent idea."

He paced the room with long, swinging strides, his forehead puckered.

"There are two reliefs," he said, "one in the morning and one in the evening. I could send a note to the sergeant of the morning relief telling him that I had arranged for a new set of night men—I have changed them twice already, one cannot be too careful—and I could give you the necessary authority to take over charge."

"Better still," said Connor, "instruct him to withdraw, leaving the place empty, then our arrival will attract no notice. Lombard Street must be used to the commissionaires going on guard."

"That is an idea," said Spedding, and sat down to write the letter.

The night of the great project turned out miserably wet.

"So much the better," muttered Connor, viewing the world from his Kensington fastness. The room dedicated to the use of the master of the house was plainly furnished, and on the bare deal table Connor had set his whisky down while he peered through the rain-blurred windows at the streaming streets.

"England for work and Egypt for pleasure," he muttered; "and if I get my share of the money, and it will be a bigger share than my friend, Spedding, imagines, it's little this cursed country will see of Mr. Patrick Connor."

He drained off his whisky at a gulp, rubbed the steam from the windows, and looked down into the deserted street. Two men were walking toward the house. One, well covered by a heavy mackintosh cloak, moved with a long stride; the other, wrapped in a new overcoat, shuffled by his side, quickening his steps to keep up with his more energetic companion.

"Spedding," said Connor, "and old George. What is he bringing him here for?"

He hurried downstairs to let them in.

"Well?" asked Spedding, throwing his reeking coat off.

"All's ready," answered Connor. "Why have you brought the old man?"

"Oh, for company," the lawyer answered carelessly.

If the truth be told, Spedding still hoped that the old man would remember. That day old George had been exceedingly garrulous, almost lucidly so at times. Mr. Spedding still held on to the faint hope that the old man's revelations would obviate the necessity for employing the Borough Lot, and, what was more important, for sharing the contents of the safe with them.

As to this latter part of the program, Mr. Spedding had plans which would have astonished Connor had he but known.

But old George's loquacity stopped short at the all-important point of instructing the lawyer on the question of the cryptogram. He had brought him along in the hope that at the eleventh hour the old man would reveal his identity.

Unconscious of the responsibility that lay upon his foolish head, the old man sat in the upstairs room communing with himself.

"We will leave him here," said the lawyer; "he will be safe."

"Safe enough. I know him of old. He'll sit here for hours amusing himself."

"And now, what about the men?" asked the lawyer. "Where do we meet them?"

"We shall pick them up at the corner of Lombard Street, and they'll follow me to the Safe Deposit."

"Ah!"

They turned swiftly on old George, who, with his chin raised and with face alert, was staring at them.

"Safe Deposit, Lombard Street," he mumbled. "And a most excellent plan, too—a most excellent plan."

The two men held their breath.

"And quite an ingenious idea, sir. Did you say Lombard Street—a safe?" he muttered. "A safe with a word? And how to conceal the word, that's the question. I am a man of honor, you may trust me." He made a sweeping bow to some invisible presence. "Why not conceal your word thus?"

Old George stabbed the palm of his hand with a grimy forefinger.

"Why not? Have you read my book? It is only a little book, but useful, sir, remarkably useful. The drawings and the signs are most accurate. An eminent gentleman at the British Museum assisted me in its preparation. It is called—it is called——" He passed his hand wearily over his head, and slid down into his chair again, a miserable old man, muttering foolishly.

Spedding wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"Nearly, nearly!" he said huskily. "By heavens! he nearly told us."

Connor looked at him with suspicion.

"What's all this about the book?" he demanded. "This is the second time old George has spoken like this. It's to do with old Reale, isn't it?"

Spedding nodded.

"Come," said Connor, looking at his watch, "it's time we were moving. We'll leave the old man to look after the house. Here, George!"

Old George looked up.

"You'll stay here, and not leave till we return. D'ye hear?"

"I hear, Mr. Connor, sir," said old George, with his curious assumption of dignity, "and hearing, obey."

As the two men turned into the night, the rain pelted down, and a gusty northwesterly wind blew into their faces.

"George," said Connor, answering a question, "oh, we've had him for years. One of the boys found him wandering about Limehouse with hardly any clothes to his back, and brought him to us. That was before I knew the Borough Lot, but they used him as a blind. He was worth the money it cost to keep him in food."

Spedding kept the other waiting while he dispatched a long telegram from the Westbourne Grove post office. It was addressed to the master of the *Polecat* lying at Cardiff, and was reasonably unintelligible to the clerk.

They found a hansom at the corner of Queen's Road, and drove to the Bank; here they alighted, and crossed to the Royal Exchange. Some men in uniform overcoats who were standing about exchanged glances with Connor, and as the two leaders doubled back to Lombard Street, followed them at a distance.

"The guard left at four o'clock," said Spedding, fitting the key of the heavy outer door. He waited a few minutes in the inky-black darkness of the vestibule while Connor admitted the six uniformed men who had followed them.

"Are we all here?" said Connor, in a low voice. "Bat? Here! Goyle? Here! Lamby? Here!"

One by one he called them by their names, and they answered.

"We may as well have a light," said Spedding, and felt for the switch.

The gleam of the electric lamps showed Spedding as pure a collection of scoundrels as ever disgraced the uniform of a gallant corps.

"Now," said Spedding, in level tones, "are all the necessary tools here?"

Bat's grin was the answer.

"If we can get an electric connec-

tion," he said, "we'll burn out the lock in half——"

Spedding had walked to the inner door that led to the great hall, and was fumbling with the keys. Suddenly he started back.

"Hark!" he whispered. "I heard a step in the hall."

Connor listened.

"I hear nothing——" he began, when the inner door was thrown open, and a commissionaire, revolver in hand, stepped out.

"Stand!" he cried. Then, recognizing Spedding, dropped the muzzle of his pistol.

White with rage, Spedding stood amid his ill-assorted bodyguard. In the searching white light of the electric lamps there was no mistaking their character. He saw the commissionaire eying them curiously.

"I understood," he said slowly, "that the guard had been relieved."

"No, sir," said the man, and the cluster of uniformed men at the door of the inner hall confirmed this.

"I sent orders this afternoon," said Spedding, between his teeth.

"No orders have been received, sir," and the lawyer saw the scrutinizing eye of the solitary sentry pass over his confederates.

"Is this the relief?" asked the guard, not attempting to conceal the contempt in his tone.

"Yes," said the lawyer.

As the sentry saluted and disappeared into the hall, Spedding drew Connor aside.

"This is ruin," he said quickly. "The safe must be cleared to-night. To-morrow, London will not hold me."

The sentry reappeared at the doorway and beckoned them in. They shuffled into the great hall, where, in the half darkness, the safe loomed up from its rocky pedestal, an eerie, mysterious thing. He saw Bat Sands glancing uncomfortably around the dim spaces of the building, and felt the impression of the loneliness.

A man who wore the stripes of a sergeant came up.

"Are we to withdraw, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," said Spedding shortly.

"Will you give us a written order?" asked the man.

Spedding hesitated, then drew out a pocketbook and wrote a few hasty words on a sheet, tore it out, and handed it to the man.

The sergeant looked at it carefully.

"You haven't signed it, or dated it, either," he said respectfully, and handed it back.

Spedding cursed him under his breath, and rectified the omissions.

"Now you may go."

In the half light, for only one solitary electrolier illuminated the vast hall, he thought the man was smiling. It might have been a trick of the shadows, for he could not see his face.

"And am I to leave you alone?" said the sergeant.

"Yes."

"Is it safe?" the noncommissioned officer asked quietly.

"Curse you, what do you mean?" cried the lawyer.

"Well," said the other easily, "I see you have Connor with you, a notorious thief and blackmailer."

The lawyer was dumb.

"And Bat Sands. How d'ye do, Bat? How did they treat you in Borstal, or was it Parkhurst?" drawled the sergeant. "And there's the gentle Lamby trying hard to look military in an overcoat too large for him. That's not the uniform you're used to wearing, Lamby, eh?"

From the group of men at the door came a genuinely amused laugh.

"Guard the outer door, one of you chaps," said the sergeant, and, turning again to Spedding's men: "Here we have our respected friend, Curt Goyle."

He stooped and picked up a bag that Bat had placed gingerly on the floor.

"What a bag of tricks!" the sergeant cooed; "diamond bits and dynamite cartridges and—what's this little thing, Bat—an ark? It is. By Jove! I congratulate you on the swag."

Spedding had recovered his nerve, and strode forward. He was playing for the greatest stake in the world.

"You shall be punished for this insolence!" he stormed.

"Not at all," said the imperturbable sergeant.

Somebody at the door spoke.

"Here's another one, sergeant," and pushed a queer old figure into the hall, a figure that blinked and peered from face to face.

He espied Spedding, and ran up to him, almost fawning.

"The Safe Deposit—in Lombard Street," he cackled joyously. "You see, I remembered, dear friend; and I've come to tell you about the book—my book, you know. My munificent patron who desired a puzzle word——"

The sergeant started forward.

"My God!" he cried. "The professor!"

"Yes, yes," chuckled the old man; "that's what he called me. He bought a copy of my book—two sovereigns, four sovereigns he gave me. The book—what was it called?"

The old man paused, and clasped both hands to his head.

"A Study—a Study," he said painfully, *"on the Origin of—the Alphabet.* Ah!"

Another of the commissionaries had come forward as the old man began speaking, and to him the sergeant turned.

"Make a note of that, Jimmy," the sergeant said.

Spedding reeled back as though he had been struck.

"Angel!" he gasped.

"That's me," was the ungrammatical reply.

Crushed, cowed, beaten, and powerless, Spedding awaited judgment. What form it would take he could not guess; that it would effectively ruin him he did not doubt. The trusted lawyer stood self-condemned. There was no explaining away his companions; there could be no mistaking the meaning of their presence.

"Send your men away," said Angel.

A wild hope seized the lawyer. The men were not to be arrested; there was a chance for him.

The Borough Lot needed no second ordering; they trooped through the doorway, anxious to reach the open air before Angel changed his mind.

"You may go," said Angel to Connor, who still lingered.

"If the safe is to be opened, I'm in it," was the sullen reply.

"You may go," said Angel; "the safe will not be opened to-night."

"I——"

"Go!" thundered the detective, and Connor slunk away.

Angel beckoned the commissionaire who had first interrogated Spedding.

"Take charge of that bag, Carter. There are all sorts of things in it that go off." Then he turned to the lawyer.

"Mr. Spedding, there is a great deal that I have to say to you, but it would be better to defer our conversation; the genuine guard will return in a few minutes. I told them to return at ten o'clock."

"By what authority?" blustered Spedding.

"Tush!" said Angel wearily. "Surely we have got altogether beyond that stage. Your order for withdrawal was expected by me. I waited upon the sergeant of the guard with another order."

"A forged order, I gather?" said Spedding, recovering his balance. "Now

I see why you have allowed my men to go. I overrated your generosity."

"The order," said Angel soberly, "was signed by his majesty's secretary of state for home affairs"—he tapped the astonished lawyer on the shoulder—"and if it would interest you to know, I have a warrant in my pocket for the arrest of every man jack of you. That I do not put it into execution is a matter of policy."

The lawyer scanned the calm face of the detective in bewilderment.

"What do you want of me?" he asked at length.

"Your presence at Jimmy's flat at ten o'clock to-morrow morning," replied Angel.

"I will be there," said the other, and turned to go.

"And, Mr. Spedding," called Jimmy, as the lawyer reached the door, "in regard to a boat you have chartered from Cardiff, I think you need not go any further in the matter. One of my men is at present interviewing the captain, and pointing out to him the enormity of the offense of carrying fugitives from justice to Spanish-American ports."

"Damn you!" said Spedding, and slammed the door.

Jimmy removed the commissionaire's cap from his head and grinned.

"One of these fine days, Angel, you'll lose your job, introducing the home secretary's name. Phew!"

"It had to be done," said Angel sadly. "It hurts me to lie, and I couldn't very well tell Spedding that the sergeant of the commissionaires had been one of my own men all along, could I?"

CHAPTER X.

SOME BAD CHARACTERS.

It happened that on the night of the great attempt the inquisitive Mr. Lane, of 76 Cawdor Street, was considerably exercised in his mind as to the depleted condition of his modest treasury. With Mr. Lane the difference between affluence and poverty was a matter of shillings. His line of business was a humble one. Lead piping and lengths of telephone wire, an occasional doormat improvidently left outside while the servant cleaned the hall, these represented the scope and extent of his prey. Perhaps he reached his zenith when he lifted an overcoat from a hatstand what time a benevolent old lady was cutting him thick slices of bread and butter in a basement kitchen.

Mr. Lane had only recently returned from a short stay in Wormwood Scrubbs Prison. It was over a trifling affair of horsehair abstracted from railway carriage cushions that compelled Mr. Lane's retirement for two months. It was that same affair that brought about his undoing on the night of the attempt.

For the kudos of the railway theft had nerved him to more ambitious attempts, and with an exhausted exchequer to urge him forward, and the prestige of his recent achievements to support him, he decided upon burglary. It was a wild and reckless departure from his regular line, and he did not stop to consider the disabilities attached to a change of profession, nor debate the unpropitious conditions of an already overstocked labor market.

It is reasonable to suppose that Mr. Lane lacked the necessary qualities of logic and balance to argue any point to its obvious conclusion, for he was, intellectually, the reverse of brilliant, and was, therefore, ill equipped for introspective or psychological examination of the circumstances leading to his decision. Communing with himself, the inquisitive Mr. Lane put the matter tersely and brutally:

"Lead pipin's no go unless you've got a pal to work with; telephone wires is so covered up with wood casin' that it's

worse'n hard work to pinch twopenn'oth. I'm goin' to have a cut at Joneses."

So in the pelting rain he watched "Joneses" from a convenient doorway. He noted with satisfaction the "workmen" departing one by one; he observed with joy the going of "Jones" himself; and when, some few minutes afterward, the queer-looking old man, whom he suspected as being a sort of caretaker, came shuffling out, slamming the gate behind him, and peering left and right, and mumbling to himself as he squelched through the rain, the watcher regarded the removal of this final difficulty as being an especial act of Providence.

He waited for another half hour, because, for some reason or other, the usually deserted street became annoyingly crowded. First came a belated coal cart and a miserably bedraggled carman, who cried his wares dolefully. Then a small boy, escaping from the confines of his domestic circle, came to revel in the downpour and wade ecstatically but thoroughly through the puddles that had formed on the uneven surface of the road. Nemesis, in the shape of a shrill-voiced mother, overtook the boy and sent him whining and expectant to the heavy hand of maternal authority. With the coast clear, Mr. Lane lost no time.

In effecting an entrance to the headquarters of the Borough Lot, Mr. Lane's method lacked subtlety. He climbed over the gate leading to the yard, trusting inwardly that he was not observed, but taking his chance. Had he been an accomplished burglar, with the experience of any exploits behind him, he would have begun by making a very thorough inspection of likely windows. Certainly, he would never have tried the "office" door. Being the veriest tyro, and being conscious, moreover, that his greatest feats had connection with doors carelessly left ajar, he tried the door, and to his delight it opened.

Again the skilled craftsman would have suspected some sort of treachery, and might have withdrawn; but Mr. Lane, recognizing in the fact that the old man had forgotten to fasten the door behind him only yet another proof of that benevolent Providence which exerts itself for the express service of men "in luck," entered boldly. He lit a candle stump and looked around.

The signs of that wealth which is the particular possession of "master men" were not evident. Indeed, the floor of the passage was uncarpeted, and the walls bare of picture or ornament. Nor was the "office," a little room leading from the "passage," any more prolific of result. Such fixtures as there were had apparently been left behind by the previous tenant, and these were thick with dust.

"Bah!" said the inquisitive Mr. Lane scornfully, and his word echoed hollowly as in an empty house.

With the barren possibilities of his exploit before him, Mr. Lane's spirits fell.

He was of the class, to whom reference has already been made, that looked in awe and reverence toward the Borough Lot in the same spirit as the youthful curate might regard the consistory of bishops. In his cups—pewter cups they were, with frothing heads atop—he was wont to boast that his connection with the Borough Lot was both close and intimate. A rumor that went around to the effect that the "mouthpiece" who defended him at the closing of the unsatisfactory horsehair episode had been paid for by the Borough Lot he did not trouble to contradict.

If he had known any of them, even by sight, he would not at that moment have been effecting a burglarious entry into their premises.

Room after room he searched. He

found the ill-furnished bedroom of Connor, and the room where old George slept on an uncleanly mattress. He found, too, the big room where the Lot held their informal meetings, but nothing portable. Nothing that a man might slip under his coat, and walk boldly out of the front door with. No little article of jewelry that your wife might carry to a pawnbroker's with a long face and a longer story of a penury that forced her to part with her dear mother's last gift. None of these, noted Mr. Lane bitterly, and with every fresh disappointment he breathed the harder.

For apart from the commercial aspect of this, his burglary, there was the sickening humiliation of failure. An imaginative man, he had already invented the story he was to tell to a few select cronies in sneak-thief division. He had rehearsed mentally a scene where, with an air of nonchalance, he drew a handful of golden sovereigns from his pocket and ordered drinks round. And while they were sipping his drinks, smirking respectfully, he would have confided to them the fact that he had been duly, and with all ceremony, installed a full-fledged member of the Borough Lot.

Of the irony of the situation he was ignorant. A qualified burglar would have completed a systematic examination of the premises in ten minutes, but Mr. Lane was not so qualified. In consequence he dawdled from room to room, going back to this room to make sure, and returning to that room to be absolutely certain that nothing had been overlooked. Oblivious of the flight of time, he stood irresolutely in the topmost room of the house when the real adventure of the evening began.

He heard the click of a lock—he had thoughtfully closed the office door behind him—and a voice, and his heart leaped into his throat. He heard a voice, a voice hoarse with rage, and another, and yet another.

Mr. Lane realized, from the stamping of feet on the stairs, that half a dozen men had come into the house; from their language he gathered they were annoyed.

Then he heard something that froze his blood, and turned his marrow to water.

It had begun in a rumble of hoarse, undistinguishable words, and ended in the phrase that caught his ear:

"He's sold us, I tell ye! Put spies on us! He led us into the trap, curse him——"

He heard another voice speaking in a lower tone:

"What are we worth? You're a fool! What d'ye think we're worth? Ain't we the Borough Lot? Don't he know enough to hang two or three of us? It's Connor and his pal, the big lawyer——"

The Borough Lot!

The paralyzing intelligence came to Mr. Lane, and he held on to the bare mantelshelf for support. Spies! Suppose they discovered him, and mistook him for a spy! His hair rose at the thought. He knew them well enough by repute. Overmuch hero worship had invested them with qualities for evil which they may or may not have possessed.

There might be a chance of escape. The tumult below continued. Scraps of angry talk came floating up.

Mr. Lane looked out of the window; the drop into the street was too long, and there was no sign of rope in the house.

Cautiously he opened the door of the room. The men were in the room beneath that in which he stood. The staircase that led to the street must take him past their door.

Mr. Lane was very anxious to leave the house. He had unwittingly stepped into a hornets' nest, and wanted to make his escape without disturbing the inmates. Now was the time—or never.

While the angry argument continued, a creaking stair board or so might not attract attention.

But he made no allowance for the gifts of these men—gifts of sight and hearing. Bat Sands, in the midst of his tirade, saw the uplifted finger and head jerk of Goyle. He did not check his flow of invective, but edged toward the door; then he stopped short, and, flinging the door open, he caught the scared Mr. Lane by the throat, and, dragging him into the room, threw him upon the ground and knelt on him.

"What are ye doing here?" he whispered fiercely.

Mr. Lane, with protruding eyes, saw the pitiless faces about him, saw Goyle lift a life preserver from the table and turn half round the better to strike, and fainted.

"Stop that!" growled Bat, with outstretched hand. "The little swine has fainted. Who is he? Do any of you fellers know him?"

It was the wizened-faced man whom Angel had addressed as Lamby, who furnished the identification.

"He's a little crook—name of Lane."

"Where does he come from?"

"Oh, hereabouts. He was in the Scrubbs in my time," said Lamby.

They regarded the unconscious burglar in perplexity.

"Go through his pockets," suggested Goyle.

It happened—and this was the most providential happening of the day from Mr. Lane's point of view—that when he had decided upon embarking on his career of high-class crime, he had thoughtfully provided himself with a few homemade instruments. It was the little poker with flattened end to form a jimmy and the center bit that was found in his pocket that in all probability saved Mr. Lane's life.

Lombroso and other great criminologists have given it out that your true degenerate has no sense of humor, but on two faces at least there was a broad grin when the object of the little man's visit was revealed.

"He came to burgle Connor," said Bat admiringly. "Here, pass over the whisky, one of ye!"

He forced a little down the man's throat, and Mr. Lane blinked and opened his eyes in a frightened stare.

"Stand up," commanded Bat, "an' give an account of yourself, young feller. What d'ye mean by breaking into this——"

"Never mind about that," Goyle interrupted savagely. "What has he heard when he was sneaking outside? —that's the question."

"Nothin', gentlemen!" gasped the unfortunate Mr. Lane, "on me word, gentlemen! I've been in trouble, like yourselves, an'——"

He realized he had blundered.

"Oh," said Goyle, with ominous calm, "so you've been in trouble like us, have you?"

"I mean——"

"I know what you mean," hissed the other; "you mean you've been listenin' to what we've been saying, you little skunk, and you're ready to bleat to the first copper."

It might have gone hard with Mr. Lane but for the opportune arrival of the messenger. Bat went downstairs at the knock, and the rest stood quietly listening. They expected Connor, and when his voice did not sound on the stairs they looked at one another questioningly. Bat came into the room with a yellow envelope in his hand. He passed it to Goyle. Reading was not an accomplishment of his. Goyle read it with difficulty:

"Do the best you can. I'm lying 'doggo.'"

"What does that mean?" snarled Goyle, holding the message in his hand and looking at Bat. "Hidin', is he—and we've got to do the best we can?"

Bat reached for his overcoat. He did not speak as he struggled into it,

nor until he had buttoned it deliberately.

"It means—git!" he said shortly. "It means run, or else it means time, an' worse than time."

He swung round to the door.

"Connor's hidin'," he stopped to say. "When Connor starts hiding the place is getting hot. There's nothing against me, so far as I know, except——"

His eyes fell on the form of Mr. Lane. He had raised himself to a sitting position on the floor, and now, with disheveled hair and outstretched legs, he sat, the picture of despair.

Goyle intercepted the glance.

"What about him?" he asked.

"Leave him," said Bat; "we've got no time for fooling with him."

A motor car came buzzing down Cawdor Street, which was unusual. They heard the grind of its brakes outside the door, and that in itself was sufficiently alarming. Bat extinguished the light, and cautiously opened the shutters. He drew back with an oath.

"What's that?" Goyle whispered.

Bat made no reply, and they heard him open his match box.

"What are you doing?" whispered Goyle fiercely.

"Light the lamp," said the other.

The tinkle of glass followed as he removed the chimney, and in the yellow light Bat faced the Borough Lot.

"U—P spells 'up,' an' that's what the game is," he said calmly. He was searching his pockets as he spoke. "I want a light because there's one or two things in my pocket that I've got to burn—quick!"

After some fumbling, he found a paper. He gave it a swift examination, then he struck a match and carefully lit the corner.

"It's the fairest cop," he went on. "The street's full of police, and Angel ain't playing 'gamblin' raids' this time."

There was a heavy knock on the door, but nobody moved. Goyle's face had gone livid. He knew better than any man there how impossible escape was. That had been one of the drawbacks to the house—the ease with which it could be surrounded. He had pointed out the fact to Connor before.

Again the knock.

"Let 'em open it," said Bat grimly, and as though the people outside had heard the invitation, the door crashed in, and there came a patter as of men running on the stairs.

First to enter the room was Angel. He nodded to Bat coolly, then stepped aside to allow the policemen to follow.

"I want you," he said briefly.

"What for?" asked Sands.

"Breaking and entering," said the detective. "Put out your hands!"

Bat obeyed. As the steel stirrup-shaped irons snapped on his wrists he asked:

"Have you got Connor?"

Angel smiled.

"Connor lives to fight another day," he said quietly.

The policemen who attended him were busy with the other occupants of the room.

"Bit of a field day for you, Mr. Angel," said the thin-faced Lamby pleasantly. "Thought you was goin' to let us off?"

"Jumping at conclusions hastily is a habit to be deplored," said Angel sententiously. Then he saw the panic-stricken Mr. Lane.

"Hullo, what's this?" he demanded.

Mr. Lane had at that moment the inspiration of his life. Since he was by fortuitous circumstances involved in this matter, and since it could make very little difference one way or the other what he said, he seized the fame that lay to his hand.

"I am one of the Borough Lot," he said, and was led out proud and handcuffed with the knowledge that he had established beyond dispute his title to consideration as a desperate criminal.

Mr. Spedding was a man who thought quickly. Ideas and plans came to him as dross and diamonds come to the man at the sorting table, and he had the faculty of selection. He saw the police system of England as only the police themselves saw it, and he had an open mind upon Angel's action. It was within the bounds of possibility that Angel had acted with full authority; it was equally possible that Angel was bluffing.

Mr. Spedding had two courses before him, and they were both desperate; but he must be sure in how, so far, his immediate liberty depended upon the whim of a deputy assistant commissioner of police.

Angel had mentioned a supreme authority. It was characteristic of Spedding that he should walk into a mine to see how far the fuse had burned. In other words, he hailed the first cab, and drove to the House of Commons.

The Right Honorable George Chandler Middleborough, his majesty's secretary of state for home affairs, is a notoriously inaccessible man; but he makes exceptions, and such an exception he made in favor of Spedding. For eminent solicitors do not come down to the House at ten o'clock in the evening to gratify an idle curiosity, or to be shown over the House, or beg patronage and interest; and when a business card is marked "most urgent," and that card stands for a staple representative of an important profession, the request for an interview is not easily refused.

Spedding was shown into the minister's room, and the home secretary rose with a smile. He knew Mr. Spedding by sight, and had once dined in his company.

"Er——" he began, looking at the card in his hand. "What can I do for you—at this hour?" He smiled again.

"I have called to see you in the matter of the late Mr. Reale." He saw and watched the minister's face. Beyond looking a little puzzled, the home secretary made no sign.

"Good!" thought Spedding, and breathed with more freedom.

"I'm afraid——" said the minister. He got no farther, for Spedding was at once humility, apology, and embarrassment.

What! Had the home secretary not received his letter? A letter dealing with the estate of Reale? You can imagine the distress and vexation on Mr. Spedding's face as he spoke of the criminal carelessness of his clerk, his attitude of helplessness, his recognition of the absolute impossibility of discussing the matter until the secretary had received the letter, and his withdrawal, leaving behind him a sympathetic minister of state who would have been pleased—would have been delighted, my dear sir, to have helped Mr. Spedding if he'd received the letter in time to consider its contents. Mr. Spedding was an inventive genius, and it might have been in reference to him that the motherhood of invention was first identified with dire necessity.

Out again in the courtyard, Spedding found a cab that carried him to his club.

"Angel bluffed!" he reflected, with an inward smile. "My friend, you are risking that nice appointment of yours."

He smiled again, for it occurred to him that his risk was the greater.

"Two millions!" he murmured. "It is worth it. I could do a great deal with two millions."

He got down at his club, and tendered the cabman the legal fare to a penny.

CHAPTER XI.

THE QUEST OF THE BOOK.

When Piccadilly Circus, a blaze of light, was thronged with the crowds that the theaters were discharging, a motor car came gingerly through the

traffic, passed down Regent Street, and, swinging along Pall Mall, headed southward across Westminster Bridge.

The rain had ceased, but underfoot the roads were soddened, and the car bespattered its occupants with black mud.

The chauffeur at the wheel turned as the car ran smoothly along the tramway lines in the Old Kent Road and asked a question, and one of the two men in the back of the car consulted the other.

"We will go to Cramer's first," said the man.

Old Kent Road was a fleeting vision of closed shops, of little knots of men emerging from public houses at the potman's strident command; Lewisham High Road, as befits that very respectable thoroughfare, was decorously sleeping; Lea, where the hedges begin, was silent; and Chislehurst was a place of the dead.

Near the common the car pulled up at a big house standing in black quietude, and the two occupants of the car descended and passed through the stiff gate, along the graveled path, and came to a stop at the broad porch.

"I don't know what old Mauder will say," said Angel as he fumbled for the bell. "He's a methodical old chap."

In the silence they could hear the thrill of the electric bell. They waited a few minutes, and rang again. Then they heard a window opened and a sleepy voice demand:

"Who is there?"

Angel stepped back from the porch and looked up.

"Hullo, Mauder! I want you. I'm Angel."

"The devil!" said a surprised voice. "Wait a bit. I'll be down in a jiffy!"

The pleasant-faced man, who, in dressing gown and pajamas opened the door to them and conducted them to a cozy library, was Mr. Ernest Mauder himself. It is unnecessary to introduce that world-famous publisher to the reader, the more particularly in view of the storm of controversy that burst about his robust figure in regard to the recent publication of Count Lehoff's embarrassing "Memoirs." He made a sign to the two men to be seated, nodding to Jimmy as to an old friend.

"I am awfully sorry to disturb you at this rotten hour," Angel commenced, and the other arrested his apology with a gesture.

"You detective people are so fond of springing surprises on us unintelligent outsiders," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, "that I am almost tempted to startle you."

"It takes a lot to startle me," said Angel complacently.

"You've brought it on your own head," warned the publisher, wagging a forefinger at the smiling Angel. "Now let me tell you why you have motored down from London on this miserable night on a fairly fruitless errand."

"Eh?" The smile left Angel's face.

"Ah, I thought that would startle you! You've come about a book?"

"Yes," said Jimmy wonderingly.

"A book published by our people nine years ago?"

"Yes," the wonderment deepening on the faces of the two men.

"The title," said the publisher impressively, "is 'A Short Study on the Origin of the Alphabet,' and the author is a half-mad old don, who was subsequently turned out of Oxford for drunkenness."

"Mauder," said Jimmy, gazing at his host in bewilderment, "you've hit it—but——"

"Ah," said the publisher, triumphant, "I thought that was it. Well, your search is fruitless. We only printed five hundred copies; the book was a failure—the same ground was more effectively covered by better books. I found a dusty old copy a few years

ago, and gave it to my secretary. So far as I know, that is the only copy in existence."

"But your secretary?" said Angel eagerly. "What is his name? Where does he live?"

"It's not a 'he,'" said Mauder, "but a 'she.'"

"Her name?"

"If you had asked that question earlier in the evening I could not have told you," said Mauder, obviously enjoying the mystery he had created, "but since then my memory has been refreshed. The girl—and a most charming lady, too—was my secretary for two years. I do not know what induced her to work, but I rather think she supported an invalid father."

"What is her name?" asked Angel impatiently.

"Kathleen Kent," replied the publisher, "and her address is——"

"Kathleen Kent!" repeated Jimmy, in wide-eyed astonishment. "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!"

"Kathleen Kent!" repeated Angel, with a gasp. "Well, that takes the everlasting biscuit! But," he added quickly, "how did you come to know of our errand?"

"Well," drawled the elder man, wrapping his dressing gown round him more snugly, "it was a guess to an extent. You see, Angel, when a man has been already awakened out of a sound sleep to answer mysterious inquiries about an out-of-date book——"

"What!" cried Jimmy, jumping up. "Somebody has already been here?"

"It is only natural," the publisher went on, "to connect his errand with that of the second midnight intruder."

"Who has been here? For Heaven's sake, don't be funny; this is a serious business."

"Nobody has been here," said Mauder, "but an hour ago a man called me up on the telephone——"

Jimmy looked at Angel, and Angel looked at Jimmy.

"Jimmy," said Angel penitently, "write me down as a fool! Telephone! Heavens, I didn't know you were connected."

"Nor was I till last week," said the publisher, "nor will I be after to-morrow. Sleep is too precious a gift to be dissipated——"

"Who was the man?" demanded Angel.

"I couldn't quite catch his name. He was very apologetic. I gathered that he was a newspaper man, and wanted particulars in connection with the death of the author."

Angel smiled.

"The author's alive all right," he said grimly. "How did the voice sound—a little pompous, with a clearing of the throat before each sentence?"

The other nodded.

"Spedding!" said Angel, rising. "We haven't any time to lose, Jimmy."

Mauder accompanied them into the hall.

"One question," said Jimmy, as he fastened the collar of his motor coat. "Can you give us any idea of the contents of the book?"

"I can't," was the reply. "I have a dim recollection that much of it was purely conventional, that there were some rough drawings, and the earlier forms of the alphabet were illustrated—the sort of thing you find in encyclopedias or in the back pages of teachers' Bibles."

The two men took their seats in the car as it swung round and turned its bright head lamps toward London.

"'I found this puzzle in a book
From which some mighty truths were took.'"

murmured Angel in his companion's ear, and Jimmy nodded. He was at that moment utterly oblivious and careless of the fortune that awaited them in the great safe at Lombard Street. His mind was filled with anxiety concern-

ing the girl who unconsciously held the word which might to-morrow make her an heiress. Spedding had moved promptly, and he would be aided, he did not doubt, by Connor and the ruffians of the Borough Lot. If the book was still in the girl's possession they would have it, and they would make their attempt at once.

His mind was full of dark forebodings, and although the car bounded through the night at full speed, and the rain which had commenced to fall again cut his face, and the momentum of the powerful machine took his breath away, it went all too slowly for his mood.

One incident relieved the monotony of the journey. As the car flew round a corner in an exceptionally narrow lane it almost crashed into another car, which, driven at breakneck speed, was coming in the opposite direction. A fleeting exchange of curses between the chauffeurs, and the cars passed.

By common consent, they had headed for Kathleen's home. Streatham was deserted. As they turned the corner of the quiet road in which the girl lived, Angel stopped the car and alighted. He lifted one of the huge lamps from the socket and examined the road.

"There has been a car here less than half an hour ago," he said, pointing to the unmistakable track of wheels. They led to the door of the house.

He rang the bell, and it was almost immediately answered by an elderly lady, who, wrapped in a loose dressing gown, bade him enter.

"Nobody seems to be surprised to see us to-night," thought Angel, with bitter humor.

"I am Detective Angel, from Scotland Yard," he announced himself, and the elderly lady seemed unimpressed.

"Kathleen has gone," she informed him cheerfully.

Jimmy heard her with a sinking at his heart.

"Yes," said the old lady, "Mr. Spedding, the eminent solicitor, called for her an hour ago, and"—she grew confidential—"as I know you gentlemen are very much interested in the case, I may say that there is every hope that before to-morrow my niece will be in possession of her fortune."

Jimmy groaned.

"Please go on," said Angel.

"It came about over a book which Kathleen had given her some years ago, and which most assuredly would have been lost but for my carefulness."

Jimmy cursed her "carefulness" under his breath.

"When we moved here after the death of Kathleen's poor father I had a great number of things stored. There were among these an immense quantity of books, which Kathleen would have sold, but which I thought——"

"Where are these stored?" asked Angel quickly.

"At an old property of ours—the only property my poor brother had remaining," she replied sadly, "and that because it was in too dilapidated a condition to attract buyers."

"Where, where?" Angel realized the rudeness of his impatience. "Forgive me, madam," he said, "but it is absolutely necessary that I should follow your niece at once."

"It is on the Tonbridge Road," she answered stiffly. "So far as I can remember, it is somewhere between Crawley and Tonbridge, but I am not sure. Kathleen knows the place well; that is why she has gone."

"Somewhere on the Tonbridge Road!" repeated Angel helplessly.

"We could follow the car's tracks," said Jimmy.

Angel shook his head.

"If this rain is general, they will be obliterated," he replied.

They stood a minute, Jimmy biting

the soddened finger of his glove, and Angel staring into vacancy. Then Jimmy demanded unexpectedly:

"Have you a Bible?"

The old lady allowed the astonishment she felt at the question to be apparent.

"I have several."

"A teacher's Bible, with notes?" he asked.

She thought.

"Yes, there is such a one in the house. Will you wait?"

She left the room.

"We should have told the girl about Spedding—we should have told her," said Angel in despair.

"It's no use crying over spilled milk," said Jimmy quietly. "The thing to do now is to frustrate Spedding and rescue the girl."

"Will he dare——"

"He'll dare. Oh, yes, he'll dare," said Jimmy. "He's worse than you think, Angel."

"But he is already a ruined man."

"The more reason why he should go a step farther. He's been on the verge of ruin for months; I've found that out. I made inquiries the other day, and discovered he's in a hole that the dome of St. Paul's wouldn't fill. He's a trustee or something of the sort for an association that has been pressing him for money. Spedding will dare anything"—he paused then—"but if he dares to harm that girl he's a dead man."

The old lady came in at that moment with the book, and Jimmy hastily turned over the pages.

Near the end he came upon something that brought a gleam to his eye.

He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a notebook. He did not wait to pull up a chair, but sank on his knees by the side of the table and wrote rapidly, comparing the text with the drawings in the book.

Angel, leaning over, followed the work breathlessly.

"There—and there—and there!" cried Angel exultantly. "What fools we were, Jimmy, what fools we were!"

Jimmy turned to the lady.

"May I borrow this book?" he asked. "It will be returned. Thank you! Now, Angel," he looked at his watch and made a move for the door, "we have two hours. We will take the Tonbridge Road by daybreak."

Only one other person did they disturb on that eventful night, and that was a peppery old colonel of marine, who lives at Blackheath.

There, before the hastily attired old officer, as the dawn broke, Angel explained his mission, and, writing with feverish haste, subscribed to the written statement by oath. Whereupon the justice of the peace issued a warrant for the arrest of Joseph James Spedding, solicitor, on a charge of felony.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

THE STRANGE DOINGS OF MISTER QUINLAN

• BY CHARLES S. SIEGRIST •

"POP" McCLUNG slowly drew the big mitt from his hand and slapped it enthusiastically toward the players' bench, nodding brief dismissal to the blond young giant who had been pitching to him for the last half hour.

"Going a bit better to-day, Quinnie," he called good-humoredly, his ready sympathy reading the hunger for encouragement in the youngster's eyes. He turned around, smiling at "Scrappy Bill" Joslin, the peppery manager of the High Rollers.

"Well, Pop," began the manager, scratching his head thoughtfully, "there's one bush leaguer that beats me. I thought I'd wised up to all there was to know about baseball, but I never saw such class drop out of the clouds before. That kid, Quinlan, has speed to burn, curves, control, and a spitter that will make 'Crab' Wagner break his back reaching for it."

"Yes-s-s," hesitatingly agreed the old-timer, "he's got everything that any portsider ever had—so far as we know now. Question is, has he got nerve; can he stand the gaff?"

"Only putting him under fire will show that. If he falls down that will explain why we never heard of him before, and the can for his." Joslin started to move toward the plate, where Kincade, veteran right-hander of the pitching staff, was fungo batting to a horde of ambitious recruits in the field. Pop McClung stopped him.

"I ain't so certain that even that will tell," he began. "I remember Cy Murphy—he was before your time, Scrappy—got sent back to the minors three years before I gave him a regular chance. That was fifteen years ago, when I managed the Canaries. He had everything a ball player could want, and fielded his position as well as he batted, which was three hundred or thereabouts. But, somehow, every time he went in the box he blew up—had everything, but just naturally blew up a mile. I tried him out in six games before benching him. Still, I wasn't satisfied that he was yellow. I sent out a scout to the towns where he'd worked before, and they made reports to me.

"Then I saw what was behind it all. Murphy was so blamed miserly that the fear of losing the fat salary he made in the big circuit had got him so scart he couldn't do a thing. I called him into my room one night, and put it up to him—told him what I knew. Then I went after him. I made a regular spendthrift out of Murphy, made him spend money to hang on to his job. It was like pulling teeth, but he figured out that, even the way it flew, he was making more than he would in the minors. Well, Scrappy, it made Murphy the finest pitcher I've ever worked with."

"Meaning that young Quinlan is a miser?" queried the manager, smiling

broadly. He knew the deep insight into human nature which Pop McClung had gained through his wanderings, his intimate associations with men, and loved him for the quality quite as much as for his whole-souled nature.

"If money was blood," slowly answered the old-time coach, "you could scratch this young fellow clean to the heart and not draw a drop. If you'd step on a wad of chewing gum, Scrappy, it wouldn't be half as close to your shoe as Quinlan is about money."

Joslin shook his head darkly.

"Keep it under your bonnet, Pop," he warned. "The kid might be sensitive about it, and you know how the fellows josh—especially a live bunch like the High Rollers. Gee, they'll be sore as turpentined pups when they find it out. And then——" He groaned aloud. "When Royce gets on the coaching line for the Bears, and begins handing out some of his rough stuff to Quinlan about money matters, that kid'll go up in the air so far he'll have a peck of stars in his mitts when he comes down."

"He's proud of it," groaned the old man.

Joslin looked at him incredulously, then turned toward the bench. Here was something totally beyond his ken. From the ground up, he knew ball players. Twelve years he had been in the business, and, as is necessary with a successful manager, half his duties consisted of gaining insight into character. He could not understand the double phenomenon of a man's being stingy, and, at the same time, rejoicing in it. While ball players, as a rule, are rather a saving lot of men, the High Rollers—as the name implied—were the exception to the rule. Still, Pop McClung knew more about men than he. He watched the practice closely, but his eyes were really upon the handsome young fellow beside him, studying, pondering the problem of how to fit his personality into that of the High Rollers.

Difficult matter that, considering that he knew absolutely nothing regarding the young chap. As a general thing, the ball player with merit sufficient to draw even a second thought from the big-league manager is heralded from one end of the country to the other. Clubs engage, at big salaries, scouts to scour the United States for talent. No hamlet too insignificant, no tale too thin to draw one of these argus-eyed men thousands of miles to watch a so-called "comer" work.

And, at the end of the season, if all the scouts have landed one man with ability enough to gain a bare tryout in spring training, they have done well, and their salaries are more than earned. All this for even an outfielder. Pitchers, the Brahmans of baseball, are scarcely ever picked up except at tremendous expense.

Now, this young Quinlan had never been heard of before. He had dropped into Long Horn while the High Rollers were beginning their spring training to get the regulars into shape and the recruits a chance to show the stuff they were made of. One thing was certain—he had unlimited nerve. In the lobby of the little Texas hotel he had braced Scrappy Bill Joslin and asked for a chance to work.

It was the best card of introduction he could have produced. Joslin loved nerve, and this was something more than nerve—pure, unadulterated gall it was for any man to imagine he stood a show to get on the pay roll of the High Rollers, always winning or scrapping it out for the pennant in the biggest league of them all. Laughingly, Joslin had consented. He ceased to laugh when Pop McClung reported to him that night. Not only was the youngster worthy of a show, but seemed likely to win a place on the team. Joslin kept his weather eye

peeled the following day, scanning the volunteer recruit's work keenly, searchingly.

It was impossible that this fellow could be of big-league stuff. Yet, as he watched admiringly the easy wind-up and delivery, saw the tremendous force of leg, stomach, and arm muscle that went into the toss, heard the thud of Pop's big mitt, and the old man's grunt, he knew that McClung had not been overly enthusiastic about this chap.

Then, with the same easy motion, the same apparently tremendous force, Quinlan loosed a slow one. It floated up, shoulder high, and Joslin fancied he could count the seams upon the ball's brown surface, so lazily slow was it. In swift, bewildering succession followed sharp, short, snappy curves and two spitballs that zigzagged crazily down into the ground, one of them eluding the agile mitt of the catcher and barking his shins. Control was Quinlan's middle name, even though his first was Jack. Never, in early season, had McClung seen such perfect work.

Perhaps, he reasoned, this brilliant showing seemed so fine to him because the old-timers were only tossing the ball about easily, limbering their precious muscles and ligaments up gradually. He watched for a week, and Jack Quinlan's constant improvement convinced him finally that Pop was right. A miracle had happened. A star left-handed pitcher had dropped into his hands from the skies.

The correspondents soon caught on to the interest he showed in young Quinlan, and gave that gentleman their undivided attention. There were columns written about him, the gorgeously fine news mystery of the month. But it brought no information regarding the mystery himself. Quinlan might have been born from the bowels of the earth for all the news these papers brought out. And then the stories took new shape. The correspondents saw that this youngster was not only a great story, but a great pitcher as well—that he appeared to have won a berth with the wonderful High Rollers.

And all this retrospection was running through the manager's mind as, from the tail of his eye, he studied his find. Young, handsome as a Greek god, gentle looking and good-natured, it did not seem possible that miserliness could be the weakness in his nature. Yet some flaw there surely must be. No man could be all that Jack Quinlan had showed himself in the pitching line and not have some grievous fault. Joslin leaned over.

"How's the whip, son?" he questioned.

The young chap's eyes brightened affably, while a splendid smile parted his lips as he rubbed his south arm, swelling the biceps.

"Getting loosened up every day," he responded cheerily. "I don't get half enough work, Mr. Joslin."

The manager grunted.

"You're working *too* hard. Run around the park three times and then go to the hotel."

With slow chagrin the recruit rose and trotted obediently about the ball park. He did not shirk, allowing his long, splendid legs to stretch far out in a sprinter's stride. He was certainly more than full of pepper, thought Joslin, as he turned his attention to the other players. Still, there must be something wrong. There must be.

That night at dinner the topic of conversation revolved about the annual ball which the players gave the townspeople for the entertainment so lavishly showered upon them throughout their stay. It was the big event of Long Horn, and the players enjoyed it more than the guests themselves. As their name implied, the High Rollers never did anything by halves. Not a

dissipated lot of men, they still believed in enjoying themselves to the utmost, and Joslin approved of most of their sport, arguing that it kept them from going stale, getting nervous and irritable during the hot train rides, and the strain and stress of a driving season on the diamond. He suddenly noticed young Quinlan's face drop as the subject of expense arose. He determined to see what there was to Pop's surmise of the afternoon.

Hat over his eyes, he squatted in a big lobby chair after the meal, apparently dozing. In reality, his little black eyes never left the face of the young twirler. "High Pockets" Jennings, of all men the most persuasive and good-natured, emerged from a clump of eager players, notebook and pencil in hand. He stopped beside the manager and whispered:

"How much, Bill, for the ball? I'm putting you down hard."

"Call it a century, High," shortly answered the manager, ignoring his pet infielder's warm thanks. He was watching the eager way with which Quinlan rose from a near-by chair and started toward the stairs. Jennings saw him going and started in pursuit, but Joslin's voice rang out commandingly:

"Quinlan! Step here a second!

"Hand me your book, High," he cried sharply to Jennings, then waited while the new pitcher approached, his jaw thrust forward pugnaciously.

"Quinlan," he began slowly, his tone pleasant, but his teeth snapping down on the words in the way which all big leaguers knew meant trouble or anticipated trouble, "being a new man, you probably don't know of a custom we have had for the last five years of giving a hop to the people of Long Horn to show our appreciation of the entertainment and good feeling they always exhibit toward us.

"Jennings is taking up a subscription now. As you may not have the ready cash, I'm asking myself what you want to subscribe. I'm giving a hundred bucks, but of course I represent the owners and give more than the boys." He lifted his eyes inquiringly, wondering at the black look disappearing so quickly.

"It is embarrassing, Mr. Joslin," glibly answered the young pitcher. "You see, I took a big chance coming down here. You consented to pay my board and room rent, and that's kept you from knowing what a hole I've been in. As a matter of fact, I'm strapped—flat broke."

"I might advance you something," suggested Joslin, his jaws tightening. "I think I'll carry you a few weeks, anyhow, Quinlan, until I have to decide whom to drop from the roster."

"I'll be under contract—salaried then?"

"Sure. Say a couple of hundred a month."

Quinlan shook his head decidedly.

"Not for me, Mr. Joslin. I want real money to play with the High Rollers. Why, I know that Alberts gets eight thousand a year for——"

"Never mind what Alberts gets. We're not talking contracts now. I'm spieling a little song and dance about this ball of the High Rollers. You've been at the town dances; you've called on some of these people, and enjoyed their hospitality in many ways. How much do you want me to loan you?"

"On my salary, you mean?" Quinlan's eyes narrowed at the corners and a cunning expression played about his mouth.

"Certainly," Joslin impatiently responded. "I'll deduct it from the first month's envelope."

"Well, you see, Mr. Joslin," hesitatingly began the pitcher, "it's this way with me. You talk about a measly two hundred dollars a month, and I might be led into doing something which would bind me——"

Joslin's teeth snapped together with a distinctly audible click. If there was one thing for which he was noted more than another it was the square dealings he had with his men. No one had ever complained of ill treatment from Scrappy Bill, and he had enemies by the score—exclusive of umpires.

"Never mind about that talk," he grated. "You've got money, Quinlan, and I know it. I've seen you haul out a roll of bills when you paid for your laundry. Now, I'm trying to do the decent thing. Do you want to contribute, to pay back for what you've received?"

"No, I don't want to," as shortly answered the left-hander. "I didn't ask for any hospitality and didn't figure on a come-back, or I would never have accepted it. You can just count me out."

"I didn't ask you to practice with the High Rollers, either," snarled Joslin, "but I was willing to give you a chance."

"And I showed you something you'd be willing to pay five thousand dollars for, didn't I?" Quinlan laughed, and half turned on his heel. "I'm not asking any favors and I don't expect any. If I get a berth with the High Rollers it will be because I'm worth having along."

Scrappy Bill stared in speechless amazement at the broad back of this youngster who talked to him as no one had dared talk for many years. By a mighty effort of will he curbed his tongue. After all, he owed it to his own employers to give them his best, to save them the thousands which this boy would earn for them. He himself was merely a cog in a machine when it came to this team, and no enmity could arise between inanimate things. Jennings, who had been listening interestedly, started to address him, but the expression on Scrappy Bill's face forbade conversation. The popular player hustled out on the veranda to gossip about this astonishing conversation to the other players, while Joslin sought out Pop McClung.

The effects of what Joslin had to tell and what Jennings had to tell were soon apparent. The veteran coach, who was carried along at a good salary merely to coach youngsters in the finer art of the game and because of his masterly handling of any situation involving kinks in human nature, listened to the manager gravely and nodded his wise old head. Then he started to talk things over with Quinlan, hoping to show him how impossible it was to get along with his fellows, to get the best out of himself when the men were against him, should he continue to hoard his every dollar. On the other hand, the men began to look for traits of miserliness in the recruit whom they felt sure by now would be a regular during the coming season.

The High Rollers found exactly what they were looking for, and that by no very strenuous effort. Quinlan was mean, niggardly, a hoarder of wealth.

"And to think," groaned little Josh Reynard, who sported more diamonds than were ever seen before outside of a pawnshop window, "that his first name is *Jack*, and a miser has crept into the High Rollers. Wowie and likewise, zowie! Can't you hear Royce opening up on the coaching lines when he gets wise to this Quinlan person! Can't you just hear the bleachers out at the Bears' grounds getting wise to the Royce line of spiel and passing it out to me there in the sun field? Oh, wow! Wow! Wow! They'll change the name of the High Rollers to Short Skates! I'm going to ask to be released to Kalamazoo because it sounds like mazuma."

And little Josh knew whereof he spoke. The High Rollers and the Bears, always bitterest of rivals, clashed over the temperament of Jack Quinlan. Royce's brilliant invective against the

meanness of the young left-hander was passed on throughout the league. Had the lad been with any other organization than the High Rollers it would not have been so bad. There were the Benedicts, all married, whose wives collected their pay envelopes; and there were the Bachelors, who yearned for married life, and hoarded against the happy day; and there were the Crabs with four notoriously stingy men on their roster—Quinlan's disposition would not have stood out so flamingly with any of the three. But to have such a one with Joslin's spenders—that was a little over the limit.

But Quinlan was carried with the team quite as every one had prophesied. Everything he had, save ability to get in the box and deliver the goods. Joslin, rather gladly, decided that the roasting the lad received from players and fans about the circuit had gotten his nerve. But, somehow, when he stood behind old Pop and watched the youngster warm up before games, his intelligence could not find it in his heart to release him.

One game—two games—three games, Jack Quinlan lost in rapid succession. In the last essay he faced the Bears with nothing but a glove and a prayer. Joslin nudged old McClung in the ribs.

"Pop," he whispered, "there's nothing to it. I've got to drop this young whirlwind. He hasn't got nerve."

The old man shook his head dissentingly.

"He's all there, Scrappy. Take it from me, he'll be a sensation when he hits his stride. Remember what I told you 'bout Murphy——"

Joslin laughed impatiently and trotted out to the coaching line. He could not understand the situation and it irritated him. Already, the president of the club was asking why in the world he carried such a supine failure further, and there appeared no answer. Rarely, if ever, before had Mr. Collins interfered or questioned his judgment of a ball player, but three games lost in a row by a beginner had caused that gentleman considerable worry about the state of Scrappy Bill's mind.

The evening after that third defeat, Pop McClung took the left-hander off in a corner of the lobby, his good-humored face very serious.

"Quinnie," he said, "I want to have a talk with you where no one who knows us can overhear. The boys are all watching us now and they're sore at your pitching to-day. How about the theater to-night?"

Quinlan's face lightened with the boyish expression which always tugged at the old ball player's heart. There was something so frankly ingenuous, so delightfully unselfish about that look he could never believe what he knew to be true about the pitcher's trait of miserliness.

It put him in good humor all through the walk. Quinlan chatted—boyish delight at the outing, evidently the first he had enjoyed for a long time. In the line before the box office, Pop waited, creeping slowly forward till he was almost in front of the ticket window. Then he thrust his hand into his pocket, withdrawing it quickly, an expression of dismay upon his ruddy features.

"Well, whatta you think of that!" he laughed ruefully to Quinlan. "I left my money in my other pocket, Quinnie!"

The southpaw's face set in stern, sad lines.

"Gee!" he muttered. "That's a shame. I wanted to see this show pretty bad."

Even knowing the young fellow as he did, Pop stared at him incredulously for a second. No, there was no symptom of his hand reaching toward his own pocket to amend the blunder; there was nothing on his face but regret at being obliged to miss the performance

within. The treasurer was glaring impatiently at the old catcher as he held up the line. No chance now to discover suddenly that he had his roll with him. There was nothing to it save mutter an excuse about "forgetting his money," and drop out of the line.

Bubbling over with a rage he could not easily repress, he wandered out into the night. Once he glanced up into Quinlan's face. The young man met his eyes reproachfully.

"A man your age ought to be more careful, Pop," he warned seriously. "No telling who'll get into your room while your away. I always make it a point to carry my money with me. Nix on the banks and that sort of thing for me." He slapped his breast pocket gleefully, and then Pop flamed.

"You mean to tell me that you admit you've got money with you and still let me stand like a hick in that line, explaining to a frozen-faced snipe that I haven't got the price of a brace of seats!" he demanded. "Now, see here, Quinlan"—he halted squarely in the middle of the hurrying throng and faced the left-hander, "that's what I come out to talk over with you. I know what's ailing you—you're so scairt of losing your job that you haven't the nerve to pitch ball. Joslin has made up his mind to let you go. Mr. Collins, for the first time since he made Scrappy Bill manager of the High Rollers, is sore, and demands that you go back to the bush.

"I claimed that you could deliver goods that were all wool and a yard wide. But you've got to get over this nervousness about that sweet salary of yours, or, first thing you know, you'll be earning nothing. One more chance for you, son, and that's the end. You'll go from the High Rollers stamped as the quitter who didn't make good even when given the finest trial any youngster ever received."

Quinlan suddenly held out his hand with an impulsive gesture. It was the first time he had made any advance of friendship toward one of his fellows, and, from the hungry look in his eyes, the old-timer knew that he had long been yearning for a bit of companionship. Slowly he took the hand and clasped it firmly.

"I understand a little bit, son," he said slowly. "There's something about you I like even if you do beat hell for stinginess. But remember, I can't do any more for you than get you this last chance. That's straight."

The next two days young Quinlan sat on the bench, biting his nails in intense nervousness. Then he began to brace up, his jaw squared into an obstinate expression, while the eyes lost their worried expression. The fourth day he approached Joslin and requested that he be allowed to take a turn in the box.

"I'm right, Mr. Joslin," he said diffidently. "I just want one more chance, and if I get it at the time when I feel as I do now I think everything will be O. K. for the rest of the season."

And that was the start of the string of fifteen straight victories that set the country wild with excitement. The name of Quinlan became a byword. No odds how brutally he was assailed by the coaches, no matter what execration was heaped upon his head, Quinlan went into the box and came forth with another scalp hanging to his belt. He appeared invincible.

But not even this could endear him to his teammates. It is a curious thing on a baseball team that the members may be the worst enemies off the field and yet work in perfect harmony on it. Quinlan might have remained stingy during that string and been an idol with the High Rollers, but the only effect his success appeared to have upon him was to make the disagreeable trait worse than ever.

And he celebrated his tenth victory

by going to Joslin and demanding a bonus for every victory. As the terms of his contract had been very loose in the beginning, Scrappy Bill had an extremely difficult time forcing him to remain satisfied. Everything pertaining to money he seemed to know about intuitively. Did Joslin bring forth the bugaboo of banishment from big-league circles, Quinlan only laughed and pointed out that he was clean living and too much of a drawing card to remain unforgiven long by the magnates. Yes, Quinlan knew his worth and tried hard to exact his pound of flesh.

Then came the two affairs which threatened to cause a strike among the High Rollers, the pair of events which made them ready to stop playing ball with such a man.

Old Pop, whose eye was getting a bit hazier every day, misjudged the spitter of a youngster he was trying to break in, with the result that he was laid off permanently. Sentiment does not permit of a team's carrying any dead wood. A subscription was immediately taken up among the players of not only the High Rollers, but from members of other teams who cared to contribute. Quinlan refused point-blank to come in.

"Pop should have seen this coming long ago," he declared stubbornly. "I told him that he was a dead one and ought to put a few dollars aside, but he laughed at me. I tried my best to help him——"

"Help him!" howled Jennings wildly. "*You* help Pop! Why, Pop taught you all you know of the fine points of pitching; Pop kept you on the team when Collins was after Joslin for hanging onto you. *You* help *Pop* with advice! I've a great mind to kick——"

Quinlan's teeth closed with a click, his eyes flamed brilliantly; then, turning abruptly on his heel, he walked away, head high, step firm. Suddenly he turned back.

"As a matter of fact, fellows," he announced, a glint of laughter in his handsome eyes, "I haven't got a red cent to-day. I've been buying a little option. Maybe you'll know me better to-morrow."

"I hope not," muttered Jennings aloud.

Vain hope! The next afternoon in the clubhouse, while the men were sitting about discussing the merits of little Josh's diamonds, the door burst open and Limpy Stearns hobbled into their midst. For years Limpy had rented the peanut and soft-drink privilege in the stands of the High Roller's grounds. His affliction, coupled with a cheery nature, had made him a prime favorite with all the players, as did also his unswerving devotion to the team. But there was no cheerfulness about his appearance now as he stood there, glaring about the room, his eyes fastened upon the splendid figure of Jack Quinlan.

"That's the guy!" he howled excitedly, his eyes blazing with rage as he pointed a quivering finger at the indifferently smiling young giant. "That's the guy what done me up!"

"Done you up, Limpy?" questioned little Josh Reynard quickly. "What do you mean by that stuff—doing you up?"

"He skinned me when I wasn't lookin'," wailed the cripple.

"Come on, Limpy," urged Jennings, stepping forward. "Put a straight one right in the groove, waist high, and maybe we'll get you."

"Still beefing about that seven-thousand-dollar smear, Limpy?" grinned young Quinlan tantalizingly.

For a second Limpy choked with rage, then he whirled out the words as though from a machine gun.

"Yesterday my option expired for sellin' soft stuff in the park. I thought everything would be all right, all right, so I waits till to-day to hop 'round and see Mr. Collins. An' whatta you t'ink

dat Quinlan guy had done. He'd tied up that contract by planking down his salary for the rest of the season and some cash, an' now he's holdin' me up for a seven-thousand-dollar increase."

"Isn't that cheap, Limpy?" queried Quinlan teasingly.

"Cheap—cheap!" Limpy broke down, tears pouring from his eyes. "It's so cheap that I'll have t' go t' work meself and lay two boys off to come out on th' season."

"Well, anyhow, you make a living," lightly responded the portside twirler; then, to the astounded players: "So long, fellows, I've got a little date at the gate with a friend of mine. I told you I didn't have a penny yesterday. Some day you'll begin to understand me."

He flipped his hand lightly, his face fairly beaming with innocent good humor, absolutely unconscious of the scorn on his fellow players' faces as he passed out the door. Talk broke loose, flooded. Little Josh was delegated by the men to talk with Quinlan immediately and force him to make easy terms with the cripple. Then they waited while the left fielder chased out to the gate.

"Did you hand it to him, Limpy?" queried the sympathetic Jennings.

"Mr. Collins said he was sorry, but business was business," moaned the privilege man. "There wasn't nothin' much fer a guy like me to do, so I asked him to pay it over to Quinlan for me and I'd turn it back as it came in. Gee! Whatta you think of a guy's doing that t' turn seven thousand dollars!"

"Seven thousand dollars!" muttered Larkin wonderingly. "Why, that fellow was broke at Long Horn this spring, and now he's got ten thousand dollars if he's got a cent. I didn't know there was that much money in the world."

"And robbing a cripple——"

"Don't it beat hell!"

"I'd like t'——"

The storm of anathemas was interrupted by the breathless reëntrance of Josh Reynard, his eyes popping wide with information.

"Did you see him—bawl him out?"

"Did I see him!" Josh drew himself proudly up to his five feet four inches of height. "See him! I should guess yes. There isn't any missing him. He's gone clean off his nut. Quinlan was standing at the gate, buying roses for the swellest skirt you've ever lamped—*buying roses and paying for 'em with ten-dollar bills and not takin' the change.* I hope I'm something of a gentleman sometimes, but when it came t' looking on and seeing Limpy's coin go that direction I turned loose of a line of talk that would make Scrappy Bill Joslin sound like he was tongue-tied."

"What did he say—do?" demanded the players.

"Grinned at th' skirt," groaned Josh dolefully. "Just grinned and says to her, 'This is our sun fielder, little Josh. I'm a pitcher, they say, but it don't pay half so good as robbing cripples.' And then—and then they both laughs and talks low, and I see it ain't no use trying to puncture his hide, so I beats it back."

"Buying roses with ten-dollar bills, and not taking change!"

It was the awed muttering of Jennings, who appeared to have fallen into a haze. In fact, that afternoon Larkin said that when he was on first, waiting to steal, Jennings coached him along thus: "Take a lead! Buy a rose with a ten-spot! Whoa, boy! Don't take th' change! Yea, boy! Rose, I tell you!"

Quinlan had gone mad!

Mad?

What a peurile, febrile word it is to express the doings of the celebrated southpaw after that day! Baldom yet talks of the doings of the most no-

torious short skate that ever hit big-league circles.

That afternoon Quinlan won his way into the Immortals, for not a smell of first base did a single Bear get. And, following the direction of his constant gaze while on the bench, the High Rollers wondered at the adoration glowing in the beautiful eyes of the most dazzling girl that had ever graced a box at that particular park.

It was after that game that Quinlan sprung his first sensation. Calling Joslin aside, he whispered something in his ear, at which the manager looked startled, then walked over to the box in which the girl of Josh Reynard's comment still waited, and indulged in a long conversation which caused two bewitching dimples to stand out in her rosy cheeks. The men were only held in the clubhouse by their desire to have further explanation from Quinlan regarding his dealings with Limpy, and also by curiosity to find out what Joslin meant when he told them the southpaw had something to say to them.

When Quinlan arrived his face was beaming with boyish delight and good feeling. The players regarded him curiously, wonderingly. Did ever man take such delight in overthrowing a cripple?

"Just wait a second, fellows, till I get on my clothes," he called. "I've got a big notion to celebrate to-night, and you're all in."

"Using up Limpy's stale peanuts?" sneeringly queried Jennings.

"We might have them, too," cryptically answered the pitcher. "I have a few automobiles waiting at the gate to haul us to the hotel, and maybe Limpy can get the peanuts down in time for dinner."

Automobiles! Dinner! And from Quinlan!

Curiosity overcame their distaste for indulging in any of the fruits of his rotten victory over the little privilege man. But it was a silent, glum party that was driven to the Crown Hotel, where only Mr. Collins, millionaire owner of the High Rollers, stopped. The marvel increased when, instead of paying off the chauffeurs, Quinlan ordered them to wait and take every one home. He did it in a manner that told plainly as words that he was accustomed to giving just such orders to just such men.

About the lobby, the men waited a few moments while Quinlan held a whispered conversation with the manager of the hotel. Then that gentleman himself came over to them and conducted them to the elevator cages. Quinlan was a host beyond reproach, his manner perfectly easy and gracious.

There was another wait outside a pair of huge folding doors, a wait relieved by the passing about of boxes of cigars, the brand of which only was familiar to these men who live upon the best, and who are able, if they choose, to accept of the best, admiringly tendered them by fan admirers.

And then the doors were thrown open to display a table, glittering with the most fragile glass and golden plate. Never was such a banquet as the tongue-tied players sat down to, never was a more wondering body of men served. But not even this could down their animosity against the player who had always been so niggardly, and who, to gain this precious wealth, had gone to such cruel lengths. Nor could the easy affability, the charming graciousness of their host dispel the gloom. Quinlan was in very dutch, and no filling of stomachs could set him right.

As they leaned moodily back in their seats before the coffee, waiting for the speeches they knew to be inseparable from such an affair, Quinlan raised his hand, whispered something to the obsequious head waiter, then lifted his voice.

"Boys," he said, pressing his

knuckles down hard upon the polished board, "I'm no talker, and what I've got to say will come out in a few words. I'm not going to listen to any thanks now, because I've got an engagement with a young lady that I'd mightily hate to break. But there's a new brand of cigarettes I'm interested in which the waiter will pass around in a second. Good-by."

The players gasped as he stepped swiftly out the room. Then a hearty laugh rose, followed by a babel of sound.

"Can you beat it!"

"Some cigarette firm has hired Quinnie to advertise their brand."

"And we're the goats!"

"Picture of the High Rollers, who know and use only the best, smoking Egyptian Harems!"

Before each man was placed a tiny box. Another laugh rose.

"First sale of a hundred thousand will clear the cost of this feed!"

"Quinnie can't be beat!"

"Pipe the size of the box! 'Bout as big as Griffin's curve!"

Thus the comment changed in an instant to a loud whistle of amazement from little Josh Reynard, as he stared, mouth open, eyes bulging into the opened box.

From a bed of blue cotton blazed at him a glittering mass of brilliants, crusted on a shield which bore a pendulant baseball. And on that baseball were the words, High Rollers—19——

Each box contained the same souvenir. The talk died down, lifted itself once more, then the men rose slowly, stupidly.

"It must have cost the whole ten thousand," muttered Jennings then skeptically; "unless the diamonds are paste."

"Paste!" howled Josh Reynard, authority on stones. "Why, they're the finest blue-white beauties I ever lamped!"

"But what's the answer?"

"Answer—there ain't an answer! Quinnie's gone nuts!"

There was little sleep that night, the men gathering together in clusters, still discussing the marvel. Joslin came round, his face glowing, and behind him a little ways wandered a beaming, ruddy-faced Pop McClung and a chipper Limpy.

"Why, Pop, where did you blow from!"

"Say, Limpy, what's massaged dull care out of your nut?"

But the men only shook their heads smilingly.

"Tell you, boys," said Joslin, when he was threatened with mob violence if he did not explain to some extent, "Mr. Collins just sold the club to-day, and the new owner has given Pop the job of ground keeper. He has also handed Limpy all the privileges of the park—bar and cushions and programs, in addition to the soft stuff and peanuts."

"New owner?"

"Yep. He'll be in the owner's box this afternoon. He's a thirty-third degree fan and—well, wait till you take a slant at him."

Of course, it was Quinlan. There is no use delaying that which you already know. It was Quinlan, seated beside the beauty of the game of the day before. He strolled over to the bench, immediately finding himself surrounded by his teammates.

"I'm flat broke, boys," he said dolefully. "It isn't any use. I started out a spendthrift and a spendthrift I'll always be. The beloved governor of mine happens to be a millionaire mining man out in Nevada. I raised such hell with his coin that he chucked me out to earn ten thousand. And now I've gone and spent it again. But he saw it first, though. He saw it first, and everything will be all right——"

"But Joslin said——"

"I'm broke, boys, except for the High

Rollers and my wife in the box with me. I want you to come round after the game and meet her. It takes a lot of nerve and love for a guy like me to stick out of a two-bit limit poker game and harpoon a cripple just to win a girl—but, gee, boys! Just lamp her for a second, and tell me, ain't it worth the miserliness?"

Mr. Jennings, in company with the rest of the High Rollers, did "lamp" the beaming, blushing bride in the owner's box, then he spoke:

"Keep loosened up with the change, Mr. New Boss. It's a good habit with a owner in this bunch. Keep loosened up in every way, Quinnie, but hang on to that dame tight as you ever squeezed a cent in the last six months. That's the tip of the High Rollers, ain't it, boys? Tell Quinnie what you think."

The vociferous response had not subsided before a sudden ungovernable squirt of tears shot to Quinlan's eyes as he grasped Jennings' hand.

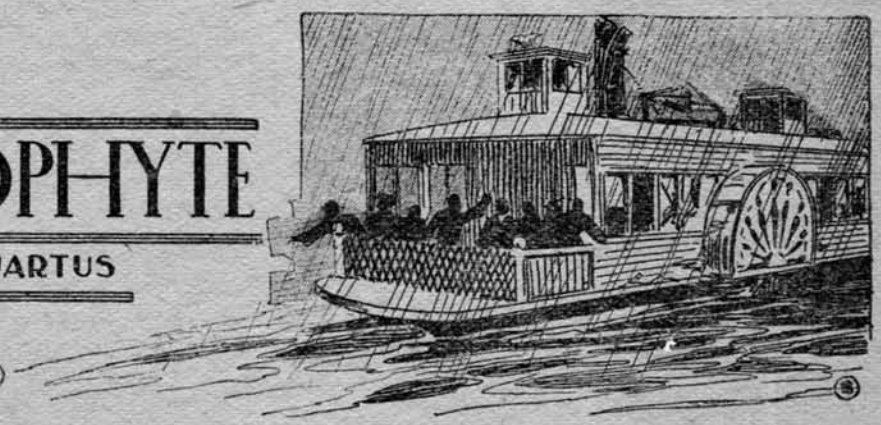
"My name, boys," he said, "is Harvey, and I thought of using it for my regular box name, but I've changed my mind. I've just heard something from some one outside of Pop for the first time since I joined you that sounds mighty good to me. Say it over again, Jennings—it's regular music."

"What's that?" demanded the astonished infielder.

"Quinnie," softly responded the miserly southpaw. "Quinnie! Gee, that's some name!"

THE NEOPHYTE

BY JOHN QUARTUS



CHAPTER I.

SOMEBODY hit him a blow on the shoulder and dragged him aside with affectionate roughness. Somebody whispered in his ear with mysterious emphasis.

"Get that note all right, old chap?"

Curly nodded eagerly into the smiling, superior face that bore over the heavy hand.

"Oh, yes—yes, thanks. I got it, sure enough."

He recognized the questioner—as an outcast mongrel pup might recognize a pampered prize winner whom he has seen and envied from gutter distance. An upperclassman. A confident, smartly garbed youth of the type Curly had learned to associate unerringly with the fraternities.

"Be there on time!" warned this sudden friend. And passed with a significant wink.

Curly's heart swelled in a gush of warm gratitude as he mumbled acknowledgment. Would he be there on time? Could anything keep him from being there on time? He watched the trim figure swinging on down the campus path, noting the carefree swagger, the snappy flare of the coat, the high-cuffed trousers. He watched, with admiration and a touch of awe.

It had come at last, the offer of fellowship and friendship for which he had hungered. It had happened at last, the mysterious visitation which called him out of loneliness and neglect. He held the proof of it in the letter he had received that morning. There went the actual messenger of it down the walk.

He flushed with painful self-consciousness as he suddenly realized the contrast he must have presented beside that gilded butterfly of college fashion just now.

He was shabby. His "pants" were guiltless of crease, and flirted distantly with the tops of his hobnailed shoes. His sleeves revealed an unornamental expanse of red, bony wrist above each big hand. A ready-made tie of purple satin advertised his bulgy chest and his rural taste. Uncut fringes of hair about his ears added nothing to the style of an ancient slouch hat.

This was the understanding that came to Curly Dowd. Apparently at the touch of a condescending hand. In fact, his mind had been subtly preparing for the discovery during the two weeks since he had tramped into the varsity town with a huge carpetbag bumping against his leg and a great ambition pumping at his heart.

He had learned a great deal in those two weeks. Things having nothing whatever to do with lectures and textbooks.

He had learned that the college community was divided into two great camps, the "Greeks" and the "Barbarians"; which meant, in rough translation, the kid-glove guys and the slobs.

He had learned that the student members of the Greek-letter societies, or "frats," formed the social, political, and athletic trust, the privileged circle.

He had learned that to join a "frat" was to have friends, influence, importance, standing, attention, and a thousand advantages; while to be a "barb" was to remain lonely, forgotten, unremarked, shunned, lost in the common herd amid a thousand handicaps.

Because he was young and normal, Curly Dowd had craved companionship, laughter, pals, hard handgrips, and the good things of human society. And because he wanted to belong, he had seen no reason why he shouldn't.

But now he could see—partly. Looking down at his misfit clothes, he could see. This was another illuminating moment in his essential education.

"Gosh, what an awful roughneck I've been!" murmured Curly Dowd.

And he stopped long enough to polish his shoes on his calves, glancing guiltily about the while.

"That ain't so bad," he noted, approving the process and the result. "I'll buy me one of them new celluloid collars to-morrow."

To-morrow!

He thrilled at the word. Marvelous things were to happen to him before that day rolled around. Glorious surprises were due before another dawn. He laughed aloud to himself in sheer content, and slapped his solid thigh. What mattered such trifles as collars now? He had won his heart's desire, in spite of all deficiencies.

Yes, won it. To demand what you want outright—and get it. That's winning. And that was what he had done.

Fortunately.

He had not left to the "frats" themselves the task of seeking him out. He had not waited for them to pry under his rusty exterior for the good stuff inside. He had declared himself frankly. Applied for membership.

And the reward was just ahead. He had had the promise of it. A written and official acceptance. A familiar touch on his shoulder. A confidential voice in his ear.

By to-morrow he would be admitted to the fraternity group. By to-morrow he would have comrades, chums, partners. By to-morrow he would have

left the ranks of the undistinguished many to flock with the favored few.

"Gosh!" chuckled Curly Dowd. "I'll bet them fellers are reg'lar cut-ups! Bet they'll initiate me good!"

He brought, from an inner pocket, the note that had been smuggled under his door in the cheap student boarding house that morning, and studied it again furtively.

An amazing communication. Written in red ink and spread around with skulls, daggers, coffins, in sinister array. Just the sort of delightful foolishness that always accompanied a real, sure-enough "bid." And it ran in this fashion:

NEOPHYTE!

Know by these presents that you have been called and chosen to join a dread and secret band. At midnight, on the striking of the clock, you will deliver yourself up at the coal wharf, there to meet your doom. As you love life, say nothing of this to any one. Be prompt! Beware!

Curly Dowd was chuckling again over this wonderful missive when a shadow fell across the paper. He whipped it away, and looked up just in time to avoid colliding with a spare, alert, elderly figure that was just turning into the graveled campus walk.

"Pardon, professor," he murmured.

Professor McCracken stopped and smiled, with a kindly word. That was always Professor McCracken's way with every one. More particularly was it his way with gawky, raw freshmen who were having a hard time of it in the first weeks of college life.

The professor understood. He had seen too many promising youngsters crushed by the weight of social ostracism under the "frat" system. He had seen too many ambitious boys make a losing battle against loneliness and the sense of failure because they were never "bid." He had seen too many ordinary fellows, on the other hand, turned into finished snobs by the frat atmosphere. Aside from fighting frats and what he called their undemocratic and vicious arrogation of power, he extended sympathy and help, as he was able, to those who suffered by them.

"Dowd," he said impulsively, "I've been looking for you. I want you to join our little Geological Club. All good workers like yourself. You'll make good friends there."

Curly flushed and thanked him, hat in hand.

"We're off for an expedition to Mulberry Island to-night in the college launch. Camping out, you know, and returning to-morrow—seven of us. I'm sure——"

He checked the look of embarrassment that spread upon the freshman's broad face.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm sorry," stammered Dowd. "To-night—I—I can't. I have an engagement."

"An engagement?" queried the professor, surprised.

Curly nodded, and started to unfold the red-inked letter. But he remembered its warning in time, and stood mumchance. Professor McCracken noted, and made a shrewd guess—albeit an astonished one.

"A—fraternity engagement, Dowd?"

"Yes, sir," nodded Curly, who could not withhold a delighted grin.

It was strictly none of the professor's business, of course. But impulse moved him again.

"You're sure of these frat friends, Dowd? Sure that's the crowd you want to run with?"

"Oh, yes, sir," stammered Curly.

"I know you've been lonely—but most men who stand on their two feet are that," continued the professor. "It's a lot better to be lonely than to make a mistake."

"But I like them," said Curly, rather warmly. "They have such corking good times. They're the real stuff."

He nodded emphatically.

"Oh," said the professor, rebuffed. "I see. Well, of course, that's your affair."

He passed on stiffly, shaking his head, while the happy freshman hurried away to a quiet corner where he could read the fascinating note again.

"How in the world did they ever come to bid a boy like that—as sound, and genuine, and simple, and altogether unfitted as that?" Professor McCracken wondered to himself.

"How lucky it was I didn't wait for them to bid me of their own accord—gosh!" Curly Dowd exulted in his vast satisfaction.

CHAPTER II.

The "Deacon" stood in the doorway, smiling the smile of an expectant terrier.

A shout rocketed at him from the length of the table. Here was sauce for luncheon. Here was nippy news. They sensed it in his dancing eye and his gladsome grin.

"Did he fall?" was the burden of the outcry.

Deak beamed upon them, and maintained a suspensive silence. He slid into his chair, and motioned for food. Eager hands hastened to do his will. Gramp, who, as the only postgrad in the chapter, presided over the huge serving platter, did him honor in the matter of cutlets. Palpitant freshmen descended upon the kitchen and dispossessed the slow-moving waiter of coffee and pie for his benefit.

"Speak up, Deak," whined Pringle, most fretful of sophomores. "We get the dramatic effect. That's enough."

"I'm faint," returned the Deacon reproachfully. "Can't I stay my famine?"

"No!" they chorused. "Out with it, Deak!"

The deacon lifted a chunk of cutlet on the end of his fork, and regarded it tenderly. He had his mouth opened for the succulent morsel when Tootle grabbed his wrist. Tootle was guard on the varsity, and had a generous fist.

"Not a crumb till you tell," he growled.

Deak gazed piteously at the end of his fork.

"Well—I saw him."

"Did he fall?"

"Like a ton of brick!"

They snickered with glee, clamoring for details, but the Deak had a mouthful, and only grinned greasily.

"I knew that softhead clam would fall for it," cut in Sooky, with vast freshman confidence.

"You knew!" echoed Pringle.

"Yes, I did," insisted Sooky hotly. "Why, in Polycon yesterday he hauled out a huge red bandanna to rub his big ham of a face with. Soon as Deak let on he was going to send him a phony bid, I called the turn. I *said* nothing was too raw for that rube. And—it ain't!"

"Sooky's right," nodded Tootle. "There never was such a dub. Have you seen his neckties?"

"Granted the chap is a section hand," said Pringle. "But it hardly seems possible he could be so dull. Why do animals like that ever come to college, anyhow?"

"To furnish us with amusement," suggested Gramp.

"Well, if it's true he's delivered himself up horse, foot, and guns like this, I'm in favor of doing justice to him," stated Pringle sharply. "Let's make him a howling communal joke, some way or other."

The deacon made a lofty gesture.

"What do you suppose I sent him the bid for? I'm a philanthropist and a public benefactor, I am. Everybody's in on this act."

"Already?"

"Yep. Saw Bulty and Hunk Woods

up at the Hall. The Tri Eps are primed. So are the Phi U's. Hunk is going around to the Deltas and tell them the gaudy plot. But say—you fellows think you know something about the rareness of that bird! Wait till I tell you!"

They waited while he luxuriously consumed a huge bite of pie. He had their full attention.

"Why—he only applied for admission to the Phi U's, that's all!"

"What?" shrieked the bunch, in one blast.

"That's it," affirmed Deak. "He stopped Hunk—yesterday it was—pointed to his Phi U pin, and gave out it was the yearning of his youthful bosom to belong to 'one of them there frat clubs.' Any frat—but Hunk's would do. And please would Hunk kindly see to it?"

"Oh, my orphan aunt!" sobbed Sooky, and laid his head upon the table.

The unbelievable raciness of it left most of them incoherent. They rocked, they wept, they pounded one another on the back. Only Gramp retained a vestige of his rep as a patriarch.

"That's one of the kind you read about," he remarked. "Is it true, by any chance?"

"Hunk swore by all his gods," declared Deak. "And if you'd seen the cowlike delight on the idiot's face when I lisped in his ear on the campus just now, you'd know he is capable of anything."

"But—applied!" gasped Tootle.

"Why not? I tell you that creature has the moss bearded on him like a forest primeval. The meadow larks are roosting in his hayloft. He reeks, absolutely reeks."

Pringle had hooted with the rest. But laughter was not adequate for what he felt.

"By jing! a thing like that needs treatment," he piped, in his shrill, biting voice. "It's a giddy jest, of course. Meanwhile, he's an offense, an insult, to a decent school. It's lowering our tone to tolerate cattle of that kind."

"I'm sorry for the rustic if he rouses Pringle's tone," put in Gramp slyly.

"Never mind being funny," retorted Pringle sharply. "This has gone beyond a joke. If what Deak tells us is true, we've got to take action. You can't snub such a plebeian. You can't show him his place by ordinary means. Think of it! A monumental ass that *asks* to join a frat!"

Deak checked him with another wave.

"Be calm. You seem to forget who's got this in charge. I'm going to attend to him."

"Attend to him by driving him out," snapped Pringle. "That's the only adequate move. We can't tolerate him."

"Don't believe you'll have to tolerate him long after I get done. Leave it to me."

"I want to be sure you hit on something he can understand, that's all," insisted Pringle. "A matter like this is serious. The worst thing that ever happened to this college was old McCracken's getting those three chaps expelled last term for hazing. With that kibosh laid, we might do something."

"Ease your mind of old Cracko," said the Deacon, with a mysterious smile. "He's the least of my worries."

"There isn't a place in town where you could pull off anything without his hearing of it," suggested Tootle.

The Deacon went upon his dignity.

"Once for all, you guys back up. Whose scheme is this? Mine, I believe. I sent him the phony bid. I nursed him on it. I gave out the invites to a doings. It's all mine, and I ain't going to loosen another word. I'll only say to you children, be at the coal wharf to-night, or miss the time of your young lives—that's all."

"Give us a hint, Deak," they begged.

Deak set down his coffee cup and grinned.

"The good ship *Zacariah Johnson* sails for parts unknown this midnight. Leave the rest to your uncle!"

CHAPTER III.

A restless householder in one of the little cottages that clump above the storied banks of the Sequanock had a curious experience that night. He turned in his bed, and lifted the shade and peered out through faint moonlight, blurred and veiled with low-flying wrack. And it seemed to him that he saw a small, low-hulled vessel with a single smokestack surge slowly out of the ragged shadows behind the coal company's wharf and glide down the stream.

He gazed and rubbed his eyes, and presently huddled, with shivery haste, into his sheets again. For a cloud had passed, and lo! the river was empty and the dim shape gone, and no glint of lantern, or furnace, or side light. Whereupon he remembered the *Sally Meadow,* the tragic old rear-wheeler that went into the chute below Mulberry Island with sixty souls aboard, back in the war time, and still came hooting and listing down the Bowl, so the clam fishers swore, in the late summer storms—a kind of fresh-water Flying Dutchman.

It was not a matter to pry into, the mirage of the *Sally Meadow.* It was held to be bad luck of the worst kind, and the dredgers who had seen it never boasted thereof. So the householder, who was river-born, jammed his head into his pillow and tried to make himself believe that the prickle of a rising wind had played tricks with his nerves.

A closer or less credulous observer might have looked twice and guessed better. Might have recognized in that dim water wraith the unlovely but wholly material form of a very different vessel. The *Zacariah Johnson,* to wit, superannuated ferry, cattle transport, and clam dredge. If he had been close enough, he might even have received olfactory proof of the apparition's identity and her employment.

Still, had the interest of this supposititious witness led him so far as to row out and board the ancient craft, he might, after all, have reverted upon the householder's naïve suspicions.

For it was a ghostly crew that sailed the Sequanock that night.

On the forward deck were clustered some forty weird and fearsome figures. They were black-robed from head to foot, and under their cowls they murmured and gibbered from grinning skulls. They were clustered about the little capstan, as about a sacrificial altar. And upon that altar was stretched a human victim. A victim bound with ropes, disheveled, stripped to the waist, hard-breathed, and helpless.

Weird rites were being practiced as the spectral mob swayed and hustled in a ring.

"Who receives this candidate?" chanted a melancholy voice.

"A blood brother," moaned the dismal throng.

"Who marks his brow?"

"A blood brother," they chorused balefully.

"Who strips his hide?"

"Brother—blood brother."

"Who plucks his heart?"

"Blood—blood brother."

And they groaned like the mournful tombs.

The leader, a lean, portentous figure, reared himself upon the rail and delivered his sentence with awful solemnity.

"Neophyte, the judgment of the brethren has been passed. Know that all who aspire to enter this most noble and famous order must undergo the uttermost trial in body and spirit, lest they be unworthy. Know that many are tested, but few survive. Know that the dread moment approaches.

Pause, while yet you may. Pause, while life itself remains. Are you still hardily minded to tempt your fate?"

They crowded close, peering down to catch the least intonation, the least quaver, that might lend a gratifying tang to the reply.

The pale face gazed up at them. But not in dread. Not in doubt. Rather in simple gratitude. And this was the astonishing reply:

"Oh, yes, sir. I've heard about these 'nitiations. I don't mind a bit. Any fun you fellers are bound to have with me is all right—if you only let me in!"

There was a choking sound from the ghostly ring, and certain of the executioners found it necessary to withdraw hurriedly beyond the deck house.

"Deak," gasped one gigantic bogle, who hung limp upon the leader, "immortal Greek, we salute you! Never, never was such a clover-scented kine. Your paw, Deak!"

"Now, will you believe it?" was the response from under a general gurgling chorus. "I told you chaps, didn't I? Made a scientific study and told you, and you doubted. And I might have kept him as a juicy morsel for our own bunch—but I didn't. I'm a philanthropist. Do you appreciate, you other muttonheads?"

They did, and paid him homage.

"Still, you can't blame us," put in another. "The guy is stupendous. He's incredible!"

"I believe y'," growled a fat ghost. "Ain't it a bum actor you hired to kid us all, Deak? Why, he ain't even worried."

"Worried? He's blissful. Utterly blissful. Can't we begin to laugh pretty soon? I'll bust soon."

An active, quick-gestured member thrust in.

"I'm sick of laughs," he declared acridly. "The pig needs a lesson, and a damn stiff one. What's the good of laughing? He's too thick to get the point."

"He'll get it when he wakes up tomorrow."

"Not good enough," insisted the sharp-tongued speaker.

"Our Pringle abhors the subtle quip."

"There's nothing subtle about him," was the irritated reply. "He's an outrage. If you fellows mean to keep up fraternity prestige in this school, you've got to take a high hand with such intruders, once for all."

"Pringle's right," murmured the fat ghost. And others nodded, won to this forceful view.

"Soothe your perturbed spirits," interrupted the deacon. "Seems I can never get you to remember whose game this is. List to me when I whisper that the night is to be historic."

They sensed significance in his confident accents and hushed to expectancy.

"I haven't the soul of a thumbscrew, like Pringle," went on Deak, "but my ambitions are leaping. Say—you may have noticed that when I began to gather a crowd, I got at least one chap from every frat while I was about it."

"It's a fact," admitted somebody, in the pause. "Even the Betas. There's Medicine Ball over by the capstan now."

"So the whole Greek outfit is in on this," enforced Deak.

"Well?"

"What's the Machiavellian answer?"

"The answer is, we're all in this thing *together*. The answer is, that, should we happen to kick over a few faculty rules to-night, we all stand *together*. They can't fire the entire Greek contingent. So we're safe. No matter what we do!"

"And that means——"

"That means we are about to revive the king of the lost arts," announced Deak dramatically.

"Hazing!"

"You apprehend me, Stephen," nodded Deak.

They hesitated. It was a gorgeous temptation.

"What about old Cracko?" asked some one.

"Cracko is far away. He went off this evening in the launch with the Crackums, his pet little gang of stone breakers. We are well past the town. Gramp has been poling us around the Bend, where we can anchor at ease. The rest is—silence! Are you on?"

"Lead us to it!" gurgled the fat ghost.

And they all voted with him. No resisting Deak's logic. No rejecting the opportunity he had created. He swept them with him to the waiting feast of glee, and they shouted, secure in his assurance.

"Then we hoof him?" squeaked Pringle.

"The classic hoof of all time," returned the Deak, uplifted. "To the penultimate limit!"

CHAPTER IV.

They began mildly. They passed a rope around the victim, set him forward at the bitts, and then snatched him after through a flailing gantlet of barrel staves.

Two huge and very fleshy shades, who might have been Tootle and a fellow guard in the life, paired on the deck house, and did the hauling. He came like a ball on a string, only to be bounced back again and made to repeat.

The roar of the third trip was dominated by a bull bellow from the rail:

"Over with the boob!"

Half a dozen huskies grabbed him on either side, took a long swing, and shot him forthright into the dark and the river.

"Yo-heave!" bawled the bucko ghost, and they snaked the rope inboard again with a half-drowned neophyte on the end of it, wiggling like a hooked eel.

"The other side!"

They howled rapturously, and slung him to port, and while he was there they dropped him back a few times so that he could catch his breath under the river. But when he was back again, there was air enough. Air to stand on.

The rope had been run through a block on the stubby derrick mast, and he hung a foot above the deck.

"Form up for dummy practice!" came the order. "Everybody tackles!"

They obeyed with gusto, and ran ramming into the helpless bundle, one after the other, until it whirled like a teetotum. After that they lowered it until the toes just touched the planks, and demonstrated with the staves while it span helplessly, making futile efforts to stand and brace.

A feeble and breathless Sooky stumbled out of the whooping mêlée to lean against the bulwark near Gramp, who was content to watch.

"Hold me up; I'm joy-jagged!" gasped the promising infant. "What next, Gramp? Oh, uncle mine, will you look at it, though—just look at it!"

The scene had just burst upon Sooky in all its ripeness, and his emotion was scarce unnatural.

"The pipe dream of a Salem witch burner!" agreed Gramp.

Certainly no sane vision ever before held such a sight as the forward deck of the *Zacariah Johnson*. The shaded lantern on the deck house gave a fox-fire glow. And therein the black shapes hooted and gamboled, monstrous in their flapping robes. Outboard, the night was gullied by lawless winds that came in sharp, hot puffs. Cloudwrack unveiled a ragged slip of a moon, and gave an instant's finishing touch of infernal fantasy. There came a growl of thunder from up the river.

"Where are we?" asked Sooky, peering into the innocent blackness. "It wouldn't do for the native to pipe this anywhere."

"We're safe from that. I dropped

the anchor myself, as we came behind the Bend. We can pole back."

Sooky grabbed his arm.

"Then what's that?"

Beyond his pointed finger, in the brief flick of moonlight, they had a glimpse of a vague, massive bulk against the sky. It slid away, like a mirage, into the windy blank.

"Bend nothing! I learned the river pretty well this summer." Snooky was suddenly very sober. "That looks like Grayling Bluff to me! Sure your anchor held?"

"Not sure, no!"

"She's still short, then. Hurry!"

They scrambled forward.

"Grayling Bluff means a matter of three miles below town, don't it?" inquired Gramp.

"If that was all," came the answer, against a gust of wind. "It means we're in the Bowl, something less than a mile above the rapids and Cedar Chute. On this side the river, Gramp. Say nothing, but hurry!"

No one missed the two deserters. The jovial crew was already deep in further delights under the skilled guidance of the Deak. The candidate had been cut down, revived with a generous draft of tabasco, and was now stripped to fighting trim within a yelling ring.

Cotton pillows were bound upon his fists, and he was booted into action against a laughing young giant who saluted him with a four-ounce glove smacked to the jaw. Strong arms caught him as he faded, and thrust him back into the fray.

"Fight, you rummy!"

He turned a glance around at his tormentors, while he lifted his helpless hands, and somehow he found a way to smile. A wry smile, rather disfigured, but fatuous and willing as ever.

"It's all right, boys," he nodded. "I'll do my best."

Somebody tripped him as he moved into action, and he went staggering against a facer. He waved the pillows and tried to counter, and the mob shouted as his opponent rocked him here and there at will. The loudest of all in the front rank was Pringle, who had thrown aside all disguise, shrilling and hopping with eagerness.

"Smash him! Smash the slob! Why, he ain't even broke yet. Wipe that smile off!"

And as the victim reeled past, Pringle got in some good work for himself with a buffet across the mouth.

It was hugely entertaining, but all too brief. Knocked breathless, dizzy and half blind, the neophyte went down under a full swing that pulped his ear, and was unable to rise without help.

They gave him help!

"The thirty-third degree!" howled Deak; "I call for human sacrifice! Up with him to the masthead!"

They trussed him, like a basting fowl this time, and added the last artistic touch of horror with a blindfold. Then they hauled him to the end of the derrick arm, where he dangled twenty feet above the deck.

"Cut the rope!"

The cry went up in ravening chorus, and they waited to hear him weaken, to plead, as a right stout heart might have done at such a moment, without shame.

"Cut the rope!"

He stayed mute. Amid savage cries, then, the rope was duly severed, and its burden shot down through space. That it brought up again fifteen feet lower on the prepared loop with a tremendous jerk could scarce have been much comfort to the unfortunate neophyte.

And still he had not caved. When they let him down, dragged him to lantern light, and slopped a bucket over him, he blinked and nodded up at them cheerfully. No sign of fear, no shrinking. To many it was curious and disappointing. To Pringle, it was sheer scandal and outrage.

"Ain't you got anything better?" he squealed.

But the Deak was already launched upon his master maneuver. From the engine-room doorway he swarmed to view with a flaming charcoal brazier in his hand. While the hopeful outfit bound their victim to the mast, and the rising wind trailed sparks across the deck from a nest of glowing irons, he announced his triumph.

"Neophyte," he boomed sepulchrally, "the fatal moment has come. Thus far we have merely trifled with you. Now comes the true ordeal."

An expectant silence fell, disturbed only by the coming murmur of storm and a grumble of thunder. The black robes gathered round again, in solemn state.

"Know that you enter, O wretched neophyte, under a new rule of our noble order. Henceforth each candidate who rashly persists in his ambition, if he survives all else, must submit to have the magic insignia of the order—branded upon his forehead!"

Deak snatched a glowing iron from the brazier and flourished it. There was no make-believe about that iron.

"Are you ready?"

The candidate's face was pale, but he answered steadily:

"Any hoss you want to play, boys. Ain't I pretty near in?"

"You'll be in, all right," the Deak said grimly. "Forever afterward to be recognized as a full and certified member of the Alpha—Sigma—Sigma!"

The crowd heard, stared a moment, gurgled, and broke into prancing as the bandage was thrust into place again.

"Alpha—Sigma—Sigma! Wow-ee! He's qualified. Slap the brand on him!"

Deak whiffed the iron near, and, as the victim instinctively shrank from the heat, he clapped to the forehead a little cube of ice, pressing it with devilish precision. Three times he repeated, and the blinded neophyte writhed, for the illusion was painfully real. Then, while the mob wept for laughter, with the gesture of a conjurer and the craft of an inquisitor, he whipped out a bottle and brush and deftly painted his three letters in staring black across the helpless brow.

"Rah—rah—rah—Alpha Sig Sig!" they rioted. "Rah, rah, rah for the Alpha Sig Sig!"

Deak desisted from labor amid embracing arms, and, as they closed on him, he revealed the ultimate touch of genius.

"Acid in that paint," he murmured. "He won't get it off for a week!"

They were still striving feebly to do justice to the Olympian glory of the great man when Gramp, with Sooky at his heels, came leaping down the deck and burst upon them like a bombshell.

"Help, you fellows! The anchor chain's twisted or something, and we'll all be down Cedar Chute in half a minute!"

CHAPTER V.

The night split wide with a searing blue flare, and showed the startled crew a strange river. Not the wide, familiar shores by the Bend, but the battlemented cliffs below Grayling Bluff, and the narrow channel that swept down inside Mulberry Island. Not the easy, languid stream that passed the town, but a hurrying, swirling flood that twisted in eagerly for the chute and its deadly rapids.

At the wink of the next glare, the first squall struck, driving great drops like scatter shot. Blue was streaked with gleaming yellow where froth leaped up beneath the lash, with living green where the shuddering tree masses lifted.

And the storm was on them. Sweeping down the valley as Sequanock storms can sweep. Heeling the old *Zacariah Johnson* like a dead leaf, driv-

ing what counsel might have prevailed aboard her to amazed confusion.

"But—but—how'd this happen! How'd we get here!" came the high wail of Pringle.

"Drifted, you idiot!" bawled Gramp, against the roar of the gale. "Isn't anybody going to help?"

They broke up as the rain struck sheetwise, dodging helter-skelter. Orders, appeals, and questions went unheeded. Some swarmed to the house and attacked the single dinghy, long bedded there in paint. Others shouted and waved toward the shore, if any help might come from that wild stretch. Sooky had found a ring preserver, and ran with it along the rail, peering down with it into the yellow foam. Pringle, quite simply paralyzed, cowered on the deck. One inspired soul flocked by himself to the little cabin and span the wheel with frantic energy. A few crawled forward after Gramp to fumble at the stubborn chain and wrestle impotently with the capstan.

Meanwhile, the storm was piling up, and the *Zacariah Johnson* was lumbering down the island channel like a barrel on a hill slope.

"Look there!" some one cried hoarsely, and pointed below across the tawny waters, and there, through the lightning flicker and the flying spume, they had a glimpse of another craft, a low, white strip swaying among the broken waters. They quavered into a hail, but it died, shredded on the blast, and drowned in thunder.

"They're done, too!" gasped Medicine Ball.

"It's the clinkers' launch!"

The instant's hope passed, for they saw that the other craft was as helpless as their own, sliding the channel below them and nearer the island side, though more slowly.

The little group about the capstan stared into the weltering cañon of the rapids. And the wet wind came suddenly chill as they realized. They hung literally upon the edge of death.

"We're going down—going down!" babbled Bunty. "Good God!"

It was the last urge of panic, and they scattered again, crying and stumbling in their absurd black robes. There was no plan or reason in them. And when Tootle, in a final, frantic tug, happened to loosen the capstan lock and release the suspended chain, no soul on board had anything to thank save sheer accident.

The anchor plunged and found a grip somewhere below. The *Zacariah Johnson* came careering around, like a cow on a tether. The flood whipped her over, tilted the froth into her decks, and finally straightened her out on a drumming chain in the full mouth of the chute.

The crew lay where they had fallen or huddled, drinking the deep breath of immediate safety, and staring out toward the island. Staring in dread of what they might see at the next flash. The launch with the geological party was out there somewhere, and the thought of her leaped into every mind with the relief of present personal fear. Presently they had a photographic glimpse of her, in near the rocks, head to the current, with her passengers a black dot at the stern.

"Engine short-circuited! She's anchored!" gasped the Deak, who found himself lying against Gramp by the mast.

"But it won't hold! Didn't you see? She's sliding!"

So it was, as all of them knew when the lightning flickered up once more. The first squall had half filled the little craft. She had been sucked into the chute. Her anchor was too small or too light to hold her. And now she was dragging slowly down, the current boiling about her at mill-race speed.

At instants she caught and seemed to brace bravely. Again the hungry thin

water ridges, edged with foam as cruel as fangs, bore her back in a whelming charge. No foot lost could be regained. It was a slow-drawn agony of waiting, a racking, hopeless struggle against the inevitable. Those aboard her were powerless to aid themselves—with the tumble of the rapids ever nearer.

The crew of the *Zacariah Johnson* watched in terrified fascination. And their nerves went to straw in them as they saw the launch slip, and slip, and slip again, like a weary man who clings to a beetling roof. Some whimpered. Some crouched on the deck and hid their faces. This clap of tragedy, coming upon the very lilt of their folly, struck them groveling.

"There's not a chance for her," croaked the Deak. "Not a chance!"

"Seven lives!" answered Gramp, in a groan.

"What you doing about it?" asked a clear voice.

They looked up. The neophyte still stood against the mast, forgotten by every one. He had quietly worked himself free of the wrist ropes, removed his bandage, and was now stripping himself of the last of his bonds.

"What you fellows mean to do?"

"Do?" repeated Deak dully. "We can't throw a rope that distance. There's nothing to do."

Curly Dowd stepped free and took a quick survey of the deck, the huddled groups, the white faces under the lightning flashes.

"Nothing! We've a sound boat—plenty of hands. Going to let those folks drown without an effort?"

The crisp, eager phrases dragged a few uncertainly to their feet. But they had little time to wonder at this strange new note in the despised rube, or to resent it.

"Any steam?" he snapped.

"The fires are banked. We only poled."

"Stoke 'em then. We can be moving in five minutes!"

He jumped aft to the little door of the engine room. It was lighted and half filled with frightened initiators in their sopping robes, who had crowded in for warmth and shelter.

"Look alive!" shouted Curly Dowd. "Grab them shovels and jam some coal into her. You other guys get busy on the capstan and walk her up!"

Nobody moved. They stared at him bulking there against the livid sky, with blank eyes. He turned to the Deak and the others who had followed him.

"There's nobody can run the engine," stammered Bunty.

"I'll run her," rapped the neophyte.

"What's the idea?"

Dowd had been sensing the attitude of these valiant manhandlers. As his eyes swept them, his face suddenly darkened and knotted.

"Damn it all, this ain't no debatin' society!" he cried. "Seven people dying, that's the idea! There's steam pressure on the gauge now! If we drop down, we might save them yet, maybe. We got to try!"

"Leave our anchorage now?" came a burst from Tootle. "I should say not!"

Curly's glance flashed and widened on him.

He looked around the group again.

"Who's with me? Will anybody help?"

"We'd all help if there was a chance," said Gramp smoothly. "It can't be done."

"It might be done!"

"You're crazy!" shrilled Pringle, thrusting in. "We're safe out of those rotten rapids. We're safe, only just safe. And we're going to stay safe, you fool!"

Curly Dowd passed the quivering creature over.

"Is there a backbone in this crowd?" he asked quietly. Nobody answered.

Outside, the storm howled by. Back of them somewhere, the launch was laboring nearer the rocks.

"Because I'm going to try it alone if I have to," he added.

"You'll not lay a hand on that capstan, if that's what you mean," growled Tootle.

"You say so?" inquired Curly Dowd. And at the word he knocked Tootle underfoot with a smash between the eyes, caught up the slicing bar, and began to lay about him.

"Get t' work, y' cowards. It's me runs this craft now, and, by gosh, I'll put some guts in y' before I'm done!"

CHAPTER VI.

The Sequanocks used to say that the big, bad spirit comes to dwell between the river cliffs in the tempestuous late summer. Any clam dredger thereabouts knows that the devil walks abroad upon the waters of the Bowl when the thunderclouds mass low. The riverfolks have always agreed that strange things occur within the sinister, sucking sweep of the rapids.

But no legend ever whispered a more curious tale than the very haps as they happed on board the good ship *Zacariah Johnson*, what time she dipped among the rocks of a certain darksome night.

There was none to mark. No outer eye to see, or ear to hear. The storm charged down the heights of Grayling Bluff. It whelmed all with clamor of wind and artillery. It blanketed all with driving spume and rain. The little side-wheel steamer was a dim blot in the welter. What passed on her decks and in her engine room only the forty-odd souls who were there could have told. And of the forty-odd, certainly no single soul would have told, chance what might.

For once the myths of the Sequanock came to simple truth, and within the Bowl there ranged a rampant being who wielded the evil rod of power.

He flailed them around the house and back again.

Here and there one stood to him with protest or outcry, not understanding. Such he stretched to the deck outright and strode on, driving the herd to his will with words and blows that hurt.

"You—and you—and you—smart with them shovels. There's lives to save—lives to save, y' chicken-hearted whelps! Work!"

There were forty of them in the mass, and because no forty of them can all be of dough, there were some quickly shamed into ready service. Sheer moral force overmastered them, as it always must.

Young they were, and foolish, and flabby, but not all literal cowards. Only weakened by silly games and shallow poses, by snobbery and social cruelty. Only half spoiled for manhood by the vicious frat atmosphere, by selfishness, pretense, and monstrous conceit. This rough-handed, roughnecked freshman suddenly put upon them the compulsion of red blood and clean brain. And they obeyed.

Presently, somehow, the shovels were flying.

The Deak was among those who attempted an argument. The Deak had been badly shaken. He clutched at Dowd.

"We won't stand this!" he gabbed. "Who the dickens are you to smash us around? Look here——"

Curly Dowd caught him by the arm and wrenched him up under the dim light, where he could see into his eyes.

"Need you at the throttle, there. That's it—shiny handle. Grab it and wait for orders!"

The Deak gasped, blinked, and, sharply released, stumbled for the engine guard rail. His hand groped out and found the throttle.

"Work—work, y' pups!"

They worked. A feverish knot fed the red maw of the furnace, and the foremost, straddling a shovel with black robe kilted around his waist, bore a jagged cut from the slicing bar over his eye.

They worked.

A pale-faced youngster, toiling with the best, was taken with a gust of sobbing.

"If we can only do it—if we're only not too late!"

Curly stood to peer through the driving smother.

"'S all right, sport," he cheered. "They're holding on! If we're all as good as you, we'll do it yet!"

The pale face set sternly.

Curly turned hard, and a spanner flew from the dark ahead of him, and caught him in the chest. He gathered the hysterical bundle that fluttered before him, and dabbed the deck with it.

"Lemme go, you big ruffian!" chattered Pringle. "Lemme go, I say. You want to murder the lot of us——"

The neophyte paused.

"Oh, it's only you, is it?" he queried politely. "Gosh, I near mistook. Sorry."

He slung the cringing Pringle gently to the top of the house, and left him paralyzed.

"Capstan here!" called the new commander, springing up the deck. And it was here he met Tootle, waiting with Medicine Ball and another. They swarmed on him without preamble, and got the slicing bar.

The big guard was rather wild in his heavy way.

"If y're insane, we ain't!" he gasped, hugging the captive.

Curly's answer came in crisp appeal as he struggled:

"You damn fool, can't you see? This ain't personal! The launch—think of the launch!"

"That anchor stays!"

The group swayed and staggered.

"I warn you," panted Curly. "Anything goes now! It's lives! You're on the track, and, by God—you got to get off——"

The three had been hauling and mauling the neophyte all evening. They had the gauge of his resistance. But it was suddenly different. Curly did not mean to fight. This was no fight. Only a primal issue being stupidly clogged. He moved with the simplicity permitted to utmost need and straight purpose, things of which these young gentlemen had never learned.

He sent a jab into Tootle where it closed him like a jackknife, and laid him cold. He gave Medicine Ball the knee, and finished him by tripping him headlong. The third he merely took by the throat and squeezed.

"Rough stuff on the high seas!" murmured Curly grimly, as he got to his feet.

A cry went up from the deck house.

The storm was still flickering through its uproar, and, by a brighter flash, the launch, far back now, was seen to have lost sharply. The yellow, spouting rocks were close aboard her.

"Throw her open!" called the commander to his engine-room chief. "For all she's worth!"

The craft quivered and jounced as her rocking beam rose like the arm of a rheumatic but still vigorous old lady. The note of machinery clanked above the howling gale. The paddle flapped overside. And the *Zacariah Johnson* stretched jerkily into action.

It seemed hopeless, with the anchor still to retrieve. At every glimmer, they looked, to see a blank where the launch had been. But Curly Dowd had a play to make. "It's win or lose, boys," he laughed, groping for the spanner. As he darted back to the capstan, the *Zacariah Johnson* eased up, and he knocked out the shackle that held the chain.

It snaked loose and away, carrying

half the rail, and the next instant the flood had snatched them down the chute.

CHAPTER VII.

On the edge of the tumbling falls, under the jagged shore of Mulberry, seven geologists in a half-sunken launch, watched a helpless old side-wheeler careen past, like a dying duck down a brook.

For themselves, they had given up. Exhausted by bailing and shouting, they had finally wedged into the stern to give their craft the last inch of forward lift, and abandoned a useless struggle. There they sat, mute amid the sheeting sprays, and waited. It could not be long now. Once they were driven upon a rock, the end would come swiftly and mercifully.

"Broke her moorings, Alston," the little riverman who had come as engineer made laconic comment.

They followed the dim craft whose fate they could only expect would be their own within some moments. They saw her swept away into the dark. And hopelessness had a murmur of pity to spare for these other unfortunate companions in disaster.

Professor McCracken, crouched under the lee of the dead engine, spoke with quiet feeling:

"Poor fellows! I made sure they were safely anchored. Dredgers, I suppose. With wives and children to think of. With that much more of bitterness in their crisis. Yet they made no outcry. We can remember that when our time comes!"

His grave voice calmed and nerved the forlorn little band.

From the blinking, rumbling turmoil of the storm behind them sounded the single blare of a steam whistle.

With common impulse, those who were still covered took off their caps. Some of the weaker cowered lower. Disaster was very close upon them.

The next instant, Alston was on his feet, clutching his neighbors, staggering to the violent leaps of the launch. He pointed aft, with an inarticulate yell.

They stared.

Something was bulking up out of the storm veil where they had seen the fated vessel disappear. Something that seemed to gather and take form again from the very spindrift. They dared not believe even when a brighter pencil of lightning streaked across the base and etched the lines of a river boat.

"The *Sally Meadow!*" breathed Alston, shrinking. For what craft of wood and steel had ventured that fearful chute? What navigators of flesh and blood had ever steered that rock-strewn channel?

Yet another minute and they knew. No mirage, this. No thing of their tortured fancy. A real side-wheeler, bucking stoutly up the stream, with labored exhaust and out-trailed banner of sparks, heading serenely through the nested dangers. The same side-wheeler that they had seen whirled by to apparent destruction.

"She came down just for us!" cried the professor, with swift comprehension.

"If you'll tell me what pie-eyed lunatic on the river 'u'd take such a chanst!" burst from Alston, in sheer amazement.

And still of that, too, there was presently no doubt. The steamer edged for them. Fell off a trifle, and edged again. Foam piled up on her bows like an avalanche. Close under one wheel boiled a jutting rock. Almost in her path a yellow cascade flung above the shoal. It was mad. It was impossible. But it was being done.

Slowly she fought nearer, her paddles tearing the uptorn water into mist.

The climax came with a rush.

The launch's inadequate anchor ripped again from its hold, and she was borne back. She lifted, whirled, and smashed like a shoe box. Snatched in-

stantly from the rock, wrecked, broken-backed, and sinking, she was hurried on——

To toss in a smother of froth against the quarter of the rescuing craft where a dozen strong hands hauled the gasping geologists through the rail gap to the low deck.

CHAPTER VIII.

The professor stood before the wheelhouse, blinking water and light blindness from his eyes, and seeking astonished adjustment of the fact that the crew of this clam dredge was a bunch of hopefuls from his own college campus.

He appealed to Sooky.

"If I could see the captain—to say to him—to try——"

Sooky waved to the cabin, and slipped away. But the professor, following the gesture, saw only a freshman student spinning busily with the wheel in the dim recess.

He tried again.

"The dredger, you know?" he asked earnestly of Gramp. "Whoever's in charge? I don't seem to see—— And we've got something to ease our minds of, you may well believe!"

His lips were a trifle unsteady.

"You've all a great claim upon our gratitude, of course. We feel it deeply. And we shall try—— But where is the captain? Do tell me!"

Gramp took him by the arm.

"You'll find the boss right there at the wheel," he answered gravely. "And, professor," he added, low-voiced, "he's the only one to thank. We'd rather you knew. As a matter of fact, he, and he alone, went down the chute after you—and carried us with him."

Gramp disappeared in his turn, and left the bewildered professor to grope for the significance of his strange words.

The storm was passing, giving way to a spread of higher cloud and a gentler breeze. They were well out of the Bowl now, running steadily under Grayling Bluff. The wheel required less attention when Professor McCracken entered the little cabin.

"Dowd," he was saying incredulously. "You are in command here?"

The freshman turned, with a grin.

"I guess so, for want of a better. How are you, professor? Gosh, hope you come through chipper!"

The professor's reply died away in open-mouthed amazement, for now he could see the figure that faced him.

Curly, naked to the waist, was welted and scored with crisscross blows. One eye was closed with a purple bruise, and a stave had laid open his cheek. But the thing that held the professor's startled eye, the mark that flared upon him, was the triad of big black letters painted across his brow.

The freshman was clearly unconscious of the shameful and ludicrous brand, as he instantly saw. And the fact was illuminating, besides being, in a way, rather pathetic.

Professor McCracken had not watched and fought the fraternities for years for nothing. Professor McCracken was far from being slow of apprehension. Professor McCracken was nobody's fool.

A boatload of Greeks on the river at midnight. Black robes. Paraphernalia. A single "Barb" in sight. Added the evidence before him, Dowd's plea of an "engagement," the confession of Gramp, and the shamefaced silence and aloofness of the whole outfit in what should have been, normally, an hour of congratulatory triumph.

He began to understand.

"You were—initiated?"

"I guess so," returned Curly Dowd. And it was the measure of the educational value of the last few hours that, believing, he spoke the words with absolute indifference.

He tended the wheel for a pause.

"They put me into something, I reckon. Don't seem to remember the name."

"Did they call it—Alpha Sigma Sigma?"

"That's it."

"Do you know what it means?"

"Not me."

Behind the shaded light in the cabin hung a tiny mirror, lingering vanity of some whiskered riverman. The professor took it down and offered it silently.

Curly Dowd saw his own reflection and the three reversed letters it bore. And as he read, a hot, red flush overspread his battered features.

A. S. S.

"So they were razzling me—all the time," he noted quietly. "There ain't no such frat, of course?"

The professor waited for some further comment. But Curly Dowd's mouth only stayed set and grim.

"There is one now," said McCracken, a trifle incoherently. "And you're the only member of it. And I'd like to say it's the only emblem of the kind that ever was a mark of honor or distinction. You're alone because there's nobody else in the crowd to class with you. By God, sir——"

Not academic language, but the professor was beginning to sense the things that must have passed aboard the *Zachariah Johnson* that night: The low advantage taken; the bitter humiliation inflicted; the cowardly hurts. Finally, the single-handed struggle and conquest when the real test of human character broke for that crowd.

He sensed these things and all they had meant for himself and others. And they overbore him.

"By God, sir," he choked; "I'd like to say—— By God, let me have a handgrip of a man! Of a *man*, sir!"

Forward, in the bitts, well out of sight, three gay young Greeks, representative of as many different "frats" in the college's social trust, were huddled. Only they were not remarkably gay at that moment, and they seemed to take small comfort in each other's presence. There were emotions upon them, as they sat gazing up the dim track of the river, which they could scarce handle, much less share.

"There isn't a bunch in school that wouldn't crawl on their bellies now to get that chap Dowd to join. Don't you know it?" murmured Bunty.

"Course I know it!" responded Hunk Wood. "Say, if *we* could only get him!"

"You make me tired!" growled Tootle. "Can't you see a fellow like him is too big? Lord—him in a frat! Fussing around with fudge, and dames, and sofa cushions, and dance cards? Show me the bunch in this school fit to touch him. 'Cept to black his shoes, maybe!"

Back in the little wheel room, Professor McCracken gave up his attempt to make the neophyte talk, with a very human sigh of regret.

"There's nothing to tell," said Curly Dowd shortly. "They all helped, once they got started. You saw how they worked."

"I saw," nodded the professor. "And I can imagine what went before—I can imagine, after a fashion. But about yourself, Dowd. I suppose you know that every one of them is liable to be expelled for what was done to you?"

"Forget it!" returned Curly Dowd, in a very undutiful blaze. "Nothing like that, professor! If you think you owe me, or any of the rest of us, anything, that dies right here. Me, I guess I've learned that a 'frat' ain't a place for any lad that means to stand on his own two feet, like you said yourself. I'm glad I learned it, and cheap at the price.

"As for them, they'll be pretty good fellers, most of them—when they get grown up!"

THE OPEN ROAD

BY HALLIWELL SUTCLIFFE.

IX.—THE BORROWED HORSES.

AFTER breakfast, Jonathan called for their reckoning, paid it, and asked the obsequious host what weather there was out of doors.

"A keen frost, sir, and the snow as hard as ice."

"So I thought, from the weather signs last night. We shall need two horses. See that their shoes are sharpened."

The host began explaining that they could leave the horses at "The Crown and Thistle," in Carlisle, when they took the next stage forward; but Jonathan cut him short. They would need their mounts for a longer period, and proposed, in fact, to buy them. The money in his purse was insufficient, but he and Mauleverer were gentlemen of the prince's, who must reach the main army without delay, and they would give him a note of hand, to be redeemed when there was a Stuart on the throne again.

"Nay, that won't carry corn, gentlemen. The prince—he came, and he went again, and his Grace of Cumberland followed after, and news comes of hangings in Carlisle. I'm for King George—his face on good money—and not for any horse deals that go by note o' hand."

Jonathan slipped his pistol out and handled it with a carelessness that appalled the host. "We commandeer the horses, then, and you can whistle for the note of hand. It's a trick I learned from an officer of your side—a better man than you or I—who's on his way to America by now."

"Bustle, host!" urged Mauleverer, with his tired laugh.

When they were mounted, and the sharpened hoofs of their nags bit hard into the frozen crust of snow, and they were away to recover a week's leave of absence, Jonathan had a twinge of conscience.

"That poor wretch of a host—the tears were in his eyes, to part with two good horses—or the price of them!"

"Oh, let him be! He's fat, and will forget. It's the lean men, Standish, who take things overmuch to heart."

It was surprising, this ride of two men who knew that they were hopelessly behind their own army—hopelessly behind Cumberland's army, that marched, six days ahead, between the Stuart and themselves. Yet both were well content. The glamour that was Prince Charles Edward's, and only his, drew them north through any peril, through any spite o' the weather, making poetry of hardship.

The horses were fresh, and they reached Penrith in good time. The

town had gone to sleep again, after its wont, though only a week since it had been in the midst of battle—retreating Highlanders and advance parties of the Hanoverians, and running fights all up and down the streets.

They passed through, after baiting at "The Lonsdale Tavern," and neared a village five miles from Carlisle. They were not so fit of body as they thought, and had been riding with the reticence men show when each is ready to drop, and neither will confess it.

"Are you tired, Standish?" drawled Mauleverer.

Getting no answer, he glanced at his companion and saw that he was fast asleep in the saddle.

"Eh?" asked the other, roused by a sudden jolt of his horse.

"Oh, I merely asked if you were tired."

"Yes, as the brook is tired of running. Where are we?" he added, after a sleepy pause.

"On the great gay road, my lad. Where else?"

"To be sure," assented Standish, wide awake enough to laugh. "Do you know what I was dreaming Mauleverer? Just that I slept in a bed again, and needn't wake for twelve months and a day. I never had a finer dream."

"Well, I'm dead beat, too. Shall we halt at the first inn we come to?"

"Agreed, comrade. I want to recapture that good dream of mine."

They rode into the village. The moon touched snowy roofs and the tinkling silver stream with poetry. The homestead lights shone ruddy across the frosty street.

"A good picture," drawled Mauleverer. "We only need the waits, and church bells ringing in the distance, and Father Christmas here a little before his time. Standish, I was reared in a fairy-tale-come-true village like this. On my honor, I was. I bleated to you once, you remember, about the rectory and the lavender, and what not? If I'd stayed there, eh, instead of roaming—why, lad, I might have been a paragon by this time!"

"You might," assented Jonathan dryly.

And suddenly Mauleverer's voice was gruff, impatient. "Oh, it's no time for jesting! Old days are round me like a cloud. If I'd stayed in that West Country village, so like this—if I'd stayed"—the old tired laugh returned—"why, I'd have been just myself, Standish! It was better to hide my roguery in town."

They came to an inn, not so roomy and suggestive of good cheer as last night's lodging; but a meal and a place to sleep in was all they asked, and they found both indoors. There was good stabling for their horses, too.

That night they had the recompense that comes to men who have fairly earned it in the open. They slept the long, deep slumber that children know—a sleep that surrendered all into the Hands that made them. It was penance to wake with the next dawn, roused by the host's noisy thumping on the door.

"I'd have given the prince's ransom for another hour of sleep," said Mauleverer, when they met for breakfast.

"Why didn't you sleep on, then?" snapped Jonathan, whose own temper was nothing of the best.

"Oh, some whim to keep tryst. We told fat Boniface that we were to be up at dawn, and, to be sure, there's leeway to make up. The Stuart has a week's start of us already."

Breakfast was not as punctual as they were, and they strolled out to see how it fared with their borrowed horses. The dawn air was mild and quiet, with a smell of violets in it, but underfoot there was the crispness of a keen night frost.

"It's good to be alive," said Jona-

than, with all a countryman's zest in the fragrance of a winter's morn.

"One supposes so. For my part, I loathe your climate, Standish. It nips me to the bone."

"Oh, it has a playful bite, I own, but no harm in it—just a good watchdog that keeps one at a distance."

As they came out of the stable, after seeing that all was well with their nags, the sharp tat-tat of hoofs sounded down the street, and a ruddy-faced man, mounted on a stout cob, swung round the corner and drew rein in the inn yard. The landlord bustled out, and a friendly grin ran in and about the port-wine wrinkles of his face as he saw who the newcomer was.

"You've come for the Christmas fair, then, William?" he said. "I never knew you miss our fat-stock sale, save once. You'd broken both legs that year through a fall down your cellar steps, and it wasn't in reason to ask a man i' that case to come to a fair. Best take your liquor at bottom of cellar steps, say I—there's not so far to fall in case of accident."

William responded, with a touch of spleen, that old bygones ought to be old bygones, especially with Christmas coming on. And the fat host asked pleasantly how the world wagged with his friend.

"None so well," grumbled William. "I lost two horses yester morn. A couple o' footsore men with a three days' growth on their chins had asked a lodging overnight. I gave it them, seeing they'd money in their pockets, though I wondered how they'd come by their gains. Then next morn they turn out to be whelps o' this Stuart army that's gone north with its tail between its legs. They'd pistols, they had, and so I had to let 'em steal th' horses."

"Aye, they're prime thieves, these Charlie's men," agreed the other, with all an easy-going man's contempt for a defeated cause. "That will be a sad loss to ye, William—as bad, or near thereby, as breaking your two legs down cellar steps."

A look of great craftiness stole into William's eyes. "Well, as between friends, Daniel, it wasn't so much a loss as a misfortune. I swopped two broken-winded horses, good for nowt save the price of hide and carcase, for yon stolen couple. The chap who swopped me was dithering in his cups, so I'm not so much what you call out o' pocket."

Jonathan, listening to all this from the stable door, laughed incontinently. He knew his own dalesmen so well, and these folk of Cumberland were not vastly different where a horse deal was in case.

"Standish, I used to laugh like that," said Mauleverer nonchalantly. "One pays for it, I always find."

Their host of yesterday turned sharply, whispered something to Daniel, their host of to-day, and there was silence for a moment.

"Come on, Daniel," said William. "They've left their pistols behind them this time. My two good horses are inside your stable yard."

It was two to two now, and Jonathan, growing accustomed to long odds, was perplexed by the simplicity of the affair. After all he had come through on the road of his choice, it seemed child's play to met a fat host who came to him with naked fists. But this host had been the prime boxer of the north, before prosperity and good living had loosened his strength, and now he remembered many ancient tricks. Twice he felled Standish, who rose with astonishing persistency, and caught Daniel a wild cut across the jaw. But the return blow brought night absolute to Jonathan.

Mauleverer fared no better at the hands of William, who was fighting for the horses he had lost yesterday; and, when these two gentry of the prince's

returned to knowledge of the world about them, they saw a press of villagers gathered round the two hosts who had sheltered them on successive nights.

"What shall we do with them?" asked William, turning to the crowd.

"Put 'em in stocks," came a voice. "It's lucky we have two sets o' stocks, standing cheek by jowl together, like man and wife, as a body might say. They should fratch, by that token, once we've got 'em sitting side by side."

"That's a rare notion," laughed another of the crowd. "Give 'em a taste o' prison before the sheriff comes to hang 'em. I was never one for Stuart Charlie."

He lied. When the march came swirling south, with the pipes rousing echoes from every hill and crag, he had been for Stuart Charlie, because he saw some gain in it. Now, when he knew that Carlisle Castle, garrisoned by a forlorn hope, had yielded to the Hanoverians, he was a George's man.

Jonathan, hustled forward to the village green, got out of his sickness and bewilderment. "Blow hot or cold, you lout!" he said. "I never liked the middle men."

Then some one struck him on the jaw, and, when this world opened dizzily again to him, his feet were hampered. There was a jeering crowd about him, and he felt weak and hungry. Presently, out of the numbness of heart and soul, he realized that he was sitting on wet ground, with his feet prisoned in the stocks; and two was company.

"Awake, Standish, are you?" asked Mauleverer. "I never met a man who got to sleep so easily when the world's not going very well."

"Where are we, by your leave?"

"On the same gay road—where else? After all, our ankles ached as much when we walked the highway yesterday—walked, Standish, till I thought we should never find horses again in this world."

"We found horses," said Jonathan, with a gust of laughter, "and we're here on that account. These louts have left our hands free, after all. You will take a pinch of snuff with me?"

"Ah, that's a help, sir. They have us by the heels, they think, but we disdain them so long as we have snuff."

The way of these two men, here for their gibes and ridicule, began to stir queer feelings in the crowd. The culprits took snuff with extreme precision and punctilio. They talked together of the shower of sleet that was drenching them to the skin, and wondered if better weather were in the making.

When a coward in the mob came forward and began to tug at Mauleverer's boots, in preparation for the game of tickling his feet until madness came on him, there were protests, and two or three of the village folk ran forward.

"Let him be," said Jonathan, and they drew back, surprised by his persistent gayety.

As the coward got Mauleverer's right boot off, Jonathan leaned over and tapped him on the shoulder. "Well done," he said, "and now a pinch of snuff with me."

The man lifted his head, and Jonathan dusted both eyes for him till he whimpered that he would go blind for the remainder of his days. And the crowd laughed, liking the way of these vagabonds who took their penance gamely. The worst of the horseplay was over, by tacit consent of the villagers; but they did not forget that these two were horse thieves. Abhorrence of that form of robbery was inherent in their blood, and they did not loose their prisoners. Only they contented themselves with gibes and banter, instead of throwing missiles; and the change was pleasant.

"We have not breakfasted," said Jonathan, fumbling in his pockets, "but we've tobacco."

"A meal in itself," agreed Mauleverer.

The ground they sat on was chilly, and their legs were tilted toward the sky; but they lit their pipes and smoked with a disarming, grave tranquillity.

"Smoke while you may," growled one of the onlookers. "Sheriff has been sent for, and he's a quick way with horse thieves."

They smoked while they might, and passed a jest or two, and found their liking for each other thrive under this discipline of raillery and great discomfort.

Mauleverer turned by and by, his voice too low for the crowd to hear. "I'm getting a grip of t'other side of things," he said, jeering at himself. "I've earned this penance, earned it richly, Standish. But you—what have you done to deserve it?"

"I'm no Galahad myself."

The other glanced at him, then shook with laughter. "If you're Galahad, you've hit on a devilish fine disguise. Standish, if you could only see yourself! A four days' beard, a smear across your forehead where the rotten carrot hit you—and the Galahad concealed beneath it all!"

Into the midst of it all a post chaise rattled. By instinct Jonathan knew who was seated in it. She had a knack amounting almost to a passion of finding him a masquerader, and always playing some part of comedy or farce.

The chaise went slowly through the press of villagers, and Miss Linstoke leaned out to learn the meaning.

"Oh, hurry, postilion!" she said, in her brisk, imperative way. "The judge lies ill in Carlisle, and I must be at his lodging. I am late already."

She glanced about her, saw the two men in the stocks, halted a moment in sheer distrust of herself. Then she forgot the judge; and just as the postilion was whipping forward, in obedience to a tongue he feared, Miss Linstoke opened the chaise door, stepped lightly into the sleety road, and would have fallen if a man had not clutched her by the arm.

"My thanks," she said, in her royal way, as she moved forward and stood facing the two thieves.

Mauleverer had talked lightly of penance a while since. In grim earnest he found it now. She saw and knew him, but as one remembers a face that has passed out of heart, if not out of mind. Her glance sought Jonathan's. Perhaps a four days' beard, and feet pilloried in the stocks, and what not, matter less to women than men think. At any rate, Mauleverer saw a light in her eyes as if strong dawn were moving up the hills. And in that light his own hope went out for good and all. Deep in the deep places of his soul his clean love for this girl had taken root and thriven. All that might have been, all the dull, lifeless road ahead, lay stretched before him. He suffered in that moment as only strong men are allowed to suffer. If his sins were many, noised abroad wherever men had heard of Beau Mauleverer, his penance was extreme. Here, as he sat in the stocks, a figure for derision, the fire ate inward and consumed him.

He did not know as yet that to the sinners on a grand scale is given a repentance, if they will take it, planned on the like big scale. He simply sat there, his feet aching in the stocks, and thought the bitterness of death had come. He was mistaken. The bitterness of life had reached him at long last, and his strength was in the making.

Miss Linstoke stood in front of Jonathan and mocked him. "Are you the prince to-day, sir, or simply a rogue in the stocks? Your disguises are so many."

"I am as you see me," said Jonathan briefly. "I stole two horses, and the sheriff has been summoned."

"Oh, how consistent rogues are! First a guinea at the Rylstone tollbar, then five guineas and a highwayman's mask, and now a common horse thief. Your descent has been rapid, Mr. Standish."

"But gay," assented Jonathan. "Mauleverer here assures me that we are on the great gay road. We disguise our happiness, I own, but that is lest folk should envy us."

Miss Linstoke regarded him with troubled pansy eyes. Then she turned sharply to the crowd. "These gentlemen go free," she said. "Release them."

"How can we, with the sheriff sent for? Horse thieving's grave business, mistress, choose how you look at it."

"Aye, fool, so is the imprisonment of men without fair trial. I know these gentlemen. Judge Linstoke knows them."

"Judge Linstoke?" echoed the man, his effrontery gone. "We've heard of Judge Linstoke hereabouts. He gives hard sentences."

"Yes, to hardened rogues. See you, there will be trouble if the sheriff comes and finds these friends of mine in the stocks."

From his very pain of heart Mauleverer found humor come to him. "You put us here, you yokels, and you'll have to face the business. We're innocent, of course, and the man who locked me into this quaint pair of boots will answer for it. If the sheriff is in good humor, he'll only crop his ears for him, close to the head, but otherwise there'll be the noose."

Jonathan laughed in his haphazard way, but the villagers did not hear. They were daunted by this fine, imaginative picture that Miss Linstoke and Mauleverer, between them, had drilled into their brains.

The end of it was that the prisoners were freed; and they took no joy of their freedom for a while. No man's legs are ready for a minuet on the highway just at once after the stocks have numbed them. They hobbled to the inn, recovered their sword belts and pistols; and, when they came out again, knowing themselves armed, they moved with a firmer step.

"You go to Carlise, Miss Linstoke?" said Jonathan. "So do we. We can give you safe-conduct when we've got our horses out of stable."

Without let or hindrance, they crossed the yard and hustled the hostler into some sort of speed in clapping on the saddles. The host, accepting the changed face of things, as, indeed, it was his trade to do, followed them with many expressions of regret that their stay in the village had been incommoded.

"Good for you, host!" drawled Mauleverer. "Incommoded? Try an hour or two in the stocks, and you'll not be so nice of speech, I promise you. Standish, you're fond of jests. We've been incommoded, says fat Boniface."

But Jonathan had disappeared, though a moment since he had been standing in the yard; and Miss Linstoke and Mauleverer were left face to face. It angered him that she should show no diffidence, no sense of constraint. As time went, it was not long since they had ridden together on the Gretna road; as the soul's clock reckons time, however, many years had passed. She had crossed the barrier between girlish dreams and riper knowledge, and Mauleverer was a shadow, no more, no less, moving across a world of real folk.

"Life's deuced odd, Miss Linstoke," he said lamely.

"Life is surprising, I admit, but, oh, so good to taste! Dreams are pleasant, and buttercups and daisies are good for

weaving into garlands, but I'm tired of child's play."

He felt himself swept aside, not petulantly, not with anger prompted by regret, but with a carelessness that was not counterfeited.

"Why does not Mr. Standish come?" she asked presently. "He knows that I'm in haste."

Jonathan knew that she was in haste, but he was obsessed by the belief that a few days' growth on his chin mattered. He had gone into the inn and found there a pert chambermaid, and had asked for a razor.

"'Tis pity you should cut your throat for any woman's sake," said the maid demurely. "Not one of us is worth it."

Standish, in a high mood of seriousness, was minded to be furious. It was absurd, after these days of hardship, that his face, and the way of his love for Miss Linstoke, should be plain for any tavern wench to read. Then the unalterable humor of the road came back to him.

"Not one of you is worth it—true," he assented cheerfully.

So then she pouted; and, when he did not follow the lead her vanity had given him, she bridled. But it was all one to Jonathan, and in the end he made his way to the host's bedchamber. He shaved hurriedly but cleanly, washed odd stains of carrots and rotten eggs from his face, and stepped out into the inn front with something of a bridegroom's air.

"Sir, you've delayed me," snapped Miss Linstoke. "Why?"

"Cannot you see?" said Mauleverer lazily. "He always learns a new trick of fence when we're together. Contrast his chin with mine."

"Coxcomb, lead me to my chaise!" she said, with a little wayward smile.

They took the road, these three. Astonishing as the prince's wild march to the throne had been—and more astounding the sudden mad retreat—there was a quiet surprise, too, about this five-mile journey to Carlisle. The man thwarted of a bride at Rylstone tollbar, the man who had fought for the girl's happiness, were guarding the chaise in which Miss Linstoke hurried north. And the two men were friends, though one of them, so far as his heart was concerned, had taken a mortal hurt.

When they reached Carlisle and the judge's lodging there, Miss Linstoke was insistent that both should come in; but Mauleverer declined.

"By your leave," he said, "I have to counter Standish's attack. I go in search of a barber."

It was not raining in Carlisle, as it happened. Gray sleet was falling instead, and through the murk of it Mauleverer passed, a fine, upstanding figure of a rogue.

"He goes well," said Jonathan, sharp pity in his voice.

"Sir, I shall never understand you men," she said, as they went indoors. "You always take each other's part."

"What else is there to do? We're simple folk, hemmed in by women we shall never understand."

"You are clearly out of temper, Mr. Standish," she said. "Will you wait here and cool it while I run up to see my father? He may be well enough to thank you for your escort."

She did not find the judge in his bedroom, and ran out in great alarm. On the way downstairs she met her father's body servant, an elderly fellow of discretion and partial sobriety.

"The judge is better, mistress. He's downstairs, with deviled kidneys and a pint of claret in front of him. He has been asking for you very often."

"He is well enough to see you, Mr. Standish," she said, as she reached the hall. "Claret and deviled kidneys are always a sign of convalescence."

With the fugitive smile that half ad-

mitted him to friendship and half disdained him, she beckoned him into the parlor on their right. It was a room paneled to the ceiling, old with the rustling ghosts of many judges who had sipped their wine and jested here when the day's work was over. Judge Linstoke, as he sat at the table, the ruddy hearth glow and the candlelight playing round his square, decisive face, was a figure to uphold the traditions of his forbears.

"Ah, here at last, child?" he said sharply. "It was well enough to pay a call of duty for me on my kinsman, since I couldn't go myself, but you've taken a pretty time to drive five miles out and home again."

She went to his side and ruffled his stiff iron-gray hair with a liberty no other dared have taken. "*You* to be angry with me, sir?"

"I'm at war with all mankind, I tell you. Isn't it enough to have gout in the feet, and gout in the bones and head of me? I tell you, child, I feel like the bagpipes must do, with one of Charlie's Highlanders torturing them. I've heard a good deal of the music since coming to Carlisle, and I know."

Jonathan, doubtful of his welcome at the first, retreated still farther into the shadowed door space. There was such confidence between these two, such ripe affection, salted by humor, that he felt himself an intruder and an alien.

"There, child, you look bonnie, after all," said the judge presently—"like your mother when I first went wooing. And now she's dead, and I'm an old man with gout!"

Illness had unsteadied Judge Linstoke. His voice broke for a moment, but he recovered gamely and filled himself a bumper. "Here's to life!" he said, lifting his glass. "She's an odd box o' tricks, but then so is a woman. That is why we're fond of both, maybe. Why were you so late in coming, child?"

"There were two rogues in the stocks as we drove by."

"And you stayed to help them out? You would. I've spent the best part of a lifetime in getting rogues safely haltered, and you spend your time freeing them. I always said that women live to undo a man's patient work."

"One of the rascals was named Jonathan Standish. And, father, I wish you had seen him, with a chin like a wayside tramp's and the smear of a broken carrot across his forehead. I did not stay to help him—not at first—but merely to laugh, in the midst of these sad times."

"They dared put Standish in the stocks?" snapped the judge. "I was thinking much of him to-day. Full to the brim of fantastical, high motives—a dreamer—but there's steel in the lad's spine! Where is he, Alison? I need him."

After the nightmare journeys of these past days—after ambush, fight, and skirmish—after that walk with Mauleverer over a road hollowed out by the passing of two armies, its pools frozen so hard that their ankles all but broke at every step—after it all, Jonathan found himself seated at a good table, with warmth and friends beside him.

Miss Linstoke was pleased to minister to his thirst and hunger, though he protested. He was a dreamer, as the judge had said; and, while he ate and drank, he was aware that this girl with the pansy eyes had brought the swift beat of angels' wings into his life.

"Alison told me that your chin was like a tramp's," said the judge, breaking up a silence that was growing burdensome. "When did you find time to shave?"

"At the inn, sir."

"Good! A man who can think of his chin between the stocks and the gallows is a man I like to meet. You're aware, Standish, that this rising is over

and done with? You're aware that every step you take in Carlisle streets is shadowed by the government I serve?"

Like a knife at his heart, Jonathan felt a pain he did not understand, until, in leisure, he could remember his meetings with Charles Edward—the strength and grace of a man in whom kingship was inborn.

"It shall not fail. There's to be a battle. Soon or late——"

"Take an old man's word for it. It was a high endeavor, lad, and it failed because it aimed too high for this world. In the next—— Oh, fill your glass, Standish! I'm too old and gouty to guess where Stuart Charles will stand when the Trump o' Judgment comes. Besides, it would be treasonable to the government I serve."

When Standish asked what had happened during the past week, it was Miss Linstoke who told the tale for him. She spoke quickly, as one who had witnessed tragic scenes and did not care to dwell too long on them.

"My father, after the assizes, fell ill, and we stayed here. I saw the brave defeated army march into the town. I saw the prince, his face gay like sunlight through the rain. They spent a night here, and then Colonel Towneley volunteered to hold the castle, to give the retreat a respite; and the prince would not listen till they persuaded him that his Highlanders would have a better chance of safety. If I were Towneley's wife, I should be proud."

"Alison's keen for the high endeavor, too," said the judge. "Oh, how you youngsters cry for the moon, and will not rest until you fall to earth again!"

"The castle held out for two days, and after that they brought Towneley out into the market square. They asked him if he would recant his Stuart faith, and he lifted his head to the rain and said he hoped to die like a gentleman."

"Fine," murmured the judge, "fine and quixotic, Standish. Towneley seems to have been a bit of a dreamer, too. One always pays for dreams, I tell you—sometimes with one's head."

Miss Linstoke stood there in the candlelight, slim and eager. "If I were Towneley's wife," she repeated, "I should be proud. I should shed tears at his grave—tears of sheer happiness. To go into the castle, waiting there for death, when he might have taken his chance in the open—to care nothing at all, so long as he served his prince—there are few of his breed left, and none among the younger men."

Jonathan was roused. He had no great faith in himself—rather a sort of humorous contempt of what he thought his easy-going nature—but he was the one man here to stand for the younger generation. "I take up your challenge. Give me a second hazard of the kind, and I'll accept it."

"At a price?" said Miss Linstoke, with daintiest irony. "Is it a guinea this time, or a pile of gold, or a minuet on the highway? No highwayman does anything without his price."

She had stung him into fury unexpectedly, and was dismayed by the result, as women are. Standish leaned his hands on the table, his eyes ablaze and level with her own. "Yes, I've my price—your heart to wear on my sleeve, good for men to see."

"Daws might peck at it."

"Once," said Standish grimly. "Afterward there's a way to treat pecking daws."

The three of them were silent from sheer astonishment. The fever and unrest of the times were on them, and shams were swept aside. Jonathan had broken all rules of conduct by stating, without reserve or casual lying, how his own heart stood.

It was the judge who broke up the

tension. He began to laugh, and laughed more and more until his eyes were weak with tears. "Alison," he said at last, "it is the most diverting offer of marriage ever heard of. You'll have to pledge yourself to this adventurer; there's a look of will-not-be-denied about him."

She did not smile—simply stood there, her glance meeting Jonathan's. Then her brows lifted with the old disdain. "Have you ten guineas at command, father?" she asked.

"Oh, I suppose so, child. Why?"

"Ransom me, by your leave. This adventurer is rising in the world, and one guinea will not bribe him now."

She curtsied to her father and was gone, leaving a nip of east wind in the room.

"It's droll, Standish, how women hug a grievance. Alison knows she was well rid of that Gretna business —knows you'd rather meet the headsman than a bribe—but she won't get the rankle out of her mind. The best of them are like that."

"Do you let me win her, sir? I've my sword and a house called Wuthrums, smothered in debt, and some knowledge of the open road. To be honest, that is all I have."

The judge drummed with his fingers on the table, then he took a pinch of snuff.

"Standish," he said, "it's true that a man gets what he wants, if he prays stark and constant for it. For twenty years I neded a son, and none came till you met us at the Rylstone tollgate. Then you went, like a puff of wind, following this mad fellow of a Stuart, and I missed you. I never wanted any man about me as I wanted you three hours ago."

"I'm here, sir, entirely at your service."

"There's a grim, north-country physician here in Carlisle, who's been attending me. He came this morning, thumped me about, and asked whether I liked truth or lies. I explained to him that liking for the truth was inborn in me. Then he said bluntly what ailed me, and gave me a month to live, with care. So I got up, of course, and said in that case I'd have deviled kidneys and a pint of claret. If physicians could give me only a month of slops and lying on a bed, I'd mortgage the inheritance."

"Sir, it is not as bad as that?" protested Jonathan.

"Oh, no sympathy! I've seen life, and I'm ready to lie down and get to sleep. There'll be a better waking on the morrow, lad."

Jonathan did not know what he said —the words ran out of their own accord. He stood so close to his own father's death, so close to the perils that had followed, thick on each other's heels, that his heart spoke unchecked. Speed of action, not time as the clock marks it, had brought these two into a close relationship.

"So that is your feeling?" said the judge dryly. "It seems I've found a son at last; the pity is that we have to say good-by so soon."

Then he talked of his daughter, of the unsettled times. Whichever way this warfare ended, the towns and highways would be filled with the jackals who always prowl on the outskirts of honest fight.

"In brief, Standish, you won her at the Rylstone tollgate. Finish the ride; Gretna's just over the border. Forgive the bluntness. A dying man does not waste time."

The wonder of it, the simplicity, captured Jonathan. He wasted one whole minute in a dream.

"You are forgetting Miss Linstoke in this matter," he said by and by.

"True. Women are so odd. Here's a dying man wanting her safety, and a youngster wanting her happiness, and

a bedlam of Charlie's men and George's men cutting each other's throats, and Alison will ask to be wooed—here a dropped glove, and there a box on the ear, and then six months of withdrawals and advances, and what not. There's no time for it, I tell you."

At Jonathan's heart the little lamp he carried there burned suddenly to flame. "By your leave, sir, she does not give me her regard. That is all. Why talk of it?"

So then the judge canceled twenty years. He had loved Alison's mother in just this fashion, a little absurdly, a little too finely for this world's give and take, but with a strength that abode with him still.

"Are you pledged to the prince's cause?" he asked.

"I've done the last errand he gave me, but I'm pledged to him."

"You'll not stay till claret and deviled kidneys have shortened my leave here? Jonathan, I want you about me. They're a week and a day ahead of you, those misguided Highlanders. Will you not be about me just for this little while?"

The call of the open road was in his ears again; but a lame dog needed him, and he stayed on.

Miss Linstoke came in presently, and stood half between the door and the candlelight. "Ten guineas would not bribe him?" she asked, her voice dangerously quiet. "Offer him twenty, then."

The judge was his own man again. "Alison," he said, "I entertain an honored guest. Get up to your nursery and pray—for manners, child. If you'd had grace to be a boy, I'd have known how to lick you into shape."

Late that evening, when the judge was abed and sleeping tranquilly, Standish went out into the Carlisle streets. There was sleet underfoot and a driving wind, but these were better than the stifled, indoor air. He made his way to the castle. A light burned here and there, throwing the squat, unlovely front into darker outline. For Jonathan, the place was lit with glamour. Here Towneley had gone to certain death; here he had come out to meet the fate he coveted. Till time ended, Carlisle would be haloed by the story of one gallant gentleman and of the forlorn hope for which he did not fear to die.

His heart ached for Scotland, ached to follow the army pressing north. Why had he agreed to be tied by the leg here, because an old man needed him? There was room and freedom yonder, and a chance to play the man.

"One was born a fool, I suppose," said Jonathan, with his gentlest laugh. "Undoubtedly that is the explanation."

He pictured rousing battles across the border, perils by night and day that he might have undertaken for the prince, the stride of a good horse under him, eating up the miles. And he had bartered it all for attendance on a dying man! The young blood in him rebelled. Was he a priest or doctor, to stay on here when battle was singing like a pibroch to him?

In the quiet of the night he remembered his hot challenge to Miss Linstoke that he, too, would go into darkness, as Towneley had done, if she would point the way for him. She had not pointed the way, but the judge had.

It came to him, down from the starlit sky, this knowledge of the enterprise. So Towneley had felt when he volunteered to go into Carlisle Castle, instead of meeting happier perils in the open. Yet Towneley stayed.

Jonathan, for the first time in his life, knew true humility, the roots of which are grounded in common, thrifty earth, and its flowers, later on, are white as knighthood. If Towneley had been content to be tied by the leg, why not a lesser man?

He turned at last to seek the judge's lodging. Not fifty paces away he saw

the cloaked figure of a man, blurred in the starshine and the cloudy moonlight, and his hand reached down for his pistol. The figure glided out before him and was lost in the narrow windings of the street.

"Another jackal!" Standish muttered. "Faith, how they loathe the sight of a pistol muzzle!"

The next morning Judge Linstoke woke with an insistent cry for Jonathan. He was weak and shaken—a child, whose needs must be ministered to at once. When Standish came, he was content, and slept again. And so this siege went on—the siege undertaken in glad memory of Colonel Towneley—until Jonathan began to know what lack of sleep meant. Sleep waited for him at every turn; it threw dust in his eyes when he was striving to keep eyelids open; it tempted him to lay down his courage and sell his manhood for an hour's forgetfulness. He could not yield. The judge needed him, that was all. Day by day the knowledge gained on him that he was priest and doctor both, nursing a sick man back to health. He gave of his strength, and Judge Linstoke sucked it up as a thirsty man drinks water. And Jonathan lost flesh; but the patient asked oftener for claret and a good cut from the joint, and that was so much to the good.

Whenever Standish got out for a run in the open, he was aware of a cloaked figure shadowing him. The figure would not come within pistol distance, and the stealthiness of it all would have troubled him at usual times; but to Jonathan, sick of inaction within doors, the hazard was a stimulus. He kept his pistols ready, and grew to love this jackal who shared his night walks with him.

He met Miss Linstoke often these days, and he had not guessed till now that a woman's temper could be forged of such brittle steel. She was waspish. It seemed as if the sting of the old serpent that once wrecked Eden had got into her tongue.

On the fourth day of this enterprise, after Jonathan had given out his strength in the sick room upstairs, and was proposing to eat a good meal before going out of doors, he met Miss Linstoke on the stair.

"You serve the judge very well," she said, withdrawing her skirts from him as if he had the plague. "What is your price nowadays?"

Jonathan's easy-going temper snapped. He looked her up and down and laughed. "Just to forget you, Miss Linstoke."

Her eyes grew soft and pleading. He felt as if he had hurt a child. But, by some gift of common sense, he let the feeling go, and passed out into the hazard of the Carlisle streets.

Clendenning.

By Hugh Johnson.

HAD the lot of Horace Clendenning fallen among Samaritans, he might have been a sexton—and he would have been a faithful one. But it fell among thieves, and he became a military convict with a twenty-year term to serve.

I have seen several of that precious gang of Nineteenth Century Free Companions that by some quirk of fate coalesced in D Troop of the Fiftieth and traced the name that delighted them—The Forty Thieves—across the Island of Luzon. They fought like fiends, and their devil of a captain—he has long since been cashiered—used to boast that he could ride with them from one end of the island to the other—insurrectos or no insurrectos. The Filipinos used to cross themselves at the sound of the troops' hoofs thudding across the dry rice paddles.

How they kept out of trouble so long I do not know. Such a hard riding and fearless troop was worth a regiment on advance guard, but when they looted the great cathedral at Bontoc and strung the sacristan up by the thumbs until he told them where he had hidden the chalices—that was too much. They went before a Red Terror of a Court Martial that thinned their ranks as effectively as a level sheet of shrapnel could have done. That was how Clendenning got his sentence. I do not know what his place was in the Forty Thieves, but he must have been a holder of horses, a stander-by to watch. I knew him in the big military prison of San Leandro in southern California, and there he drove a mule cart.

You may see some men at their work and know that they have struck their level—that they fit their task completely, and that nothing else would have suited them so well.

Such was Clendenning's condition as he shuffled along in rear of the San Leandro garbage cart, his stable broom slanting across his shoulder, his weak blue eyes on the ground, alert for the slightest swirl of dust, the tiniest scrap of paper. A remark upon the immaculate condition of the prison grounds was enough to make him flush with pleasure. He was boastful and vainglorious concerning the amount of garbage he removed. It was his belief that no such animal as Jerry, the seventeen-hand army mule that drew the cart, had ever been foaled. The brasses of his harness were always spotless, and the leather as soft as kid.

Jerry was worth going far to see. By what telepathy it was done I cannot tell, but that mule always stopped without a signal at precisely the proper spot, always started on the necessary instant, and at the end of a tour toiled up the wooden ramp to the garbage chute, backed into position, and waited for Clendenning to spring the lever.

Clendenning had no friends among the prisoners. He was too colorless for them. I doubt if he missed their companionship—he had his mule. He talked to that brute, confided in him, and, in the dusk of the stalls at feeding time, crooned over him, caressed him, and gave him the love for which every human being must have an outlet somewhere.

It was my business to talk to the prisoners, to hear their stories, and to do what I could for them—I felt no professional jealousy of the mule—and, but for something that happened dur-

ing the second year of my tour of duty at San Leandro, I should have gone away certain that no fate could have made Clendenning more content and that few men were in truth happier.

He got permission to speak to me one night, and, since he was trusted anywhere within the walls, I received him in my study. Instantly I knew that some unusual news had come to him. His old look of placidity was gone. His shallow face, with its negligible chin, was twisted in a look of frantic anxiety.

"Well, Clendenning," I said as kindly as I could, "what can I do for you?"

"Chapling," he whispered, edging closer to me, "I gotta git out—see—*gotta*—just gotta, that's all."

At last he showed me a letter that had somehow been smuggled to him, and stood fidgeting his cap between his big, bony hands, and shuffling from side to side like an uneasy animal while I read it.

It was dated Iloilo on the letterhead of a British mercantile company. "Favorite husband of my dearest," it began, and, having seen many similar compositions, I seemed to glimpse the picture of a bespectacled Filipino shoe hombre, his tongue in his cheek and a Visayan-Spanish-English vade mecum open on the desk beside him.

FAVORITE HUSBAND OF MY DEAREST: Long time that I do not write on you since when, account per guards of those prison where you are accommodate nothing percolate, sadness to conversation it mister.

Those pequenious fortune of moneys that you are leaving are expend sad are I to so since remark about arrival of these little son of yours thus absolved of the food which we eat. Therefore you should to borrow me five or nine hundred pesos by quick come back of mail. Much obliged mister of those funds. We are needing him oh how sorrow.

That you are not acquainting of the friendly son we describe, he sojourn on me after you go so sadly and pesos are require to eat it. Everyday in the morning he looking like you mister and those moneys possible to come by swiftness oh beautiful.

We are starving in disgustedness Mister and pesos are expecting themselves you bet. Loving with thoughts your angel wife of beauty sad with pesos.

SYMPROSA CLENDENNING.

I did not look up. I did not wish to hurt him by saying what I thought.

"Have you any money?" I finally managed.

"She had it all," he growled, "ten thousand pesos."

"Ten thousand pesos!" I didn't believe him.

"Loot, sir—that was a small share—some of the boys had twicet as much."

"Well, wasn't that enough?" I did not care to hear his confessions.

"Sure it was enuff—it was more'n nuff. She was just a squaw."

"Well——"

"But a *baby,* sir. Me with a baby! She says so in the letter, didn't you see? An' it looks like me."

This was a new side to the business, and I inspected him closely—nothing but sincerity. I had thought you could scrape Clendenning dry with a figurative spoon and find no more than a desire for three meals a day and a mechanism designed to do the bidding of a stronger will than his. There was more. The man was simple as a lever and fulcrum, but he had the power to love some one beside himself very deeply.

"I'll do what I can for you, Clendenning," I promised. "I'll take it up. I've been thinking of doing it for some time. I'll try for a pardon."

Instantly his round face became pyriform.

"Take it up!" he groaned. "Take it up! That'll be months."

"Yes," I said, "at least—but you've a good chance."

I could fairly see resolve come into his face.

"It won't do, by G—— I mean—beg yer pardon, chapling."

"See here, Clendenning," I warned. "Don't go away planning any foolishness. You'd just spoil every chance you've got."

He seemed to think I had some power to help him, for suddenly he burst out in a torrent of words that only intense excitement could have evolved from him.

"My Gawd, chapling—I ain't never had nawthin'—not nawthin'. I was found on a doorstep, and since then nobody but you wot's paid to do it never had nothin' for me but a kick er a command. Nobody never so much as smiled unless they was after somethin'.

"It never hurt much, chapling—the kicks. Seemed like I was built for 'em. I never snarled back—not me. But I never had nawthin' nor nobuddy to call my own. And *I wanted 'em.*"

Poor devil—he made that clear enough. He was standing with his bony hands outstretched, his inconsequent face contorted by an effort to suppress tears.

"But here I've got a baby—a son of my own to look up at me. Mebbe he is half brown. He'll need me. He's mine. He'll grin at me and wait for me to come home, and want me. And I'll work for him. They ain't nawthin' I won't do. I'll——"

He stopped so suddenly that I followed his glance in a direction across my shoulder. Even my study windows were barred with a lattice of chilled steel.

He covered his face and sobbed.

After he was gone, I wrote two letters, one a formal recommendation for Clendenning's pardon, the other to the lieutenant of the Fifty-first at Iloilo, asking for what news he could gather of Symprosa Clendenning. The Iloilo letter required two months for an answer, and there is no hurrying a pardon recommendation. There was nothing for Clendenning to do but to possess himself in patience and to wait.

He couldn't do it. He began to get marks against his A-1 rating. The prison commandant said to me one day:

"Your pardon recommendation is going to be twelve hundred and forty-two's undoing. Without that he'd have gone on with his old mule, happy and contented. He's restless now, and he's taking up with that old 'D' Troop gang. They're bad actors."

Had I been astute enough I would have reported the Iloilo letter right then and there, but I hadn't been in the prison business long enough to attach the proper importance to such slight indications. Clendenning avoided me, too—that should have been a warning. I had only one other conversation with him before matters came to a very serious head. He wanted to know about the progress of his pardon suit, and all I could say was:

"No news, Clendenning. Have you heard any more?"

He said:

"No." But I had one of those queer intuitions that the men call "hunches" that he was lying, and that for some reason of his own he would confide in me no more. The reason was that he and some ten other military convicts had planned one of the most daring prison deliveries that San Leandro ever had to frustrate.

They had outside confederates, who had in some manner smuggled to them enough hexagonal pierced-grain, big-gun powder from the naval station on the bay, ten miles down the estuary, to blow the whole prison to smithereens.

The plan was this:

The garbage chutes open through hoppers that hang over the estuary. Under these the city garbage scows stop on their way out to sea. The chutes open from a platform about ten feet above the prison yard, and this platform is approached by two ramps.

The space beneath the platform is inclosed by concrete walls and is utilized as the prison tool house. Two men work here, sharpening axes and saws, and counting and receiving the tools from the working parties.

On the prison wall just above is a caponier, or little guardhouse, where is mounted an automatic machine gun that sweeps the assembly yard from its swivel. At five-thirty in the evening, the men from the furniture factory across the yard are just forming to march back to retreat, the two tool-house men lock their door, and Clendenning is dumping his last cartload into the chutes.

The powder was placed against the outer wall of the tool house, a slow fuse of twisted rags dampened with kerosene was so to time the explosion that it would occur when all of the groups were at a safe distance from the tool house. The quantity of powder insured a breach in the river wall, the destruction of the caponier and gun, and an excellent opportunity for escape to any of some hundred and fifty convicts who cared to make the attempt.

It worked beautifully to the very last second. I was in the prison yard when Jerry came toiling in through the east gate. The sentry over Clendenning stepped aside as the iron doors shut, and stood pumping the cartridges out of his gun, while Jerry, Clendenning slouching along beside him, ambled across the yard, turned at the chute, and labored up the incline.

Every man was perfectly schooled in his part. The tool-house men came out, closed their door, and stepped into position for the lock step across the yard. Over in front of the furniture factory, the long butternut brown queue of tired convicts was forming to march away. Then the first critical incident was passed over smoothly enough.

The moment Clendenning sprung his dumping lever a resounding "thump" sounded from the platform. It caused every one to glance in that direction, and was followed by a suppressed and decorous murmur of laughter. The off wheel of the garbage cart had worked off the axle, and now, with increasing velocity, went spinning down the ramp toward the stables. Clendenning stood a moment with a look of perplexed stupidity on his face, then glanced at the grinning guard in the caponier, and received permission to go after it. The wheel struck and rebounded from the concrete stable wall, and lay rocking on its hub when Clendenning reached it.

The furniture gang had formed by that time, and the tool-house men were halfway across the yard. I was not the only person to be struck by Clendenning's peculiar attitude at that instant.

He had stooped over for his wheel, and had ceased movement, as though suddenly frozen in that position, back bent, hand outstretched, eyes turned upward from his task in a look of awful horror.

All that I could discover to educe such emotion was the form of Jerry silhouetted against the evening sky, as he peered over the edge of the platform above the tool house, his hammer head drooped dejectedly, his long ears limply forward in a pose of deathless sadness and inscrutable yearning. But something had electrified Clendenning. He dashed across the sanded prison yard toward the tool-house door, and to the guard's frightened command:

"Halt!" he yelled, "Fire!" and stood clawing a moment at the latch.

Sure enough, a thin eddy of blue smoke came curling out through the opening, and when I reached it I could see Clendenning furiously tossing aside the corded picks and shovels at the far side of the room, a tongue of flame sputtering around his feet. Looking over his shoulder, he yelled at me:

"Get out, you fool—it's giant powder!"

But in the excitement I didn't comprehend, and when I did the cold sweat fairly wet my hair. Clendenning had kicked out the fuse and scattered some small brown canvas bags, each filled with big, honeycombed hexagons of nitro explosive.

I didn't feel particularly kindly toward him, or very sorry that the court that tried him added ten years to his sentence, but it was a painful duty to read to him the answer to my Iloilo letter from irreverent Fleming of the Fifty-first.

"——there is a Symprosa, and she used to be Clendenning. Her friendly son is, I fear, a child of the imagination of Pedro Salacar, her present consort. She has been married some eight times since the solemnization of the Clendenning nuptials. Pedro is the affable monte dealer at the fan-tan parlors of our progressive fellow townsman, Looey Sing, late of Macao, Portuguese China, and I suspect that it is he and not Symprosa who is sad with pesos——"

He looked at me with a slight quiver of his weak chin that calmed after a moment.

"Chapling," he said, "I been more'n half suspicionin' somethin' like that, ever since the scheme fell through. Ain't people jest meaner'n hell?"

I had no comment to make upon this generality, and he apparently desired none, for after a moment of deep thought he asked:

"The stable orderly says that mules sometimes lives for fifty years. Do you know if that's true?"

My answer seemed to give him perfect peace, for I told him that they often did.

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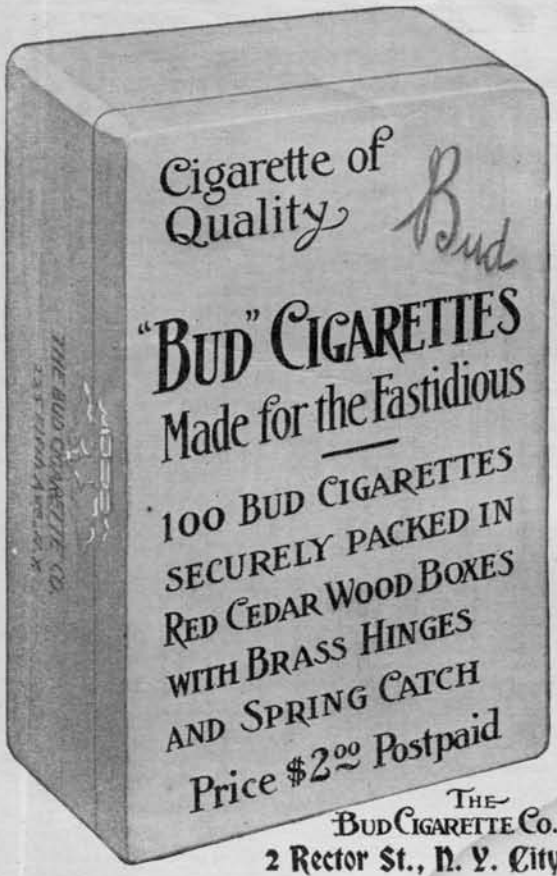

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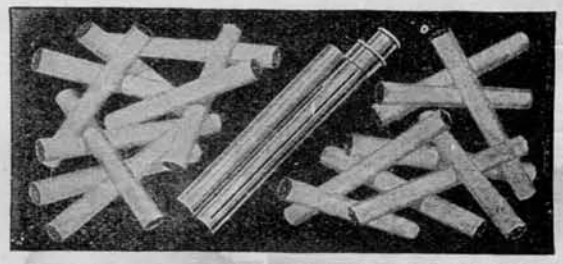

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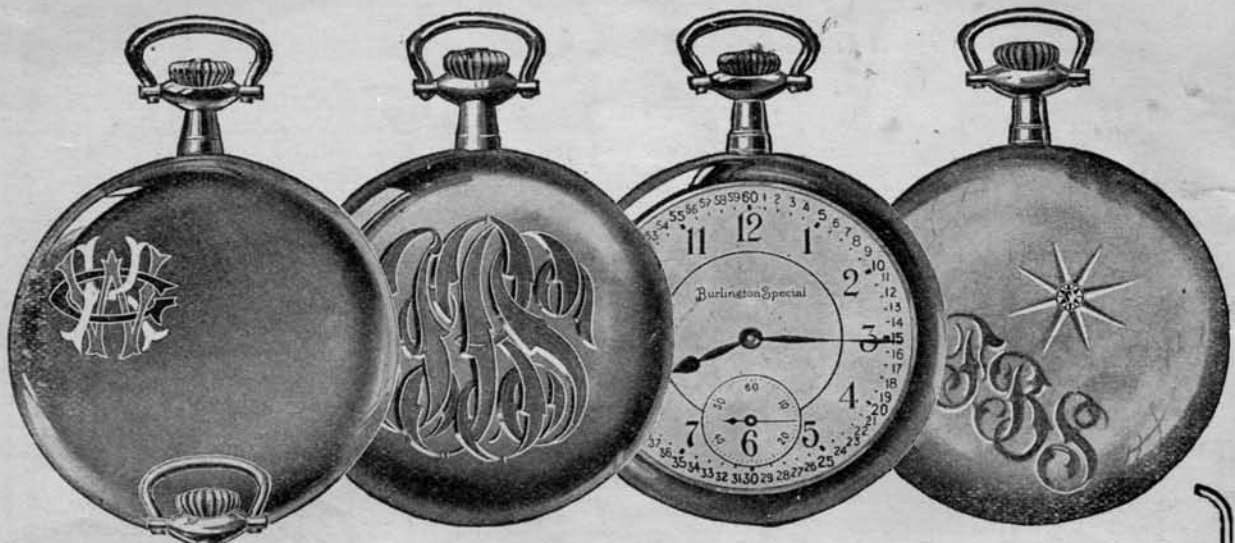

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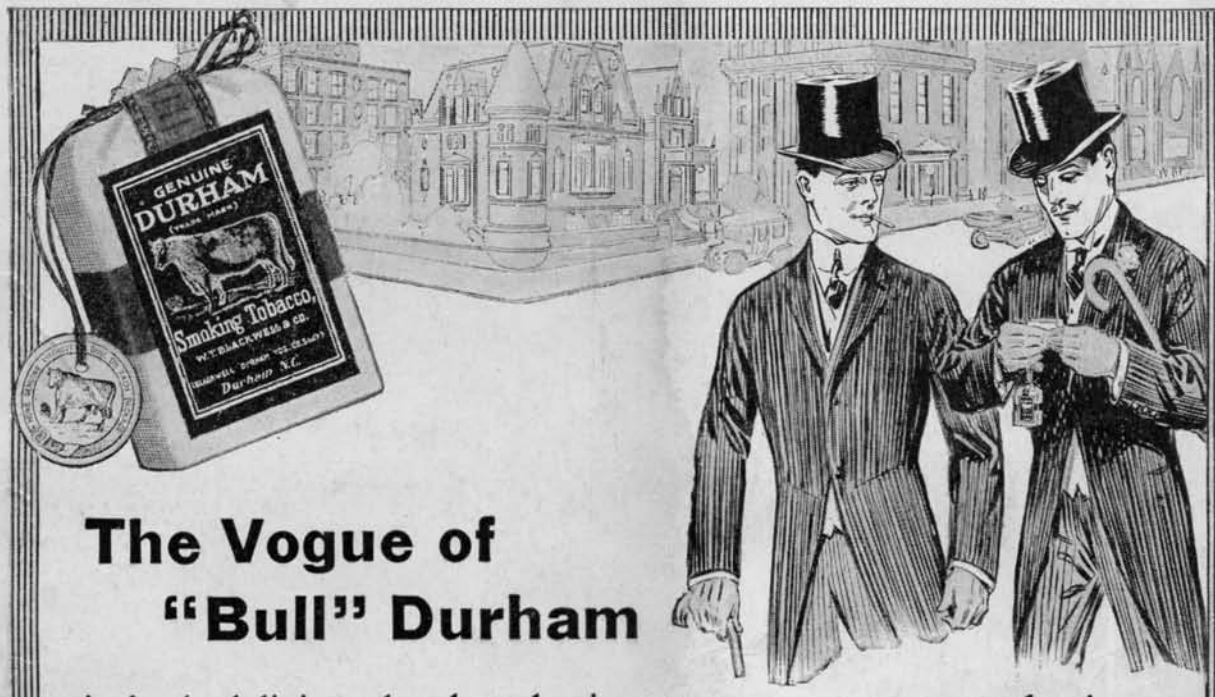

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