ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

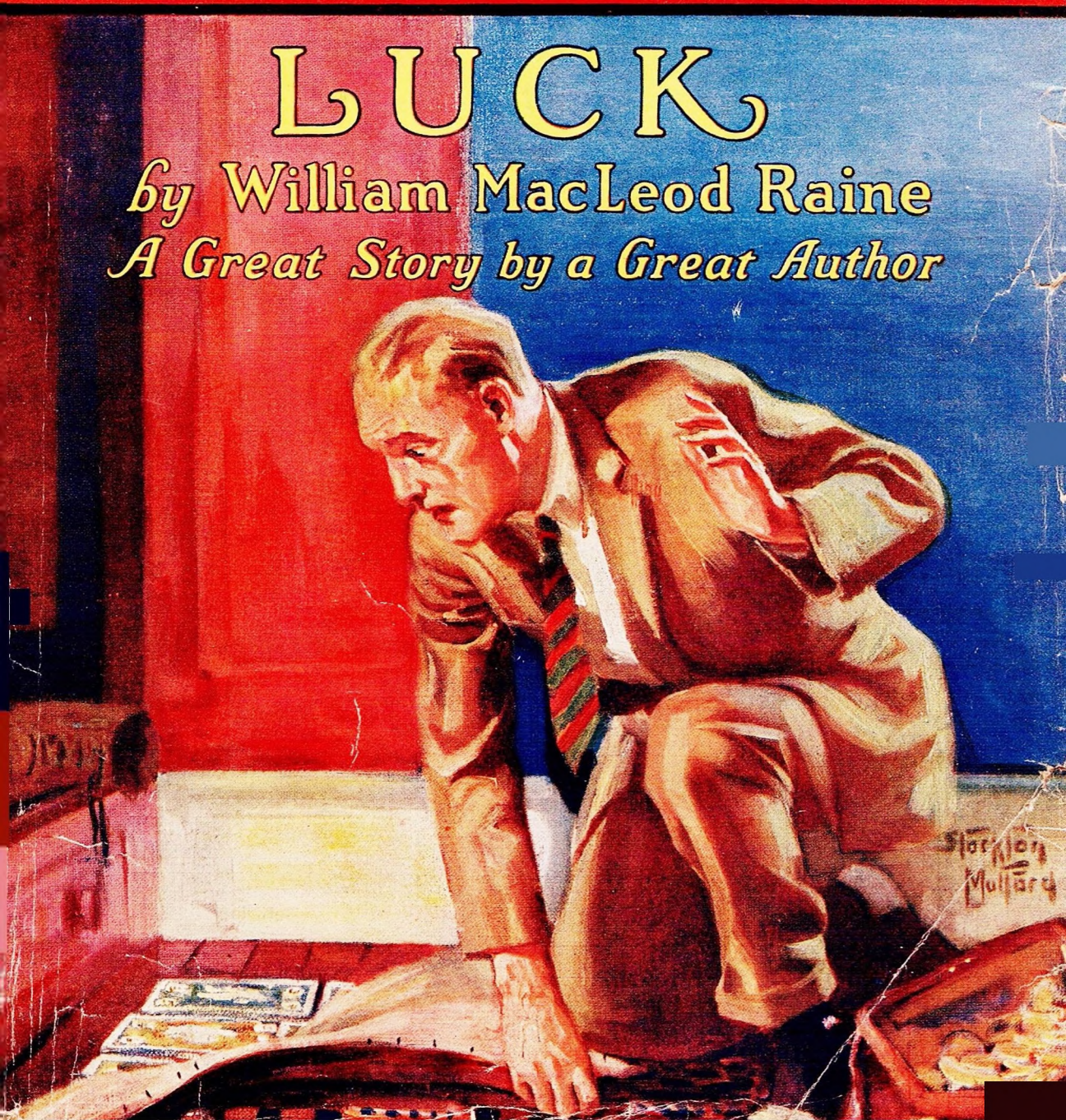
AUGUST 7

PRICE 10¢

LUCK

by William MacLeod Raine

A Great Story by a Great Author



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A thunder-sheet falls to the stage during a performance of the Glenellen Amateur Dramatic Club, and the accident causes considerable laughter But that little incident caused more than laughter in Glenellen. Out of it grew a state of affairs that set the whole town by the ears. Start it next week.

THUNDER OFF STAGE—*By JOHN HOLDEN*

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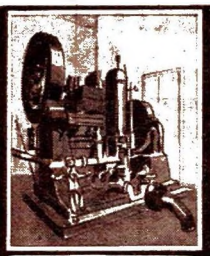

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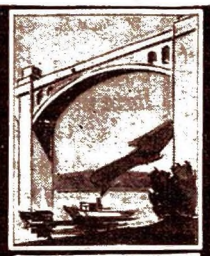

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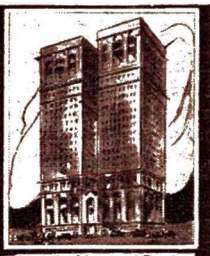

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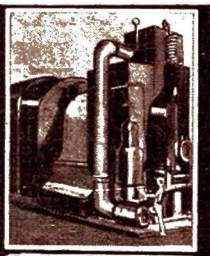

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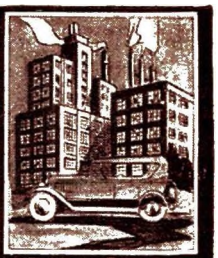

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLXXIX SATURDAY, AUGUST 7, 1926 NUMBER 4

Luck

By WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE

Author of "The Desert's Price," "Bonanza," "Troubled Waters," etc.

MR. RAINE DIPS INTO THE PAST

I BEGAN to write, lo! these many years ago after fate handed me a wallop and put me temporarily down and out. I was insolvent both in health and pocketbook. My first story went to ARGOSY, then, as now, edited by Matthew White, Jr. It was called "The Luck of Eustace Blount." The check that came back to me looked bigger than any check I ever had. It meant that I could go on eating.

I sent a second story in the wake of the first. The title of it was "For the White Rose." Another check came back from the Munsey people. I was a potential millionaire, already headed for recovery both in health and finances.

Since then I have had many checks from the Frank A. Munsey Company, some of them for sums a hundred times larger than these. But none of these later ones have given me the thrill of the first two, for with the optimism of youth I felt that my feet were in the stirrups and I was on my way.

Since I am a Westerner, transported from England to Cattleland when I was a small boy, I naturally wrote of that West I knew; of that section of America in the making which came under my own immediate observation. Of the thirty or more novels under my name twenty-five of them are set in some part of that country which was frontier when first I saw it. WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE.

CHAPTER I.

MORAN.

THEY say adventures come to the adventurous. But there's nothing to that. They just walk around the corner upon the innocent bystander. And to prove my point I cite the case of 'Fraid Cat Moran.

He was christened Percy, which is, from the American schoolboy's point of view, a crime. To live down such a name one just has to be a ruffian. And young Moran wasn't.

It was a pug-nosed girl in red pigtails that called him 'Fraid Cat first. She did it to taunt him to jump from the eaves of the woodshed. Of course, he had to jump after that, and he did it so awkwardly that he broke a leg. But the name seemed to fit him because he was timid and shy. So it stuck. That young hooligan Tim Murphy saw to that.

The boy hated it, of course, though no more than he hated his real name, Percy. His instinct told him that he ought to fight it down, that he ought summarily to wade into every kid who used it. But what was the use? Tim was cock of the walk, a terror with his fists. He could lick Percy with one hand tied behind him. Young Moran knew it. Why invite destruction? It was characteristic of him that he avoided Tim whenever he could.

Percy's people moved from Hilltown, and the pig-tailed girl and Tim Murphy were no longer in his life to plague him. He grew up, went to college, and left in his sophomore year to go to France. It was like him that he did not go to an officer's training camp for a commission, but joined up as a private without delay.

Probably this was unfortunate, in spite of the fact that he got rid of the Percy by boldly signing as Peter Moran. For in the juggling of men he found himself one day at the front in camp with Tim Murphy.

Since Tim was a born bully this was nuts and pie for him. He fell upon his former victim with a loud yelp of glee. "Look who's with us! Per-r-r-cy Moran. Old 'Fraid Cat. Well, well, well!"

The same shy timidity was in Peter that had been in Percy. He hated the grime and filth of the trenches. He disliked extremely being wet and cold for many hours at a stretch. When shells whistled over his head the pit of his stomach sank under him. The zero hour was torture. But he had learned that he could get by if he resisted the temptation to tell anybody how wretched he was.

Now he looked over from the cot where he was lying, and said quietly, "My name is Peter Moran."

"The hell it is," retorted Tim. "It's Per-r-r-cy, an' it'll be 'Fraid Cat whenever I want it to be. See?"

Moran saw, and turned a little pale about the gills. "Peter," he reiterated.

"Per-r-r-cy an' 'Fraid Cat," derided the bully.

The fight that followed was a joy to the company. Peter had not wasted his time at college. He had taken boxing lessons and discovered in himself to his surprise a natural aptitude for it. Athletics and later camp life had developed him from a stringy boy into a closeknit, well-muscled man. Tim was bigger and stronger, but he dissipated a good deal. He made the mistake in the first three minutes of the fight of underestimating his opponent, during which time Peter landed some very hard body blows. The bully was game, but he soon discovered he was in for a licking.

A swift clip to the point of the jaw sent Tim crashing through a cot. He stayed there.

Moran, breathing hard, looked round at the others present. "Is there anybody else here who has personal opinions about my name?"

Apparently nobody had.

Peter continued to detest the mud, and shiver at the horrible cold, and shrink from the sound of the shells. He was, he knew perfectly well, no hero. Yet, by some queer freak of luck, he won a citation for bravery, and the occasion of it was one day when he dragged Tim Murphy back to cover under a heavy fire when the latter had been wounded going over the top. It chanced that somebody with influence was on the spot and saw Peter do it. Hence the citation.

Now Peter never knew why he did it. The fact did not work any miracle in him. Secretly he still funked danger and discomfort. If anybody referred to what he had done he was acutely embarrassed and felt that he was traveling under false colors. Since they thought he was game they would expect him to play up to his reputation, whereas all he wanted to do was to get by as well as he could unobserved. His medal made him uncomfortable, and he buried it deep in the bottom of his kit bag.

All of this by way of preamble, since this is not a war story, to back my claim that if adventures really came to the adventurous, Peter Moran would never have been flung into such a series of melodramatic ones as was forced upon him by that blind goddess Luck.

CHAPTER II.

PETER RENEWS HIS ACQUAINTANCE.

THE war was an old story and had been for some years.

Peter had had more than his share of hard luck. The death of his father at a time when his investments were in a particularly unfortunate condition had made it necessary for Peter to look after his mother and sister. This had kept him very poor. A year ago his sister had married, and this had been followed by the death of his mother.

To-night Peter walked the streets of Hilltown meditating on the fickleness of fortune. Three months before, he had held a good berth with promotion in the offing. Now he was on his uppers, with no job in sight. An irritated appendix had done this for him. It had put him in the hospital for two months, at the end of which time he found himself on the streets of Chicago with very little cash in hand and physically unfit to do any but the lightest kind of physical labor. Unfortunately this put him, in the minds of those to whom he applied for work, in the category of the genus tramp. It was the old story a hobo always pulled.

He had bought a ticket for Hilltown because he thought of it as a rather small place, where some people would remember him. But Hilltown had grown into a city, and it remembered him not at all. He was in a place looking for jobs where jobs were not—at least of a kind that he could fill.

Walking through the new country club district of Hilltown in the mellow darkness of an autumn night, Peter did not reflect on the loveliness of the evening but upon the fact that he had just seventy-six cents in his pocket. When that was gone—

A closed car drew up at the curb fifty feet in front of him. Peter observed, without paying any attention to it, that two ladies descended from it, the first middle-aged and inclined to embonpoint, the second straight, slender, and evidently young. They were followed by a young man.

A hard staccato voice brought Peter back to the present.

"Don't move, ladies—or you either, you guy. Stay right where you're at. An' hand me over yore bags an' rings an' watches an' cash."

The old lady screamed.

"None of that," the bandit ordered roughly. "Come through—an' quick."

Two of the holdups were standing by the car. One was already relieving the young man of his watch and cash. Quite sensibly, the young fellow's arms were reaching skyward.

Peter was again the victim of that instinctive urge which made him do hazardous things he really had no intention of doing. He had not meant to fight Tim Murphy. He had not meant to run back and drag him to the trench on the occasion that resulted in the citation. He did not want now to do the foolhardy thing he was doing. For, automatically, Peter's muscles

were already functioning. He was moving forward at a run, head and body low as when he was starting to make a tackle in the old football days.

One of the robbers turned and gave a startled oath. He fired wildly, and the bullet whistled harmlessly past Moran's shoulder. Yet another instant and Peter had clutched the wrist of the arm which held the revolver. He and the holdup struggled, the one to deflect the weapon from his body, the other to free his arm. Peter, in his efforts, tried to keep the body of his antagonist between him and the second outlaw. It occurred to him that he was a damned fool for interfering, and that he would probably get shot for his pains. But he dared not let go now.

Vaguely there came to him alien sights recorded and recalled later—the dilated eyes of the young fellow still standing with his hands in the air, the tense look of the girl, the hysteria of the woman. Also sounds which were merely a chorus to the main drama—a woman's scream, a man's voice, running footsteps, another oath.

Twice the revolver exploded, luckily flinging its bullets into the air. Peter began to feel faint. This was the first violent exertion he had undergone since leaving the hospital. In a few seconds he would be helpless.

Then, unexpectedly, the holdup with whom he wrestled dropped the revolver, succeeded in wrenching his arm free, and legged it down the street after his companion, who was already in retreat. Peter leaned against a maple tree in the parking and relaxed weakly. He was irritated at himself because he thought he was going to faint.

But he did not do that. The older woman anticipated him by sinking into his arms just as a bareheaded, white-haired man ran down the walk. She had fainted.

The older man gave orders. "Carry her in, you two."

His daughter—it developed later that she was his daughter—spoke a little sharply to the other young man. "It's all over, Jack. You can help, can't you?"

Jack hurried forward. His arms, no longer perpendicular, went round the lady's waist. "Take her feet, my good fellow," he told Peter.

They carried the lady into the house. The younger woman led the way, opening doors and sweeping impedimenta from a lounge in a living room. She flew to get water and smelling salts, while her father unloosened the fur scarf of the unconscious woman.

Peter waited, not quite certain whether he ought to go yet or stay. The other young man moved toward him just as the young woman returned with restoratives. He was immaculately dressed in summer sport clothes. His flannels, shoes, shirt, the tan of his face—everything was perfect. Into his right hand trousers pocket his hand slid a little hesitantly. Evidently he was not quite sure of his ground.

"Jack," the young woman said hastily, "get our things out of the car, will you?"

He vanished on his errand. Peter made to follow him and moved toward the door.

The older man did not appear to be looking at him, but he gave a crisp command in the tone of one used to being obeyed. "Wait!" He was about fifty-five or perhaps a little older, well-dressed and well set up. There was a distinction in the clear-colored face with its clear contour crowned by the shock of wavy silvery hair.

Peter waited. He had no business outside which demanded pressing attention. His chief trouble was that he had no business anywhere, unless one could dignify by that term the matter of looking up a very cheap lodging house for the night. Moreover, Peter was interested to see what this man's reaction to the situation would be. The younger fellow had been on the verge of offering him money when the girl had distracted his attention. He did not expect the silvery-headed man to be so crude.

After restoratives had been applied, the lady on the lounge opened her eyes. "James—Janet!" she said uncertainly. "What is it? I—I—"

"Don't worry, mother. It's all right," the young woman answered.

"You fainted, my dear," the husband explained. "A little shock, but it's all right now."

She took another whiff of the smelling salts. "I remember now. Those dreadful men." She shuddered. "Was anybody hurt?"

The daughter spoke. "One of them fired at this—this gentlemen two or three times." Her eyes had shifted to Peter. "He didn't hurt you, did he?"

"No," said Peter.

He observed that her eyes were a lovely brown, how very clear the complexion, with what simple elegance the slender figure was gowned. She was perhaps twenty-four or twenty-five, this young woman, and her face interested him very much. One could scarcely call it beautiful, and yet—

"How did it come about? Tell me what happened," the father said.

It was his daughter that answered. She seemed to have inherited her father's capacity for leadership. The mother was a soft and pliable person, Peter judged. Jack had just returned, but if he had any intention of telling the story the girl forestalled him. She took off her hat as she began to talk, and the magnificence of her red hair took Peter by surprise. Hair like that would make any woman's fortune. He wondered now that he could ever have thought for a moment she was not beautiful.

"We were just getting out of the car when a man pushed a gun at us and told us to give him our rings and our bags. There was another man with him. I think mother cried out. She was shocked and frightened. We all were."

The immaculate Jack murmured what might have been regarded as a protest against being included in this admission.

Janet paid no attention to this. "I started to take off my rings. One of the men took Jack's watch from him. Just then things happened in a rush. This gentleman ran at one of the robbers and fought with him for his gun. It went off two or three times. Then we heard you coming. The robbers ran away—and mother fainted."

Jack got in his explanation. "The fellow shoved a gun against my stomach. There was nothing to do but stick up my hands."

"Of course," the girl said impatiently. "Nobody blames you." It occurred to her that another man, a stranger and not the man to whom she was engaged to be married, had found something else to do.

"The beggar took my watch," Jack said.

"Did he?" Janet's eyes sparkled. One might almost have thought that she was glad of it.

The older man turned to Peter. "My name is Carey. I don't need to tell you how much we are indebted to you, all of us, for what you did. It was uncommonly plucky and might have cost you your life."

Peter shook hands with visible embarrassment. "Nothing to that. Nothing at all. I just happened to be there, so I thought I'd butt in."

"Well, it's fortunate you did, as it turned out."

"My name is Moran—Peter Moran," the butter-in murmured, understanding that this was expected of him.

Carey completed the introductions. "Mrs. Carey, my wife—and my daughter, Janet. Mr. Meredith."

Janet's hand lingered for an instant in Peter's. There had been for a few moments a puzzled expression on her face. She felt sure she had seen him before. But where?"

"I think we have met before," she said uncertainly.

In a flash he knew her. She was the red-haired girl of his school days, but no longer a tormenting imp in pigtails. Evidently she had gone up in the world as he had gone down.

He grinned. "'Fraid Cat Moran," he suggested.

"Of course." Her face lit up with recognition. "Percy Moran."

"It's Peter now, not Percy," he corrected.

Her smile was brilliant. "And it's not 'Fraid Cat either."

"I'm not so sure of that, though I don't stand for the name from others."

"I'm sure enough, after to-night. I never saw anything so splendid." Then, with apparent irrelevance: "I was a perverse little devil in those days."

"Yes," he admitted impartially.

"Where have you been? I never hear of you. I've never seen you since. Didn't you move away?"

"Yes. I came back this week."

"I'll want you to tell me all about yourself," she said.

He liked her eagerness, her vivid manner. On the other hand, Mr. Jack Meredith did not. Why did Janet have to give herself just as enthusiastically to this beggar as to her friends, to him, for instance? Of course, she had to be courteous after what he had done, though it was a damn fool business if anybody asked him, Jack Meredith. By all the chances of the game, he should have been potted through the heart. It was like Janet to overplay her hand that way. She was always falling hard for some impossible duffer nobody else could see. He had a good mind to put his foot down about it.

"It's nice you know each other," Mrs. Carey said equably.

Peter felt it was time to go. He hoped that Mrs. Carey would be none the worse for her fright, and bade them good-by.

Carey handed him a business card. "Can you call on me to-morrow, Mr. Moran? At ten thirty, say?"

Peter said that he could and beat a retreat.

Under a light at a street corner he took out the card and from it gathered the information that James Carey was president of the First National Bank of Hilltown.

Decidedly the Careys had gone up in the world since she had been at the public school with him when they were kids. Still, he did not need the card to tell him that. The large house and its luxurious appointments, the clothes and manner of the family had told him so. He wondered, rather irrelevantly, if the solitaire she wore on the engagement ring finger of her left hand had been given to her by that bounder Meredith.

CHAPTER III.

CAREY ASKS QUESTIONS.

PETER was on hand promptly at ten thirty. He did not know exactly what Mr. Carey wanted with him, but there was always the chance of a job in the offing. Very likely, the banker had a good many irons in the fire. Perhaps he indulged in the luxury of a ranch. He might be receiver for some business or manufacturing plant. No doubt, he was interested in the new oil fields that were booming at Petrolia. Anyhow, Peter did not want to overlook a bet. He would have felt insulted if he had been offered pay for what he had done, but he was not so quixotic as to refuse any work he could handle, anything of a nature for which he could give value received.

The bank had a prosperous metropolitan look. It was built of granite and there was a good deal of marble inside. There were many windows for receiving and paying accounts, savings department, collections, and statements, as well as railed-off spaces for the desks of cashiers, vice presidents, and trust officers. In the open lobby men and women hurried to and fro or waited in queues at the windows.

Peter had to wait a few minutes in an anteroom. Presently, a plump baldish man with a well-fed look emerged from the inner room with Mr. Carey and they shook hands at the door. The banker called him by the title Senator, and from cartoons and pictures he had seen, the young man recognized him as the senior United States Senator of the State. The two men were laughing and chatting in a very friendly fashion. Somehow, this gave Peter a feeling that he was small fry and of not much importance.

He followed Carey into the inner office and took the chair offered. There were others waiting in the outer room, yet the banker appeared to be in no hurry. He passed across the desk a box of cigars, but Peter declined to smoke. The older man lit up and leaned back comfortably.

"Pretty hectic doings last night, eh, young man?"

Peter assented.

"I needn't tell you that we're grateful for what you did. I'm frank to say I think you risked your life. Not very wisely, I'm afraid. Still, I should be the last to complain."

"If I had had time to think, probably I would have had more sense," Peter replied.

"It worked out very well for all of us."

Carey shifted the angle of approach, after puffing for a moment in silence. "I was interested to learn that you are an old school friend of my daughter."

"Afraid that's stretching the facts. We were in the same room. That's about all."

"I talked with her after you left. She seems to have behaved rather badly toward you. From what she says I gather that she was responsible both for the nickname your mates gave you and for a broken leg."

"That's hardly fair. My temperament was responsible for both, I suppose."

"Her conduct was on her conscience after you got hurt, but she did not mention it at home. She says she has often thought of it since."

"She need not worry," smiled Peter. "The leg healed and the nickname is forgotten. So that's that."

Again the banker shifted his conversational approach. "Do you mind, Mr. Moran, if I ask some questions about yourself? I assure you it is not from idle curiosity."

"I'll be glad to tell you anything you'd like to know about myself," the young man assured him. It began to look to him as though he were on the trail of a job.

"Suppose you start then by giving me a sketch of your life since you left here. Unless I'm taking too much for granted, perhaps you are placed satisfactorily in employment."

"It happens that I'm not. I came to Hilltown looking for work. A place to suit me is difficult to find. I'm just out of a hospital, and I'm not at all strong yet."

"Do you want outdoor or indoor work? What is your profession?"

"I'm like a good many million other Americans. I haven't any. I have kept books more or less, and been head salesman in a broker's office. Just now, until I get stronger, I'd like some light outdoor work. I'm not particular about the pay so long as it is enough to keep me."

Peter told his story in a dozen sentences. The banker asked questions and jotted down notes. Before Peter had finished Carey knew several places where he had been employed, his reasons for quitting each place, the regiment and company in which he had served in France, and the names of several of his superior officers, as well as the hospital from which he had lately been discharged after the operation. Peter admired the thoroughness with which he went after his facts.

"By the way, Janet says your name was Percy. I believe you call yourself Peter now?" The banker's keen eyes plumbed into him.

"I couldn't take Percy into the army with me," the young man explained. "I would have had a dog's life. 'Peter' turned out to be so much better to live with that I've kept it since."

Carey did not question this, but Peter had a feeling that the banker was going to look up his record thoroughly before he went too far to retreat.

"I can give you some half-time temporary work in the bookkeeping department. Would that suit you for the present? Perhaps later I can find something that may be more to your taste. There is no opening just now in our bond department."

"That would suit me very well. I shouldn't care to stay a bookkeeper very long, but for the present it will do nicely."

Peter went to work next day. It was ten days later that the president summoned him to his office.

"I've been looking up your record, Moran," he said, without any preliminary talk. "I find it's good. By the way, you didn't tell me you were decorated for bravery while in the army."

Peter blushed. He was the type of man who is embarrassed when anything creditable is discovered about him. "That was a fluke," he explained.

"How do you mean a fluke?"

"I happened to see a wounded man and hoisted him on my back. A brigadier general happened to be there. He wrote some hot air about it to headquarters."

"I see," the banker said dryly. "Well, if you don't mind, I'll take the brigadier general's point of view. I can use you just now in another capacity if you'll let me shift you. We're shipping a lot of money for expenses and payrolls to Petrolia these days. That's known, of course. Some

very bad characters have gathered both here and at the oil field. They are attracted by the easy pickings that always go with a sudden gold or oil boom. I want a man upon whom I can rely to act as a guard for gold and currency shipments. Do you know how to use a revolver?"

"As it happens, I do. I used to practice with the ex-champion of the country. I suppose I'm rather a good shot; at least he told me so. Of course, I did not class with him."

"Good. Can you look after this for me, then. I don't want, you understand, to send an arsenal along with these shipments. I'm not really expecting a holdup, and I don't want to advertise for one. But it occurred to me that if you could be there on the job all the time it would make me feel more comfortable. Have you any objection?"

The young man hesitated. "I'm not the best man you could get by a long shot. The fact is, I'm rather a timid person. You can deduce that from the name they gave me at school."

"Yes; well, that's all right," the banker smiled. "I want for the job rather a timid person, of your particular type of timidity. We'll consider it settled if you'll accept."

Peter gave a little shrug of his shoulders. "Oh, all right, then."

But after he had left the room he asked himself resentfully, "Now, what did I let him wish it on *me* for?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE TIMID MAN FUNCTIONS.

IT was a sunny afternoon in late January. A glow as warm as Indian summer brooded benignantly over the land. Its languor seeped down even to the bottom of the deep cañons formed by the high office and store buildings lining Seventeenth Street.

There was a steady hum of traffic, pierced occasionally by the honking of a horn, the snorting of an automobile, or the traffic officer's whistle. Trolley cars, trucks, busses, private motors and pedestrians moved in a shifting kaleidoscope. An artist might have chosen the scene to represent peaceful commerce moving in orderly confusion to its appointed ends.

In front of the First National Bank a closed van came to a halt. From the seat beside the driver a young man swung alertly down. He wore a pinched sombrero, one that had seen the heat of a good many summer suns, and an olive-drab suit with trouser legs incased in putties. The young man moved to the entrance of the bank and waited there, as a casual loiterer might, while the driver went into the bank.

An indolent indifference was suggested by the manner of this olive-drab youth. He leaned negligently, as it were, against one of the pillars near the entrance. But if anybody had watched him closely—and it developed later that somebody did so watch him—it might have been observed that his blue eyes were very attentive to what went on around him. His brain registered data that might by some millionth chance later prove valuable. His right hand, now buried to the knuckles in the pocket of his coat, remained there motionless.

His busy eyes and brain, as he stood there, selected and appraised. They automatically eliminated from consideration three giggling high school girls eating chocolates, a dozen women on shopping bent, two lawyers with brief cases, in fact, most of the hurrying pedestrians. But they took cognizance of a heavy-set man in a flivver on the opposite side of the street, a man with his back to the bank, hunched low in the seat. Something about the set of that back seemed somehow vaguely familiar to the watching eyes. They noticed, too, a ferret-eyed, putty-faced man who slouched past and later joined the man in the flivver.

These registered impressions would probably be of no importance. If not they would be sponged from the retina of the memory unconsciously. It was on the long chance that they might that they were temporarily recorded.

Yet after all, the watchful young man was taken by surprise. A young woman's voice hailed him.

"How do you do, Mr. Moran? Why haven't you been to see us?"

The voice and the hand that was offered belonged to Janet Carey. Young Meredith was with her, immaculate in the latest equipment from head to foot.

"Excuse my left hand," Peter said.

"What's the matter with your right?" she asked. "Have you hurt it?"

"Not exactly, but it's busy just now," he said, returning Meredith's curt nod.

"Busy," she repeated, looking down at it without understanding.

The driver of the van emerged from the bank, accompanied by two clerks, each of them carrying a heavy bag.

Peter spoke bluntly to Janet Carey and her escort. "Excuse me, please," and his eyes wiped them off the map. His glance went up and down the street, then followed the bags to the van.

One of the clerks got into the van with the bag, locking the door automatically from the inside. The other returned to his duties in the bank. Moran stepped across the sidewalk and took the seat beside the driver. His finger knuckles still protruded from the coat pocket, where they had remained ever since his arrival.

The flivver with the two men in it passed the van and swung round a corner out of sight. It was headed toward Eighteenth Street. The van turned at Cheyenne Street and again at Eighteenth, each time to the left

"Got a cig, Pete?" the driver asked.

"Sure, Bill." Moran's left hand drew from a pocket a package of cigarettes and shook one out. The driver drove with one hand while he took and lit the cigarette.

Scarcely a minute later the van drew up at the express office in the Union Station and backed toward the pavement. In the open space to the right at the passenger entrance a taxi was disgorging occupants and baggage. Other cabs were moving to and from the station, passing under the Welcome Arch as they came and went. A large car with several men in it stood in the parking space opposite the express office. Its engine was running. Not far from it a flivver waited. The engine of this car also sounded.

As Bill swung down from the seat behind the wheel his cigarette was still two-thirds unsmoked. Already Moran was standing beside the wide double door leading into the express office. The door of the van opened and the bank messenger stepped out. He was joined by the driver and a clerk from the office.

In the mellow afternoon sunshine the scene was peaceful as old age. A stray dog lay on the sidewalk and hunted not too diligently for fleas. A freckle-faced red cap sauntered past with his hands in his pockets whistling the tune of a song from "No, No, Nanette." Peter had heard it at the local theater, a few days before, and the drift of it was that the singer wanted to be happy, but he could not be happy "unless you are happy, *too*."

Then—a shot rang out—another—and another. From both the flivver and the big car men were shooting. One had a sawed-off shotgun, one a rifle, the others revolvers.

The driver of the van ran around the car to see what was wrong. There was another shot. He stopped, a queer, dazed expression on his face, and sank down against the front wheel of the van. With a yelp of fright the bank clerk dropped his bag and bolted through the express office to the platform beyond and down through the subway to the farthest tracks. The express clerk, the red cap, and the electrified dog vanished. They had been on the horizon; now they were not.

Nobody was left by the van except the timid man. At the flash of the first shot Peter Moran's hand had leaped from the coat pocket, in the closed fingers the handle of a blue-nosed forty-five. Before the sound of the second shot had died away he was answering the fire of the bandits.

A hot thrust, as from the steel of a plunging rapier, pierced Peter's forearm and numbed it. The guard knew he had been hit, and shifted the revolver to his left hand.

From out of the automobiles the outlaws piled. They came toward the van with a rush. Moran fired again—once, twice. The swarm of men were almost upon him when he knew by the harmless click of the hammer that he had spent his last shot.

A rifle barrel descended upon his head.

He flung up an arm to break the force of the blow. The earth crashed up to meet the sky, and the two went whirling. He staggered back, went down under the impact of another blow from a blackjack, and slid down close to Bill, who still sat propped up by the wheel.

If Peter lost consciousness it was only for a few seconds. When his eyes shook off the haze they looked into the white, ghastly face of the driver, Bill. A thin curl of smoke still rose from the cigarette held between the man's lips.

Then Peter remembered what had taken place. His eyes swung round to the cars, into which the bandits were piling with their booty. He noticed that one of the men drooped forward, his head hanging over the side of the car. In another moment both automobiles had swept around the curve and were racing up Eighteenth Street.

Peter tried to rise—and fell back again weakly. Funny how the silly old world began to jazz when he moved.

"Those guys—they'll make a clean getaway," murmured Peter to the driver.

Bill did not answer. Smoke still curled in a faint spiral from the cigarette. At least half of this was still unsmoked. The driver's head, arm, and body drooped laxly. A bullet had penetrated his heart before he even knew the van had been attacked.

Then Peter collapsed. He sank back against the wheel and slid down. For the time he lost all interest in the subsequent proceedings. He had fainted.

CHAPTER V.

JANET GOES ALONG.

JACK MEREDITH looked after the van as it swept around the street corner on its way to the station. He was a neat, good looking man, and he wore a carefully reared black mustache. A spoiled only son, he still pouted occasionally when annoyed. Just now he was distinctly annoyed. He did not see any reason for putting up with this Peter Moran's rotten manners.

"Impudent beggar," he commented, in resentment of the other's brusque behavior.

Janet had been thinking something rather like this herself, but she chose to object to the expression of such an opinion by her *fiancé*.

"Think so?" she asked, in her voice the studied indifference which does not take the trouble to mask opposition.

"Offering his left hand, by Jove. Cheek, I call it."

"You would. I suppose you didn't happen to notice what he was doing with his right hand."

"Oh, whatever he does is right," he said sulkily.

"He had a revolver in it. If you'd use your eyes and your gray matter, Jack—"

"I dare say he was some kind of a bally guard. That's no reason for being insulting."

"He was busy. Some men are, you know."

"Why slam me because you're sore at him?" he asked in a huff.

"I'm not sore at him, as you so elegantly express it. The point is that he had been given a job to do. He couldn't stay here and pay compliments to us."

"Walked away from us like the Shah of Persia, and you seem to like the tramp's high and mighty airs."

"Please don't speak of my friends that way," she told him, her chin in the air.

"Oh, is he your friend?"

Janet walked into the bank, and he followed her. Meredith was annoyed at her and dissatisfied with himself. It seemed to him that ever since this Moran had butted into their lives five or six weeks ago the weather had been squally. Janet and he used to get along fine, but now she was so touchy. The mere mention of Moran's name made for friction, though this might not reach the surface. Jack did not realize the reason, which had to do with both his own and Janet's mental reactions as affected by the hold-up episode participated in by all three of them.

Moran had usurped the star's part, and Jack Meredith wanted to play star himself in his relationship with Janet. Even if he had not been very vain, this would have been natural enough. He was engaged to her, as much in love with her as he could

be with anybody except himself, and he had no fancy for yielding the spotlight to another man. The whole thing was absurd of course. He had done only what any man of sense would have done, but this jackass, by blundering into the scene, had made it look as though he were playing an unworthy part.

Carlton, the cashier of the bank, was an old friend of the Carey family. He rose from his desk to come forward and shake hands with Janet.

"Dad busy?" she asked, after greetings had been exchanged.

"I notice he's usually not too busy to see you," Carlton answered, smiling. It was notorious that the bank president was so partial to his daughter that he did his best to spoil her.

Presently she and Meredith were shown into Carey's office. Janet concluded her business with him.

"Why don't you go out to lunch with us, dad? We'll let you pay for it," she suggested.

"Too busy. Directors' meeting. Run along now and play."

"Play, h-m! If you were as busy as I am, if you did as much in a day—"

The telephone buzzed. Carey picked up the receiver. Instantly the lines of his face hardened. His solid figure straightened. When he spoke his voice was crisp.

"Both killed, you say? Have the police been notified?"

The girl was aware of disaster. The atmosphere had instantly become tense, electric. She stood rigid, silent, her eyes on her father, while she waited for him to finish with the telephone before she poured out her anxious questions.

The bank president cut in again. "A clean get-away, you say? With all the money?"

Even as he was hanging up he was pressing a button, one of a small array of them attached to the side of the desk.

A man appeared. "Tell Mr. Carlton I want to see him. At once, no matter with whom he is engaged." He turned to his daughter. "Is your car here?"

"I came in Jack's." Then, uncontrollably: "What has happened, dad?"

"A holdup. The van has been robbed. And two men killed. One of them, Moran, I'm afraid."

She did not cry out or make any display of feeling. But it seemed to her for a moment as though her heart had stopped beating. It had come so near to her, this shock out of a clear sky. Not ten minutes ago she had talked with this man. Without conscious thought it came to her how vital he had looked, how the muscles of his legs and shoulders rippled beneath his clothes as he moved, how individual were his manner and appearance. He could not be dead. It was not reasonable.

Her father was telling Carlton about it when she came out of herself. He gave directions.

"I'm going down to the station. Don't spread the news. If it gets out and people pour in to ask questions minimize it. Be careful not to give out to the newspapers the amount of the shipment or any official statement. I'll probably be back soon."

"I'm going with you, dad," the young woman told him as he started for the door, beckoning to Meredith; and, fearing refusal, she pushed on with her explanation. "I couldn't sit here and wait. I'm worried and anxious, too. You'll let me go, won't you?"

"Come on if you want to," Carey said. "It won't do any harm."

Meredith drove them down to the station. Already a large crowd had gathered and, the police in force had established a cordon to keep people back. A captain of police recognized Carey and made a way for his party.

"Have the robbers been caught yet?" asked the banker.

"Not yet, far as I know, sir. We've phoned to all the outside stations to keep a lookout, and to every town near the city in case they try to make their get-away in cars. Half a dozen cars filled with armed officers are scouring—"

"What about Peter Moran?" Janet broke in. "Is he— Did they shoot him?"

The captain shook his head. "Don't know. They killed the driver and wounded a guard. Here comes the ambulance for him now."

The banker's party had pushed through to the van. A doctor and two or three others were ministering to somebody whose face Janet could not see, while four or five police officers pushed back the press of onlookers.

The doctor shifted his position, and Janet looked down into the white face of Peter Moran.

CHAPTER VI.

TO THE HOSPITAL.

PETER wondered mildly about this world upon which he opened his eyes when he came back to consciousness. It seemed full of heads rather oddly detached from bodies, big-eyed faces that stared at him from all directions to which his gaze wandered.

His impressions localized. There was first of all an annoying little person taking liberties with his head. At least, it was probably his head. Certainly it was a very painful one, whoever it belonged to. Back of him were policemen, several of them, holding back a circle of pressing people. He knew by this time they were people, though they were still mostly eyes.

What was it all about? He tried to rise, but gave that up with a groan.

"Don't move," the annoying little man ordered. He had a black bag and scissors and a roll of gauze.

Peter's roving eyes met those of Bridge, the bank clerk. What had taken place began to come back to him.

"We were held up, weren't we?" he asked.

The clerk nodded. His face was still drained of blood. He had been given the shock of his life. "Lord, it was awful!" he said.

The treasure guard put a heavy hand to his aching head. It felt moist. He looked at it and was surprised to see that his fingers were red. He frowned.

"Don't do that," the doctor told him. "Keep your hands away."

"Did they get the bags?" Peter asked Bridge.

"Yes."

"Where's Bill?"

The bank clerk's lip quivered. Bill, but for the grace of God, might have been Philip Bridge. "He's—dead."

"Dead! He can't be. He was smoking here beside me."

There was an undulation in the crowd. It opened, to let through a policeman, followed by Carey, Janet, and Meredith.

Carey spoke to the doctor, in a low voice, nodding toward the wounded man. "How is he?"

"Can't tell yet. He has lost a good deal of blood. Here's the ambulance. We'll get him right to a hospital."

"See he gets the best attention and the best surgeons in town. I'll be responsible for the bill."

Looking down on the white face and bloody head of Moran, Janet was the victim of a strange insurgent emotion. She forgot all about the number of people present and dropped down on a knee beside him.

"Oh, Peter!" she murmured tremulously.

He managed to grin. "Had to jump from the woodshed again," he told her. "Look out. I'm all bluggy."

His voice was rather weak, but his manner reassured her. A man about to die could not talk like that.

"You'll have the best care," she promised him. "Don't try to talk now, please. You must keep your strength."

Her father touched her shoulder. "They're ready for him, dear."

A lane had been made through the crowd. The men with the stretcher put it down beside Peter. They lifted him upon it and carried him to the ambulance.

"Let's go to the hospital, dad," she urged.

"Not now, dear. We can't do any good there. In fact, we'd be in the way. He'll get the best possible attention. I've talked with the doctor. And I have work to do. You'd better go home. Jack will look after you."

Janet had no intention of going home. As soon as they were in the car she said to Meredith: "Drive to the hospital, Jack."

"What for?" he asked, at once resentful.

"To find out how he is. I want to know."

"If we go we can't find out. The doctors

themselves won't know until they've examined him thoroughly, perhaps not until after he's been operated on."

This was probably true, but Janet did not want to be ruled by common sense just now. She was wrought up emotionally and intended to be ruled by her impulses. It seemed to her that if Jack had any consideration for her he would be in a sympathetic mood.

"I'm going to the hospital," she said by way of flat announcement.

"All right," he yielded ungraciously. "I suppose you'll have to have it your way. You always do."

She did not reply to that. As long as he took her where she wished to go she was indifferent to what he thought.

His prediction proved true. They had to stay below in the waiting room. Nobody paid any attention to them till Janet persuaded a nurse to find out how the wounded man was getting along. She returned with the usual ambiguous report that he seemed to be doing well. There could be no more definite information for some hours, she added.

Janet went home reluctantly with her fuming *fiancé*. He took pains to let her know that he had told her they would waste their time if they went to the hospital. The fact that he was right did not increase her good will toward him. It occurred to her, as it had done more than once lately, that she was just about fed up with Jack. They seemed always to be annoying each other, to be taking opposite points of view. She did not understand it, because at first they had seemed very congenial.

Jack Meredith was heir to the fortune of an old wealthy family. He had retired from all business except that of looking after his property, the active work of which was done by an agent. Socially and financially he was a catch, the sort of youth for whom mothers angle as a husband for a daughter. He was not vicious. He was healthy. And he had all the advantages that accrue when one is of the best set and in easy circumstances.

Janet had done herself rather well. Moreover, she had fancied herself in love with him in spite of his lordly ways. These amused her, since she was not the victim of them. Certainly it had flattered her vanity that of all the girls in Hilltown he had picked her, whose family only recently had come to be accepted socially. For Janet was entirely human, even though personally democratic.

When they reached her home Jack did not offer to come in, nor did she ask him. Each realized that there was a bit of a strain between them, that they were not in accord just now. Janet was relieved that he did not come in. He was in a sulky humor, and she herself in one frankly hostile to his point of view. They would be very likely to annoy each other more. It was even conceivable that they might have a grand flare-up.

Janet did not want to quarrel with him. She quite appreciated the advantages of being engaged to him, and until lately they had been such good friends. He had a gay engaging way with him when he wanted to please, and it had been fun to play with a man whose time was always at her disposal. No, decidedly she did not want any break with him—especially over nothing more serious than the fact that she wanted to be decent to Peter Moran.

CHAPTER VII.

PETER HAS A HUNCH.

THE temperature dropped thirty degrees the night after the holdup of the pay roll shipment, and it continued to fall most of the next day. The weather in the Rockies is subject to sudden changes. This is merely a slight flaw in the climate, which is freely admitted by the inhabitants to be the best in the world.

Peter was not particularly inconvenienced by this sudden descent of winter, since he spent the next ten days in bed. During that time there was no modification of the severe cold, except slight changes of a few degrees during the hours in the middle of the day.

As soon as Peter was able to stand questioning, Carey and Burlson, the local head of the detective agency which represented the bank and the surety company, came to

the hospital and questioned him about the holdup. He was getting along as well as could be expected. The bullet had passed through the fleshy part of his arm and left a clean wound. The doctors had been disposed to worry more about the blows on the head, but it developed that these had brought about no concussion likely to produce permanent results. So he built up his strength again rapidly and was soon able to undergo an examination.

The chief of the city detective bureau arrived and was shown to Peter's room while the other two men were getting seated.

Burlson did most of the questioning. He carried Peter over the whole episode, starting from the time the van had driven up to the bank and ending when he lost consciousness.

Peter told what he knew. He had nothing to conceal. Unfortunately he could not add much to what the sleuths had already picked up. One detail he supplied. He mentioned that the flivver which had taken part in the attack, in which two men were sitting when the van drove up to the express office, had been waiting in front of the bank when the pay roll shipment had been brought out to the van. This was important, because it showed that the bandits expected it to be sent and had men on the job to ascertain the moment of starting and to carry word to their confederates at the station.

"Would you know any of these men again?" Burlson asked.

"I think I'd know the putty-faced fellow who passed by me and joined the other fellow in the flivver. He looked like a dope fiend."

"Probably is. That's the kind that gets into jobs of this sort nowadays," the city chief commented.

"Describe this putty-faced man as well as you can," Burlson said.

"Well, I can't give a very good description of him. He had heavy eyelids. I noticed that because his eyes didn't look at me direct. They kind of slid over to take me in and then dropped. I have an impression he was smoking a cigarette and that it drooped out of the corner of his mouth. But I'm not sure. Maybe it just seems to me now that he was the kind of man who would be smoking that way. Seems to me he was rather flashily dressed in a cheap way—in a light striped suit perhaps, though I'm not absolutely sure of that either."

"What about the other man—the one in the car opposite?"

"He had his back to me. I thought he rather hunched up. He was heavy-set, I should say. Funny, but I remember I had a queer feeling that I had seen him before. Probably there's nothing to that, though."

"What was it about him that seemed familiar?"

"I don't know exactly. The way he crouched down. I can't remember who he reminded me of. I dare say I'm all wrong, anyhow."

"Did you see him later down at the station?"

"I didn't have time to pick out any individuals. They were all shooting and they all came swarming forward."

"Notice the number of either of the cars or the make of the large one?"

"I did notice the number of the small car opposite the bank, but I don't recall it now. Seems to me the first two numbers were three and five, and that there were five numbers altogether."

"How did you happen to notice that? You don't remember the numbers of all the cars you see, do you?" asked the chief of city detectives with a manner that suggested suspicion.

"No. But I've been training myself to notice things. I thought if there was ever a holdup it might be up to me to describe cars or people. So when I saw this putty-faced man go over and join the hunched-up one, after the fellow had lounged past and given me the once-over I stuck away the number of the car in my mind. I suppose they whacked it out of my head with their guns when they hit me."

"Do you mean you thought they were going to hold you up?" asked Burlson.

"Of course not. I mean that I had been trying to register in my memory anything out of the ordinary. For instance, if some ladies out shopping had passed I wouldn't have noticed them. But these fellows hung

around. I don't mean that they acted suspicious. I wasn't at all worried about them. I just noticed them."

"Natural enough," Carey said crisply. "That's what he was there for, to keep his eyes open." He added as an afterthought: "The girl on our switchboard remembers a hundred numbers of customers and firms with which we have dealings. It's the same principle."

"But you didn't notice the make of the other car?" Burlson said.

"No. I'm not an expert on cars, and it was probably forty or fifty yards from me. Besides, when I noticed about the first car I was standing around waiting for the shipment to be brought out of the bank. I had nothing else to do but look around. At the station I was watching the money and hadn't time to make outside observations."

Burlson nodded an admission of this point. He had not made up his mind about this guard entirely. He might have given the tip to the robbers and been shot by accident while pretending to exchange shots with them. The fact that they had beat him into unconsciousness later rather militated against this theory, but for a lot of money a man will take quite a hammering. Moran's defense of the shipment might be wholly a camouflage designed to prevent suspicion from falling upon him.

The robbers had got away with a large enough haul to justify such a theory; to be exact, they had taken one hundred and ninety-two thousand, three hundred and eighty-two dollars. For, in addition to the weekly pay roll at Petrolia, which was being sent to the leading bank in that town, a considerable sum was being transferred to pay for a transfer of some oil leases owned by an ignorant Bohemian who demanded cash for his property rather than a certified check.

Peter managed to catch Carey's eye before the banker and the detectives left. A wireless message passed between them. Carey was not sure what it meant, but he knew the young fellow wanted to talk with him alone. He left the hospital with the detectives, but separated from them at the entrance. He stepped into his own car, was run around the block by his chauffeur, and returned to Peter's room.

"Well," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I'll be out of here in three or four days, Mr. Carey. I wish you would put me privately on this robbery case. I have a hunch I could help run down the robbers. Maybe I'm wrong about that, but I'd like to try."

Carey took a chair beside the bed. "Why do you think you could?"

"I've been following the case in the newspapers. My nurse has read to me all that has been in the papers. I had her get a back file. It doesn't seem to me that the police are getting very far with it, though, of course, they may be hiding what they have discovered in order not to alarm the bandits."

"No, I think you're right about the police, Moran. All their clews have come to nothing. They're up in the air."

"Well, I've a notion or two in the back of my head I'd like to try out if you don't mind letting me tackle the job."

"For instance?"

"I don't agree with the police that they've gone far from here. All this talk about their being in Cincinnati and Chicago and Atlanta seems to me just guesswork. And I don't think this is a band of famous crooks, at least not most of them. I think they are just amateurs. They will give themselves away; at least they would if there was anybody close enough to pick up the clews they drop."

"Where do you think they are? In Hilltown?"

"Maybe, but if I were on the case, I'd spend a good deal of time at Petrolia. Birds of that kind flock where the pickings are good—and Petrolia is a wide-open town."

"There's something in that," Carey agreed, after consideration. "If you want to work on this as my personal representative, Moran, I'll be glad to have you. I don't mind telling you that this thing has got to me. Of course, we don't lose the money. We are protected by a bonding company. But in a sense, it's a reflection on my management."

"Then you'd better not tell anybody I'm

working on the case, or mention my point of view, sir. There's one thing you could have done, though. I'm convinced I'm right about the flivver. The number began with three and the second was five. There were five numbers in all. Get Mr. Burlson to check off every flivver in the city that has a license plate beginning with those two numbers—that is, every one with five figures. We may find out something that way. Another thing. The big car must be scarred with one or two of my bullet marks.

"Every private garage in the city ought to be visited, as well as the public ones. I'm convinced I hit one of the men. What became of him? What doctor attended him? Was the doctor paid so well for his silence that he kept quiet? If so, perhaps we can frighten him into coming to the police. Run a story in the papers saying that the doctor aiding the bandits is suspected by the police and is being watched. He may be so worried that he'll tell at once what we want to know."

"That's a good idea," Carey admitted. "I'll have that done. Anything else?"

"No, sir. Not till I am up myself. You'll let me know if the police pick up anything, sir, won't you?"

Carey assured him that he would.

CHAPTER VIII.

PICKING UP CLEWS.

PETER'S suggestions to the banker stirred up at least a renewal of activity. The papers were still full of the bold daylight robbery. The reporters exercised their imaginations in suggesting ingenious theories most of which were cooked up while they smoked together in their room at police headquarters. They privately agreed, with the clever cocksureness of their craft, that the police were dumb-bells and that if they had been given a free hand they could have landed the robbers before this.

But outside of newspaper speculation, the policy of the authorities was mostly one of watchful waiting. They had rounded up dozens of suspicious characters and given them rigid cross-examinations. They had broadcasted the news of the holdup all over the country. All roads out of Hilltown were watched. But the officers had come to an *impasse*. The bandits apparently had left no trail behind them that could be followed.

Carey was a forceful man and one important in the community. When he called upon the chief of police the latter listened to him respectfully, even though with a slight irritation. The papers were beginning to criticize him for having failed to catch the robbers, and he was human enough to resent this.

"Of course, that's been done already, Mr. Carey," he said. "I gave orders at once for all patrolmen to cover every garage, public or private, on their beats."

"And you found nothing?"

"Nothing. Inside of twelve hours I had a report from every substation in the city."

"Would you mind having it done again, chief, as a special favor to me? The point is that if the robbers are local people—"

"But they're not. We're satisfied as to that. Blinky Craig's gang did this job."

"Very likely you're right, chief. You know more about such things than I do. But we ought not to omit any chance. Now if local people did do it those cars are probably in town right now. If so, they must be in some garage."

"Grant for the sake of argument that's true, Mr. Carey. Even if it was an outside job, the cars are very likely here. But how are we to identify them?"

"I've just left Moran at the hospital. He's almost sure that the license plate of the flivver had five figures and that the first two numbers were three five."

"Well, that's something," the chief admitted, "but not much. Of course, they would change the license plate. That would be easily done just now because everybody in the city has to get a new plate this month for the new year. With forty thousand new plates being issued, there would be no risk at all in getting one. Very likely they already had the second plate and substituted it immediately after the robbery."

"Then you can get at the Secretary of State's office the old and the new license numbers of all Ford roadsters whose last year license began with three five."

" All right. I'll do that," the chief said.

" Another thing. Moran is almost sure he wounded one of the men in the small car and he thinks his bullets must have struck the big one. If your men see a car scarred by bullets that would be worth investigating. Or if some doctor in town has attended a wounded man—"

" We've sent a letter to every doctor in town. Nothing doing. It's unlikely he hit any of the bandits. Naturally, he was excited. At that distance he could not have struck any one except by chance."

" It's possible Moran may have been mistaken when he thought he hit one," Carey conceded.

" Anyhow, I'll have a recheck of cars made, Mr. Carey, and I'll have the garages gone over again. To please you, because you've asked it," the chief said, with a little emphasis of the words. " I'm not expecting to learn anything new."

Carey thought it as well to get a double check on the Ford roadster. He sent for Burlson and asked him to look up the owners of all the cars of that make which began with the numbers three five.

Before forty-eight hours, Burlson came to Carey with news. He was a fat little man with a round cherubic face. He looked like a guileless grocery clerk except when he remembered that he must be impressive and succeeded instead in being pompous.

" I've got it," he burst out triumphantly as soon as he was alone with Carey. " I've got the number of the roadster the robbers used and I know who owns it. His name is Hilary Thomson. He's a plumber, and his shop is on East Twelfth Street. He's a perfectly respectable citizen, a church deacon, and he has a wife and three children."

" How did you find this out?"

" Began checking up the Ford roadsters the way I suggested to you. By and by I came to the one with the license plate 35444. The records showed who owns it. So I called him up. ' This Mr. Thomson?' I says. ' Yes,' he answers. ' You own a roadster with the license number 35444?' I says. ' Yes, have you found it?' he shoots back. Course I didn't give myself away. ' Just when did you lose it?' I asks. Right off the reel he answers. ' The afternoon of the eleventh—about two thirty.' "

" Less than half an hour before the robbery took place," Carey said.

Burlson nodded, his little beady eyes shining. " I hiked right over to Mr. Thomson's place. He's all right, I guess. Anyhow, he looks straight. He reported his loss to the police that afternoon, I have found. The car was taken from in front of a barber's shop where it was parked while Thomson was upstairs in a rooming house mending a leaky pipe."

" Of course, that may just be his story."

" Far as I can I've checked it up. He did leave the car in front of the barber shop and do some work on bathroom fixtures. The landlady sent for him. That's okay. She confirms it, and so does the lady who has the room. She works in a beauty parlor, the woman who rents the room. I've seen her. She says she told the landlady the water in the bowl wouldn't drain without leaking a little and the landlady promised to get a plumber. When Thomson got through he went down to the street and his car was gone. He went into the barber shop and asked the barbers if they had seen anybody driving it away. The men in the shop confirm that."

" He seems to have a pretty good alibi. Yet the thing puzzles me a little. I can understand how the robbers might pick up a car for an hour while they needed it and then desert it after they were through. But the car hasn't been found. Evidently they still have it. Why should they keep a stolen roadster that may at any time get them into trouble?"

" My explanation is that they probably sold it to some farmer a few miles from town while they were making their getaway. If the farmer had come forward with the car he would have lost it; so he's hanging on to it in the hope that the identity of the car won't be discovered, and if it is he'll play innocent and say he doesn't read the papers much."

" Possibly," admitted Carey.

The banker submitted this theory to Peter.

" I suppose it's as good a guess as any other we're likely to make," that young

man said. "The one thing we can be sure of is that if they have any sense they got rid of the car as soon as they could."

Peter left the hospital next day. Within two hours of that time he saw another of his suggestions bear startling results.

The chief of police had sent his chauffeur to bring Peter down to headquarters. The head of the plain clothes department was not wholly satisfied that this young man was as innocent as he appeared and the chief wanted to study the guard at first hand. So he put him through a quiz.

"Let's hear your story, son," he said.

The chief had a way of calling all the young reporters "son," and extended the term to include most of the men under forty that he met.

Peter told again what he knew. The chief put some incisive questions. The plain clothes department head had voiced a suspicion—it was hardly a suspicion, more like a remote possibility—that this young fellow Moran might be in with the gang, that in fact he might have organized the whole thing and tipped off to the others the best time for the raid.

While Peter was in the office of the chief the desk sergeant hurried in bursting with news.

"I gotta see you alone, chief," he said with a glance at Peter.

The chief followed him out of the room. He returned five minutes later.

"Come with me, son. I've got something interesting to show you," he said to Peter and reached for his hat and overcoat.

Peter donned his heavy overcoat. The weather was still bitterly cold.

They stepped through the outer office and the chief stopped to leave some directions with the desk sergeant. Peter had no idea where they were going. He did not ask. For a moment it had crossed his mind that they might be arresting him, but he had dismissed this. The chief did not have to leave his chair to have him arrested.

The chauffeur of the chief's car drove them through South Hilltown, an old, rather *passé* residence section. An officer in uniform met them and was taken into the car. The chief held a low-voiced conversation with him. Peter caught part of it.

"—just as you found it?" This from the chief.

"Yes, sir. —got Hamlin, left him there, and phoned to headquarters."

The next question did not reach Peter, but he caught part of the answer.

"—an old stable used for a garage—window very high—nobody at home—found a ladder and looked in—"

"How did it happen you missed it before, when the first order to make the search was sent out?"

"—my vacation—new man substituting—"

The chauffeur, directed by the patrolman, swung into an alley and stopped at an old wooden stable. The men descended from the car and walked into the building. The chief was just behind Peter. He was watching that young man closely.

What Peter saw was a roadster. In the seat beside the one behind the wheel a figure was huddled. Head and shoulders slumped back for support against the braces for the top. The coat was open, and the white shirt was stained just below the heart with a splash of red. This had been frozen stiff.

The chief stepped forward and felt the body.

"Frozen," he said.

From the coat pocket he drew a newspaper. It was dated January 11.

"A *Post,* the early afternoon edition. Probably he bought it before the raid and had it with him," the chief said. He swung round abruptly on Peter. "I guess you were right, son. You wounded him sure enough. Through the heart, probably. The others left him right here in this garage and lit out."

Peter's blood chilled. He felt as though a block of ice were moving down his spine. He had killed this man. It gave him a shock.

"Recognize him? Ever see him before?" the chief asked.

"No, sir."

"Well, he got his all right. He was asking for it." The chief glanced at the license plate on the car. The number was 35444. "It's the stolen roadster all right. It must have been lying here all the time.

Some one is going to get into trouble about this." The last was fired in the general direction of the two patrolmen in uniform.

Peter knew that against this evidence the police could no longer harbor any suspicion that he had been in the conspiracy to raid the express shipment. It was possible that somebody in the bank might have given the bandits a tip, but certainly that man would not have engaged in a battle with them, been wounded himself, and killed one of the attackers.

Before Peter left, the chief took occasion to pay him a compliment. "If you'd like to join the force, son, I dare say I could make a place for you."

The young man thanked him, but shook his head. "It's the last kind of a job I want. I hope I'll never have to fire a gun at a man as long as I live. I've had enough."

And he meant it. He had been on the side of law and order. What he had done had been necessary to protect the social order against destructive forces. He had to fire in self-defense, unless he had chosen instead to desert his post and run away. But the fact remained that he had killed a man, had struck out of life almost instantly a man who a moment before had been full of lusty energy. A wave of nausea swept over him. He stepped out of the garage into the cold air and walked slowly toward the street car track.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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STUMBLIN' PAINT

PINTO, y' see; an' I names 'im Paint, as owners of pintoes does.
I reckon ol' Paint is th' stumblin'est hoss they is or ever wuz.
But I keeps 'im, pard, an' th' mint itself don't carry enough o' gold
To buy that plug from offen me—why? Wait till me yarn gits told:

We's rockin' along, ol' Paint an' me, past Crazy Woman's Fork,
When 'is hoof goes into a gopher hole an' fits it like a cork.
Then me, I goes through th' atmosphere like a ball frum th' pitcher's paw—
Why that ol' Paint don't break 'is leg beats all I've ever saw!

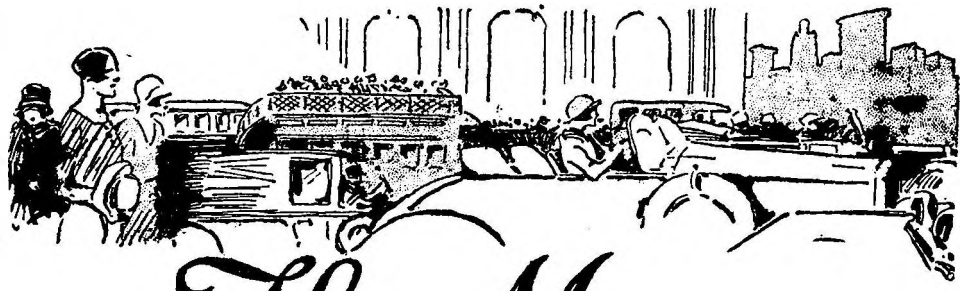
I lays there dead fer a spell or two till me dang ol' wind comes back,
While Paint, 'e santers up an' stops, with 'is reins a-hangin' slack.
He acks like a hoss that's sound asleep or ain't a-feelin' well,
An' me, I cusses 'im loud an' free an' asts 'im go t' hell.

But jest mid-cussin' I hears a sound what makes me blood freeze up;
An' right by me haid, in a dip o' ground like a alkali-lined cup,
Is coiled a ol' sidewinder—say, 'is body's th' thick o' me arm!
It takes no prophet t' calcalate 'e aims t' do me harm.

If I bats a eye that snake 'll strike, an' I ain't all set t' die.
I jest lays still an' looks at Paint a-standin' mournful by—
But I wisht y'd 'a' seen that hoss perk up when 'e harks that rattler buzz!
Y'd never know frum 'is actions then, 'e's th' stumblin'est ever wuz!

One jump 'e makes—it wuz plumb ten foot—an' 'is hoofs lands clean an' clear—
That dam' sidewinder 'll never hand nobody else no skeer . . .
So 'e saves my life, ol' Paint, he does, an' though 'e's a stumbler yit,
'E ain't fer sale; an' they ain't no kale kin change my mind a bit!

Strickland Gillilan.



The Man Time Forgot

By JACK BECHDOLT

Author of "The Masquerading Mansion," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

AUTHOR INTERVIEWED BY JACK BECHDOLT

"MY gracious, how you have aged since I last saw you!" the reporter exclaimed on meeting Jack Bechdolt. The reporter hadn't seen Mr. Bechdolt for years and years.

"That's a lie!" The gray-haired writer flushed angrily. "That's absolutely untrue. I'm not a year older—not a day—"

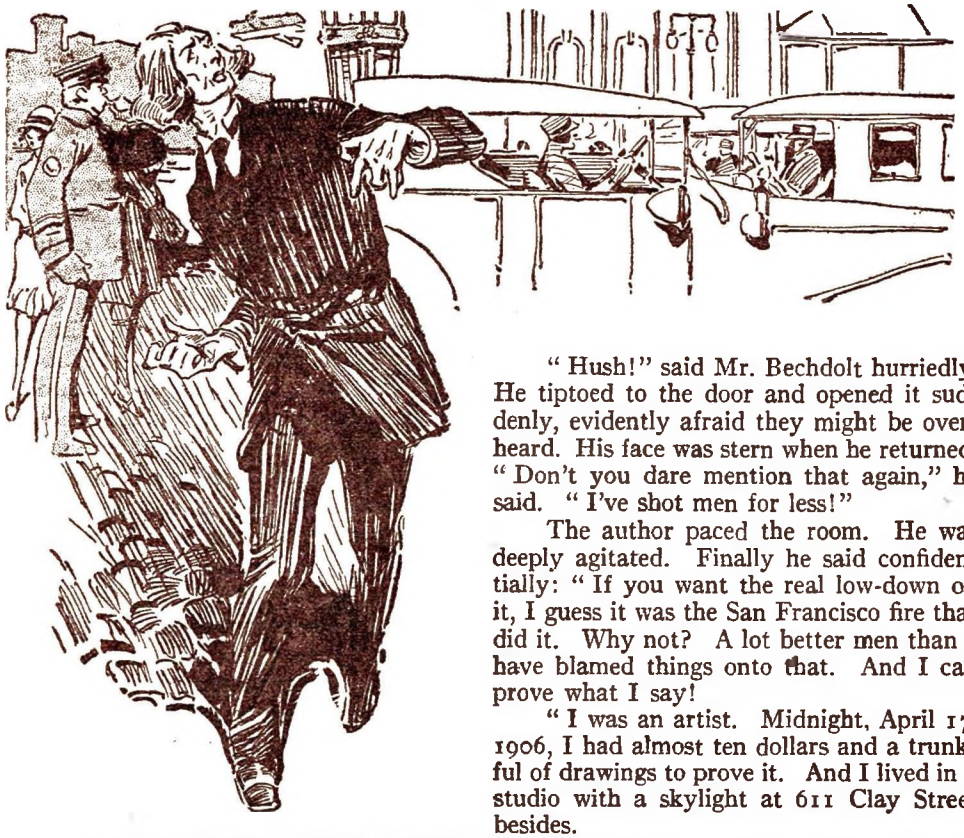
"Oh, yes, you are," said the tactful reporter. "Oh, yes, indeed, you are! Why, look, your hair is all gray and—hold still, will you? Yes, sir! Look at that! Getting bald on top!"

"That's another lie," cried the writer, turning pale. "You may tell ARGOSY readers I deny that absolutely. I'm not an hour older than the last time we met and that was only—well, let's see. That was in 1906, wasn't it?"

"April, 1906. April 18. Just about five o'clock in the morning. It was in San Francisco," said the reporter promptly. "You claimed to be an artist at that time. What the ARGOSY would like is an explanation, if there is any, of how a man who claimed he was an artist in 1906 has the nerve to go around claiming he is an author in 1926! If you have anything to say, I'll print it. But you'd better think up a good, logical explanation, you know!"

The author tried to evade by taking refuge in cheap philosophy. "There isn't anything logical about life," he explained hurriedly. "That's why I like fiction—"

"That won't get by," the earnest reporter advised him. "Think up a better one. You claimed to be an artist, you know. You spent two years in an art school. You looked like an artist—flannel shirt and big, baggy corduroy pants and a portfolio. Why, you even held positions on various newspaper and advertising art staffs, held them long enough to get regularly fired. Yes, and you illustrated some contributions to Western magazines—"



"Hush!" said Mr. Bechdolt hurriedly. He tiptoed to the door and opened it suddenly, evidently afraid they might be overheard. His face was stern when he returned. "Don't you dare mention that again," he said. "I've shot men for less!"

The author paced the room. He was deeply agitated. Finally he said confidentially: "If you want the real low-down on it, I guess it was the San Francisco fire that did it. Why not? A lot better men than I have blamed things onto that. And I can prove what I say!

"I was an artist. Midnight, April 17, 1906, I had almost ten dollars and a trunkful of drawings to prove it. And I lived in a studio with a skylight at 611 Clay Street besides.

"A little after five o'clock next morning all I had left was a pair of pants and some spare neckties I grabbed on my way out of the ruins.

"Pretty soon I got hungry. And the coat I borrowed from my brother, Fred, didn't fit me. It made me feel sort of conspicuous. So I went up to Seattle and got a job as a cub reporter on a newspaper that paid me eight dollars a week. After awhile I got to be various kinds of newspaper editor. I found the world is crammed full of things people like to read about. People will even pay money in order to read about them. But mighty few people ever paid money for the kind of pictures I could paint! And that's what made a writer out of me. I kept on doing all sorts of newspaper writing in Seattle for eleven years, then drifted East by way of the Kansas City *Star* and began turning all that experience into fiction. Now, when I feel that I've got to be an artist or bust, I take a week or two off and be one and nobody is any the worse for it. Notice this coat I'm wearing. It fits, doesn't it?"

"It looks all right," the reporter conceded.

"I had three square meals to-day," the author continued boastingly. "And I own a second-hand automobile besides!"

"Pretty good," the reporter applauded politely.

"I got money in the bank," the author confided in a hoarse whisper. He added anxiously: "That is, unless I made a mistake balancing my check book the last time I went over it."

"Fine!"

"Here's an idea for you," said the author after some thought. "Here's a good way for you to begin your article about me in the ARGOSY. Why don't you start off with a bang by saying something like this: 'The great San Francisco fire, which changed many things, robbed the future of American art to enrich the future of American literature?'"

" Yes," the reporter agreed doubtfully. " Or I might begin: ' The great San Francisco fire enriched the future of American art, but it played a dirty trick on American literature!' And besides, if you want to advertise, why don't you buy space in the back of the book?"

CHAPTER I.

BACK TWO DECADES.

ERTYL STANWIX of the Stanwix galleries was a celebrity in his way. His figure was familiar to the fashionable sections of Fifth Avenue, Madison Avenue, and Park Avenue. He was a man to attract attention.

The white carnation in the lapel of Stanwix's frock coat was a permanent fixture, as much so as the gleaming monocle in his eye or the impressive little goatee and mustache after Chase's portrait of James MacNeil Whistler.

In the easygoing sartorial times of 1926 when men wear soft hats even at the opera, Ertyl Stanwix clung to the formal stiff opera or full dress hat referred to by the vulgar as the " stove pipe." The hat, like his gray spats, like the monocle, like the distinguished hirsute adornment, was a part of the Stanwix stock in trade, helping to stamp Ertyl Stanwix, picture dealer, as a man of manners, distinction, and aristocratic idiosyncrasy.

It was like the old country doctor's ponderous watch chain and whisker, or the new-fashioned doctor's clean-cut, broad-shouldered varsity look, a guarantee to the credulous rich that Ertyl Stanwix was a connoisseur of fine paintings, a picture dealer who had risen above the estate of mere merchant and become an authoritative art critic whose slightest word was law. The fact that he had accumulated a large private fortune from dealing in the works of artists was sufficient proof, if proof was needed, that these things were so.

About four o'clock of a fine spring afternoon the glossy black, closed town car of Italian make disgorged Ertyl Stanwix on the pavement of a side street in the west side of the city, far from his usual fashionable haunts. Stanwix spoke quickly to his chauffeur, naming the hour the car was to call for him, and hurried toward the entrance of a small, old-fashioned brick house.

The smart society used to seeing Stanwix in his gallery or attending on varnishing day of the national academy would have had difficulty recognizing him in his present garb. Even his discreet chauffeur, glancing back at the dapper figure that hurried with guilty side glances toward the door of the brick house, allowed the ghost of a smile to flicker over his wooden face.

On his head, in place of the inevitable silk hat that so distinguished him, Stanwix wore a brown derby with a quaint brim. His fawn-colored topcoat was ridiculously broad across its padded shoulders, as was the sack coat underneath. His shoes were an obsolete, sharp-toed pattern known as the " toothpick " to vulgarians who were old enough to remember back a quarter of a century. The monocle had vanished, and so had the dealer's elegant walking stick.

Stanwix hurried to the door of the house and let himself in with a latchkey. He was much relieved to see that there were no onlookers to comment on his odd appearance, although in that section his appearance was sufficiently in keeping with the architecture and atmosphere not to seem absurd.

It was a very quiet, old-fashioned row of small brick houses that Stanwix visited. They stood in a block not far from the river and the docks of the oceanic liners. They were little houses of two and three stories with wrought iron pineapples adorning their steps and railings.

To the west of them, toward the river, was a district of factories and warehouses and cobbled streets filled with huge trucks and panting switch engines. To the east, separating the backwater from the rushing tides of modern New York, was a bleak area of tenements—lofts where paper boxes were stamped out, where theatrical scenery was painted, where woodenware and furs and findings were bartered. The quiet little dwelling houses lying between with their front areas and back gardens had changed little during a century.

The click of the front door latch as Stan-

wix closed it brought a young woman in nurses' uniform into the entrance hall. She was a rather pretty, highly colored young woman who bore herself in the strictly upright posture our mothers and grandmothers knew. She patted anxiously at an imposing "rat" of blond hair that rose off her forehead in a shining knob and left artful tendrils curling about her ears.

The young woman scarcely had murmured a respectful greeting before a man appeared from behind her, parting the portière. Like Stanwix, he wore a sack suit of light blue with absurdly padded shoulders. His face was long and grave and a little too shrewd and smug to suit a particular man. It was to him the art dealer spoke first.

"Where did you get that tie?" said Stanwix, frowning.

"'Out of a trunk in me old man's attic."

"I don't like it, Foster."

"It was a *trick* in them days, Mr. Stanwix. A tie like that was collegiate, sure."

"Too red—much too red. It's atrocious." Stanwix frowned with annoyance. "What d'you think you're supposed to be—a race track tout? Change that tie for something decent and black; a black four-in-hand will do."

"Yes, sir." The man disappeared.

Stanwix turned to the nurse. "Where's Varony, Letty?"

"Out back, in the garden."

"Alone?"

"I was with him till I heard you come in. I was reading him the paper—about the Russians and the Japs fighting in Manchuria."

"That's all right. But don't leave him alone. And watch yourself. Don't crack wise to him. Get it into your head that twenty years ago a girl acted like a young lady."

The nurse, Letty, giggled. "Say, don't you think I know it! I've been so damn ladylike around here I ache all over!"

"You're being paid to be ladylike—twice what your detective agency pays you for the usual case. I warned you that you would have to work to earn it."

"I'm not kicking, but it's no joke playing a part all day." Letty patted the golden bun of hair and smiled reassuringly.

"And another thing," Stanwix went on. "Watch Foster. Foster's a good man—sharp. Not afraid of anything. But he's dumb. You know, Letty? Another break like that necktie, and Foster will find himself off this job."

"I told him that tie was a bust!"

"Lord, that thing is what they used to call an Ascot. It belongs back before the year 1900. It's a good ten years out of period, and even Varony would notice that. How about Varony—has he been painting?"

"Working like a dog all day."

"That's good, Letty. Keep him inside as much as you can. If he insists on the garden, stay out there with him. The great thing is to let nothing happen that will give Varony a clew. He must not find out."

The young woman nodded.

"I'll find Varony," said Stanwix. "You needn't come. Go find Foster and make sure he changes that necktie."

Stanwix glanced about the old-fashioned front parlor. The windows that faced on the street were heavily curtained. A bright patterned carpet was on the floor, and an old-fashioned, figured wall paper covered the plaster walls. The furniture was of varying periods, but none of it modern.

Stanwix picked up several popular magazines from a small center table. They were dated over several months of the year 1904. He smiled curiously over a copy of that year's popular novel, a book whose title had been forgotten for twenty years.

The smile changed to a frown as the dealer picked up a small beaded purse that lay as it had been dropped in a chair.

He went to the door and called for Letty. "This is yours, isn't it?"

Letty acknowledged the purse.

"Don't ever leave that in view while you're in this house. Do you realize you might have spoiled everything?"

"What is there about a purse? I remember my own mother had a little purse like that, and Varony never notices—"

Stanwix interrupted. "Look here. This is what's wrong about your purse." He snapped the purse open and took out a few small coins. "Here is a dime dated 1907,

a penny dated 1910, another for the year 1918. Money dated for years he never heard of! A dead give-away, every one of them. Never let him see new money."

The girl removed the purse, and Stanwix went through a folding door to the rear parlor of the house. The room was almost bare of furnishings except for a big easel that was placed in the best light. A palette, paints, a jug of brushes, and a number of stretchers with half-finished paintings testified that it was an artist's studio.

The art dealer paused before the easel and studied the painting that rested on it. The glow that came into his eyes, the look of wonder and admiration that slightly parted his lips, was altogether genuine. For the moment Stanwix was neither the famous critic of the year 1926, with his calculated eccentricities and his pose of connoisseur, nor was what he had dressed himself to be, Ertyl Stanwix more than twenty years younger. He was simply a man who knew pictures and picture values paying tribute to the work of a master.

"That's good," Stanwix said aloud, and with sincerity. The words recalled him to the present.

He glanced through the long French windows into the little rear yard where the afternoon sun struck down over the shoulders of opposing houses, lighting the new green of the ailanthus trees and ragged box hedges. The rays touched a garden seat where a spare, tall, white-haired man was resting, his eyes fixed on the ground, his figure utterly relaxed from fatigue.

Stanwix stepped through one of the windows to a little rear veranda, and looked down on the older man. Still he was not observed, and the dealer announced himself eagerly:

"Varony, old friend!"

CHAPTER II.

VARONY.

LETTY had retired to a small sitting room in the basement of the house out of sight and earshot of the two men in the garden. She lounged in one chair and cocked her feet up on another. She pulled up her long skirts that were designed to sweep the floor, exposing silk-clad legs and shapely knees. She lighted a cigarette and inhaled the smoke with a deep sigh.

Foster entered the room, and Letty moved her feet slightly, indicating the opposite chair with a nod.

"A nip?" Foster suggested, displaying a small silver hip flask.

"My Lord, no!"

"It's good, prewar stuff. No kidding. I didn't get it off any bootlegger. The last bird I shadowed for had a cellar that would make your eyes stick out. Better take one —you look tired."

"And let Stanwix smell my breath?"

"Why, baby, there was four saloons to every corner in them days!"

"Not for ladies, there wasn't. And I've gotta keep in character—oh, Lord, yes—even if it breaks my heart!"

"Speaking of which, how's this tie?"

"Looks K O to me, Foster."

Foster nervously felt over the sober black tie he had just put on, and begged the loan of the girl's vanity case. Letty kept the metal box hidden in the bosom of her starched shirtwaist. Foster maneuvered to get a view of himself in its tiny mirror.

"And why no looking-glasses?" he burst out, irritated by the futility of his efforts. "How am I going to know what kind of a tie I got on?"

"I manage to get along without looking-glasses. I guess even a Valentino like you can make out."

"Yeah, but they certainly had mirrors in houses even in them days."

"Sure. I remember my own mother doing her hair in front of one. She used to wear it like this wig of mine, and the hem of her skirt kept the carpets swept up."

"Stanwix could find an old looking-glass," Foster grumbled. "What's his big idea?"

"If you ask me, it's to keep old man Varony from getting a look at himself. He might get wise that time was skidding. Anyhow, it's no business of ours. Stanwix is paying us double wages for a job that's a cinch.

"Why, the last case I was out on, one night I spent six mortal hours cramped into

a coat closet with my ears glued to a dictaphone, listening for evidence that never came through. Why, my ear was sore for a week, and I had a kink in my spine that it took two doctors to work out.

"There was one day I was without even a sandwich for fourteen hours, shadowing my party. If you ask me, this job's got that beat a mile. Regular eats, regular sleep, light, easy work. If it wasn't for wearing this straight front and having to ruin my permanent wave under this confounded wig, I'd think I was taking a spring vacation. But I do hate looking like a museum piece!"

"You look good to me, just the same," Foster grinned. "Take you with all that phony hair and corsets and everything else, and you're a knock-out. It ain't the fashions in clothes that makes a girl a wow, baby."

"Thanks," Letty acknowledged coolly. "Save the bouquets till some day we're off this job. You know what Stanwix will do if he ever finds you lamping me or trying to hold my hand. Be yourself!"

Thus reproved, Foster dropped the hand he had taken in his enthusiasm. He returned to his former worry. "What's his game in this house? That's what I want to know. I can't make him—"

"His game?" Letty lowered her voice. "Why, he's keeping old Varony kidded into thinking that he's living in the past. We're all living in the past—get that. It's the year 1904 around here, Foster. Roosevelt is President, and Japan is having a war with Russia. No real nice girl like me ever dreamed of smoking a cigarette before a man, and hip flasks haven't been invented. Only the crazy rich own automobiles, and when the debbies go riding in them they tie on their hats with a veil till they look all tied up like a rug. Gibson girl pillows are all the rage, and the movies only cost a nickel, provided your eyes can stand the strain.

"And listen, Foster, if you ever want to give me a joy ride, I was just reading an ad in to-day's paper that says you can buy a swell rubber tired buggy for fifty bucks. Ain't life quaint?"

Foster gestured impatiently with both hands. "I know, I know! It's all done to keep Varony kidded. But why? That's what's spoiling my beauty sleep. Why?"

Letty shrugged. Then she turned serious. "That," she said impressively, "is none of our damn business. Nobody paid us to think, now did they?"

Stanwix and Varony were talking in the garden.

Varony's hair was white, and he wore it in a mane that brushed his coat collar. He was a slender, erect man, large-boned, clad in loose unpressed old clothing that had taken characteristic folds from his spare figure. His face was gentle, and his lips smiled while his blue eyes puckered as his attention wandered from their talk to consideration of the lances of sunlight lying across the sparse grass of the little garden.

Stanwix was saying: "I stopped to look at the picture. It is good. I think I can find a purchaser, and I will buy it from you if you are ready."

Varony looked up with quickening interest. "Is it good? Don't think you have to compliment me, Stanwix. Tell me the truth."

"It is good. I'm too fond of you to try to deceive you, my friend. Shall we say at the price of the last one?"

Varony shrugged. His face flushed, and he looked uneasy. "I would like to give it to you."

"Nonsense, my dear friend! I am a dealer."

"And I am deeply in your debt—"

"Oh, as to that—"

Varony stopped him with an impatient wave of his slender hand. "I want you to reckon up the total, Stanwix. We must be businesslike. Give me a bill for the whole thing, doctor, hospital, nurses, everything. I'm not afraid to face facts, and I will pay you back if I live long enough. How long was I ill?"

Stanwix reckoned on his fingers. "It is seven, no, just eight months since the day I walked into your studio and found you lying unconscious before your easel—"

"What a friend you were!"

"It was nothing. Only what anybody would have done. I sent you to a hospital,

of course. You were in a state of coma for nearly four months. Then I got the specialist, and he operated. A clot on the brain, you understand?"

Varony touched his head tenderly and sighed. "A specialist! That means money. A hundred dollars at least for a specialist—"

"Don't," Stanwix urged. "Don't worry about that. When you were recovering, by the doctor's advice I had you removed to this house, a safe, quiet place where you can regain your strength."

"How generous you have been! Stanwix, this house must rent for at least forty dollars a month. Come, confess it!"

Stanwix smiled modestly. "I happen to own it, old man. It was standing vacant; so I used it. Then I hired the nurse Letty and this fellow Foster to look after things. Quiet and rest, that's all you need, Varony! And don't mention money to me again. Leave that until later."

"I shall pay you back, every penny," Varony assured him. "What could I have done without you? They'd have packed me off to an almshouse—a painter, alone, poor, without near friends. Stanwix, I see my mistake! I have been too solitary all these years, too absorbed in my work. This stroke is a lesson to me. I shudder when I think how it would have happened but for your kindness!"

"You have no recollection of this stroke, your illness?" Stanwix asked curiously.

"None. Not the slightest. I remember that last day in the studio. Nothing beyond that. Lord, Stanwix, I feel like another Rip Van Winkle. I feel a thousand years old. Look at this arm, a pipe stem! And my legs, like an old man's."

Stanwix shifted uneasily. "Merely wasted by your illness, Varony. That's all. You'll see what wonders care and good nourishment will work."

"I feel like poor old Rip just the same," Varony persisted. "Eight months out of the world? It seems like twenty years—forty years—"

"Do you paint like an old man?" Stanwix argued hurriedly.

Varony brightened. "No. You're right about that. I can still paint, eh? And yet my hand is clumsy. It's hard to get back what I lost from that stroke. Stanwix, you're quite sure that time hasn't slipped a cog?"

"Slipped a cog? What do you mean?"

The artist smiled. "You're not hoaxing me? You didn't let me sleep a quarter of a century, say?" At the spectacle of the dealer's mounting color and evident excitement, Varony began to chuckle. He patted Stanwix's arm affectionately. "Well, I was only joking. I realize it is still our year of grace and good times, Nineteen Hundred and Four—"

Varony broke off his speech. The garden was a quiet little spot, hedged in by neighboring houses, screened by its own trees, a little world by itself where time, as reckoned in the changes of civilization, had no existence. The noises of the big city that surrounded it were softened by the walls they had to pass to reach the place, and existed only as a distant beating of sound waves like the deep toned hum of far off surf.

Now a new sound struck down into the garden.

It came from the sky itself, a waspish, high-pitched snarling, increasing in volume.

The airplane whose engine rasped like an angry blue bottle fly was not yet in sight. Stanwix knew it might appear in the sky at any second.

Varony was listening, his blue eyes turned upward, wonder growing on his face.

Stanwix sprang to his feet and grasped the artist's arm. "Your painting!" he exclaimed. "I must see it again. Come in! Come inside, my friend!"

CHAPTER III.

THE NOISE OVERHEAD.

VARONY rose reluctantly, his face still turned to the sky.

"That's an odd racket, Stanwix, what makes that?"

"Come along," Stanwix urged impatiently.

"Just a second—that noise. Do you notice how it seems to come from the sky itself?"

" Pshaw, it's only a noise. The city's full of noises."

" No, this is something new. I believe there's something up there."

Stanwix laughed with a boisterousness that tried to cover his nervous panic. " Yes, yes, no doubt! It's the fabled roc, Varony, the giant bird that carried off Sinbad the Sailor! He must be looking for you!" He dragged Varony toward the house, and added soberly: " That thing is the sound of a steam safety valve, blowing off pressure. Remember, you're living near the steamship docks, old man."

Varony shook his head anxiously. " I suppose it's my illness is to blame. All sounds seem changed to me. The noise of traffic is changed. The wheels make a deeper, heavier rumble, and I miss the clatter of horses' hoofs. Yes, the world doesn't sound like the one I quit eight months ago."

" I'll tell you one thing," Stanwix assured him, leading him in front of the big easel. " You paint better than you did eight months ago. I like that landscape, Varony. I gave you two hundred for the last, I think? I believe I could stretch the price another hundred for this."

Stanwix remained in the studio another half hour. His watch informed him that his car would be waiting before the house. He paid Varony for the new painting, and took his receipt for the money. Varony insisted on returning the greenback at once, to apply on his growing indebtedness to the dealer. They parted affectionately, and Stanwix called the nurse, Letty.

Stanwix let himself out of the front door, the canvas under his arm.

" Remember," he cautioned Letty, " don't leave him alone. There was an airplane flew over the garden while we were there. Watch out for it. If he sees that it may give the whole show away."

" Those darn planes," Letty whispered. " One was buzzing around yesterday and got him all excited. I'll watch out for them, Mr. Stanwix."

The car was outside and Stanwix, noting first that the street was empty of passers, dashed out to it and slammed the door. As the big closed limousine started away, he pulled down the blinds of its windows.

The car made a very good dressing room, and Ertyl Stanwix had a complete change of costume waiting for him. When he stepped out before the handsome entrance to the Stanwix galleries—a converted millionaire's mansion in Fifty-Seventh Street—he was again Ertyl Stanwix, the distinguished dealer, complete from his high silk hat to the spats over his shoes, not forgetting the monocle or the white carnation in his buttonhole.

Varony meantime puttered about his studio. He got out several stretches of landscapes half begun, and considered them until the light began to pale. He glanced through the newspaper. Letty, in attendance, offered to finish reading him the news.

Varony chuckled. " No, no, my dear! You've tired those pretty eyes enough for one day. I'll just take a little nap in my chair, I think. If you like, why don't you slip away and take a walk before dinner?"

" I'm afraid Mr. Stanwix wouldn't like that," Letty smiled. " And I know the doctor wouldn't. We nurses are just like soldiers, you know. We're under orders."

Varony sighed at his own thoughts. " Before my stroke," he mused, " I was very fond of a little walk before dinner. It was about the only recreation I allowed myself. When the light failed, I used to put brushes aside and take a turn up the avenue. A pretty sight toward dusk, with all the smart carriages and hansoms rattling uptown!

" I love that clop-clop of hoofs on the asphalt, and the silhouette of that wonderful, skyscraping Flatiron Building up at Madison Square, in misty blue against the night sky. What a city we live in, my dear! What a civilization! And I suppose our grandchildren—yours, not mine, Letty—will be speeding around in these ridiculous, evil-smelling gasoline cars, or maybe airships, eh?"

Letty laughed prettily. " What an imagination you have, Mr. Varony! You oughta write a book, honest!"

The artist glanced into the garden.

" I rather think there's a book being written right under my nose, Letty. A romance—a love story—"

" I guess I don't understand you." Letty looked innocent.

Varony chuckled. "I've still got eyes, though the doctor did have to operate on my brain. Just now I noticed a handsome young blade out there, staring at this window. I wonder if he carries a guitar like the old troubadours? Perhaps he's about to serenade you?"

"Oh—Foster!" Letty rose impatiently and went to the window, waving Foster away.

"He seems a very nice young man," Varony protested mildly. "He tells me he hopes to get the post of interne in St. Vincent's pretty soon. Perhaps he'll turn out a doctor. A handsome young doctor isn't a bad husband for a nurse, Letty."

"That cake eater!" Letty caught herself hastily. "He thinks himself a masher," she amended.

"I'm very comfortable and very drowsy," Varony suggested. "If you care to take a turn in the garden, please yourself."

Varony closed his eyes. Presently, he began to breathe slowly and regularly, and his head dropped forward. Letty saw that he really slept, and looked a little anxiously into the inviting garden. Presently, she slipped through the long window, careful not to disturb the artist.

CHAPTER IV.

LOOKING AROUND.

LETTY greeted Foster not quite in the words of a classical Juliet toward her Romeo.

"Listen, Helpless, why not give yourself the air some place else but under the window? Even the old man is getting wise to you."

"What do you mean, wise, baby?"

"Your standing out here lamping me all the time! He cut loose and kidded me about my sweetie, just now."

"Well, what about it? It's so, ain't it? You know all you gotta do is drop a hint and you can slip the old shackles onto me for life."

"Thanks for the tip. I'll consider it some day when I'm not on a case. Meantime, don't gum things up by making a human mustard plaster out of yourself. If you gotta stick to something, go stick to the wall."

Foster looked sulky.

"What d'you want? Have I got to sit in the house and count my thumbs all day? Have I gotta read all these out of date magazines and books all over again? I know 'em all by heart. If there was even a radio in the place, so's I could tune in on W J Z—"

"A radio would look nice, back in 1904, wouldn't it?" Letty laughed. "Listen, Foster, since you're around, you can do something for a pal, if you want to."

"Whatever you say, baby. Anything!"

"Varony's asleep in his chair. Don't disturb him, but just keep an eye on him. I want to slip out and buy a refill for my vanity. Then I've got to get something for his dinner. Just stick around and watch the job."

"Of course," Foster agreed. "Take all the time you want. I owe you that for letting me off to the movies last night."

They passed through the studio, walking lightly out of thoughtfulness for the sleeper.

Letty turned back to look at Varony again. "He's a sweet old papa," she whispered. "Foster, I'm strong for that old boy. If Stanwix is putting over anything dirty on him and I'm helping in it, I'll hate myself the rest of my life!"

A quarter of an hour later Letty walked out of the front door. The girl was living proof that some women, at least, can dress in quick time.

Letty was very much herself again.

Her dark hair, worn in a boyish bob, showed only in two curling "vampies" from under the thimble hat of green felt. Her dress was exceedingly "trick," and its skirt hem touched her knees.

Foster locked the door after her and returned to his charge. Varony was sleeping.

Foster walked in the garden for a few turns, but gardens did not interest him. He looked in on Varony again and saw that he still slept.

He picked up one of the old magazines, but laid it aside with a shudder of distaste. Foster was very bored.

In the arrangement of affairs in the house

the man's duties began at night. Ostensibly, he was a night nurse for the convalescent.

Foster had not slept well that day, and Varony's relaxation made him envious. He found himself yawning. There was a couch in the front parlor. He lay down upon it. From there he could hear Letty's ring on her return or Varony's call, should Varony chance to call him. He was soon asleep.

A roar that seemed to fill the small house and set it vibrating came out of the sky.

Foster stirred out of slumber and listened a moment.

"That baby's flying low," he muttered, "liable to knock a chimney off this house, if he don't look out. Oughta be a law about them sky joy-riders." Foster's mutter drifted into silence, and he snored placidly.

On Varony, the noisy advent of the low-flying plane was not so soothing.

The artist sprang from his chair, wide awake and trembling violently.

The horrible, shattering roar of Liberty engines fairly menaced the house and filled the heavens. Varony ran to the rear window, and glanced into the sky.

A big flying boat that had been circling the city was planing down toward the Hudson, settling in a series of spirals toward its landing float.

Varony, staring upward, saw it flash overhead across the evening sky, a giant bird such as he never dreamed of.

It was the hour of dusk, and lights twinkled from the cockpit of the plane. Varony could make out dimly some device painted on its enormous wings, a red star within a circle. He knew that it was man-made.

The plane passed out of his sight in a few seconds, but its snarling lingered in the heavens. Varony ran into the garden and looked for it in vain.

The artist turned into the house, and hurried to the front door. It occurred to him he might get a farther view of the marvel from the open street.

Varony was trembling violently. His throat was dry with excitement. His hands could scarcely manage the spring latch of the door.

He was not frightened, but inordinately excited and thrilled.

The airship and the airplane were not ideas totally unknown to him. They had been discussed, theorized about, pictured in imaginative drawings. Varony half understood without attempting to analyze the apparition.

He ran into the street and caught another view of the circling plane, and stood there with his head tipped back and his mouth open.

A few people passed him.

None of them showed unusual interest in the plane. One or two glanced up idly without stopping.

Two girls saw him, looked back, and burst into giggles.

Varony realized slowly that they were laughing at him, laughing at his extraordinary attitude of interest in the miracle of flying.

He saw with a start that this sight, so amazing to him, was a commonplace to these others.

Varony had been under strict orders from the doctor Stanwix provided for him.

One of the strictest of these orders was that he was not to venture out of the house. The doctor predicted terrifying consequences if the patient disobeyed this.

Varony's one interest in life was his work. He was the ideal convalescent, mild, amenable, content if only he was allowed to paint.

When he realized that he was being laughed at for his excitement over a flying machine the painter remembered he had disobeyed orders. He was in the street.

Varony turned guiltily toward the little house. He went in the gate and toward its front door which stood ajar as he had left it.

Then he stopped.

Something sped down the quiet, empty street, something that went on velvet-shod wheels and without a horse to draw it. It was a large, closed automobile carrying some belated business man from the docks to his home.

There was a glow of light within, and Varony caught a glimpse of its occupant, scanning his evening newspaper.

The car passed him in a flash, uttering its faint purring song. It vanished in the distance.

Varony knew it for an automobile, a horseless carriage or gasoline car, but none such as he knew from previous experience.

The vehicle that he was familiar with stood high and awkward. It was open to the weather and built without doors, like an open carriage. It had a shining array of brassy gear shifts and brake controls attached to the right hand outside where the driver, muffled in a dust coat, sat bolt upright. And it snorted, and spat, and smelled abominably when it went, which it was not always sure to do.

The painter watched this second miracle out of sight. He glanced hastily toward the house; then turned and walked rapidly into the street, turning his face toward the glow of lights that came from the heart of New York.

He was hatless, but not aware of it. He walked rapidly. His gentle face was set in a strange, strained expression. In Varony's direct, blue-eyed glances doubt was beginning to show, doubt and fear, and a growing determination.

CHAPTER V.

THE PLEASANT NOVICE.

AT about the same moment that Ertyl Stanwix was buying Varony's painting in the little brick house, Myra Cole, the dealer's secretary, looked up from her desk and saw that the young stranger was back again in the Stanwix galleries. This young man had been dogging the footsteps of Ertyl Stanwix in vain for three days. He wanted to see the dealer. Evidently he wanted to see him very badly.

Myra Cole felt a little sorry for the persistent young man.

Under his arm he carried a large, flat package. In the two years she had been private secretary to Stanwix, Myra had seen numerous men and women, young and old, all with that eager, half determined, half timid expression, and all carrying large, flat packages.

They were artists who hoped to interest the dealer in their work.

Myra felt sorry for them all in a general way, for she understood the utter futility of their efforts, none better. She felt particularly sorry for the present young man.

He looked rather shabby, and his color suggested he had not been dining overwell. She saw that one of his shoes had cracked open, and the cuffs of his heavy coat were worn shiny.

Myra smiled at him kindly, impersonally, and said:

"I'm sorry. Mr. Stanwix has not returned yet. Would you care to leave your pictures?"

"I'll wait, if it's all right with you, ma'am?"

"He may be late. Sometimes he's too busy to look at pictures."

"I'll wait. You don't mind?"

The young man sat down in one of the chairs in the dealer's little reception room. It was a little gem of a chair belonging to one of the elegant Louis periods. Its silk and rosewood made the visitor's shabby raiment look more shabby by contrast.

Myra was used during the last three days to seeing the stranger wait in that chair—wait with a quiet, determined patience and poise that made her marvel.

He was a nice sort of young man, in spite of his shabbiness, and not in the least like other young artists who came hopefully to call on Stanwix. Most of the younger of these men had soft, rather vacant faces and dull eyes. They wore their hair long, and their clothes, whether new or shabby, had a certain studied, artful bagginess. They were very fond of wool scarfs of bright hues, sloppy neckties, and talk, much talk. All of them loved to talk—about themselves.

The present caller never talked while he waited. He never fidgeted. He sat perfectly at rest, just waiting. His hair was cut short, and showed an indication to curl crisply. His face was broad and homely, with a turned-up nose, a wide mouth, and shrewd, gray eyes puckered at the corners. His clothes never had been meant to be arty. They were a suit of ready-made garments that had seen much hard service. He wore a wide, rather shabby gray sombrero hat, and spoke with a faint drawl.

Myra Cole was not an artist. She had

cultivated a knowledge of fine paintings as a part of her duty toward the Stanwix galleries. She had a promising appreciation. But artists, especially the young males of the species, made her faintly tired. That was why she liked this different young man.

Myra went on typing some letters, and occasionally looked at him. He might have done worse than look at her. She was a handsome, alert, dark-haired young woman with traces of fresh country color still lingering in her cheeks.

Instead, the young artist sat as impassive as a stone Buddha. His mind seemed to be miles away. So genuine was his abstraction that presently he selected a thin brown paper from a packet, shook out a pinch of granulated tobacco, and started to roll a cigarette.

Myra never had seen a man roll a cigarette outside the movies. She watched the process intently.

The young man saw her watching, started, and colored up.

"Well, excuse me, ma'am!" he exclaimed. "I certainly did forget where I was."

He crushed the cigarette and looked around vaguely for a place to throw it.

Myra protested. "Smoke if you want to. It's perfectly all right. Everybody smokes around here."

"Oh, no, ma'am! It would annoy a lady."

"But I sometimes smoke a cigarette myself!"

The visitor stared at her. In his intent interest he stuffed the damaged cigarette into his coat pocket where, Myra thought amusedly, it must have been rather messy.

"You do?"

"Yes, though not in business hours. You don't approve of a girl smoking?"

"Yes, ma'am! I'm for equal rights for ladies. I've known real nice ladies that smoke. But somehow you don't look like any of 'em." He colored again. "I don't mean you don't look nice, only not the smoking kind."

"Are you from the West or the South? I can't make up my mind."

"I was born in Oklahoma, but I've been 'most every place since. I'm kind of a wanderer—a rolling stone, I guess."

"I'm from upper New York State myself," Myra explained impulsively. "Cayuga County. I never was away from there until I came here two years ago. Tell me something about your wandering. You're an artist, of course."

The young man grinned gravely. "I don't know's I am. I tell you, ma'am, I'm trying to find out whether I am or not. That's how I want to see Mr. Stanwix. If anybody can tell me, I reckon he can."

"So you've been roaming all over, painting pictures. I envy you."

"Not painting pictures, nope. No, ma'am! But I've roamed, for sure! I started when I was fourteen. Got a job as cook's helper with a logging outfit near Moclips—that's way out in Washington State. I was kind of small for the job, but I stuck it out. They let me wait table mostly. Say, if you want a man's job, try rustling grub for a gang of hungry bohunks! I learned a lot there."

"And what else did you do?"

The visitor had fallen silent as if there were no more to be told.

"Why, nothing interesting. I was on a salmon trap near Point Roberts—that's the Canadian line—for awhile. I got a job tallying for a mill on Vancouver Island. I was back in my own State for a piece with a cattle outfit, but that was kind of tame. Then there was the war; that kept me sort of busy.

"After that I was kind of restless, so I went out to Chile. Down there I got up against it, and took a chance with an outfit that was handling some cattle on Easter Island, and I got hung up in that Godforsaken spot six months. I certainly am sick of cows!"

"And when did you take up painting?" Myra smiled.

"Never did. But I was always drawing things, even the time they nearly worked me to death in that logging camp. I made up pictures of things I saw. Drew 'em on paper box covers and old letters, and anything I could get hold of. Why, I was always drawing pictures since I was eight years old, and finally a fellow from New

York that was hunting up back of Litooya Bay, he told me I'd better come to New York and get to amount to something that way. So I came."

"Let me see your pictures," Myra demanded.

"Right here, you mean?"

"Yes. Do you mind?"

"Do I mind?" His white teeth flashed in a grin. "Lady," he said, "you're the first person I've run across since I been east of the Missouri River that ever asked me to look at my pictures. The rest of 'em, these hard-boiled folks around this town, I've had to pretty near strong-arm them to make 'em take even a peek. No, ma'am, I certainly don't mind!"

CHAPTER VI.

SPREAD OUT FOR INSPECTION.

THE young rolling stone began unwrapping his large, flat bundle hurriedly.

"I don't believe I know your name," Myra interrupted.

"My name's Caxton—Sam Caxton. And yours, ma'am?"

Myra told him, and he paused to bow slightly. It was not the polished bow of Ertyl Stanwix, or of so many of the distinguished buyers, critics, and dealers Myra was used to, but it had native dignity.

Caxton spread out his wares, propping his sketches against chair legs, laying them flat on the floor.

She had been prepared from Caxton's brief autobiography to see something pretty crude. One or two other of these tramp artists with more easy nerve than native talent had dropped in on Stanwix during her two years in the gallery. Myra looked over Caxton's pictures, and was puzzled and rather at a loss.

They were on various bits of cardboard and paper as she imagined, drawings in ink and a few pencil sketches. Mostly they were drawings of laboring men, tree fallers, loggers on pay day, trapmen loading salmon scows, little Indian children going to a mission school that stood under the shoulder of an enormous, gaunt mountain, an Indian squaw skinning a seal.

The pictures were crudely done, but their very crudeness gave them power. And they had a character that made them individual.

The secretary pointed out one landscape among them. It was a drawing of a number of stone totems of fantastic design. Several had fallen and were half hid by wild grass. Others stood in stark grandeur against a wild sky. One tiny human figure, a man contemplating the ruins, seemed to accentuate the weirdness of the scene.

"That makes me shudder a little," Myra confessed. "It feels so lonesome."

"Lonesome? That's the most God-awful place on this globe, ma'am. At least it's the worst I ever saw. That's some old stone monuments on Easter Island. Nobody knows how they got to be there. Some forgotten race built 'em, I suppose. That little man down there in the corner, that's me, the way I used to feel when I went up to look at 'em. Yes, that sure is one lonesome, tough spot—"

The footstep of Ertyl Stanwix had made no sound on the soft carpet, but his shadow fell across a sketch; and Sam Caxton looked up and caught his breath.

Myra started guiltily. She was not paid by Stanwix to look at pictures, and this was taking liberties with his reception room.

The secretary managed to smile and wave her hand toward the artist. "Mr. Caxton has tried several times to see you, Mr. Stanwix. I thought his drawings were very interesting."

"Thank you, ma'am," Caxton said gravely before turning to the dealer. "I sure would appreciate your saying what you think about 'em, Mr. Stanwix," he invited. "Some folks advised me to get some schooling in art, and I thought I'd better ask a real expert like you first. I'm getting a little old to go to school unless it would pay me."

Stanwix glanced over the sketches at his feet. Myra, who was used to all the subtleties of his expression, knew that he was contemptuous of the sketches. But Stanwix's face hinted nothing of the sort to Caxton.

The dealer said perfunctorily:

"Very interesting. Yes, yes—quite amusing. Really very amusing."

Caxton's cheeks reddened. His gray eyes glistened.

"You mean they're so bad they make you laugh?"

"No, no—quite the contrary! Don't misunderstand me. We critics sometimes apply the word amusing to whatever intrigues our fancy. Certainly I was not making fun of your work."

"Oh! Well, what do you think of them? Are they any good?"

"Heaven forbid, I should say!" Stanwix exclaimed. "But if you mean, can they be sold, I'm inclined to think not. Too crude for the academic school, you see—a bit too academic to be classed among the modernist things."

Caxton looked dashed.

"I didn't suppose you'd buy any outright, Mr. Stanwix. But I thought maybe you could put a couple in your store and sell 'em on commission. A fellow that had a store in Juneau did that once—and he sold ten pictures for me—"

Stanwix interrupted with a wave of the hand, and his bland, deprecatory smile. "Quite impossible, I'm afraid. I handle only a few paintings by men of established reputation. You must excuse me now, Mr. Caxton."

He turned toward his inner and private office.

"Well, just a minute," Caxton begged. "I have traveled four thousand miles to get your advice, because a fellow told me you're the biggest sharp on this sort of thing in America. Would you mind telling me if you think I stand any chance if I was to go on with this work?

"You needn't be afraid to talk straight out and say what you think. After a man has been cussed out by a salmon trap foreman and a logging camp cook he can stand any kind of criticism, I guess. You see, I set such a lot of store by your word I've been to a lot of trouble to get here. And I would thank you kindly—"

Stanwix shook his head firmly.

"Impossible," he said. "I never advise."

He passed into the inner office and closed the door.

Sam Caxton stood among his drawings without a word of comment. He looked depressed.

Myra out of natural kindness stooped down and began to gather the sketches off the floor. Caxton knelt beside her with a hurried:

"Don't bother, ma'am."

They made up the package in silence. Caxton paused, his smile wistful.

"You were downright decent to be so interested, Thank you." He bowed and put on his sombrero.

"I'm really very sorry, Mr. Caxton. Personally I enjoyed your pictures. They are crude, but I think they show promise of something fine."

"I wish it was Mr. Stanwix saying that. Not that I don't thank you very kindly."

"I wish I was Mr. Stanwix just for the minute!" Myra agreed.

"That's all right. I did come quite a way, and it took three months and some hard work to make it, but lots of fellows have spent a whole season prospecting without panning any color. So I don't mind. Good-by, ma'am."

Caxton strode out of the room with his package.

The reception room was curtained from the ground floor showroom of the establishment by heavy velvet.

Sam Caxton passed through the portal, and the velvet dropped behind him. Then he paused to admire a small landscape on the gallery wall.

Ertyl Stanwix stepped out of his private office.

"Miss Cole," he said.

"Yes, Mr. Stanwix."

"Miss Cole, I'm not aware that I am paying you to view pictures or to hold little exhibits by unknown young men to while away your afternoons."

Myra colored. "I am very sorry," she said steadily.

Stanwix was too annoyed to be mollified by this.

"I can't help tramp artists coming in here, I admit," he went on. "That's one of the penalties of running a public gallery. The great unwashed are ever with us. But I certainly don't expect you to encourage them, to let them make a lodging

house of my reception room, and spread their confounded, unwanted trash all over the floor.

"A fine sight that would be if one of our regular patrons dropped in to see me. A hobo artist in a dirty shirt—a package of his crude scratchings all over the rug—and my own secretary entertaining him! Another break like that, Miss Cole, and I shall look for a new secretary."

Myra said nothing. Her cheeks were burning. A hot retort trembled on her lips. But she needed her job. Stanwix had not paid her enough to make her independent of his employ in two years. She was not trained for women's usual business occupations. She didn't dare part with this position.

Stanwix lingered still. He had just thought of something more cutting to say. But he didn't say it.

The velvet curtain parted, and Sam Caxton returned.

Caxton walked directly to the dealer, and looked him in the eye. "I heard what you said," he began in a menacing purr. "I didn't mean to, but I stopped to look at a picture outside that door. I don't mind what you call me. Your opinion of me don't bother me any more than a flea bite. But you jumped this young lady without any cause. If she was looking at my pictures, that was my fault, not hers."

"Indeed?" said Stanwix.

"I'm telling you."

"Now I'll tell you something, Mr. Caxton. I've been rather patient with you. I have wasted valuable time looking at your worthless pictures. But I shan't waste much time on you when you butt in where you have no business."

"What's my fault is my business. I said it was my fault she looked at the pictures. If I was you I'd apologize to this lady for what you said. And I wouldn't hesitate very long, either."

"Oh, please!" Myra gasped.

Stanwix looked into the young man's gray eyes, and decided against uttering the sarcasm on the tip of his tongue. He turned to Myra. "I apologize for my error, Miss Cole."

Sam turned away gravely.

Stanwix added with poorly concealed venom: "As for you, young man, get out! Don't ever bring that trash in here again."

CHAPTER VII.

IN MADISON SQUARE.

STANWIX went into his private office after Sam's departure. He said nothing to Myra except to ask for the letters she had been typing.

Presently he brought out the correspondence, duly signed and approved, gave the secretary one or two instructions, and added his usual good night. No reference to the recent unpleasantness, not so much as by a glance!

Myra was not deceived by this attitude. She had worked for Stanwix long enough to understand him pretty well.

The famous dealer did not forget an affront. Sometimes he waited patiently for months to pay back his scores, but he was not the forgiving, forgetting sort. Myra knew the mean little streak in him too well for her peace of mind.

The secretary mailed the day's letters, tidied her desk, and along with the several suavely elegant salesmen who made up the staff left the Stanwix galleries to the care of the night watchman. Because she was perturbed in spirit, worried about Stanwix and what form his revenge upon her would take, she walked briskly down the avenue.

The walk was a good tonic. She was smiling before she reached Madison Square, glad to be alive and a part of the busy, inspiring scene.

In the square the old trees were putting out their new leaves of tender green. The tulip beds were beginning to unfurl many-colored banners. Myra turned in to look.

Seated on a bench near the fountain, she found Sam Caxton.

The artist still clasped his large, flat bundle. His chin was sunk in his collar, his shoulders hunched forlornly. Myra's heart was stirred to pity.

For the moment Sam was frankly blue. The New Yorker he had met hunting in the Alaskan wilderness had been enthusiastic about Sam's sketches. He looked to

Sam to be a man of intelligence and knowledge of things like that. He predicted that Sam had the makings of an artistic success, even hinted that Ertyl Stanwix might buy a sketch or two from him.

This New Yorker was going to give Sam a letter of introduction to the dealer directly he returned from a little expedition he was starting when they met. Sam didn't wait for the letter because the trader's launch called at camp earlier than expected, and he was impatient to start his long journey toward the East and his career without loss of time.

Sam thought of all the miles he had come and the effort it took to cover them. What had it led to? His drawings were trash. Stanwix said so.

"I guess I am just a bum in a dirty shirt," Sam decided.

Then he looked up and found Myra Cole smiling on him.

Sam leaped to his feet and doffed his battered sombrero.

"I couldn't pass by," Myra was saying, "without thanking you for your taking my part to Mr. Stanwix."

"I'm sure you're welcome, ma'am. Afterward, I thought maybe I had put my clumsy foot into it worse. I was afraid maybe he'd try to get even on you after I went away. Is everything all right?"

She assured him bravely that everything was.

"I don't know," Sam considered gravely. "Maybe I ought not to say it about the man you work for, but that Stanwix has got a mean streak in him. Yes, he has! I've known his kind before this. There was a squaw man used to live on the beach near the placer camp I was in. Stanwix reminds me of him a lot!"

Myra had to laugh. "How Mr. Stanwix would love to hear that!"

"He'd better let you alone or he's likely to," Sam said gravely. "I don't know but I'd better keep an eye on that hombre for a time. He's got a bad face. I've known one or two horses and dogs with an eye like that. You've got to look out for that kind."

Myra changed the subject hastily by asking how he liked New York. They sat on the park bench and discussed their impressions, their prospects, their hopes.

Sam Caxton, she discovered, lived in a shabby little rented studio on Fourteenth Street. He had been working there for several weeks, getting up pictures to show to Stanwix. She inferred accurately enough that he was both lonely and low in funds.

Out of her own knowledge of pictures and galleries Myra could not offer much encouragement.

"The big dealers are obliged to sell the public what it wants," she explained. "It is mostly the rich who buy paintings, the collectors who are looking for an investment that will appreciate in value. So they only buy the work of men already famous. If it didn't sound so very discouraging, I could tell you dozens of true stories about painters who had to sell their canvases at starvation prices in order to exist.

"The Stanwix gallery, most of the big galleries, are filled with fine things that were bought for two or three hundred dollars apiece. There are Americans whose work is famous to-day, men like Blakelock and Twachtman who were glad to let their pictures go for as little as a hundred, fifty, even twenty-five dollars each when they made them. After these men died those same canvases sold for many thousands instead of hundreds of dollars. But they didn't get the money."

Sam asked forlornly: "Do they always have to die in order to get famous, ma'am?"

"Their pictures are always worth much more after they die," Myra explained frankly. "Then the buyers know that the supply is definitely limited. The prices go soaring if there is any vogue for their work."

"I was sort of reckoning on getting famous," Sam drawled, "but I hadn't calculated on dying to get there. I don't like that notion a bit!"

They laughed at the idea and felt better.

When Sam, with considerable diffidence, managed to suggest that he would highly appreciate Myra's company at some modest restaurant, the secretary cast conventions to the winds and accepted. She stipulated only that she pay her own dinner check.

Myra Cole had lived her two years in

New York without making intimate friends, or even meeting many congenial people. Daytimes she was too busy to think about loneliness. In her idle time she refused to let her mind dwell on the thought. But she was lonely, and her heart turned toward this man who was more lonely, and so innocent of the art world that he aspired to. Myra's was the sort of generous impulse that pays good dividends both ways.

CHAPTER VIII.

WAKING UP.

VARONY walked on, hatless, through the streets, and had no notion of time or distance.

When he neared Fifth Avenue, as he crossed the town going east, the crowds that thronged the walks astounded him and frightened him a little.

Far more astonishing were the roadways filled with motor traffic. Trucks as big as small houses shouldered high among the taxis and town cars that dodged about them. Everything moved at a terrifying speed, and with a roar of sounds utterly different from the horse-drawn traffic the artist knew before his mysterious waking.

The streets were like rivers, noisy with flood, bearing on their currents objects puzzlingly strange to him, vehicles he could only half comprehend.

And the walks were jammed with strange men and women, strange in their dress and posture and manner.

The number of women and girls in the throngs was beyond anything he knew. Their short skirts, painted faces, short cut hair, and new manners shocked and annoyed him.

Men and women alike hurried, hurried, hurried.

Varony missed the old-time leisure of this hour, the more temperate strollers who relaxed after the day's work.

As for the buildings and landmarks, he recognized few. Except that the Elevated railroads remained and the old Flatiron Building loomed against the sky, he might have been lost altogether.

Then he reached the avenue itself, and found its wide stream bed running bank-full, the long processions of green busses towering over everything like herds of green elephants, and great, shining, low passenger coaches of extraordinary luxury carrying as many as forty persons within them and flitting with scarcely a sound on their enormous rubber tires.

And above all, in slender bronze towers, flashed mysterious lights that changed from green to red and back again to green. As they changed the traffic stopped or started.

Varony marveled in a kind of trance.

His naïve soul thrilled with the strangeness and the excitement of the world. His artist's eye rejoiced in a bewildering confusion of new, strange masses, and colors ever in a state of flux. He strode on with increasing rapidity, marveling and carried out of himself.

Then before a big hotel he came on a rank of three hansom cabs, three vehicles familiar to him. Their coachmen in tall, old-fashioned hats dozed on the high seats. Their skinny, dejected nags sank their heads in the shafts and weaved dizzily in their dreams.

Varony stopped and stared at this little fragment of the world that he knew, this remnant of his own time that was as strange in its setting as the fossil of some outlandish form of lost life set in a museum.

A lump came into his throat.

His eyes misted over.

He felt an irresistible impulse to go up to the cabs and touch them with his fingers to make certain that they were real, and not a part of this nightmare he was in.

His fingers touched hard, substantial wood, and warm horse flesh. The cabs were solid and real. He was wide awake.

Varony turned and hurried off, retracing his steps down town.

Comprehension of the true state of affairs was growing clearer with every step.

Stanwix had lied to him. All had lied to him, nurses, doctor, everybody.

He had been ill not months, but years.

Time had rolled on and over him while he lay buried in a living grave. How many days? How many years? When he tried to think it out, his head reeled.

And behind his wonder another question

was framed and grew in its immediate, overwhelming importance. Why?

Why had they all lied to him?

Varony had not paid any attention to his wandering. He pushed in one direction so long as the street traffic permitted. When the flow changed and blocked his path, his steps turned toward any open channel.

He realized sharply that he was tired and weak, very weak.

That mysterious illness had taxed his strength severely. He had worked hard at his easel most of the day. This mad wandering that brought so much amazement and shock was the final straw. He wanted a place to sink down, any place.

A modest little *table d'hôte* restaurant caught his eye. He stumbled down two steps below the pavement and through its doors, and found a little table.

To the waiter who came to brush up crumbs and hover at his shoulder, Varony whispered in his tired voice: "Something to drink first—a glass of wine."

Dimly he comprehended the shocked look that crossed the waiter's smug face. He heard his mumbled: "Very sorry, sir, we don't dare take a chance in here! They just padlocked the place next door yesterday."

Varony understood only that he could not have wine. "Something hot then," he said. "I am very tired."

The waiter presently brought him a cup of coffee, hot and thick and black.

Several diners who had heard the request for wine and the answer watched him with amused glances.

The taste of the coffee was grateful. Varony finished half the cup and turned to look about him.

Across the room he saw a spare, gaunt old man with a thick mane of white hair, poising a coffee cup in his hand, his elbow on the table. Instinctively outraged at the ungraceful posture of this other Varony started to put his own cup down. And the old man across the room started to do the same thing simultaneously.

Suddenly curious, the painter stayed his hand.

The old man across the room stayed his hand.

Varony turned his head to the left hand, the phantom old man imitating the action. He saw that both walls were lined with mirrors. It was his own reflection he had observed.

In the glass close beside him he saw the face again framed in the shock of thick, white hair. It was himself!

Varony gaped at the reflection, forgetting everything else.

The other diners, more amused than ever, smiled more broadly. They looked a little startled as Varony pushed back his chair and it toppled over with a crash.

The painter walked to the nearest occupied table.

A young man with a pleasant, homely face and honest gray eyes was entertaining a very pretty girl with short, dark hair.

Varony stopped beside them. His voice trembled badly.

"I hope you will pardon this intrusion," he said with the old, instinctive courtesy. "I am just a little bewildered. Would you mind telling me what year this is?"

"What time it is?" the younger man suggested, thinking he misunderstood. His hand reached toward a pocket where a watch should be and stopped, remembering that no watch was in the pocket. That watch had gone to raise ready cash.

"Not what hour," Varony explained. "What year. Now, this present year—what year is it?"

The younger man stared, but he did not smile as others were smiling at the gaunt old man.

"This is the year nineteen hundred and twenty-six, sir," he answered gravely.

"Nineteen twenty-six! You—you are certain?"

"Yes, sir."

Varony's spare figure stiffened. He turned and walked directly toward the door, and out of the restaurant.

From the rear a startled waiter shouted a warning.

A fat woman at the cash register raised a shrill cry.

Varony stalked on unheeding and slammed the door behind him.

Several diners had risen, among them Sam Caxton and Myra Cole.

The waiter jostled them as he ran after Varony, calling noisily for the price of a cup of coffee.

Sam and Myra followed him out of the door.

"Look out!" Sam shouted, and ran toward the old man.

Varony had stepped off the curb into the midst of a whirling flood of vehicles. He walked on like a man suddenly stricken blind while horns raised a din, brakes screeched, and a general shout went up.

Sam reached his side with a wide leap. His hand caught Varony's shoulder, and hurled him back out of the path of a wildly skidding truck.

Then for a moment, until it was safe to move, they clung together in midstream, two bits of human flotsam tossed on the savage currents of flood tide.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHAT ADDRESS?"

BY this time there was the nucleus of a crowd at the curb, watching Sam Caxton.

There was the waiter, still vociferous about the unpaid for cup of coffee and incidentally keeping a sharp eye on Myra as though he suspected her of similar larcenous designs against the restaurant.

There was the fat lady cashier at the restaurant door. There were several other diners who craned their necks.

There was Myra herself, hatless and coatless, and for just a few seconds breathless as well, for it seemed as if she was to witness the annihilation of two men amid the traffic.

Around them a dozen or so of strangers had gathered by the time Sam Caxton led Varony to safety.

The shock of danger restored Varony to a sense of the immediate present. He turned on Sam gratefully. "My dear fellow, I owe my life to you!"

The artist was obliged to lean his weight on Sam's shoulder.

Behind Myra voices were saying: "It's a fight."

"Go on, you're crazy. It's a pinch."

"Is 'at so? I saw the kid sock him in the nose."

"Knocking down an old man! I'd like to take a sock at him!"

Myra said hurriedly to Sam: "Can't we go back inside? We're attracting a crowd."

Sam turned toward the restaurant, walking slowly, half supporting Varony.

He was obliged to push the insistent waiter aside. "Take his other arm," Sam growled. "Nobody's going to beat you out of a nickel! Do something useful."

They went inside, and the three sat down at a table. Some of the crowd lingered at the windows, flattening their faces against the glass. But when they saw nothing more than three persons dining together peaceably, they gave it up and sought excitement elsewhere.

Sam disposed of the curious neighbors inside with the curt explanation: "Nothing happened."

"Just rest a few minutes," he advised Varony. "You got a bad scare from that truck, sir. Maybe some coffee and a bite to eat wouldn't hurt any."

Varony was reminded. "By Jove," he exclaimed, "I find I haven't a cent in my pockets. When I left home I didn't expect to dine out."

Sam assured him heartily that he was their guest and could send him the money whenever it was convenient. Varony ate a little to please his hosts, and they talked of everything but what most interested them all.

After Sam paid the check Varony exclaimed: "My dear chap, you've been more than kind to me. If you'll let me have your name and address now."

They were on the sidewalk again.

"You look rather tired," Sam said kindly. "If you don't object, sir, this young lady and I will see you home."

Myra nodded approval.

"I have been very ill. I'm still a little weak," Varony confessed. "If you don't mind too much, I would thank you for it."

Sam hailed a taxi.

"What address?" he asked the older man.

Varony groaned. "I haven't the slightest idea."

They stared at him.

The white-haired man passed an unsteady hand across his brow.

"You see, I have been convalescing after a bad stroke, a blood clot on the brain, the doctor tells me. A friend looked after me. He lodged me in a house he owns, and provided a nurse. In a general way I know the address, over in Chelsea district, but I don't know the street or the number. What a confounded old nuisance I am to you!"

"Not at all, sir."

"If you can tell us your friend's name, perhaps we can find the address in a directory," Myra suggested.

Varony hesitated a moment.

He was not yet ready to return to the house where, he now realized, he had been virtually a prisoner.

"I would rather not mention his name," he answered, adopting a half truth. I have a good reason. For one thing, I should very much dislike to alarm my friend, and he would be very much alarmed if he learned I had been in any danger. Given a little time, I think I can find my way back."

Sam and Myra exchanged anxious glances.

Neither one of them believed the old man fit to wander the streets in his present wearied condition.

Perhaps, if he had been a more hardened New Yorker, Sam would have grasped at any excuse to evade responsibility for a stranger. But Sam was not a New Yorker at all. He said, "Will you do this? Will you stop at my studio for an hour or two and rest yourself?"

Varony accepted this hospitality eagerly. Myra said good-night, and Sam promised to let her know the outcome of the adventure. Sam and the artist rode in the taxi to Fourteenth Street.

CHAPTER X.

FRANTIC SEARCH.

SAM CAXTON'S residence was a dusty, dingy room on the top floor of a dingy and dilapidated old house. Though the address was most convenient, the property was known as a "taxpayer," which means that the owner was content to let it drop to pieces so long as the meager rentals paid taxes, or until somebody made him a good offer of purchase.

The studio had one easy chair, a reed affair much battered, a kitchen table, a cot bed, and an easel.

Sam gave his guest the chair.

"I forgot to make a telephone call. It's about a job I'm looking for," he exclaimed. "Will you excuse me a few minutes, sir?"

Varony nodded. "I'll just rest a little. I'm more tired than I thought I was." He looked utterly wearied.

Sam ran down the four flights of steps to the street. From the crossing patrolman he learned the address of the nearest precinct police station. To the officer on duty behind the desk he reported the little incident of the restaurant, and the present whereabouts of Homer Varony.

"He's quite an elderly gentleman," Sam explained. "I guess he's been ill, besides. I reckon his friends or kin will be getting worried, and probably they'll ask you about him."

The sergeant agreed. "Sure, it happens like that a dozen times a day around here."

Sam scarcely had left the precinct station, feeling that he had done the best he could for Varony, before a telephone inquiry was relayed from headquarters at Center Street. An old man named Varony was being sought by his worried friends.

Sam's information was passed over the wire to a scared inquirer. The New York police marked another little case closed.

In the old fashioned brick house over by the river Foster turned from the telephone. Foster swallowed the lump in his throat, and drew his first full, free breath after two hours of mental agony. "He's found," Foster reported.

Ertyl Stanwix had been pacing the room liked a caged lion since his hurried arrival at the house and his first comprehension of Varony's disappearance. Stanwix had said scarcely a word, but his white, haggard face, the compressed lips, the somber gleam of his eye, told of a bitter anger that threatened to boil over and scald everybody near him.

Stanwix stopped short at Foster's announcement. His eyes flashed. "Found?"

Letty, huddled disconsolate in a big chair, biting her lips in a nervous frenzy, leaped up repeating the word.

"It's this way, Mr. Stanwix," Foster related eagerly. "A young fellow saw him in a restaurant, acting kind of queer. He saw the old boy was tired, and he took him to his own place, a studio on Fourteenth Street. He's right there now—"

"You have the name and address?"

"Oh, sure. Name is Sam Caxton, No. 9 West Fourteenth—"

"Foster! Look out!" The cry came from Letty. Both of them sprang toward Stanwix.

The dealer had reeled at Sam Caxton's name. Letty thought him about to fall. But he waved them away with a groan. "Caxton! Number Nine? It's the same. I saw the address on his damned drawings. Out of six million people it had to be him!"

Before Stanwix's bitter look Foster and Letty retreated nervously, drawing closer to each other.

Stanwix choked over his emotions before he could make himself coherent. He gasped finally, "A fine mess you made of this job!"

"I'll get you out of it," Foster stammered, staring at the insane rage in Stanwix's face.

"By heaven, you'll do that! Listen, you two, you'll both go up the river with me for life unless you get me out of this. You're in as deep as I am. And you'll pay for it, if you blunder again. I want Varony back. Understand?

"I want him back if you have to commit murder to get him. I want Varony back in this house to-night. At once. And I want it done without one living soul getting wise that I am mixed up in this in any way. Not only that, but Varony's name is not to be mentioned in public.

"Never mind expense. The sky is the limit. But I want Varony back to-night, if you have to chain him to drag him here. If you fail you two pay for this along with me. Now, is that plain enough—"

Letty cried out angrily, "Wait a minute! Get me right. If you're going to hurt a hair of that old boy's head, count me out. I'm no moll, and I don't run with crooks and gunmen—"

Foster was pulling at her sleeve. "For Pete's sake," he whispered frantically.

"I won't shut up! You can both listen! If you hurt that old man—"

"Be still," Stanwix ordered bitterly. "I give you my word Varony won't be hurt, if you do your part. Is that enough? You fall down this time, and I won't answer for his life—or yours, either. Now cut these hysterics and get busy. The car is outside. Come along."

Stanwix ordered his car parked near Sam's studio. He spoke to Foster.

"I'm out of the picture. This man Caxton knows me. You go up to that room. Use your head and your ears. Find out what they're doing, but don't let them see you. Report back to me."

"Yes, sir."

"Get the lay of the land. Then we can decide how to go about this thing. Understand, we get Varony back. I don't care if it costs a million dollars and a million murders—we get that old fool back!"

CHAPTER XI.

BY THE DIM LIGHT.

VARONY had dropped asleep in the wicker chair when Sam returned. He opened his eyes with a start, stared about him in bewilderment, and half rose.

Then he caught sight of Sam's homely face with the broad, reassuring smile, and remembered his friend.

Sam repeated his excuse about the telephone message.

"You, too, are an artist?" the older man exclaimed suddenly, his eyes taking in the bare little studio, with its dirty skylight, the easel, and the large, flat package of drawings that leaned against it.

Sam's smile drooped.

"No, sir," he admitted. "I thought maybe I was cut out for that kind of work, but they tell me I'm not."

"Bosh, my dear fellow! Never take anybody's word for that! Never! An

artist, Mr. Caxton, is not made or unmade by anybody's say-so. If he is a real artist, that is because there's an itching in his soul for self-expression that all hell can't blot out. If what any critic or dealer says to you can stop you from painting, you're not an artist. You are cut out for a plumber."

The spare, shabby old man spoke with a fierce pride. His head rose proudly, his blue eyes flashed.

Sam thrilled strangely.

"By heaven!" he exclaimed. "I'll show the world!"

"Let me see your work," Varony smiled. Sam untied the package and spread out his small exhibit.

His strange guest examined the sketches in silence that lasted some time. "Now tell me all about yourself," he commanded finally.

For the second time that day, Sam related his history. Varony asked numerous questions.

"You will do good work, Mr. Caxton," he said gravely. "You're young and strong. You can stand hard knocks. You have something to say to the world. That is the vital thing. You must go to the best masters and learn all they can give you. Then you will learn to speak in your own language, the priceless possession of every real artist, the thing that raises him above mediocrity.

"Never again pay the slightest attention to the opinions of critics or dealers—not even Ertyl Stanwix himself. The critics are parasites, the dealer only a salesman. You—you alone—are the one of real importance, the artist who creates."

Sam was throbbing with a strange excitement that was part awe for the old man.

"You talk like a man who knows," he exclaimed. "You must be a real artist!"

"I am Homer Varony," the painter answered simply.

Sam turned red with embarrassment.

Varony chuckled. "The name means nothing to you? Why should it? The only thing I can boast of, my dear fellow, is that I have made it a name I can be proud of. It means something to me. Let me tell you."

Sam listened with rapt attention. Varony sketched his own life.

It was the story of a boy born on an impoverished Vermont farm. His boyhood had been mostly hard manual labor. When he was twelve Varony had handled a plow alone and learned to wrestle with the bowlders that peppered his father's arid fields. He had passed his twenty-first birthday a farm hand with a rudimentary education and no hope of escaping from his slavery. But the ambition to paint had not died.

Varony told how at last he had made an opportunity to come to New York where he could learn. He told of years of starvation and desperate effort to keep alive, and buy paint and canvas.

"Success came finally," he said. "Not money success. If I were to add the total of all that my pictures earned me, it wouldn't be much more than my father averaged each year on his Vermont farm. But my paintings won prizes. A dealer, Ertyl Stanwix, began buying them and found an outlet for them. I had won a living. And best of all, I knew that my work was good. I know it will be better. I wonder if you can understand what it cost me?

"I was thirty-seven years old. Fifteen years I barely existed. Because I was poor and because my ambition drove me to ceaseless work, I had scarcely a friend or acquaintance in all New York. But I succeeded. Luck turned. Life was tasting sweeter.

"Well, I paid for it. I was taken ill, stricken down at my easel, they say—my boy, did you say this was Nineteen Twenty-Six?"

"Yes, sir."

Varony dropped his head into his hands with a groan. Sam heard him cry out in a low voice: "It can't be! More than twenty years gone!"

The painter finally showed his face. It was white and lined, and working with strange passion.

He said with a great effort: "I am not mad, I hope? Tell me honestly, you don't think I'm queer—queer in the head?"

"I most certainly do not! You're as sane and collected as I am!"

"Yes. You're right. I know, without

asking, that I am sane. I am sane, and yet—"

Varony's eyes narrowed. His look grew bitter.

"There's a lot I don't understand," he said slowly. "Other things, I begin to see more clearly. Mr. Caxton, I have been the victim of an amazing deception! I don't know the motive behind it. That's to be found out. But I have been deceived, hoaxed, perhaps swindled outrageously.

"I shall need a little time to investigate, to find out details. Do you know what I believe? I think I shall prove I have been outrageously swindled! I believe I am going to prove that one of the greatest scoundrels of his time is Ertyl Stanwix!"

Sam Caxton sprang to his feet.

"I don't know what Stanwix has done to you," he exclaimed, "but if you say he's a crook, I'll give odds of a hundred to one that you're right!"

"I am going to prove that I'm right," Varony said more composedly. "I've got that to live for."

The painter began to tremble violently. He lay back in his chair, and his tired hands fluttered.

"Here," Sam exclaimed, "you're all done up! You've been through a lot in the last few hours. And you're not strong yet. Maybe I'd better find a doctor—"

"No doctors! I'm tired, that's all."

"Then crawl into my blankets. You bunk here overnight."

"How about you?"

"Never mind about me. There's a dozen hotels near by I can slide into for a night." Sam thought anxiously that whatever hotel he chose, it would have to be a very inexpensive one. But he sprang at his cheap army cot, and arranged its blankets for his guest. "You're not making any trouble at all," he declared. "You do as I say, or I'll call that doctor."

Varony rose unsteadily to remove his outer clothing. He was still protesting, but he was giddy with fatigue. He submitted to Sam's help without a murmur.

Almost immediately he had laid his head low, Varony fell asleep.

Sam Caxton watched him anxiously.

"Wonder if I hadn't better call a doctor," he muttered. "Wonder if a doctor would charge much? Well, dog-gone it! Any doctor wouldn't have the heart to refuse to help the old boy!"

Sam picked up his battered sombrero, and let himself out of the door softly as he could.

He nearly collided with a stranger in the dimly lit hall as he came out. The stranger was Foster.

"I beg your pardon," Foster exclaimed. "I was about to knock. Are you Mr. Markley?"

"No, sir. Markley's place is the floor below," Sam explained. "Same door as this, on the next flight down."

"Oh, of course! Stupid of me," Foster apologized. He preceded Sam down the stair, and Sam left him rapping lightly at the door of his neighbor below.

Foster took good care not to disturb the tenant at whose door he knocked. The minute Sam descended the stair, he was after him. He watched Sam down the street, then hurried to the closed car where he reported to Stanwix, and received further orders.

It was fully an hour before Sam returned to his studio.

He had tried three doctors.

One had gone so far as to listen, protesting in the chill night air, to an account of Varony's symptoms, and advised Sam that all his guest needed was a good night's rest.

Sam pushed open his door, and found the studio deserted.

The blankets had been folded neatly over the empty cot.

On the mantel he discovered a note signed with Varony's initials. It thanked him for his kindness, and advised him that Varony had rejoined his kind friends. And it told him even more than that.

CHAPTER XII.

A HASTY NOTE.

SAM CAXTON'S jaw dropped.

He exclaimed to the empty studio, and apropos only of his intense surprise: "Well, how d'ya do?"

There was something anti-climactic about

this note. It poured chill waters over Sam's enthusiasm about his visitor.

He reread Varony's lines:

DEAR MR. CAXTON:

The good doctor thinks I will be better off at my friend's house; so I am going back with him. Don't think me ungrateful in leaving so abruptly. These things are written in the stars, you know. I myself was born under Leo with Venus in the ascendant. Those great painters, Rembrandt and Van Dyck, were born under Leo. That must be why their spirit hands guide my brushes, don't you think so? Let the stars be your guide, my friend! At my friend's house, when I sit very quietly, many great men come to talk with me. Napoleon comes and the late William Shakespeare. And both of the Jones Brothers who made the soothing sirup. We have jolly times at my friend's house.

H. VARONY.

Sam pondered the note dolefully. "How d'ya do?" he croaked. "The old boy is nutty as a squirrel. And I never got wise to it!"

The note was scrawled in a round, unformed, childish hand, and filled with tremulous flourishes.

Sam looked at these painfully formed letters and tears came into his eyes.

"The poor old boy! Just a harmless old nut. I'll bet it was overwork drove him crazy."

Sam sat down soberly in the old wicker chair. If he was a little ashamed of himself for having taken Varony so seriously, for having been deceived as to his mental condition, he was more concerned for the old man's tragedy. He thought of making inquiries about him next morning. Then he remembered that Varony had not revealed the name of the friend who was caring for him.

Sam's eyes strayed to the sketches, still scattered about the easel.

He grinned sadly.

"Well, he certainly had me going! I began to think I was going to amount to something. Huh! I suppose I'm as crazy as he is!"

He began gathering up the sketches. Then his face brightened. "That Miss Cole, now! She thinks I might amount to something. There's certainly nothing crazy about her, I'll tell the world."

A rap on the door startled him. He dropped the sketches and shouted: "Come in."

"Mr. Sam Caxton?"

The visitor was a short, broad-shouldered man with a seamed and weather-beaten face. He sported a generous flowing mustache and his small eyes twinkled. His garb was a queer combination of wide-brimmed black Stetson, a broadcloth overcoat with a fur collar, a frock coat, and gray-striped trousers, and a fancy vest. Sam noted a large and weighty gold watch chain, composed of small nuggets strung together, a diamond tie pin, and a nugget finger ring.

The stranger extended a broad hand, and shook Sam's hand hard. "My name's Gorman, Pete Gorman. Don't know but you might have heard about me."

"Afraid not, Mr. Gorman," Sam smiled. There was something breezy about Gorman's dress and manner that was like a tonic to Sam. Gorman was the sort of man he was used to, much more used to than a man like Ertyl Stanwix. Before he said more, Sam guessed that Gorman was a Westerner, probably an Alaskan sourdough.

"Well, you're no stranger to me," Gorman declared. "It's a pleasure to meet an artist that looks like a real, he-man!"

"Yeah? Well, who says I'm an artist?"

"I do, Caxton. Ought to know. I bought two pictures of yours in Juneau a couple of years back. I've got some low-grade ore properties up that way, and I happened to see some of your work in a store window one day—"

"Cross's stationery and jewelry store!" Sam exclaimed, grinning with pleasure.

"That's the place, I guess. Never noticed much about the store. But I liked the pictures. I don't know a damn thing about art, Caxton. Don't pretend to. But I know a picture I like at first sight. Funny Cross never mentioned my name to you."

"I was working in a placer camp," Sam explained. "I wasn't back in Juneau for six months. By that time Cross had sold my sketches. I never asked who bought 'em."

"A placer camp!" The visitor eyed Sam admiringly. "By the eternal, when I saw your stuff I says to myself: 'There's one

artist knows what he's talking about! That boy has swung a pick and shovel himself,' I says. Say, d'you know what I've been doing the last three months?"

Sam did not know.

"I've been in New York," Gorman declared. "I sold out my claims to a syndicate and cleaned up a pretty good pile. Time to take it easy awhile, I figured. I figure I've got enough to take it easy on the rest of my life and not have to scrape the bottom of the barrel, either. I kind of had an idea I would settle down and play this town high, wide, and fancy. Thought maybe I'd buy me some good pictures to put in my house, pictures that would kind of remind me of the old days. Caxton, by the eternal, I can't find 'em!"

"You can't?"

"No, sir, by the eternal, I can't. And I've prospected this town from hell to breakfast. I've been to every picture store in New York, I'll bet you. I says to them all, money is no object. When I see what I want, I'll snap it up. Get me the goods. Those were my orders. Caxton, by the eternal, they couldn't do it!"

"They couldn't?"

"No, sir. They couldn't!"

Gorman made a disgusted face.

"Of all the mush-faced, lily-fingered pups I ever saw, these artists take the pot," he groaned. "And the dealers, by the eternal, they're worse. All tricked out in fancy clothes and stinking of perfume. There's one of 'em, Ertyl Stanwix—he fairly turns my stomach. And I've got a stomach that was raised on sourdough at that. Give me a Siwash Indian for company any day. That's better than him!"

"Hello!" Sam grinned. "You said something then. You and me, we think alike about Stanwix, anyhow!"

"Give the devil his due, Caxton. Stanwix did you a good turn to-night—"

"How come? I'll bet it was an accident?"

"Well, so it was! Here's the way. I stopped in his place about half past five. Caught him just as he was leaving. Asked him if he found any pictures to suit me. He showed me a couple of things I wouldn't hang in a barn. 'By the eternal,' I says, 'don't you ever get any real pictures done by men that know something! Why, there's a boy up in Juneau—name is Caxton—that can give them artists cards and spades and take every trick! I got two of his pictures and, by the eternal, if I could find him again, I'd buy him out.'"

"You said that to Stanwix?" Sam gasped.

"I said that. Yes, sir. He got sore as a boil. 'Oh, if that's the kind of hen scratches you're looking for,' says he, 'that bum you mention was in here just this afternoon. Here is his address.' So, you see, he did you a good turn, and he did me a good turn. I don't know though, maybe he was glad to get rid of me. I'm a man that says right out just what he thinks—got some more pictures here, my boy?"

"Well, here's one or two new ones," Sam offered diffidently. But it warmed his heart to watch Gorman's face as he examined one and another of the sketches.

Gorman was breathing noisily. He muttered comments, and nodded delighted recognition of the pictures. He said at last, reaching for a fat wallet: "How much for the lot?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE VISITOR'S PROPOSITION.

SAM CAXTON'S mouth opened, but words would not come. He sat down, suddenly, on his cot bed.

The studio and Gorman were spinning around him.

"Here, what's up now?" his visitor grinned. Then his look turned to concern. He pulled up the wicker chair near Sam, and laid a big hand on Sam's knee.

"I guess I shot a little sudden. Take it easy, boy. Everything's all right. Say, how's this, you been having some tough sledding in this man's town?" Gorman's eyes wandered about the bare studio, confirming the discovery.

"I'm all right," Sam said slowly. "But I'm not used to having anybody buy a picture off me. Listen, Gorman, I've got to give you the low down on my stuff. The biggest dealers, the fellows that know, say it's a bust. Understand? I couldn't give

you a false steer. Those picture sharps, they know better than we do what's worth real money."

Gorman's answer was a roar.

"By the eternal, you listen to me, *tillicum!* I don't give one lonely toot in hell for art. Get that? Art is a word that gives me a profound pain in the neck. All I know is what kind of pictures I like. I like your kind."

"But—" Sam stuttered.

"But nothing! Listen. Sam, when I cleaned up and turned my holdings over to that syndicate, I came outside worth three-quarters of a million dollars. Enough to do what I want to do, and tell every blank picture dealer and art critic in America to go jump in the river, if he don't like it. Get that. All right.

"You're a Western boy. I'm a Westerner. I like Western paintings. You can make 'em to suit me. Now, here's my proposition to you. I'm going to stake you to Paris, France, for two years. That's where they turn out the highest grade artists in the world, they tell me. I was going there anyhow. I've got my tickets bought. Now, by the eternal, you're going along with me."

"You're crazy!" Sam shouted.

"Yeah, crazy like a fox! Don't think you won't have to pay me back. You're going to sign a contract binding you to turn over every picture you make during the next two years to me. Every picture. In return for that I stake you to your living and a course in the best French art school money can buy. Do you get it? Take your time, boy—think it over. But you're going to say yes!"

Out of a stunned silence Sam managed finally: "I don't know what to say."

"Then everything's settled, Sam. It's a go."

"But listen! I've got to tell you what the sharps say about my pictures."

"Tell me nothing! Don't you suppose I had to listen to that big stuffed shirt, Stanwix, shooting off his mouth about how rotten your pictures were? I listened to him till I got a tin ear, but it don't change my opinion any. Sam, there isn't anything to tie you here?"

"I can pull up stakes this minute, so far as that goes, Gorman."

"Then it's done! We sail to-morrow morning on the Caronia. Cabin's already engaged. I'll fix everything. All you have to do is throw your stuff into a bag and come along. What's your answer?"

"It's yes," Sam gasped, giving him his hand.

Gorman seized the hand and crunched it in his hard fist. "Then, by the eternal, you come along with me up to my hotel now! To-night, Sam, we're going to put on a little party that will teach New York something about a real party."

"No," Sam said firmly, withdrawing his hand. "Get me right on that. If you're looking for somebody to go on parties, I'm out. Here, and in France, too. I've got to work like the devil, if I ever amount to anything as a painter. Any parties we stage together will have to wait until I've made my mark, Gorman."

"That's for you to say, Sam," Gorman agreed quickly. "But you'll bunk at my hotel?"

"Not to-night. I don't know just how to put it, but you've exploded an awful shot under me, Gorman. I've got to have a few hours to get used to it. All by myself—see? I—well, I guess you know how you'd feel if you struck rich pay dirt after starving to death for six months?"

"You said plenty, Sam! I understand. But you sure won't throw me down to-morrow? You'll be at the boat?"

"With both feet, Gorman. Count on that."

Gorman studied the young man shrewdly. He nodded.

"You're a white man," he said. "I know your word is good. Good night, Sam." Then Gorman winked ponderously. "If it's a girl you've got to say good-by to, give her my best."

"Be yourself!" Sam chided indignantly. "There isn't any girl—anywhere."

But Sam was mistaken.

After the first half hour of dawning comprehension of his marvelous turn in luck, he remembered that there was a girl—that nice Miss Cole, of the Stanwix galleries.

Good Lord, things had been happening fast! So much had happened since Sam lugged his pictures into the little reception room that afternoon, he marveled that he still had a brain left. Now there was one white girl, that Myra Cole! She had tried to do him a good turn with Stanwix. She honestly thought his pictures weren't so rotten. And she had dined with him and tried her best to be entertaining. Besides, he had promised to tell her all about Varony.

Sam reached for his watch, and remembered again that his watch was resting in the care of an affectionate "uncle." He had to run down four flights of stairs to see a street clock. The hour was past eleven.

Too late to telephone Myra Cole. Sam remembered how she assured him she was not one of the late-hour, jazzing kind, not in the least. Now she would be in bed and asleep. Sam climbed back to his studio, found letter paper, and wrote a note.

He had difficulty with the note. He wanted it to sound sort of nice and cordial, but not fresh, and of course he really only had met Myra. Then, too, it was hard to explain about Gorman and his marvelous good fortune without making the note sound as though he was bragging about his talents. Sam sweated uneasily, and wrote three drafts of the note before he was satisfied.

He knew Myra's address. At first he thought of dropping the letter into the post box. Somehow that notion did not seem to satisfy. Sam wanted exercise to calm his mind. He walked across town to the boarding house where Myra Cole lived. If he left the note under the front door she would surely get it before he sailed for France.

It would be comforting to think that, at the moment he set out on a new and strange life, one nice girl in New York would be thinking about him. Perhaps wishing him well.

Sam looked around guiltily. Certain that nobody was near to observe, he mounted the steps of the house as stealthily as a burglar, and slipped the note halfway under the door. There it stuck, and he was afraid to push it farther lest he soil it beyond recognition.

Then Sam went home, after a long backward glance at the house where Myra slumbered.

And from behind him, from the moment he quit his studio to the moment he returned and got into his blankets for the night, a man followed. If Sam had seen him he would have recognized in his human shadow Gorman, the philanthropic patron of Western art.

When Gorman was quite sure that Sam Caxton was in the blankets and asleep he retraced Sam's steps to the boarding house. The corner of Sam's note was still visible under the front door.

Gorman worked busily, tugging gently at the envelope until it slid out into his hands. He opened it and read the inclosure under a street light. Then he was thoughtful enough to burn the envelope and note together.

After this delicate attention toward his young protégé Gorman evidently considered that he had done a good day's work. He went uptown to a hotel and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

QUICK ACTION.

IT was a big moment for Sam Caxton. Maybe it was going to turn out a big moment for the future of American art. Maybe, years after, when somebody wrote a book called "Samuel Caxton, a Critical Study of the Man and His Work," he would refer to this morning when young Sam Caxton stood alone on the deck of the Caronia, a little withdrawn from the bustle of late arriving passengers, finally embarked on his artistic career.

"Aw, be yourself!" Sam chided his exuberant imagination. But his imagination only laughed at his will and gamboled along primrose paths.

Gorman certainly had done things handsomely.

The old sourdough had taken a private cabin with attached bath, the sort of thing that costs a mint of money.

Just for the moment Gorman had disappeared with a muttered excuse about some forgotten detail.

Sam kicked his battered old bag under the nifty little brass bed that was to be his berth and strayed out to watch the departure.

The ship's rail on the dock side was crowded with passengers saying good-bys to friends ashore. A bugle was blowing musically, and stewards were warning stragglers off the boat. Late arrivals were scurrying through the long sheds with nimble cabin boys staggering under their bags and rugs.

A pretty girl on the dock began tossing lemons to a group of pretty girls on the boat, assuring them they wouldn't want anything else by dinner hour. Sam watched a gang in blue jumpers trundle a heavy gangplank, and criticized their technique. The big ship began to tremble with an almost imperceptible vibration as the screws turned slowly. The whistle let off some deep-throated hoots.

So this was Paris! Just out there somewhere beyond the horizon, only a few days, just a few hours almost, out of Sam's reach. Soon to be his! How do ya do! Sam looked thoughtfully at the New York skyline.

Myra must have his letter by now. He knew she was wishing him Godspeed. A little lump of lonesomeness came into his throat.

He glanced down on the lower floor of the dock and bristled like an angry dog. Sam had caught sight of Ertyl Stanwix.

The picture dealer was standing in a quiet nook behind a crated automobile, talking earnestly to a man whose back was toward Sam.

The man moved his head. It was Gorman!

Gorman talking to Stanwix!

And in the most friendly way, his hand on the art dealer's arm!

Stanwix was laying down the law about something. Gorman was agreeing amicably. Suddenly they glanced together at the decks of the boat above them, and Sam dodged away from the rail.

Sam took to his heels, sprinting down the broad deck. He collided with a steward, with a fussy fat man, with a pretty girl and her papa. He did not stop for apologies.

There was something rotten about this business!

Sam had the quick instinct of a man who has been in plenty of tight situations, who outwits danger by seconds.

His brain marked the position of the two men on the dock in relation to the liner. He knews boats fairly well, and all ships are much alike.

Sam went from deck to deck, ever downward. When he came to the iron stairs he slid them like a sailor, his hands on the brass rails, his feet ignoring the treads.

He reached the bowels of the ship, and darted along passages with plain steel walls, where electric light was the only illumination. He pushed on forward, through a crew dining room, through a galley, regardless of curious looks from the few men about, regardless of some petty officer's sharp warning.

The quick instinct that marked the position of the two men, and a well-developed sense of location guided him when he opened the door of a little three bunk stateroom, a stewards' room. The room's tenants, in white jackets, were on duty above, and it was empty.

Same opened the porthole. He peeped out and found himself just above the heads of Stanwix and Gorman, so close that he could have leaned down and knocked the silk hat off Stanwix's head. Sam did not yield to that impulse. Hs listened with two large, eager ears, and all his attention.

Stanwix was saying: "Now, Gorman, we understand each other?"

"Sure! My job is to take Sam Caxton to Paris, and keep him there a year."

"At any cost, mind you! Keep him there if you have to bury him on French soil. Get me right. I mean that!"

Something venomous and hard in Stanwix's voice showed that he did mean it.

"How do ya do?" Sam thought, his eyes opening wide.

"Listen," Gorman was saying. "When I agree to take a party and keep him out of the way, I go through with it—see? I

don't have to be told anything about my work. You come to me like you would come to any expert. I do the rest."

"See that he stays out of my way for twelve months, then."

"Mr. Stanwix, if that baby gets back to the U. S. inside of twelve months, he'll come in so many pieces you won't never have to worry. Now about expenses—"

"Yes. Time's short. Your right. Here!" Stanwix began to count yellow-backed bills into Gorman's hand. "If that's not enough," he said, "you can draw on me from Paris. I guess we needn't say anything more?"

"Not on my account, you needn't," Sam was muttering.

Stanwix had clasped Gorman's hand. "A pleasant voyage, Gorman!" he was saying.

Sam withdrew his head from the window, and sat down on one of the triple-decked bunks fastened to the wall.

"Stung, by thunder!"

This Gorman he had accepted so readily, and liked, and believed in, was nothing but a cheap hired crook, playing a part for Ertyl Stanwix.

And Stanwix, for reasons utterly incomprehensible, was trying to railroad Sam out of the country.

"*Keep him there if you have to bury him on French soil,*" Stanwix said.

Yes, he would!

"If I do any dying, I'll die right here at home," Sam vowed. He rose, and quit the stateroom.

Even down there in the dimly lit depths, muffled by walls of steel, but audible, came the long-drawn roar of a last whistle. The vibrations increased. The liner had slipped her moorings, and was headed for France.

An hour before Sam had watched two tugs slip alongside to help turn the big vessel and guide her down the narrow channel to the lower bay.

He located an open port just above the deck of one of the tugboats and leaned out, surveying the field.

Presently a red-headed young fellow with a chest like a barrel, clad in faded brown denim, came along, and began coiling a rope in the tow boat's stern.

"Hey, buddy!" Sam shrilled.

The red head looked up.

Sam displayed a five-dollar bill. He thanked the gods of luck that he had let Gorman press some ready money on him that morning.

The red head saw the bill and grinned. "Hello, chief!"

"Catch!" Sam whispered, folding the bill around a silver quarter and tossing it down.

The bill was examined and pocketed.

"Who d'ya want bumped off?"

"Nobody. All I want is a ride. I don't like this boat. Afraid I'll get seasick."

"Nix! Listen, fellow; if the bulls are after ya—"

"They're not. You won't get into any mess, I give you my word And I got another five waiting for you when I get onto a dock"

The red head reconnoitered hastily. Having made sure they were alone he came to just below Sam and advised him, "Look, ya wait till we're about to cast off, see? Then if the Old Man gets wise you're aboard, he can't do nothing but boot ya off when we touch at the Battery. I'll be right back here, taking in the hawser, so ya don't have to worry none. That won't be for an hour yet, see?"

"Got ya," Sam agreed. "Remember, that bill's getting lonesome to see it's little brother that's in your pants pocket!"

Then Sam found his way back to B deck, and conversed pleasantly with Gorman while the liner headed down the bay toward France.

Sam didn't want Gorman to miss him until there was no possibility that Gorman could turn back to America to find him.

In case of dire necessity Sam was not without guile himself.

CHAPTER XV.

RIGHT BACK AT STANWIX.

EVERY time the telephone rang Myra Cole answered it with bright anticipations.

Every time a visitor pushed aside the portières between the galleries and the

little reception room she looked up with an eager smile.

Myra thought surely she would hear from or see Sam Caxton, the interesting young adventurer from the West. Sam had promised to let her know what became of that nice old man they had met in the restaurant. It was really a very peculiar and pitiful case, and Myra was thrilled by the little romance.

She wanted very much to discuss it with somebody, but she did not care enough for anybody about the Stanwix galleries to take them into her confidence. Sam was about the only person she cared to discuss the case with, really.

The business day wore along, and Myra's spirits began to droop from disappointment.

Stanwix was busy in his private office all morning. There had been several callers, among them a Dr. Tyler Scofield—a young, alert, too-handsome medical man Myra had met before and did not like.

She remembered Dr. Scofield because he had had business with Stanwix a matter of seven months or so ago. At that time he had made some flirtatious advances that Myra treated with chill disdain. This morning he returned again, more resplendent than before as to raiment, more conceited and smirking. He greeted Myra as "little girl," then called her "sister."

Myra froze him again.

Stanwix himself had said little to his secretary. He looked pale and preoccupied and in a bad temper. Myra hoped he would forget his grudge against her.

Early in the afternoon a messenger handed in a radiogram for Stanwix. Myra herself carried it to the inner office. As she was quitting the room she was startled by an incoherent cry.

Turning about, she saw on her employer's face such a look of discomfiture and rage that she shrank against the door, frightened.

"What—what is it, Mr. Stanwix? Can I do anything?"

She had to repeat the question several times.

Stanwix made a sign of negation. The man seemed beyond the ability to speak. He rose and stared about him blindly.

"Let me get you a glass of water," Myra offered.

"No."

Stanwix made an effort toward composure. He rose and passed his hands wearily across his face. He stared at Myra without recognition, his attention concentrated on his own problems.

"I hope it isn't bad news?" Myra ventured.

"News?" Stanwix stared, then recovered. "No. Nothing. A radiogram from the Caronia. A sale I counted on has fallen through. Wait. Miss Cole, get the Cormorant Agency on the wire for me."

Myra put in the call from her extension telephone.

She was familiar with the agency number. Stanwix had used this private detective service frequently in the past few months.

Within a quarter of an hour two quiet-mannered men of professional aspect called and were closeted with Stanwix. Myra knew that they were operatives from the Cormorant Agency.

Then another visitor entered, and she saw that it was Sam Caxton. Myra's smile was genuine and warm. Sam looked good after the last trying hour.

"I'm awfully glad to see you," she said to Sam, offering her hand. "Now I want to hear what became of that nice old man."

There was something intent and ominous in Sam's face that baffled her and left her sentence trailing away into silence.

"I've got to see Stanwix," Sam muttered.

"There are two men with him just now."

"Listen, Miss Cole, I don't care if the whole United States army is with him. I've got something to say to that crook. I'm going to say it to his face."

"Mr. Caxton! What in the world—"

"Excuse me, if I seem rough, ma'am. I—it's a personal matter—just between me and Stanwix."

"I will tell him you are here, if you wish."

"Please do that, ma'am. I think he'll be interested to know it."

Myra looked into the little office, after a warning rap at the door.

"Mr. Sam Caxton is outside," she said. "He says he must see you."

Three men wheeled about in their chairs and stared at Myra.

If she had announced that the Angel Gabriel had just dropped in, her words could not have been more startling.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SHOW-DOWN.

STANWIX gulped hastily.

"Caxton, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"He—he wants to see me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was he—that is, did he seem or act—Never mind; never mind that! Caxton!"

Stanwix stared at the blotter on his desk, then looked an inquiry at his visitors. One of the detectives leaned over him and whispered in his ear.

"Miss Cole," Stanwix said, "tell Caxton I will talk to him in a minute."

Myra delivered the message. Sam nodded. His lips made a straight, ominous line across his broad face. His gray eyes narrowed to slits.

Myra touched Sam on the sleeve timidly. "Mr. Caxton, is there anything I can do?"

"No, ma'am," Sam said gently, his eyes intent on Stanwix's door. "I thank you for asking. This is just a little matter between me and him."

"But you look—you act so—well, strangely! Mr. Caxton, promise me you won't do anything rash."

Sam did not remove his eyes from the door, but his voice was considerate and gentle.

"Just you sit down at your desk, ma'am. I won't do anything to be ashamed of. Ah!"

The door opened. Stanwix came out of it. "Well, young man?" he said.

Sam walked close to him. Stanwix stood his ground, though he looked pale.

"A little surprised to see me, eh?" Sam began.

"Not at all—neither surprised nor interested. I hope you'll be brief."

"Brief enough. I just wanted you to know that your hired man, Gorman, fell down on the job. Gorman isn't going to be able to do what he promised you. He can't carry out your orders to take me to France and keep me there for a year, *even if he has to bury me on French soil.* I am back in the United States, Stanwix, and I didn't come back in small pieces, like Gorman promised."

"Caxton," Stanwix cried sharply, "I haven't any idea what you are talking about!"

Neither had Myra Cole. Myra wondered if Sam had been drinking. Or had he gone mad?

"I'll be plainer then, Stanwix. You are the dirty pup that hired a strong-arm man named Gorman to railroad me out of this country and keep me away for a year. I don't know why you did that, but I am going to find out—and I'm going to make you pay for that."

"This man is crazy!" Stanwix cried loudly.

As if that were a signal, the two detectives from the Cormorant Agency stepped into the reception room. They came from behind Sam. Myra saw that they had gone out by a side entrance and come around through the public gallery.

"Before you say I'm crazy," Sam went on steadily, "let me tell you I overheard every word you and Gorman said on the dock before the Caronia sailed."

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Then you are a plain liar!" Sam cried.

Stanwix jumped back from him, his hands raised before his face, though Sam had not made any menacing gesture.

Instantly, even while Myra cried a warning, the two detectives seized Sam by either arm.

Sam struggled a second, then gave his captors a glance. "Another frame-up eh?"

"You heard this man threaten me?" Stanwix gasped.

Both plainclothes men nodded.

"Take him to the nearest police station. I will prefer a charge. He's a dangerous crank—and mad as a hatter!"

Stanwix darted back into his private of-

fice and slammed the door. "Come along quiet or we'll have to slip the cuffs on you," one of the detectives growled at Caxton.

Myra sprang up, her hands outstretched. "Sam! Mr. Caxton! How can I help you? What will they do to you?"

Sam looked back at her quietly.

"Don't you worry, ma'am. They can't do anything. They can prefer all the charges they want to; I didn't hurt anybody. You can testify to that, can't you? All right then. Just sit tight till you hear from me. And thank you for your kindness. You're one regular, white girl, Miss Cole."

Then Sam disappeared, an alert, hustling guard at either side of him.

Myra sank into her chair, her head whirling.

She recalled what Sam said to Stanwix.

To her the words were wild beyond belief. What conspiracy did Sam refer to? What earthly reason had Ertyl Stanwix, rich and influential picture dealer and critic, for interesting himself in the movements of Sam Caxton? Try to keep Sam out of the country? Stanwix? Myra, instinctively loyal to Sam, could not believe that!

Stanwix looked out of his door, presently. The dealer was quite his former self, cool, suave, polished.

He said: "A very unfortunate incident, Miss Cole. Sorry you had to witness it. Evidently, that young man has lost his mind. Poor fellow! But you understand I must protect myself. A dangerous crank. Positively murderous! But the police will treat him well. I will speak to them myself. I'll make it my business to see that he gets the best of care."

Myra pondered all this hopelessly. But there was work to be done, always work. She turned to her tasks, trying to put aside her worries and amazements.

The telephone rang; it must have been an hour later. Myra answered, and found the call was for Stanwix. She plugged in Stanwix's telephone and listened, as she always did, to make sure the call went through. The first words she heard kept her ear to the receiver, regardless of the ethics of eavesdropping.

The man who greeted Stanwix said: "We've got Caxton where he won't talk any more."

"Where are you now?" Stanwix asked.

"Nine hundred West Twenty-Fourth Street. Phoning from the house."

"Nobody saw you take Caxton there?"

"Not a chance. Used a closed car. The only witness is your office girl. And she thinks he went to police headquarters."

"Then listen. Don't take chances with Caxton. He got off that boat, you know, in spite of Gorman. Keep a man on the job. If Caxton makes a move, drop him in his tracks. If he goes out of that house alive, he goes where I tell him to go. Understand?"

"O. K., Mr. Stanwix."

"Then I'll be along to take charge in just a little while. Good-by."

Stanwix's door opened within ten minutes. Stanwix wore his hat. He looked sharply at Myra whose hands were busy typing on her machine.

"Oh, Miss Cole—"

"Yes, Mr. Stanwix?"

"I shall be away the rest of the day. Leave the letters on my desk for to-morrow morning. Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Stanwix."

Five minutes after Stanwix had gone, and Myra saw with her own eyes that he was safely away, she had on her hat and light coat.

Myra walked out of the Stanwix galleries.

She knew that she would never return to her job.

She was going to find Sam Caxton and help him against Stanwix. Whatever were the rights and wrongs of this mystery, Myra knew which side she was fighting on.

Myra was for Sam, first, last, and all the time.

CHAPTER XVII.

INTO THE JAWS OF DANGER.

MYRA hailed a taxi, and had herself driven to the house on Twenty-Fourth Street.

Her plan—which was more impulse than plan—was to discover Sam and demand his

release. Myra was just plain mad. The idea of Stanwix trying to kidnap Sam Caxton! She would catch the dealer red-handed and give him a piece of her mind.

Myra's cheeks were pink with indignation, and she walked briskly and angrily to the door of the old-fashioned house with its pineapple gratings. She rattled determinedly at an old-fashioned bell pull and drew herself up to her full height, which was not a very terrifying height.

A woman answered the door. Myra was surprised. She rather expected Stanwix himself, or one of the detectives he hired.

The woman was young. Her dark hair was cut in a boyish bob. She wore a nurse's apron. She eyed Myra coldly.

"Sam Caxton is in this house, and I want to see him," Myra said resolutely.

"Never heard of the party."

"I don't care whether you heard of him or not. He's here. If I don't see him I'll come back with a policeman. You can tell Mr. Stanwix that."

The two women eyed each other like strange cats meeting. Letty opened the door wider. "Step in a minute," she invited. "Wait here."

Myra stood in the little reception hall. She was breathing rapidly.

The house was very quiet. As she grew calmer, Myra looked about her and wondered at the old-fashioned chromos, the figured carpet, the quaint style hats and coats that hung on a rack.

After five minutes Letty came back. "You can step in here," she said. "I guess you'll find the man you asked for."

"Thank you." Myra smiled triumphantly, and followed Letty into the front parlor. The light was dimmed by the shaded front windows. Myra looked about curiously as the door closed behind her. A man rose from a chair and advanced toward her. She saw that it was Stanwix.

"I came here to find Sam Caxton," Myra began. "Don't try to tell me that he isn't here; I know better."

"I am not trying to tell you he isn't here, Miss Cole. Though how you found that out is beyond me."

"I found it out," Myra answered firmly. "And you had better let him go!"

Stanwix smiled coldly. "What a little champion you are! Dear, dear, I suppose if I should refuse you'd tear the house down?"

"No," said Myra. "I would call in the police."

"Before you do that, listen to me." Stanwix's voice was stern. "I want you to get this straight in your mind. I had Caxton brought here from motives of kindness, nothing more. He is a dangerous young fool—out of his mind. Well, it happens I'm sufficiently sorry for him to want to spare him the humiliation of arrest and commitment to an asylum. I'm willing to go to some expense and trouble to have him taken care of until he gets over this mental hiatus."

Myra could stand no more.

"Mr. Stanwix," she cried, her voice trembling, "I don't believe you. You brought Sam Caxton here for quite another reason. And it was not an honest reason! *You* sorry for him! I suppose that's why you told your men to drop him in his tracks if he tried to get away?"

Stanwix had the grace to look taken aback. But he managed a shrug presently. "I am sorry you persist in misunderstanding me, in twisting my words."

"You are holding that man a prisoner. I demand you let him go!"

"Very well. I shan't argue. Talk to Caxton yourself. You'll see that I was right." Stanwix rose, took a key from his pocket, and led Myra to the door that communicated with the studio at the rear of the house. He unlocked the door. "A visitor to see you, Caxton," he announced, and stepped aside to let Myra enter.

Sam's voice greeted Myra with a shout. "Myra! Keep out. Get out of this house—oh, for heaven's sake—"

While Myra hesitated, confused and frightened by the greeting from the room which was made dim by drawn blinds, she was pushed gently forward, and the door swung shut behind her with a bang. The key clicked in the lock.

Out of the dusk Sam made a run at the door.

Myra was horrified to see the grotesque figure he cut in the dim room, his short,

awkward steps, the absence of arms in his silhouette, the faint click of a steel chain as he moved. The door was locked long before Sam reached it. He turned upon Myra clumsily.

Then she understood. Sam's hands had been fastened behind his back with steel bracelets. Ankle irons hobbled him.

Myra's heart went out in pity for him. She laid her hands on his shoulders, and led him back to a chair. "Oh, Sam! What have they done to you?"

Sam's answer was a groan.

"If I had only known it was you, I would have shouted sooner. I could have warned you! And now—"

Myra drew close to him, frightened. "What does it mean? What is this horrible house? Has Stanwix gone mad?"

"Now just you sit down here," Sam insisted gently. "Don't you go to worrying. Even Stanwix won't dare harm you. Not one bit, Miss Cole, ma'am!"

"But I don't understand! What is it all about? What have you done? What have I done?"

"I'll make a guess what you have done," Sam exclaimed warmly. "Somehow, you found out they brought me here, and you came to help me, like the fine, loyal pal you are! Gosh, excuse me, ma'am, if that sounds fresh, but—"

"I did come to help you," Myra answered. "But why are you a prisoner? What does Stanwix mean to do with you?"

"Miss Cole, I don't know. It's all a muddle in my mind, and I'm beginning to get a little light. Say, do you know who else is a prisoner in this house? Old man Varony! I heard his name mentioned, and I got it out of that girl they call Letty A prisoner like me."

"Varony?" Myra looked puzzled.

"Oh, of course, you don't know him by name. The old man we found in the restaurant last night. Listen, Miss Cole, I'll tell you all I know. Maybe we can guess it out between us."

Sam plunged into a detailed account of Varony's visit to his studio, his disappearance, his note of farewell, the visit of Gorman, and his discovery of Gorman's duplicity.

"When I found the old man's note naturally I figured he was crazy," Sam went on. "Everything made him look like a mild old nut. So I just felt sorry for him and forgot about him. But, of course, you know that part. You got my note that I left at your boarding house?"

Myra entered a prompt denial. They had fresh fuel for speculation.

Sam returned to the main issue. "Now, what I think," he said, "is that maybe Varony never wrote that note that was left on my mantel. Maybe somebody else wrote that note to keep me from wondering too much. And that somebody else was Stanwix or one of his men, because it was Stanwix sent along Gorman to kid me into going to France. Stanwix wanted to get rid of the one man who talked to Varony! You see, all those pieces fit together pretty well, but that doesn't answer the big question: Why did Stanwix do it?"

They pondered this in silence, drawn closer together in the dim, quiet studio, surrounded by dangers they could not understand.

The old house had been still as the grave.

That quiet was broken suddenly by a strangling cry that might have been the last despairing shriek of a human throat or the outburst of a savage beast, nobody could say which.

The cry, muffled by partition walls, died as abruptly as it started; died, as though choked by a strong hand.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HANDCUFFED AND HELPLESS.

THE walls of the old house echoed the pounding of feet as somebody ascended a stair, two and three treads at a bound.

The confused movement of several persons sounded from overhead.

Then the silence returned.

Myra was clutching Sam tightly.

"Sam!" Her dry throat barely articulated the whisper. "Sam, we must get out of this awful place!"

"Oh, these damned handcuffs," Sam

groaned. "If I could just get my hands free."

"There are windows," Myra said. "They must open on a yard or court." She walked on tiptoe to the long French windows. The blinds were closed their entire length. The windows had been locked. Myra pulled the corner of a blind aside, and peered out.

She crept back to Sam.

"There's a man guarding them," she whispered. "He was close against the glass—one of the private detectives who brought you here. Be careful how you talk; he might overhear us."

Neither spoke for some minutes. Myra returned again to the mystery. "Who is this old man? What does he do? What did he tell you, Sam?"

Sam whispered back, "Didn't I tell you? He says he is a great painter. Says his pictures took prizes and got famous—"

Myra clutched Sam's arm. "Not Homer Varony? He didn't say his name was Homer Varony?"

"Sure he did. That was the name. The poor old hobo!"

"Hobo!" Myra nearly choked in her excitement. "Do you know what Homer Varony's paintings are worth? Stanwix sold one of his landscapes, a small one, to the Manhattan Museum last month for seventy-five thousand dollars."

"My Lord!" Sam said devoutly.

"But then, this man isn't Homer Varony! Not the real Varony. His telling you that just proves that he is crazy, Sam."

"How do you know?"

"Because Homer Varony is dead. He died years and years ago. I know all about him, because Stanwix owns the few pictures that Varony left. Homer Varony was killed in a railroad accident in Northern New Jersey in 1904."

"Then the old boy is a nut, after all," Sam whispered. "But look, Miss Cole. Talking about paintings, there's a half-finished picture leaning against that easel that I was looking at. It's got Varony's name written on the back of the stretcher. Take a look at that."

Myra carried the stretcher to the dim light of the shaded window. She examined it minutely. She hurried to Sam to whisper, "This is marvelous! I'm not an expert, but I know Varony's landscapes. Sam, this is one of his—half-finished—"

"Then it must be worth a mint!"

"Yes. But, Sam! The paint on this canvas is not yet dry. Look!"

Sam gazed with awe at the canvas and the evidence of wet paint. He was about to whisper a question when, from the front parlor of the house, a woman's voice rose stridently.

"I won't stand for that, Stanwix!"

The words vibrated with anger.

The speaker went on, her voice rising with her indignation, "I told you before if you ever tried to do any dirt to that old boy, I'd—"

A man's voice roared, "Shut up, Letty! Don't be a damn fool."

"I won't shut up. Not for you or anybody—"

Then Stanwix broke in. "Shut up yourself, Foster. Do you want to stir up the neighborhood? And you, Letty; you keep that voice down or you won't talk again. Now listen—"

The words trailed into a mumble, in which the voices of the two men and the woman took alternate parts.

Myra tiptoed hurriedly to the door, and pressed her ear against the keyhole.

Stanwix was talking. "Letty, I promised you nobody was hurting the old man, didn't I? But if a competent doctor says he is crazy, the only thing to do is to put him in a nice, quiet asylum, isn't it? Well, you heard that howl he gave? You saw him struggling with the doctor. He's mad as a hatter."

"Crazy!" Letty broke in. "He's had enough to drive him crazy around here. It looks funny to me."

"Will you take the word of a reputable physician, an expert on mental diseases?"

"I suppose so?" Letty agreed sulkily.

"Of course she will," Foster seconded heartily. "Why, baby, I certainly got to hand it to you for your kind heart! We all got to hand it to you. But the old bird is as crazy as a saxophone player, and everybody knows it!"

"Now, get out, both of you," Stanwix

ordered. "I want Dr. Scofield. After he's reported, Letty can question him if she wants to."

Myra beckoned Sam to join her at the door. She whispered in his ear what she had learned thus far.

Presently they heard Dr. Scofield join Stanwix. At first the mumble of voices eluded understanding. Stanwix broke out irritably, "You don't know! What do you mean, you don't know? The old man is mad. It's your business to commit him to an asylum. The car's waiting to take him to your sanatorium. What did I bring you here for if it wasn't to take him and attend to the legal details?"

"That's all right," Dr. Scofield protested, "but I tell you I won't touch it! I'm a reputable physician. I don't mind going a long way to oblige you, but I'm damned if I'll risk my reputation. Why, this is a felony. I warn you—"

"You're mighty tender all of a sudden! An hour ago you told me, as solemn as a judge, that Varony was out of his head, mad, crazy, hopelessly insane. And now—"

"Suppose I did? I didn't know you were going to invite the whole of Greater New York into this thing! I'm not looking to see my name in the newspapers—not this way."

"What are you talking about? Nobody knows a thing about this but you and me and a couple of hired detectives. They won't talk."

"How about a man named Caxton? And that office girl of yours? Both of 'em in this house, locked up in a coal bin, I suppose."

"That's only two others—"

"Yes. Two too many."

"And I can handle them easy enough. Neither one of them will ever utter a yip. Why, they don't even know what it's all about!"

Sam's eyes met Myra's. Sam grinned wickedly.

"Now, you listen to me, Scofield," Stanwix went on rapidly. "Who set you up in business? Who gave you enough to start a sanatorium that's making you money? Why, you were nothing but a third-rate, small-time doctor before I came along! If you ever expect another nickel out of me, return that favor now.

"You sign a paper committing the old man to your asylum. You swear he's hopeless before the proper authorities. And mind you, don't give his name as Varony. From now on, he's Eli Galt, same as he was before. And do that quick."

"It's a felony, I tell you!"

"Have it your own way. But do it. Do it, or I'll take that sanatorium business away from you so quick it 'll make your head swim."

A silence.

The doctor said finally, his bluster changed to a whine: "You've got to protect me, Stanwix. By heaven, you promised, remember!"

Stanwix said curtly: "I'm not forgetting. Now, let's get the old man out of here before anything else happens. How is he?"

"Asleep," the doctor answered. "I gave him morphine to shut him up."

"All the better. He'll go without a fuss. And when he wakes up he'll be in a nice, quiet place where he can't do any harm to anybody."

CHAPTER XIX.

VARONY'S FRIEND.

MYRA and Sam, kneeling by the door, stared at each other in the dusk.

"They're going to railroad him to an asylum!" Sam whispered.

"Yes. What can we do?"

"If I could just get my hands loose—oh, Lord!"

Myra ran to the rear windows, and peeped out again. The guard was still on duty on the little porch.

As she turned away, Myra heard another voice from the yard. She listened; then turned on Sam, waving him into the chair. "That woman, Letty, is coming in here," she whispered. "If I have to, I can tackle her."

"No. You can't risk that, Myra."

The rattle of a key in the lock of the big windows silenced Sam's protest. Letty stepped into the room, and closed the win-

dow behind her. She said loudly. "Hot dog, you both look sore! I suppose you're too mad to want a nice bite to eat before you leave here?"

Letty advanced on them. She said in a cautious whisper: "Go on, abuse me. Kick up a row. I want that big stiff on the porch to hear us!"

Sam and Myra were dumb with surprise.

"Get wise! Get wise!" Letty urged. "I'm with you, not against you. But we've got to keep everybody kidded."

Sam grinned, and burst into a noisy protest at his imprisonment. Myra joined in.

Letty knelt beside Sam. She joined the three-cornered quarrel shrilly, but her fingers were busy with a little key. Sam's handcuffs slipped off. The leg irons were removed. And all the time Letty kept up the quarrel.

Sam rose and stretched his aching arms, chafed his wrists, and kicked out his legs. Letty stared at him doubtfully. The girl's face began to work.

Letty gasped contritely: "Oh, my Lord! I'm a bad woman. I never dreamed I'd do a thing like that, double crossing a client and my own pals!"

"Why, ma'am," Sam reasoned, "you ought to be proud of doing the right thing by us."

"I've gone back on the man who's crazy about me!" Letty whispered. "I double crossed him—and I love him! That key, I had to steal it from Foster. I got it while he had his arms around me, stealing a kiss. I never dreamed I could fall so low—"

"But you are doing the right thing!" Myra whispered eagerly. "Oh, don't regret it now! Help us to help an old and helpless man."

"Yes. That's it!" Letty's eyes flashed. "Listen. Not a minute to lose. Do you know what they're trying to do to that poor old boy? They're sending him to a private mad house—and he's just as sane as you or me. I heard Stanwix framing it up with that Dr. Scofield. I listened at the hall door."

"We listened at this door," Myra whispered. "Thank heaven your heart is in the right place, Letty."

"Never mind that. You two get out of here, and find the cops. It's the only way. Listen, when I go out I'll leave that window unlocked, see? There's a guard on the porch. I'll try to get him away. If I can't, you look big enough to slip out and tackle him, Caxton?"

"Just give me the chance!" Sam whispered eagerly.

Letty clutched them, each by an arm, and drew them close. She said fiercely: "You know which one is Foster?"

Sam nodded.

"That's my sweetie. That's the man I double crossed to help you two. If either one of you hurts Foster or testifies against him—or anything—after this—I'll kill you both— No, I'll kill myself. Remember!"

Sam and Myra promised to protect Foster.

"Listen at the window," Letty whispered. "If I can't get that fellow off the porch, I'll leave and Caxton can handle him. I'll only bluff at locking the window. Caxton, keep your hands behind you when I go out; and make a fuss, both of you."

Letty herself broke into loud and rude pleasantries at the prisoners' expense. She opened the long window, stepped out, and rattled the key in the lock as she closed it.

They heard a man's voice greet her: "Hello, baby. The boss is asking for you."

"That's Foster!" Sam whispered.

"Go easy with Stanwix," Foster was advising. "He's getting sore on you, Letty."

"Oh, he is! Well, he knows what I think about this."

"Be yourself! We're hired by Stanwix. He's paying us and he's the boss. Don't worry your head about what is his business. Now you'd better run." Foster's hand tried the windows. "Here! Where's that key?" he called after Letty. "You didn't snap the lock. Want those birds to get loose?"

They heard Letty return with the key. Then Foster saying: "What you waiting for? Stanwix wants you quick."

"I want that key."

"Beat it! I'll bring it to you. What the dickens ails you all of a sudden?"

"She's gone. She didn't dare wait!" Myra reported, her eye at the crack of the curtain.

"And we're locked in," Sam echoed. "And now there are two men on that porch!"

Foster showed an inclination to linger outside their windows, talking with the guard. Finally, they heard a shouting, and Foster answered it by hurrying away.

"Now," Sam exclaimed, gripping Myra's hand. "I've got to smash that glass and drop that guard in the same blow. Our only chance is when he gets close against the window. Myra, you watch from the other window. I'm going to have my hands full."

Sam proved this by picking up a plain wooden chair, and swinging it thoughtfully about his head.

"The first minute he gets close to the pane, you say so," Sam directed. "You can do that?"

"Yes."

"When I break the pane, if I succeed in dropping my man, you get out and get out fast. It's a back garden, but I guess you can shin over a fence if you have to."

"I can," Myra nodded.

"Beat it for the first house. Get in somehow. Use a phone and call the cops. Meantime, I'll hold them from following you."

"Sam! You're not coming?"

"Can't. If somebody doesn't bluff this gang, they'd be on our heels and get us both before we got over that fence. Now, get on the job."

Myra planted herself at one of the long windows. Lifting the edge of the holland blind she could peep out and watch the man on the little porch. He paced restlessly back and forth. Apparently he never meant to rest again.

Behind the holland blind at the other window, Sam stood, the wooden chair poised above his head, ready to crash the glass and the head he hoped to find just beyond it.

Minutes went by. Sam's arms began to tremble with weariness, but he waited with a desperate patience. Myra's eyes grew tired with watching for what never seemed destined to happen.

Within the house they heard a subdued bustle as of preparations. They stared at each other with a new fear. Suppose their captors came for them before they could make the break for freedom?

Myra raised her hand in a warning gesture. Sam's arms tensed.

"Now!" Myra cried.

The up-ended chair crashed through blind and glass, and upon the head of the man just beyond that fragile barrier.

CHAPTER XX.

STANWIX SEEKS AN EXIT.

THE guard lay face down on the little veranda above the garden.

Sam widened the breach in the broken glass, and urged Myra through it.

He shouted in her ear: "Run! Run like the devil. You've got to get over that fence!"

He ran with her, helping her off the veranda. They crossed the garden.

"Up you go!" Sam panted, and bent to give her his back to climb upon.

Out of the house, through the broken window, and through the basement door, men burst in pursuit.

Myra's shoes were kicking the high board fence. Her fingers clutched at the top board, slipped off, clutched again.

Sam, doubled low, faced the pursuers.

"Look out!" he shouted. "I'm going to shoot."

His hand, thrust into his coat pocket, pushed the cloth forward as though it masked a weapon.

The little group stopped their action with abrupt awkwardness, holding the pose as though a motion picture film had stopped in mid-reel.

Myra slipped again. Her weight came squarely on Sam's broad back. Caught unaware, Sam went on his face.

Before he could spring up, men had leaped upon him. They pressed his face into the garden dirt. He seemed about to suffocate. Then he was jerked to his feet. His first glance was for the fence. Myra had vanished.

"Get him inside," Stanwix ordered.

"The girl, chief?"

"Never mind the girl. We've got to work fast."

Sam was hustled without ceremony. They gathered in the front hall of the house.

There was a stretcher in the front hall. A still form lay under a blanket. Sam knew that it was Varony. Whether the old man was dead or merely under the influence of the doctor's morphine, he did not know.

Letty had been left to watch Varony.

When they brought Sam in, the girl glanced at him curiously, but her eyes told him nothing.

"Now, what's the plan?" Foster panted.

Stanwix spoke promptly. "Get the old man into the doctor's ambulance first. Somebody get handcuffs onto Caxton. He goes next."

"Not to the sanatorium!" Scofield gasped.

"That's just where he does go. I can't argue with you now, fool. The girl's loose and bringing the police, no doubt."

"Then I'm ruined," Scofield groaned.

"Not if you work fast, like I tell you. Get them away, that's the big thing. Get them out of here."

"I won't risk taking another sane man. It's a felony."

"You don't have to! I'll take Caxton off your hands to-night. I'll guarantee that he never talks again. And as for the girl, I'll have the story all fixed *with proofs* when the police ask questions. Do as I tell you, Scofield, or by heaven, you are ruined. You'll spend to-night in a cell!"

The elegantly dressed doctor bit his pale lips. His fluttering hands finally described a gesture of surrender. "All right. Get the old man out first."

Two of the detectives picked up the stretcher. The doctor opened the door for them. Sam saw, at the curb, a plain, closed car, waiting.

Foster handed Letty a pistol. "Keep him covered," he grunted, indicating Sam. "If he makes a move, plug him. Now, Caxton, stick out those hands."

Sam looked despairingly at the short-haired girl. She was pale. Her eyes were expressionless. But the pistol was steadily menacing. "Get busy and do what Foster tells you," Letty warned him. "I'm a good shot, Caxton."

Sam held out his hands with a groan. Through the glass of the front door he saw the stretcher and Varony taken into the big, black car, Dr. Scofield superintending things.

There was not a soul on the quiet street to witness this. What if there had been? Sam knew that a few words from the respectable-appearing doctor would have explained all satisfactorily.

"How you got out of that last pair beats me," Foster grunted, as he snapped the cuff about one wrist. "This time I'm going to swallow the key."

Sam dared everything on a second's advantage.

His right hand, still unmanacled, he jerked free of Foster's grip and swung a blow at Foster's chest that shoved him backward.

Sam turned and dashed for the rear of the house.

Letty's pistol exploded, but it was pointed at the floor.

Foster leaped after his prisoner with a yell.

A light, gilded hall chair dropped into Foster's path. Letty had thrown it without a second's hesitation.

Foster went down, the fragile chair crashing under him.

Stanwix found himself gaping into the mouth of Letty's weapon.

Scofield and his two helpers came through the front door and paused, spellbound at the scene.

Sam crashed through the broken window a second time, and into the arms of a policeman.

Other bluecoats were dropping over the garden fence. Still others broke open the front door of the house.

Ertyl Stanwix saw the invasion from front and rear.

The dealer snatched the pistol from Letty's hand. He dashed up the stairs toward the floor above. Letty screamed and pointed toward his flight. A policeman leaped after him. But halfway up the stairs the patrolman paused.

All the excitement halted, shocked into immobility by the report of the pistol from the rooms above.

The nearest patrolman ran up with renewed energy. They heard his shout: "Give a hand here! He's shot himself."

CHAPTER XXI.

SCOFIELD CONFESSES.

IT was Scofield who made plain what had puzzled all those connected with the house on Twenty-Fourth Street.

The faint-hearted doctor was quick to seize on any advantage that might come from a full confession. The police stenographer recorded the following statement, signed by him.

My name is Tyler Scofield. I am a registered physician in this State, and New Jersey, formerly practicing at Bearcliff, New Jersey. My first practice after finishing my professional studies was in the little village of Bearcliff. I was miserably poor and in debt for the cost of my professional education. I never was good at saving money, and I suppose I had expensive habits. Anyway, a doctor never had a ghost of a show to build up a decent business in that quiet little hole.

In this village there was an odd-job man known to everybody. His name was Eli Galt. He is the same man known as Homer Varony.

I had been practicing for three years, starving to death is a more accurate description. One day I was called to attend Eli Galt.

This man Galt was generally considered a simple-minded, harmless, and useful sort of hanger-on. He had lived in Bearcliff a matter of twenty years. Nobody knew where he came from, or cared. Sometimes he spaded a garden, sometimes built a stone wall, or helped to shingle a house. He worked for little, and lived by himself in a little two-room cottage and never gave any trouble. He was looked on with more or less good-natured pity and contempt.

The day Galt was hurt was October, 1925. He had been helping the local carpenter and fell from a scaffold. I attended him and found an injury at the base of the spine, some contusions, and a slight fracture of the skull. It was not until Galt was convalescent that I took any particular interest in his case.

Then I found that he no longer answered to his name. He declared to me that his name was Homer Varony. He said he was a painter well-known in New York City. He asked me to communicate with his friend, the art dealer, Ertyl Stanwix.

The most curious feature of Galt's case was total forgetfulness of his life in Bearcliff, evidently caused by an injury to his brain from his fall. A matter of twenty years had been wiped clean from his memory. The man was living in the year 1904.

Through my medical studies, I have some familiarity with amnesia in its various forms, and Galt's case interested me very much.

The patient was able to tell me in detail of his last day in his studio; this was in 1904, remember. From that day until the present, his memory was blank.

I knew that Ertyl Stanwix was a picture dealer and critic of considerable reputation. I thought it would do me no harm to communicate with him. I visited New York especially for that purpose.

Stanwix was astounded. He informed me that Homer Varony, the painter, had been well-known to him. Stanwix had bought pictures from Varony over a period of several years. Those paintings, bought for a few dollars, were now almost priceless in value, for years had added to Varony's fame. Collectors bid high for his work, and Stanwix had realized a very tidy fortune out of his early investments.

Stanwix showed me newspapers for 1904 which listed Homer Varony as one of those killed in a train wreck in Northern New Jersey. It was evident that some person had been identified from among the bodies charred by fire as Varony and buried under his name. On my insistence, Stanwix came to the village secretly and identified my patient Galt as the painter so long supposed to be dead. There was no doubt about Varony's identity.

It was then that I made an arrangement with Ertyl Stanwix which was to make us both richer. Stanwix began by pointing out that Varony's return to the world might

play the devil with the value of Varony's paintings which he still sold. "Those paintings reached their high value because the artist is dead," Stanwix told me. "Collectors realize that the supply of Varony canvases is strictly limited. If Varony comes to life and ever paints again, I stand to lose hundreds of thousands."

In brief, our first consideration was to isolate this queer patient and keep the news of his identity from the world. Stanwix agreed to pay for his care.

But we made a more amazing discovery. With returning health, Homer Varony demanded paints and canvas. We tried the experiment of letting him paint. His powers were unimpaired! Stanwix declared that Varony was as great a painter as he was on the day of his disappearance in the railway accident. Not only memory had been restored, but all of the cunning of an artist's hand.

Stanwix then proposed the arrangement we carried out. That was to bring Varony to New York, where he demanded to be. We would keep him in ignorance of the years he had been Eli Galt, the odd-job man. We would let him paint to his heart's content, and Stanwix would add these pictures to his collection, producing them to the public from time to time as newly discovered paintings done in Varony's "latter days."

You understand that just one of those canvases Varony could produce and sell to Stanwix for a mere hundred dollars or so was worth forty or fifty thousand, and you can readily see where Stanwix got rich out of that!

My own part in this arrangement was an annual retainer fee that financed my present sanatorium for mental cases in Connecticut.

What harm was there in this? It was not a crime. Simply we kept from an old man the shock of learning that he had lost more than twenty years from his life. That shock might have killed him, or driven him mad. No fair-minded jury can condemn me for that!

I was called back into this case only yesterday, when Ertyl Stanwix telegraphed me that the patient had eluded his guards and lost himself in New York. I agreed, when Varony was found, to lodge him in my sanatorium for a time.

Question by Examining Officer: "You knew you were compounding a swindle against Varony as well as every person who bought one of the recent paintings by Varony?"

Dr. Scofield: "I never gave it a thought. I am a doctor. My duty is toward my patients. I will swear by solemn oath that, at this minute, it is my opinion this patient, Varony, or Galt, may suffer the gravest consequences from the shock he has received. Whereas, if I had been allowed to remove him to quiet care in my sanatorium—"

By the Examining Officer: "Then you are not aware that Homer Varony has stated to us in clear English that to-day he protested to you he was not mad? This in the house on Twenty-Fourth Street. Not only that, he demanded his freedom. And struggling against you was attacked by you, subdued by force, and given an injection of morphine to quiet him?"

Dr. Scofield: "Let them prove that if they can. I deny it."

Examining Officer: "I think the State will do that for you, doctor. The girl, Letty, an operative for the Cormorant private detective agency, Miss Cole, and Sam Caxton, all can testify to prove that. And they will."

Dr. Scofield: "Very well. It's true. I admit it. But it was Ertyl Stanwix who planned all this. Make him pay!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A BIG ARTIST'S WIFE.

SAM CAXTON sought out Myra at her boarding house the following afternoon. The roving artist was grinning shyly, and evidently much elated.

"I had to tell you, first off," he exclaimed. "I just talked with Varony. The old man is feeling fine. Not a thing wrong with him, the doctors say. And here's the big news. Stanwix is going to recover. They got the bullet out of his chest, and he'll pull through. His attorney brought word

to Varony. Stanwix is willing to make good on every nickel he cheated Varony out of. And pay damages besides. Varony is taken care of for life."

Myra clasped Sam's hands and beamed on him.

"But here's the best of all," Sam hurried on before she could speak. "Varony feels kind of grateful to me. He is going to take me in hand and help me get that art education I need. He says I am going to be a lot bigger painter than he ever was—oh, well, maybe he *is* kind of crazy, now! But I'm going to try, Myra! I'm a fighting fool when I get my eye on something I want. Will you help me fight for it? Will you, Myra?"

Myra blushed.

"Why, Sam! You know I will. You'll be a big man one of these days, Sam. And when you are, I'll be proud to be a great artist's friend."

"Not friend!" Sam corrected hastily. "I want you to be a big artist's wife. I suppose I've got an awful nerve! But that's what I want—and I'm going to fight for it."

"You might try, Sam," Myra smiled. "There's no harm in trying, is there?"

THE END

OUT FOR AIR

"OH, Henry," said the missus, with her usual monologue,
"Put on your coat and rubbers, dear, and exercise the dog."
I donned my coat and rubbers, though the day was warm and bright,
And leashed the mutt and muzzled him so that he couldn't bite,

For bite he could: he was a brute both large and wide and high,
And when he stood on two hind legs, was twice as tall as I.
We sallied forth into the air and started down the street,
The sun was warm, the day was gay, the breezes light and sweet;

A pleasant promenade, so full of stateliness and grace!
Our Nero lamped a kitten and the stroll became a chase.
I puffed and tore in frantic haste, appendage to the chain,
Nor ceased until the feline found some shelter in a drain.

Then on—until good Nero paused, a statue in the road;
I hauled him from the passing wheels. He was a heavy load.
Then onward to the sunny park where idle dreamers sit:
Dear Nero circled 'round one bench and tied things up a bit.

I found the lady's purse within a fount where it had flown;
I tried to calm her ruffled ire, to pity and condone;
Apologies meant naught, she said, in words I can't repeat,
When ladies sitting on a bench are thrown off their feet!

Then on and on in peace and calm, till Nero spied a squirrel,
Then 'round and 'round and 'round the tree, in idiotic whirl,
'Mid chatterings and patterings, our Nero leaped in vain,
And all the while I clung and hung, appendage to the chain.

And when at last we homeward came, with Nero fresh and gay,
And I with puffing chest and lips of ashen hue and gray,
The wife said: "Oh, you've exercised our little dear, I see."
"Ah, no," I answered grimly, "he's been exercising *me!*"

Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift.

The Rider o' Spook Hollow

By CHARLES FRANCIS COE

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I AND II

TOD JENNINGS, crack rider of the Loop K ranch, is in love with Nan Rogers, daughter of the ranch owner, John Rogers. Rogers favors Tod until he makes Bram Goud foreman of the ranch soon after Mike Trop and Rod Caspar, saloonkeepers of the neighboring town of Salvation, report finding and burying the bullet-riddled corpse of Dave Gaard in Spook Hollow, a near-by mountain gap. Tod and Slim Willett, his best friend, also a rider of the Loop K, are arrested by the sheriff on suspicion of a bank robbery committed by a gang under Caspar and Trop. Tod escapes from jail, leaving Slim behind. He overhears a conversation between Goud and Trop, in which Goud tells how he will force himself into partnership with Rogers, mortgage the ranch, and disappear with the money, together with the bank loot, which the gang has hidden. Tod rides off to Willow Slip, and waits there to talk to Nan. She tells him a posse is on his trail. Tod sends Nan to Salvation to warn Slim not to talk while he rides gayly in full view of the posse. He would not care if he were caught—but he has to stay free to save Nan and her father!

CHAPTER XIII (*Continued*).

THE TRAIL TO NOWHERE.

INDEED, it made a huge difference if he lost!

Behind him the posse set up a hue and cry. They had seen him. He glanced back and saw that they had spurred their mounts into a keen gallop and were streaming over the plains like so many chariots of vengeance.

He could understand that the sheriff after following a blind trail to the murderer of Dave Gaard was especially incensed at the

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manner in which Tod had escaped from his jail. The man would fight hard to establish his prestige after that.

Tod's pony slipped into a steady gallop. They headed directly for the range, and after some ten minutes of riding Tod turned again to measure his relative position to his pursuers. A short whistle crossed his lips. They had gained several hundred yards and, with the enthusiasm of success, were crowding their mounts to the utmost. He could hear their shouts clearly now, and wondered if any of them had rifles.

He gave his pony a free rein for a moment and smiled a little at the burst of speed the little creature summoned.

"We can let 'em have another good gain, hoss," Tod muttered, "an' then you an' me'll start up that range plum' fresh while they'll hit it with hosses that are winded an' tired. It 'll be a tough climb, hoss, where we're goin'!"

With the expression a sudden thought came to Tod. Just where were they going? Beyond a general knowledge of the peaks and principal ravines and trails, Tod knew little of the range. He entered that mountain fastness now solely because it offered the first protection at hand.

Once there, he planned, of course to take up a vigil at Spook Hollow and pursue relentlessly the secret of Bram Goud's power over John Rogers. But first he must shake off this posse. Where were they going, indeed? The question recurred to him with surprising force. He glanced speculatively at the range ahead. Already the ground under him was rising steadily and soon would sweep upward into the pines and spruce ahead.

"I reckon, hoss," he averred then, "that this here we're followin' is that well-known trail to nowhere!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A BLOCKED TRAIL.

THE posse had drawn up to a position slightly over a quarter of a mile away when Tod pushed his pony into the first belt of scraggly pine trees that fringed the lower mountain. The little animal's hoofs rang out sharply in the clear morning air as they crunched down upon rock and shale. Ahead lay a steady rise that led through bowlders and trees. It was a steep climb, and one that needed a fresh mount if any speed was to be attained. As it became evident to the posse that Tod was going to reach the sanctuary of the trees, they took up a desultory shooting that achieved nothing more than the noise it made.

Revolver shots fell far short of the range at which they were fired, and Tod disdained returning any of them. Through the trees shadows lurked, and by reason of the nature of the ground over which they traveled Tod knew that the posse would soon find it quite impossible to trail him.

Rather than worry over the possibility of capture, he gave thought to the future, trying to plan his course so that it would take him ultimately over a partial back track to Spook Hollow. It was just as well, he thought, to manage things so that he could effectually lose his trail against even the most prolonged search as, after he had reached the Hollow, he would remain there a more or less easy prey to surprise attack from any of the posse who lingered after others had forsaken the chase.

With that in mind he climbed steadily, knowing this to be the quickest way to exhaust the mounts of the posse. His own horse was going easily and strongly upward, and he spared him no little by taking a zigzag course that, while it might impress the posse as a loss of time, led him actually and imperceptibly closer toward his ultimate goal of Spook Hollow.

Even at such an easy pace the shouts and noises of his pursuers faded behind him. Tod leaned forward and patted the sleek neck of his pony in appreciation. The animal flicked an ear much as though he too understood affairs and was exacting from them his just portion of amusement.

Once they stopped long enough to listen carefully, and in that silence there came the ominous sound of a rattler among the rocks near at hand. The pony shied away a little, and took to a fretful dancing that evidenced the healthy fear he had of the reptile.

Tod slid from the saddle and picked up a round stone about the size of a coconut. Then he approached the rocks, holding the reins and leading the frightened pony behind him. The rattling grew in volume, its insidious whir cracking through the mountain silence with a particularly threatening tempo. Soon Tod espied the snake, coiled and ready to strike. He grinned a little, snapped off a branch from a near-by tree, and poked at the creature.

Immediately the coils straightened as if they might have been of tempered steel. Tod felt the shock of the strike through the small branch; then as the reptile recoiled he raised the stone and dashed it downward. The snake writhed hideously, and Tod, his riding gloves serving as but small protection, reached downward in a move almost as rapid as the striking of the snake, seized the twisting tail, and snapped the long brown body as one might a lash.

He laughed softly as the head of the creature, torn free of the body, whirled high above the trees in a gyroscopic parabola.

"Rattle a mite more some time," the fugitive muttered casually then. "I reckon you won't be strikin' at nobody again!"

He leisurely twisted the reins over his pony's neck and swung into the saddle again. The sounds of the pursuers had drawn closer again, due to the delay. With a sardonic smile about his lips Tod leaned over and caught the twisted body of the snake. With no little care he draped it over the limbs of a tree under which the posse was quite certain to pass.

Apparently drawing huge satisfaction from this, he prodded his pony and again resumed his way. The animal stepped gingerly about the rock pile, its ears pointed intently and its nostrils aquiver. Tod saw that, some two hundred yards ahead, loomed the first of the ravines that seamed the mountainside. He planned to ride into this just as he once had with Nan Rogers. He recalled the great rock walls that hemmed it in, and the spacious valley that spread away from the far end of the mighty crevice.

Once let him gain that valley, and he would swerve sharply to the south, put his pony up the steep banks that led to Stony Brow, and thence absolutely lose his trail in the mountain fastness. By delaying now, thus keeping the posse close enough to their quarry so that they would not lose interest in the chase, he would save his horse for a real burst of speed once they were above Stony Brow, an eminence which commanded a mighty view, and a favorite place for picnics and lovers. It was there he had held Nan's hand the first time.

He gained the ravine while the first of the posse paused to examine the weird spectacle of a rattler among the branches of a tree. They were a little closer than he had thought, so he urged the pony along at a fast pace until the valley opened before him. Then he swung sharply to the right, and hit the rocky trail up the steep grade to Stony Brow. He was enjoying the view from that eminence when the posse arrived at the valley opening several hundred feet below him.

He watched while they talked matters over and searched about the soft soil of the downgrade into the valley for a trail. Then the voice of the sheriff came to him:

"He went up, gents—damn 'im! But he ain't more'n a quarter of a mile ahead, an' the goin' gits bad the higher he gits."

"My hoss ain't got the wind of a newborn calf right now," one of the men grumbled.

"We can't leave him walk off, kin we?" the sheriff demanded testily. And for an answer to his own question he put his own tired horse up the steep grade toward Stony Brow.

Tod laughed softly, then whirled his mount and settled to the business of losing the posse as quickly as possible. He felt that he had attained his purpose. By taking the course he had he was now within striking distance of Spook Hollow without having roused their suspicions as to his destination.

Before him loomed the narrow ridge that gave Stony Brow its name. He recalled that from the valley below the trees through which he now rode had much the appearance of hairs forming a huge eyebrow. His mount responded readily to an urge for speed, and by the time the wearied posse

had gained the eminence Tod was a good mile down the ridge, the hard ground absorbing his trail as a mill pond swallows an object cast into its placid depths.

From the position of the sun, he judged that it was a good two hours before noon. The rarified atmosphere of the mountains and the effort and excitement of the chase had given him a ravenous appetite. He hoped that before the sun had started its downward course in the heavens he would be able to prepare himself something to eat. Once he stopped at a trickling stream, and after watering his horse drank deeply of the clear, cool water himself.

The ridge had narrowed now into a sort of sheer hump that offered the only course to the peak beyond. On both sides of the hump the ground fell away in a series of precipitous cliffs and descents which ended only after they had seemingly been absorbed in the valleys some hundreds of feet below.

Tod had never ridden the trail before, if trail it might be called, but he knew that the peak which loomed ahead was the only way for him to reach Spook Hollow without risking his neck by going down the sides of this ridge and making an arduous climb upward again on the walls of the peak.

Once or twice the loose shale under his pony's hoofs broke free, and crumpled into sharp particles. Tod saw that the entire ridge was of this structure, shale bedded over rocks by the working forces of centuries. Through this shale there managed to grow scrub pine and a heavy, twisted vine which was strange to Tod.

He had entirely lost all traces of the posse now and was confidently expecting to gain the peak ahead where he could prepare a meal for himself. Then to his complete amazement and infinite concern he suddenly became aware that some one else was on the ridge.

It was no animal of the wild kind; it was a horse. The steady *clip-clop* of hoofs reached his ears, and after a moment of tense listening he realized that the horse was coming along the ridge toward him. There seemed no possibility of avoiding discovery.

The ridge was but a hundred feet wide, and though it was fairly well covered with the scrub pines and the vines, it did not offer a hiding place for horse and man.

To have met a strange rider in this place seemed to Tod to be the very essence of ill luck. He dared not go back over the ridge, because such a course was almost certain to lead him onto the guns of the posse. He hated to meet any one here, because of the violent results which might occur, and the certainty that his whereabouts and his destination both might easily be suspected should he have such an encounter.

The hoofbeats drew nearer, and Tod saw that he must make a move of some kind immediately. A glance at the eastern side of the ridge brought a hopeless shrug. It was a sheer cliff that no horse might negotiate. He whirled about and rode to the western side. The result was identical; there seemed not the slightest chance of making an escape with those two walls on either side of him, the posse possibly behind him, and this strange rider coming on to sound an alarm.

However, he drew his pony back under some pines and found the best cover available. Then he dismounted, took the animal's nostrils in his fingers to prevent a nicker while the rider passed, and tensely awaited developments. They were not long in coming.

Through the shadows Tod caught first sight of a mounted man. The fellow was riding with his eyes fairly glued to the ground as though he might be in search of a trail. At this realization all hope of escape forsook Tod. His hoofmarks were clearly visible in the shale covering of the ridge at that point, and it was a matter of minutes only until his presence would be discovered.

On came the rider until he reached the point where Tod had caught the first warning hoofbeats. There he stopped, and Tod saw him straighten in his saddle, then slip to the ground and make a minute investigation of the trail. Finally he straightened, his hand dropping to the heavy gun he wore at his hip, and his eyes darting about curiously. Then it was that Tod

placed the fellow for the first time. He had seen him once or twice at Salvation and wondered at the evil cast of his face.

Finally the man tied his horse to a pine, and set about following Tod's trail toward the eastern edge of the ridge. For a moment Tod thought of slipping past him and riding like mad for the peak beyond. Then he saw the futility of such a course. He might very easily ride into others who were searching for him.

Had the posse split? Had they known his plans all the time, and outguessed him from the start? Was this a well-sprung trap into which he had ridden with the blindness of a child?

The man was coming back now, and in a matter of seconds must find him. The time for action was at hand, and Tod felt his muscles flex as he drew his gun and met the issue.

"Stick 'em up, stranger!" he ordered hoarsely, and the man stopped instantly, his hands going aloft and his evil eyes peering through the trees in Tod's direction.

"That you, Rod?" he demanded, as if he had expected to meet some one.

The voice for the second time gave Tod an immense start. He was face to face with Trop, henchman of Bram Goud—one of the bank robbers and possible possessor of the secret which Tod sought.

"Nope, it ain't Rod," Tod growled, suddenly seeing in this chance meeting another stroke of good fortune. "I reckon you mean Rod Caspar, eh?"

But Trop did not answer. A puzzled expression played over his bearded face, and he was trying to place Tod definitely through the trees.

"Walk in here, Trop!" Tod ordered. "You an' me are goin' to have a nice little talk:"

As he spoke he knotted the reins he held about a branch. He must work fast if the posse had really guessed out his plans.

There were several ways open to them back at Stony Brow. The most likely thing for Tod to have done was to take the west side down the ridge from that point. If they decided that that was what he had done, he was safe. If not, they might come along the ridge at any moment.

Trop, his hands still aloft, walked toward him. As he drew close and recoginzed Tod a short exclamation crossed his lips, and his face twisted into a combined suspicion and fear that traced his every craven trait about the close-set eyes.

"I see you know me, Trop," Tod grinned, determined not to let the other see his fears about the posse. "I'm lookin' for Caspar myself. Got a score to settle with him!"

Trop did not reply, but Tod saw him wet his lips uneasily; and his eyes darted about incessantly, as though in search of some way out of his dilemma.

"What you doin' up here so soon after robbin' the bank?" Tod demanded in a casual tone.

"I didn't rob no bank; you're talkin' foolish!" Trop snarled.

"Yeah? You didn't have it all fixed for a certain party to be hidin' on that false top across the street from Lem Stagg's either, huh?"

"It's a damned lie!" Trop avowed. "I never fixed that up."

"Fixed what?" Tod smiled.

"That shootin'; I never knowed about it!"

"How do you know about it now?" Tod grunted. Trop showed that he had trapped himself. The things which Tod mentioned so casually, this man had believed to be the darkest secrets. Into his beady eyes came a crafty, hateful glare.

Suddenly, with a burst of courage that must have been beyond anything else the man had ever attained, he leaped forward. Tod was taken by surprise by the daring move. His gun was knocked from his hand, and he had only time to grasp Trop's wrist as with a cry of satisfaction the man reached for his own weapon.

Far down the western slope of the ridge there sounded a shout. Tod knew that the posse had lost his trail completely. Trop grunted a hoarse curse, and dug his elbow deep into Tod's throat. Still holding Trop's gun hand, Tod fought him with all the strength that he had. Underfoot the shale crumbled and slipped. First Tod went to his knees, then Trop, as they battled for possession of the latter's gun.

Blood seeped through Trop's beard from a gash in his lips which a glancing blow from Tod's fist had inflicted. From his eyes gleamed a fire of hatred as he worked steadily toward the cliff at Tod's back. Trop never fought without an end in view, and in the heat of combat Tod seemed to have forgotten the existence of the cliff until his feet stumbled to the very edge of it, and he fought back with the desperation of impending defeat and death upon the rocks below.

Trop, sensing that Tod had discovered his purpose, fought with the rage of baffled hate. His breath whistled through his blood-soaked whiskers, and fell hot and moist against Tod's face. Underfoot the shale crumbled gratingly. Far below them came more shouts, and Tod realized even in the stress of the moment that the posse could see that desperate struggle.

Finally seeming to bet all upon a last mad surge Trop dropped his gun and clinched closer with both arms in an attempt to squeeze the strength from Tod that he might break himself loose and give his adversary the one final push that would settled the issue for all time.

Behind him Tod heard the clatter of the weapon which Trop had released. It fell hundreds of feet, as though sounding a warning of the depths which beckoned Tod himself.

CHAPTER XV.

BARE HANDS.

WITH both arms free, and the assurance that Trop could not resort to the use of his gun, Tod seemed to gather new strength for the mad struggle at hand. His feet slid and ground deeper into the loose shale. Trop, sensing the life or death struggle into which he had been plunged, fought with renewed fury. Try as he would Tod seemed unable to swing the man around so that he himself would be removed from the yawning peril at his heels. Below them came more shouts from members of the posse.

The madness with which he was struggling caused bright flashes mixed with great dark spots to appear before Tod's eyes. He could feel the hot, blood-laden breath of Trop as the man leaned against him, pressing him back toward the cliff.

"If I go I'll drag you with me, Trop!" he managed to gasp as he felt the shale again sliding under his feet. Trop, for a fleeting second, seemed to realize the truth of the assertion, and Tod felt the muscles of the man loosen slightly. At that exact moment he put his all into one last effort to win his way back to the ridge where lay at least temporary safety.

He won his point. With a snarl Trop felt himself heaved backward, and once again his great muscles hardened and he fought with all the strength and fury he could summon. Tod realized that the man was muttering something, but the words were unintelligible.

The shouts which had come from the valley below them now assumed in his mind a new significance. They made of this struggle one against time as well as one against Trop. If the latter succeeded in holding him long enough, the posse was certain to climb again over Stony Brow and drop down on them while they still fought. Trop would then be a hero, and Tod a prisoner.

With the knowledge that he was fighting now only the man Trop, and need no longer struggle against pitching over the cliff, Tod changed his style of attack. His fists beat a steady tattoo against Trop's body, and presently the latter received the blows with a gasp and a shrinking of his torso that was evidence of the pain they caused him.

Tod smiled in satisfaction at that. Trop was weakening, as any man must under such a thundering attack against lungs and heart and stomach. Soon Trop's elbows attempted to shift downward that they might fend off the blows. This weakened his grip on Tod, and after driving home another body blow with each hand, Tod fought himself free with a mighty wrench, and his hard right fist darted upward and crunched again against the bearded face with prodigious power.

Under the impact of the blow Trop staggered backward, his feet stumbling weirdly in an endeavor to save him from a fall. The shale rattled as though in applause of the

mighty struggle. Tod was after his man like a flash, his lips parted in a bruised smile of victory. Ineffectually Trop threw up his arms in defense. Then as Tod sidestepped and darted forward with what was to be the finishing blow, Trop dropped to his knees and grappled him about the legs.

Both rolled into the sharp particles of broken shale, and Tod felt a million needles grinding into his hands, arms, and knees. He kicked himself free, but Trop was up as quickly. They whirled again to the attack, all thought of the posse having fled from Tod's mind. He had reverted to the primitive; all that filled his thoughts was an implacable determination to beat to earth this enemy who had come so suddenly upon him. He seemed no longer to be fighting just for freedom; instead he was fighting with the hate that actuates the aboriginal. He was fighting to win, and, like the wolf, might easily have howled over the still body of his foe.

His hands were bleeding from the shale wounds as he charged; his face was twisted into a grimace of cold rage. Trop crouched to meet the attack, his beard blood-stained and his eyes rolling wildly with the first realization that here was one who would beat him down as surely as the sun shone.

They clinched, both missing mighty swings as they did so. Then Trop raised his left hand, the fingers gripping a large fragment of the shale into which they had fallen. This he brought down onto Tod's back with all the strength he had. The jagged weapon ripped through clothes and flesh alike. Tod gasped a little with the sheer pain of the thing, and Trop muttered again as he felt the warm flow of blood from the wound he had made.

Then the man who had confessed to Goud previous attempts upon Tod's life, found refuge in a trick which was characteristic of him. He twisted his body slightly, and brought his knee upward with the force of a piston. The twist had warned Tod of what was coming, but he could not move quickly enough to avoid entirely the vile attack. The blow landed full against his stomach, the very force of it lifting him off his feet.

Every bit of his breath seemed knocked from his body. He bent forward, groped a little blindly for Trop's body; then lashed out again with both hands, and took a second to fight for air as Trop fell back under the punishment. A natural trick of boxing opened to him then. Trop, his body flailed unto death, strove to protect it against further assault. His great, bloody hands hung low, close in to his stomach, the left still gripping the murderous shale.

Tod charged forward, his eyes riveted upon Trop's body. As the other shrank away from the attack, he paused, suddenly planted his feet as firmly as possible in the insecure footing, and shot his right fist upward again with all the power he possessed. The blow caught Trop full on the chin. Like Bram Goud before him, the outlaw collapsed as though his knees might have turned to butter.

His head hit the shale with another resounding crunch, and his hulking body lay quite still, little clouds of dust rising about it and settling in the folds of his torn clothes. Trop, as a fighting man, had given all that was in him. With the realization of that fact, Tod staggered forward, and stood looking down upon his victim.

His body swayed uncertainly, his mouth gaped for air much like the gills of a captured fish, his eyes bulged, and he ran a stained and soiled hand slowly over the shoulder which Trop had gouged with the shale. In the struggle the tape which had covered the wound on his forehead had become disarranged, and the wound freshly opened. Blood from this trickled slowly down over his cheek.

With a mighy effort he staggered toward his pony. On the way he gathered up the weapon which he had dropped when Trop made his first attack. At the saddle he unfastened his canteen, and drank deep of its contents. He rinsed his bloody mouth several times, then hooked his hand over the pommel of the saddle and hung there, fighting for air, and rest for outraged muscles.

There was plenty of water in the mountains he knew, and after a moment he poured the canteen water over his shoulder wound. It felt cool and grateful. Several

minutes passed thus. Had Trop regained consciousness and renewed his attack, Tod surely must have fallen before the assault. Nausea gripped him firmly.

Finally he caught sounds of the oncoming posse which, as he had thought, was riding down upon him in a last endeavor to place him in the clutch of the law. The sounds galvanized him to action. He breathed as deep as his burning lungs would permit, coughed forth part of the air thus obtained, then prepared to swing into the saddle. As he did so, Trop's horse caught his eye. He gritted his teeth and fought for mental control.

It was evident that, after just completing that climb over Stony Brow, the horses of the posse would be utterly winded. They could offer no great pursuit now against his rested pony. It dawned upon him that his fight with Trop must have lasted over thirty minutes. The posse was close.

Should he leave Trop's fresh pony, at least one of the men could shift and start the pursuit with every chance of success against Tod in his weakened condition. He strode staggeringly to the pony, and freed the reins, leading it back with him. Then he loosed his own horse, and swung feebly into the saddle. With a last look of dislike at the still quiet Trop and a moment of intent listening to gauge the nearness of the posse, he started once more along the ridge in the direction of the peak ahead.

He had gone about two hundred yards when he thought he heard a shout. He was not at all certain; there was such a pounding in his ears that he was unable to localize any sound other than the roar of blood in his head. He paid no heed, merely gripped the saddle before him, and clung desperately to the rein by which Trop's horse was being led.

Then came a sound which no cowboy could mistake. It was the spiteful bark of a forty-five. The bullet struck a tree not far from him, and roused him from the lethargy into which his wounds and exhaustion had plunged him.

"By heaven!" he muttered thickly, at the same time turning his face partially over his shoulder to indicate the direction whence his pursuers were coming. "Fire away! You may get me, but you'll still fight for me!"

He leaned low over the pony's neck, his hands still clutching at the saddle for support; then he spoke to the animal and prodded its flanks with his heels.

"Git goin', hoss," he muttered thickly. "I'm pullin' leather, I admit—but you can beat 'em, an' I'll hang on somehow!" The rein of the led horse jerked a moment at his arm, then Trop's pony met the increased gait of the other. Another shot rang out, and from somewhere in his battered carcass Tod found the will and the strength to laugh a raucous taunt.

It seemed to him that his pony had three ears instead of the two he knew to be there; now and then there were two heads bobbing before his eyes, too. But he fought the unconsciousness which reached forth to envelop him, fought it with visions of Nan and all that his success meant to her. Somehow he clung to that jerking, reeling, slipping saddle.

More shots sounded behind him, but he could catch no trace of the bullets that were being sped after him. The ridge widened rapidly as he rode. It stretched forth now to embrace the peak whereon he was sure he could lose himself, and fight off the weakness that kept his head pounding and his eyes seeing queer things. Once again the pounding of the hoofs of Trop's horse made him think that pursuers were at his heels, but the hallucination helped because it cleared his mind.

The pine trees thickened, and under his pony's hoofs rang the sheer rock of the peak. No trail could be followed over such going, he knew. Where the rock was covered by a layer of the springy pine needles, the impress of hoofs disappeared as rapidly as they were made, and on the rocks no trace remained.

Tod's mind was unable to plan. It concentrated upon the one vital thing, which was sticking to the saddle as long as he could, thus gaining all possible distance on the fagged horses of the posse. Once or twice he cringed suddenly as imagination painted upon his mind another of Trop's charges. The bearded face of his enemy flashed before his eyes now and then.

By and by a pine limb scraped his face lightly, and the pressure against him nearly unseated him. He shook himself, smiling weakly, ready to admit that the limit of his strength and endurance was at hand. He straightened a moment, his blurred vision in search of water. Fortune favored him. A short distance away ran one of the mountain streams that trickled toward the plains below.

Into this he guided his horse, the cool water splashing upward from hoofs with a sound like music to his pounding ears. For a hundred yards he rode through the water, then there opened before him a little pool shaded by pines. Here he slid from the saddle, leading the animals a staggering course onto the bank and under the cover of the trees.

Finally, after making sure that they were tethered and could not wander away, Tod stumbled toward the water again. At the edge of the stream he fell to his knees and plunged his body into the clear cold water. He drank his fill, dipped his torn hands and arms again into the refreshing liquid, then once more immersed his burning shoulder until the wound and the garment over it were saturated.

After a time he crawled back onto the bank in the shade of the pines and lay very still.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PINTO PILOT.

WHEN Tod opened his eyes again the clearing about him was gradually relinquishing its light to the shadows of gloam. The sun had sunk low behind the towering peak, and a cool air was stirring among the pines, an air that invigorated, stimulated and soothed.

The pounding in his ears had departed, though his head still ached violently, and when he tried to move his gouged shoulder reminded him effectively of the damage which Trop had achieved with the fragment of jagged shale. However, Tod rose to a sitting position, and the move brought once again a giddiness that he found it difficult to shake off.

"I'm empty as a cleaned trout!" he growled. "If it kills me, I gotta eat." With that objective in view he staggered to his feet and went to the horses. Not daring to risk a fire, he searched the saddlebags which Nog had packed for him, and soon was back at the bank of the stream munching hard biscuits and jerked beef, and washing the not too savory meal down with the clear water of the stream.

From the coarse food he drew strength, however, and it served to overcome the nauseating gnawing at his vitals which had greeted him on his wakening. After that he more carefully bathed the wound on his forehead, and then removed his clothing to the waist and washed as well as he could the wound which Trop had inflicted. As nearly as he could tell, the shale had ripped through his flesh and over his shoulder bone in a jagged, rending slash which, though it drew considerable blood, had not gone very deep.

The water which he scooped over it seemed to bring new life to the injured tissues. Finally he plunged his head entirely into the stream, and that process served to renew circulation and clear his brain immensely.

That done, he looked to his weapon, and found it in perfect condition. By reason of the manner in which he had thrown himself into the stream earlier in the day, he dared not trust the cartridges in his belt; so he went to his saddlebags again and changed for fresh and dry shells. His tobacco, carried in the pocket of his shirt, had also suffered from immersion, and he withdrew a fresh bag and went well back into the pines for a smoke which he was willing to risk for the good to be gained from it.

Smoking and pondering had always gone hand in hand with Tod. He pondered now as he inhaled the grateful smoke. After all, there probably was not a great deal to fear so long as he remained where he was. The fact that he had escaped the posse and Trop both was evidence enough that his present hiding place was as good as any.

There need be no great hurry about getting to the Hollow that very night, he thought. The probabilities were strong that his presence in the locality might easily

serve as a warning to Trop's gang that he suspected their whereabouts, and thus to go directly toward the Hollow might serve to lead him into a trap which they had planned.

Rest would do him good, too. He needed it. Never had he been so completely done up as he had after that thrilling and grueling battle with Trop. He wondered how Trop himself had fared. He recalled the thump with which the man's head had struck the shale, but that might easily be no more serious than the blow Tod had struck the man's chin.

"His body 'll feel that lickin' for a spell," Tod soliloquized not unhappily. "I pumped enough shots onto his ribs to batter in a building!"

Had the posse continued its search or given up because of the exhaustion of their horses? Had they taken Trop back toward town with them, or was he still in the locality? Would Trop have trouble explaining to the sheriff his own reasons for being on the range at such an isolated point?

"I could be askin' myself questions for a month and never answer one o' them!" Tod grumbled finally. "But I ain't feelin' fit to walk into another race with the posse right now—an' I couldn't fight a cream puff the way I feel. The thing for me to do is bed down right here.

"To-morrow mornin' I can chance a fire an' cook myself some real grub. Then I'll just work along easy an' careful till I come down onto Spook Hollow in my own time an' way. From the top o' this peak I can look down into the Hollow plenty. I'll mebbe be able to see how it is a hoss can climb up to where I saw that ghost. There may be heaps o' other things I can see, too.

"But right now—the way I feel—if that rider was to dance around this clearin' all night long, I wouldn't even roll over to watch him."

Later on, after night had settled over the clearing, he unsaddled the horses. Then he ate a little more, enjoyed a little smoke, and rolled into his blankets. Pine needles were thick on the ground, and he managed to make himself comfortable. Scarcely had he settled himself before sleep came, and all through the silent night nature had opportunity to rebuild the bruised and battered nerves and tissues of his body.

He woke with the dawn the next morning. The music of the little stream was a pleasant greeting. He sat erect in his blankets and took a leisurely inventory of his condition. Indubitably he felt better. His head did not ache, and only a stiffness and soreness was manifest in his shoulder. His ears were clear as a bell, and the nausea had left his stomach. When he stood up there was no sign of dizziness.

"Shucks!" he grunted. "I reckon I was just beat up enough to make me want to quit!"

Very carefully he removed his clothing again, a series of superficial twinges reminding him that his shoulder wound was just beginning the processes of healing. Then he dug into the saddlebags once more, located a piece of soap, and for fully twenty minutes disported himself in the cold water of the stream. When he returned to his blankets his skin had responded to the vigorous treatment with a ruddy color and his blood was racing with a tingling that bespoke renewed life.

He dressed, strapped his gun about him, led the horses to the stream where they dipped their muzzles and drank greedily; then he gathered some wood and built a fire. Within a short time he was enjoying flapjacks and coffee set off by a rasher of crisp bacon that filled him with strength and satisfaction.

His smoke finished, he threw saddles back onto the ponies, rolled his kit, and mounted.

"There, gents," he grinned happily to mythical pursuers, "if you spotted my smoke, come an' get me!"

Out into the stream he rode, Trop's horse following along obediently. Tod finally lashed the rein about his pommel, thus freeing both his hands. The clear air, his return to himself physically, and the adventure ahead thrilled him. He was, he felt, at last close to the insidious secret of Spook Hollow. He was riding like a knight of old to the rescue of a fair maiden.

A strange exuberance gripped him at the thought. He looked ahead to that day

when he could ride in state to the Loop K and shake the old, hearty John Rogers by the hand. He must prepare a little speech, he thought, for the occasion, something that would be terse but expressive, brief but powerful. Then he imagined Nan coming to his arms, and the wedding which would make of the Loop K a festive place.

They had left the stream now. Tod turned his pony toward the peak which reared ahead. Birds flitted about as he rode, and now and then their morning songs greeted him much as though there was not a thing in the world but that which was right and glorious and peaceful. They were to his rejuvenated spirits messengers bringing to him a forecast of triumph.

They climbed until the sun rose above the peak and cast fanciful shadows over the mountainside. The limbs of the scraggly pines stood gaunt against an azure sky.

"Imagine any ghosts floatin' around these parts!" Tod muttered scoffingly. "Right soon I'll top this peak, an' get me a look into the Hollow where the rider with the flamin' face rules the roost!"

By noon he had attained much of his journey toward the top of the peak. There had been no evidence of human beings other than during one thrilling moment when Tod had topped a rise and come into a clearing from which he could gaze out over the plains far below. Miles away, huddled together like sheep when storms plunge over the range, were the buildings of the Loop K.

Very faintly he could see them, and he stopped long enough to isolate from the others the ranch house which he knew so well. Nan must be there even now, he thought. The haze of distance seemed to him to be the living spirit of the cloud that had come upon the place. Would he ever ride back there, the conqueror he had imagined?

The sun grew hot, and the ponies were covered with lather from the effort of their climbing. He stopped a long time during the noon meal, that they might rest and cool off. It was during this wait that he determined to look through the saddlebags of Trop's pony. What he discovered proved interesting.

First, he found an electric torch. These were common enough and of no particular significance until he recalled that various folks who had ridden through Spook Hollow at night mentioned that they had seen flashing lights among the high walls of rock.

"I just wonder," Tod mused. "What a cinch it would be with a gadget like this!"

However, the spotlight certainly could not explain the presence of Dave Gaard in the Hollow! A man who had been dead six months certainly had to have more than a spotlight and some questionable friends to put him back on a horse!

The second article of interest was a sheath of bills—new bills they were—and Tod was pretty certain that they had come from the Salvation bank robbery. These, along with the light, he slipped into his own bags.

Then once more he started on the arduous climb over the peak that dropped sharply down into Spook Hollow on the other side.

But Trop's pony seemed to have other ideas. Tod noticed that the animal sheered off from the upward climb when they started. It showed evidences of a desire to go its own way. Two or three times he had to jerk on the reins in order to keep the creature moving.

Once they passed a narrow gulch that slanted off at a westerly angle, and here Trop's horse actually planted its feet and resisted farther upward progress. At first Tod was a little angered, thinking that the animal was tired of the incessant climb and laying back in the hope of a longer rest.

Then it dawned upon him that the territory was not new to the pinto. The animal knew the ground; he was accustomed to traveling in that straight line from the ridge toward the peak, and it was his habit to turn into this gulch rather than continue straight on upward. The thought brought a sudden thrill and realization to Tod.

Determining to use every caution in his next moves, Tod forced the animals some little distance higher, then again tethered them in a secluded place among the rocks. After that he returned to the gulch and entered the place afoot. By the most cau-

tious procedure he worked his way into the place, and after less than half a mile of traveling he made the startling discovery that instead of the innocent little gulch the affair appeared to be, it opened into a massive ravine that creased the peak diagonally.

"If this thing goes on like this," he muttered, "it 'll cut right through the peak and open into Spook Hollow!" The thought had the effect of opening the way for him to hitherto inexplicable things. For instance, he thought, it might quite simply explain how it was possible for that ghostly rider to appear on the sheer wall of the Hollow!

But if the discovery of the gulch, through the habit of the pinto, had taught Tod its benign lesson, it had also opened the way for serious speculation along less encouraging lines.

What of the gang which he had heard both Goud and Trop mention? Surely this place must be very close to the rendezvous where Trop had admitted the loot of the bank was being cared for!

It was entirely reasonable to feel that he was very close to that gang, Tod felt. He might at any moment encounter one or more of the members, and that meant instant war to the death. If Trop had by any chance left the posse and returned to this place afoot, then all the gang would know that Tod was in their locality and correctly assume that he was searching them out because of the manner in which he had accused Trop of the robbery.

Again, if Trop had returned with the posse in order to throw them off the trail that led to the gang, he would quickly tell Bram Goud of his meeting with Tod, and the two would manage so that the gang was warned. Tod saw quite clearly that he was between two fires: the law on the one hand, and this apparently well-organized gang on the other.

However, his hand resting constantly on the butt of his gun, he continued his way along the ravine. Finally, he caught a sign of life. Far ahead of him, sitting on a rock in the shade of a pine, was the figure of a man. A long range rifle lay across his knees, and as he smoked a pipe, he permitted his gaze to wander fleetingly over the ravine itself and toward a large open space at his left.

Tod dodged out of sight and watched the fellow for some time. Beyond a filling of the pipe now and then, and the ceaseless watch he maintained in all directions, the man made no move until another came to relieve him. Then the first man walked toward Tod for a short distance, finally disappearing into a passage that seemed to open off the ravine.

"That open space beyond the guard ain't a thing in the world but Spook Hollow!" Tod muttered. His gaze went aloft to the top of the peak he had planned on climbing. By gauging the distance through the peak he was able quickly to verify his belief. And in that verification lay solution to the manner in which the ghost rider's horse was able to appear high on the walls of the Hollow.

"It's somebody made up to look like Gaard!" Tod muttered as his thoughts turned again to the ghost. "That's easy!" But even as he muttered the words he thought again of the certainty of George Lenz who had known Gaard well.

As a final comment on his discoveries he said at last:

"I've learned a heap—but there's a heap more I gotta learn before I know enough! It must be Bram's secret is the gang I can see hangs out here—but how does that gang tie in with Bram's power over John Rogers?"

CHAPTER XVII.

DISCOVERIES.

AS he lay under cover in the newly-discovered ravine, Tod came to the somewhat discouraging conclusion that the more he learned the more there was to be learned! While it was a great forward step to have located the gang to which he had heard references and to have in his own possession some of the money they actually had stolen from the bank, still the way ahead was by no means open.

He dared not ride for town, show the sheriff the money, and lead a posse back

here on a sudden raid. To do that would indubitably bring upon the head of John Rogers the evil power which Bram Goud exerted over him. No, he must still play a waiting game and strive to find a road to the secret that would enable him to render Goud powerless.

At the back of his mind there lurked a natural, but horrible thought. The logical thing for him to believe was that Rogers was associated with Goud's gang! Goud, as the leader, might be holding membership in the gang and complicity in previous crimes over the ranch man's head. This, however, Tod refused to do more than consider. He had known Rogers too long, was too dead certain of the innate honesty of the man.

Even with these various factors to baffle him, Tod nevertheless felt that he had gained a good deal, too. He had known for some time that Spook Hollow held Bram's secret power in some form or other. Now, and largely by chance, he had stumbled onto definite things that had their being in Spook Hollow. It was, he thought, the sensible thing to do, therefore, to remain close at hand and see what he might himself be able to discover.

With that in mind he worked his way carefully back through the ravine, then upward to the horses. He led the animals far up the peak and found a suitable place to hide them where they could graze and find water from a tumbling stream in case he was away longer than he anticipated.

The afternoon hours dragged a good deal as he waited for darkness. As a matter of precaution he slid the bills he had found in Trop's saddle deep into the side of his riding boot. He fingered the little spotlight for some time, then decided that it could do no harm to take the thing with him when he made his nocturnal excursion into Spook Hollow. He slipped it inside his shirt.

By the time darkness had come the rocks about him were strewn with the stubs of cigarettes he had smoked in nervous anticipation. It took him a good half hour to reach the entrance to the ravine once more, and progress through the gap was slow because of the impenetrable darkness that would last until the moon rose. He hoped for a clear night, but the sunset had shone upon cloudbanks in the west, and he was by no means certain that his luck would hold.

About twenty minutes of careful progress through the rock-strewn cañon brought him to the place where he had seen the guard that afternoon. The odor of tobacco soon verified his suspicions that he had gained that point.

It was while he was pondering the risk connected with attempting to pass the man and gain Spook Hollow itself that he became aware of still another presence. He withdrew among the rocks, but knew that he could not get far away from the floor of the ravine because of the steep walls that banked it on either side. Though he could hear a muffled tread and knew that it was near at hand, the sound seemed distant, heavy.

Presently there loomed almost at his side a huge shadow. Almost as quickly as it had appeared, it was gone. Tod, however, knew that a horse had passed. Its hoofs fell as softly on the rock as the tread of a wild cat, but he had heard the breathing, the creek of leather as a rider shifted in the saddle.

"The ghost!" he muttered to himself. "He passed within five feet o' me, an' I couldn't do a thing! He must be headin' for the cañon to scare somebody else!"

Immediately he fell in behind the weird rider who had passed. He had learned still another thing, one that was infinitely simple; the reason the ghost rider's horse made no sound as it flitted about the Hollow was because the rider had muffled its hoofs.

"A scare game sure an' plenty!" Tod mused. "Now what do they work a gag like that for? That's sure somebody made up to look like Gaard. They picked on him 'cause most folks knew him, an' knew he'd been dead for six months before he showed up again on a hoss!"

So effectually had the hoofs of the animal been muffled that Tod nearly walked onto it in the darkness. He drew back instantly for fear the horse might sense his presence and sound a warning. The fact

that the strange rider remained motionless convinced Tod that they had gained the point where the ghost was wont to appear.

In other words, the Hollow lay directly before them, and the rider was keeping his frightful vigil on the chance that some one might pass through the Hollow below, thus giving him opportunity to appear in his ghostly rôle and send another terrified messenger to the haunts of civilization.

A long time passed in absolute silence. Tod once more found himself hoping earnestly that some rider would enter the Hollow below them. He was anxious to get a look at this ghost at close range. By and by the rider made a faint clucking noise with his lips, and the muffled hoofs moved ahead. Tod followed as closely as he dared. A few steps brought him to a steep declivity, and he knew that here was a trail down into the Hollow.

As he took the down trail he could hear again the hum of the waterfall, and the soft air blowing through the place gave vent to its ceaseless voicing of the elements. The trail was steep, but not difficult to negotiate. Apparently the horse ahead was well accustomed to it, for he did not hesitate until once again the ghost rider spoke softly, and Tod knew they had gained the floor of Spook Hollow at about the point where George Lenz had been frightened.

There, Tod thought, the rider might well wait until convinced that none would pass through the cañon that night. Then doubtless he would turn back over the up-trail to the cañon above. That meant that he must pass within a foot of where Tod was hiding. The horse was certain to give some sign of his presence and thus precipitate an encounter that was likely to prove fatal to himself or the ghost and would almost certainly lose for him all the advantages he had gained.

With the softness of a shadow he glided forward. He held his breath as he almost brushed the flank of the horse, and the animal danced away slightly. Once again the rider spoke shortly, and the muffled hoofs quieted as Tod slid by to the open spaces beyond. It was with a sigh of relief that he left that narrow trail and sank down beside a bowlder to wait.

He felt that he was reasonably safe now. So narrow and steep was the trail over which he had come, and so naturally was its approach hidden by nature, that he was not at all surprised that it had remained hidden from people generally. There was just one secret of the gang's rendezvous he recalled that he had not penetrated. That was the little by-pass that led off the upper ravine, and down which the sentinel had disappeared that afternoon.

"But I know how to reach it," he satisfied himself, "an' when the right time comes it won't take me long to find it."

The deeper shadows of the hollow had begun to relent before the light of a rising moon, and Tod saw that the clouds had broken enough so that he would have the advantage of light from time to time. He crawled slowly away from the trail approach to avoid possible discovery should the Hollow suddenly be flooded with visibility.

Somewhere down the Hollow an owl hooted, and immediately an answer came from the ghost rider, and Tod knew that men were signaling each other. It was evident that some one was entering the Hollow, and had announced his arrival in an agreed manner. He drew farther away, finally came to a low mound of stones, and crept, prone, behind them. Far down the Hollow there sounded hoof beats.

As the strange rider approached the up-trail it suddenly dawned on Tod that he was enjoying the unique position of lying in hiding behind the grave of a man who was being impersonated by the ghost rider. The pile of stones were those which Trop and Casper had used to make a grave for Dave Gaard.

It struck Tod that here was a clear case of poetic justice; it might almost be said that Gaard himself was taking a hand in the defeat of those who mocked his death and made of his vanished spirit an instrumentality for evil.

The newcomer reached the grave, and growled at his horse as it shied away from Tod's unseen presence. Then Tod heard the two men talk, but could not catch what they said. The tone of voice used by the newcomer, however, was enough to bring

a smile to his lips. He would know that voice anywhere. It was Trop.

In a moment he heard the hoofs of Trop's horse clattering up the steep grade. He waited for some time, then crept close, and saw that the ghost had gone on up also. He returned to the mound of stones and waited. If some innocent person would only enter the Hollow, he thought, action would be fast, and opportunity to draw his own conclusion would thus be offered. He wanted to see the ghost in action.

Once again his mind went to work on the mysteries which were rapidly becoming mysteries no longer. He made up his mind that the man who was altered to resemble Dave Gaard must be a stranger to the country.

He was certainly a member of Bram's gang, and the object the gang had in using him thus was certainly to scare people away from their rendezvous. That seemed to indicate that the gang had deep-laid plans for more depredations such as the bank robbery and the ruin of the great Loop K.

As he pondered Tod took to weighing the stones in his hand. The moon gave enough light now so that the up-trail to the place of hiding used by the gang was quite visible. He was sure he would be able to see the ghost rider should he again take up his station there. And as he moved the stones about an idea came to him with sudden forcefulness. For twenty minutes he was busy. They were of a size that suited his purpose admirably, those stones. He made a neat pile of them directly across the narrow trail that the ghost rider used.

Then, instead of remaining to hope for results, he worked his way rapidly toward the Salvation end of Spook Hollow. He had not forgotten that Nan had left him with the idea of riding to town and talking with Slim. It was reasonable to think that Slim would deliver to her there the message he had planned delivering at the ranch before they were arrested.

Part of that message was that Tod would go to the entrance to Spook Hollow regularly in order to meet any who might come there with word from Nan. It was in his mind that the beating he had given Trop, and the fact that he had taken the man's horse and the money which would serve as evidence against the gang, might have brought about a showdown on Goud's part that would work harm to Rogers and Nan.

He gained the far end of the place, and tried to detect some presence. After a considerable wait he loosened a small stone and flung it toward a bowlder that was particularly prominent. It struck with a sharp noise, followed by a rolling clatter. A brief second after that noise had died away another stone landed on the bowlder, and Tod's heart leaped in response. Within a brief time he had spoken to the shadowy figure of a man. The voice that answered him was that of Nog Barton.

"Nan sent me, Tod," he announced. "She wouldn't have it no other way! Trop come in an' told about your fight, and she was scared you was dyin' out on the range somewheres."

"This gang is nearin' the end o' their rope, Nog!" Tod responded with a new confidence. "I got some real whiz-bang ideas in my mind, an' I never was so glad to see anybody in my life as I am you right now!"

"It ain't hard to hear your voice, Tod!" Barton grinned. "We're missin' you a heap back there—say, Goud don't know what the devil to think, but he surely gave some dirty looks to all o' us when he learned from Trop that you was alone! We had him convinced that you had a pard that night what bent that gun over his ear!"

But Tod was paying little heed to Barton's words. He waited till the man had finished, then said sharply, "I'm plumb glad to see you! You can ride back an' tell Nan I'm fine—but before you do, there's a little job for you right here!"

"Good! A whack at this gang o' Bram's?" Nog was eager indeed at the thought of such a delicacy.

"Not exactly, Nog. What you're goin' to do is to stay right here for thirty minutes. Then you're goin' to get on your hoss an' ride into Spook Hollow. Come along whistlin' like you was scared to death, but not tellin' yourself about it, see?

"And about the time you get near the

waterfall a ghost will appear and his face will light up—"

"The hell yuh say!" Barton gasped. "I'll fight my own kind! I been hearin' about these speerites out here. It's a damn lonely place, an' I never did have no use fer dead gents."

"Bunk!" Tod snapped. "You ain't scared, Nog?"

"Who—me? Scared? I should say not. But my knees is."

"You ride in, Nog. When this ghost appears I won't be more'n three feet away. I want you to sit tight for five seconds after he shows up; then I want you to bellow like you was scared stiff, wheel your hoss, and ride back for here as fast as you can. When you get here, pull up an' wait for me. You'll do it?"

"Shore! I'll do it, awright. But, Tod, I'm tellin' you this: the three things a gent can't tangle with safety is rattlers, women an' ghosts. We're headin' fer trouble, an' the only part about your scheme I like is ridin' like hell for here arter I meet up with this ha'nt!"

Tod laughed softly and turned back into Spook Hollow. He was wonderfully elated. That pile of stones across the trail meant everything to him. At last he could come to grips with things that hitherto had been intangible.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GHOST RIDES.

ONCE again Tod took up his watch at the foot of the trail down into the Hollow. In all his plans there was but one weakness in so far as immediate events were concerned. In case the ghost decided to remain at the higher point on the trail and show himself to Nog from that angle, then Tod might well be rendered powerless. However, he considered that a slight chance in that the rider had come all the way into the Hollow before.

Everything else he considered satisfactory. All that Nog need do was exactly what Tod had told him to do. By calling out in fear and dashing away through the Hollow after he had seen the ghost he would make others believe that he, like those frightened before, had fallen for the game. His cry and the clatter of hoofs as his horse fled back toward Salvation would make those higher up at the rendezvous believe that all was well with their ghost.

The light was sufficient so that the pile of stones across the trail would be visible to the horse the ghost rode, but not strong enough to show itself clearly to the mounted man. It was at a point just before the horse reached the barricade that Tod crouched in waiting.

Soon the sound of hoofs in the distance rang through the place, and Tod knew that Nog was on his way. The shrill whistle so often affected by a lonely and frightened man sent its piercing wail through the night. Nog was riding as rapidly as seemed reasonable through the ravine.

Almost instantly there came sounds of commotion above Tod. He waited, his heart seeming to stand still, until once again he heard the soft, ponderous thud of the muffled hoofs. Fate had treated him kindly, for the ghost was coming down the trail. It was almost ghastly the way that massive figure would appear from the shadows. A breath, a slight creak, then at one's very side stood a horse and rider! The hoofs were muffled well, indeed.

Nog was perhaps a hundred yards away when the shadowy thing appeared at Tod's side. Once again the horse instinctively shied away, but a muttered curse from the ghost quickly quieted it. Horse and rider were at the stone pile now, and the animal stopped short. Tod crouched not three feet away. From a constantly decreasing distance came the plaintive notes of the whistle.

The ghost tried to urge his horse a little ahead, but the beast faltered, and doubtless because the time for action was at hand the man did nothing more than mutter an almost inaudible curse. On came Nog, Tod crouching in the pass, and the ghostly rider timing the propitious moment for his appearance.

Suddenly that soft, resonant laugh swept forth. Tod could see now that its sepulchral note was nothing more than the in-

stantaneous echoes the high walls flung back into the cañon. The ghost laughed long and low, and the sound of Nog's progress ceased as did the whistle, the latter trailing off into a wheeze so realistically that Tod was sure all his friend's fear was not simulated.

It was a ghastly thing, that laugh! And it paved the way in the terror of strangers for that more staggering thing which came with sight of the hideous, gleaming face. As Tod watched, a gleaming luminosity swept over the ghost's features. The face was ghastly, and the pallor of it served to lend the eyes more or less the appearance of great holes in a skull. Once more the laugh swept forth, and Nog, this time dead certain that that upon which he gazed was really a ghost, emitted a bawl of fright that set his horse to dancing madly.

Then he wheeled, and the animal he rode needed no urging to speed down the cañon over the trail they had covered. With that the laugh came again, and it seemed to Tod that there was imbedded in it a note of satisfaction. Finally the luminosity of the face vanished, and there remained before him only the hulking shadow of man and horse. The effect was horrible, as Tod could attest from his first meeting with the thing.

But this time he did not delay. The coming of that lighted face had galvanized him into action. His hand crept into his shirt front, and from there he withdrew the spotlight that he had secured from Trop's saddlebag. With this in his left hand and his gun in his right he slipped to the rider's side.

Once again a stream of light swept the face. The ghost recoiled in amazement, his horse shying a little despite the narrowness of the trail and the low pile of stones at its forefeet.

"Don't wiggle a whisker, ghost!" Tod snapped. "This here is a final show-down, an' I'll blow you to hell in a fur-lined bucket if you make a sound!"

"Who the hell—" It was a most unghostlike utterance, and upon hearing it Tod smiled a little. However, there was no time to be wasted. The clatter of Nog's flight might easily serve to keep those above in ignorance of the trap into which their ghost had walked, but time was still a vital element.

"Know what we're goin' to do, ghost?" Tod whispered. "You an' me are goin' to ride double right into town! An' we're startin' now. There's a pile o' stones ahead o' you, an' you wanna step your hoss right careful over 'em. I'm climbin' on behind, an' we ride for the Salvation trail. Don't get me wrong; I'll salivate you plenty if you make a tricky move!"

Because there was absolutely nothing else that he could do, the rider obeyed. Tod leaped onto the horse's back and pressed the muzzle of his gun hard against the man's side. The horse stepped gingerly over the barricade Tod had erected to keep the rider just where he wanted him; then they started silently down the Hollow on the trail of Nog.

"First time I ever rode with a real ha'nt!" Tod grunted mockingly. "You gents has a lot to explain, an' you're goin' to start the ball a-rollin'. How'd you make yourself to look so much like this dead gent, Gaard, Mr. Ghost?"

But the helpless rider failed to make any retort, and the soft laugh that rang out through the Hollow this time was that of Tod. They had nearly gained the place where Nog was to wait when lights flashed back on the hidden trail where Tod had captured the ghost. An owl hooted twice, and when there came no answer the lights flashed more often.

"Answer that signal, you!" Tod ordered the rider, and the willingness with which the man complied showed him at once that he had guessed wrong. That, instead of delaying the pursuit which threatened to follow, the answer, coming from where it did, was certain to speed it. With that thought in mind Tod himself kicked the flanks of the big horse they rode, and the animal hit a faster pace, its hoofs making scarcely a sound that Tod himself could hear.

Nog was waiting, his voice lowered and tense, his fright still showing to be a very real affair.

"Hit the dirt with us, Nog," Tod snapped. "I got this here ghost ridin'

ahead o' me with a gun in his ribs. If you hear a shot you'll know he got foolish."

"My Lawd! What was that thing, Tod?" Nog grumbled. "I was expectin' it to show up all the time, but when she popped that laugh onto me an' then slung a mug like the moon—wow!"

Behind them sounded the clatter of hoofs, and the horses were being pushed to a break-neck pace over the rough going.

"They're comin' Nog!" Tod snapped. "This critter has its feet muffled so's they can't follow by sound, but they'll hear you, an' I don't think they'll follow 'cause all they want is their fine ghost back."

"Lawd knows they kin have him fer all o' me!" Nog growled.

"You better hit fer Willow Slip, an' I'll ride along with you, Nog," Tod ordered. "Make all the time you know how, an' if it comes to close quarters, don't be afraid o' shootin' anybody in this gang. There's reasons enough, an' we gotta make this a fight to the finish now it's started rollin'!"

Through a dangerous, sliding, stumbling race they gained the lower Liberty trail with the men behind them gaining because of their better knowledge of the trail and the fact that Tod was riding double. The clouds were gathering overhead though, and visibility was low. Tod had few fears once they left the hard trail and struck off directly through the muffling dust of the open prairie.

They rode for a time toward Salvation as though that was their destination. This, Tod thought, might serve to make the gang rush past them after they had left the trail. The men behind, he knew, would see ruin in letting their ghost get into the town, and would ride hard to overtake the quarry before that might happen.

When they turned sharply and cut for the slip, Tod soon saw that the muffled hoofs were more of a liability than an asset. The horse did the best it could under constant urging, but its speed was materially reduced by the clumsy footing it had. However, the chasing gang did exactly what Tod had imagined they would. While the fleeing riders dashed for the Slip, a thunder of hoofs behind them showed that the gang was still racing toward the town.

But Tod would permit of no slackening of their own speed. Every stride counted, and if his plan was to have a chance to win he and Nog must reach Willow Slip where they could offer a defense against the gang attack.

And as it happened, he was proven right. The hard-ridden horses slid down into the protecting banks of Willow Slip just as the first sounds of pursuit sounded again behind them. Looking back, Tod could see in the distance the occasional flashing of spot lights as members of the gang used them to catch their trail.

"They can't miss out on trailin' us," he muttered. "This hoss with the wrapped feet must leave a trail like an elephant!"

"As long as there ain't no more ghosts among 'em," Nog announced evenly, "they can't git here too soon fer me!"

"Throw your rope off'n that saddle," he ordered tersely. "Pull this maverick's arms around behind him an' hog-tie 'im plenty! Just as soon as that's done, Nog, you start hell-bent for the ranch an' rouse out the boys!"

As he spoke, he snapped on the flash light and trained its ray upon the features of the man who had posed as a ghost. The same weird luminosity glared back at them, and Nog shuddered a little despite the grumbling protests that came from the flour-covered lips.

"Ain't he a sweet-lookin' mug?" he grunted. But he did not let the words interfere with his speed in carrying out Tod's instructions. In a flash, the erstwhile ghost had been snugly trussed up and gagged with the neckerchief which Nog wore. And Tod was possessed of a second gun.

"Now ride, Nog!" Tod snapped. "An' believe me, I mean ride! There may be half a dozen o' them gents comin' here. I'll hold 'em off as long as I can, but rouse out the boys an' hustle like hell both ways!"

Nog was on the point of demurring, but seemed to see finally that one of them had to go on the ride for help. He swung again into his saddle, and with scarcely a word, he thundered up over the sandy bank and started his quirt to work on the flank of his pony.

Tod, after a flashing inspection in which

the light again served his purpose, snapped the catch that plunged the Slip in darkness, and darted up the bank to face the onrushing riders. He settled himself firmly, spreading his cartridge belt out before him for ease of reloading, and with jaws clenched and eyes gleaming awaited the attack.

"A darn sight diff'rent than the last time I stretched out in this nice little Slip," was the thought that came to him as the muffled thunder of hoofs grew louder and louder. "But these thugs are goin' to walk into a right powerful snack o' slugs before they carry me an' this ghost gent outa here!"

He had no thought other than that he was fighting for John Rogers and for Nan. Here in the silence of Willow Slip, in the fitful light of a clouded moon, must be settled the issues which meant his and their happiness. No matter what the secret might be, no matter how dire the results that Bram Goud might effect, now was the time in which Tod determined to make his last stand against the forces arrayed against him.

Nog's thundering horse had vanished ffom his hearing, and he knew the mad ride his friend would take. He had but to hold these men at bay for something over an hour until help would come, help that would sweep such a crew before it as wind lashes the dust of the plains! The boys at the Loop K would fight with the pent-up angers and emotions of months! This was the one thing for which they had waited.

With the thought of that hour-of-death combat, Tod buried his knees firmly, found the ideal rest for his right elbow, and trained his weapons as though in practice.

The rush of hoofs stopped some little distance from the Slip. In the ensuing silence Tod could catch a vagrant word here and there, and assumed that Trop, by reason of his meeting here with Goud, knew the lay of the Slip and was explaining it to his cohorts. The men sounded excited, much as though they were not sure that Tod was in the Slip, but dared not either ride by it or approach it without due preparation and caution.

Finally, two of them drew close, and Trop's voice called out:

"We'll give you-all a chance!" he cried. "Holler out an' surrender, or we'll wade in on you an' blast you plenty!"

For a second, Tod held his silence. Then it seemed that sound of that hated voice spurred him to heights of courage and determination that would not be brooked. He trained his revolver in the direction of the voice and fired. Immediately he ducked behind the bank, but not too soon to hear a harsh curse as his bullet found lodging in human flesh.

Then came a harsh order to close in and show those in the Slip no quarter. The battle was on.

CHAPTER XIX.

GUN FANNING.

A VERITABLE hail of bullets spattered against the bank of Willow Slip in response to Tod's shot. Men shouted in the shadows back of the trees, and the silence of the night was torn asunder by a combination of rattling shots and raucous shouts and curses.

When next Tod peered over the top of the bank at a point well away from that at which he had originally fired, the moon had cleared enough so that he caught sight of moving forms some thirty or forty yards away. He cut loose with both guns, and the intent behind the effort was as deadly as the bullets themselves. One of the forms dropped to earth and lay still. The other dodged, then dropped low and returned the shots.

The precarious nature of his situation was ably borne in upon Tod when he saw that the bank where he had lain was fairly riddled with bullets a fleeting second after he had dropped low and darted back to his original place. By working fast he was able to reach that point and take aim once more before the others had finished their firing.

Once again he got results. There came an agonized wail in answer to his first shot, and a soft grunt that followed his second. While he was there he reloaded from the belt stretched on the sand, then moved farther down and once more peered over the bank. The shots of the others were undergoing a strange lull, and from that

fact Tod deduced that they were deploying and planned surrounding the Slip, gaining the other bank from where they could fire from both sides.

Darting back, he recovered his cartridge belt and managed to drag the prisoner with him to the cover of the trees that such a short time before had shaded Nan and himself. Instead of soft words of love the Slip was now filled with winged death! From that vantage point, Tod kept a close watch on the banks a short distance away.

Uppermost in his mind was the thought of stalling for time. Even as he fought off these gangsters, Nog was pounding over the plains and would soon rouse out the riders of the Loop K. Tod had no fear for the ultimate results once those hardy lads arrived!

Therefore he played a waiting game, and made no attempt to frustrate the enveloping movement he was sure the enemy was making. If their silence served to put him in doubt, he thought his own would have a tendency to slow down their attack. Every time he fired from one place it was possible for several of the attackers to creep closer from different angles.

Among the trees he had a big advantage. There the darkness was supreme, and the few trees covered so small an area that he was sure he could keep others from gaining that cover unless they rushed onward in a body. If they cared to chance that, he decided, the price they paid for victory would be a dear one!

Far down the bank came a sliding sound, and without hesitation Tod fired at it. This time he heard no sound that would indicate accuracy of aim, but two shots flew into the trees with a spiteful hum that seemed to cling to the air like a faint odor. As a matter of precaution rather than a direst offensive, Tod blazed away in machine-gun style with both guns. He trained them along the bottom of the banks leading into the Slip, and two or three curses, coupled with another of those smothered grunts showed him that the gang had gained the Slip itself, and that fighting must be at close quarters.

The volley that whipped through the trees in answer to his own showed him that at least four or five men still remained of the attackers. His execution thus far had been practically nil, he thought. With the bullets snapping twigs about him, ricochetting off trees, and whining through the night like voluble comets, Tod again reloaded. Then he hooked each of the guns over his trigger finger, and whirled them like a pinwheel, that the air might cool them.

A few seconds later he fired once more at a scraping sound no great distance away. He had braced himself behind a tree, and his shooting was done around the trunk. In response to his shot a bullet bit deep into the tree that shielded him, so deep that he clearly felt the shock of impact. He fired back at the flash, but knew that he was too late to do harm.

For a few moments more there was silence again; then Tod blasted forth another sweeping volley, that riddled the Hollow about knee high. That, he thought, would drive men back whether they were moving erectly or slinking along the ground, creeping in a crouched posture. Once more he fanned his guns as he reloaded them.

The Slip was heavy with the acrid, hot odor of burned gun powder. The silence of the night had been rent until distant echoes of the shooting reverberated through the shallow place and seemed to cast a spell of death-like stillness over the trees. It seemed to have become the order of battle to shoot at the slighest movement.

Suddenly the clouds over the face of the moon broke again. It was a mighty advantage for Tod, and he did not hesitate to avail himself of it. His guns barked three times, and they were not random shots. Once again one of the shadowy figures in the Slip sprawled grotesquely over the ground, and one other toppled, lay still for a brief second, then crawled slowly back from the trees.

After that there was prolonged inactivity. Occasionally sounds reached Tod's ears, but they were for the most the stamping of horses' hoofs or the stray nicker of an animal without a rider, and nervous because of the continued shooting. Obviously the attackers had some other plan in mind, and Tod shifted his position without losing the vantage point of the trees.

"Hey, you, down there!" a voice called suddenly, and Tod recognized again the man Trop. He knew a sense of disappointment that none of his shots had dealt summarily with that particular villain. He made no pretense of answering the hail, and in a moment it was repeated:

"Speak up, you damn fool! We got you cornered there tighter'n a rat in a trap! Tell us who you are, an' mebbe we can make a dicker!"

Tod was pretty certain that they had surmised who he was because of the fight he had had with Trop so near the rendezvous. This, then, was a scheme on the part of the attackers to attract his attention from some flanking movement that would quickly engulf him when the hour struck.

"I'm Santa Claus!" he bellowed back at them, "an' here's a little gift for you!" He fired in the general direction whence Trop's voice sounded.

"It's that damn meddlin' cow-puncher, just like I guessed!" Trop announced to the others. "It's the fellah that Bram has been tryin' to salivate since Napoleon first enlisted. We got 'im now! There ain't any sense in our walkin' in on him; we'll wait till mornin' and git 'im then. Spread out, and anybody that comes near this place afore daylight, shoo 'em off plenty!"

The words were a godsend to Tod. He could not repress an inward chuckle at the thought of this band of night riders shooing off such an aggregation of sure death as the Loop K boys would be. He had gained his point, he knew; had kept these attackers back long enough to convince them that they could not smoke him out till daylight, and thus assured the success of his plans. It remained only for Nog to complete that ride, and the Bram Goud gang would taste a whipping that would stay by them for many a day!

So he settled himself to wait. As an extra precaution he crept once more to his prisoner, who still lay where Tod had left him after dragging him from the Slip itself to the shelter of the trees. The man's bonds were intact, and Tod gave them a final testing to be sure that they had not loosened. As he did so the fallen "ghost" muttered something behind his gag, and Tod gave him a friendly nudge with the toe of his boot.

Down at the far end of the Slip, but over the bank and out of pistol shot danger, the attackers seemed to have gathered. They settled themselves to await the coming of day, and Tod could hear their muffled voices as they talked and smell the odor of tobacco as they indulged themselves in cigarettes. After half an hour had slowly dragged by a sense of complacency swept over him.

He tried to imagine the furor the arrival of the Loop K riders would create. They were due in another half hour, and, if Tod knew their temper, these bandits had a long, hard chase ahead of them before they could shake that angry crowd. He smiled as he thought of how they were playing directly into his hands.

Yet, he thought, it was not unreasonable in a sense. They probably thought that he had escaped down the other side of the range after his fight with Trop, and had ridden into Spook Hollow as a stranger would have. Then, when their ghost attacked him, he had attacked the ghost and captured him! The thought that more than just one rider had been in the Hollow doubtless had not occurred to them at all, probably.

Therefore they had no thought that another was even then speeding toward them at the head of a determined band of straight-shooting cowboys. When that Loop K band dropped into the picture Trop and his crew would find themselves facing an affair such as they had never tasted before, Tod thought. He was willing to wait.

And then something attracted him from the bank over his head, and directly back of his position in the trees. He whirled to investigate, but even as he did so there came a clattering of sand and gravel, and two forms, like indistinct shadows, bore down toward him. He fired with both guns, and one of the men fell. The other closed in, struck Tod a stunning blow on the face with his clenched fist, and shouted for help.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

Moon of the Great Wind

By FLORIA HOWE BRUESS

"I'M leaving day after to-morrow, Wilson; better come back with me. You've been away from civilization long enough—" Ford paused and laid his hand affectionately on the younger man's shoulder.

Wilson stared at his friend moodily.

"Can't do it, Ford," he began.

"Do you lack money? I'll see you back to Montreal," Ford said eagerly.

"Thanks," Wilson's voice was curt, "but I have plenty of money. I can't go, that's all, old chap."

Ford gazed earnestly at his friend.

"Are you going to tell me that this country has *got* you?" he asked incredulously. "How you could live in this God-forsaken wilderness—"

"God-forsaken?" Wilson broke in sharply. "I never knew what peace and contentment were, until I came to this northland. You know what I was heading for in Montreal, Ford. A drunkard's grave had its jaws open just waiting for me to fall in. I was a shame to my family; a shame to myself."

Wilson's voice fell low; he paused.

"Are you afraid drink will get you again if you return to the old life?" his friend asked quietly.

Paul Wilson's blond head went up. The blue eyes grew cold.

"No," he said, "that's out for me. Whisky can never mean anything to me again. The life out here is too clean, too square, too big for sordid things—I have lost all appetite for it."

"Then what keeps you from going back with me, Paul?" Ford broke in quickly. "I've seen a wistfulness in your eyes when I've talked to you of the family, the old crowd, the old haunts. You can't tell me you are so utterly satisfied here."

His keen eyes watched the restless pacing of his friend.

"Paul," he said, finally, "it isn't the Indian girl Nee-nah?"

"My wife, Mrs. Wilson, you mean, Ford?" Paul's eyes and voice held a steel-like quality. As his friend remained silent he went on: "You remember I told you the mission priest here married us, according to our faith—"

"*Our* faith!" Ford ejaculated.

"Yes, Nee-nah was taught Christianity at the mission school, when she learned

English. We had a Christian marriage as well as an Indian marriage, for after the priest's ceremony in the presence of Nee-nah's father, I wrapped my blanket around the girl as she came under it."

Ford's brain was busy as he scratched a match for his pipe. He was slow in getting the tobacco going to his satisfaction.

"So," he said, finally, a note of contempt in his voice, "you want to stay here and live as a squaw-man—"

Wilson wheeled, facing his friend tensely.

"I won't hear that even from *you*—Ford." His voice was metallic. "You have seen Nee-nah, talked with her, lived at our lodge for three days, what have you to say about her?"

Ford hesitated. "She is young, very beautiful, speaks pretty fair English, has pretty manners, adores you, my boy—but—she's an Indian."

"History has never called Captain Smith a 'squaw man' yet Pocahontas was his wife." Paul's voice was very quiet.

"She was the daughter of a great chief—" began Ford.

"And Nee-nah's father is Matonob-bee, a chief of the Chipewyan's—"

"Yes, I know that, Paul, but this isn't the seventeenth century; times have changed."

"Human nature does not change." Paul spoke doggedly. "And Nee-nah's emotions are the same as ours. Her skin is a natural red; not a painted red and white, as was the woman's in Montreal who told me to go to the devil by whichever route suited me."

Silence fell between the men; each was busy with his own thoughts. After a time, Paul rose, pulled on his great fur coat.

"This is good-by, old top. It's been rippin' to see you again. Tell the folks back home that I'm well, and the best trapper in the north."

There was a suspicion of mist in the older man's eyes, as he wrung his friend's hand. "I don't leave until Thursday. If you change your mind."

Paul shook his head. "I won't get down to the post again, Ford, and you will be too busy finishing up the company's business to get out to the lodge, so this is good-by."

Ford went outside with him, watched him unblanket his dog team; sleek, silver-gray dogs with bushy tails arched over their backs, filling the air with their shrill yelps. It was fifteen miles from the Old Lake post to the forest lodge, and Paul snapped his long whip over the backs of his dogs.

He came up James Lake—the lake's flat breast and dead calm face lay ice-bound, the sledding easier for the dogs than the hill route. He was anxious to get back before night fell, for the sky had lost its vivid deep blue, and bent its gray face on the white world beneath. Its sullen gray was the abode of storms that but awaited their hour.

"Snow, a blizzard, will strike to-morrow," the man thought.

With the post left behind, it seemed to him he was in the silence and mystery of a lost world. Was it because of his friend's words that the lonely grandeur of the scene around him seemed to shrink his soul, and cause his nerves to quiver as he sped along under the shadow of the measureless sky?

In the north sky a bow of silvery sheen was forming. As the dusk fell, its sheen deepened. It was the aurora, the harbinger of the deadly cold. A silvery bow, but it held only the promise of death.

The massive forest trees took on a spectral look. Shifting, changing shadows were making human sight a mockery. The hills lay in a gripping silence, a menacing hush. Only the croak of the moose-bird sounded.

"The lights are beginning, no, are shining now on the streets of Montreal," Paul thought. "Gad, much as I enjoyed seeing old Ford, I wish he had not come. He has stirred too many old memories; memories that have lain dormant, sleeping."

He spoke aloud.

"Yes, Nee-nah's skin is not white, but her soul is whiter than Madge Carrol's, her heart is clean, her love is absolute."

His thoughts were of the Indian girl. Born in a Hudson's Bay post, her hands knew the ache of the northland's cold, and the touch of a rifle that could kill as well as any man. They could hold the skinning knife, they could paddle a canoe, swift as the racing current itself, and they could be tenderly soft.

As the dogs sped on through the deepening dusk, he thought of the girl's young body, standing like a slender birch; of the two long braids of soft black hair hanging to her knees, of the wide velvety shy eyes, of the rich rose in her cheeks and lips. She had a step as fleet and as graceful as a deer, she sat a horse with the unconscious skill of her ancestry.

But the man's face darkened and his eyes narrowed.

A light flickered through the tall, motionless trees, just as the blackness of night fell on the icy world. The dogs knew that beacon, and needed no guiding or word.

They swung from the lake to a small clearing and brought up abruptly in front of the long, log-built cabin. The crunch of the sled's runners on the crusty snow, and the light blazed a trail from the opened door.

"How!" was Nee-nah's soft-voiced welcome.

"I'll be in after I take care of the dogs," Paul said.

The girl closed the door quietly and stood leaning against the latch, wide-eyed, staring at the burning log in the big stone fireplace.

It had come! For the first time in their three years of marriage he had failed to rush into the lodge and sweep the girl up in his arms. Always had he done that in returning from a trip to the post; the dogs were attended to later. To-night, they came first.

Nee-nah's firm round breast rose sharply. After a motionless minute, she moved to the table set by the stone hearth. She brought the food, steaming, savory from the kitchen that adjoined the main room.

Caribou stew with pearl white onions and dried corn in its rich fragrant gravy. A platter of corn cakes and fluffy white biscuits accompanied the big bowl. She filled the cups with a strong clear tea.

Paul came in through the kitchen door; his was the only cabin in those hills that had a kitchen. He had built it on, for he disliked the cooking carried on in the living quarters—and the girl heard him splashing the melted snow water as he bathed face and hands. Her hands clenched suddenly as she stood waiting.

"Supper ready? I'm as hungry as a timber wolf." He sank in his chair, filled his plate and began eating.

The girl's appetite had fled, but her pride was in arms; quietly, she made a pretense at the food before her. Often they had eaten in silence; but heretofore, that silence had been one of comradeship, understanding, often physical fatigue after a long day on snowshoes, hauling back the sled loaded with prime pelts. To-night the silence was strained, awkward.

The meal ended. Paul sat in the deep, bearskin-lined chair puffing on his pipe as Nee-nah moved noiselessly to the little kitchen, carrying the soiled plates.

Paul's eyes swept the room. Bright and cheery it was in the flickering fire and candlelight. Heads of bear and wolf, antlers of caribou and moose hung between big pipe racks, and horn gun-racks on the log walls.

Pelts of bear, wolf and lynx covered the floor, soft, deep and warm for the feet. A shelf of books ran along one side, books thumbed and worn, friends of many an hour during the northern nights.

He glanced at the wide deep couch, the big table, the low comfortable chairs and closed his eyes, visioning his old home in Montreal. He opened his eyes, gazed around again, and a feeling of disgust seized him, at the sight of the rude, primitive cabin.

As Nee-nah entered the room after the completion of her kitchen work, he moved restlessly.

"I'm tired; turning in, Running-Water," he said.

The rose faded from Nee-nah's cheeks, bringing the clear bronze out strongly. She stared after him, with terrified eyes.

"Running-Water!" He had used her Indian name. He had measured the gulf between the white and the red!

When he had first loved her, he had asked the equivalent to her name "Nee-nah." She had told him. Running-Water was the meaning, and he had said earnestly: "Nee-nah always to me, little girl, for your heart and soul are as white as mine. You are no longer Indian, but my wife."

The words he had just spoken returned

her to her tribe. She lay wide-eyed all night, a grim hand clutching her heart, as she listened to the even breathing of the sleeping man.

II.

AFTER breakfast the following morning, they made ready to go down the line of traps.

"An Indian girl is better in one respect than a white," thought Paul as their snowshoes slid over the crusty surface of the snow, "for she doesn't ask the questions the white girl would be firing at me."

A dull pity shook him as he saw the girl's heavy eyes, and noticed the little droop in her splendid young figure, then the words of his friend would return to him searing his brain as a white-hot iron. "Squaw-man!"

But a question had been burning, hot, on Nee-nah's lips; at last she voiced it.

"Mr. Ford, he have gone?"

Her instinct, an instinct of the wild had told her it was her man's friend who had sown the seed of discontent, who had lighted the fire that lay smoldering in her man's breast. This friend from the life beyond—

"He leaves to-morrow," Paul answered, casting a sidelong look at the girl's somber face. "And he wants me to go with him. He says my place is home. This northland is for half-breeds and—Indians—"

The girl quivered. For a second, her great dark eyes blazed.

They went down the line of traps in silence. Thick prime pelts of lynx, wolf and marten; the harvest was rich.

Throwing the frozen carcasses on the sled they rubbed their bare hands with fresh deer fat to kill the man scent; reset and concealed the traps, smoothed the broken crust of snow, went on to the next.

"After my check for that last bale of furs comes from the company I'm going, Running-Water. The lodge and everything in it is yours." He spoke feverishly.

"Better get it over with," he thought.

"There is white flour and yellow meal to last till spring," he went on. "Quantities of berries you dried last summer. The storehouse is filled with smoked caribou and deer quarters and dried fish as you know. All the pelts we get until I leave are yours."

He was eager in his peace offering and every word fell like a hammer blow on the girl's heart, but she made no sign.

"I'll snowshoe to the post, and the dogs are yours, too," Paul continued with another side glance at the girl's immobile face.

Before dusk they returned; the sled heavy with its precious weight of furs.

After supper Paul turned in. The cold had increased under a gale that whipped the tall trees into an incessant artillery. The forest monarchs split asunder under the sledge-hammer blows of gale and ice; their long, gaunt, icy arms broke and fell in a fusillade of sound.

When the night was well spent, and Paul was sleeping heavily, Nee-nah rose. Silent as one of the shadows the flickering firelight cast in the room she dressed. With hands clasped to her breast, she stood gazing at the sleeping man, then turned and stole from the house.

The noise in the great forest deadened the sound of the dogs as she moved among them, picking out the four huskies that were her own. She uncovered her own sled, hitched the dogs swiftly.

Arranging the bag of food and her rifle in its skin case on the buffalo rug, she sat on the sled, the dogs fell into a swift trot and the cabin was left behind.

III.

WITH wide, burning eyes, the girl gazed at her father. "I have returned to the home of my people," she said slowly in the Chipewyan tongue. "The camp fire of the white man has died; it no longer warms the heart of Running Water. The hunter no longer returns from the hills to his lodge. He passes on to the great cities.

"There are no moose trails in the land where he will live, but he cares not; his hunting spear is broken. The deer are as the leaves of the forest, yet he will track them no more. The feet of the white hunter never grew weary on the trail—soon those feet will walk the streets of great cities. The hills will know him no more, the valleys will smile not as he passes."

The girl paused. She shook in a convulsive sob. The voice of her mother rose, as the voice of a were-wolf. Rocking back and forth on her heels Nee-nah strove to repress the agony eating at her heart.

"When does the white hunter leave?" her father, Matonob-bee, asked.

"The sun will rise and set seven times. Seven sleeps will pass. I could have stayed in his lodge, but—" she made a fierce gesture with her brown supple hands, "the fire of his love lies in ashes. Let the daughter of the tribal chief Matonob-bee crawl into a fox hole and die. The sun has set for her; the moon will not rise again."

Matonob-bee gazed at his daughter's grief-stricken face. Silently, he rose and left the room.

For two days and nights Nee-nah lay with her face to the log wall. She thrust away the food her mother brought her. A blizzard raged and shrieked its voice over the valley where lay the Indian camp.

Up in the hills it tore at the long low cabin and bit at the twisting log on the great stone hearth. When the house would shake under its mighty blast, Paul Wilson would raise his haggard eyes to the glazed, ice-coated window.

Wandering wolf packs, lean with hunger, were high lords over the frozen forest. Their long howl was heard day and night, as they roamed, exacting their ancient rights, levying their tribute of blood upon all the weaker creatures of the snowy waste.

"I would speak with Matonob-bee," Nee-nah said on the afternoon of the third day since her return.

Her mother's eyes grew beady.

"He has gone over the snowy trail that leads to the white hunter's lodge," she said. "Two of our young men have gone with him. When he returns he will bring you the white man's heart, cut from his breast; then will Running Water's lips smile; again her eyes shall glow, and happiness will take its home in her heart."

A low gasp broke from Nee-nah's twisting lips, but her mother misread the sound.

"Fear not," she said softly. "Has love and—hate—made my daughter's heart timid and fluttering as the hare's? The white chief at the post will never know. Matonob-bee will cover the deed as the snow covers the earth, as the darkness hides the sun—"

"How?" the girl breathed.

"When the heart is torn from his breast, then shall Matonob-bee burn the white hunter's lodge, and all shall be ashes—but first, will he take the food and the furs," she added, a cunning smile on her impassive face.

Nee-nah rose swiftly to her feet.

"When did they leave?" she asked, her voice low and soft.

"Between high sun and the sunset hour. When the wind raised his mighty voice and slew the great hemlock—"

Rapidly Nee-nah thought. The crash of that falling tree had been about two o'clock.

"Did they use my dogs?" Her eyes were feverishly bright as though fed by an inner flame.

"No, they drove their own," the woman answered.

"I go." Nee-nah sprang to her bear-skin coat and hood.

The woman caught the girl's wrists in a fierce grasp.

"You return to cringe like a dog at his master's feet? To lick up the offal he has cast away? He scorns the chieftain's daughter—"

She broke off, as Nee-nah, with blazing eyes, tore her wrists loose from the woman's grasp, and raised her clenched fist as though to strike her. The woman shrank from the mad fury in the girl's eyes.

"I go," Nee-nah said between set teeth, "I go to tear that heart with my own hand, from the dwelling place where my head has lain."

The woman stared at the girl intently, then half closed her gleaming eyes in satisfaction.

"Matonob-bee wished for a son who would become a mighty hunter and bring the moose and caribou to the women's cooking pots," her voice grew sing song; dully Nee-nah listened as she strapped her leggings. "He wished for a son to spear the heavy salmon, to lead the young men in following the bear tracks; all of this has Running-Water done. And more, for now she goes in the moon of the great wind to

"I would not leave you to the wolves, faithful one," she whispered, "but I cannot release you. The spirit of the storm has laid you in the snow, yet you will await me—"

During these hours of her agony, the girl's Christian teaching was forgotten. She over whom the kindly, tired-faced little priest had labored many an hour, had unconsciously reverted to her childhood faith, the belief of her forbears.

The dogs missed their powerful leader, and the speed slackened.

Nee-nah peered ahead anxiously. There was a bog in this region, a treacherous thing fed by some strange, unknown warm undercurrent, or spring. Often she had seen it and knew its sucking terror, for whitened bones lay on its surface, and a rifle barrel protruded through the mud.

A traveler had gone in unawares. The Indians had named it Hella-Henna (troubled pool), and had a superstitious awe regarding it. Carefully she felt her course, for the hard-crusted snow concealed its presence. Beneath that crust the thick mud awaited the unwary.

She had purposely come this way, for it was a shorter route. She knew the Indians invariably went around that point when traveling at night, but she knew she must take the chance if she were to reach her lodge before her father and the young men.

Warily she guided the dogs, her nerves taut with suspense. Some impulse made her strap her rifle to her back. She looked narrowly at the trees on which the Indians had blazed the warning and direction of the bog, but they stood alike, clothed in ice and snow, some larger, some of smaller growth. Many of them had stood through the centuries, mute witnesses of primitive tragedy.

She heard the howl of the pack, relentless, pursuing, their famine unsatisfied.

"Others have heard the food howl and have joined them," she thought grimly.

Her caution was contagious, the dogs' instinct became aroused and they felt their way carefully, going at a slow trot.

"I have skirted it safely," the girl thought, as she urged the dogs on to faster speed.

Suddenly there was a crunch in the hard snow. The lead dog went down. The abrasion widened, sucking in the startled animals. In a flash of terror Nee-nah saw the dogs held helplessly in the gripping mud of the bog.

The sled was sinking. She felt the ooze on her feet. She swept a swift glance behind. The snowy crust had broken in all directions and widened under the weight of the dogs and sled.

She measured the distance and knew she could not make the jump. The dogs were sinking rapidly, and their shrill yelps of terror rang through the forest. They were trying desperately to swim, for their front paws beat the air.

With heavy, somber eyes Nee-nah watched them. Now only their necks and heads were visible. Slowly they sank. Their shrill barks were stilled.

Nee-nah was standing in the clutching mud, and realized suddenly she must act, or she would follow the dogs.

A long, gaunt, ice-laden branch of a spruce stretched above her. The tree stood near the bog, and if she could grasp that limb she could go over it to safety.

Cautiously she lifted one foot. It tore from the mud with a gurgling sound. Yes, she could free her feet, but if she missed the tree limb she would fall into the bog. "But what matter?" she thought. "There is no other way of escape."

She crouched low, and with a catlike, powerful spring she jumped. She caught the limb. Only the strongest of trained muscles could have accomplished the feat.

Hand over hand she drew herself slowly, cautiously, eyes fixed on the death beneath her. It seemed an eternity of time to the girl until she felt her body swing against the massive tree trunk.

She fell lightly on the hard snow. Running like a deer, she skirted the treacherous place. A wild prayer rose in her heart, and suddenly she thought of the gentle little priest and his teachings.

"Oh, Great Spirit," she breathed, "God over all, the white man and the red, lend the wings of the eagle to my feet, and let the men who go before me fly as heavily as the gorged buzzard."

The howl of the wolves rose long, savage, pitiless. Behind her the gaunt bodies came. They had picked up her scent again.

Stopping to reload her rifle, she dropped to her knee, sighted the leader carefully. They were running close together, the leader slightly in advance. She emptied the .38 and reloaded swiftly.

Some of the pack went down, some dashed madly for the shelter of the great trees. Slinging her gun over her shoulders, she fell into that swift, mile eating run, head up, elbows at her sides.

IV.

THE man sunk deep in the big chair before the glowing log raised his eyes to the glazed window.

"How still it is," he murmured. "The wind has died; clear weather to-morrow."

He sighed impatiently.

"God, how I miss Nee-nah!" he continued, speaking aloud, as those who live in much solitude form a habit of doing. "Who says an Indian girl has no spunk, no pride? She's proud as Lucifer. Left without a word, took nothing save her own gun, her own sled and dogs!"

Puffing slowly on his pipe, his thoughts went back to that day three years ago, when he had stumbled, sick in mind, broken in body, into the priest's cabin that adjoins the mission. He had seen Nee-nah for the first time then. She was sitting by the table, struggling with the lessons in which the man was patiently instructing her.

Her parents lived at the post then, and the girl went daily to Father O'Neil, so anxious was she to speak English better than her family. A close bond of friendship grew between the two, for the priest recognized the uncommon quality of the girl.

She had stolen silently to a corner in the little cabin, and sat, wide eyed, motionless as Paul poured his heart out to the wisely understanding priest.

"I thought I had controlled it, father, but it got me again. I came here to escape it; thought this country and life would kill the craze. I've fought it off for months. but the torment will drive me mad—mad."

Paul's eyes narrowed as he recalled that scene.

"But I did not go mad," he said aloud. "I conquered the damn thirst—but would I, if it had not been for Nee-nah's sweet, understanding companionship?"

For when he left the little priest's cabin two weeks later Nee-nah went with him—his wife.

How she had helped him over the periods when the craze was on him. Had taken him from their cabin and forced him to follow the big game trails, deaf to his cursing, wide eyed, silent, until at night he returned, tired out with his long snowshoeing, exhausted mentally, to fall into the deep, nerve-restoring sleep.

That first summer of their marriage, when the torturing, soul-searing thirst had returned, she had spent days with him in the swift current streams, angling for the game trout, the big salmon, and under that warm sun and winelike air, with the spicy fragrance of spruce and cedar drifting on the breeze—it had passed.

"For three years I have been able to keep the stuff in the cabin and in plain sight," Paul said aloud, "and it means no more to me than snow water."

He paused, struck a match for his pipe.

"What a pal she was. What a game little sport, what an infinite patience and comprehension. How many white women would have shown the loyalty, the utter devotion, that Nee-nah has given me? Damn few!"

He laid his pipe on the hearth, and, sinking deeper in his chair, he threw his head back against the deep fur. Idle thoughts took on the shape of dreams. His breathing deepened as his eyes closed.

Suddenly he stiffened as the cautious noise came to him. His narrowed eyes raised to his shotgun standing against the log wall near the hearth. He debated whether to chance the rush for it.

"If I am covered," he thought, "the sneak in the kitchen will get me before I reach it. If I sit quietly, I'll have a chance."

He knew some enemy had entered the

cabin through the narrow kitchen door. The entrance had been of too stealthy a nature to admit the possibility of its being a trapper, for the jingle of the dogs' bells would have been heard.

The wind had died; the outside world was still and brooding. Through its tomblike silence he would have heard a sled's runners or the crunch of snowshoes on the hard snow as the traveler approached the cabin.

There had been no sound. No shrill bark of dogs, yet a few moments since he had been startled from a half doze by a sinister, stealthy footfall, or belly-dragging sound. Sitting deep in his chair, drifting on that borderland of drowsy consciousness and sleep, he could not determine the nature of the sound that had started him into complete wakefulness.

Not daring to turn his head, he sat quietly, eyes half closed—save for that one swift glance at his gun—but every sense alert, nerves taut, steel muscles drawn for a spring.

The seconds lagged in the intense quiet. As the log snapped, sending up a thousand multicolored sparks, it seemed like a cannon report to the taut man. And evidently, to the two lurking figures in the small kitchen, for they bounded forward at the sound.

Quick as the steel clamp of his traps, Paul reached for his shotgun; but a pair of sinewy arms clasped around him as his fingers touched the barrel; his knees were free, and he brought one up with a savage, powerful thrust that brought a surprised grunt from the Indian.

Matonob-bee stood with folded arms. A glitter lay in the depths of his small black eyes, but his face was as impassive as a piece of sculptured bronze.

The two men went to the floor with a crash. The Indian's legs twined around Paul, holding him in a viselike grasp. His hands went around the white man's throat in a grip that crushed the muscles, and if continued a minute longer would snap the bones of the vertebrae.

The roar of an incoming tide pounded in Paul's ears. His protruding tongue hung from his open mouth as he gasped for breath. He felt the Indian's hot breath on his skin and fixed his bulging, bloodshot eyes on that bronze face directly above him. The blood ran in a stream from his nose and trickled warm and salt on his protruding tongue.

As he tasted his own blood a primitive lust seized him. He no longer fought for his life; he fought to tear the life from the form that was crushing him.

He sank his teeth in the wrist on his chin, tearing the flesh savagely with a strength born of primitive fury; he turned, bringing the Indian under him. His knees bore into the man's stomach. The catlike turn had torn the hands from his throat and a rush of blessedly cool air brought renewed strength.

With one arm he fended away that crushing grasp; with the other he smashed again and again, torpedolike blows in the twisting, squirming face beneath him.

An enormous strength lay in those blows, a strength developed by the constant swing of the heavy ax, by the daily use of the one-man saw, back and thigh muscles hardened by the many miles covered each day on the hard snow, following his line of traps. The eyelids of the Indian were purple black, swollen; soon the eyes would be closed.

Paul's hands grew slimy with blood. The Indian wrapped his long legs around him, bringing Paul from his kneeling to a full length position. Over and over they turned.

The Indian fought like one of his forest wolves, tearing, twisting, slashing. Again Paul was on top, driving his sledgehammer blows in the face of the man beneath.

A terrific blow cracked the jawbone, another blow over the heart, and that muscle ceased to function. The Indian grunted, his grasp relaxed; the arms fell away, he was still.

Paul, with the battle glow surging through his veins, sprang to his feet like a tight steel spring suddenly loosed.

Matonob-bee stood straight, tall, in the kitchen doorway. His finger was curled on the trigger of his automatic. A gun Paul had given him, one of the exchange gifts the day he married Nee-nah.

The men faced each other in silence. A deep glow of admiration lay in the depths of the Indian's eyes.

Finally he spoke. Paul, who had learned the tribal language, listened closely.

"The white man's name should be Sagina (a chief). He has the quickness of the eagle, the strength of the bull-moose."

"Matonob-bee, why do you seek to kill me?" Paul's voice was low, tense.

"You were the light of the Indian maid's eyes; your voice, to her, was as the voice of the singing birds; she turns her face to the wall, two sleeps passed, but she closed not her eyes, for the white chief goes to the distant land of his birth. Her lodge is left desolate, its cold ashes strew the floor, the wolves come in through the broken windows. I shall cut your heart from your breast, and so carry it back to Nee-nah. Then will she smile again, then will she eat from the cooking pot, again will she sleep."

Paul's lips compressed grimly. "Do you realize you will hang for this, Matonob-bee?"

"Not so. The fire will leave but a heap of ashes. The white man's tomb shall be among the ashes. This lodge shall become but a dream of the Indian maid's—"

"She wishes you to do this, Matonob-bee?" Paul's heart beat in thick, suffocating throbs. His eyes grew dull, as though a film gathered over them.

"So," he thought, "Nee-nah was but thinly veneered and stark savagery lay concealed in her beautiful body. And she will hold my heart in her hands, perhaps use it for a ball," he thought dully.

"You have the advantage of me Matonob-bee. You are armed"—Paul knew one step taken in the direction of his gun, leaning near the stone hearth, would mean instant and winged death—"but will you fight out your grudge with me as did—" He motioned to the man on the floor.

"Matonob-bee is no longer young. His step grows slow, his strength lessens. The eyes of the maid would never behold the white chief's heart. We have had talk enough." His voice changed, a sinister quality lay in its tone.

Paul glanced at the sheet of paper lying on the long table.

"Matonob-bee," he said quietly, "lower that gun a minute. I have something to say. A dying man does not lie—"

"The white man is all lies. He lied when he took the maid under his blanket." The Indian spoke viciously.

"Wrong, Matonob-bee. A friend came to me from my other life. He spoke many things. I listened. I thought I would return. I was wrong. When I awakened and found Nee-nah gone, I was relieved. I thought it best. All day I sat in my lodge, for the blizzard came, and no man lives outside when the north god speaks.

"All day I thought. With my eyes on the burning log, I thought many things. What my friend said to me passed as the wind passes. I wrote on this paper a message to Nee-nah. At dawn I intended to go for her, but not knowing whether she had gone to the village or the mission I wrote this."

He walked to the table and picked up the sheet.

"If she returned here while I was away, she would read it and await me here. You cannot read English, Matonob-bee. Shall I tell you what it says?"

A cunning look came in the Indian's eyes. Cold, watchful eyes they were.

"The white chief speaks false. He is crafty as the lynx, treacherous as the wolf, deadly as the north wind. He speaks false words to save his body from the fire."

"You have known me many snows. Has Matonob-bee ever found me timid as the rabbit—cowardly as the buzzard." Paul's face darkened.

Slowly the Indian raised his revolver. Grimly Paul folded his arms. He knew a sudden rush forward would avail him nothing. The Indian was a master marksman.

He lifted his head and gazed coldly in Matonob-bee's gleaming, baleful eyes. As the loud report reverberated in the room he saw through the drifting smoke the gun arm of the Indian fall limp; the automatic clattered to the floor. In a dull amazement he knew he had not been struck. The bullet had sped past and imbedded itself in one of the thick wall logs over his head.

Stupidly, incredulously, Matonob-bee looked down at his limp arm. Paul sprang forward, picked up the fallen revolver. His eyes looked past the Indian into the dark kitchen, but the shot had not come from that direction, for the man had stood with his back in the door.

He wheeled swiftly. The door to his right was opened a mere crack, but enough to admit the barrel of a rifle. As Paul stared at it, fascinated, the Indian drew his knife stealthily.

As he sprang at Paul the door swung open. Nee-nah stood with the face of one risen from the grave. Her rifle was aimed at her father's breast.

The two men fell back, stunned with astonishment. The great blazing eyes were the only life in the pinched, drawn, gray face. The deep rose of her lips had become a mere white line.

The intense silence was broken as the river ice split with the boom of cannon.

With one foot the girl kicked the door shut behind her.

Silently the Indian sheathed his knife.

"I have crossed the long snows in the moon of the great wind." Nee-nah's voice, plaintive with a piercing sweetness, fell on the quiet room. Her eyes looked past Paul, and gazed gravely at her father. "I was caught in the grip of the Hella-Henna, my sled and dogs were sucked down by its evil spirit; but the Great Spirit directed me, and I was saved. I have run with the feet of the deer across the long snows." She paused, swayed a little.

"Nee-nah!" cried Paul, and at the break in his voice the rose sprang to her cheek and lips. She lowered her rifle to the floor and stood leaning on it.

"Because the eagle cannot mate with the owl, or the moose with the lynx, must he die, oh, my father?" Her eyes gazed gravely at the silent man.

"Nee-nah, you knew nothing of this?" Paul cried eagerly, his voice shaking.

Still the girl avoided his gaze.

"I have sat at your hearth, eaten at your table, slept on your couch. Could you think I—"

Again she paused and swayed. Paul sprang to her, caught the strong, beautiful figure in his arms, carried her to a deep, fur-lined chair. The girl was shaking from head to foot.

Oblivious of the deep, unfathomable gaze of Matonob-bee, Paul strode to the table and poured a glass of fiery liquor, which he held to the girl's stiff lips. Gulpingly she drank it. Her eyes left her father and fell on the motionless Indian on the floor.

"Take him back to the village on your sled," she commanded sharply. "Where is Mit-wah?"

"With the dogs. He is guarding them in the white chief's dog lodge." Her father spoke low. He raised his bleeding forearm.

"You would send Matonob-bee to his tomb?" he asked, a curious hush in his voice.

"I but arrived in time to turn the course of your lead," she answered simply.

She laid her head back against the bearskin rug, a tired sigh fluttered at her lips.

Paul drew a low stool beside the deep chair.

"Nee-nah," he said, speaking still in Chipewyan, for he wanted her father to understand his words, "a great wind blew from the west. It blew to me thoughts, long quiet desires, long sleeping wishes that were almost dead. As the great wind blows over the forest, bending, breaking the trees, so was I bent under its fury, but not broken. Not broken, Nee-nah," he repeated.

The girl lay quiet with closed eyes. He watched her face anxiously.

"The great wind passed," he went on, "and left peace. There is no world for me, save this great north world that I love with all my soul; there is no woman for me, save she whom I call wife—you—Nee-nah. The girl who ran the gamut of a thousand perils for me."

He watched Nee-nah shrink back in her chair.

"A girl dauntless of heart, with a courage as that of the she bear. My love for you flickered, Nee-nah, but now and ever—through the moon of the great snows to the moon of the harvest—it shall burn steadily as the North Star."

He lifted the girl's hand and pressed it gently.

"It is because the white chief pities the wood hen that he so speaks."

Paul sat silent. He knew her nature, he knew her pride. She thought that he spoke as he did only because she had saved him from Matonob-bee. How could he convince her?

With impassive face the Indian chief, who had been listening intently, picked up the sheet of paper that had fallen to the floor. He held it in his injured hand.

"Nee-nah," he said in his deep voice.

She opened her eyes, gazed at her father. "Many words are written. The white man had it on his table before I came here. Read."

Wonderingly she grasped the sheet and read aloud:

> "Nee-nah, I go for you. First to the mission house, if you are not there, then I go to your village. All our lives shall we live in the country of the furs, where the trail of the caribou and moose cross. I do not go away. The little priest taught you what forgiveness is. Forgive me, for I love you."

Her soft voice trembled, faltered over the last words of the message. She raised great, dewy eyes to Paul.

"Even as I have said." His voice was low, tender.

She gazed at him searchingly, then rose, took off her fur coat, and removed her hood of bearskin.

Paul walked to his pipe rack, selected a big stone pipe of Indian make, filled and lighted it. He puffed on it a moment, then handed it solemnly to the Indian. Matonob-bee lifted it to his lips, puffed slowly, then handed it back. He walked to the hearth; with his hand he drew out some ashes from underneath the blazing log.

Sprinkling them on the wide stone, he rubbed his feet on them. Peace had descended on that lodge, and never again after the Indian rite just performed would enmity from Matonob-bee or his tribe cross its threshold.

Stooping, he drew the wounded brave over his shoulder. Paul thrust the automatic in the Indian's holster. The man turned and in complete silence strode from the room.

Through the open door the aurora flared and flickered in a wild beauty. The north god was spreading his stupendous glory over the frozen world.

Softly Paul closed the door, as the bitter air filled the room.

He walked to Nee-nah, and as his arms went around her, her head fell on his breast like that of a tired child.

THE END

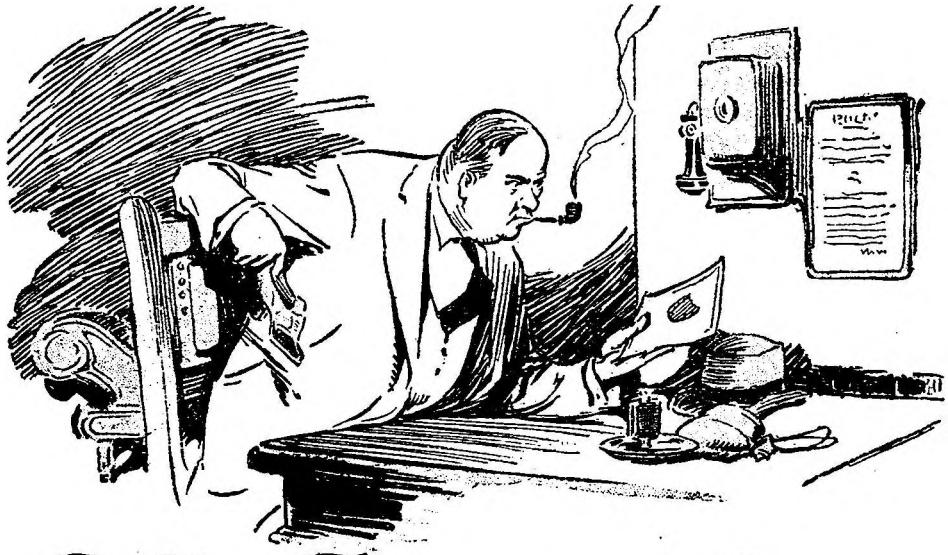
DARK MYSTERY

WHERE do all the blinky stars go,
Stars of night?
Does some gossamer fairy of the skies
Snuff out their light?

Does some Cinderella fairy
Scrub by day
All their many points to sparkling—
Without pay?

Then as twilight filters down
Do fairies flit
About the vast dome of the world
Till all are lit?

Lulu Minerva Schultz.



The Print of a French Heel

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Hole in the Wall," "West of Broadway," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

AMON PETERSON, an old loan shark of Miltville, who has lived alone since his wife died, and his son and daughter ran away, is shot and mortally wounded. With his dying breath he phones that Bill Phillips has murdered him, though the telephone operator refuses to swear that she heard "Bill Phillips." Bill disappears and Henry Finch, Peterson's lawyer, declares that Bill was chief beneficiary of the miser's will, though his bank deposit boxes are found to be absolutely empty and no papers or treasure are found at his home. However, Andrews, the State detective in charge of the case, finds Peterson's clothes and two bottles of champagne in the barn, a woman's handkerchief initialed "P" in the murder room, and the heel-print of Ruth Peterson, daughter of the miser, in the hallway near by, though she claims to have been in New York at the time of the murder. Mary Litchfield, the daughter of the local banker, who is in love with Bill Phillips, insists he was with her outside her home at the time of the murder despite her parents' denial. Bill is caught trying to cross the Canadian border and at the county prison at Oakdale, Mr. Graham, the district attorney, and Andrews prepare to grill him with questions.

CHAPTER XIII.

BILL PHILLIPS IN DURESS

THE accused appeared to be a big, good-looking, steadfast, and honest youth, with rather curly blond hair, a strong nose, and a firm chin with a cleft in it, an agreeable mouth, and well-shaped ears. He was obviously distressed at his situation, particularly at the handcuffs which still fastened him to the deputy.

"You can take the bracelet off now and leave us alone with this man," said Graham. "Sit down, Phillips."

The boy dropped gratefully into a chair, and regarded the floor.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 24.

"Why did you kill Amon Peterson?" asked Graham sharply.

"I didn't," said the youth in a low tone.

"If you didn't, why did you run away?"

"I didn't run away, at least not at first."

"All right; why did you leave town night before last?"

Phillips looked up. "Do I have to answer these questions?" he asked.

"It will be better for you if you do," declared the district attorney savagely.

"My understanding is that no one is expected to incriminate himself."

"Oh, you know the law, do you?"

"I know that much. And I have a right to have a lawyer."

"That's true. But if you are innocent and will explain a few things to us it will set us on the trail of the guilty man and get your freedom much sooner."

"I prefer to wait until I have seen a lawyer."

"Phillips," said Andrews from the window, "I am a State detective assigned to this case. Don't answer my questions if you don't like, but I would be obliged if you would tell me one or two things."

Andrews's attitude was friendly, and his voice was sympathetic.

"What do you want to know?" asked Phillips, after looking him over.

"You were not in Miltville at all night before last. Is that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"You took your car and left town right after supper?"

"Yes, about half past seven."

"You didn't call on Miss Litchfield?"

The boy started, looked distressed.

"Not that night; no, sir."

Andrews nodded in satisfaction. That settled poor Mary's efforts to establish an alibi for him.

"You were in Boston three days before the murder?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"I had some private business."

"To cash a check made out to you for ten thousand dollars, signed by Amon Peterson."

"How did you know that?"

"Never mind. It was a bad check."

Phillips jumped to his feet, his face flushed, his eyes snapped.

"Why, the damned old crook!" he exclaimed.

"That's all. Much obliged," said Andrews.

"Now, young man, listen to me," began the district attorney.

"I refuse to answer any more questions," said Phillips defiantly.

"You'll regret this."

"I won't say a word until I get a lawyer."

"Who's your lawyer?"

"I want to ask Walter Otis, of Boston, to be my lawyer."

The district attorney drew in his horns. If Otis was coming into this case he must be careful how he treated his client. He knew Otis to be not only one of the biggest criminal lawyers in the State, but one of the three men who controlled the dominating political party of which he was an ambitious member.

"We have evidence enough to hold you for trial. You will be committed awaiting an indictment by the grand jury, which will be returned without a doubt," he said. "I have great respect for Mr. Otis, but I shall be surprised if he takes a case which is so obviously without a defense."

"Nevertheless, I shall ask him. May I send a wire?"

At that moment the sheriff entered. "Just got a telegram from Walter Otis," he said to the district attorney. "He notifies me that he is on his way down from Boston to defend Phillips; will be here tonight."

"You didn't have to ask him, son," commented Andrews. "He must be a good friend of yours to stomach you after you got him to indorse a bad check."

"He's a good friend, all right," declared Bill Phillips. "I didn't kill Peterson, sir."

"You know a lot you're not telling, though, and you could help me by coming through."

"I must talk with Mr. Otis."

"It's no use," said Graham. "Take him out and lock him up."

After the young prisoner had been led

out the room Graham looked inquiringly at the detective.

"What do you think?"

"I got a hunch he didn't do it, but he knows an awful lot he's not telling."

"I can't understand Otis coming into this. This fellow has no money; he's nothing but a garage mechanic, and why should one of the biggest men in Boston drop everything and come down to this jerk town to defend a case in which there is no defense."

"This is a lot bigger thing than you imagine, Mr. Graham. There is more to it than killing a miser in a country town, as we're going to find out before we're very much older. The boy looks to me like the goat."

"The facts are plain."

"Too damn plain. They look as though they were fixed."

"I suppose a man dying from an assassin's bullet was in a plot to fix something when he gave the murderer's name over the telephone."

Andrews laughed deprecatingly. "That doesn't sound reasonable, does it? How do we know it was Peterson who called?"

"What!"

"You can't see over a telephone."

"But the girl recognized his voice."

"Voices have been imitated before, and Lulu's pretty dumb."

"Surely you don't think that."

"No, I don't really think so; I was just showing that what we call facts might not be facts at all. I'm like a feller that is trying to untie a big tangle of threads. He pulls at one thread as far as it will go, then stops and pulls on another. By and by, if he has patience, he might get hold of a thread that will pull all the way out, just by accident, you know, and the tangle is all straightened. I try to think of all the possibilities, and give every one of them a jerk."

"If I didn't know you were a good detective I'd say you were a fool."

"You mightn't be so wrong at that," he chuckled.

The funeral of Amon Peterson took place the next afternoon. Litchfield had loaned Amon Jr. two hundred dollars upon his expectations, as the boy was sure to get five hundred if the missing will was found, and might be worth half a million if it were not. With part of the loan he purchased a black suit at the Boston Clothing Store, and garbed in correct mourning, even to black kid gloves and black derby hat, he frowned at his sister, who entered the undertaking rooms in her mink coat and brown cloche hat.

"The least you could have done was to wear black."

"Unlike most blondes, it is not becoming to me, and it may be damp at the grave and I have only one fur coat. Besides, who cares?"

"You have no sense of the proper fitness of things," he whispered.

There was a large attendance of curious persons in the parlors, people who had come to peer at the son and daughter of the town miser, who had no liking for him in life, and lost their fear of him in death. Mr. Litchfield was there with his wife and daughter, and Mary went at once to Ruth and pressed both her hands.

She had taken a liking to the city girl, though she never would have recognized her as the ragged daughter of Peterson, whom she used to know; and Ruth had won her heart by the story of Bill's gallantry in assisting her to escape from her father's house, and in loaning her all the money he had at the time to enable her to reach the city. Besides, Mary had stiffened her determination to stick to the alibi, for Bill had assured her that no jury would convict in the face of her evidence.

The Rev. Skinner, pastor of the church which Peterson had attended when he was first married, made a brief address. Although the good man had been chased from Peterson's door years before when he attempted to make collection calls, he tried to forget the evil of the deceased and think only of the good, but he could think of so little good in Amon that he was hard put to make a respectable address. However, he prayed earnestly for the eternal repose of the soul of this man, and the forgiveness of his transgressions, and in time came to a rather lame conclusion and ceased. Then the coffin was carried out to a waiting

hearse, and only two machines accompanied it in the drizzling rain to the churchyard. Ruth, forced to think of her long dead mother, wept bitterly. It was Amon Jr. who was dry-eyed on this occasion.

Then, when all that was mortal of a strange and miserable old man was underneath the sod, the two children whom he had brought into the world returned to the hotel to resume the business of life.

John Litchfield was moved by the grief of the girl, and stopped her as she was about to go to her room.

"I have loaned your brother some money on his expectations," he said.

"I wondered where he got the undertaker's clothes," she replied, laughing through her tears.

"You can draw on me up to five hundred dollars if you need money."

"Thank you, but I have enough for the present. Let us wait to see just what I am entitled to."

"Perhaps that is the best way," he said with a sigh of relief. After all, there might turn up a will completely disinheriting; a banker learns not to listen to the voice of his heart, and he avoids risks when possible.

Andrews did not go to the funeral. He sat in a chair in the lobby waiting for the rain to cease; he wanted to get to work at the house, but he hated to go out there on a dismal day like this.

Ruth Peterson interested him intensely; as yet he had not fitted her part in the affair into place, but he was convinced that she was the woman who had stood in the dust in the hall outside the old man's door, though he was not certain that she had been a witness of the murder; it was possible that the footprint might have been made earlier, perhaps days earlier. However, she had stoutly denied that she had visited the old home at any time since the day four years before upon which she had run away, and he was sure she was lying.

Furthermore, she was mixed up in some way with Bill Phillips; not for a moment did he credit her statement that she had not seen him since the night he had escorted her to the railroad station. For one thing the way she persisted in telling of his gallantry; her assertion that he could not have had anything to do with the crime, an assertion which she had made not only to him, but to Halliday and others, persuaded him that she was still very good friends with Phillips despite her denial.

While it was possible for him to get her in a corner and cross question her, the tale she had told to Halliday convinced him that she was an unusually clever girl, not likely to get rattled, and able to evade answering any question which seemed to her dangerous. He preferred to avoid a show-down until he had more facts, and thought it much better to appear not to suspect her at all.

He had admired the way in which she had disowned the handkerchief, but she had recognized the perfume, named it, and that was something. He was inclined to think that she did use the perfume, did have handkerchiefs initialed with "P," but had missed the bit of linen after leaving the house and had laid her plans to disassociate herself from it. If she had been mixed up in the murder it was bold and brazen of her to turn up next day and revisit the scene of the crime, but she was hard and sophisticated; the life she had evidently led made her callous.

Yet why was she friendly with Phillips? Why accompany him on a mission of murder, since the developments of the day showed that their interests were completely opposed? Peterson had made a will leaving his fortune to Phillips; surely he would wish the will to be found, and she would desire it to disappear? Perhaps he was being used as a cat's-paw by the woman, he, thinking the will existed, and killing to inherit, she urging him on with the knowledge that it had been destroyed. Was there a love affair between them? Then how about Mary Litchfield, who was so devoted to him, and to whom he had apparently been devoted?

Although he had a hunch that Phillips had not committed the crime, a hunch which had been increased by his brief interview with the young man, Andrews had not reached a point where he refused to accept evidence; hunches were all right when you had nothing else to go on, but

if he found conclusive proof that Phillips was the murderer he would not hesitate to use it.

And his crafty brain was scheming as he watched Ruth talking to Mr. Litchfield without appearing to have noticed her at all, how to trap the girl into giving him the information he was sure she possessed. He grinned a little as he wondered how she had accounted for the loss of her shoe which was an exhibit in his collection; had it awakened her suspicion? Had it put her more on her guard?

In the morning he planned to go out with a carpenter and ransack the house and barn from cellar to roof in the hope of finding the hiding place of the miser's fortune. The old man was running true to form in hiding his lucre; he thought there might be a quantity of gold coin in the pile, misers love the glitter of gold. In the meantime there were policemen on guard, things were safe enough.

The rain continued to fall, cold, biting, depressing rain, regular weather for a funeral, particularly fitting for such a corpse as Amon Peterson. His half closed eyes closed completely and he dozed, in full view of the village street, though fortunately for his reputation there were few passers-by.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GIRL OF THE GREAT WHITE WAY.

A QUARTER of an hour later Halliday woke the detective by a tap on the shoulder to introduce two or three colleagues; for the developments of the day had thrown Worcester, Springfield, and Boston city editors into a frenzy of excitement. The arrest of Phillips, the defense by Walter Otis, the disappearance of the miser's fortune, the beauty of Ruth Peterson, whose pathetic story, as embellished by Halliday, had been plastered all over the front page of the morning *Planet* combined to make a sensational news feature; therefore contingents of journalists with their photographic satellites had begun to arrive. New York was interested, and the hotel had received wires to hold rooms for scandal hounds from the big town.

So far none of them had heard about the love affair between Mary Litchfield and Bill Phillips, nor of her frantic alibi which Andrews had already broken through, the innocent admission of the accused herself, but it was a foregone conclusion that Mary would be in the limelight, and the newspapers would have two beautiful girls to pursue with snapshot cameras instead of one.

The reporters were grinning to find the detective in charge asleep on the job, but Andrews knew he could depend upon their discretion because they needed his friendship more than he needed them. Therefore he grinned good naturedly, acknowledged the introductions, and welcomed them to town. He told them the main events of the day, omitting everything that seemed to him he had better keep to himself, and agreed to give them all the information that would not injure the cause of justice if it were published.

Most of them were content the first day to send back graphic pen pictures of the sleepy village suddenly become the scene of a great sensation, and they scattered to call upon various local celebrities with the intention of describing and perhaps poking fun at them.

It occurred to Andrews that his photographic print ought to be ready, and he ventured out in the rain to visit the camera shop where he had left it to be developed. It was ready, the proprietor had a witticism about wasting good film on such queer subjects which he turned aside with a grin and hastened, if any of his motions could be described in this way, to his room, where he lit the electric light and inspected the print. Considering that the hallway was pretty dark, it had come out very well, not clear and distinct, but sufficient for his purposes.

He took out of its hiding place Ruth's shoe, turned it over and inspected it, then referred to the print. Aside from the fact that the patch on the heel seemed a trifle larger than that on the print, the resemblance was perfect, and he could account for the very slight difference in the size of the patches by the character of the material in which the print had been marked which did not make for perfect accuracy. There

were six nails in the patch on the heel and six nail heads showed in the print. Any court would decide that the heel had made the impression shown on the photograph. So that settled that.

It was now supper time, and Andrews decided that he deserved a good meal; so he descended into the dining room, which was crowded to-night; there were six photographers and four camera men, as well as Ruth and Amon, Jr., and the regular guests. For appearance's sake Ruth and Amon were sitting at the same table, but they were not speaking to each other.

A bellboy, entering with a yellow telegraph blank, approached the detective, which caused a hush in the buzz of conversation while all reportorial eyes fastened on him sharply; any message to the man in charge of the case might contain important news, but Andrews thrust it in his breast pocket and continued his devastating assault upon a platter of pork chops.

Just the same he hurried his supper, and returned to his room to open the telegram which he suspected to be a reply to his request of the New York police department to get him all available facts about Ruth Rector. It was:

> Ruth Peterson, alias Rector, has never been in trouble with the police; no records of her, or finger-prints, or photographs. She is known about the theater and restaurant district, habitue of night clubs and cabarets. Was in two Bonfeld productions as chorus girl, is supposed to have been a waitress and cabaret performer, has a one-hundred-and-fifty-dollar-a-month flat at —— Riverside Drive, is supposed to earn a living as entertainer, no protector as far as is known. Large acquaintance, including several men suspected of being crooks.

That word, entertainer, puzzled Andrews; what did it mean? Was she a singer, a dancer, an actress, in vaudeville, or what? It couldn't mean cabaret entertainer, because they had already said she formerly worked in a cabaret; it was some ultra New York expression meaning something outside the ken of a Massachusetts State detective.

Halliday might know; he used to work in New York before he became the star of the Boston *Planet*. He decided to ask Halliday. He went down on the elevator and saw the reporter still eating supper; therefore he seated himself and lit a cigar, no occasion to appear as if he asked the question except from idle curiosity.

In about ten minutes Halliday came out, stopping on the way to speak to Ruth and her brother, and, seeing Andrews, joined him of his own accord.

"Halliday, you worked in New York, didn't you?"

"Yes, several years ago. Hate the place."

"I was reading an account in a New York paper to-day, and it referred to a girl as an 'entertainer.' What did it mean?"

Halliday laughed shortly. "You mean you were reading a telegram from New York."

"How do you get that way?" growled the officer.

"You're as subtle as a rhinoceros, Andy. You want to get a line on Ruthie; you aren't satisfied with my interview, you wire to New York for her record, if any, and they reply that she is an entertainer."

"Aren't you the smart Alick?" grinned Andrews. "Anyway, what's it mean?"

"Almost anything. An entertainer can be an actress, a singer, a dancer; she may work in a theater or a cabaret, or she may do a turn at private parties, banquets, smoke talks, and so forth."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. New York is always full of visitors from other parts of the country coming on to make big purchases of merchandise, to place contracts, to leave money with New York business men. They are strangers, and they expect their business acquaintances to provide their amusements for them. The fact that these business men may be married and not have any wild friends doesn't mean a thing; they have to scare up a party to put the customer in the mood to sign on the dotted line, and to have a party you need women.

"Working actresses aren't any good because the idea is dinner, a musical show, and a night club, perhaps a private party. So this fellow scurries around and gets the address of a couple of girls who are available. He gets a pair of peaches, well dressed, good talkers, good fellows; friends of his he assures the out-of-towner; they

meet the girls, put in a lively evening, and send them home about two or three or four in the morning with a fifty-dollar bill tucked in their mitts for services rendered.

"If the outsider knew that they were hired he wouldn't get the kick out of it, but he thinks that the New York man has introduced him to a couple of society friends, thus proving how much he thinks of him; and of course he does business. Sometimes they pull off a big dinner party and use a dozen girls, all the same stripe, and the ladies find their reward hidden in the dinner bouquet or tucked inside the favor."

"I'll be damned. Say, when I was down to New York a couple of years ago a police captain took me out on a party like that. I thought they were a couple of swell married women out on a lark."

"New York is the only place in the world where such things happen, but, believe me, there is a good living for several hundred girls who are ladylike and can flash good clothes. So that's the way Ruth gets by!"

"I suppose they could be respectable at that."

"Most of them are; they are just catering to the demand of lonely strangers to be seen in nobby New York cafés with well dressed, beautiful and sophisticated looking women, and, believe me, most of the out-of-town buyers ought to pay the girls for being polite to them for a few hours."

"I see," nodded Andrews. "I'm much obliged."

Halliday lowered his voice. "Say, Andy, I've played your game for you; now you come through for me. What have you got on Ruth? She seems to me to be a square, plucky, decent little devil who's had a hard time, and I like her. You don't suspect her of being mixed up in this thing?"

"I think she's been in Miltville recently, and she says she hasn't. I just want to know why she won't admit it. I haven't got any evidence; it's just a hunch. Besides, I want to know everything about everybody who has any interest in the death of old man Peterson; it's just ordinary investigation."

"She was telling me about the inexplicable disappearance of one of her slippers the other night. Couldn't make out what become of it.

"In view of your marvelous generosity, coughing up that quart of wine when you'd as soon part with your heart's blood, and asking me to get her to drink it, I knew you'd sneaked into her room and swiped her shoe. What did you do it for?"

"S-h!" cautioned Andrews, for Ruth and her brother were coming out of the dining room. "You're on the inside, Halliday; I'll give you the story in good time, you'll get it exclusively. Now don't bother me."

"Bah, you're a musical comedy detective," taunted Halliday, but he drifted off, and Andrews knew he was safe enough. Clever young fellow, he wouldn't make a bad State detective if he didn't earn twice as much as a reporter.

So Ruth was an entertainer, and an entertainer was a lady who went out on parties with strange men and got paid for her social services. She might be decent, but certainly not too scrupulous. Some of her associates were men whom the police were watching, high class crooks, probably. Such fellows would think nothing of slipping into the country and murdering an old man who lived alone, and who was supposed to keep large sums in cash in his house.

While Andrews doubted that Ruth was brutal enough to countenance the assassination of her father, she might have entered into some scheme to rob him and the killing had occurred not according to program, which would compel her to shield the criminals. She could justify herself for robbery by believing that she was only getting what would be hers eventually unless her father robbed her of her inheritance.

As a matter of fact, he could build a very good case against Ruth and unknown accomplices if one Bill Phillips hadn't seized the leading rôle, been personally accused of the crime by the victim before he died, and had fled the town and been caught trying to make Canada.

The detective in charge of a capital crime is like a gladiator in the arena, Andrews thought.

He is told off to solve the crime and capture the criminal, and through the newspapers the eyes of the nation are on him,

watching his every move, while every voice discusses his prowess, criticizes his judgment, cavils at his actions, demands quick results, and helps him not at all.

The law handicaps him, the public jeers at him, obstacles are thrown in his way by all with whom he comes into contact; most people evade his questions from fear of being drawn into a court case or because they have a hangdog sympathy with a fugitive, at least, do not wish to be the one whose testimony sends a fellow human to the chair; often the criminal becomes a public hero if he happens to be good looking and tells a sad story. If an officer could arrest everybody who might have committed the crime he would probably land the criminal very quickly, but there is a prejudice against charging with murder; no arrests can be made unless there is very strong evidence, and the securing of evidence when the criminal has planned carefully and taken every precaution is almost impossible.

Just the same, the officer in charge whether he be district attorney, chief of police, or detective has to produce results quickly or be condemned as stupid, incompetent, and even corrupt.

Andrews was always very sorry for himself when things were most difficult, and the mood sometimes lasted for hours; in the end his reaction was a spurt of energy, rather than to quit on the job.

He was in his room and preparing for bed about eleven o'clock when the wave of action replaced the inertia of the last few hours.

He paused in the act of taking off his shirt. "What in the devil is the matter with me?" he demanded of himself. "Supposing all the Peterson papers, the will, and everything else are hidden in that house as well as all the money in the world. I don't know the hiding place, but maybe somebody else does.

"This is a hick village and there is a hick cop out there; like as not he is sound asleep as the other one was the other day. If the murderer was scared away without getting what he came after, he isn't going to give up; he's coming back, provided it isn't Bill Phillips over at the county jail. It may be a wild-goose chase, but I'm going up there and see how that cop is getting along."

Accustomed to act on his hunches, he dressed, dug out his overcoat, looked out the window, and saw that the rain was over and the stars were out, for which he gave a grunt of satisfaction; then opened his door, and stepped into the corridor. There was considerable noise coming from a room across the hall; he heard the clink of ice in glasses and a loud voice declared:

"I think you guys are bluffing; so I'm just going to tip the pot another half a dollar."

He grinned; gambling was illegal, drinking also, but he was working on a murder case, and if all the reporters were sitting around a table playing poker they wouldn't be trailing him. So he went downstairs and out into the night. At first he thought he would get his auto out of the garage, but, after all, it was only half a mile and the noise of the car might wake up the policeman if he was sleeping on post; he would enjoy catching him snoring, and razz Chief Easton upon the efficiency of his force.

So he moved solidly along the deserted street; even the Miltville drug store closed at ten thirty and the pool room down by the depot locked up at eleven. The rain seemed to have brought the tardy spring; there was a sweetness and a little tang in the night air which made him square his shoulders and march more lightly.

CHAPTER XV.

DENIZENS OF THE DARK.

MILTVILLE was a pretty little town as soon as one got away from the central square. The mills were on the outskirts at the other side, with their long rows of corporation wooden dwelling blocks; here were comfortable cottages with neat lawns, sometimes a good-sized house in the center of an acre or two of ground.

He passed a couple of young people spooning against a fence, halfway between two street lights and partly sheltered by a big tree, and it reminded him of Mary Litchfield and her tale of a similar evening

with Bill Phillips. It seemed to him that it must have taken a great love for a girl as well-educated and refined as she to admit spooning on the public street, and it was no wonder that her father and mother were horrified by her confession. Well, that was out; Bill Phillips had denied it.

By and by he arrived at Cedar Street, and proceeded until he came in sight of the Peterson house. All the houses on the street were dark; evidently everybody had gone to bed. He expected to find the policeman about the grounds or on the porch; he was quite sure that the local cop would not venture into the house of death, even after the removal of the body, in the dark of night, but he did not see him as he came to the gate, which caused him to chuckle. If the man was lying asleep on the porch he would bring him to with a kick in the ribs, and give him a bawling out that he would remember.

He tiptoed up the path and drew his flash and swept it along the porch, but there was no recumbent figure. However, the door was ajar; the man must have more courage than he had given him credit for, and had entered the house to make himself comfortable, perhaps on the horsehair sofa.

Andrews had no nerves in his big body; nor was he in the least superstitious, for he was convinced that dead people stayed dead, and ghosts did not walk. The hunch which had drawn him from his chamber at this hour had been marched off during the promenade; he was an idiot to have taken the trouble, and he did not actually credit the possibility of illicit visitors. Therefore he entered the dark house as cool and unconcerned as though it was noonday, and threw a beam of light ahead of him along the hallway.

When he came to the parlor he stood in the doorway and turned his flash upon the corner where he knew the sofa was located. And then a pair of hands grasped his thick ankles and pulled them backward so that he landed upon his paunch and his face, which he protected by upraised arms. Instantly a heavy weight fell upon his back, strong arms grasped his arms, and he felt his wrists being fastened behind him.

Although the detective was a fighter, he had no chance under the circumstances; he was securely pinned down, the flash had been knocked out of his hands, he was in pitch darkness, and could not have seen his antagonist or antagonists if he had been able to turn his head. His two legs were being securely tied; he grunted when the rope cut into his flesh. And a hand lifted his head by the simple expedient of grasping a handful of hair; then fingers began to thrust a cloth into his mouth; Andrews closed his teeth upon the fingers; he heard an oath in a bass voice, then something descended with a crash upon the back of his head. As Bret Harte said, "subsequent proceedings interested him no more," at least for quite a while.

By and by Andrews realized that he was alive and sentient, but darkness was still upon his eyes; there was a nasty tasting cloth in his mouth, which seemed to be choking him, as breathing exclusively through his nose had been difficult for him for a very long time. He was lying on his side, on the floor, his hands fastened with crossed wrists behind his back, his legs tied tightly together. There was no sound in the house.

Whether he had been unconscious for hours or minutes he did not know, but he had been clubbed on the back of the head and it ached horribly. His humiliation was profound. As he lay supine and helpless he cursed himself for his stupidity in walking, without taking precautions, into the house from which the guard had vanished, but he had been so sure that the policeman was asleep on the job that it had driven from his mind the possibility which had been the urge that had drawn him from the hotel.

Now he was doomed to lay bound and gagged for many hours; it would probably be six or eight hours at least before the relief would arrive for the night officer; during that time he was sure he would die of suffocation, for the pain of breathing was increasing at every moment.

And then the shame of being found in this condition; Henry Andrews, the shrewdest and most competent detective in the Commonwealth, to have walked

blindly into a trap and to have permitted wrongdoers to truss him up like a chicken in a butcher shop.

Alone in a house where murder had been done, in which the murderers still lurked, perhaps. Who knew what had happened to the Miltville policeman; had they slain him or tied him up as they had treated himself? Fear, however, had no room in his mind; Andrews was a strong man, and afraid neither of knife or bullet; in the Spanish War he had charged up San Juan Hill in a hail of lead, and exchanged bayonets thrusts with Spanish soldiers; it was his powerlessness that infuriated him, to think that he was helpless while something was transpiring that he should be interrupting; perhaps the whole solution of the Peterson mystery was in his grasp, and he had let it pass for lack of intelligent precaution.

Time passed; he twisted and wriggled, but he only drew his bonds tighter, and his wrists suffered when he pulled up his arms, and he could not free his legs without the use of his hands. The gag, though—he might remove the gag somehow.

It seemed to consist of two handkerchiefs—one stuffed into his mouth, the other passing over his mouth and holding the gag in place, was tied tightly, and the knot was at the back of his head. If he only could get close to a piece of furniture, the leg of a chair or table, force the legs between his face and the handkerchief, he could pull on it and eventually get the gag loosened and off. He was trying to remember the arrangement of the room, and figure out about where he was lying, when he was startled by a noise in the house.

From somewhere came a moaning sound, like the groan of a dying man, a sepulchral sound, like a soul in agony, or a voice from the tomb. Iron of nerve and bold of heart as was the detective, that unearthly moan frightened him; it seemed as though it might have been the dying cry of Amon Peterson, dead three nights before. Could he have returned, was his soul on guard in the house where his treasure was hidden?

Again it sounded. "Oo-oh! Oo-oh!"

Andrews began to shiver; never again would he jeer at the supernatural. And then came a thud, like a falling body; then a heavy thump, as though a corpse was dragging itself along. Thump, thump, thump; Lord in heaven, it was coming nearer, and he was helpless; perhaps in its path, unable to lift a hand or put out a foot to ward the thing off, whatever it might be. Again the hollow groan; then suddenly he heard words.

"Oh, my head, my head; if I ever get out of here!"

Gagged and frightened and helpless as he was, Andrews laughed; his laugh was soundless, of course, but he laughed, for he knew that the thing that frightened him was a man, a badly injured man, perhaps, and one who was more terrified than himself—undoubtedly the policeman for whom he had been searching.

He lifted his feet high in the air and brought his boots down on the floor with a crash; it was his only way of attracting attention to his plight, but the effect of the noise was different from what he had expected. There came a yell from the hallway; the suffering, groaning person, who had been dragging himself along, suddenly got the full use of his limbs, and ran madly out of the house, shrieking insanely.

He could hear his yells outside in the grounds; then they died away. The policeman had fled, and would not come back. Furthermore, if he carried a report of evil spirits within, Andrews doubted if he could raise a force in the town to return and investigate unless he located the poker party, whose members feared nothing.

And now he was indeed alone in the house, but he was able to smile inwardly at his own fears; that a man of his experience should have assumed a supernatural explanation for any sound or apparition in the world! He did not know that fear is not entirely of the mind, but also of the senses and the body. The chill, the gooseflesh, and other manifestations of terror are an inheritance that a few generations of mental development are not powerful enough to entirely control. He had understood in his brain right along that this was no ghost, but the sound communicated directly with his senses and provoked the usual reaction.

The big man now began to writhe over the floor in search of some object which might help him in his effort to remove the gag; he struck a table, but it was one of those old walnut center tables with huge legs; he encountered it with the back of his head just where he had been hit, and it caused the place to smart, but he rolled off in another direction and eventually tipped over a chair.

That was a piece of luck, because the upper part of the legs protruded horizontally about eighteen inches in the air, and he lifted himself and rubbed his head against the object until he succeeded in pushing the end of the leg inside the gag just behind his ear; he pulled hard and steadily; finally he felt the cloth loosening, gave a sudden jerk, and pulled himself away from the chair; but the confining handkerchief dropped around his neck, and he spat out the wad in his mouth disgustedly.

It was a tremendous relief to fill his lungs full of air again; now he did not mind the bonds so much. He was still considering an hour later when he heard a motor car stop outside the house, and the sound of voices in the yard. Glory hallelujah! A rescue party had arrived! There were quick steps on the porch; he heard the front door flung open and Chief Easton, rather unsteady of tone, shouted:

"Who's in there?"

"It's me. Andrews. In the parlor," he shouted, and half a dozen men uttered exclamations. Then they poured into the house, and several flashlights lighted the room. The lights blinded Andrews, but enabled the newcomers to recognize him, whereupon they fell upon his bonds and set him free in a few seconds. The detective got unsteadily to his feet and stretched himself.

"Much obliged," he muttered. He now saw that the party consisted of the chief, Halliday, Green, the local editor, and two other reporters. There was also a camera man, who was setting up his machine on a tripod. Then he took out a curious stick with a little steel crosspiece, upon which he sprinkled some black substance.

"Now, Mr. Andrews, lay down again and pretend to be tied up, just as you were when we rescued you," he commanded with the superb impudence of a news photographer.

"You go to hell," roared the infuriated Andrews. Bad enough to be caught tied up and defeated, but to pose in that attitude was too much for any human being, let alone one who had suffered much in the last two hours.

"Who tied you up, Andy?" asked Halliday.

"I don't know," he said sullenly.

"You mean to say you let them bind you like that and you didn't even see them?" asked Easton incredulously.

"The fight was in the dark," he said. "I'll tell you what happened. I had a notion that my place to-night ought to be here instead of in my bed at the hotel; that the policeman on guard might need assistance. Accordingly I came out here about eleven o'clock. I found the ground deserted, but I heard the sounds of a struggle in the house, and I supposed that the officer was in a battle with criminals, and I rushed into the house to help him.

"I had just got inside the door when four dark figures arose and set upon me. I put up a pretty good fight, but there were too many for me, and before I could get my gun into action I was knocked out by a blow in the head. When I came to I was tied up like this."

The story was not exactly true, but Andrews felt he owed it to himself to make the best explanation he could for being *hors de combat*. He was glad to see that it was accepted without question.

"Didn't see any ghosts, did you?" asked the chief.

"Certainly not," replied the detective testily.

"Well, Sears, my man, says he was leaning against the front door of the house, which he had locked, and he had the key in his pocket, when it opened behind him and a ghost pulled him right through the door and into the house. He saw the grinning skeleton and he fainted. When he came to, the front door was open, and he was lying at the back of the hall.

"He had struck his head a frightful

blow when he fell, and thought he had fractured his skull. He was crawling to the front door when the ghost came after him again, but he managed to get out and he didn't stop running and yelling till he got to the police station. The man in charge telephoned me. Meanwhile the reporters came out of the hotel, and we all piled into my car and came up to investigate."

"The second ghost that frightened him was me," grinned Andrews. "I was gagged as well as bound, and I heard him groaning; so to attract his attention, I banged on the floor with my heels. I heard him yelling all the way down the street."

"Who do you suppose the four men were?" demanded Halliday.

"I don't know. Perhaps some crooks who read in your valuable papers that there was supposed to be a treasure hidden here, and came out to have a try for it. Suppose we scatter and search the house."

"Better keep in a body," suggested the chief. "If there are four of them, and they are still here, we'll need a crowd."

"Oh, they've gone long ago," replied the detective. "They either found what they came after, or they didn't. Otherwise your friend wouldn't have been allowed to make his getaway. I'm astonished they didn't tie him up as they did me."

Easton threw on the electric lights, and the terror of the darkness was dissipated. They found evidence of rummaging, but no trace of any secret hiding place which had been located by tearing up floors or or breaking through walls.

Halliday drew close to the detective. "Do you think that it was the murderer or murderers of Peterson who were in the house to-night?" he asked.

"You know as much about it as I do. Perhaps so, perhaps not. It's a cinch that the eyes of all the criminals in this country are now on this place, thanks to the publicity, and some of them are capable of making a try for the treasure."

"Isn't it more likely that persons who knew why the vaults were empty, and where their contents were hidden, might have been here?"

"That's possible. Anything is possible in this darn case. There is only one thing that is impossible, that Bill Phillips was present; he's safe in the Oakdale jail."

"But he's not," exclaimed Chief Easton. "I intended to tell you. We got a phone message from Oakdale an hour ago that he escaped at nine o'clock to-night."

"Good Lord! How could that happen? It's one of the strongest jails in the State."

"They don't know how it happened; they went to his cell and he was gone. In his place, wearing his clothes and suffering from a drug, was his attorney, Walter Otis, of Boston, who hadn't been able to tell what had happened when I got the message."

"Then it was Phillips who was hiding in this house," exclaimed Halliday; "the very man you said couldn't possibly be here, Andy. What do you think of that?"

"I wish I didn't have to think at all," groaned Andrews. "I wish I was a street cleaner or a hod carrier—what a great life they lead!"

CHAPTER XVI.

FUNERAL MARCH AND WEDDING MARCH.

LOVE is a great happiness when requited, but it creates a tremendous capacity for sorrow; it carries a protective instinct that is wonderful; it blinds its victims to all faults in those who are loved, and it becomes a frenzy when events make it impossible for one lover to aid another who is in pain or trouble.

Mary Litchfield had come to love Bill Phillips; in him she did not see an everyday youth whose career did not give evidence of much brains or great ability; while her father believed that Bill was a very ordinary young man whose education had done him no good and who had reached his proper level when he was lying under an automobile, his face covered with grease as he tinkered with the in'ards of the brute. She saw a gallant chap who remained in his home town, where there were no opportunities, for the sake of his mother, and who bravely accepted hard manual labor because it was the only way he could support her and remain with her.

When she had first heard that her hero was accused of killing Amon Peterson, she had been filled with fury at the fools who would harbor such an idea, and burned with desire to convert them to a sensible mode of thought. Then she learned that Peterson himself had accused him with his dying breath, and that Bill had fled the town. It seemed to her as though there was no way of controverting a dying statement except by proving conclusively that the dead man had been mistaken because the person he thought he recognized had been somewhere else, and she had immediately rushed to the rescue with her story of being in Bill's company a mile away from the scene of the crime at the moment it was known to have occurred.

She never doubted for a moment that Bill was innocent; she thought she knew him inside and out, and the possibility that he could shoot down anybody, particularly a helpless old man, was preposterous. However, she had a college education, had read a lot of fiction, and was *au courant* with the newspapers, and she knew that innocent persons were often convicted of crime upon much more flimsy evidence than identification by the individual who was shot.

In her mind she was not assisting a criminal, but protecting an innocent person by her fictitious alibi; if Bill had other proof of his innocence which was conclusive so much the better, but if he had not, his sweetheart would go upon a witness stand and perjure her pure soul with all the good will in the world.

The news of his capture while trying to enter Canada was a hard blow, but her faith stood it; she figured it out that Bill had no proof that he was not in the vicinity of the crime, and, of course, had no means of knowing that she had supplied it; therefore, he supposed that he would be convicted out of hand when he heard of the dying statement of Peterson, and had obeyed a natural impulse to save his life by flight.

She had laid her plans to go back to the Oakdale jail and insist upon seeing him so that she might whisper to him how she had saved him and compel him to corroborate her story, but it happened that Mrs. Litchfield had suspected some such intention, had notified her father, and they locked her in her room and put the hired man on guard all day beneath her window to prevent her departure.

Mary feared to write him a letter because she thought that the police would open all his mail; she could not telegraph him for the same reason even if she succeeded in getting a message away from her home. She banged on her door until her little fists were bruised without any effect upon her hard-hearted parents, and cried for hours as though her poor little heart would break, which it very nearly did.

She had attended the funeral with the intention of asking Ruth Peterson to deliver the message to Bill, but her father stuck close to her side, and when she got home she was locked in again while the bank president remained home to aid in the jailing of his beloved daughter. So far as Mr. and Mrs. Litchfield were concerned their name would not figure in the trial if they could help it.

There were no trains to Oakdale after seven in the evening and Mary was released from imprisonment on the night when the events in the last chapter occurred. She sat at dinner, but refused to eat, her face was streaked with tears and her eyes were inflamed from excessive weeping, and she refused to make any reply to the kindly remarks of her suffering parents.

After dinner she moved to the piano and played the last mournful nocturnes and preludes of Chopin as most expressive of her mood. She was performing the "Funeral March" in a manner that a critic would have described as lacking in technique and sloppy with sentiment, when the phone rang, and from force of habit she answered it. Her mother and father were still in the dining room, the instrument rested upon the piano top in the parlor.

"Hello," she sniffed.

"Darling," came softly from the instrument.

"Ooh," she exclaimed. "Is it you? I thought—"

"I'm out. I escaped. Mary, do you trust me?"

"With my life. Oh, Bill, my heart is broken!"

"I didn't do it, Mary."

"I know that. Listen. I've told them you were with me all the evening. I'll swear to it."

"No good; I admitted you were not, and I wouldn't have you swear a lie."

"But I wanted to. I had to do something for you."

"Just trust me. Never mind what they say. Good-by."

"But Bill—" she wailed. No use. He had hung up. The girl's mood had changed. Suddenly her parents heard the crashing chords of the opening of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," and then the triumphal music rang out. Mary gave a loud laugh; then she threw her arms upon the keys, and laid her head on them while she alternately laughed and wept happily.

CHAPTER XVII.

"SECOND THIEF BEST OWNER."

NEARLY two hours were spent by the officers and reporters in the Peterson house in a vain effort to discover indications of what the unknown assailants of the detective had been doing in the place, and whether they had accomplished the object of their visit. That these had not been aimless visitors seemed to be evidenced by the fact that they had not smashed through floors and walls; nothing was injured, nothing seemed to have been disturbed. In the end there was nothing to do except return to the hotel where the procession wended its way.

It was after three o'clock when Andrews turned in, but he set his alarm clock resolutely at eight; there would be a big day in front of him. It did not seem to have been ten minutes before its clang awakened him, and he saw a daylight-bathed chamber. Groaning, he arose and doused himself with cold water.

He was stiff and sore in every joint, and he saw red welts on his bare legs and wrists where the cords had cut into them. Coming out of his bathroom with his face dripping and a towel in his hands, he observed that the position of his bureau was not as it had been the night before; it seemed to have been moved several inches to the right.

His eye had been trained to notice such trifles, but whether the bureau had been disturbed during his slumber or during his absence the night before he did not know; in the condition of mind in which he had returned from Peterson's it was quite possible he would not have observed anything.

He dropped the towel and sprang to the piece of furniture which he pulled out. It had been placed cornerwise near the window, and behind the bureau he had tucked a box containing Ruth Peterson's slipper, exhibit A, the handkerchief, exhibit B, and the remaining bottle of wine, exhibit C.

He knew before he looked that the slipper would not be there, but he gave an exclamation of indignation when he saw that the box had vanished with its entire contents, wine and handkerchief as well as the dainty little shoe.

Of course, the thief was obvious. Miss Ruth Peterson had come to the conclusion that he had stolen her slipper for some reason connected with the crime, and she had taken advantage of his absence to get into his room and retrieve her own; unless she was caught taking it she ran no risk, for the shoe belonged to her. Andrews could not have had it in his possession unless he had stolen it; to create a disturbance about her recovery of it would be an admission that he was illegally in possession. He did not blame her very much, in fact, rather admired her daring; but he considered it a dirty trick to walk off with the wine, and why had she taken the handkerchief which he had shown her, and the ownership of which she had disclaimed.

Darn it, the girl had swiped all his clews. It was a very angry detective who sat down in his B. V. D.'s in which he did not look in the least athletic, to consider what he was going to do, and in what respect the situation had been changed by her audacity.

In the first place she had stolen his proof that she was the woman who had left the heelprint in the dust, and that she had

dropped a handkerchief in the chamber in which the crime had been committed. He had evidence enough in the shoe and the heelprint to arrest her on suspicion, but he could make no arrest without one and the other. In the next place, she had carried off the handkerchief which he had hoped to force her to admit was her own.

On the other hand, she had convinced him by this action that she was the woman visitor to the Peterson house, and that she had a guilty knowledge of the events on the night of the murder.

If there had been an innocent explanation of the heelprint and the handkerchief she would not have felt it necessary to retrieve them. Furthermore, a young woman does not enter a man's room in the dead of night to commit a robbery if she knows the man is a detective, armed and probably sleeping with one eye open, not even such a bold young woman as Ruth Peterson. But if she knows that the detective is not at home, that he is a mile away, lying in the dark, bound hand and foot and securely gagged and will be likely to remain there for many hours, she might take advantage of that fact and do all the burglarizing she wants.

Therefore it seemed evident to him that Ruth had been aware of his plight; and if she were aware of it, it meant that she knew there were criminals hidden in the house that night and who they were. Her activity in the hotel, the escape of Bill Phillips from Oakdale in time to have come by automobile to Miltville and be in the house before Andrews got there indicated that the pair were working together, probably with confederates.

On the one hand she had stolen his evidence, giving him no excuse for making an accusation against her. If he alleged that he had secured one of her shoes and compared it with his camera print, finding that the print had been made by the heel of the right shoe, but that he didn't have the shoe any more to prove his assertion, he would be hooted.

On the other hand she had practically admitted the truth of his suspicions by taking the offensive, and made it evident that she knew what she could not possibly know innocently, that he was forcibly detained from returning to his room. As he had not intended to arrest her, but preferred to leave her free so that she might lead him to the other principals, he concluded that what he had deduced from her behavior was more important than the possession of the evidence.

"I'll find a way to get even with you, young lady," he said grimly; then continued the business of dressing, and finally descended to the dining room with an appetite for his breakfast. Just inside the door at a table facing the one which he was accustomed to use sat Ruth looking as fresh as a daisy and as cheerful as a cat which has just completed the guzzling of a singing bird.

"Oh, Mr. Andrews, may I speak to you a moment?" she chirped as he entered. Grinning sourly, he lumbered over to her table.

"Sit down, please."

He bumped into a chair and regarded her dubiously while he began to drum on the table with his big fingers.

"You are a wonderful detective, I know," she smiled, "but you are terribly busy so I didn't dare bring my small mystery to you; but now I'd like to tell you about it."

"I'd love to hear it," he said with heavy satire.

"A few mornings ago, I discovered one of my slippers was missing. I looked everywhere for it, but it never turned up. My door was locked on the inside and nobody could possibly have entered through the window, and it was the most utterly weird thing, wasn't it?"

"Doesn't sound possible," he growled. How he hated to be razzed!

"Of course, that made the other shoe worthless, and I felt badly about it because they were very comfortable, though they had been worn a lot. However, I had other shoes and I thought no more about it. But this morning I made the astonishing discovery that the left shoe had gone after the right."

"So that's the story!" he exclaimed approvingly.

"Isn't that the most astonishing thing.

Do you suppose rats could have taken them?"

"Couldn't say," he retorted.

"Have you any idea what could have become of them?"

"Yes," he said glaring at her. "I think that both shoes fastened together and weighed down by heavy stones, are probably lying in the deepest part of the Miltville River by this time."

"But how could that be?" she asked with a smile of bland simplicity.

"You're a clever girl, Miss Peterson," he retorted, "but I'm no fool as you'll discover before you're many days older."

"Oh, now you're angry, and I thought you would help me. You seemed so nice," she pouted.

"I've got more evidence that you overlooked; come again when I'm home," he said pointedly. Then he rose and lurched away with so much dignity in his back that she giggled.

Andrews's face was red, and his indignation was boiling. The girl had taunted and flouted him, but he'd show her. How brazen she was and how completely unafraid; but she had shown her hand; from now on he would have her watched, the slightest misstep would betray her.

Until now he had been uncertain whether the unknown visitors of last night were the people who had killed Peterson or crooks attracted by publicity and in search of hidden treasure, but Ruth had proved that the murderers had been there in person. While he had told his rescuers that four men had assaulted him, he actually had no idea how many there had been; it was possible that Phillips alone had done the job, perhaps Phillips assisted by Ruth. That would explain how she knew it was safe to ransack his room at the hotel; if she had helped gag and bind him she could have entered the chamber without fear.

He dreaded to see the morning papers because he knew his discomfiture would figure in the headlines; he ducked his head as reporters entered the room; he didn't want to discuss the matter if he could help it.

So he gulped his breakfast, went to the newsstand, bought all the papers, and went back to his room where he could look them over leisurely and carefully.

There he was in the headlines:

State Detective Duped;
Andrews Rescued By Reporters;
Famous Sleuth Bound And Gagged By Crooks
Andrews Outwitted

They made him writhe with shame, but he read the accounts and realized that the reporters had done the best they could for him. What he wanted to know about most, however, was what had happened at the Oakdale jail; what story Otis had told to explain the escape of Bill Phillips. There it was.

Walter Otis had visited Phillips late in the afternoon, and had arranged to send the accused man's dinner in from a hotel. The meal had been inspected by the assistant warden and sent in to the prisoner who had eaten heartily.

About eight thirty Otis had returned, and was admitted to the cell without question. He declared that he was discussing the case with Phillips quietly when the man had sprung at him, covered his nose with a handkerchief soaked with chloroform, and he knew no more. When he awoke, he found that his clothes had been removed, that he was dressed in the prisoner's clothes, and lying on his bunk. He was furious at the trick, renounced the defense of Phillips, of course, denounced the prison officials for permitting the escape, and planned to return to Boston in the morning.

The guard who had let Phillips out, and the assistant warden who had passed him to the street declared that Otis had left the cell, spoke pleasantly in the office, and stepped into an automobile which had carried him away. Otis was about the same size as Phillips, had iron gray hair, and a grayish black mustache; so had the prisoner when he left the jail. Of course, there was a hue and cry; the pursuit was on—and all the rest of it.

The theory was that chloroform, a gray wig and a mustache had been smuggled in to Phillips, probably with the dinner.

It seemed to Andrews that the explanation of the prison officials was very lame,

and that Otis's story would not wash. It was much more likely that the disguise had been taken to the prisoner by Otis who had assisted him to put it on. As the cell door was nothing but a steel grating, the guard must have turned his back.

Andrews knew that Otis was a power in the State, had tremendous influence, perhaps enough to fix the authorities to connive at the escape. While it was possible that Otis had bribed the guard it did not seem likely that the warden would have been deceived; Andrews knew that disguises were rarely effective, particularly one donned in haste as this must have been. He nodded his head sagely—that escape was winked at. Why?

Bill Phillips was nothing but a mechanic in a small town garage. That Otis knew him at all was strange, that he would undertake his defense remarkable, and that he would connive at his escape was preposterous, unless—unless what?

That Phillips was more than what he seemed. That he was a tool of Walter Otis, had committed a murder under orders, but had not accomplished what he had come for, and had been released to finish his job.

So there was politics in this affair. Well, politics had never interfered with Henry Andrews, and it wasn't going to. He had been assigned to catch the murderer of Amon Peterson and send him to the chair, and he proposed to do it, Walter Otis, the sheriff of Oakdale, and every crooked politician in the State to the contrary notwithstanding.

If one could find the explanation of the friendship of Otis for Phillips, a friendship which survived indorsing a bad check for a big sum and which he was sure had not been ended by the handkerchief moistened with chloroform, it would be of great assistance in solving the Peterson mystery, but Andrews felt sure that Otis would not make an explanation. If the big lawyer could be watched, if his papers could be examined, something worth while might result; however, he knew better than to go to his chief with a request to shadow Otis unless he had a lot more than conjecture to justify his desire.

He did think that recent developments made it evident that he needed an assistant in Miltville, as the local police had failed to aid him in any important particular; accordingly he called the State House and asked that another man be assigned to the case at once. The chief bawled him out for getting himself tied up and put out of commission the night before, and he took the rebuke meekly for he considered it deserved.

"I'll send down Murphy," said the chief. "He is a fighter and a good sleuth, but he hasn't any wonderful amount of gray matter. You can depend upon his doing what you tell him."

"That's all I want; much obliged, boss."

When Murphy arrived he would put him on Ruth Peterson's trail; for Ruth would lead him to Phillips if the alleged murderer were lurking in the vicinity.

Curiously enough, he still was loathe to believe that Phillips had slain Peterson; that hunch stuck despite the rapidly increasing indications that he had, despite his own actions which were certainly those of a man who knew he was guilty and wanted to save his neck. While many a policeman would have shut his mind to any other explanation and contented himself with getting enough to convict Phillips, Andrews followed that course only when he was shown conclusively that nobody else could have done it.

The ringing of his telephone bell broke in upon his cogitations, and to his astonishment it was Ruth Peterson on the line.

"May I have a few words with you, Mr. Andrews?" she asked sweetly. "Will you come down to my room?"

"If you want to hand me any more raspberries, no," he retorted.

"Serious conversation, really."

"All right."

He put on his coat; he always took it off in his room; and he wore suspenders; then crossed to thirty-seven, knocked, and was told to enter.

Ruth was sitting by the window, but rose when he came in.

"What I wanted to see you about was this," she said. "There is no sense in my hanging around this dead town any longer.

The public administrator takes charge of the estate in the absence of an executor, and it may be months before he decides that my brother and myself inherit in the absence of a will. There is nothing in it for me to stay; I haven't much money, and I can be earning something in New York. How about it?"

"Why do you ask me?" he demanded.

"Because you've got some idiotic suspicion that I killed my own father, or know something about his death. You've been sleuthing me since I arrived, and I want to know whether I am going to be arrested or not."

"I've got good grounds for my suspicions," he said frankly. "You could do a lot toward clearing this thing up if you talked. I am not going to arrest you if you stay in town, but you try to take a train out and see what happens."

"I have a mind to see," she retorted, a glint of anger in her eye. "You haven't a thing on me since—"

"Since you swiped the shoe, you almost said."

"Since I got back my property which you had stolen. What did you want of the old shoe, anyway?"

"I should tell you," he grinned. "Now listen, Miss Peterson. You are a good, wise girl, and you don't want to get into trouble. I've had you looked up in New York, and I know all about you; you haven't hidden a thing. I don't accuse you of killing your father, but you stand an elegant chance of going up as an accessory if you don't come clean; I'm talking straight."

"Upon the night my father was murdered I was one of a party of four which went to the theater in New York, and supped at the Biltmore. I was escorted home at two in the morning; my maid received me at my apartment. I rose at nine, read in the morning papers that my father had been killed, dressed in a hurry, and caught a train at once for Miltville. Trump that."

"Got an alibi all cooked up," he sneered. "Who were the parties with you?"

"Reputable people."

"Give me their names, and I'll have them looked up."

"After you arrest me, not before."

"You were seen in Miltville in company with Bill Phillips on the night of the murder," he said impressively.

The girl laughed scornfully. "Try your third-degree methods on some one who hasn't been around," she replied. "I am, then, a prisoner under suspicion, and must not leave town."

"That's about it."

"Very well. I won't call your bluff for a couple of days. I can stick it out in Miltville a week or two longer if I have to."

"That's a nice, sensible girl," he approved.

"Thanks for calling, Mr. Andrews."

"Don't mention it," he growled. Then he took his departure a trifle discomfited. He had been bluffing, and she knew it, and she had been having fun with him. He hated people to have fun with him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WALTER OTIS IN PERSON.

HE left the hotel and got his car out of the garage, and started toward the Peterson house. He was annoyed to see two or three cars follow him, filled with reporters and camera men, but there wasn't anything he could do about it. It was bad enough to be stumped by the case, but it was awful, every time he tried to slip away quietly, to be forced to head a parade. When he reached the scene of the murder he stationed the two local cops at the fence with orders to keep the reporters outside the grounds. He didn't want them to see him puttering around, for he had no particular purpose in his visit.

The house had already been searched from cellar to attic, and the barn had been combed pretty thoroughly. He would have liked to play on the old piano out in the stall, but he couldn't with an admiring audience on the fence.

After a few minutes in the house he went out to the barn and sat on the piano stool, while he lighted a cigar and went into a brown study.

What had been the motive of Amon

Peterson in clearing his deposit boxes of his securities and private papers; living alone in a house apart? He must have known that he ran great risk in bringing anything of much value into his house. While the man was a miser in the sense that he was mean, he was a business man; he did not hoard his money, but put it out to draw big interest; he even took risks of loss, something that misers do not do.

If Andrews could discover exactly what business he had been in at the time of his death, he would be a long way on the road to discovering the cause of the murder. Why, for example, had he given Phillips a check for ten thousand? It must have been in payment for something; he never gave anything away.

Had he taken his securities out and sold them in order to get a very large amount of cash for some big enterprise? If the detective could discover one stock held in his name he might find out what agent had sold it to him, and by inquiry find out who transacted his market business. He struck his thigh in disgust for his own stupidity, although it was excusable, since he was not a business man, and the running down of ownership of stocks and bonds was not in his line.

The Miltville Bank had cashed coupons for Peterson; it must have a record of the bonds from which they were cut; and there was the United States collector of internal revenue, who had Peterson's income tax return. Upon that blank would be a list of securities held by the old man. Andrews wasn't sure that the publicity provision of the income tax would permit him to look at the entire return, but he had some friends in the office; most likely they could be induced to come to his assistance. While Peterson undoubtedly cheated the Government as much as he dared, ownership of securities were a matter of record, and he would not dare fail to make his return.

Once he was in the possession of the list of the missing securities he could ascertain if they had been sold, and whether it was money or the securities which had been responsible for his murder.

He rose and looked again around the barn. They had already pried up all loose boards in the floor, tapped every inch of the walls, looked carefully over the roof; certainly there was no hiding place in the barn, yet he had found champagne bottles there, and Peterson was no wine bibber; somebody had been making use of the stable beside the owner.

He considered bootleggers. There was supposed to be big money in bootlegging, and a couple of hundred per cent profit would look good to an old rascal like Peterson, while the illegality of the business would not bother him in the least. And bootleggers were violent; murder was a common thing among them. Had bootlegging confederates killed him?

It might have been a good theory if they had not so much evidence against Bill Phillips, who earned his living in a garage and did not roam about the country delivering booze. Andrews put the soft pedal on the piano, and began to play "Hearts and Flowers"; it helped him to think when he made music. Why did people kill? For love, jealousy, gain, self defense, vengeance, to prevent betrayal?

Suppose Peterson had double-crossed unscrupulous associates, had planned to betray them, was holding out on them, his existence had become a danger. Drop the hidden treasure motive, the desire to kill him to inherit his wealth; suppose Phillips was a dupe, Ruth a catspaw playing somebody else's game, some powerful person, able to make a prison door stand ajar; suppose Walter Otis had killed Peterson?

Andrews ended his music with a discordant crash. Why not Otis? What other reason would be strong enough to persuade him to risk his reputation and influence by conniving at the escape of Phillips? Where had Otis been on the night of the murder? Had he been in Miltville? Was he in company with Phillips; had Phillips carried him out of town after the crime?

He got quite excited about the new theory, walked up and down, lit another cigar, and puffed on it violently. And then one of the police guards entered the barn and said,

"There's a man named Walter Otis out here, and he insists upon seeing you."

"Bring him in," shouted Andrews. What a coincidence, what an amazing coincidence that this man whom he had been considering as the possible murderer, should have arrived at this time in a place where there was not the least reason for his coming, unless—

Walter Otis walked into the stable. He was a man of about fifty, clean cut, athletic, polished, and assured in his manner. He wore a trim light gray suit, carried a cane of Malacca, wore a small gray mustache under a rather aquiline nose, and had clear keen gray eyes, which took in the detective at a glance. Andrews donned his mask of solidity and stupidity, and concealed his triumph very skillfully.

"You Mr. Walter Otis?" he asked.

"Yes, and you are State Officer Andrews." It was a pleasant but authoritative voice.

"At your service. I've heard of you, Mr. Otis. You are well known in Boston, and of course I heard of the affair at the jail the other night."

"Naturally. I had an unfortunate experience."

"Must have been," said the detective sympathetically. "I was wondering what brought you down here."

Otis seated himself upon a box, and from a gold-mounted case he drew a cigarette, which he lit with a patent lighter of gold. Then he smiled in friendly fashion, revealing fine white teeth.

"I looked for you at the hotel, and then followed you out here. I had to run the gantlet of a lot of reporters."

"Yep. I'm like a rhinoceros that always carries a lot of little birds on his back; I'd like to drown the whole kit and caboodle of them."

"Don't blame you. You are very well thought of in town, Andrews. The chief told he had his best man on this case; you've had a number of striking successes, I believe."

"I've been kind of lucky, but you didn't come here to tell me how good I am."

"No. I represent William Phillips."

"Still?" asked the officer satirically.

Otis's eyes twinkled, but he nodded. "Despite his shameful treatment of me I cannot think the boy guilty," he declared.

"What's your big interest in this fellow?" asked Andrews curiously. "Here he goes and passes a bum check on you, and then he dopes you and breaks jail; and you still think he's an innocent kid."

"I do. Foolish of me, isn't it?"

"You haven't got a reputation for being a fool," said the detective gravely. "What is your game, Mr. Otis? We're alone in this barn; it's your veracity or mine, and I think any court in this State would take your word instead of mine. You know darn well that you cooked up that jail break."

"Since we are alone, I don't mind admitting that I did."

"Well, you're honest, anyway."

"Thanks. The reason I helped him to escape is that I happen to know that he is innocent, and that the district attorney wanted to rush his trial. He stood a chance of being railroaded to the chair before the real facts have a chance to come out, and I couldn't have that happen."

"If I had any witnesses to this conversation you'd go to jail yourself."

"I am aware of that, but there are no witnesses. I am so sure of his innocence because he happened to be with me on the night of the murder."

"Right here in this house, perhaps."

Otis laughed slightly. "Perhaps you think I killed Amon Peterson."

"It's not impossible, Mr. Otis. Why did you indorse that check?"

"I indorsed it because I wanted to have a chance to sue Peterson. I expected that it would be bad."

"You knew him, then?"

"We had business dealings in the past."

Andrews stood up and began to walk about. "You didn't come here to make a lot of dangerous admissions to me, Mr. Otis. You're too wise a man for that. You wanted to find out something from me. Will you make a clean breast of what you know in this matter if I tell you everything I have found out?"

"I know very little more than I have told you, but I should like very much to know if you have other evidence against

Phillips than the alleged dying statement of Amon Peterson."

"You'll find out my other evidence when the case is tried. You are the second person who has tried to establish an alibi for this fellow. Miss Litchfield, his sweetheart, said he was with her in front of her house at eleven five; but I found out she was lying, and I got an admission from Phillips in the presence of the district attorney that he had not been with her at all. Where were you and Phillips when the crime was committed?"

"I am not ready to tell that, Mr. Andrews."

"It won't wash, anyway. You demonstrated you'd go the limit for him when you smuggled in a disguise and let him dope you. I happen to know that Phillips was in this town in the company of Ruth Peterson, the old man's daughter."

Otis started violently, then laughed.

"I'm too old a bird to be caught with that chaff." He too rose from his seat and began to walk about in apparent aimlessness. His course took him straight into one of the stalls, and he kicked without apparent reason at the loose straw piled up at the far end.

"If you're looking for that champagne, I found it," said Andrews quietly.

Otis reddened, then laughed.

"You made a thorough search, I see," he said.

"Found the booze first thing off the bat. What do you know about it?"

"It was some of my private stock," said Otis brazenly.

"For the love of Mike!" gasped the detective. "And what was it doing here?"

"Confidence for confidence," replied the lawyer. "You tell me what you have discovered, and I'll tell you what the wine was doing here."

"You tell me first."

"I brought it down here to drink."

"You and Ruth Peterson?"

"Ruth Peterson and myself," he replied.

"Well," grinned Andrews, ably concealing his astonishment, "she got some of it; in fact, she has one of the bottles hidden in her room now, if she hasn't drunk it up already."

"You surprise me; I thought you said you had it."

"That's quite a story, too. Say, I could put you under arrest for what you have already admitted."

"If you should arrest me, you would be called off the case, and I should immediately be released."

"Yes," he said bitterly. "I know you've got a big pull. Do you know who killed Peterson?"

"No—except that it was not Phillips."

"And do you know why Peterson accused him with his dying breath?"

"If he did."

"What did you come down here for, anyway—to put your head into a noose?"

"No," was the astounding reply. "I came down to tell you that I intend to bring Phillips here to-night, and I don't want you to arrest him."

"But I've got to arrest him!" exclaimed the astonished detective. "I'll lose my job if I don't. He's wanted for murder, and he's broke jail."

"If I give you my word that I'll produce him myself and restore him to jail in a couple of days?"

"I'm not so sure of your word after what you've told me. It's my duty to take in the pair of you."

Otis made a gesture of impatience, suddenly drew a card case from his pocket, took out a folded sheet of notepaper and thrust it under the eyes of the officer.

"Does that mean anything to you?" he demanded.

Andrews ran his eyes over the paper.

"I'm deaf, dumb, and blind," he declared.

"That's all right. Now I'm going out and say a few words to the reporters. I promised to make a statement after I had seen you."

The two men walked out of the stable, and the group of news writers at the gate immediately became eager.

"This is Mr. Walter Otis, boys," said the detective. "Maybe he'll say something to you."

"Please, Mr. Otis," pleaded Halliday. "You're the first piece of news to-day. What are you doing in Miltville?"

"I came down to consult with Mr. Andrews. Since my outrageous treatment by the ungrateful Phillips the other night I felt it my duty to give the detective in charge some facts in regard to Phillips that will help the case."

"Then you are not going to help him any more?" asked Halliday excitedly.

Otis made an expressive gesture.

"I was deceived in the young man," he said.

"What is the nature of the facts you refer to?" asked Halliday.

The lawyer laughed good-naturedly.

"Really, the time isn't ripe to disclose them. I'm going back to the hotel, boys, and I happen to have a bottle of good Scotch in my bag. A word to the wise—"

As a result, the entire party, with the exception of Andrews, hastened away from the Peterson place, leaving the detective alone in his glory.

CHAPTER XIX.

ANDREWS ARRESTS A LADY.

ANDREWS looked after them with perplexity written on his countenance. To him the affair was taking on the most amazing complexion. The note which Otis had shown to him was an order. It was signed by the chief of detectives, his superior officer, and it instructed him to obey without question any demand made upon him by Walter Otis.

Andrews was a good soldier, but he could not help wondering if the note had not been written under a misapprehension by the chief. Surely his superior had not expected that the first demand made by Otis would be to keep his hands off the man so badly wanted by the authorities for the murder of Amon Peterson, when it was his duty to arrest Phillips on sight.

Or else the thing was so big that Phillips was not important, and it was Otis's desire to make use of him to catch greater fish; in which case he had no business being secretive with the detective in charge of the case.

Andrews felt he was competent to keep any secret, and he certainly could not continue to work intelligently when things were going on behind his back in this fashion.

With all due respect to Walter Otis, he determined to have a talk with the chief over the phone before he obeyed outrageous orders without question.

Filled with this purpose, he went back to the village, stopped at the drug store, and put in his long distance call from there.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

HE CAME, HE CAME

HE came, he came
On Mary's night;
Her heart's delight
And mine, and mine.

He came, he came,
Sweet baby boy,
To be her joy
And mine, and mine.

He came, he came;
Let joy bells ring
Her little king,
And mine, ah, mine.

Robert Wilson Stevenson.

Letting Him Down Easy

By RICHARD F. MERRIFIELD

POP DRAPER moved his glasses down his nose and studied the crumpled clipping. It seemed curious that one's life and food could depend on so small and innocent an object as a newspaper cutting hardly half an inch in length.

He leaned back in his chair, while Constantine, the old Greek, placed the coffee and fried rice on the table before him.

"Vairy mooch bizzy, Pop?" asked Constantine, as he had asked for thirty years.

Pop looked up at the massive, genial face, with its great white mustache and friendly eyes, and grunted just as he had grunted for thirty years. The thought passed through his mind that he might never hear the old waiter ask that familiar question again.

When Constantine had gone back to the kitchen Pop looked blankly around at the dark-green walls of the little restaurant. He remembered how he had "discovered" the place, years ago, and had selected it as a haven to come to and think over his assignments from the *Morning Transcript.* He reviewed his career on that paper, as rewrite man, telegraph editor, sports editor, and art critic.

Art critic! What a triumph that had been! He had covered everything from the Metropolitan Opera to the galleries. He had met them all—from Lina Cavalieri to William Chase. Art critic on the New York *Morning Transcript*—those were the palmy days!

And now—Curtis Newell Draper had become just old Pop Draper, a hanger-on who was retained at his desk more for sentiment's sake than anything else. He had found the old adage true—that the value of a newspaper man decreases with the years.

Pop grunted again, and reflected on the fickleness of fame. There was not time, though, to do much reflecting now. He had that clipping to attend to.

They had tossed it on his desk scarcely half an hour ago, saying that it was very important and the story had to be in before the first morning edition went to press—or ten o'clock that night. They had hinted that if it wasn't in before that time he would be advised to look around for easier work somewhere.

He knew what they were up to. He had seen it happen to others many times. They were " letting him down easy."

The restaurant clock pointed to two thirty. He read the clipping over again. It said that Thomas Hinckley, of Ashton, New York was in possession of a painting which he claimed was an original by Raphael. He had bought it from an art dealer, the item went on to say. The rumor was that Hinckley was trying to sell the painting, and that local art dealers had pronounced it a copy, a fake, and not an original. There wasn't much more.

Pop could not make out for certain whether the State mentioned was N. Y. or N. J. That was all the address contained in the story; no street number.

There was an Ashton, New York, he had found before leaving the office, and one in New Jersey. The New York town was two hundred miles up State; the Jersey one over beyond Jersey City somewhere. Yet it would hardly be the Jersey one. Pop did not fool himself for one minute. They were trying to get rid of him, and he knew it.

He recalled the twisted grin on the face of Lew Grimes, in charge of the desk at the office. Grimes had selected the clipping with care, Pop felt sure. Naturally, since he meant this assignment to be Pop's Waterloo, he had chosen not only a difficult but an impossible one.

It looked hopeless. Even if he succeeded in getting the story, and actually turned it in at the right time, Grimes would surely find some fault with it, and use that fault as an excuse to let him go.

He would make a faint attempt to get the story, though. Perhaps it might be in Jersey. There was always a bare chance. Grimes might have been mistaken in his choice.

Pop drew himself painfully out of the chair and rummaged behind the cashier's counter for the suburban telephone books. The one with the Jersey directory in it was beneath the dirty old typewriter on which the cashier wrote the menus every evening. Pop had used the machine on several occasions when he had been pressed for time. He lifted it away, and was surprised to find that such little exercise almost winded him. It hurt his back to move anything heavy nowadays.

As he placed the directory on the counter he caught sight of his reflection in the glass top. Ordinarily it would not have attracted him, but to-day he hesitated, and bent over, peering down to scrutinize his face.

He saw deep-lined features, framed about with stringy white hair and below with a short, uneven gray Vandyke. His mustache ends drooped now, where not long ago they had maintained a proud angle in the other direction.

Nevertheless, it was a distinguished face, he felt, and the glasses, heavily rimmed, with a black string, helped it immensely. He was encouraged. This was not Pop Draper, but Curtis Newell Draper, art critic and authority on the arts.

Then he remembered the clipping again, sagging inwardly at the thought. No, he was still Pop—and what was more, he'd have to hustle or he'd be just an old man without a job. This rambling thought and reminiscence would not do at all.

There were seven Hinckleys in the book under Ashton, but not one Thomas Hinckley. He sighed and rang up the first one listed.

" Ashton, 686-R, Ashton, New Jersey." A twenty cent call!

Constantine did not lift his head. He had heard Pop call out-of-town numbers many times.

" This is the New York *Morning Transcript*. We want to locate Thomas Hinckley. Does he live there?"

Pop blinked a little as the party at the other end slammed the receiver. This began to look interesting. He called another number.

" No—Thomas Hinckley does *not* live here!" he heard a man's voice say.

The third voice was that of a middle-aged woman. She informed him that the man had moved to Jersey City about a week ago. No, she was his sister-in-law. No, she did not know his address there, and would not wish to give it out if she did know.

He drew a long breath, blew upon his glasses, and polished them with his handkerchief, biting his mustache while he considered the problem.

Plainly, other people had been looking for Thomas Hinckley, and had been annoying these subscribers with inquiring phone calls. That accounted for the impatience of the people he had rang up. The afternoon was getting on. He wanted to give up the chase. It wouldn't be worth while in the end, anyway. Grimes would find a fault—

"Constantine," he said, calling over the counter, "they're trying to fire me. What do you think of that?"

"Eef they do that t'ing," replied the Greek, showing his white teeth, "I close op dees joint. When my frien' Pop not come here I cannot stan' eet!"

Pop straightened, and a little thrill went down his spine. Here was some one who regarded him affectionately. He had a friend.

"Well, I'll tell you something, Constantine. They are not going to fire me—understand? I won't let them!" With that, he flapped his coat together, buttoned it, hung his cane over one arm, and, with his shoulders thrown defiantly back, marched out of the door.

He rode uptown to the Hudson Tube, bought a Jersey City paper, and took a train for that city. People looked him over inquisitively from across the aisle, but he comforted himself with the idea that they thought him a celebrity.

He opened the paper wide, running over the columns from force of habit, but stopped presently at one headline. His eyes darted through the story, squinting more and more as they neared the end. It was an exposé of the Hinckley painting.

Hinckley, it said, was trying to sell an imitation Raphael as an original. The authorities had decided to investigate this. Art dealers were up in arms. The whole art world was in a furor at this deed of iniquity. And Hinckley had brazenly confessed that the picture was a fake, and, it was said, had mentioned three thousand dollars as the price.

The train finally pulled into Jersey City, and Pop was jostled off without realizing where he was. When his bearings returned he followed the crowd to the street. What should he do next, he wondered?

But then, he reasoned, of course the story of the fake painting *would* be featured in this town first. It hadn't broken into the New York papers yet. There was still time to get his story in. All he needed was an address and a picture of the "masterpiece." The rest of the data would be supplied from the columns of these papers.

His teeth set when he thought of that Hinckley fellow trying to pass off an imitation Raphael. Some chaps have a lot of nerve. He'd write scathingly about it, in his own manner.

How well he could treat a thing of this kind! If they would only let him have about three-quarters of a column on it. Perhaps signed. That would be a comeback! Hinckley should be raked into court.

First, he would need the address. The papers might give it to him; then again, they might withhold it. Why hadn't they printed it? Maybe there wasn't any address.

No, that couldn't be true. Every one has an address. Maybe they just neglected it. He decided that in the hurry it had been forgotten.

He would call them anyway. One can always try.

But luck was not with him. Beads of perspiration covered his brow as he telephoned each office in vain. The city desks either did not know or refused to give out information.

He hung up for the last time. Outside the drug store it was growing dark. Night would be along soon.

Mopping his brow, he stepped out of the booth. What would he do after he had been dropped? After thirty years on one

job, how does a man go about getting another?

Could he get another? Doing what? Newspaper? His brain had become dull. Wait—he thought—they might know the address at the police station. Should he try, or phone? No, they wouldn't know. The man, Hinckley, hadn't been arrested, although he deserved it richly. What should he do next?

Pop wandered out of the drug store, and stood surveying the long, darkening street. It was getting chilly. He drew his coat sleeves down over his hands and hunched his shoulders. His glasses were steamed.

Let's see. If Hinckley were trying to sell the painting, he would be nervy enough to try it through some dealer, some gallery. Maybe the scamp was in cahoots with some dealer-crook. The two of them might be disposing of a regular fake output in this manner. Such a scheme would not be impossible to carry out.

Art dealers—where would they be? Ah, the phone book, the classified directory. Pop stepped back into the store, and turned the pages of the book he wanted. With a short pencil grasped in his numbed, quivering fingers, he jotted down several addresses.

A tall man with a derby hat was locking the first place, leaving for the day. Pop walked up to him.

"Are you closing now?" he began hopefully.

The man nodded curtly at him and stalked down the street. Pop watched him disappear around the corner; then turned to observe the store, which was quite dark.

Well—the next address. He studied it under an arc lamp at the corner. The place was closed. Pop's spirits sank. A jeweler's clock said eight fifteen. An hour and three-quarters. Pop ran back over the afternoon and wondered where the time had flown.

He must have mused and dozed a long time in Constantine's. Probably he had left there around four or five. He had wondered several times before why time passed so quickly. His memory must be failing him. Where *had* the afternoon gone?

But never mind about that—there was still another art dealer. No, this was a gallery. On the second floor. No lights? Oh, yes. What luck—a light in the rear. Probably a bookkeeper working late.

The bookkeeper, a pleasant-faced chap of twenty or so, with serious eyes and fair hair, answered the knock.

"I'm looking for a Raphael, owned by a man—" What was the man's name? Hilton? Hinchley? No— "Anyway, he lives, or lived, in Ashton, and owns a Raphael." Pop was getting very tired.

"I am very sorry, sir, but we have no Raphaels here."

The young man's voice was pleasant. Pop sighed and turned to leave. There was no time for pleasantries. The fellow seemed to be thinking of something.

"But, do you know," he added, "I've heard the name Ashton somewhere, and I'm trying to place it. Wait a second." He went back to his ledgers, and turned the pages hurriedly, then beckoned to Pop.

"There—I was right!" he exclaimed, pointing at a page. "You see, we have a man in Ashton who does our frames for us. But that won't help you buy a Raphael, will it? I just wanted to satisfy my curiosity."

Pop bent over suddenly and read the name of the Ashton man. Thomas Hinckley! Picture framer. H-m.

But, no, the bookkeeper did not know Hinckley's Jersey City address. As a matter of fact, they hadn't had any dealings with him for some time. Doubtless, because of his moving. Glad to know he was in town. They would look him up.

When Pop was on the street once more he took a long breath. "Thought I'd never get out of there," he growled. Picture framer. Hinckley might have a shop with a sign somewhere.

No, that's right, he wouldn't, since he came here to escape publicity. He'd get publicity if Pop got hold of him! The scoundrel—causing him all this trouble!

Picture frame store, picture frame store. Weren't there any at all in this town? One at last. Was that a light in it, or only the reflection of the street lamp? Damn—it *was* the street light!

How cold it was getting! Pop's blood

didn't circulate so good nowadays. Guess Hinckley was in hiding now. He wouldn't show his face after the noise in the newspapers.

What would he tell Grimes, the desk man at the *Transcript?* Couldn't get the story; fell down on it. Well, he wouldn't go back there—that was all there was to it. He just wouldn't see Grimes's dirty smile. "Sorry, Pop," Grimes would say; "but we think you'd better find something easier for you now. Here's a voucher for two weeks' pay." The low-down—

"Hardware and Paint Supplies."

Pop had heard of "the last resort" many times. This was it. The last thing he could do. Not quite the last. There would still be the police station, or maybe another picture frame place on a side street. But they were slim chances. Still, he couldn't afford to overlook anything now.

He forced himself into the store. It was warmer in here anyway. The owner stood up from his seat behind the stove and removed a dead cigar from his teeth.

Pop began miserably. "You—you people supply some picture framers, I suppose?"

"Uh-huh." The man was exasperatingly casual. "Yup, we carry frames and backings and tacks and paints."

"I mean, do you know the names of any of your customers?"

"Some of them. But I wouldn't care to tell some one I don't know who they are. You could be a competitor, or something."

Pop told him that he was an art critic—*the* art critic on the New York *Morning Transcript*. The man regarded him with new interest.

Then Pop outlined the whole story very briefly. The shopkeeper had not read the papers, but he was willing to gossip.

"Why, yes—there's a—let's see—there's a fella down the street a ways. Bought some shellac and bitumen and one thing and another only th' other day. Don't know his name, nor his number, but he's near here, I guess. Say, I guess you newspaper fellas have to work right hard, don'tcha?"

Pop escaped as soon as possible, and gained the sidewalk again. He was beginning to know this sidewalk well—too well.

One thing was settled, at any rate. Hinckley—if this man the hardware fellow had spoken of was really Hinckley—was faking up old masters, after all. Bitumen. That was what most of the old artists had used to get those deep effects—the warm, underlying shadows, the foliage, the rich colors. Hinckley would know of that, and would use bitumen to make his fakes look genuine.

Bitumen had a strong odor. Pop knew that. It had petroleum gases in it. In this damp air, a heavy odor would follow the air currents down to the street. He had seen smoke descend just before rain.

Yes, it was going to rain before the night would be over. Therefore, if he walked along the street he might smell bitumen, or—

Pop shook himself. This thing was becoming an obsession—what crazy notions.

"I must think I'm *Sherlock Holmes,*" he mumbled. "Bitumen following the air currents! If I go crazy to-night, it 'll be Grimes's fault. Oh, yes, if I walk up and down this street long enough, maybe I'll smell bitumen and find my man! Brilliant idea. Rats! Anyway, bitumen is kept in cans. That hardware man said near here some place.

"Seems to me it wouldn't be a new house. Some old one, so Hinckley wouldn't have to sign a lease. That would be like making his address public, and besides he might want to skip somewhere else. Of course, it would be an old house."

He looked up and down the street for old houses, and selected one with dull red brick walls on the other side of the way. Before he crossed, it was necessary to wait on the curb, shivering, until a lumbering truck passed. Then he picked his way over the glistening asphalt.

The house was an undertaker establishment!

Pop's eyes found another building a block down the street. It certainly looked decrepit—a slanting roof and clapboards—clapboards painted to look like brick. There

was a little plot in front fenced in with iron grillework. Pop looked over the house and shook his head. As he did so he smelled paint, and started sniffing eagerly. Yet, despite its domestic appearance, it was evident from the various signs tacked on the side of the door, that the place was now used for offices.

In the black hallway he caught the odor better. It tickled his nostrils.

It wouldn't hurt to try. The first door on his left appeared dimly at the far end of the hall. He felt his way toward it and knocked again when no one answered.

In a moment the door opened slowly inward. He saw a girl and an elderly man standing behind her. The man motioned quickly. The girl slammed the door in Pop's face.

He staggered back against the wall, catching his glasses as they toppled on his nose. This was Hinckley's place all right. The crook.

Pop fumed, clutched his fingers together, and tried desperately to gather his wits. To work so hard to find his man, and then to have this happen.

He tried to force the door, but it would not budge.

"I'll fix them," he half whimpered. "I'll fix them. I'll have them jailed for this."

Luck started turning his way. The green lights of a police station shone calmly on a side street. Pop walked toward them as fast as he could, propelling himself with his cane.

With his *Transcript* credentials, the newspaper containing the story of the fake, and his own angry eloquence, he persuaded the lieutenant that Hinckley should be brought in and examined.

"Oh, McGuinness," the lieutenant called to a two-hundred pound plain-clothes man, "run over with Mr. Draper here and get this Hinckley fellow. Make it snappy, will you? The night shift 'll be here pretty soon, and I want to get home."

Pop struggled to keep up with McGuinness, and was puffing when they finally arrived at the house with the painted clapboards. The officer did not hesitate, but banged unceremoniously on the door.

When it was not answered, he put his massive shoulder to it and gave a gentle shove. The lock cracked—the door swung in and light flooded the hallway. Pop followed him into the room, a stuffy little office.

Hinckley was standing, petrified with fear, at a table which was stacked with frames and prints. All four walls of the dingy room were covered with prints, beautifully framed. Near Hinckley stood the girl, her eyes blazing with anger.

They were great black eyes, matching her black bobbed hair. Hinckley did not look like a relation. He was small, and fully as old as Pop.

No white hair, however, grew either on his head nor his face. Instead, he was quite bald and much wrinkled. Altogether, he looked very meek and harmless.

"This the man?" asked McGuinness. Pop nodded. The officer jerked his head at Hinckley. "Don't make a fuss now, folks. Come on over and see the lieutenant."

"Am I—are we—arrested?" murmured Hinckley weakly.

"Naw. Just pulled in. Don't be scared. Let's go," answered McGuinness.

"I won't go! And neither will he!" cried the girl defiantly. "He hasn't done anything. This is more of that newspaper stuff! You're not going to take us!"

"You'd better go quietly," suggested Pop.

"I suppose you're one of those rotten reporters!" she accused him. "Well, you can't arrest us, that's all!"

McGuinnes looked at Pop for advice. Pop returned the look expectantly. The girl kept on talking.

"I don't see why they can't let Mr. Hinckley alone. It was bad enough to have it all in the papers, but to be arrested, that's going too far. I won't allow it. I won't allow it."

McGuinnes eased himself into a chair, and began filling his pipe. The decision was up to Pop.

"Are you Hinckley's daughter?" he asked her. "If you tell the story now, perhaps you may save yourself from being arrested."

"That's right," put in McGuinness.

"Get the story and forget the arrest if you can. Maybe this guy's all right. Never c'n tell."

Hinckley looked reassured. The girl, under Pop's soothing words, quieted down, and consented to tell what it was all about. Pop, now that he faced the two, and saw that they were so human-looking and inoffensive, lost his rancor.

"Well, then," she said, "I am Mr. Hinckley's assistant, and my name is Miss Wilson. If I tell all about this, maybe you can write about it so that people won't think Mr. Hinckley is dishonest. You see, he was always loving Raphael so much. That was the cause of it. And one day, out in Ashton, he came in with the painting under his arm, rolled up. An art dealer there sold it to him. That happened before the notice in the *Courier* came out."

Pop drew the clipping from his pocket—the one Grimes had given him.

"This notice?" he said.

"Oh, you have it? Yes, that one. Well, Mr. Hinckley told me it wasn't a real painting by Raphael, but he didn't mind as long as it was near it."

"I—I liked it just the same," interrupted Hinckley.

"He wanted to hang it up so he could look at it. He spent three thousand dollars for the picture, all his savings. But then, it's so pretty. There's two women and two children—peasants—and they look so lifelike, even if Raphael didn't paint them. I think the artist who did ought to get some credit."

"A little slower," Pop requested. It was hard to memorize all this information. McGuinness was dozing in his chair.

"And then, well, the rumor leaked out, first, that he had an original, and it spread, until people were asking me if it was true that Mr. Hinckley was selling imitation old masters for real ones and getting big money for them. Can you imagine such nonsense! It got so bad that he moved here and asked me if I couldn't commute. I didn't mind, because I had faith in him. Mother said yes. Mr. Hinckley had been over to dinner with us several times—he lives alone—"

"No family, you know," said Hinckley, smiling gently. "Only a sister-in-law. She took my place in Ashton when I left."

Pop remembered the voice on the telephone, the middle-aged lady.

"Well, so one morning," went on Miss Wilson, "she found a bunch of reporters there, and couldn't get rid of them for love or money. They pinned her down and shot questions at her for an hour almost. She said a lot of things she didn't mean, because she was so confused. And to-day the papers told about him in the worst way. That was why I slammed the door when you came a little while ago. And now you and this policeman want to arrest us. What for? What have—"

"Wait a minute," Pop stopped her. "Hinckley, what do you use bitumen for?"

"Bitumen? Why, I mix it with turpentine and paint the frames with it. It makes them look old. There's nothing wrong in that."

"No, there isn't," agreed Pop. "I thought you were using it to make imitation old masters. They—Raphael and the rest, used it."

"You seem to know about paintings," said Hinckley. "Would you like to see mine, the imitation Raphael. Of course," he added deprecatingly, "it isn't real, and you might not like it."

"Let me see it, nevertheless."

Miss Wilson bent down and fished under the table, bringing out a long roll. She and her employer unrolled it carefully, holding it as high as they could reach.

McGuinness opened his eyes, regarding the proceedings sleepily.

Pop took three steps backward, stroked his Vandyke, half shut his eyes, drew up his body, cocked his head from side to side, and then advanced, bending low. He fingered the old cloth, scratched the brush marks with his little finger nail, sniffed here and there at the paint, and nodded to himself with satisfaction.

"Mr. Hinckley," he said importantly, "you are a fortunate man."

Hinckley's little dots of eyes sparkled worriedly.

"Although you may not know it," continued Pop, "you have here a genuine Raphael! I stake my reputation on it!"

"I knew it all along," laughed Miss Wilson happily.

"See," grunted McGuinness. "What did I tell you? Now it's all hunky dory. Kiss and make up. Blah!" He rose to go.

"I withdraw the charge, officer," said Pop. "Tell the lieutenant I'm sorry to have bothered him, and you, too. Have a cigar. And, by the way, hold the story out of the papers till to-morrow morning, will you?"

"Not on your life," retorted McGuinness. "I've got to report, haven't I? Well, they'll pick it up over at the station. This goes in the Joisey papers first. Can't help it. You'd better hustle."

He stooped as he went out the door.

"How can we thank you!" cried Miss Wilson gratefully.

"I'm not finished," said Pop dryly. "You people come with me to New York or you'll have a raft of reporters over here in half an hour. You have the laugh on the world, my good friend, while I—I believe that I may also afford to chuckle a little."

II.

CONSTANTINE was given the surprise of his life when Pop sauntered gayly into the little restaurant with Miss Wilson.

Hinckley followed, and the three seated themselves regally at the same table which Pop had occupied five hours before. Pop noted that the clock pointed to nine. There was one hour more before press time.

"If you'll excuse me for a moment," he said, rising, "I must use the phone."

"Just a minute," Hinckley detained him. "I want to tell you what I have in my mind and it can't wait.

"Mr. Draper," he spoke throatily, "I've been thinking over something. If you hadn't happened along, I'd have gone off to jail, and I'd never have known that my painting was real."

Pop remained silent.

"I have decided to sell the painting now. It will bring a great sum of money, many thousands. I believe I can get fifty thousand for it, and I want to divide that money with you."

"Wouldn't think of it for a minute," Pop decided without hesitation. "Not for one minute. Althought, mind you—"

Hinckley held up his hand for attention.

"Then," he interrupted, "will you be my guest on a round-the-world trip on which we shall visit the great galleries and view the art treasures of the centuries? I have always wanted to see them, but I desire a companion. Will you help me to sell the painting, by writing about it, and by telling me just how to proceed? Will you let me pay you for these services, because if I don't pay you, I'll have to pay somebody else, and you not only deserve it, but you are qualified—"

"On those conditions, Mr. Hinckley," said Pop, gravely, "I accept."

"And, Miss Wilson," asked Hinckley, turning to her, "will you accept my business and its contents, and the office?"

When that was arranged for, Pop stepped to the telephone and called the *Transcript*.

"City editor, please. Ah, Mr. Grimes? Draper speaking. I'm sorry to tell you that the masterpiece story, the fake story, is no good. What? No, I couldn't get the story of the fake. Oh, I am? No, you're wrong. I've just resigned. And now that I've resigned and been fired, let me tell you something.

"The story is not about an imitation painting, but a real one! Genuine! Wait a minute. Curtis Newell Draper, who has just disconnected from your staff, is about to leave on an extended trip, a voyage—ah, around the world, you know. Before he goes he will place this feature story for publication. Would the *Transcript* be interested? It would? Well, how much would the *Transcript* pay for so sensational a tale? Other papers are bidding—"

The phone call over with, Pop sat down at the cashier's typewriter, his face aglow. He twisted his mustache ends until they stood out bristling. There was still time, forty-five minutes in which to turn out his story for the *Transcript*.

Constantine waddled to the table.

"Thees joint, he weel be open whain you come beck, Meester Pop," he said, grinning.

THE END

Without Stopping to Think

By JUDSON PHILIPS and MOON CARROLL

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

JIMMIE CURTIN, a millionaire's son who found Broadway not fast enough for him, and who has been running rum, agrees with Terry Drew, a member of the river police, to sail down to Barrientos on the coast of South America to kidnap Bull Legore, a gunman who is wanted for murdering three river policemen. Before they sail, Jimmie goes to call on his chorus girl *fiancée*, whom he has not seen in four months, and finds she has been having an affair with Count de Résoc, who is engaged to marry a wealthy girl named Diana Van Dyne. Jimmie is so mad he becomes "fighting drunk," thrashes the count, kidnaps Miss Van Dyne, and takes her to his boat, the Neptune. During the voyage of the Neptune one of their three sailors, a Portuguese named Sanchez, insults Diana, and has to be put in chains. After they reach the harbor of Barrientos their other two sailors release the Portuguese. He overhears their plans against Legore, and jumps overboard and starts to swim ashore. They dare not shoot after him as they must avoid attracting attention. Baffled, they stand on the deck of the Neptune in the pitch black night, and hear the steady splashing of Sanchez as he swims toward their enemy.

CHAPTER X.

THE DESPERADOES CONFER.

HENRY LEGORE had not gained the sobriquet of "Bull" because of any inherent ability to tell fairy stories. He was as lacking in physical charm as a man could be, with a square head which sat on a neck knotted with muscles; with moist, thick lips, which he constantly wet with his tongue; with apelike arms, the size of hams, and with watery, piglike eyes.

Bull had had a varied career. He began in the West in the days when men lived by the gun. He had gradually worked East,

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 31.

spending a time in the Chicago gang districts, until he decided that for the sake of his health it would be better to move on. From there he had gone to the coal mines, where he ran lotteries, unknown to the superintendents, and became something of an agitator. One day he had a run in with one of the guards on a pay car, and he shot him dead. This required another migration, which terminated in New York. Here he mixed in politics, escaped the war, and finally got into rum-running.

About the same time Major Bracken's service sprang into existence, and it was a serious menace to Legore's activities. One night three of the major's men had disguised themselves as disreputables, and had shipped aboard one of Legore's speed boats. They had completely fooled Legore, who was usually astute about such matters. But in some way they gave themselves away later. They had acquired incriminating evidence. Legore followed them when they left his boat. They went to a hotel on lower Broadway for dinner, and while they sat at a table Legore ambled into the lobby, shot and killed all three of them, wounded a house detective who had tried to stop him, and escaped by a side entrance.

This incident was characteristic of the man. He had courage in unlimited quantities, but he had no idea of caution. He never considered consequences, and he never tried to cover up a criminal action. If he wanted to get a man he got him, regardless of time or place. He seemed to bear a charmed life, for enough lead had been fired in his direction to armor-plate a battleship—if lead were used in that process—yet the only evidence of it was a deep scar on his right cheek.

After the shooting of the three river policemen, Legore realized that this country was going to be too hot for him from then on; so he made arrangements through various channels to abdicate to Barrientos. There he built up a tremendous system, which at the time of the arrival of the Neptune was in full swing. The liquor business was only a small part of what he now did. He was mixing in the politics of the country, having organized something similar to the old vigilantes; similar in mode of action, but opposite in purpose; for their one aim was gain for themselves, and to hell with any one else. They had terrorized the city and the surrounding country. Police or soldiers dared not interfere with them, for how can one combat an organization that shoots from dark alleys and attic windows?

Legore was not responsible for this new efficiency which had apparently developed under him. It would have been more or less typical of Legore's braggadocio and sheer lust for killing to fight in the open streets. Organization was not one of his strong points. He had always worked alone. But at Barrientos he had met Captain Harry Lowe.

Lowe was an Englishman that England had been unable to find room for within her vast boundaries. He was a direct opposite type to Legore. He was tall, angular, and had hawk-like features. When he looked at a man with his cold, piercing eyes through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and smiled with his thin, cruel lips, that man was beaten on the spot. All of Legore's daring, all his courage, seemed sapped when he was faced by Captain Lowe.

Legore was the nominal leader of their organization. It was he who gave orders, who killed traitors, or administered punishment to some stupid one. Men cowered before him, and ran to do his bidding. But it was Lowe, sitting in an armchair in his rooms, his eyes on the ceiling, the tips of his long fingers pressed together, who gave Legore his orders. And when Legore demurred, Lowe would look away from the ceiling for just a moment, and his eyes would glitter behind his spectacles, and he would repeat the order in a soft, purring voice, and Legore would run.

One might suspect that Legore would be restless under Lowe's iron rule, and rightly so. Yet he was not so stupid as to fail to see that under Lowe their operations were thriving. And Lowe, in turn, knew that Legore was invaluable. He did the fighting and the handling of men. He had a reputation the world over as a fearless and unscrupulous gunman. It is under this

sort of leader that men will fight. Legore would drink with them and fight with them and kill them.

As long as Lowe could control Legore he could control the whole organization. And Legore was under his thumb. Thus, each man was in a sense dependent on the other. Legore, while he hated and feared Lowe, knew that without him there would be less profit, the result being that he would fight to the death for Lowe. Lowe knew that without Legore to handle the men his schemes would not bear such luscious fruit, so that he would protect Legore to the last ditch. Separately they were both dangerous; together they were a positive menace.

One night, about midnight, Lowe was sitting in his rooms reading when there came a knock on his door. He put down his book with a sigh. "Well?" he said sharply.

"It's me—Legore. Got a guy here with some dope for us."

Lowe got up, crossed to the door, and unbolted it. Legore came in with Sanchez, the Portuguese sailor.

"This bird has some interesting news for us," announced Legore.

Lowe went back to his chair.

"Well?" he repeated.

Sanchez sank into another chair.

"You will stand when you talk to me," said Lowe coldly. "You look dirty, and I've just had that chair upholstered."

Sanchez was about to make a retort when he met the icy stare from behind the gold-rimmed spectacles. He stood up.

"I am Juan Sanchez," he said. "I jes come from thees United States on a schooner. She is own by devil name Curtin, who come here to get Legore for keel three of his friends."

"It's a guy named Drew," growled Legore. "He was one of that outfit that I told you about in New York. I kinda think he'd like a shot at me."

"Are you afraid?" asked Lowe.

Legore threw back his head and roared.

"Afraid? By heaven, that's good. I've got men watchin' for him already. As soon as he steps off'n that boat I'll know where he is. And then—" He tapped his hip pocket significantly.

"How many men are on this schooner?" asked Lowe.

"Four and cook, but two of them ees with me. They weel not fight."

Lowe smiled that thin-lipped smile of his. "That would hardly seem to constitute a menace," he said.

"But there ees girl," confided Sanchez eagerly. "She ees rich. Maybe we get much money from her family!"

"We have nothing to do with women here," said Lowe coldly.

"She ees for Legore," said Sanchez. "I geeve her to him," he added magnanimously.

"There is only one who decides such matters here," said Lowe, "and I am that person. I say we have nothing to do with women here." He turned to Legore. "Who is this Curtin? Do you know him?"

"No. He's some damned kid that's in rum runnin'. The spig told me he agreed to bring Drew down here. I'm not worryin' any about him nor Drew either. There's no two guys in the world that can make me worry none."

Lowe smiled. "No?" he said.

"No," repeated Legore less positively.

"Well, since this is purely a personal matter between you and these two men, why do you come to me?"

"This guy wants to join up with our outfit," explained Legore.

Lowe eyed Sanchez critically. The Portuguese shifted uneasily on his feet.

"Curtin was paying you to work for him?" asked Lowe.

"*Si*—yes."

"Why are you betraying him to us?"

"Because," snarled Sanchez, "he put me in irons!"

"Why?" Lowe's tone was sharp, concise.

"Bah! I try to kees thees girl. We fight. He ees very mad. I slip and fall down and he strike me with club. I am beaten. But now I get the revenge."

"It was his woman, wasn't it?" asked Lowe.

Sanchez nodded.

"Then what the devil were you doing trying to kiss her?"

"Ah, she ees beautiful, *señor!*"

Lowe turned to Legore.

"Kick this fellow out," he said calmly. "If he'd misuse Curtin's property, he'd misuse ours. If he'd betray Curtin, he'd betray us. Tell him if he comes around here again—"

Legore smiled. "I got you, chief."

"And after you've thrown him out, come back. I want to talk to you."

"But, *señor*—" pleaded Sanchez.

Lowe said nothing. He had picked up his book again.

Outside, Sanchez turned to Legore.

"I reesk my life to save you, and now thees feller throw me out!"

"I'll look out for you, buddy," said Legore. "The chief is kinda snappy at times. But you done me a good turn and I won't forget it."

Sanchez eyed Bull cannily.

"It ees not like Bull Legore to take orders from thees man," he said.

"Lowe is a wise bozo," growled Legore. "He's helped make a lot of money for us, and that's straight dope. He knows his stuff when it comes to big things, and I have to kind of humor him over little things. Savvy?"

"But you weel not pass up thees girl? She ees made for you."

Legore's pig eyes gleamed. "I'll give the bim the once over when she comes ashore. I ain't seen no real woman in months. Down here they got so many in the family you got to lick a whole army if you want 'em."

"You meet me later?" asked Sanchez. "We talk about thees?"

"Right. And now beat it. I got to go back and chin with the chief. Go to the Café Madrid. I'll meet you there in an hour. They got some mean dames down there, too!" And Legore chuckled.

Lowe was still reading when Legore returned to his rooms, but when the big gunman arrived, he put down the book and took a cigarette from a box on the table. His long, thin fingers were stained a pale yellow at the ends, but they were steady as he held a match to light his fag.

"One has to be careful of that sort of dog," he said blowing a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "They don't know what loyalty is. There must be honor, even among thieves."

"Yeah, you're right, I guess," said Legore, rubbing his chin reflectively. "But about this girl, chief. Her old man is worth a sock. There might be real profit in holding her. What do you think?"

"Haven't you had enough trouble in the States without putting your foot in it again?" asked Lowe, dryly. "We can handle the men. They're bootleggers and there won't be much of a row kicked up over their disappearance. But if anything happens to the girl there'll be a frightful hullabaloo. You know that as well as I do. Forget it, Legore. There are plenty of women down here to satisfy you. What precautions have you taken?"

"Well, as soon as the spig told me about these fellers, I sent men down to the docks to watch for them comin' off their boat. As soon as they put a foot on shore I'll know, and I'll take care of 'em."

"We can't have any one prying into our affairs, Legore. While this is more or less of a personal feud with you, I think I must sanction a little discreet gun play." Lowe's tone was cold, indifferent.

"Good," said Legore, almost greedily. "Anyhow, these fellers would take a pot shot at me, and as long as I get a look at 'em first, I'll be the first to move."

Lowe flicked the ash from his cigarette. "But for heaven's sake, have a little delicacy about it," he admonished. "You're like a bull in a china shop most of the time. You have no sense of the artistic, my dear fellow. Don't make a messy job of it."

"Trust me," grinned Legore. "I never had to shoot at a guy more than once that I can remember."

CHAPTER XI.

GOING ASHORE.

"THERE'S just one thing to do," said Jimmie to Drew as the sound of the Portuguese swimming to shore died away in the darkness, "and that's to step on it! If we let that fellow get to Legore before we can get on shore our goose

will be cooked. They'll have people looking for us, and we'll be shadowed from the very first."

"Right," said Drew. "What are we going to do about these other two men?"

"I trust Lo Peng implicitly," said Jimmie. "I'm going to put Sumner and Jorgenson in irons. There's no doubt in my mind that they both helped Sanchez to escape. How much further they'll go to help him we can't tell. But we can't take any chances. I'm going to lock them up and leave Lo Peng out here to feed them. You and Diana and I will go ashore at once. You get our things ready, and I'll take care of the men."

Jimmie went on the run to the chart room where he got a pair of revolvers from their stock of firearms. Then he returned to the deck. Jorgenson was still leaning against the rail smoking his pipe, and Jimmie went up quickly to him.

"Put up your hands, Jorgenson," he ordered sharply.

The Dutchman looked around, much surprised, and saw the two revolvers. His jaw dropped.

"What for?" he asked.

"Do as I say," snapped Jimmie, "or I'll fill you full of lead. You played a dirty underhanded trick on us, and I'm going to see that you don't have another chance. Put up your hands!"

Slowly the Dutchman obeyed.

"You going to put us in irons, eh?"

"Just so," said Jimmie. "Step lively!"

Very slowly Jorgenson walked down the deck. He was looking from right to left for some chance of escape, but one of Jimmie's guns was pressing into the middle of his back. Down to the hold they went. Jimmie was watching for Sumner. If he had to get them both at once, it might prove difficult, but the Negro failed to put in an appearance.

Once in the hold Jimmie snapped the irons over Jorgenson's wrists and ankles.

"Perhaps this will teach you that when you're working for me I expect obedience. What you've done is mutiny under maritime law and I have a perfect right to shoot you. If there's any more trouble I won't hesitate to do it, either."

The Dutchman glowered at him in silence.

Sumner was drinking a cup of coffee in the galley and he was no less surprised than Jorgenson had been, but Jimmie's guns were an irresistible argument and he was very soon in chains.

"Remember," said Jimmie, as he made to leave them, "I'm not going to put up with anything more from you two."

Orders to Lo Peng followed. He was to see that the two prisoners had food, but he was not to release them under penalty of death. Jimmie kept the key to the irons in his pocket, but he so thoroughly frightened Lo Peng that the little Chinese on his knees and by all his gods swore that he would guard the two men with his life.

Diana and Drew had already lowered one of the small boats and were waiting for Jimmie. Ten minutes after Sanchez had escaped they were making for shore.

"What are you going to do when we get there?" asked Diana.

"We've got to find Legore, because that's where Sanchez will be," said Jimmie. "When I find that Portuguese, I'm going to break his damned neck! He certainly has thrown a wrench in the works!"

"You and Diana had better make a round of the public places," said Drew, "and I'll keep a watch on the streets. This is a good-sized town, but we can be certain that Legore will restrict himself to the lower section unless he's working on some job. You're armed, Jimmie?"

"Two guns and about fifty rounds apiece."

"Good. Remember that these fellows won't stop to talk. They'll shoot first and ask questions afterward. You'll have to do the same."

Jimmie turned anguished eyes toward Diana.

"What of her?" he asked Drew.

She reached out a hand to Jimmie. "I'm in on this, old boy, don't forget. I may be able to land Legore in spite of Sanchez. They're not going to shoot me."

"It might be better," worried Jimmie.

"Don't be morbid," laughed Diana. "We're going to come out of this all right."

"I'm not worrying about myself," said

Jimmie between his teeth, "but I am worrying about you."

"Why?"

Jimmie stroked viciously at his oar. "Oh, damn it, Diana, you know why! This is no time or place to tell you. Haven't you any intuition? Women are all supposed to have it!"

"I'm probably very dull," said Diana.

But then the boat scraped bottom, and the moment had passed. Drew jumped out and pulled it up onto the beach. Jimmie and Diana got out, and he lent her his hand to help her. As she took it she gave it a little squeeze that sent the blood bounding through his heart.

"We've got to determine some place to meet," Drew was saying. "It can't be here in the open, and we can't go back to the Neptune."

"Perhaps we'd better go into the town together," suggested Jimmie. "We'll pick out a place there. Keep a sharp lookout for any one who may be watching us."

They stumbled up on the beach, not daring to use the flash light which Drew had in his pocket. Ahead of them in the blackness was a dim light, probably a street lamp on one of the water-front byways. Jimmie loosened the revolvers which he carried in holsters under each arm. While they had worked quickly there was no certainty that Sanchez hadn't found Legore immediately and that they were not already being watched.

Once on the street they walked a couple of blocks into the city and stopped in an alley which branched off the main road.

"This is as good a place as any to meet," said Drew. "Let's get things straight. I'm going to scout the streets, and you people are to go to restaurants, dance halls, and the like." He paused. "There's a chance that either one of us may be done in, Jimmie. In that case Diana and the other man had better make for the Neptune and get away." He glanced at his watch.

"It's now a quarter to twelve," he said. "Let's say we'll meet here at five in the morning. If for some reason either one of us can't make it we'd better arrange some sort of signal."

Jimmie had been leaning against the wall of a building. Now he turned.

"There's a loose brick here," he said. "If there was any change in plans we could leave a note back of this brick."

"Good," said Drew. "And now we'd better move on. Sanchez will certainly have found Legore by now, and he'll be sending people to the water front to look for us." He held out his hand. "Good-by and good luck, Jimmie."

They shook hands in silence.

"Good-by, Diana," smiled Drew. "I hope you're a success at vamping our gunman."

"I'm beginning to lose faith in my abilities," said Diana, casting a sly glance at Jimmie.

The water front section of Barrientos is probably no different than that of any other city, unless it be even more poorly lighted, and the streets more twisting than the average. There was scarcely any light at all, as a matter of fact, the only illumination coming from infrequent, dim street lamps, and through the cracks of shuttered windows.

As Jimmie and Diana made their way up the streets they met no one.

"Looks like a deserted town," murmured Diana.

Jimmie led her out into the middle of the street.

"I want plenty of room if there's going to be any sort of surprise attack. I have a feeling that we're one step ahead of Legore."

As he spoke they heard the sound of running feet coming toward them, and high, excited voices speaking Spanish. Jimmie and Diana went into the shadow of the buildings again and waited. Presently three men passed them running at a jog trot. They were making directly for the water front. Out of the flood of incomprehensible Spanish they spoke Jimmie caught one word—"Legore." He drew in his breath sharply.

"That damned Portuguese knew where to find him all right," he said to Diana. "That's a detachment sent to watch for our arrival. We'll have to work fast. For the moment we have the jump on them

because they think we're still aboard the Neptune. Come."

His hand reached for Diana's, and they stole down the narrow back street like a pair of escaping criminals.

"How are we going to find the public places, and how are we going to get in them?" Diana asked. "They don't seem to advertise very extensively down here. I mean, no electric signs or what have you!"

"We'll have to look for people and follow them."

They rounded a corner in the street and stopped abruptly. Twenty paces away was a street light, and under the light was a man holding a match to a cigarette.

"By Heaven, what luck!" ejaculated Jimmie.

He and Diana flattened themselves against the wall of the building. The man under the light was Sanchez.

"There are two things to do," said Jimmie quickly. "One is to catch him and make him tell us where Legore is; the other is to follow him and see where he goes. What do you think?"

"If you could make him tell us," said Diana, "and then keep him out of the way, it might be better. Legore doesn't know us by sight anyway, and if Sanchez isn't there perhaps he won't guess at once."

"I'd like to do away with him permanently," said Jimmie.

He took one of his revolvers from its holster and worked his way carefully along the walls of the buildings. Sanchez, his cigarette lighted, began to amble on down the street. Jimmie increased his pace until he was directly behind the Portuguese. He stuck his revolver into the small of the other's back.

"Put your hands up," he almost whispered.

With an oath Sanchez started to turn, but the pressure of the revolver warned him to stand still. Running off the main street was another alley.

"Go into that alley and be quick," ordered Jimmie.

The Portuguese obeyed with alacrity. Jimmie backed him against a wall and, still covering him with his revolver, searched Sanchez quickly for weapons, finding a wicked-looking knife and a small but effective gun. He put these in his own pocket.

"You come queek, Mr. Curtin," snarled Sanchez.

"Yes," snapped Jimmie, "and I'm going to work quickly now. You're going to tell me where I can find Legore, and you're going to tell me in a hurry."

Sanchez shook his head. He was smiling.

"I don't tell nothing," he said.

"I'll give you just about three seconds," warned Jimmie, "and then I'll shoot."

"You weel not shoot," said the Portuguese blandly, "because eet weel breeng many men who weel keel you."

Jimmie's lips tightened. "You forget your own knife," he said, taking it from his pocket. "I think it will be as effective as a gun."

Even in the darkness the blade gleamed. Jimmie put the point against Sanchez's throat, and the fellow was now thoroughly frightened.

"I tell," he said—"I tell."

Jimmie moved the blade ever so slightly. "Well?"

"Legore weel be at Café Madrid in one hour," whimpered Sanchez.

"And where is the Café Madrid?"

"It ees about three blocks more down thees street."

"Sanchez," said Jimmie, "if you had been satisfied to mind your own business aboard the Neptune, you would have been much better off. As it is, you have forced my hand, and I can't have any mercy on you. It's necessary to my safety to have you out of the way for several hours."

Before Sanchez could move Jimmie lifted his revolver and brought the butt of it down on Sanchez's head with considerable force. With a moan the Portuguese sank to the ground. Jimmie slipped off his belt quickly and trussed the man's hands and feet tightly. Then he stuffed his handkerchief into the other's mouth.

Out on the street he rejoined Diana, who had been waiting anxiously.

"I've done for him for a few hours anyway," he said grimly. "Legore is going

to the Café Madrid, which is near here. We must hurry."

They went quickly down the street together.

CHAPTER XII.

TERRY'S TRAILING.

IN the heart of Terry Drew there was an emotion a little deeper than a sheer love of adventure which had prompted him to come to South America to rout out Bull Legore. Three of his friends had been done to death by Legore—friends who had gone through the war with him, friends who had seen service with him under Major Bracken, friends who had stood by him in all sorts of scrapes.

Had Drew been less of a sportsman, he would have planned to hunt out Legore and shoot him callously, as his friends had been shot, but within him was something —call it a sense of fair play, or an instinct for the dramatic, if you will—that made it necessary for him to meet Legore face to face and have it out on an equal footing.

Major Bracken wanted Legore brought back to the States, but Drew knew that if he met the gunman there would be no question of persuading him to return or even duping him aboard the Neptune. They would shoot it out on the spot. And Drew knew he would get his man, though he lost his own life. He knew this with a certainty born of a determined purpose.

With this definitely in mind, Drew had sent Jimmie and Diana off to hunt out Legore in the public places, for he had very little faith in the possibility of their finding him. He had come to feel a certain sense of responsibility for them both, and he wanted a first crack at Legore himself. His own plan was to wait at the water front for Legore's spies, whom he felt certain would put in an appearance very shortly. These men must eventually report to Legore, and he would follow them. It was the one sure way of reaching his quarry.

After leaving the others he made his way back down the winding street to the water front. Very cautiously he sought out a hiding place under the shadow of a ramshackle building from which not a speck of light came. It was either empty or its inhabitants had all gone to bed. The harbor at Barrientos was so constructed that the beach on which they had landed was the only place that one could come ashore. Therefore Legore's men were sure to watch here. Huddled against the building, he waited impatiently. He dared not smoke, for the light, however small, would give him away.

He hadn't long to wait, however, for the men who had passed Jimmie and Diana farther up the street soon put in an appearance. Evidently they felt that they had been warned in sufficient time to preclude the possibility of the Neptune's people having come ashore as yet. They stood within fifty paces of Drew, talking in low voices, smoking, and laughing together.

Now and then from the flash of a match to a cigarette Drew was able to catch a glimpse of their faces. They were an evil-looking lot, four in all, heavily armed without any effort at concealing their weapons. Legore, as ever, was defiant of law and order. He must have considerable influence in the town to make it possible for his men to be so open about their lawlessness.

Presently one of the men uttered a sharp ejaculation. He had caught sight of the rowboat from the Neptune pulled up on the beach. Drew swore softly under his breath. They should have hidden it or cast it adrift. It had not occurred either to him or to Jimmie to take that precaution. The four men hurried down to the beach to the boat. Here they held a consultation in excited tones. Then they returned on the run and started back up the street. Drew, with a grim smile on his lips, set out in pursuit.

Through the winding streets the men ran, and Drew was forced to run himself to keep them in sight, at the same time making sure to keep in the shadow and keeping an eye out for any one else who might observe him. Legore had given orders for his men to report to him at Captain Lowe's, for he had expected to be there with the Portuguese.

He had had an idea that Sanchez would

be accepted into their organization by Lowe, and the chief's quick refusal on this score had changed his plans somewhat. He had gone to the Café Madrid to meet Sanchez, and he had sent another man to the water front to tell his spies that he would not be at Lowe's. This man had delayed somewhat in delivering the message. So that the four men hurried to Lowe's in accordance with their first orders.

As they approached the house Drew was making his plans. He would wait till the four men had reported. They would probably come out bringing Legore with them. Then he would face Legore and take his chances on shooting up the whole party and escaping in the darkness.

From the second story of the house came a few thin gleams of light from between the chinks of a shutter. The men went to the door and knocked. Drew hid around a corner of the building in a small passage which separated that house from the next one.

Presently the men were admitted, there was silence. From far off came the sound of some one laughing. Except for this the town was as quiet as if it had been a desert wilderness.

Drew, waiting in the passageway, rubbed his hands together vigorously. A foggy dampness had settled down on the town. He couldn't afford to have stiff or cold fingers if he was to vie with Legore in gun play. He felt quite sure that his own weapons were ready for use at a moment's notice.

Upstairs four excited men were telling their story to Captain Lowe. The people from the Neptune had already arrived! There was no trace of them. Legore must be warned.

Lowe sat in his chair, frowning darkly. "I don't know where Legore is," he said in Spanish. "He sent some one to tell you where he was going. Find him. You know the few places where he is apt to be. Hurry. I have a feeling that we're dealing with two clever men. At any rate, they've checkmated their Portuguese friend."

The four men left quickly. Drew, waiting below, heard the front door open, and his hands went to his guns. He was at a point of vantage, so that when the men descended the four steps which led to the front door they would be in full view. He was somewhat perplexed when he saw that Legore was not with them. Perhaps he would follow directly. The four men passed out of view down the street, and Drew, tense in every muscle, watched the front door.

Meanwhile, Lowe had decided to take a hand in the affair himself. There were many irons in the fire, and he couldn't afford to have Legore put out of business just now. He went to a closet and got a tweed cap and a slicker. Into the pocket of the coat he slipped a revolver and went out of his rooms, locking the door behind him.

Now, Lowe had one habit—or it might be called a precaution—which he always observed. He never used the front door of his house as an exit. It was too exposed. If any one were lying in wait for him, they could get a glimpse of that front door from several blocks in either direction. Therefore he had had a special exit constructed, a back stairway leading to a door which opened onto the alley which ran between his house and the next.

This alley was a blind one, the door into his house blocking one end, and the mouth of it opening onto the street. It was in the mouth of this alley that Drew was waiting for Legore to put in an appearance, and now, as Lowe came quietly out the back entrance he saw Drew, but Drew did not hear or see him. He was intent on the front door. It was a simple matter for Lowe to creep softly up behind him and stick his revolver into Drew's ribs.

"I'll take your weapons, young man," he said dryly.

For a moment Drew, taken completely by surprise, thought of fighting, but he knew it was useless. Slowly he put up his hands and turned to face his assailant. It was almost a sigh of relief that he uttered when he saw that it was not Legore. Lowe, his hawklike features shaded under his cap, was peering at Drew.

"This is my house," he explained, "and I have a considerable objection to having people waiting in this alley for me to come

out the front door at night. You are no doubt either Mr. Curtin or Mr. Drew."

"How did you know?" asked Drew, much surprised.

"I know everything," said Lowe, his thin lips tightening. "Suppose you come back into the house with me. Your presence here has saved me the unpleasant necessity of going out into this damp night. Many thanks. Just step down this alley, please."

Drew had no alternative, so he preceded Lowe down the passage to the back entrance.

"One flight up and the first door to the right," said Lowe in a politely ironic tone. "I think you will find my rooms a bit snugger than waiting against a wet building."

In his rooms, Lowe waved Drew to a chair while he removed his cap and slicker. In the lamplight Drew got a clear view of the man's face, hard, stern, cruel, and yet with just the suggestion of a whimsical smile fluttering about the thin lips. His gray eyes seemed to be boring through his spectacles straight into Drew's mind.

"Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?" he asked.

"I'm Drew."

"Ah, I suspected as much. Legore gave rather an accurate description of you. I suppose you were waiting for Legore. Well, he'll probably be here shortly, and then you two can settle your little problem here. Awfully sorry I can't let you have it out with guns, you know. Nothing I enjoy so much as a really good duel of that sort, but I am distressingly dependent on Legore in my business. And you might kill him—who knows?"

"So you're part of Legore's outfit?" said Drew contemptuously.

"Perhaps it would be a little more accurate to say Legore is part of *my* outfit," smiled Lowe.

"Then you sanction his having sent three of my friends to their death?"

Lowe passed cigarettes to Drew, which the latter refused. He lit one himself before he replied:

"Well, my dear fellow, you forget that you are a policeman and that your friends were policemen. Policemen are anathema to us, you know. We have to protect ourselves against them."

"And you haven't sportsmanship enough in your veins to give them an even chance for their lives?"

"I'm giving you an even chance," Lowe pointed out. "I'm going to keep you here till Legore comes, and I assure you I won't have any killing done in my rooms. It's so messy."

Lowe had taken Drew's guns, and Drew could see that he kept his hand on his own, which was obviously in his pocket. There was no use trying to escape. One look into those cold blue-gray eyes back of the glasses was assurance enough that Lowe would not hesitate to kill if the necessity arose.

The phone on the table beside Lowe rang, and he answered it. He didn't take his eyes off Drew as he listened to the conversation at the other end. When he finally hung up he was smiling grimly.

"Things are happening with amazing alacrity," he said. "Your Portuguese friend has been found in an alley with his head bashed in and bound hand and foot. They don't seem able to revive him. Score one for Mr. Curtin, I should say. Legore is missing. That is to say, his men can't find him. You two seem to have caused quite a stir, Mr. Drew. Things would have been complete had this situation been reversed. I'm afraid it all necessitates my going out after all. Let me conduct you to my guest chamber."

There was nothing to do but obey, and Drew went into the next room. Lowe followed him, and as he shut the door behind it gave a clanging, metallic sound. Lowe flashed on a light, disclosing a bare room, a bed and a chair being the only furniture.

"Make yourself as comfortable as possible," invited Lowe. "I shall leave whisky and soda, and cigarettes."

He went into the next room to procure these things, and returned with them immediately.

"Good-by—cheerio," he said, and was gone.

Drew heard him turn a key in the lock. He went to the door and tapped it with

his knuckles. Steel. He crossed to the only window. It was barred and shuttered. He was irretrievably a prisoner.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE CAFE MADRID.

THE cafés in the lower section of the city of Barrientos are about as bad a lot of places as one can find anywhere about the world, and the Café Madrid was the worst. It was one of the best crime hatcheries in the country, a place where guns were carried in the open, and where men were as quick and as deadly with the knife as our Western cowboys used to be with a six-shooter.

The Madrid had been the scene of rise and fall of dozens of high-class browbeaters. It was here that Gregory, the famous mail robber who escaped from the States, held sway until the coming of O'Donohue, the Mexican, a scion of an old Spanish family gone wrong. Gregory and O'Donohue met at the bar in the Madrid and shot it out, and O'Donohue became king for a spell.

One day a little bowlegged, weazened up hunchback strolled into the Madrid and broke into a game of poker. O'Donohue was one of the players, and he thought he detected the hunchback cheating. Men do not ask questions at the Madrid, and O'Donohue went for his gun. He never got it out, for the hunchback plugged him between the eyes very neatly and very deftly. Thus the reign of Crooked Charlie began. Then one day they found Charlie with about a pound of lead in his carcass, and Bull Legore was the big bug.

Legore was still the man at the top among the patrons of the Madrid, and the story of his meeting with Lowe was only spoken of in whispers. Lowe had strolled in one day, and Legore, steeped in his cups, had started a quarrel. Lowe had done an unprecedented thing. Legore had drawn his guns and begun to taunt his victim before killing him, and Lowe had walked right up to him, taken the guns out of his hands, struck him a stinging blow across the mouth, and walked out.

No one knew why Legore hadn't shot. No one dared discuss it in Legore's presence, for it was something of a sore point with him. Lowe was seldom seen at the Madrid after that, but he was regarded with awe when he did put in an appearance, for his meeting with Legore had indicated that he must be well-nigh a sorcerer. This may have had a grain of truth to substantiate it, for it had been those steely eyes of his that had so fascinated Legore that he had forgotten to pull his triggers.

Aside from its personnel, the Madrid was a foul place. It was heavy with the smell of tobacco smoke, and stale liquor, and perspiring humans. There was no ventilation of any sort, for it was below street level, and its few windows were heavily shuttered. It consisted of two large rooms and several small chambers, called private drinking rooms. In one of the large rooms was the bar and a group of tables and chairs, where one might drink or play cards. Here were drunken men or women, laughing hilariously, fighting, sleeping on the tables, gambling with dice, exchanging alcoholic caresses.

In the next room a ramshackle piano was being beaten to death by a sleepy Spaniard, accompanied by a squawking violin. People danced, or rather moved about the floor in peculiar attitudes to the rhythm of discords, disheveled men and women, with bloodshot eyes and wet lips, and writhing bodies, laughing and shouting.

And winding his way about among his patrons was Boris Callahan, half-Slav, half-Celt, proprietor of the Madrid. Callahan was the slyest, cleverest, most thoroughly dishonest, most despicable rascal within a radius of five thousand miles. Callahan was not a fighter himself, but he was a genius at arranging fights.

It was he who saw to it that a king did not last too long. It was he who imported a first class gunman to kill said king if necessary.

Never drunk, never provocative, it was he, after all, who ruled the Madrid while he let others think that they held the whip hand. Withal, probably the most dangerous of the lot, he had never felt the sear of a bullet or the gashing of a knife.

To this charming sink of iniquity Jimmie and Diana hastened to keep Sanchez's rendezvous with Legore. At first they passed by the Madrid, for there was no sign to indicate its whereabouts, but having gone beyond the point where Sanchez had said they would find it, they retraced their steps, and the sound of music, and a raucous laugh, told them that the Madrid was behind those shuttered windows. They paused outside.

"Look here, Diana, we don't know quite what we're getting into," Jimmie said hurriedly. "I may be killed. Heaven knows what will become of you if I do. Are you still willing to go on?"

"Of course, old boy. Don't be silly."

"Oh, Diana—" Jimmie's voice trembled, "I was an ass to bring you—but if I hadn't kidnaped you I wouldn't have met you—and then—and then I wouldn't have known you—and damn it all, Diana, I love you."

She slipped her hand into his.

"I know it," she said.

"How?"

"Oh, shut up, Jimmie. If you're very good I'll let you kiss me before we go in here."

"Diana!"

For a moment she melted into his arms, and for a moment they were both happier than they had ever dreamed possible. Then she pushed him away.

"This is no time to be maudlin," she said with a laugh that was bubbling. "We haven't any time to waste, Jimmie. Before we go in let's decide definitely what to do. You're going to pretend to get drunk, and I'm going to vamp Legore. Is that the general plan?"

"I can't go through with it," said Jimmie. "Why—Lord! I can't have you run the risk."

"You can't help it," said Diana. "I'm going to do it whether you like it or not. Come on, old thing; we can't stand here talking forever. We've got to work quickly. My act is to get Legore to take me out of the Madrid. You follow and get me while he's alone. Is that right?"

Jimmie nodded, and he set his jaw tightly.

"Come on," he said.

As they entered the Madrid they both gasped for breath, the atmosphere was so dense. Then assuming an air of hilarity they went to a table. A waiter with cauliflower ears lolled up for an order.

"Whisky—and a hell of a lot of it," demanded Jimmie.

Presently the waiter returned with a bottle and glasses.

"Remember," warned Diana, "you're only to *pretend* to get drunk, my lad."

Boris Callahan had eyed the newcomers a trifle suspiciously when they entered. Despite Jimmie's rough clothing and Diana's makeshift outfit, which consisted of a jersey, and a skirt which she had fashioned out of the evening gown she had worn aboard the Neptune, there was something about their faces which marked them as different from the usual habitués of the Madrid.

But when he saw that Jimmie was going at the bottle of whisky with a vengeance, he lost interest and centered his attention on Diana. She wasn't drinking. She was a blonde, and blondes are very rare at the Café Madrid. It just flashed through Callahan's mind that Diana would bring in considerable revenue if she could be persuaded to stay at the Madrid. He decided to approach her on the subject if her escort got himself sufficiently inebriated.

Jimmie was giving an excellent imitation of being thoroughly sopped when the door of the Madrid opened and a man entered. Jimmie's hand reached out under the table and closed over Diana's.

"Legore," he said.

"You're sure?"

"He fits Drew's description to a T."

"Do your stuff, Jimmie. And she turned away from him and faced Legore.

Legore, standing in the entrance, looked around the room, evidently trying to pick Sanchez out of the crowd. He saw Callahan and waved a greeting. The proprietor beckoned to him. Legore started across the room and had almost reached Callahan when his eyes fell on Diana. He stopped short. She flashed a smile at him, and snuggled back into her chair. Jimmie's head dropped forward on the table.

For a moment suspicions were born in Legore's mind. Could these be the people the Portuguese had described. The girl was blond, and the man— But they couldn't be, or else his spies would already have reported. He moistened his lips with his tongue, a puzzled expression on his face. Then he returned Diana's smile and joined Callahan.

"Who are those people?" he demanded.

"That's what I was going to ask you," replied the proprietor.

"Damn pretty girl."

"Yeah. I was figurin' she'd go well in this dump."

Legore shot a swift glance at Callahan, and then frowned.

"If she's any one's, she mine," he said. "Get that from the start."

Callahan shrugged. "Have it your own way. I can't figure 'em out, though. They don't look usual, if you get me."

Legore was still puzzled. "They kind of fit into the description of some people I'm expecting, but I don't see how they could be here without my bein' wised up."

He looked at Diana again. She smiled.

"By heaven," he said, "I'm going to find out. There hasn't been a spig in here looking for me, has there? I got a date to meet one here."

"I haven't seen one," said Callahan.

Legore made for Diana.

"Sit down," suggested Diana. "My escort seems to have found the brew here more congenial than me."

Jimmie, his head down on the table, muttered something incomprehensible in drunken accents. Legore pulled up a chair. All the while Diana watched him with a smile, a smile which suggested a score of things to Legore.

"Say, girly," he said. "I want to get something straight right now. Who are you? Where did you come from?"

"What's the difference?" retorted Diana.

"The difference," said Legore, in menacing tones, "is that I think you're off a boat called the Neptune and that your name is Diana Something-or-other, and that this bozo with you is gunning for me. Am I right?"

Diana laughed softly. "You been reading fairy stories, mister. Who ever heard of any one being called Diana?"

"It is a funny name," agreed Legore, "but I'm warning you right now that if that's who you are and this guy is the guy that's after me, I'm going to make it right nasty for you if you try any smart tricks. Savvy?"

One of Jimmie's arms fell off the table limply, and then began to move slowly up under the table to a place where he could reach one of his guns quickly.

"I don't know who this fellow is," Diana said. "He picked me up down the line. Said he wanted to dance. Now look at him, the drunken sot! I guess you wouldn't have any trouble with him. You're Bull Legore, aren't you? I've heard about you. No one would have much of a chance against you." She smiled admiringly.

Legore licked his lips and grinned.

"You're a wise kid, ain't you? Filling me full of apple sauce right off the bat. Well, if you're lookin' for a whirl, kid, I'm your man."

"Oh, you're so sudden, Mr. Legore," mocked Diana.

"I guess I could give you plenty of thrills if that's what you're looking for."

"Probably your idea of a thrill and mine are quite different," said Diana. She was watching him through half-closed eyes, still smiling, still leaning back in her chair.

Legore leaned toward her. "Maybe," he said, "but I kind of figure that you'd get plenty of kick out of my way."

"Well, suppose you try?" suggested Diana. "Have a drink? My friend here doesn't know how much is left in his bottle."

Legore complied with the invitation, tossing off a tumbler of raw Scotch and wiping his mouth with his coat sleeve.

"Say," he said, "there ain't a woman in Barrientos that wouldn't give anything to get me. Funny I ain't seen you before." His face clouded again. "You're sure you ain't that Diana dame?"

"You can't be sure of anything, nowadays," said Diana. "Maybe you're the King of Belgium."

Legore grinned. "I ain't the King of Belgium," he said, "but I'm the king of

this burg, savvy? Anything you want is yours for the asking. Providing you ask me, savvy?"

"And what's it cost?" she asked.

"You're a wise kid, all right. Well, I guess you wouldn't find it so bad being Bull Legore's woman, what? All the other dames would envy you to beat hell."

"I could never take up with a man who couldn't dance well," said Diana. "I just love dancing."

"Say, there ain't no one here can beat me dancing," said Legore. "Least they wouldn't dare say they could!"

"Let's try and see just how good you are?" she suggested.

"You're on, kid."

Jimmie reached out under the table and caught Diana's wrist, but she shook him off.

"Come on," she said to Legore.

Legore led her toward the dance floor. It was Diana's idea to get Legore so taken with her that he would suggest their going out somewhere, perhaps to his rooms. Once on the street the rest was up to Jimmie.

Diana was an expert dancer, and it required all her ability to keep out of the way of Legore's huge feet.

"You're a wonder," she said to him.

"You ain't kiddin' me?"

"Oh, no!"

They had danced around the floor about twice when a swarthy-looking greaser beckoned to Legore.

"Excuse me a minute, kid," he said. "I got to speak to that guy."

He left her in the middle of the floor and crossed to the man who spoke to him excitedly and with many gesticulations. A feeling of misgiving came to Diana. Had Legore's spies discovered that they were already ashore?

The dance floor was separated from the bar, where Jimmie lolled at the table, by a narrow door. From the bar you could only see the dancers as they passed the door. Jimmie had moved so that he could keep a close watch. He had seen Diana pass by twice, and then she didn't reappear. He stirred restlessly. But he couldn't spoil things now.

Legore returned to Diana after talking to his henchman, a grim smile on his face. They started to dance again. At one end of the room was another door leading to the private rooms. He steered Diana, who did not suspect what he was doing, toward this door.

"So you don't know who that guy is you're with, eh?"

She looked up at him, and what she saw in his face made her heart sink. He knew.

Before she could do anything or cry out, one big paw covered her mouth and he swept her up into his arms and carried her out.

Jimmie still at the table became more and more restless. Diana had not passed that door for nearly five minutes. Finally, he could contain his fears no longer and he got to his feet and staggered for the door. He was still playing the drunk. At the door he searched among the couples for Diana and Legore but they were gone.

Callahan, who had no inkling of the truth, but who was always prepared for trouble, had followed Jimmie to the door. A drunk may do anything, and Callahan was going to be on the lookout. He quickly took in the fact that Legore and the girl were missing, and bethought him of the private rooms. He slipped past Jimmie and made for that door.

Jimmie saw him and leaped after him.

"Where are you going?" he snapped.

Callahan looked at him in surprise. He saw that Jimmie was in reality cold sober. His eyes narrowed.

"What's your game, young man?" he asked. "Why the fake drunk act?"

"None of your damned business! Where did Legore go with that girl?"

Callahan shrugged. "How should I know?"

Jimmie's hands went to his armpits and Callahan found himself gazing down the barrels of two revolvers.

"You're going to tell me or I'll shoot this place to hell!" cried Jimmie. He was in a panic for Diana. His eyes were wild and his voice almost hysterical.

Callahan looked over his shoulder toward the door to the private rooms. Jimmie saw it.

"Are they in there?" he demanded.

"No," said Callahan.

Jimmie stepped toward the door, but Callahan barred the way.

"They're not in there," he persisted.

"Get out of the way or I'll drop you!" thundered Jimmie.

Jimmie was so intent on Callahan that he had not realized that his back was to the rest of the room, and that his high, excited tones must have attracted attention. A shot rang out and Jimmie felt a sharp pain in his right shoulder. Quick as a flash, he pulled his own triggers and Callahan crumpled up on the floor. Then he whirled around and shot at the swinging lamp which afforded the only light in the room. The place was pitched into darkness and Jimmie leaped over the prostrate form of the late Boris Callahan, and made for the door to the private rooms.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SHOW-DOWN.

WITH the Madrid in a state of wild confusion, Jimmie hurried through the door to the private rooms and locked it behind him. It would give him a few minutes grace before the angry crowd could get at him. If Legore and Diana were in one of the rooms behind the row of closed doors which confronted him, he had very little time in which to find them and get his man.

He kicked at the nearest door and it opened into a black room. If Legore were hiding in such a place and Jimmie went in, it would be the end, for he would be an excellent target outlined by the dim light from the hall. It was suicide to go into the room and Jimmie knew it. He hurried down the hall, opening each of the doors to find the rooms inky dark, except for one in which a couple of longshoremen were mulling over a bottle of liquor. They looked up at him stupidly, but said nothing.

Jimmie was frantic. If Legore and Diana were still in the building and he went out he knew very well he could never get in again. But on the other hand, if they had gone out somewhere, he was losing valuable time. People in the café were beginning to pound on the door which he had locked. There were angry shouts and some one fired a volley of shots through the door which buried itself in the wall opposite.

Jimmie called out Diana's name, knowing very well that even though she was still in the building, Legore would not permit her to answer, unless it was to lead him into a trap. It was a desperate situation, and one in which Jimmie found himself completely helpless. And whatever he did he must hurry. Heaven alone knew what might be happening to Diana, and in a moment the flimsy door behind him must give away and the crowd would be in on him like a pack of hungry wolves.

At the far end of the hall was a door into the street and Jimmie made for this. His only hope was that Legore had used this exit and that he might be able to pick up the trail. It was a full hour before the appointed time to join Drew at their meeting place near the water front so that it would be useless to go there. That it would still be useless in an hour, Jimmie, of course, could not know. At any rate, wherever she was he couldn't be of assistance to Diana if he became a corpse, and that was going to be his lot in about thirty seconds unless he made a get-away. Already they might be watching the rear exit, in which case he was done for.

But as is usually the case when a crowd becomes excited the obvious is forgotten. The back entrance was unwatched and Jimmie found himself out in the street just as the sound of the splintering door reached his ears. He hurried down into the dark and out of sight.

In a sheltered recess he stopped to reload his guns and to examine his wounded shoulder. The fact that he could move his arm quite freely led him to believe that it was nothing more than a graze. It was bleeding profusely however, and he was forced to tear a strip from his shirt to bandage it.

What to do? He didn't know Barrientos at all. He had no idea where to look for Legore, or where his hangout might be. The betrayal by Sanchez had made preparations of this sort impossible. Their hand had been forced too quickly. The only thing to do was to go to the alley and wait for Drew to come. Together they

would be able to devise some systematic method of search.

With a hopeless feeling of defeat, he made his way back toward the water front. The worst had happened. Diana had insisted on running the risk, despite his warning, despite everything. And now, under his very eyes had been spirited away. And it was his fault that she was in danger. It was because he had been a headstrong idiot!

With Diana in his arms, Legore had made straight for the rear exit, his man having told him that she was, as he had at first suspected, the girl from the Neptune. His first impulse had been to go back to the bar and shoot Jimmie as he sat at the table, but so supreme was his confidence in himself, that he decided to wait till later to get the man. Diana had succeeded all too well in intriguing him, and he was determined to keep her for himself. That meant that before he did any fighting she must be put away safely somewhere.

Out on the street he put her down on her feet, one hand closed tightly over her wrist.

"Now, baby, you'll have to do some fast hoofin'," he announced.

"Where are you going to take me?" Diana demanded.

"You'd be surprised, kiddo. You played your game so realistic that I'm going to try to make my act just as good."

That was all. He started down the street on the double quick. It was useless to resist, so Diana, her wrist still held in a viselike grip, was forced to follow. Legore was moving so fast that it seemed to her that her feet scarcely touched the ground—a sort of "Alice-in-Wonderland" sensation.

"There ain't no use hollerin'," Legore called back over his shoulder, smiling. "I'm the King of Belgium! You said it, kiddo."

Even had she had any hope that calling for help would be worth while, they encountered no one on the street who might have been of service to her. This town was truly a deserted place at night. Legore and his men had terrorized the neighborhood for so long that the inhabitants knew better than to poke their noses outside their doors.

"My dump's around the corner," Legore said after a bit. "Hope you'll like it, 'cause you're going to stay there for some time, kiddo. When Bull Legore takes a fancy to a dame she don't leave till he gets tired of her, savvy? You and me is going to have one hell of a time, kiddo!"

Diana had been thinking quickly. There must be something she could do that would help Jimmie to find her. Heroines in books always drop handkerchiefs or something, but the handkerchief that she was carrying had no distinguishing mark on it. It would be just a handkerchief to Jimmie if he found it. She was praying that Jimmie had discovered her disappearance at once and that he had followed. Perhaps even now he was behind waiting for an opportunity to get Legore. It was a faint hope, and she knew it, and when Legore threw open the door of a house and dragged her in after him she gave it up altogether.

The house was pitch dark inside, but Legore seemed to know his way.

"Look out for the steps, kiddo," he warned.

Up they went, still hurrying. Diana was out of breath and almost exhausted by the long run, but Legore seemed tireless. At the top of the third flight they stopped outside a door. Legore opened it with a key and pushed her in ahead of him. He struck a light and set a small oil lamp to going.

Diana looked about her. They were in a dirty, disordered room. In one corner was a bed which looked as if it had been slept in for a generation without being made up. A rickety table, a broken chair, litters of papers, a knife stuck in the wall, broken whisky bottles, empty tin cans, and scattered clothing filled the room.

Diana backed up against the table and watched the man. He was peering at her through his pig eyes, and licking his lips. Without taking his eyes off her he went to a closet in the corner of the room and got a bottle and two glasses from a shelf. These he brought back, still without saying anything, put the glasses on the table, and filled them.

"To our life together, kiddo," he said, chuckling. He tossed off his drink and refilled the glass. Diana stood, petrified.

Legore wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his coat.

"Before we establish this here love nest," he said, leering at her, "I got some work to do. I got to get them two guys that came here with you. I don't like the idea of them hanging around here waiting to take a shot at me. I want to find out some things from you. Where is that guy Drew?"

"I don't know." In spite of her effort not to show how really terrified she was, Diana's voice trembled. Legore frowned.

"Don't pull none of that ignorance on me, kiddo. You know damned well where he is, so don't waste time stalling around. I'll get 'em anyway. You might as well help me out. It 'll make it easier for you."

"I don't know where they are," said Diana. "If I did, I wouldn't tell you."

Legore took a step toward her. "You wouldn't, eh? You ain't adopting the right attitude toward me, kiddo. You started in all wrong. You tried pulling the wool over my eyes. You and your boy friend had a little scheme all cooked up to get me, didn't you? I fooled you, didn't I? What was your game? What was the idea of you playing up to me?"

"What's the use of all this, Mr. Legore? I'm not going to tell you anything. I really don't know where my friends are. You can't get anything out of me."

"You'd be surprised what I can get out of you, kiddo. I mean to find out what your plans was." He eyed her shrewdly. "You was going to meet this Drew guy some place, wasn't you? Wasn't you?"

Diana shook her head. She didn't dare speak. To show Legore how nearly her nerve was gone would be fatal and she knew that if she spoke it would be all too evident. He came closer to her.

"Now, let's not get off on the wrong foot, kiddo. You and your outfit is licked. You know that. I like you. I'm not going to hurt you if you play square with me. If you don't tell me where your friends were going to meet I'll find out anyway. Then it 'll go hard with you. I won't stand for no one holding out on me. Savvy?"

"I'm not holding out on you," Diana told him. "I don't know where they are."

Legore was beside her now and his huge hands rested on her shoulders. She shrank away under his touch, but he pulled her back toward him. He was moistening his lips with his tongue, and his eyes were gleaming dangerously. Suddenly he gripped her shoulders so tightly that she cried out from the pain.

"Damn it," he thundered, "you're going to tell me or I'll know the reason why. You're afraid of me, ain't you? Well, if you don't tell me, I give you somethin' to be afraid of."

"I don't know! I don't know what their plans were!" she cried.

His fingers bit into her shoulders until she felt that he must break the bones. Her face went ghastly white and she would have fallen if he hadn't held her up.

"Will you tell me?" he repeated, over and over again, increasing the power of his grip each time he spoke.

Mercifully for Diana she could stand the thing no longer and she went limp in his arms. For a moment he held her, looking at her stupidly. Then there came into his eyes something very different from anger. He drew her close to him and stared at her lovely, pale face. Then with an almost violent gesture he crushed her against him and pressed his hot, wet lips to hers.

The horror of the thing brought Diana back to her senses. She cried out and struggled helplessly in his arms.

"Lord!" he muttered thickly. "You're a wow, kiddo."

Again he kissed her greedily. Again she cried out and again she struggled to free herself. It was a useless, hopeless effort. Just then there came a rap on the door.

For a moment Legore hesitated, then he turned to Diana again.

"Go to hell," he cried out to whoever the visitor was. "I'm busy."

The knock was repeated, but Legore paid no attention to it. Diana was struggling desperately now.

"For heaven's sake help me!"

The door burst open and a man hurtled into the room. He had thrown himself against it and was now off his balance. Legore whirled about, snarling like a trapped animal.

"When I say I'm busy, I mean it!" he said, whipping out a gun from his hip pocket.

"Put that gun away, you damned idiot," said the newcomer in a cold, passionless voice. "When I knock on a door it means I want to come in! You should know that by now, Legore."

It was Captain Lowe.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TABLES TURN.

SLOWLY, sullenly, Legore returned his gun to his pocket. Lowe's cold gray eyes were glittering like bits of splintered ice. He was thoroughly angry. Diana, not knowing who he was, but seeing that he was evidently connected with Legore in some way, sank back against the table with a choking sob. For a moment she had had hopes that the newcomer might help her. But he was a friend of Legore's! Where was Jimmie? Where was Drew?

Legore flushed a dull red as he faced his chief. He knew that he was in for it. Lowe was an unpleasant person when his ire was aroused.

"Who is this girl?" he demanded, sharply.

"Aw, she's the dame off the Neptune, chief."

Lowe's fists clenched and he stepped toward Legore as if he would strike him.

"Didn't I tell you that we would have nothing to do with women, Legore?"

"I ain't lookin' for no ransom, chief," Legore whined. "I want the girl for myself."

"Well, you'll jolly well not have her! There's nothing so completely demoralizing to an outfit like ours as a woman. I won't have it, Legore. Furthermore, when you start fussing around with American citizens who are perfectly respectable and of some social standing as this girl is you'll find yourself in hot water. And one thing more, Legore! I'll be damned if I'll stand having any decent woman manhandled by a dirty bounder like you! There are limits to everything."

"Say, chief," Legore muttered, "you're the boss when it comes to the gang, savvy? But you got no business interfering in my private affairs."

Lowe's lips tightened. He sensed immediately that he was facing a crisis with Legore. If he lost control of the gunman now it was the end of their partnership.

"There is no difference between our business and our private lives, Legore. You should know by now who is controlling things around here, and I say that we'll leave women alone. That's been a rule with us since the beginning. We won't break it now."

Legore looked around at Diana. The sight of her filled him with a sense of rebellion against the chief. The drinks he had had fortified his courage.

"It's going to be broke, just the same," he said. "I can't see no harm in it for us, and I'm going to keep her. Mind you, chief, I ain't denying that you've done a hell of a lot for me, savvy? I know I ain't got the brains you got, but I ain't going to have no one messing around with my private affairs. I'm *damned* if I am."

"Let me get this straight," said Lowe softly, menacingly. "You are refusing to obey my orders about this girl? You're willing to run the consequences of crossing me? You know what that means?"

"I can shoot as straight as the next guy, chief," said Legore, simply.

"I think there won't be any shooting, Legore. I've already got your friend Drew locked up. You'll let this girl go free and I'll turn Drew over to you. It's a fair exchange. If you don't do that I'll let Drew go and with minute instructions as to where he can find you. He wants you badly, Legore, and I rather think he'll get you if he has half a chance."

For a moment Legore hesitated. Then he flared up and his hand shot back to his hip pocket for his gun.

"I'm through," he bellowed. "I've knuckled under to you long enough! I'm damned if I'll give up this girl! Let Drew go! Set your whole damned outfit after me! I'm not afraid of 'em. I'll shoot 'em all to hell—and you too if you interfere any more! I'm keepin' the girl, savvy? I'm takin' her aboard my boat, and to hell

with you and your outfit from now on. Stand aside, Mr. Lowe, or I'll start my shootin' right here and now."

He stepped quickly over to Diana and swung her up into his arms. In his right hand was his gun, and he kept Lowe covered. For the first time in his career the Englishman knew that he was temporarily defeated. He shrugged his shoulders.

"You win, Legore," he said, with an unpleasant smile, "but I would suggest that you start using your gun on me right now, because if you don't you'll regret it."

Legore laughed as he backed out the door with Diana in his arms.

"Don't let him take me away," she begged of Lowe.

"I'm at the wrong end of the gun, my dear young lady," said the Englishman. "But possibly this is not the end of this affair. Who knows?"

"You better stay here, chief," warned Legore. "If I catch sight of you again I'll plug you." And he was gone.

Lowe stood where he was in the middle of the room. He took a cigarette from his coat pocket and tapped it on the back of his hand. He was smiling with his lips, but his eyes held anything but amusement. He listened to the sound of Legore's feet on the stairway. When they had died away he ambled out of the room, taking his own revolver from the pocket of his slicker.

As he walked back to his house Lowe was formulating a plan. He knew that he had permanently lost control of Legore, and that unless he could do away with him now his own position was considerably endangered. He also knew that if he made an open play for Legore himself that it would result in a disrupting of their gang. A split between the leaders meant that the men would take sides.

On the other hand, if Legore were killed or transported by these Americans that had come down for that very purpose it would mean that only Legore would lose prestige. The whole thing suddenly became quite clear to him, and he quickened his pace. A few moments later he was turning the key in the door to his rooms.

In his room Lowe took off his slicker and threw it over a chair. He still had his revolver in his hand, and he spun the cylinder with his forefinger and stared thoughtfully at the door which led to the room in which Drew was imprisoned. The thing must be deftly done, this trapping of Legore, both for his own sake and the sake of the girl.

She was in great danger, and even Lowe, who had learned to steel himself against emotion of any sort, and especially pity, could not but wish that there was something he could do to help her. For the sake of his own prestige at Barrientos, however, he couldn't run the personal risk of defeat at the hands of the gunman. His own salvation and that of the girl lay in the hands of the two men who had come to Barrientos for the purpose of trapping Legore.

He stepped quickly across to the door of the guest room, unlocked it, and swung it open. He was spinning his gun nonchalantly around on the forefinger of his right hand.

"Mr. Drew, would you mind stepping out here for a moment?"

Drew, having tested the place thoroughly for any possibility of escape, had given it up as a bad job, and had stretched out on the bed in an effort to get some sleep. Now as he came into the light of the other room his eyes blinked dazedly.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Sit down," Lowe suggested. "Have a drink. I rather think you're going to need it."

"You've decided to turn me over to Legore, eh?" asked Drew. "You're not going to give me a chance?"

"On the contrary, my dear fellow, I'm going to turn Legore over to you. That is to say, I'm going to give you the opportunity to get him if you can."

Drew looked incredulous. "What's the catch?"

"There is no catch. A great many queer things have happened in the last few hours, thanks to you and your friend. I might say that one of those things has made me an enemy instead of an ally of Legore's. You see, I won't have any of my men mixing up with women, and Legore has disobeyed me on that score. He has taken Miss Van Dyne, your young friend, to his boat, and I dread to think what will happen to

her unless something is done about it almost immediately."

Drew jumped to his feet. "You mean to say that Diana is in his hands? How did it happen? Where's Curtin?"

"It's rather a complicated story," said Lowe, in his calm, even voice. "Miss Van Dyne was playing up to Legore, evidently in an attempt to catch him off his guard so that Curtin could get in his work. In some way Legore got a sniff of the wind, and he carried her off under Curtin's nose. Curtin shot up a café, killed one of my best men, and disappeared. That's all there is to tell, except that I ordered Legore to set Miss Van Dyne free and he refused. I couldn't do anything because he had the drop on me. He's taken her to his boat. Now it's up to you."

"You mean you're going to let me go?"

"Exactly. And if I were you I'd hurry."

"You're sure this isn't a trap of some sort?"

Lowe tossed his revolver over on to the table beside Drew. His cold gray eyes met Drew's steadily.

"You see," he said, "if you don't believe me you have me in your power! Legore's boat, the Lucia, is anchored in the harbor. He may put out to sea because he thinks I'll follow. Better hurry."

For just a moment longer Drew hesitated. Then he dashed out.

Lowe leaned back in his chair, his finger tips together, his eyes on the ceiling, his lips curved in a smile.

"And that's that," he murmured.

CHAPTER XVI.

NOW OR NEVER.

FOR the first time in their association together Legore had beaten Lowe, and the gunman was drunk with success. He had not had the courage to shoot his chief outright. There was still lurking in his mind a little fear, a little healthy respect. The gray eyes behind the glasses had retained their old hypnotic power, if to a lesser degree, still effectively enough to deny Legore a complete triumph.

On the street with Diana he whistled sharply, and several men appeared out of the gloom and approached.

"All hands aboard the Lucia," Legore ordered. "Round up the rest of the crew, one of you. The others come with me."

He strode off down the street, carrying Diana as if she were a feather. His little pig eyes were gleaming in hungry anticipation of what was to come. He had thrown off Lowe's shackles. Let the whole world fight him. There was no one to be afraid of now!

Diana, though she was exhausted from the night's adventure, was taking note of her surroundings. Her heart began to beat a little faster, and hope ran high as she realized that they were going to the waterfront, and that they must pass by the alley in which Jimmie and Drew had planned to meet. If only one of them were there!

The men in the party, five beside Legore, were all talking together excitedly, and Legore was striding on ahead of them in silence. He was too busy with thoughts of the future to talk. His men knew that something unusual had happened. They had seen Lowe go to his rooms, and now Legore was flying to his ship! It was a matter for speculation.

As they approached the alley Diana prepared herself for a last effort. She would call for help. If either Drew or Jimmie were there they might be able to free her.

When they reached the spot she cried out as loudly as she could.

"Shut up!" bellowed Legore, and he clapped a grimy hand over her mouth.

But nothing happened, and with a helpless sob Diana relaxed in her captor's arms. It was all over. They would never be able to trace her now.

How could she know that Jimmie had actually been in the alley? How could she know that he had heard her screams, and that he had ripped out his guns and started out? How could she know that for once in his life Jimmie had curbed his impetuous spirit and waited when he saw that there were six to one? For that was what had happened. Now, as the Legore band hurried to the beach, they were shadowed by a slinking figure, which kept close to the buildings.

Until this moment, the most critical in his life, Jimmie had always acted on the spur of the moment. Now, as he saw Diana being carried off by Legore, and heard her screams, everything in him urged an immediate attack. He *must* go to her aid at once! Yet being so nearly on the verge of complete defeat, he had kept himself in hand. He couldn't shoot at Legore without running the risk of hitting Diana. He couldn't rush out into the street and stage a gun fight, for what chance had he against six others? It must be a game of watchful waiting. He must follow until a more advantageous moment arrived.

As he stole along behind, his muscles were tense, his throat was parched and dry, and his heart was burning with anxiety. It had all fallen on his shoulders now. He must save Diana. He must get Legore. Where was Drew? Why, when he was most needed, had he failed?

Legore and his men made straight for the beach, where they launched a boat quickly and rowed out into the darkness. For only a moment Jimmie hesitated, and then he ran to the Neptune's dory, dragged it down to the beach, and followed, the noise from the oar locks in Legore's boat being his only guide.

Diana was huddled in the stern of Legore's boat, the cold night air biting into her. Legore sat beside her, and one of his muscular arms was thrown about her shoulders. She was too tired and exhausted to offer any further resistance. Her last hope, that Jimmie might be waiting in the alley, having been dissipated, she had more or less given herself up to the inevitable.

"We're in for a big time, kiddo," Legore was saying, a note of triumph in his voice. "I'm through with bein' bossed around by any one. I'm going to let your little boy friends go. Ain't yer glad? You and I are going to slip off in my tub. There's always new places to work. We'll find them. You'll get to like knockin' around. You'll get to like me. I ain't so bad when you get the hang of me."

Too much done in for any sort of repartee, Diana sat in silence. The men were pulling hard at the oars, and the boat glided through the water swiftly. Far off on the horizon was a faint light. It was almost time for the sunrise. It was scarcely four hours since she had been in Jimmie's arms outside the Madrid. Then it had seemed that they were simply going to breeze through with the capture of Legore. Now she realized that brute force and fighting ability and power were worth a good deal. She had been so sure of herself and of Jimmie!

Behind in the dory was Jimmie, his teeth set, pulling at the oars. The effort was hurting his wounded shoulder fiendishly, but he kept on because his mind was so intent on Diana that nothing else mattered. Presently ahead of him the gray outline of the Lucia loomed up. He heard Legore's men in the small boat calling to those on the deck of the schooner. He pulled his own boat around and brought up under the stern. From that point of vantage he saw Diana climbing up the rope ladder, which had been lowered, followed by Legore. Two of the others also went aboard, but the remaining three put back for shore in the rowboat.

From his place in the dory Jimmie could hear the shouted orders on the deck. The Lucia was hoisting sail. They were evidently going to put to sea at once. She was an old boat of about the same period as the Neptune. It was too late for Jimmie to go back for help, or to think of pursuit. There had been no time to leave a message for Drew, no time for anything but to follow. Now he must discover a way to board the Lucia unnoticed.

Standing up in the dory with his hands on the sides of the Lucia, he pulled himself around to the port side. There was a row of portholes, the three stern ones being black. From the forward ones came lights. A little higher up, and right back in the upper structure of the stern was a full-sized window, thrown open at the bottom. This probably led into a mess room or perhaps something similar to the chart room on the Neptune. If he could get through that window without being seen he might be in position to get the layout above decks.

By standing up on the bow of his dory he could just reach one of the rear port

holes. He pulled himself up, and the dory drifted away from under his feet. There could be no turning back now. Fortunately there was no one in the cabin back of the porthole, and he was able to get a purchase in it with one foot, and from that point reach the ledge of the window higher up. He paused for a moment to get his breath and to see that his guns were loose in the holsters. Then he pulled himself up to the window and slipped through into the room beyond. It was unlighted, but the faint glow which was gradually increasing outside sufficed to show that it was what might have been called the officers' mess, had there been any officers!

Jimmie went to the door and opened it. It commanded a full view of the deck. He could only spot about six men, working at the rigging. As he watched, Legore came up out of the deck companionway and went forward. Diana was nowhere to be seen. Legore must have taken her below.

If Jimmie was ever to get that companionway and down to Diana without being seen, he must do it before it became any lighter. Legore had gone forward, and the other men were aloft. Between the mess room and the companion was a small deck house, probably the carpenter shop. Jimmie made a quick dash for this and got behind it without attracting any attention. The companion was still some twenty feet farther down the deck.

He took one of his guns from its holster and peered around the corner of the house. Everything was apparently clear. He could not tell if he had been sighted from above, but he must take his chance of that. Once below with Diana he would be able to stand them all off in those cramped surroundings.

He slid around the side of the house and ran for the companion. He nearly fell down the abrupt ladder which led to the cabins below. The passage off which the cabins opened was lighted by a grimy oil lamp. The crew must all be above, and unless he had the misfortune to run into the cook, or some laggard, he could try them all. The first two were empty, but in the third, huddled in a chair in the corner, was Diana.

As Jimmie came in and closed the door behind him, she turned her face to the wall, and he heard her give a little sob. Quickly he crossed and knelt beside her; quickly his arms were about her.

"Don't—please," she said in a tired voice, still looking away.

"Darling—Diana—it's me—Jimmie."

Then she turned, and there was a hysterical catch in her voice.

"Jimmie! Jimmie!"

Her arms went around him, and she buried her head on his shoulder. Her fingers clenched tightly on his arms, and he gritted his teeth to keep from wincing. She had hurt his wound. But he knew she was trying to keep from going to pieces.

"You must be quiet, dear," he said. "I don't think they've seen me. We're going to get out of this all right. Just keep your nerve a little longer. You've been so splendid up to now."

"I'm not afraid any more," she said, half laughing, half crying. "Where were you, Jimmie? I thought you'd lost track of me altogether. I had hoped you might have been at the meeting place waiting for Drew. I called out when they took me by there, but nothing happened."

Jimmie stroked her hair while she spoke.

"I *was* there, dear. That's how I was able to follow you out here. But I could not do anything then. I don't know what I'm going to do now. But somehow we'll get out of this. *I know it.*"

"Oh, Jimmie—" She looked at him, and her eyes were wet, and there was not the slightest trace of the old banter in her tone. "Oh, Jimmie—I've been thinking these last few hours—what a little idiot—I thought I was so darned good and that I could twist any man around my finger—and now I know I can't at all—and oh, Jimmie!"

He took her chin in his hand and lifted up her face so that her eyes met his.

"Do you mean to tell me that the only thing that you've been worrying about is that you failed to land Legore?"

She groaned. "Land him? Why, Jimmie, he fell like a ton of brick. But I couldn't handle him after that, Jimmie. He is going somewhere now. He said he didn't care about you and Drew. He said that he

and I—that I and he—oh, Jimmie, I can't even talk straight!"

Then Jimmie kissed her, because there were her lips, and he loved her. For a moment he held her very tightly in his arms.

"Somehow I've got to get the best of things here," he said finally. "There are seven or eight of them on board. It's a big order, but we're not licked till we're licked. I suppose Legore will come back here presently?"

"Why, Jimmie"—Diana sat bolt upright in her chair—"he's the most extraordinary person I ever knew. I give you my word I've met some Hale men that were queer, but this Legore— Oh, my gosh, I forgot—you're Hale, aren't you? And I was trying to be funny. Oh, Jimmie, I'm a total loss."

Whereupon Jimmie kissed the end of her nose.

He might have said something, but at that moment there came the sound of heavy feet on the companion. Diana clutched Jimmie's arm.

"It's Legore! He's coming!"

Jimmie slipped one of the guns out of its holster and handed it to Diana.

"You take this and use it judiciously, old girl. If any one tries to interfere with my little argument with Legore, stop them."

He stepped quickly behind the door and waited.

The door was flung open and Legore came in. Diana had slipped the gun down behind her in the chair, and she looked up with that cocky smile that had attracted him at the Madrid.

"Spirits pickin' up a little, eh, kiddo?"

Jimmie slammed the door shut and covered Legore with his gun.

"Stick 'em up!" he ordered. Now, Jimmie was something of a fighter, and he had played football, and he wasn't afraid of any one in a free for all, but he was also something of a greenhorn with a gun, and Legore was a past master at that sort of game. Before Jimmie had time to think or move, Legore sprang at him and knocked the gun out of his hand. They both went to the floor in a heap. Legore hadn't had time to reach for his own weapon, and Jimmie knew that he must fight now as he had never fought before. He must keep Legore so busy that he never would have time to reach for his gun.

Back and forth they rolled. Diana, crouched in her chair, watched with startled eyes. With a mighty effort Legore sent Jimmie spinning into the corner of the cabin. He struggled to his feet, and his hand brought out his gun from his hip pocket. Jimmie was at him like a tiger, before he could bring the gun into range. He caught Legore's wrist with one hand, and with the other he wrenched away the revolver and sent it crashing through the open porthole.

He had forgotten that he might have used it himself. He had forgotten everything except that he was fighting for Diana, and that his way of fighting was with his fists. He ducked under a wild swing and came up with a tattoo of blows on the point of Legore's chin. The big gunman lowered his head and made a bull-like charge, his arms swinging. Jimmie side-stepped and directed a sharp jab at Legore's face. One of the gunman's wild swings caught Jimmie a heavy clip above one eye and sent him spinning back against the bunks.

In one corner of the room on the floor was the revolver which Legore had knocked out of Jimmie's hand. The gunman saw it and he started for it. His big face was a pasty white. He knew suddenly that this youth was going to whip him unless he could get that gun. He knew that the men above were not hearing a sound of all this row, and that he must fight it out alone. It wouldn't do any good to call to them. They wouldn't hear.

Jimmie sprang after him and made a tackle that would have brought joy to Dad Jones's heart. Legore sprawled on his face, his outstretched hand failing to reach the gun by inches.

"Get that gun, Diana, quick!" Jimmie was panting for breath. His face was smeared with blood.

Diana slid out of her chair. Legore made a desperate lunge to reach the gun, but she kicked it out of his reach, and then picked it up and returned to her corner.

"Put up your hands, Legore! Stop!"

she ordered in a voice that was tremulous, but nevertheless firm.

"There's going to be no stopping, old girl!" cried Jimmie, a note of triumph in his voice. He had tasted blood. The bit was in his teeth, and he was fighting like one possessed. Legore was on the defensive, bellowing, trying to ward off the rain of blows. He staggered to his feet, throwing Jimmie off. He had the strength, but he was slow, extremely slow. Jimmie was weaving in and out of his aimless swings, battering, thumping, pounding.

Suddenly, from what seemed to be some distance away, came the sound of a shot. It was not a rifle or a pistol, something heavier. Then they heard a ripping sound and a thud on the deck above. Diana stood up in her chair and looked out the porthole. It was quite light now.

"Jimmie!" she cried. "It's the Neptune. They're firing at us. That Portuguese! He must have gotten the men free. They've found out you're aboard. They've struck our rigging already."

Jimmie could not stop to answer, but his redoubled onslaught was bringing an end to Legore. The big man sank to his knees, and Jimmie's blows on his head had a sickening thudding sound. Finally the gunman collapsed. Jimmie stood above him, swaying on his own feet, his face streaming blood from the cut above his eye.

"Jimmie!" Diana was clutching at his arm. "Don't you understand? The Neptune is attacking us. What does it mean? Have the men gotten free? Why should they attack Legore?"

There was another report from the antiquated brass cannon in the bow of the Neptune, and the Lucia shuddered. It had been a direct hit. They could feel her settle down in the water. They heard shouts from above decks.

"Give me those guns. You stay here!"

"I've left you for the last time, old thing," said Diana, and she dashed after him up the companion.

Above decks was wild confusion. Part of the rigging had been shot away, and they had been struck on the water line. The forward hold was filling fast. The Neptune was less than a hundred yards away, and the first rays of the sun were shining on her little brass cannon. None of the terrified Spaniards thought to disobey when Jimmie ordered them to run down their colors and put to.

"But, Jimmie, what will you do? You can't fight them all!"

Jimmie was grinning that old grin of his and wiping the blood from his eyes.

"Look, dear! Don't you see? In the bow of the Neptune!"

A man was waving frantically. Jimmie began to jump up and down and shout.

"It's Terry! It's Drew! Don't you see, dear? Oh, my Lord!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A GREAT PAIR OF KIDS.

HAVING gone straight from Lowe's to the meeting place in the alley, and not finding Jimmie, Drew had hurried to the beach. The dory from the Neptune was missing. He knew that Legore had already taken Diana aboard the Lucia, and his only hope was to follow and overtake them. He found a rowboat moored to a pier, and he commandeered it and rowed out to the Neptune.

Drew had found Sumner and Jorgenson in a somewhat chastened mood. When he put the proposition up to them that they go back to their jobs and that their past offenses would be forgotten they agreed with alacrity.

Drew had no idea where Jimmie was, and he knew that by firing on the Lucia if she refused to lay to meant that he was endangering Diana. But he had to take that chance. With the sun creeping up, he saw his position and that he was already within range. He worked the little cannon himself, Jorgenson was at the wheel, and Sumner and Lo Peng were attending to the rigging.

The first shot went whistling across the bows of the Lucia and splashed harmlessly on the other side; the second brought down some of the rigging; the third fell short; but the fourth was a direct hit just at the water line.

Then he picked up a rifle and began taking pot shots at the men in the rigging of the Lucia, a sport which he afterward told Jimmie had trapshooting beaten a mile. Presently the colors on the Lucia's masthead were drawn down, and Drew saw some one jumping up and down and waving his arms. Lo Peng came running with glasses, and Drew saw Jimmie and Diana.

Ten minutes later he was boarding the Lucia. Jimmie and Diana greeted him enthusiastically, Diana dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. Jimmie was a battle-scarred sight. One eye was closed, his shirt was stained with blood, his knuckles were bruised and swollen, but he was grinning.

"We've got him!" he shouted to Drew. "What's the idea of shooting at us, you old fool? I've licked Legore! He's out cold in a cabin below. What do you think of that, old boy? Where have you been? Holy smokes, what a night!"

Whereupon the three of them danced around in a circle, and the petrified Spanish crew who thought they had been boarded by pirates now concluded that it was lunatics.

Now Jimmie brought his hand up in a mock salute.

"I'm a good Northwest Mounted, sir. I always get my man. Your prisoner's below. Bring him up and let's beat it."

Drew went down and presently reappeared with Legore's huge bulk thrown over his shoulder.

"I can see the chief celebrating already," said Drew.

That night Jimmie and Drew and Diana, having caught up on some much needed sleep, made their way to a section of Barrientos that they hadn't seen before. Legore was a prisoner aboard the Neptune, and Drew was planning to sail next morning.

"Better start for the boat," he said finally.

Jimmie looked at Diana.

"You'll have to sign on another hand," he said, "because we're not going back with you."

"Good Lord, why not?"

"Because we're going to find the biggest and safest-looking coastwise steamer for our return trip. There's too much at stake to risk another storm aboard the Neptune."

"But what's at stake now?"

"Don't be an ass, you blinking idiot! Come to think of it, it's about time for *you* to go back to the boat, though."

Drew got up from the table.

"My error," he said dryly. "What do you want me to do with the Neptune when I get back to New York?"

"Anything you like. If she was a little smaller I'd put her on my mantelpiece as a souvenir."

Left alone, Jimmie and Diana smiled at each other across the table.

"You know, Jimmie," Diana said, "we have got to decide where we'll stay to-night. I mean we can't go to the same hotel. It isn't being done."

"Why not?"

"Well, you know the great god convention and all that sort of rot."

"But there's no law against a man and his wife staying together, is there?"

"No, but—"

"I told the American consul we'd be over about ten to-night. We've got fifteen minutes to make it. Better go, I guess."

He said this very calmly, without a smile.

"Why, Jimmie Curtin! How do you know I'll marry you?"

"Won't you?" asked Jimmie in consternation.

"Of course," said Diana, and she put out her hand to him across the table.

"My gosh, how I love you!" And he pressed her hand to his lips.

"And how did your wife take it?" chuckled H. V.

Mr. Van Dyne regarded the end of his cigar thoughtfully.

"Not being a double-speed dictaphone, I can't repeat what she said. But I convinced her, I think, that in this day and generation a bootlegger has more prestige than a count."

"The devil you did! But say, Harvey, as one father-in-law to another, they're a great pair of kids, aren't they?"

THE END

Diamonds are Trumped

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

"THE trouble with us," declared Bill, "is that we've got inferiority complexes."

"My feet always did trouble me, even when I was a kid," I interposed.

"I wasn't talking about feet," said Bill sharply. "I was talking about our inferiority complexes. We're bright, intelligent men, but just because we've done a lot of drifting about the country and don't wear the latest cuts of clothes, we have a sneaking suspicion that we're not the salt of the earth, and that feeling of inferiority holds us back. This metal polish we've got here is as good as any on the market. We ought to sell a hundred cans a day, but we haven't sold one. Do you know the reason?"

Bill paused impressively.

"Holy mackerel, Bill, look at the string of sparklers in that window," I remarked irrelevantly in an effort to change the painful subject.

The diamond necklace, tossed with studious negligence in the center of the purple velvet, was the only object in the broad expanse of display space inside the immense plate glass window. The store obviously was one of those exclusive places where the clerks blush for shame if anybody comes in without a frock coat and a high hat.

"Class" was plastered all over the dignified front. If a guy went in there and bought a thousand-dollar ring with ten hundred-dollar bills, the clerk would toss the bills into the small-change drawer of the cash register and then go wash the filth off his hands.

"Do you know why we haven't sold a single can of our metal polish?" repeated Bill, carelessly waving aside the trivial matters of diamond necklaces and class.

"Because nobody wants to buy one," I yawned.

"No, sir; because of our inferiority com-

plex," he declared triumphantly. "We're afraid of ourselves, so we don't get anywhere."

"The only thing I'm afraid of is that we'll still be broke at supper time," I interposed mildly.

"Well, you needn't be afraid of that," said Bill reassuringly. "Beginning right now we're going to subdue our inferiority complexes. We aren't going to bother with the small fry any longer. We're going to aim high. In twenty minutes we'll have our dozen cans of polish sold."

"Keep it up, Bill, old scout; that's a beautiful song you're singing," I remarked encouragingly. "Where are you going to dispose of the dozen cans?"

Bill looked around speculatively. "Right in here," he said confidently. He pointed to the plate glass door leading into the exclusive jewelry store.

"Golly, you're aiming high," I conceded cheerfully. "But you better leave the cans outside when you go in, so as they won't be dented when you land on the sidewalk as you come out."

"There you go with your inferiority complex," declared Bill triumphantly.

"That's not inferiority complex; that's common sense," I pointed out.

"Look at that brass plate," said Bill indignantly, pointing an accusing finger at the tablet set in the marble beside the door. "The man who polished that plate either had inferior polish or didn't use enough elbow grease."

"Perhaps it won't do any harm to ask the janitor if he wants to try some of our polish," I conceded judicially.

"The janitor?" scoffed Bill. "I'm going direct to the manager himself. Come on!"

I took a farewell look at the bright sun and beautiful street before following Bill inside. Some guys would leave their partners flat on a suicidal excursion like this, but I'm not that kind of a partner. The same foot that hoisted Bill out would have to hoist me out, too.

As we entered the door a fishy-eyed gent in his burial clothes with a carnation in his coat lapel greeted us with a dignified nod. I figured that this must be the manager.

It seemed nothing short of sacrilegious to mention such a mundane thing as metal polish in his presence. Bill, however, wasn't stepping blindly.

"I would like to speak with the manager," he said.

The haughty floor-walker eyed our shabby clothes coldly. Two dapper looking clerks were watching us with supercilious stares from behind the counters.

"The manager doesn't see any strangers except on matters of great importance," said the haughty one. "He doesn't talk to salesmen at all."

"Who said he did?" demanded Bill belligerently. "Who said—"

Bill paused abruptly as the plate glass door swung open and a pair entered. One of the pair was a little sawed-off runt with an air of determined dignity about him. A pace behind him was a heavily built fellow who looked like a bodyguard.

If we had noticed the two on the street we wouldn't have given them a second thought, but in this setting! I dimly recalled a picture which I had seen in the morning papers under the caption, "Prince Raymond Visiting City."

"It's Prince Raymond," I whispered audibly to Bill.

The floor-walker heard me, and he flashed a quick glance at the new arrivals. For the nonce Bill and I were completely forgotten.

"Ah, Prince?" He said it interrogatively as he strode forward to greet the little guy. "This is indeed a rare honor." The floor-walker obviously wasn't going to pass up any bets.

The little guy coldly ignored the greeting, so I concluded that my random guess of identification was correct. The little guy's steely gray eyes seemed to take in the entire store at a glance—the floor-walker, the two clerks, Bill and myself.

There was a flash of surprise in his eyes as they rested for a brief second on Bill and me. He apparently had expected to have the store to himself.

"Whereabouts is the manager?" he demanded.

"Just a minute, prince," interrupted Bill, stepping forward. "My pard and I get first crack at the manager. First come, first

served; that's the way we do things in America."

"What the—" The little guy seemed to curb himself with an effort. His manner changed abruptly from angry astonishment to impatience. "This is very extraordinary." He looked at the floor-walker suggestively as much as to say: "Now it's your move; go ahead and do something and be quick about it."

The floor-walker rose to the occasion.

"Please pardon this unwarranted bit of boorishness, I beg of you, prince. These two—two—" He couldn't quite get the right adjective. "These two specimens," he continued finally, "have nothing whatever to do with our establishment."

"Get 'em out of here quick, then," snapped the apparent representative of royalty. "Get 'em out." It was a command rather than a request.

"They will be thrown out immediately," promised the floor-walker. "Jarvis!" He raised his voice, directing it toward the back end of the store, but there was no response.

"Jarvis has gone over to the bank, Mr. Knickerbocker," interposed one of the clerks apologetically.

"Well, Robertson, you throw these two bounders out," directed the floor-walker.

"And do it quick," added the prince.

The clerk paled perceptibly.

"Come on out, Bill; we're getting in too deep here," I whispered hoarsely. "The devil with selling metal polish. I don't want any supper, anyhow. I ain't hungry."

"I'm hungry, even if you're not," said Bill, obstinately.

"Hurry up; a little action please," interposed the little guy.

Bill is hard to push when his fur is rubbed the wrong way.

"I'm an American citizen," he persisted. "This is a free—"

"Call a policeman, Robertson," directed the floor-walker brusquely.

"T'ell with a policeman!" came an angry ejaculation. "Stick 'em up!"

The command was snapped like the crack of a whip. The little guy I had thought was the prince flashed two guns and his companion did likewise. They seemed to pull them out of the air. I realized immediately that my identification had been erroneous.

We all had our hands upraised. Bill's brown paper bundle containing the cans of metal polish had crashed to the tile floor at the edge of the soft carpet, so hurriedly had he complied with the command. There's something compelling about the business end of a sawed-off gun.

One of the clerks behind the counter sought to edge along a few inches. I surmised that he was feeling for a button by which to summon aid.

"Another inch and you're dead!" snapped the gunman menacingly.

The clerk froze into a statue.

"Quick, Gus, the watchman 'll be back from the bank in a few minutes," commanded the little guy. "Work fast! I'll cover 'em while you hook that string of sparklers out of the window."

The heavily built fellow slipped his guns into his pocket, and an instant later had fished the necklace from its velvet bed, using a window hook which hung behind the panel. The guns in the hands of the little guy were held in such a position that instant death could have been dealt to any occupant of the store who dared to move. The steely blue eyes seemed to cover us all.

Quickly and sufficiently the heavily built fellow swept a trayful of unmounted diamonds into a small valise with the necklace.

"That's enough!" snapped the little guy, as the looter made a move to open another show case. "We've got plenty. Can't take any chances."

He started edging slowly toward the door, keeping his eyes and guns upon us. The big fellow snapped the valise shut and started to follow him.

Suddenly there was a snort such as might be made by an enraged bull, and like a streak of greased lightning, Bill hurled himself through the air and against the little guy. The onslaught was so sudden and unexpected that the fellow was knocked completely off his feet and clutched at the big one in an effort to save himself from falling flat.

To make the clutch he dropped one of his guns, which clattered to the floor. The

other discharged into the air, the bullet crashing through the upper part of the plate glass front door.

The next instant the two bandits were lying in a heap on the floor. Bill was atop of the heap. Momentarily the bandits were dazed, partly by the force of their falls, but mostly perhaps by astonishment.

"Grab the guns!" shouted Bill.

The floor-walker and myself rushed forward to obey the command. The two clerks were close behind. We quickly gained possession of all four guns.

A paneled door at the back end of the store swung open, and in the doorway, gazing at us in mingled astonisment and alarm, stood a big gent with gray sideburns.

"What's all this? What's all this?" he sputtered angrily. Back of him were grouped some frightened looking office workers.

"Bandits!" explained the floor-walker excitedly. "They tried to take the Superba necklace and some other stones. They—"

He looked up in relief as the front door opened and two uniformed officers, attracted by the gun shot, rushed in.

"Here's your men," said Bill laconically, as he arose from the prostrate figures of the bandits.

The manager, the big gent with gray sideburns, scarcely could conceal his agitation as he emptied the contents of the little valise on the counter. A glittering mass of diamonds lay there.

"A hundred thousand dollars worth of stones," he declared impressively.

The floor-walker and clerks were spinning their tales, and they generously gave Bill all the credit that he deserved. The manager looked as though he would like to drape himself around Bill's neck in gratitude.

"I don't wonder, though, that you flung yourself on the bandits. The sight of two men making off with a hundred thousand dollars' worth of diamonds would spur any red-blooded man to action."

"It wasn't the hundred thousand dollars' worth of diamonds that got my goat," said Bill frankly, as he absently stowed into his pocket a bank note which the management had pressed upon him.

"No?" The manager made no effort to conceal his curiosity.

"I can just stand so much and no more," said Bill. "The diamonds didn't bother me any, but when the dirty crooks made me do that to my metal polish, I saw red."

He pointed indignantly to the paper-wrapped where it had landed on the tile floor. From it was oozing a thin stream of leaking polish.

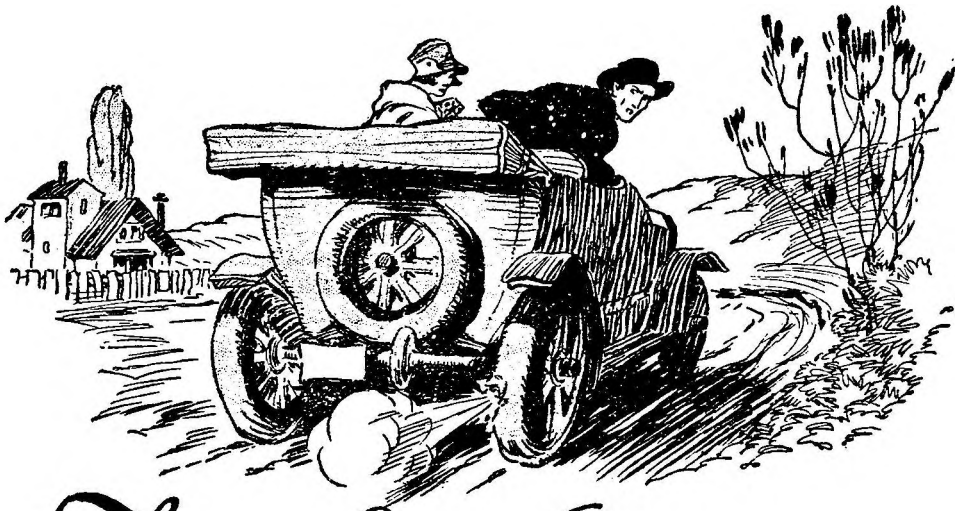
"That's what got me mad. They busted one of the cans."

THE END

A SONNET IN SEASON

IT seems to me Life's very like a yacht
Committed to the winning of a race.
She leaves her moorings full of sunny grace,
With every thought but victory forgot:
Then somewhere on the course the fates allot
A sail more resolute the leading place,
While she limps after at a losing pace
And all the promise fair that was, is not!
But though through waters difficult or shoal
The shallop Life must tack or slowly drift,
Or lie becalmed with moveless sheet and keel,
At last it shall attain the shining goal
The cup of Joy to confidently lift,
If only Love is stationed at the wheel.

Edward W. Barnard.



Two for One, One for Two

By ERIC HOWARD

BANG!

It was the third blow-out of the afternoon. The ancient little topless roadster skidded to the side of the dirt road; and William Welles, Ph.D., put his foot on the brake.

"I think," observed the girl at his side, "it's the rear right one this time."

"Since both of those on the left have already gone, it seems likely that this would be one of the right ones, unless the others are repeaters," William smiled through his goggles. One needed goggles in this car, and many other things.

He got out and walked around the machine.

"Yes," he said, after a careful observation. "It's the rear right tire, just as you said. These re-treads are no good! I am convinced of that, now."

"Can you fix it?"

"Oh, of course," responded William. "After all my practice—"

He began to hum a little tune. It was nearly as ancient as his flivver, and it annoyed the girl.

"I wish you wouldn't hum that whenever anything goes wrong!"

"I'm sorry!" said William. "I shan't do it again. It seems cheerful to me."

"It isn't. Besides, it's as out of date as this—this—well, what you call your car. It's as out of date as your darn old Restoration dramatists!"

"My dear Jane!" protested William.

"It is!" repeated "dear Jane." "And I don't care—I'm tired of listening to you talk about dead things!"

"Why—" began William. Then, being unable to go on, he began to hum that maddening tune again.

"Don't hum that!" cried Jane.

"I'm sorry," said William. "But—"

He inserted the jack under the rear axle. It was one of those contrivances made for big men and small cars.

This was a small car, indeed, but William Welles, Ph.D., was not a big man. Moderately tall, he was not muscular. One couldn't be a Ph.D. at his age and have time, also, to develop muscles. However, he was a willing worker.

"'Give me a lever,' said Archimedes, 'and I'll move the world!'" he urged himself on.

"Another dead one!" commented Jane, who had overheard him. "Will it help if I get out?"

"Not at all," sighed William. "Your weight"—a classical allusion occurred to him, but he rejected it, and continued—"is that of a feather."

The gallantry of that speech was wasted on the girl. Jane was angry. Three blowouts in one afternoon! It was bad enough to ride in the awful old car, but to have punctures every few miles, to have other cars sail by, to be laughed at—oh, it was terrible.

Why had she ever gone with him? Why hadn't she allowed Tom to take her in his new sedan? Oh!

She looked down at the man toiling with the jack, and her anger grew. He was always talking about dead people, dead things. His car was dead, too. Somebody ought to push it off a cliff. And humming that old, old tune!

Jane herself began to hum, but her song was:

> "Yassuh, she's mah baby—
> No, sah, Ah don' mean maybe!"

It was accompanied by a partially suppressed wriggle, which, unsuppressed, would have become a full-blown Charleston.

William Welles, Ph.D., looked up from his task. The deflated tire was off the ground now, and he was struggling to remove it from the rim.

"I don't like that song," he stated positively, "any better than you like mine."

Jane ignored him, but if she continued to hum it was under her breath. And her wriggling stopped altogether.

William, attempting to repair a large hole in the tube with a patch that was too small for it, reflected seriously upon the day's adventures.

It was a fine day for a picnic, and Sequoia Cañon had never been more beautiful. Alone, or with another companion, William would have been happy, in spite of tire trouble.

Blow-outs, he supposed, in his ignorance of tires and cars, were to be expected. He didn't mind them; it was not his nature to be troubled by little things. But Jane—well, Jane was annoyed. And annoying.

This was no way to enjoy a picnic, thought William. What if the others had already reached the picnic ground, in their better, faster cars? William was a good-natured, amiable person, his mind more than half occupied with pleasant thoughts, with no time for annoying trifles.

Suppose the car did boil over on every hill? Suppose the tires did give way, one after another? What of it? The day was beautiful.

That was the way William's mind worked. But not Jane's. She was annoyed by the delays. She was bored by William's light and learned conversation.

What did she care about Restoration dramatists? Not a thing. But William was full of his book on the subject; everything reminded him of his work.

However, in view of Jane's anger, he found himself thinking of the picnic.

Lord, what a bore it would be! A lot of girls like Jane, singing that silly song, attempting one step of the Charleston—why did they only do one step?—and chattering foolishly about nothing.

Jane was George Hughson's sister. That was how he had come to invite her to go with him. And Jane, having heard George talk of him, had accepted—before she had seen his flivver.

He had purchased that, not long before, from a graduate of the college in which he was associate professor. The youngster who had coddled it through his four collegiate years had no further use for it. William had often been urged to buy a car.

"A man without a car," his friends had said, "is virtually a cripple. Besides, you should get out more."

William had purchased the flivver. It was an engaging little machine. It demanded as much attention as a petulant invalid.

One could work on it fifteen hours a day, after which it would run—for a hundred miles, perhaps—with health and vigor. Then it would suffer a relapse. To-day it was full of relapses. The tires were especially troublesome.

The third blow-out repaired, and the tire replaced, William took the wheel and pressed on the starter. But the motor did not start. He pulled out the choke, and again used the starter. No signs of life.

So, adjusting the spark lever, he got out and turned the crank. No steady throb of power rewarded his efforts.

Jane looked on with increasing scorn, and then, turning, saw another car belonging to their large party approaching up the road. She waved, and the driver brought it to a stop.

It was a smooth and beautiful car, and there was room in it for Jane.

"I'll go along with you," she said, "if you don't mind. This thing will never get started."

"Oh, it 'll go!" William protested. "Just a minute. I'll get it going."

"Better jump in with us," laughed the driver of the larger car. "Leave that there, and maybe somebody will be kind enough to push it into the cañon!"

Prolonged laughter. William again spun the crank.

"No," he said, a little stubbornly. "You go ahead. I'll be along soon."

They went, Jane with them. And with them, too, went that part of the lunch that the poor little flivver had been carrying.

The boy from whom he had purchased his auomobile, as he liked to call it, had given him a little instruction in mechanics. Besides, William had purchased a book on the subject. He was the sort of person who could learn anything from a book, if the book was good.

Now, alone with his toy, he began to tinker with the curious parts that dwelt under the hood. He removed and cleaned the spark plugs, investigated the magneto point, examined the amazing number of wires that ran in all directions, took the starter apart and studied it, scrutinized and filed the coil points, referring constantly to the instruction book.

Like a bride with a cook book in one hand and an egg beater in the other, he read a direction and carefully followed it. But as is sometimes the case with the bride, the result was not altogether satisfactory. Having done all he could do, he found that it would not start.

William was greatly depressed, but his sadness lasted for only a moment. It was then completely and suddenly dissipated, by the unexpected arrival of a flivver that might have been the twin of his own.

"Bang!" said the second flivver, as one of its tires blew out.

William, bending over his engine again, leaped like a tenderfoot at the sound of a shot. And then, looking up, he saw that the driver of the second flivver—a girl—was smiling.

She guided her machine to the side of the road, ahead of his, and stopped. William answered her smile with one of his own.

"I've been expecting that," she said. "I was just wondering when it would happen."

He observed her as she pulled on a pair of gloves and began to take out a jack from her tool kit. She had a spare tire that was apparently holding air. She had, too, William saw, a most capable manner, a mouth made for laughter, and eyes that sparkled and twinkled with inextinguishable good humor.

She wore a charmingly simple dress of pongee, with collar and cuffs and tie of some darker stuff. William ordinarily did not observe how girls were dressed; he did now. Alarmed lest the charming frock be soiled, he stepped forward.

"Won't you let me change the tire?" he asked. "I've changed or repaired three to-day, so I'm rather proficient."

"Why—yes, you may! But what's wrong with your Isotta-Fraschini?"

"I don't know. I've done everything it tells one to do in the book, and it won't go."

"Hm! It needs the firm but gentle touch of a woman. These things are like naughty children. I really know a good deal about 'em. I'll see what I can do while you're changing that tire."

"All right. Thanks. But don't get your dress dirty."

By the time William had changed her tire, the girl, incredible as this may seem, had caused his motor to start. The doctor of philosophy gazed upon her in amazement and admiration.

"How did you do it?" he asked.

"A simple twist of the wrist, as Aristotle did not say. One of your battery connections was disconnected."

"Oh! I don't think the book mentioned that."

"Books overlook a lot of bets," said she.

That was the beginning of an argument —a very pleasant one, but still an argument —in which William completely forgot the picnic, Jane and everything else.

The girl likewise forgot her plans for the day, and they continued to argue until a lull came as the result of their simultaneous discovery that they were hungry. Whereupon, the girl brought forth a neatly boxed and ample lunch, which she offered to share with William.

As he partook of delicious sandwiches, he gazed upon her again with admiration. Picnics could be great fun, he reflected. This one was.

II.

WHEN William did not arrive at the picnic place in time to share the lunch, be it said to Jane's credit that she thought of him. But the thought was only a passing one, as most of hers were. It flitted through her little head, and out again.

"Where'd you lose your professor?" Tom Graham chaffed her. It was Tom who had the new and shiny sedan.

"He isn't *my* professor," Jane tossed her head. "Besides, he was so devoted to that tricycle of his—I call it that because only three wheels work at one and the same time —that he couldn't come with us."

"And I'll bet you didn't leave him anything to eat," observed Tom. "Want to run back and pick him up?"

Jane might have said yes, if, at that moment, some one had not suggested that they go on up the cañon for a few miles, where the water company's reservoir had flooded the road.

"That 'll be fun!" said Jane. "Come on, Tom!"

And so she left the poor professor to his fate. William, however, did not mind. He was enjoying himself.

He was very glad, just now, that he had purchased the dilapidated flivver. Otherwise, he might not have met Moira Philbrook. He was quite sure that Moira would not attempt to do the Charleston, and that if she did attempt it she would do it—not one step, but scores of steps.

Moira was intelligent, thought William; and then he noticed the way her long lashes veiled her twinkling gray eyes. That bit of observation led him to conclude that she was, indeed, very intelligent.

"I was going up the cañon," said Moira. "The reservoir's flooded from the last rains. I thought it might be interesting."

"Yes, let's go!" agreed William. He would have agreed to anything.

They decided to take both flivvers, in case, as Moira said, one or the other should break down. Moira's battered machine led the way, noisily puffing up grade, and William's, with equally loud protests, followed closely.

As if they enjoyed being together, the flivvers performed nobly. Without mishap, they arrived at a rise above the reservoir. The road which had circled it was completely submerged, and signs had been posted advising motorists to turn back.

It was, as any one with half an eye could see, impossible to get through to where the road continued to the head of the cañon and beyond.

Tom Graham, in his shiny new sedan, had attempted the impossible. When Moira and William arrived in their boiling flivvers, they looked down to see the sedan in the water. Tom and Jane were calling to the others of their party for help.

They were not in danger, for the water was not deep, but Jane was especially annoyed by their perdicament.

"Have you got a rope?" shouted Tom.

Those of the party who had been wise enough not to hazard the road replied unanimously in the negative. Anyway, a tow-rope of ordinary length would not reach Tom's car.

William grinned as he recalled what Jane had said about his car. Somebody ought

to push it off a cliff! It looked now as if Jane and Tom would have to leave the shiny sedan in the water and wade ashore.

"I have a tow-rope," said Moira. "It's been my ambition to tow a big car out of a hole. This looks like the chance! If you have one, we could hook 'em together and pull that pretty but incompetent boat out. He could have made it, too, if he had not driven so fast that water splashed into his carburetor. Have you a rope?"

"Yes. But—" William had not explained to Moira that he was a member of the picnic party and Jane's abandoned escort. That explanation, he thought, was a little difficult to make, considering the circumstances of their meeting.

He drew a deep breath and made the explanation. He found that it was not difficult at all. Moira understood perfectly, and her eyes twinkled more than ever.

"You see," she said, "I was supposed to go on that picnic, too. Tom there offered to take me in his rowboat, but I preferred to drive my own."

"Oh!" commented the doctor of philosophy. And he felt an unaccountable, and certainly unphilosophical, pang of jealousy.

They drove their flivvers to the water's edge, and got out their tow-ropes. These William fastened together, calling to Tom to come and get one end. Tom did so, with his usual recklessness, which ruined beyond repair a new pair of golf boots and muddied the bright plaid of his stockings.

"Who's the girl with him?" demanded Jane, as Tom secured the tow-rope to the rear end of his sedan.

"Moira Philbrook," growled Tom. "*I* asked her to come with me, and she wouldn't. Your professor is a fast worker, I'll say. You leave him, and Moira—"

"He isn't *my* professor," Jane interrupted him.

"No, he's Moira's!" Tom growled again.

"Do you suppose he can pull us out, with that piece of tin?"

"Wait and see. He seems to think he can, and a professor ought to know. If he can't, somebody else will have to hook on."

"Why did you get into this?"

"I like that!" said Tom. "Didn't you say you wanted to try it?"

William was ready to make the attempt. Having secured the tow-rope to his flivver, he got in and started his engine, signaling to Tom to throw off his brakes.

Then William put the flivver in low gear, and urged it gently forward. The rope grew taut, the flivver groaned, and then, after a breathless pause in which it seemed that the rope must break or the flivver fall to pieces, the sedan moved slowly backward.

The flivver, thus started, groaned on until, looking behind him, William saw that the sedan was again on the dry road.

Jane got out and ran to him.

"Oh, thank you!" she cried. "I think it was wonderful!"

Whereupon, she began that annoying wriggle. William turned away to see Moira talking with Tom. He felt again that unphilosophical pang of jealousy.

III.

DURING the week following the picnic, William had two long and delightful arguments with Moira. In each case, the discussion was concluded by their complete agreement.

They could start at opposite logical poles and reach a conclusion that satisfied both of them. Which speaks well for their compatibility and also for their sense of humor.

They planned a flivver outing for the following Saturday. But as both of their flivvers had been behaving badly during the week, perhaps because of the great strain of the picnic, it was necessary that one or the other be given first aid treatment. Independently, each decided to have the cars overhauled.

And so, on Wednesday morning, the twin flivvers entered the wide garage door of the authorized repair station at about the same time.

"Good morning, professor," Moira twinkled.

"If you call me that," said he, "I'll think up something to call you." He had already thought of the word; it was "darling," and he meant to use it at the first opportunity.

The chief mechanic, seeing them chat-

ting together cordially, came up and examined their cars.

"Well, well!" he observed. "Two of the same vintage, an' still goin' strong. But you can't expect 'em to live forever. No. You'll have a lot of expense on these, from now on. They're sufferin' from the same disease—old age. Say, why don't you trade 'em in on new ones?"

An ever-ready salesman, overhearing this, stepped forward.

"Yes, why not?" he asked. "We'll make you a fair allowance, on a trade-in. And then you'll have new cars—cars that will go anywhere, do anything! And terms! Let me explain our new deferred payment plan."

There was no avoiding this salesman, and so they listened. He was a forceful and compelling speaker, who had answers to every objection that had ever been made. Moira and William, before they realized it, were quite convinced that new cars were desirable.

"Let us take these in now," said the salesman, "before you've spent anything more on repairs. And then you'll drive out in your new machines! It won't take long to estimate what we can allow you on these—perhaps a half hour. We'll give you all they're worth, and it will save you money in the long run. What say?"

"But—" began William.

"But—" agreed Moira.

The salesman allowed them to go no further. Every "but" was to him an indication that he had not sold a car. He continued, and would have done so indefinitely, had not William given in.

"All right," he sighed. "Tell me what you can give me on this, and I'll consider buying a new one."

"But—" Moira again began.

"I'll give you estimates on both of 'em. It'll be about the same. Come back in half an hour, if you don't want to wait."

They decided to enter the showroom, there to examine the new roadsters.

"Would you rather have a roadster than a coupé?" asked William.

"Yes," nodded Moira. "I like to have the top down. Besides, these little cars bounce so much that in a coupé you're always getting a bump on the head. But I really can't afford a new car, just now."

"Neither can I, but—it would be nice to have one, wouldn't it?"

Moira nodded, thoughtfully, and for a moment her eyes did not have their usual twinkle.

"Yes, it would," she said, with a little sigh.

And just then Jane drove by, in Tom's sedan. This may seem irrelevant, but it isn't as you will see.

Moira and William saw her. Jane was at the wheel of the new, shiny car; it had been washed and polished since the picnic. She drove it as if it were her property.

"They're engaged," observed Moira, twinkling again. "They had quite a quarrel Sunday. Then they made it up and got engaged."

"Oh," said William. "That's why she's driving his car."

"Yes," agreed Moira, chuckling. "I suppose—"

"Moira," exclaimed the doctor of philosophy, "I have an idea!"

"You have a great many, always," said Moira.

"Yes, perhaps, but this one! Moira!" He looked about the display room. They were quite alone for the moment. "Moira, darling! It's absurd of us to buy *two* new cars. Let's buy just one! We can trade the old ones in on one, and then—"

"You mean own it in partnership? But shouldn't we quarrel a lot about using it?"

"No!" cried William. "You could have it all the time. Only, of course, I should like to go with you—occasionally."

"Only occasionally?"

"Always! Moira, don't laugh at me! You know what mean! I mean: let's become engaged! Right now!"

"Oh, I see," nodded Moira, with a perfectly maddening twinkle. "You mean so that we can save money on the car."

"No!" objected William. "No! I mean: let's get engaged to be married! And more than that, let's get married!"

"Oh! I see. You think one car's enough for one family. Is that it?"

"Moira," William was desperate, "will

you please forget the cars! Leave them out altogether. We'll get six new cars, if you like, or none at all. I'm asking you to marry me, and I want an answer!"

"Well," said Moira, "as neither of us can afford a new car, I think your idea about buying one between us is perfectly splendid. And, as you say, by trading in our old ones on *one* new one, we shall—"

"Moira, will you marry me?"

Moira's long lashes veiled for a moment her twinkling gray eyes.

"Do you think this is the place to ask that question?" she asked.

"Well, folks," the ever-ready salesman interrupted this tender scene, "we can allow you one hundred and twenty-five each on trade-ins. That's liberal. What do you say?"

William looked at Moira, who gave him an imperceptible nod.

"We will not buy two cars," said William to the salesman, "only one. "This roadster will do nicely. You can have both of the old cars as a first payment. You see, we've decided to buy a car together. One in a family is enough."

"Oh!" This from the salesman. "Why, I thought you'd want two cars, of course. That estimate—"

"We want one, or none!" William was firm. "Take it or leave it. Is this roadster ready to go?"

"Uh-huh!" said the salesman. One sale was better than none.

William helped Moira into the new roadster, and then took the wheel.

"We're in a hurry!" he called out. "Fix up the papers and mail 'em to me."

Outside, William drove the car faster than it should have been driven to a secluded street that bordered the campus.

"What's your hurry and where are we going?" asked Moira, *en route*.

William did not answer until he had reached the shadiest and most secluded part of the tree-lined street.

"How's this?" he said then.

"The car?" asked Moira. "Oh, splendid! But if you're going to drive as fast as that, I'll have to break it in."

"Moira, will you please forget the car and answer my question?"

"Your question? Oh, yes, professor! Would you mind asking that question again?"

William didn't, for a moment. Instead, he embraced Moira and kissed her parted lips. Then he repeated his question.

"Why—yes!" said Moira.

Bang! A tire had blown out, and they leaped out to see which one it was. For an instant, they had forgotten that they had a new car and five new tires all of which were properly inflated. Across the street stood a dilapidated flivver. One of its tires had given away.

"That won't happen to us for a long, long time," said William.

"No. But if it does, it will bring back the happiest recollections."

And when, as they presently discovered, the new car had been poorly supplied with gasoline and was now dry, even that did not mar their happiness. As Moira said merrily, with the professor's philosophic agreement: "Our old cars have adequately prepared us for all the vicissitudes of life!"

Had Jane been present, she would have commented: "I'll say so!"

THE END

Varony chuckled. "I've still got eyes, though the doctor did have to operate on my brain. Just now I noticed a handsome young blade out there, staring at this window. I wonder if he carries a guitar like the old troubadours? Perhaps he's about to serenade you?"

"Oh—Foster!" Letty rose impatiently and went to the window, waving Foster away.

"He seems a very nice young man," Varony protested mildly. "He tells me he hopes to get the post of interne in St. Vincent's pretty soon. Perhaps he'll turn out a doctor. A handsome young doctor isn't a bad husband for a nurse, Letty."

"That cake eater!" Letty caught herself hastily. "He thinks himself a masher," she amended.

"I'm very comfortable and very drowsy," Varony suggested. "If you care to take a turn in the garden, please yourself."

Varony closed his eyes. Presently, he began to breathe slowly and regularly, and his head dropped forward. Letty saw that he really slept, and looked a little anxiously into the inviting garden. Presently, she slipped through the long window, careful not to disturb the artist.

CHAPTER IV.

LOOKING AROUND.

LETTY greeted Foster not quite in the words of a classical Juliet toward her Romeo.

"Listen, Helpless, why not give yourself the air some place else but under the window? Even the old man is getting wise to you."

"What do you mean, wise, baby?"

"Your standing out here lamping me all the time! He cut loose and kidded me about my sweetie, just now."

"Well, what about it? It's so, ain't it? You know all you gotta do is drop a hint and you can slip the old shackles onto me for life."

"Thanks for the tip. I'll consider it some day when I'm not on a case. Meantime, don't gum things up by making a human mustard plaster out of yourself. If you gotta stick to something, go stick to the wall."

Foster looked sulky.

"What d'you want? Have I got to sit in the house and count my thumbs all day? Have I gotta read all these out of date magazines and books all over again? I know 'em all by heart. If there was even a radio in the place, so's I could tune in on W J Z—"

"A radio would look nice, back in 1904, wouldn't it?" Letty laughed. "Listen, Foster, since you're around, you can do something for a pal, if you want to."

"Whatever you say, baby. Anything!"

"Varony's asleep in his chair. Don't disturb him, but just keep an eye on him. I want to slip out and buy a refill for my vanity. Then I've got to get something for his dinner. Just stick around and watch the job."

"Of course," Foster agreed. "Take all the time you want. I owe you that for letting me off to the movies last night."

They passed through the studio, walking lightly out of thoughtfulness for the sleeper.

Letty turned back to look at Varony again. "He's a sweet old papa," she whispered. "Foster, I'm strong for that old boy. If Stanwix is putting over anything dirty on him and I'm helping in it, I'll hate myself the rest of my life!"

A quarter of an hour later Letty walked out of the front door. The girl was living proof that some women, at least, can dress in quick time.

Letty was very much herself again.

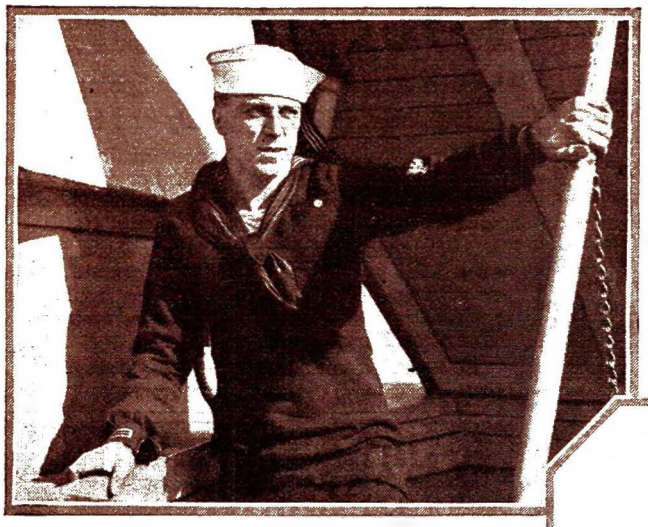
Her dark hair, worn in a boyish bob, showed only in two curling "vampies" from under the thimble hat of green felt. Her dress was exceedingly "trick," and its skirt hem touched her knees.

Foster locked the door after her and returned to his charge. Varony was sleeping.

Foster walked in the garden for a few turns, but gardens did not interest him. He looked in on Varony again and saw that he still slept.

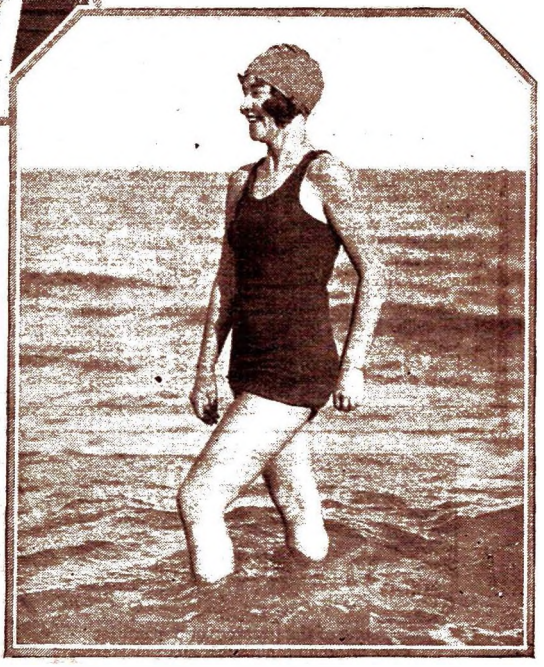
He picked up one of the old magazines, but laid it aside with a shudder of distaste. Foster was very bored.

In the arrangement of affairs in the house



LEFT

"I AM A SAILOR in the United States Navy. All my life I have been bothered with a bad complexion and stomach trouble. I never found anything to clear my skin. While home on thirty days leave, I got in the habit of eating Fleischmann's Yeast. Now my skin is clear of pimples. I feel like a new man. I perform my duties with much more 'pep.' I owe it all to Fleischmann's Yeast." STANLEY H. STRAINGE, U.S.N., Hampton Roads, Va.



"I AM A DANCER. Three years ago I had so much indigestion and constipation that I got terribly run down. I was very skinny and was too tired and nervous to take my lessons. A lady recommended yeast. The constipation was relieved and I had much less trouble with gas. In about four months I began my lessons again. Now I am strong in every way." IDABELLE BARLOW, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

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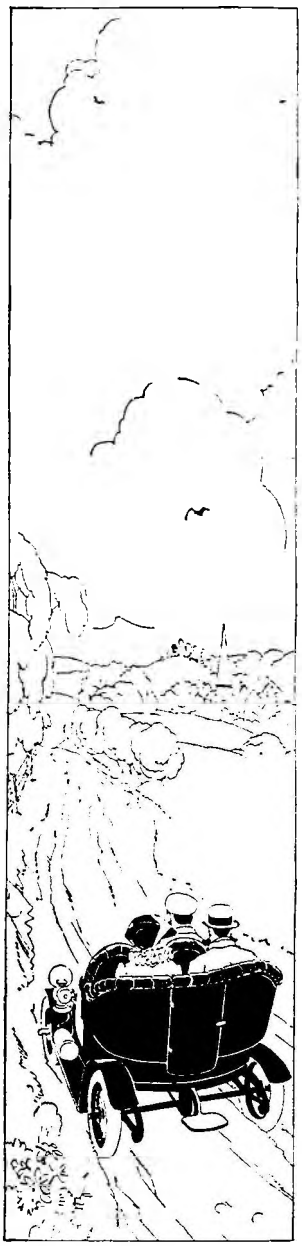
When *Hay* gave way to *Gasoline*



THE horse looked out across his pasture fence twenty years ago and watched a vehicle called the automobile cough its way along the road. As the years went by that old hay-burner saw the gas tank replace the oat-bin, and an able little engine replace his able self.

The progress of the automotive industry is littered with the names of manufacturers who have flowered and died. One name has not only survived the test of time, but the exacting demands of an industry that accepts only the best. That name is Prest-O-Lite.

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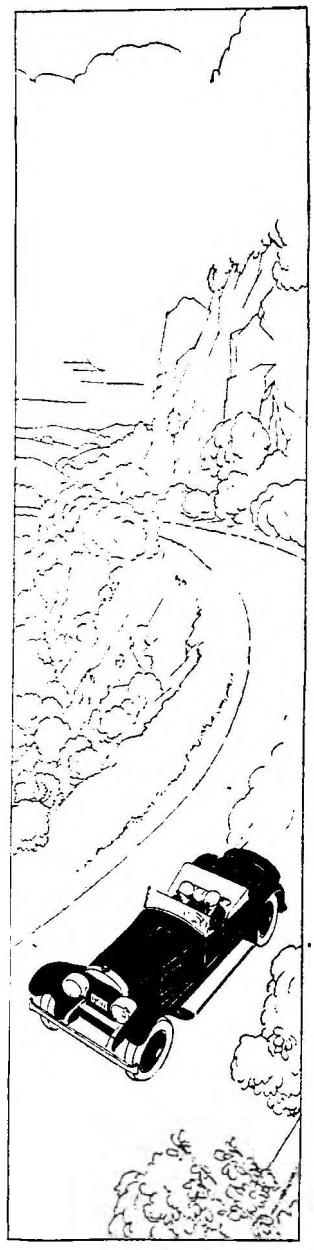

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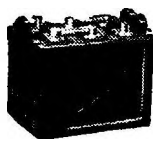

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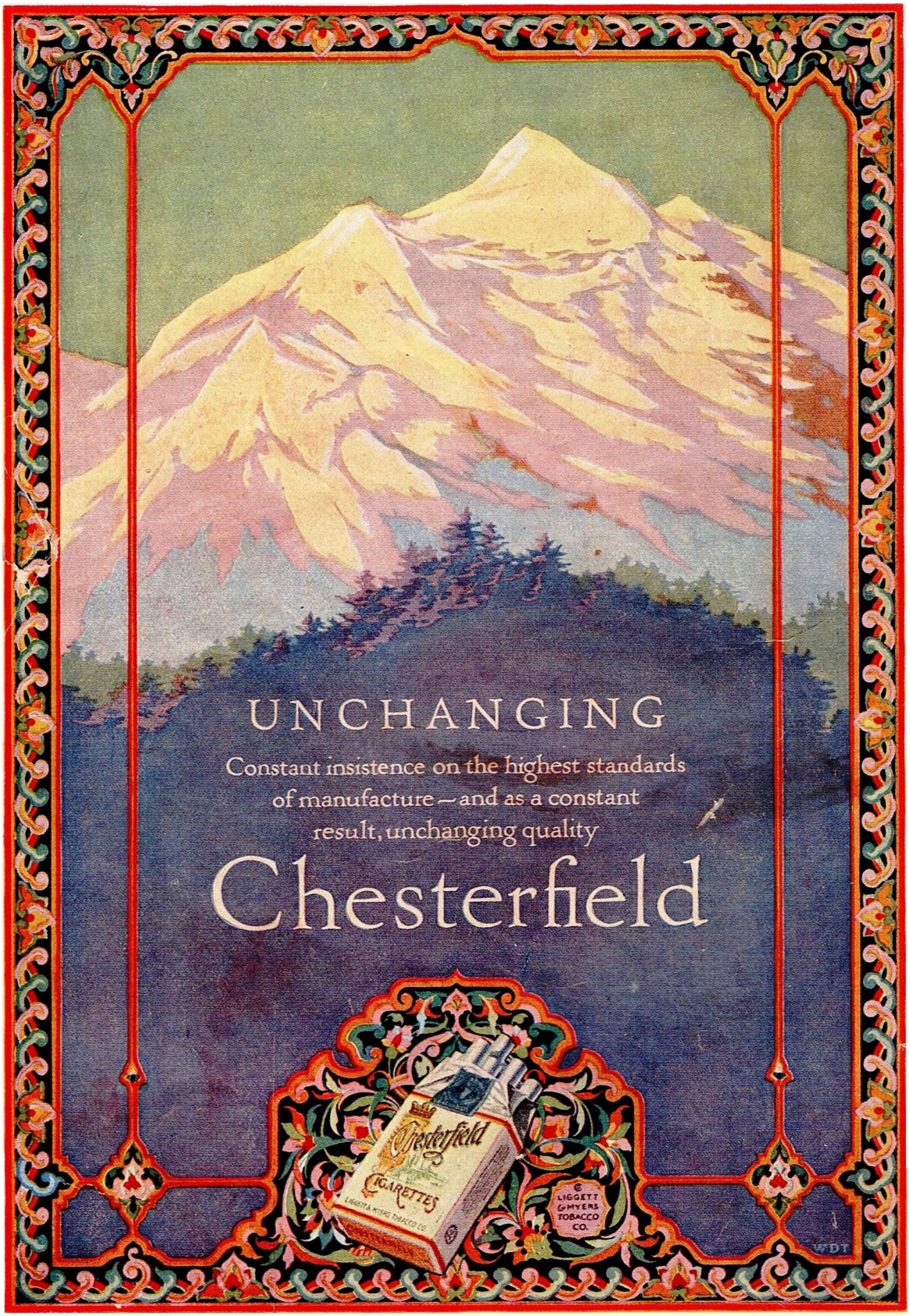
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