

ARGOSY

NOV.
3

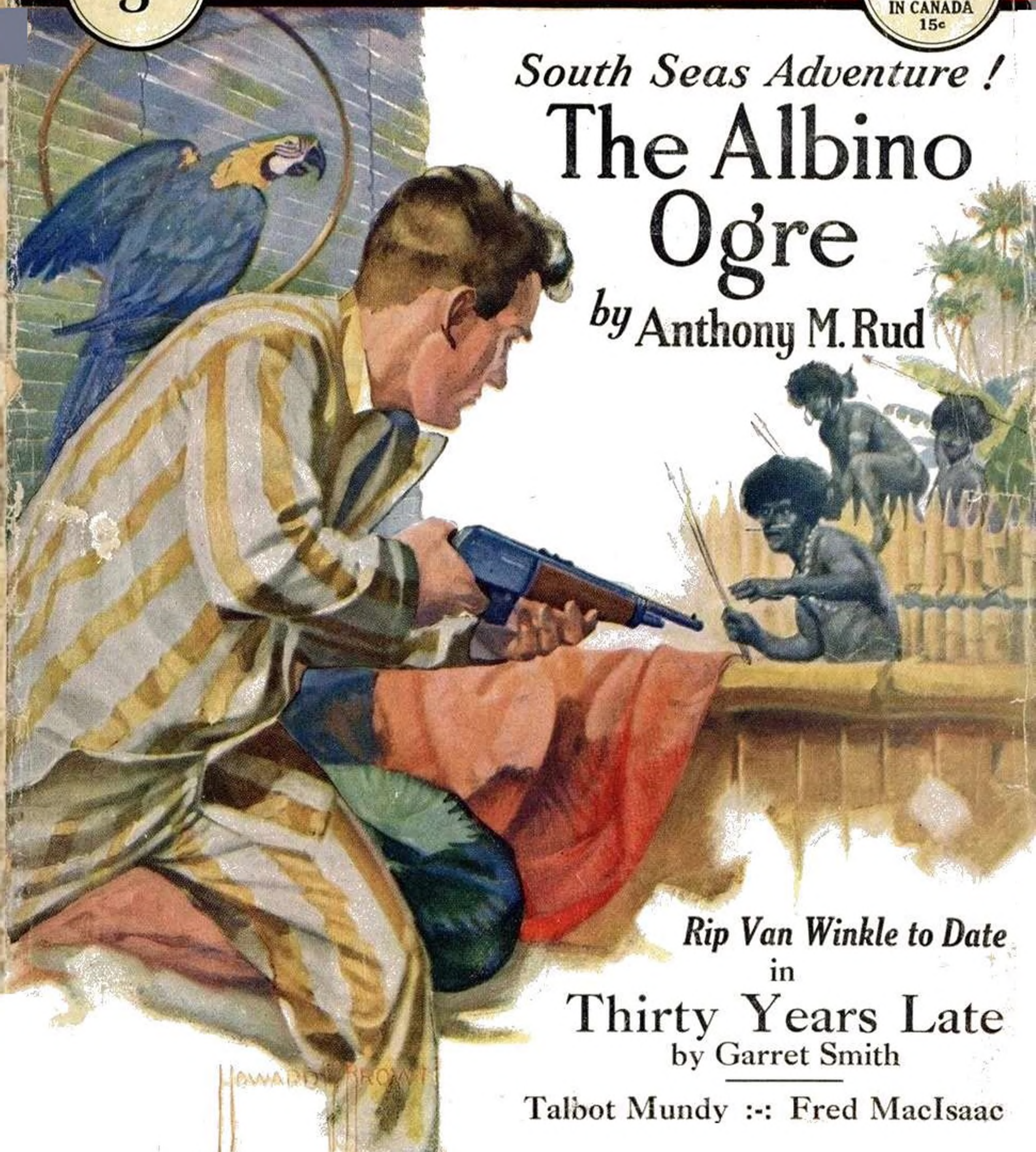
ALL-STORY WEEKLY

PRICE
10¢
IN CANADA
15¢

South Seas Adventure!

The Albino Ogre

by Anthony M. Rud



Rip Van Winkle to Date
in

Thirty Years Late

by Garret Smith

Talbot Mundy :: Fred MacIsaac

HOWARD KROFFERT



WRIGLEY'S

adds the zest that scores.
Clears the breath, soothes
the throat after smoking

AFTER EVERY MEAL



187



Kill This Man!

THERE'S a devil inside of you. He's trying to kill you. Look out for him! He tells you not to work so hard. What's the use? The boss only piles more work on you. He tells you not to bother with your body. If you're weak—you always will be weak. Exercise is just a lot of rot. Do you recognize him? Of course you do. He's in us all. He's a murderer of ambition. He's a liar and a fool. *Kill him!* If you don't, he will kill you.

Saved

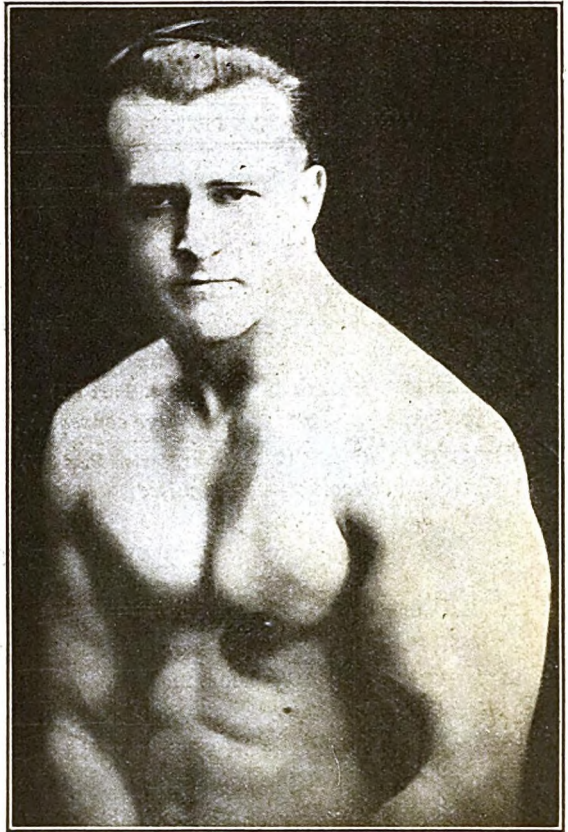
Thank your lucky stars you have another man inside of you. He's the human dynamo. He fills you full of pep and ambition. He keeps you alive—on fire. He urges you on in your daily tasks. He makes you strive for bigger and better things to do. He makes you crave for life and strength. He teaches you that the weak fall by the wayside, but the strong succeed. He shows you that exercise builds live tissue—live tissue is muscle—muscle means strength—strength is power. Power brings success! That's what you want, and gosh darn your old hide! You're going to get it.

Which Man Will It Be?

It's up to you. Set your own future. You want to be the Human Dynamo? Fine! Well, let's get busy. That's where I come in. That's my job. Here's what I'll do for you:

In just 30 days I'll increase your arm one full inch with real live, animated muscle. Yes, and I'll add two inches to your chest in the same time. Pretty good, eh? That's nothing. Now come the works. I'll build up your shoulders. I'll deepen your chest. I'll strengthen your whole body. I'll give you arms and legs like pillars. I'll literally pack muscle up your stomach and down your back. Meanwhile I'll work on those inner muscles surrounding your vital organs. You'll feel the thrill of life shooting up your old backbone and throughout your entire system. You'll feel so full of life you will shout to the world, "I'm a man and I can prove it!"

Sounds good, what? But listen! That isn't all. I'm not just promising these things. *I guarantee them!* It's a sure bet. You can't lose!



EARLE LIEDERMAN, The Muscle Builder

Author of "Muscle-Building," "Science of Wrestling," "Secrets of Strength," "Her's Health," "Endurance," Etc.

SEND FOR
MY NEW
64-PAGE BOOK

"Muscular Development"

IT IS
FREE

What do you think of that? I don't ask one cent. And it's the peppiest piece of reading you ever laid your eyes on. I swear you'll never blink an eyelash till you've turned the last cover. And there's 48 full-page photos of myself and some of my prize-winning pupils. This is the finest art gallery of strong men ever assembled. And every last one of them is shouting my praises. Look them over. If you don't get a kick out of this book, you had better roll over—you're dead. Come on, then. Take out the old pen or pencil and sign your name and address to the coupon. If you haven't a stamp, a postal will do. But snap into it. Do it now. Tomorrow you may forget. Remember. It's something for nothing and no strings attached, no obligation. **GRAB IT!**

EARLE LIEDERMAN
DEPT. 1111 305 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

EARLE LIEDERMAN

Dept. 1111, 305 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir:—Please send me, absolutely **FREE** and without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development."

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

(Please write or print plainly.)

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



VOLUME 199

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and
 LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W. C. 2 111 Rue Réaumur

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TITKINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary
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Employment
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American School
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 of Position and Increased Pay

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We guarantee that said position will pay you a salary of at least 50% more than you are earning today. Or, failing to do so, we guarantee to refund to you immediately the entire amount that you paid for this training.

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THIS GUARANTEE may be withdrawn without notice unless your enrollment application for our home-study training is sent to the AMERICAN SCHOOL promptly.

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R. J. Millieff President

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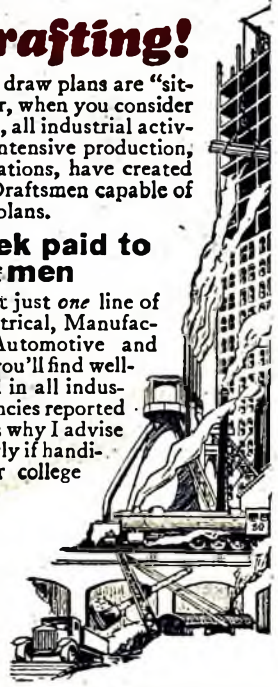
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This agreement brings you your SECOND CHANCE. To repair a neglected education, to specialize, to change to a line where you can get ahead more rapidly. Read it, and investigate it!

THE AMERICAN SCHOOL



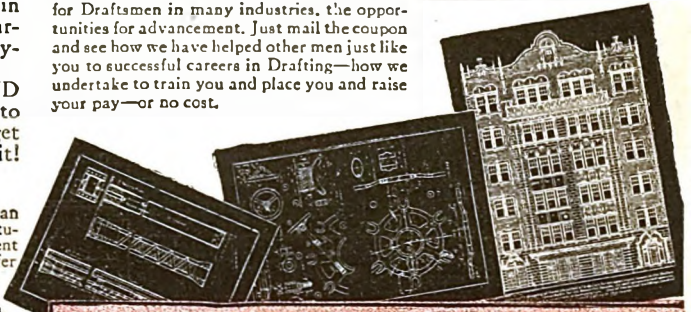
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1. Facts about the opportunities in Drafting.
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Address _____

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AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

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GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—TOILET ARTICLES, PERFUMES AND SPECIALTIES. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERM A CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



only \$1.00 DEPOSIT brings it!

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 Finest Quality—Finest Tailoring
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Overcoat is full 45 inches long. Choice of rich colors of Fancy Grey, Medium Tan and Olive Brown. Sizes: 34 to 46.

Order by No. A-8F. Terms \$1.00 with coupon. Then, if satisfied, only \$4.45 a month. Total Price, only \$27.50.

6 Months to Pay

See how convenient and practical our easy payment plan is. You can just as well have this splendid value as not because you'll never miss the easy payments—only \$4.45 a month.

Send only \$1.00 deposit now—No C. O. D. to pay. No risk (see coupon). Get this handsome coat on approval, then if perfectly satisfied take 6 months to pay the bargain price.

Send Only \$1.00 Now!

only \$4.45 a month

Send for Free Style Catalog

No Risk!
 No C.O.D. to Pay!

Elmer Richards Co.
 Dept. 2838 West 35th St., Chicago, Ill.

I enclose \$1. Send me the All Wool Overcoat No. A-8F. If not satisfied, I can return it and get my \$1 back. Otherwise, I will pay \$4.45 a month until I have paid \$27.50 in all.

(Check Color Wanted)
 Fancy Grey . . .
 Medium Tan . . . Name _____
 Olive Brown . . .

Chest _____ Address _____
 Height _____
 Weight _____
 (Be sure to fill out above lines) P. O. _____ State _____

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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EARN \$120 TO \$250 MONTHLY. EXPENSES PAID. AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. WE ASSIST YOU TO A POSITION AFTER COMPLETION OF THREE MONTHS' SPARE TIME HOME STUDY COURSE. OR REFUND YOUR MONEY. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30. STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

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GREATEST
FOOTBALL
PLAYER
OF
ALL TIME"**



By

George Trevor



Who is he? That's what millions of football fans argued for years. Read a famous sports expert's reason for naming one of the game's most dynamic human projectiles who ever wore moleskin.

**READ ABOUT HIM
IN THE**

NOVEMBER

**MUNSEY'S
MAGAZINE**



30 Selections
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Portable Phonograph
\$1.00
 down brings it on
30 Days Trial

\$11.25 worth of high grade 76c records included in this offer. 30 selections—15 double face records. Made by the new electric process; more life like, more volume, less surface noise. Play longer. Very latest popular songs, dance music, band and instrumental pieces. Read our wonderful offer.

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Plays any standard 10-inch disc record. Plays two ten-in. records with one winding. Weight 17 lbs. Waterproof imitation leather case, with hinged lid. Size 16 x 12 x 8 1/2 in. Records inside of lid are secured so they will not rattle or break. Holds 15 records. Has quiet spring motor, tone arm and reproducer with indestructible diaphragm and wide throat for full sound volume. Outfit includes 15 double face 76c New Electric Process Records—30 selections. Shipping weight packed about 25 lbs.

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We guarantee: that you get everything in this portable phonograph so far as concerns music reproduction that a \$250 phonograph can give you, also exact reproducer, exact style of tone arm and the same grade of records. That's why you get, on this wonderful offer, absolutely the best in music that any phonograph ever gave.

\$2.50 a Month

If within 30 days you decide not to keep the outfit, send it back and we'll refund your \$1.00 plus all transportation charges. If you keep it, pay only \$2.50 a month until you have paid that sensational price on this special sale—only \$24.95.

Free Catalog Think of it, a first class high grade phonograph and 15 latest double face Records (30 selections) a complete outfit, ready to play, only \$24.95! Seize this opportunity while it lasts! Send the coupon NOW!

Straus & Schram, Dept. 2837 Chicago

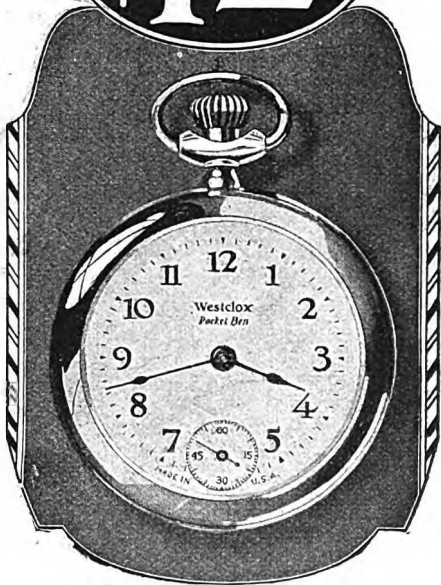
New Portable Phonograph
 Light and easy to carry. Ideal for every purpose. Plays all records with wonderful tone and volume. Beautifully covered in red Baby Alligator genuine DuPont Fabricoid (absolutely waterproof.) This portable is equipped with many new, exclusive features, including a long air column horn of the newest type, the finest reproducer on the market, a strong pulling, even running motor, double nickel-plated hardware throughout, self contained album to conveniently carry 15 records.

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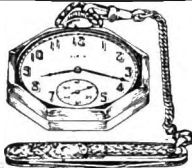
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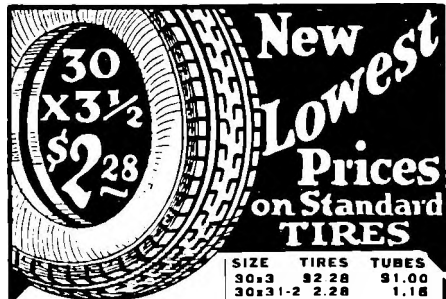
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ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 199

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 1928

NUMBER 1



There, grinning and enormous, stood the colorless monstrosity, Pappas the Pink!

The Albino Ogre

Horrible and all-powerful, the ghastly shadow of Pappas the Pink fell like a deadly blight over the coral islands, transforming a tropical paradise into an inferno of terror and death

By **ANTHONY M. RUD**

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

PORT OF THE DAMNED.

ROTUMAH LARRY'S, on Kunufunuka, is a nipa-thatched "palace" built in apparent insecurity, twenty-two feet above the

ground. Its supports—physically speaking, that is—are a number of slanting royal palms.

A guest reaches the bamboo and mat veranda through a chair lift and pulley, slung through a sort of hangman's trap. The Melanesian blackboys hitch

ropes around one of the more slanted trunks, and run up barefoot, agile as monkeys.

Up atop the tallest of the palms is a kind of crow's nest. One of the coffee-skinned sons of Rotumah Larry is up there day and night, using either the Zeiss prism night-binoculars, or the green painted Soderberg telescope which looks like a camouflaged three-pound fieldpiece.

From either of the two possible approaches to Kunufunuka the tree hut cannot be seen. Any object — from the dorsal fin of a gray nurse shark to the tracing of a British-French Commission cruiser—can be detected miles away. Because of coral reefs and treacherous shoals, no vessel larger than a flying proa or an outboard-motored canoe ever tries to come in after sundown.

And there are always enough grim-faced white men, Malays, and savage Melanesians, to repel a whole fleet of proas. Twice it had been done.

Rotumah Larry's was — still is, as far as I know—one of the eight or a dozen places in the South Seas where *every* white guest is guilty of a major crime—or, at least accused of one.

I was wanted for what the State cops called murder, back in Aurora, Illinois, U. S. A.

It was at Rotumah Larry's that I encountered Denmark. Queer name. Denmark Ordway Treleaven was his full name, though I didn't get to find that out for awhile. Those who knew him before I did—who knew him well, I mean—called him D. O. T. "Dot!"

There probably is no more metropolitan place to drink than Rotumah Larry's. Larry is a traveled man—and a wise devil, if there ever was one. To occupy one of his hideous bungalows back in the jungle of Kunufunuka—with a blackboy attendant and good tropical meals served—a guest pays forty crowns a month in advance. To drink on the bamboo veranda costs a great deal more.

So, within twenty-two feet of Rotumah Larry's ice machine, and nearer than that to his munificent bar, that I told *my* story of what had happened on the Gilbert Islands. Cannibals. Two matched pink pearls suited for the ear pendants of a maharajah's favorite. A thrilling escape in a lateen-sail canoe lacking an outrigger. A heavy sea. A swim ashore, holding to the overturned canoe, in which the gold fortunately had been lashed.

Two-thirds of it all was true; but little or none was believed. That was why I lived, perhaps. Midnight dingedonged from Larry's big gilt-copper ormolu clock. Long unused to any kind of liquor, I soon fell sound asleep.

"DRINK this."

Those were the first words I heard on awakening — though for what seemed hours I had dreamed I was in a combination tidal wave and earthquake. A complete stranger had been shaking me. Now he held a cool, frosted glass to my lips. I sighed, gulped a little of the slightly acid, fizzy liquid, then pried open my eyes.

For a little while I saw nothing clearly but the long, silvered glass. I drank — this time slowly and surely.

From the taste I was certain this was just what I needed. But I knew almost nothing about any sort of medicine or beverage except medicinal brandy, which I hated. Now I remembered with a shudder that always henceforth I should hate swizzles.

"W-what is 't?" I managed to articulate. "Damn' good. What—"

"Ice-cooled tomato juice in a frosted glass. Like it, brother?" The resonant voice sounded tolerant, amused.

I groaned, tried to sit up—but fell back. "Great stuff!" I managed to articulate. "Wish to hell I'd been guzzling that, 'stead of—"

I broke off, focussing vision upon my unknown friend. "Huh—you weren't one of the crowd?" I made it a query. I wasn't at all sure. And

impertinent questions asked of men who see fit to hide themselves south of Zero latitude, are distinctly out of order.

"Oh, yes—there is nowhere else to go. If I had chosen I could have told just where your placer was located—eighteen miles up the Rakahanga River, eh? And you cached the nuggets under the roots of that bread-fruit—"

"Hold up!"

He raised one hand warningly as I jerked to a sitting position, fumbling for the shoulder holster still reassuringly weighted under my left arm. This was clairvoyance—or something far more sinister. Had I told all this in a drunken delirium? I gazed belligerently, suspiciously at my supposed good Samaritan.

"Besides," he went on calmly, "I took the precaution of removing the cartridges from your Colt. Please don't mind that. Not now—or later when I tell you something even harder on jumpy nerves. Gold is the last and least of my worries. At Suva, Apia, and Sydney I have substantial banking connections—and what need has a man of much money, anyway?"

"The last time the Rakahanga River was worked for gold, four Gilolo Dutchmen built a sluice. Their heads are on poles in front of some Papuan chieftain's *inspara* now, I suppose. I arrived too late with my warning."

"But who are you?" I cried, sitting bolt upright and swinging my bare feet to the matted floor. My senses were clearing. Realizing that I was in the power of this stranger, at least for the time being, I scrutinized him with a puzzled glare I should have made an X-ray, had I been able. His gray eyes smiled back at me, but without ridicule.

NO, I had never seen him, to the best of my knowledge. There, tilting back against the flexible bamboo wall which gave several inches beneath the solid pressure from the

chair back, was a man considerably taller than myself—almost six feet, or possibly an inch more. He wore the lightest of native-manufactured bark sandals on feet no larger than size nine. Small for a big man—and he certainly looked big!

For clothes he wore a two-piece athletic suit, the trousers of sateen, black and gray striped vertically. The shirt seemed to be of cotton; and on the front of it a large block letter, a green D, still showed faintly after many launderings. What that signified I could not guess.

He was lean, yet there was a smoothness of sinewy curve to his forearms, biceps, and hairy legs which told me all I wanted to know. Show me a big, bunched-muscled gorilla in the other corner of the ring from me—and I'll cut him to ribbons, probably knock him kicking in two-three rounds. But these resilient, easy-moving jiggers, with muscles that scarcely ripple their skin—

I watch them! One of them, a plain palooka, dusted me for the count once, down at East Chicago.

"My name is Treleaven—Denmark Ordway Treleaven. Get up now and wash. I'll tell you a bit more as we are getting ready for tiffin, Spark." His tone was casual, yet my eyes popped wide with sudden terror.

Electrified, with my stomach performing a nauseating turn and icy chills skittering across my shoulders, I sprang erect.

He had called me by name—and *that* was a name I thought buried with my five-ouncers in Jim Mullen's resin arena, eight thousand miles ago!

CHAPTER II.

CARDS ON THE TABLE.

IT was a tribute to the arresting, magnetic qualities of those cool, half-amused gray eyes, that I did not spring upon Treleaven that second, and attempt to batter the truth out of him.

Certainly I did not fear him, did not doubt my ability to punch him to a bloody pulp in something less than a minute.

Yet I stood there, gawping like an idiot, my hands clenching and unclenching. He was obviously unarmed. He dared to call me—a wanted man—by name! Here in a jungle bungalow on Kunufunuka, refuge of the damned!

"Easy does it, Spark Starke," he went on, unperturbed, using my ring nickname and my real patronymic. "Go on and wash some of that sweat off your face. You look like the bottom of a bird cage! By and by we'll take a dip in the lagoon, and you can get fresh linen."

"Damn you!" I said, my voice hoarser than even years of those accursed swizzles ever could have made it. "I'm not using that name. How did you come to know it?"

"I know a variety of things—everything except the one fact which might make a happy man, it seems." He smiled, but there was a veil of chill weariness which crept up over his cheekbones, making him appear ten years older than the twenty-eight at which I had unconsciously appraised him.

"Do what I say right now, Spark. You are in no danger. If I had been looking for the thousand-dollar reward, I could have cashed in on you at any time during the past weeks.

"You don't believe that? No, of course you'd find it hard to swallow in one lump; but up there on the shelf is your chamber cartridge, and the three automatic clips. You have your gun. Load up and welcome: you are getting sober now. But for the love of some dago woman, get that muck off your face!"

It was impossible not to believe him, and be impressed to the point of obedience.

I washed, used a razor, brush and soap, and then drank all that remained of the tomato juice and pint of

Vichy. Except for my damp under-clothing and soiled whites, I was myself again.

Apparently he did not think so, for he took a suit of Kobe-made pongee, folded it over his arm, and led me to the hut in the jungle I had been occupying. Thence we went to a strip of dazzling white beach, where the water was still, and we swam for half an hour.

I am pretty fair with the old-fashioned trudgeon; but I was treated to a smooth exhibition of the crawl—the same stroke Perry McGillivray exemplified—it was rather new then—when he beat me and a few score others by a couple of city blocks through the murky waters of the Chicago River.

In a measure I was getting to respect and really like Treleven; he seemed like the nearest approach to a genuine jigger I had met in about two years. But I had not learned even a tenth of the real man as yet.

WE came out on the sands. He walked away, picked up something from a clump of mimosa, and came back. It was a cardboard box, somewhat battered yet with its outlines and seals intact. On the top—he grinned as he showed it to me—was the legend:

A. G. SPALDING & BROS.
New York

A set of boxing gloves, or I was a Chinaman!

They were "pillows"—ten-ouncers, such as are used in training camps—but I damned near wept over them. I laced mine on, using my teeth on the left glove, after helping Treleven first. Then I kicked off my sandals and capered on the hot sands, ducking, shadow boxing.

This big fellow wanted to see my stuff? Okay! I was happier than I had been in two years. I wouldn't hurt him; but in a whole lot of ways Spark Starke was himself again!

Of course I licked him in the two rounds we scrapped, for there is a long, long distance between a really good light-heavy amateur and even a mediocre lightweight professional.

There always is. After my preliminary days I had been up against a flash from Rockford called Sammy Mandell, both of us just kids then. We turned in at 120 ringside. Then there was Franklin Schaefer, 129—the gamest comeback man I ever met, Mike Dundee—137.

After that I was training, looking for a big time chance with Tex Rickard, perhaps against the king of them all, Benny Leonard. I didn't really imagine I could lick Leonard—nobody ever had—but I'd seen him in action, and coveted the chance to try.

Now on the sands of Kunufunuka, with a pair of pillows on my fists, I had my first set-to with a man vastly heavier than myself. Of course I was no longer a lightweight. I would have scaled in close to one hundred and fifty, and I had slowed up in proportion. I soon found out that fact.

Perhaps it may sound fishy, but for a full minute I was unable to hit Treleven. He had it on me in reach; but that should not have mattered.

Scrapping with sheer joy, going through all that Jimmy DeForest, Tip O'Neill and my own ring experiences had taught, however, I finally discovered his weak spot. Every boxer has one. He couldn't hit anything but my gloves or shoulders, of course, but for a time he successfully baffled me with his guard.

Then I feinted him silly, and slammed in a right uppercut to his breastbone. It was a hard punch, and he gasped, backing away.

I stopped there, grinning. "I'll finish you next round," I promised cheerfully. "Take a minute of rest. You're a very good man with your mitts. Why don't you go in for the big purses?"

It was staccato talk—for even *my*

wind was none too good after that hectic round. I was getting to like this big man, however. With proper training he might have been a great match against Paul Berlenbach, for instance.

The next round I slammed him plenty, and took a couple of good punches myself. Then I eased up some, just touching two or three to his belly to let him know I'd found his mark.

THAT'S enough! You're still good," he puffed, backing away. "When I saw you knocked kicking by Bat Lawrence down at East Chicago—"

I caught breath in a gasp. "Good Lord, were you there?" That had been the only time I had been knocked out. And I was ashamed of it.

"Yes." He grinned over his boxing gloves, as he worked on the knots with his teeth. "You looked bad that night. I thought I could lick you easily. Of course I was counting on my weight and height to give me an advantage. But I was wrong."

"Not very much wrong, Mr. Treleven," I told him soberly. "In about twenty minutes I can teach you how to guard your belly. Then—well, it's mostly footwork. I can teach that, too."

"Are you a good shot with a pistol?" he asked unexpectedly.

"No—rotten. I can't hit a door from twenty feet away."

Treleven smiled. "I can hit the keyhole every time," he stated evenly. "I'll show you; and I'll trade. You teach me, and I'll teach you. Is it a go?"

I assented, but my expression must have asked much, for he grinned and motioned toward the pile of clean clothes I had brought.

"Time for a pick-me-up and tiffin at Larry's," he chuckled. "This is Friday. It'll be trepang chowder, steamed clams, baked fish with bacon strips. Wonder how Larry excuses the bacon? He's a devout Catholic—when

nothing else interferes. But I rather like the old scoundrel."

At Larry's, Treleven leaned across the table, speaking in low tones:

"First of all, Spark, I want to tell you the most important thing—to you, at any rate. *You're free!*

"Some friends of yours seem to have been in strong with the Governor and the other powers that be. The indictment hanging over you has been nolle prossed, and the reward withdrawn.

"The reason why things looked so bad for you was because back then, in 1922, boxing was tolerated, but still illegal, in Illinois. The hard-shell cranks simply doted on the chance to press a murder charge; but now all that is changed. Illinois has legalized boxing. They are going to put on a heavy-weight championship bout down in a new arena they've built on the lake front.

"Of course, you were not guilty of murder, and it was foolish of you to run. The Cuba Cub did die; but it was from cracking his head on the floor, not from your punch. The indictment has been quashed now, as I said.

"All right, boy, are you going back—or could I interest you in something here? I—I need a man like you."

Treleven composedly returned to his soup, grinding into it enough black pepper to make even a Mexican sneeze.

My thoughts spiraled into a tumult. I was free! I could go back to the Windy City, run a little flivver up Michigan Avenue—even sass a traffic cop if I felt that reckless! I could look up a couple of girls I'd known out in Oak Park and Austin—

But there I grimaced. Two years was a long stretch. Cecile Horton had made it pretty plain, too, that she never had considered the "manly art of modified murder" as any sort of profession for a husband.

Doubtless she had corraled a broker by now—some decent, housebroken chap with a suite of offices in the Web-

ster Building and a couple of Cadillac sedans.

I WAS terrifically excited at first, and hurled all sorts of hectic questions at Treleven; but then I calmed down. My new friend made it plain indeed that there was no reason why I should not do exactly what I had dreamed of doing ever since the first week of my exile. But the funny part was that now I did not seem to care.

Some time I should go back, of course, but why hurry? I had a small stake. If I returned to the ring I'd have to fight as a welter or a middle-weight now—and in these higher-weight divisions I would be unknown; just a ham-and-beaner.

In a year or so, unless things broke really well, I'd be out on a bench in Garfield Park, unshaved, panhandling, talking to myself.

"Tell me just why you've taken all this bother," I asked. "What good can I be to you?"

Treleven looked me squarely in the eyes, but he took a long time about answering.

"To-morrow morning I am leaving here," he said slowly, as if weighing every syllable, "and I need a man I can trust—one who is not afraid to fight against any sort of odds. You are that man, I believe. I have looked you up—damn near wore out the Suva cable asking questions of America. I am sure of you, if once you give me your word.

"Of course you are an impulsive cuss, and might make a promise without knowing what you faced. But that isn't my way of doing business with friends. Did you ever hear of a secret agent—back in war days—called D. O. T.?"

I straightened a little. Of course my information, gleaned secondhand and late, had been naught save old tales told as mysteries, yarns passed from lip to lip among the islanders, growing

to mythical proportions as they passed. I nodded, waiting breathless.

"I was that agent. Denmark Ordway Treleven. D. O. T. No. 1113. See here."

He lifted the edge of his tan leather belt, exposing a small brass plate fastened to its underside. The plate showed the figures 1113, nothing more.

"All you'd have to do would be to repeat before last night's gang just what I've told you," he said grimly, "and I probably wouldn't see tomorrow's sun rise. That's the kind of a bond I'm offering. Do you feel you can accept?"

I started to my feet, grinning happily. This was just duck soup for me.

"Cracked down!" I told him.

But the instant my palm touched his there came a strange, ear-splitting sound—one I knew only too well, from days in France. A machine gun! I saw parts of the nipa roof thatch on the far side of the ceiling jiggle and waver, perforated—

And at that instant I grabbed a tighter hold of the hand of my new comrade and yanked him flat beside me on the floor. He understood. He yanked out a gun; but for a moment at least there was no chance to use it. The machine gun was doing all the arguing just then.

Not hurrying, especially, it dropped a yard and sewed a seam through the bamboo walls at the height of a man's waist. Then it dropped six more inches and buzzed back. The lead slugs came through like angry hornets. Pieces of bamboo showered around us. We lay doggo.

"One of the gentlemen—knows me—"

Bang-bang-bang-bang!

Treleven had sighted something through the disintegrating wall, and had fired four times, faster than a single word takes to speak.

The machine gun stopped, stuttered once, then stopped for good.

"Got them!" cried Treleven with

grim exultation. "Now, come on this way. We'll get out in the brush just to make sure. They've got plenty of men, and the guts for murder, as you have seen."

CHAPTER III.

THREE DEAD MEN.

OF course, the whole Malay gang from Larry's came on the run—and, dropping out of the hidden bungalows, furtive white men sought cover, each waiting for this unexpected menace to make itself known. Even at high noon, there can be nothing much more disquieting to men with guilty consciences, than the rattle of a "typewriter."

The boom of a sixteen-inch gun from a British warship, you say? Well, no. A machine gun somehow is personal; it may be looking for you in particular, not just blowing sky high some half acre of jungle brush.

The pagan war was over, though. There, partly covered by the half shell of a giant clam he had used as a chopping bowl in his domestic duties, lay Abkala, my Melanesian blackboy servant. A bone handled kris had been driven between his shoulder blades.

Over in the brush twenty feet from the bungalow, lay two other men—one a squat-browed, stubble-bearded sailor, by the look of him, and the second a patrician-featured Eurasian youth with skin the color of chocolate malted milk. On the ground beside them was that devilish, efficient weapon—a sort of overgrown automatic pistol—a Thompson submachine gun.

The sailor was stone dead. The Eurasian was grinning in ghastly fashion, and muttering in some tongue, probably Chinese. He spat out an epithet at the first of the Malay guard to reach him.

The big native wasted not a second. His kris swung once—which was too bad, the way I saw it. Tongatabu

Charley—as he had been called—might possibly have been made to talk; and when somebody starts in to spray bullets at me, I like to know what it's all about.

“As an assassination it was a damned poor attempt,” said Denmark coldly, when Rotumah Larry, excited and babbling questions, came waddling up on his bandy legs. “They killed the blackboy—and tried for us. Only because you can't teach a Chink or a half-caste to hold down on a target, we escaped—and got both of them.”

“But—but—” bubbled Rotumah Larry, his chubby face fairly apoplectic at this menace to his extremely profitable hostelry. “What the hell's going on? Who are ye, mister? Why—”

Denmark held up one hand. A chill curved the corners of his mouth. “Just a personal matter. You may assure all your guests that they are in no danger.

“Mr. Jones and I”—Jones had been the alias I had used on Kunufunuka—“had planned to leave to-morrow morning anyway. Now, if perhaps we could take a flying proa and a pair of blackboys, we could get out about sun-down to-night. D'you think you could arrange supplies and water, and have our baggage taken down?”

Rotumah Larry certainly could. Happenings of this sort were ruinous to his business, and he positively sighed with relief at the prospect of shipping us away immediately. He did not even haggle over the price Denmark suggested for the rent of the proa and purchase of the supplies. At that, of course, Larry was getting nearly forty crowns apiece from us—money paid in advance and never commuted in case a visitor found it advisable to depart in a hurry.

WE went out through the coral breakwater with the ebb tide that evening. Two surly blackboys of characteristic Papuan ugliness, squatted beside the bamboo outriggers, naked save for breechclouts.

As the first breeze from behind the headland of Kunufunuka bellied out our brown, patched lateen sail, heeling us over and fairly lifting us through the light, choppy waves, all four of us shifted to port. These craft owned by Rotumah Larry were the lightest and swiftest flying-proas in the islands, craft able, in a favoring wind, to show heels to anything short of a destroyer. They were necessary to Larry, and therefore not for sale.

North by east. Over toward the sunset were the blue mounds of Kailolo and Makeete, dots of guano island long since gutted of their smelly treasure by “typical tropical tramp” skippers. Ahead was somber blue water—and what more I could not guess.

There would be a fight against odds, my companion had promised. But who was it we sought? Who had been so anxious to stop our search at its inception, as to take that foolish chance there on Kunufunuka?

Looking back, I could not feel especially frightened. Such an idiotic attempt at killing us—when they might have used throwing spears during the time we had been swimming, and defenseless, letting the sharks dispose of all evidence—did not sound like genius, or even competence. But I soon found out that Treleven did not consider the matter a joke in any sense of the word.

He came back from the bow, exhibiting a ready pistol as he passed the two blackboys at the outrigger. They only looked at him sullenly, making no move.

“Getting so I suspect every one in the world,” he commented grimly. “Everybody but you. They've got a big lead on me in this dirty business, by knowing or suspecting just who I am—while I have to blunder along in the dark.

“*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*” He nodded significantly at the two Papuans who watched us with unconcealed hostility.

“Not even a *wenig*,” I grinned.

"But I can parley-voov the way the mamselles taught me—kind of a lovin', one-sided vocabulary, I suppose—"

It did suffice, however, as Treleaven spoke French well enough so he could simplify. And the tale he related fairly made my hair stand on end!

Through the Ellice, Gilbert and Santa Cruz Islands—possibly much further, though nothing more had come to light as yet—the life of a copra planter had become the poorest sort of insurance risk.

There were hundreds of these chaps, as I well knew; men who had come to the tropics, each with "a nickel and nerve," and who had ended up by owning a dot of an island in the South Pacific, with perhaps a golden-skinned wife from the Marquesas, and living like a native prince. Probably the incomes of most of them would not have been clothes money for the same number of Sheridan Road or Fifth Avenue gold-diggers; yet many of them grew moderately rich.

Where cocónut groves begin to bear in seven years, and a man can live luxuriously on something like one thousand American dollars a year, a steady five thousand a year—with maybe a lucky pearl or two—does pile up in the course of time.

I had been so anxious to get back to America that I hadn't wanted to tie down that way for any sort of money. But I had the acquaintance of lots of chaps who considered it an ideal existence.

THE reason affairs were not so happy right now, and had not been for two years at least, was revealed by the trend of Treleaven's discourse.

"There is a criminal syndicate at work in these seas," he stated soberly. "You've probably heard a few things here and there—the unexplained murder of young Charnham on St. Augustine? The scapegrace son of Lord Baldeston, who came out here with a

quarter million pounds—and a ticket of permanent exile from England?"

I shook my head. That chap had been over on Viti Levu several years before I stole ashore to hide at Wang Li's in Suva, and I had heard a few ancient tales of his profligate career; but what had happened to him afterward I did not know, or particularly care. His ways were not mine.

"Well, there were others," said Treleaven, carefully using the one-cylinder French I could understand. "Miller of Futuna. Rice of Naouti—and poor Bill Rice had a wife and three children. Loren Lee of Pandora Bank. These and several more simply have disappeared.

"Their homes have been looted and burned—with some evidences of torture. Of course, they kept fairly large sums of money on hand; and Bill Rice was known to have in his possession at least thirty fair sized pearls. No one, except the pirates who did him in, can even make a guess at their present value.

"Naturally, Spark, you want to know where you come in. Well, the rewards posted for positive information concerning what has happened to these planters—and, in some cases, for the arrest and conviction of the murderer or murderers—total now something over eighteen thousand pounds sterling. Every cent of that is yours if you stick with me and we get 'em!"

"But you?" I asked, looking at him searchingly. It was strange, particularly on this sort of an acquaintance; but I did not doubt his sincerity in the slightest degree. "Where do you come in?"

He was looking down at his Luger pistol, absent-mindedly snapping in and out the loaded clip. He took a long time to answer.

Finally he did look up, and I saw the genuine pain in his gray eyes. "I wonder if you could trust me—some?" he asked, this time in English. "I've got a greater stake in this than all the

money in the world! Would you care if I didn't—didn't tell you what I—I just guess—at least, until I know about it?"

I nodded. "About her, you mean," I amended, holding out my right hand.

"Yes, about her!" he stated, gripping my fist with fingers that sent electric tingles of pain to my elbow. Then a smile flashed into the edges of those gray eyes.

"I knew there was something wrong with you as a boxfighter!" he declared unexpectedly. "Now I know what it is! It's the same thing that makes me want you as a friend!"

Huh. I'm still trying to figure that out—but I'll confess it gave me what was almost the biggest thrill of my life, just the same. Treleaven had put into words just the very idea I had been vaguely struggling with in respect to himself!

WE did not go far in the proa. A little farther on, Treleaven gave orders to shift our course and make for Sophia Island. Now, this is a trifling seedwart in the Ellice Islands—and only a few blacks live on it.

I wondered, but said nothing. The blackboys obviously did not like it. They protested that they had been told to take the proa to Rotumah—and I got a kick out of remembering that my erstwhile host had hailed from that latter-named island.

Treleaven was firm, however. He sat now, holding his automatic, giving terse directions which were obeyed. The waters were silvered with the light of a three-quarters moon; and even the Papuans could understand the grim, commanding menace of that Luger pistol.

"Wait here! I go up alonga house. I come back soon," Treleaven commanded the blacks, when we grounded, and the proa, outriggers lifted, was pulled part up the beach.

The blackboys grunted surlily. They

glanced at one another. I was surprised when Treleaven took my arm, for I suspected one of us ought to stay and guard our provisions and my gold.

"No—just watch. I can afford anything but treachery!" said Treleaven. As soon as we were out of sight of the shore he pulled me down to hands and knees. Then the two of us hastily circled back through the bush, finding little difficulty in keeping concealed in the tangle of palmetto.

We witnessed an astonishing thing. As soon as they were sure we were out of sight, both of the blackboys leaped out of the craft we had left in their care, and sprinted up across the silvery beach. They vanished in the palmetto scrub.

I began to understand. The two boys had taken nothing that we could see—certainly not my gold, which made a good weight for any one to carry. And Treleaven half lifted me, and hurried me down.

"Hop in!" he commanded, shoving off the feather-weight proa. "Let down those outriggers—yeah. Well, Spark Starke, we're stealing the property of Mr. Rotumah Larry. That's it, let out the sail."

At that moment we slipped over the light surf, our craft as frivolous and unconcerned as the end girl in the chorus of one of Mr. Ziegfeld's Follies. And about four minutes later a dozen or so blackmen burst out from the clump of leaning palms which hid the native houses. They brandished spears. They yelled. They threw spears, but the missiles fell short.

"Well, how do you like being a popular target?" Treleaven inquired, his cool gray eyes sizing me up for what probably was the last time of our entire friendship.

I had to grin. "I've been something like a target all my life so far," I told him cheerfully, surprised to find that I was enjoying myself. "But always before I've been able to see my

opponent, and anyway try to get in the first punch!"

CHAPTER IV.

LUCKLESS LANDING.

I ASKED no questions at all concerning our destination. For that day and the next it was enough for me that I had found a comrade—and that, for the first time in over two years, I could look all men squarely in the eyes; punch them, kiss them—rather inconceivable to a jigger of my Irish ancestry—or tell them to go to hell.

I grinned at D. O. T.—might as well use the initials, for he was known everywhere by them. Not in person, however! As one insignificant identity or another he went about unquestioned, or very nearly so; and many a time I heard him join in the ancient yet thrilling anecdotes of this mysterious operative, the man who had upset the Tongatabu scuttling conspiracy; who had run down the three native murderers of the British Consul-General, and then nailed the man who had employed them.

Other tales. Weird, grotesque—some of them palpably unbelievable, yet most having sprung from a germ of truth.

And here was Treleven at my side—D. O. T.! I grinned widely at the swelling on the left of his mouth, and he smiled back. He knew just what I was thinking—and it may have been his ears got just a trifle redder. I've never even thought anything about Den Treleven I couldn't have repeated to my own mother, bless her soul in Heaven.

I was a better handler of the proa, as I showed him after a little while. He didn't have the instinct of the sea; I don't know how to phrase it better than that.

Somehow that instinct had come to me during two years in the islands.

Though I knew no more navigation than a ham-and-beaner knows high finance of the ring, I think I could have taken that fragile proa to Honolulu—and made mighty good time! Granted good weather, of course.

Anyway, we used up that day, what was left of it. We surged in to a beach of white sand maybe ten times as wide as the sand at Wilson Avenue, Chicago, where I used to swim.

Beach? That little island wasn't anything but beach. There were a few dozen forlorn looking palms on it; and the whole island was no longer than from where the Tribune tower stands now in Chicago, down to the Auditorium; no wider than from the Congress Hotel over to the Stock Exchange on La Salle. In other words, maybe one mile by one-half, or a trifle more each way.

We camped, ate, and slept—almost before the tropical twilight had winked out. We were tired; but now we were safe for the time being; and I understood full well, from what Den had told me, that in the future lay many nights when even one hour of sleep would rest among the impossible luxuries of which men dream.

In the morning we were away again, luckily dodging a pair of puff-ball squalls which came from the northeast.

"Not much farther, Spark," said Den laconically. "There ahead is Erromango. We slide through the first break in the reef. I'll show you—"

His voice trailed off, and I knew he was thinking of what he would meet on Erromango; but I was unprepared for what he did. He stood erect, and slipped out a .45 Colt automatic, pointing its blunt muzzle in the air. One shot—a space—two more—a space—and then a final report.

HE stood gazing forward with an intentness hard to understand, since the natives of this little group for most part are apathetic creatures of little warlike ability. Sudden-

ly he muttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Look, Spark!" he cried in a louder tone, snapping in a fresh clip in the automatic.

Back there of the fern banks and dark green scrub, a slender peeled pole rose white against the palms. A flag-pole! As I watched, letting go the lateen sail so the proa's rush slowed, something red fluttered to half-mast and hung there. A second later it caught a capful of breeze from the west. I saw it plainly. A British flag—*union dozen!* Trouble, in any language!

"Make it quick, Spark!" urged Den, thoroughly aroused. "This means everything to me!"

I nodded, bringing around the proa and darting through the coral break-water and across the stiller lagoon of the atoll, while Den stood ready to lift and lash the outriggers. For me thus far it was no more than exciting fun; but I was to find that a good proportion of my happiness in the world waited, going to waste, there beneath the inverted flag!

Just inside the screen of banyans, tree ferns, and ironwood scrub, whither we had scurried after beaching the proa, Treleaven made me drop flat and crawl. That was not so easy, as I had elected the smashing .401 Winchester as my chief weapon. Besides that I carried a ladylike .32-20 Smith & Wesson in holster revolver under my left arm; but while this small calibered weapon had proved itself full well in short range personal combat, it wasn't the sort of gun to train on savages coming *en masse*.

But with six heavy, filled clips ready for the short-barreled .401, and a cartridge in the chamber, I felt like an executioner, once I attained good cover. In this close scrub I should not shoot until I saw my man clearly—and then, of course, it would be a gamble that he did not glimpse me first and heave a spear.

Den was on the other side of the

path through the palmetto, both of us on hands and knees, careful to keep the muzzles of our weapons out of the sand, when there sounded ahead a low, shuddering groan!

I froze, but stealing a glance at Den I saw him gesture forward to a turn in the path. With utmost caution we crawled forward. There, half hidden by the ferns and palmetto, lay the body of a man—a Chinaman! Hands clasped across his abdomen partially concealed the awfulness of his wound, the upward disembowelling slash of Malay kris.

Den reached him first. "Watch around us, Spark!" he hurled back over his shoulder, and then bent low over the face of the dying or dead man.

"Look at me! D'you know me, Yang Chung? I am Treleaven. Who did this thing? What is wrong here on Erromango? Who did this to you?"

Under the insistent questioning, the almond eyes opened to black slits. A bubble of froth came from the pain-contorted lips, while recurrent shudders twitched the poor chap's limbs.

The bluing lips moved, though I could not catch any sound. Then, hurtled from his throat by a final spasm of agony, came a horrid awesome screech—a sound which still echoes in nightmares for me!

"Peeeenk! *The P-e-e-e-e-n-k!*"

Then a gobbling in his throat, a final drumming of heels upon the sand, and Yang Chung had passed on to his forefathers.

DEN threw caution to the winds. He arose, face gray beneath the layers of tan, and deep lines cut from beside his nostrils to the corners of his mouth. "This was Jessie's houseboy. Come!" And he started out along the path at a tigerish lope, ready automatic swinging horizontally at a level with his hip.

Probably our signal, or the dying scream of the Oriental gave the alarm;

for all at once it seemed that the narrow path was jammed with black men—nose-ringed savages daubed in colors, naked save for breechclouts.

A hoarse yell greeted first sight of us, and three shell-tipped spears were lifted to hurl.

I fired hurriedly; but even as I knocked over the first man the grim, detached thought came to me, "He is already dead."

With a motion not unlike a man pounding his knuckles on an oak panel, Den was firing—had got in two shots before I could unlimber and aim the .401 auto rifle.

But once in action my Winchester was as speedy as his Luger. I hit another of the black men, and he caromed sideways like a bowling alley ten-pin. Another who came rushing got the butt of the Winchester full in the teeth.

Then we leaped over the sprawling bodies—just in time to see a yellow devil, dressed Mandarin fashion in brocaded satin, leap out of concealment, a four-foot executioner's sword held with both hands high above his head!

The blow, aimed at me, never fell. The muzzle of my short rifle spouted fire. He went over backward, convulsively throwing the heavy sword.

As bad luck would have it, the weapon flew toward Treleven, who saw and partially dodged. Shielding his head with his shoulder and arm, he got an ugly rip through the left armpit, one which spouted blood in twin geysers.

"Good-by, my friend!" I thought, a hard lump coming to my throat. I did not doubt that this accidental cut had severed an important artery.

But seriously wounded or not, Den Treleven was not through as yet. "Come on!" he yelled. And then—for some reason I did not immediately understand—I was hard put to follow him in a long sprint through the palm-shaded aisles, till we came suddenly upon a bamboo stockade—yes, and a gate, which opened! Den staggered and nearly fell.

A red-headed girl stepped out, glancing this way and that—then staring at us coldly over the rib of a double-barreled shotgun.

"Are you Dot Treleven? Den Treleven?" she demanded of me.

"I'm the guy," said my comrade before I could reply. I was half supporting him now.

The redhead let us pass. Like a pair of drunks we stumbled inside the stockade; and the redhead coolly closed and barred the narrow bamboo gate.

From then on I must confess that everything got misty, as far as I was concerned. I remember looking down with astonishment, and pulling a kris out of my right thigh. It hurt like the devil when I did it, too—though I had no recollection of being stabbed.

I saw the redhead come up, and heard her give a little cry and try to hold me as I went to the ground. Then there was another woman, taller, all in white except for a black sash around her waist—an angel, perhaps—uh—angels ought to be up on the latest styles, not 'way behind.

I fainted.

CHAPTER V.

WHITE WOMEN.

FOR a few hours it seemed that Den and I only had aggravated the trouble already heaped high upon the shoulders of Jessie Seagrue. Helped by the redhead, Jessie stanchd the bleeding from Den's wound, and bound his chest tight with bandages. He did not pass out as I had, though he had far more reason.

When I drifted back to lightheaded consciousness it was to see him, clad in striped pyjamas, lounging on the cushions of a chaise longue—but with a Savage .303 rifle at his side.

Out there, behind the lattice screen of the veranda, the redhead walked slowly back and forth. She still carried that double-barreled twelve gauge

Parker; and I wondered vaguely how far it would knock her backward if she ever happened to let go both barrels at once. She looked so slender and little.

Introductions and all that sort of thing did not come in anything like proper sequence; affairs on Erromango were far too scrambled to allow even a brusque bow in the direction of the proprietries. For that reason I am going to telescope a whole lot which I did not learn till afterward.

Jessie Seagrue, the tall, calm-faced girl in white, owned this mysteriously beset copra plantation. She was a beautiful woman, not at all pretty—and that is about the only way I can express it. Not very young; somewhere between twenty-eight and thirty-two, perhaps.

She had dark brown hair, piled high and thick in a sort of whorl on the back of her head; dark brown eyes that looked as though they had seen so much pain and suffering they could smile only wistfully; a brown complexion—one almost might have thought her Eurasian—which obviously had been given almost no benefit of cosmetics or sunshades; and the most marvelously rounded and perfect figure I have ever seen on a tall woman.

As to myself, I reverse the usual rule of undersized men for some unknown reason. All my life I have been attracted to girls under five foot five. Yet within an hour of meeting Jessie Seagrue I respected and loved her—though never in the way Den Treleaven loved her. I saw her pause a second while she was carrying me a lime swizzle, and pass her left hand over Den's curly hair.

I know I was supposed to be semi-conscious and in need of stimulant at this time, but I saw that much; and I knew just why my comrade had made so much haste in landing on Erromango.

Therefore, when Jessie, the only left-handed woman I ever have known,

held that tall glass to my lips, I held my breath an instant at what I saw. On the third finger of her left hand were two rings; a flat cut solitaire diamond fully three carats in size, set in platinum, and a chased platinum wedding ring!

"You are married!" I ejaculated.

Pain came into her eyes, though her hand did not waver in the slightest. "Yes, Spark, my friend," she answered, and her full, resonant tone was like some stop I have heard on a big church organ in Oak Park.

"Don't try to talk just yet. Denmark has told me about you. He will tell you about me. Yes—can you hold it? Well, you will be all right soon. I wish we could sew up that rip in your leg, but I cleansed it thoroughly and swabbed it with mercurochrome. It will heal.

"But now—

"Patsy, come here! I'll take that scattergun for a little while. I want you to meet a chap Den says is the best man of his size in the islands! If you want to, you can hold his hand. He is too weak right now to resent it!" The half tart sort of introduction proved how thoroughly the elder girl understood her niece and charge.

SO that is the way I really got to know Patricia—Pat O'Hearn.

The redhead. Jessie's niece, an orphan girl of nineteen with a legacy of a couple thousand pounds which she had come to Erromango to invest under the guidance of Aunt Jessie Seagrue.

Of course I had glimpsed her once before, but then I was reeling and out of my mind because of the wound and the stress of deadly conflict. I really had not focussed any particular attention on her. Just about one fact had registered, and that was that her hair was red.

Well, so much was correct—still is. Red and bobbed. Times I feel poetic I call it chestnut, or auburn. And Pat

likes it. But in the sun it's as red as any sunset you ever watched from Benton Harbor; Irish red!

I'm still trying to tell myself a little bit more and more about Pat, so you'll have to excuse me if I don't get this first meeting all straight. Pat is like no one else in the world—and she was even less like 'em just that minute!

On her spiky little French heeled slippers—I don't know how she got around on them, even indoors—Pat stood five feet three inches in height. She was regal, even at that, slender and beautifully proportioned from snub nose to slippers. I don't believe she had a bone in her lovely body much larger than the left eyewinker of a gnat; and all the rest was electric energy expressed in its most alluring form. She—

But I'm a dub at descriptions. Just to the ladies I'll say she was wearing a skimpy, fluffy little dress of bright blue, a shade lighter than her eyes, and rolled stockings of a color called beige.

She gave over the double-barreled shotgun. "It's cocked, Jessie," she said.

Jessie smiled, looked at me searchingly, and left. I glimpsed her through the window sometime later, much later, walking back and forth. For the next few moments I saw only Patricia O'Hearn.

"Kill or cure," she said conversationally. "Spark Starke, I don't think you are bad off one bit. I'm going to have you up on your feet *right away!*"

"Aunt Jessie and I have been waiting and hoping for a couple of men, because we're in a tight fix. Now you chaps come—and how! With Mister Pink Papa out there with all his niggers, d'you think we can let you lie around and absorb mercurochrome? Not by a damsite! So this is my first step in the cure."

I give you my honest word, and you can believe it or not. She came over to me, sat on the side of my cot, swiftly put one of her soft, strong arms

around my neck, and kissed me full on the lips!

Then she went back smiling, just as I was reaching up to hold her.

"Kill or cure, I said!" she laughed—but I saw that color had crept up into her cheeks. "Revive now, Mister Starke—or I'll double that dose of medicine!"

On a real inspiration I did my best to faint—though that was impossible, with my heart suddenly pounding out a feverish one-twenty to the minute. My eyes rolled back as far as I could roll them. I tried to shudder like I was dying.

Probably I gave a mighty poor imitation, for Pat just drew farther away, laughing. "Now you may hold my hand," she tantalized. "I think you will recover!"

I WOULD never have forgiven myself for as much as entertaining a notion of cashing in from that moment forward! There wasn't a speck of danger, though. I didn't even rate another dose of the medicine which had given me such a sudden, tremendous interest in speedy recovery.

As a matter of fact Den was much worse off than I, weak and pretty nearly bloodless. My muscle wound healed swiftly. Next day I was up, bandaged tightly, and able to spell the girls on the watch they kept.

Den took a glass of palm wine arrack—villainous stuff much like the white mule of the States—and insisted on resting there on the veranda, a ready rifle at his side. His left elbow was strapped down to his breast, but he had a certain freedom of movement from the elbow down to the fingers.

Den told me what he knew of the situation on the island, the first time the girls both slept.

"If you see a big, flat-stomached, albino Greek anywhere around here, knock him down, truss him, cut off his nose and ears if you wish—but *don't kill him!*" was his surprising opening.

"He is a giant in strength, I understand; I've never set eyes on him—though I mean to," grimly. "He is the worst man in the islands, Spark. I told you I thought a criminal syndicate was operating, killing off planters, torturing them for their little hoards of wealth, killing them then? Well, from what Jessie says, I think we'll have to revise that estimate some.

"This giant Greek has almost white hair, she says. His eyes are blood red in the sunlight. He has no eyebrows, no beard. He wears no clothing from the waist upward; but his skin does not brown. There is no pigmentation in it. He is pink always, and gets redder when he is heated by sun or in combat, like a lobster in boiling water.

"*The Pe-e-e-n-k!*" I cried, shivering as I mimicked in a shocked voice the dying scream of the Chinaman my comrade had called Yang Chung.

"Yes."

"And is he here now? What does he want?" My thoughts flew to that sweet, red-haired spitfire who in less than twenty hours had enslaved me for life—and two or three eternities thrown in, if I had my way.

"I don't think he's here," said Den thoughtfully. "His men are here, though, some of them. He has taken the thirty-odd blackboys who worked for Jessie, killing her Scotch foreman and the only personal servant on whom she had learned to depend—Yang Chung. The blackboys probably have been taken to Mallikolo or some other near island, and sold on contract as laborers. There are a lot of unscrupulous planters who'd take 'em and ask no questions. Plain slave trade, of course.

"I'll look for Mister Pappas in a day or two, if Jessie is right. All I pray is that I'm ready for him when he comes!"

"And all he wants is the slave shipment—not the plantation?" I demanded, my thoughts centering around one very weary but smiling eyed red-

head whom I longed to put my arms around and comfort and reassure.

"Everything!" responded Den with terrible succinctness. "Jessie herself—her copra plantation—and what does the rest matter?"

"One redheaded part of it matters a hell of a lot to me!" I responded fervidly. "I—oh the dickens, Den Treleaven, I, I—" My voice trailed off in confusion. That was the first time in my life I ever had confessed to any one that I struggled to understand even in myself that mysterious emotion called love.

"Good leather!" he answered with slow, quiet understanding. And he did not scoff. "I'm very happy to've met you, Spark Starke—and I think some time she will be happy too!"

CHAPTER VI.

PAPPAS THE PINK.

I DID not get a chance to ask him what had been on the tip of my tongue for minutes. Why should I not kill this albino Greek, Pappas, who was credited with all these gruesome island tragedies? Why grant him even the space of a prayer to his alien gods?

But I did not get a chance to ask Den privately; and before I saw him again the world had whirled around three times and done a backflip from the high springboard. I looked again at Pat, and started to think of a possible future for her, and myself. And in that second the most horrible thought of a checkered lifetime struck me!

Back there in the proa on the beach, lashed firmly beneath the stern strut, lay a Washburn-Crosby flour sack in which were eight triple-sewed pokes of virgin gold—something like two hundred and forty Troy pounds of virgin gold, worth eighteen thousand English pounds sterling! I had forgotten it as completely as if it never had existed!

Perhaps a sensible man would have talked with Den Treleaven; yes, I know I really should have done so. Yet uppermost in my mind right then was the appalling thought that every cent I had in the world had been abandoned back there. It certainly would fall into the hands of our enemies, unless I myself did something about it. Probably they had discovered it even now.

May I plead a certain momentary insanity? I don't know what love does to other men; but this was the first time I had *wanted* a woman. And I wanted her fiercely, her only, and if I could not have her I cared nothing for myself.

Then this remembrance.

A stake good enough to start a woman and myself and a plantation home on one of these islands—and I had deserted that golden stake, two years of work and danger, without even a backward glance!

Well, that had been the Spark Starke who cared not at all for others. I realized with a feeling akin to agony that I was not the same careless, hard-boiled customer I had been. I loved a girl with all my heart, soul and body, and I was not the least ashamed to let the whole world—barring one person—know it!

Her I could not tell. Behind her easy intimacy had come the handshake of comradeship. When I wanted to say more to her than can be told in the firm hand-clasp of fellowship, I saw her drawing away, her blue eyes frosting over. I was further from her than at that first moment. It is often so, as I later learned.

"Be yourself, handsome boy!" she told me. "If we're going to die tonight, s'pose we do it up in good shape. Make love to me some time again—but not till Aunt Jessie finds her baby!"

"Baby! Baby!" I echoed aghast. "She—"

"Sometimes I think men are damn

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fools—and other times I like 'em," stated Patricia cryptically, and left me flat.

I HAVE to tell some more that I didn't learn until later. At the age of seventeen my hostess, Jessie Seagrue, had met a middle-aged captain on the Blue Banner Line, a passenger service plying between San Francisco, Honolulu, Apia, Suva, Singapore, and way ports.

The captain was moody, but handsome in his uniform. He had buried two wives, neither of whom had been spotlessly true to him—as he knew. So for his third he picked a seventeen-year-old girl who wanted to see the eastern half of the world, and to whom a voyage under the Blue Banner would spell real romance.

To the captain himself, of course, this long since had become routine, drudgery. He could not even talk in Hawaiian moonlight, and any man whose tongue is silent then has lost all touch upon the beauty of youth and love.

I don't care much about the captain, but I'll hand him this much. He left every cent of his thirty-odd thousand dollars he had saved to his girl wife. Probably his conscience troubled him a bit, nights when he lay awake.

Jessie Seagrue had used over a third of it in a vain search for him and the baby when the two vanished. The whole affair simply did not make sense, at least at first. Captain Michael Seagrue had more than a score of children—various hues—growing up in ignorance of him.

There was no reason in the world why he should have exhibited a sudden fondness for a baby son who looked so like his mother, for Jessie now for a long time had moved the veteran out of apathy only seldom. She could not be a companion for his old age, for she was not old; she was young, vital, and saddened only by her first tilt with life and love.

But she knew in her heart that both could be supremely delightful, especially love. Though she had kept it even from her cool handshake—most times—she had come to love another man. It was a secret anguish speaking poignantly only from the depth of her dark eyes.

The rest of the money Jessie Seagrue used in buying a part of an island, far from the ruined copra plantation of her husband. She thought always of her son, and a little, perhaps, of a tall, austere man with passionate eyes—Denmark Treleaven. A man who never had spoken a direct word of love to her, but who would do so—when and if!

When and if Jessie received proof that Captain Michael Seagrue was dead. All that was left of her marriage romance was loyalty, and her mother's love for a child. But that was enough. For it she would deny a far greater love. Like any mother she longed for the youngster, of course.

And that was what was wrong with my comrade.

Not quite all, however. He told me.

"That albino devil was here ten days back!" stated Den, a lift of unappeased fury in his voice; he never had even seen the man he hated.

"He said he had taken Seagrue and the boy—four years ago—and knew just where they both were now!"

THAT was all ahead of time. During most of the time I fought for this strange cause I had only a hazy idea, really, of what I was trying to win. Actually it made no difference as far as I was concerned; but that a comrade of mine could be so deadly serious about anything, suited me immensely.

In youth and sublime ignorance, I never doubted that in the end we could find the albino Greek, rescue Captain Seagrue and the boy, and win out with my gold—and my sweetheart-to-be. Yes, I called her that frankly enough

to myself, even at this ridiculously early moment.

If she had guessed, I have no doubt she would have taken a kris and lopped off both my ears. But she didn't; I kept that one foolish secret from her, even though other matters of moment fell from my lips all too often.

I gasped at Den's revelation, and pitied him. Chivalrous, stern with himself in all matters dealing with indulgence, he would not yield an inch. But I got no chance to try my poor hand at condolence. He left me brusquely; and I had a tough problem of my own to solve.

Memory of the gold had returned most poignantly. Now I knew that these others could not be bothered with such a trivial matter, but for me it was far from trivial. I had risked my life for nearly two years, locating a rich placer. I had worked the find for months, with not even a Dyak boy to shovel the sand and gravel into my sluice.

Could I leave all that stake back there in the hands of any blackboy who chanced across the proa?

I could not. Quietly I donned two bandoliers of cartridge clips, took up the automatic rifle and my little Smith & Wesson, stuck a handful of cartridges for the latter in one of the pockets of my jacket, snapped a two-quart canteen of fresh water to my belt at the left hip, and slid out of the window.

It was an eight-foot drop to the ground, but I lit with only a dull clunk-k-k of the heavy clips. A half moon was just rising, and I could determine the direction of the sea by a few cracks of moonlight showing through the palms and breadfruit trees. On hands and knees I crawled across the cleared hundred feet which circled the bungalow.

I made the bamboo stockade, and wormed away into the palmetto scrub. No one seemed to be about; doubtless all the blackboys belonging to the

albino Greek were waiting the return of their master, before disposing of these unexpected defenders of the plantation.

Cautiously I rose and took my bearings. The night made everything look strange, but I was used to jungles at night. I soon realized I had quite a space to travel, not using a trail to the water. But it had to be done. I started, holding the rifle at ready.

Something moved behind me! I froze—then started to turn with infinite caution. If now I had been discovered by the men of Pappas the Pink I was a goner for sure. But even in that tense moment there could be a lilt of comedy. Its medium was a double-barreled shotgun.

"STOP where you are!" commanded a voice that was almost the hiss of a serpent. "If you move, I will—"

The barrels pressed into the small of my back, but now they did not dismay me in the least. I had recognized that voice.

"Pat!" I whispered. "For the love of Pete, what are you doing? Why are you out here?"

"You're answering the questions!" she returned with some asperity. "Wounded, supposed to be helping hold the fort—what are *you* doing out here? 'And drop that gun! Are you betraying us to Pappas the Pink?" She poked the gun at me again, and it nearly smashed a floating rib.

"Oh, go to the dickens!" I said, exasperated. "If you want to listen I'll tell you. But take that damn gun away from my wishbone. You women—"

"Yes-s?" Her voice was silky; but she prodded in a little harder with the gun.

It made me desperate. "All right, listen to me, you wild redhead!" I whispered harshly.

Then I told her about the gold that was lashed in the bow of our proa, how I had got it, oh, a lot of useless things

that you have to throw in for explanation any time you talk to a pretty woman.

"For the first time in my life I've honestly fallen in love!" I concluded—almost saying something, but not quite doing it. Always I have been delighted that embarrassment held my tongue just then.

If Pat had guessed she at least would have given me the go-by that second, or maybe even pulled the triggers of her buckshot gun. As it was, she listened, and even seemed to sympathize a little.

"Oh, you poor man," she said. "And was it a black girl you were bound out to visit at this hour?"

Damn! Out there in the scrub at the edge of the jungle, forgetting enemies, my dual responsibilities, everything, I sat right down and pulled her to my side. I was relieved that she did not seem to think the shotgun a necessary protection any longer.

I could not see her very well, though the scent of her hair was dominant over the jungle miasmas, and even penetrated the heavy lush odor of the night blooming cereus. But I knew Pat was there. I could touch her; touch her hand. Even that made me tremble. Her shoulder seemed to lean against mine for just an instant.

"Gold!" I told her throatily. And then went on to detail the quest, my supposed exile—oh, in twenty minutes I suppose I told her everything there was to know about me.

"And now I'm in love!" I declared again at last. "I must have that gold, so the girl I want for my wife—er—" And I bogged down in confusion. Great mumps on a moonbeam, what had I said?

BUT Pat must have been smiling—I could not read the expression on her face. She placed a hand on my arm.

"You're all right, Spark. I could almost wish I was your woman. But

I'll help you out, boy. All the world loves a lover. C'mon!"

She arose swiftly; and I had to follow. I did not have a chance—or words—to protest, to tell her. Already I had said a trifle too much, and that was certain.

We started through the jungle. She led. She seemed to know just where the proa had been beached, for she went straight toward it—but not very far.

Black forms rose around us. Fifteen or twenty of them at the least. Spears were leveled at our breasts. The trail was closed before and behind, and the jungle at both sides was impassable.

Pat saw that we were caught. She dropped her shotgun, even before a command was voiced. The silent menace of the spears was enough to tell her the story. And she caught my arm before I could unlimber the two weapons I had.

"No use, Spark," she said in a low tone.

"No, not a damn bit o' use!" boomed a heavy voice. "Hey, Loochee, swing a tawtch. Right hyeah. Thass O.K. Yeah—"

Confronting us, looking us over as if we were a pair of bugs lately crucified for the collection of an entomologist, was the most enormous human being I had seen.

He was as tall as Jess Willard, but very much stronger and heavier. I have heard that Pappas scaled three sixty, but that is a later tale; I do not vouch for it. At any rate he towered there above me, my head reaching just to his shoulders. I did not see the rest of him clearly—and I thank my Maker I did not just at that moment.

I stood petrified. Not so Pat.

"Well, my man," she said coolly, coming up and placing her arm on my shoulders, "I've always wanted to tell a man I loved *him*, before he got sappy and childish about *me*. I love you! This seems to be the end of the road. D'you want to kiss me once, Spark?"

Did I?

They knocked me on the head, but not before I had kissed her. And what else in the whole wide world could matter?

CHAPTER VII.

CLUTCH OF THE MONSTER.

I KNEW that the back of my head received the spear butt, dazing, but not knocking me completely out. Falling against Pat, my arms about her, I carried her to the ground also. In a second, practiced blackboys had seized and bound us securely with palm fiber. Then, at a bellowed order, they stepped back. The white glare of an electric torch fell squarely into my aching eyes.

Standing on spread legs as massive as banyan trunks, Pappas the Pink stared down at us. He reached over one huge fist, on which the white hair stood out in moist unlovely tufts fully an inch in length; he caught Pat by the left shoulder and turned her face upward. Under his rough grasp her frock ripped. I felt her quiver where her bound ankles had been thrown against mine; but she did not cry out.

"A-a-a!" It was a bellowing blat of disappointment. As if disgusted at sight of beauty he could not appreciate, he hurled her prone again and seized me by the hair.

"These are not the ones! Where did they come from, Loochee?" I was flung back as he spoke. "This D. O. T. was let slip through—but t' hell with it. Take 'em out to the ship. Don't kill 'em."

Things happened so swiftly that my telling seems like the backing and scouting of a hesitant inchworm. But in the space of seconds by the light of that torch I saw our fat-bellied, giant captor in all the repulsive ugliness of his semi-nakedness.

He wore sea boots which, because of their size, certainly must have been made to order. He wore knee-length

whites that looked like Kobe weave in Formosa wild silk—Yamatoya, perhaps. But they had been longer once. The bottoms had been hacked off with a clasp knife, and trailed threads of that precious fabric worth so many times its weight in gold.

He wore a truly fantastic belt—a thing almost six inches in width, of shark hide, studded over its entire fifty-eight-inch length with the golden coins of all nations. Ten pounds at least it weighed.

But that one flash was all I saw. Pat and I, she calling coolly to me, "Hold up, Spark Starke!" were bundled up and taken away, out through the jungle, on the backs of blackboys, like so many bales of pearl shell.

Pat was taken several yards ahead, and even with moonlight I could not follow her passage. Had I possessed a couple of Mills grenades right then, I should have blown up the whole entourage. The thought of her in the hands of this repulsive albino—even though he seemed to believe her no especial prize—made me seethe with helpless fury.

Sap and utter fool that I had been! What were a few paltry pounds of yellow gold, beside the virtue and loveliness of a girl who had no equal on earth, either way from the Date Line? A girl I knew I loved?

AFTER perhaps an hour's swift travel away from the plantation, where slept Jessie and Den Treleaven unwarned of this ill-fated defection on the part of myself and Pat, we reached the two *una* boats, used as lighters to cross these coral shoals where a sailing vessel, even one with auxiliary motor, did not dare to chance the eggshell of its hull.

The moon had faded behind some streamers of translucent cloud, and the starshine of the Southern Cross was no more than a faint lambence above the western nadir. Not a breath of air stirred. For that reason the single

masts of the *una* boats remained unbent with sails, and the blackboys swung their paddles.

Still dizzy, and with a strange ache in my eyes, as well as my heart, I saw Pat bundled into the stern of one tiny craft, and leave. A tall, angular man I guessed to be the fellow called Loochee who had swung the "tawtch," stood erect. He commanded the paddlers for all the world like the coxswain of a racing shell:

"Ho—hai! Ho—hai! Ho—hai!"

I was fated to go in the other boat, which was slower in departing. Pappas the Pink superintended the loading of some heavy objects the nature of which I did not discover until one of them was dropped, almost knocking out the bottom of the boat.

Then I knew. These were triple-sewed canvas pokes; the yellow gold I had sluiced from the roily Rakahanga River!

It had lost importance, however, become a factor of little or no value in my bitter thoughts. Why had I been so foolish, staking everything the whole bright world could offer—one dearer than myself to me, just for money? I was thrown roughly into an inch or two of water in the bottom of the boat. Out there the other lighter was going. I lifted my head, pushing it up against the bare, greasy leg of a blackboy.

"Till death, Pat!" I shouted after the departing *una* boat.

Faint but unwavering came back her answer:

"Carry on, Spark Starke!"

The marvelous courage God gives the redheads!

THROUGH the still lagoon plugged along our lumbering *una* boat, a shallow draft catboat no more like the graceful proas I was accustomed to than a bloated baby shark is like a needle-fish.

"Ho—hai! Ho—hai! Ho—hai!"

Like a dead white, giant Buddha, the albino stood in the stern. His rumbling

voice, so coarse and low in pitch that its throbbings of vibration were almost as apparent as the silly, artificial tremolos of a tenor, growled out the strokes.

My bound wrists ached fiercely as I strained at the fiber rope. It did not give. Tears started from my eyes. If only I could free myself for one whole second, get off these constrictions from my ankles and wrists, I would leap up and swing one haymaker, aiming at that fat belly, and the solar plexus hidden somewhere behind it, inches deep.

That would knock him overboard. Then I'd leap after him—and I knew these waters well enough to realize that within one minute the white-pointers, tigers and gray nurses would be enjoying a toothsome feast.

Vain hope. I had been bound by experts in the dirtiest trade, or double trade, the world has known: piracy-slavery.

Out there lay a ship, riding at anchor without a light showing. I did not see her for a long time; but by and by there came to my nostrils a strange, hideous stench. I could not place it. The blackboys of Pappas all were Gilbert or Ellice Islanders—big, magnificent animals who were in and out of the water constantly. I was immune to their bodily odors, which never were especially offensive save on a long overland march.

And that ship with opened hatches, empty of all cargo, riding at the screened anchorage with only a small-pox-pitted Shensi Chinaman and two drunken blackboys aboard, smelled so horribly that I noticed it while we were yet a half mile distant!

Slavery! Or, as it was called in the islands then, "contract native labor." A diabolical merchandising still carried on to some extent to-day, one more profitable than guano, bêche-de-mer, Pearl shell, copra or even pearl poaching.

But at last we were aboard, in the midst of the stench. Except for my

stomach sickness I should probably have admired the spotless decks and trim lines of the ship.

She was a three-master, square-rigged. What rotting flesh slopped about in the bilge of her hold, what shrieks of dying niggers mingled with the squeaks of rats, mattered nothing to Pappas the Pink. But on cruises he had always an excess of sub-ordinary labor, and used it shrewdly. The Dutch-built Hans Brinker, like a painted harlot with dirtied silks beneath her Sydney-Paris gown, was handsomer above than a Cunarder in her teak, oak and shiny nickeled fittings.

I am no sailor, though I have learned a little of small boats. This two-hundred-and-twelve-footer, an immense craft for these waters, is beyond me. I still look on companionways—as I believe they are called—as stairs. I hardly know a ratline from a rat. So, if I err in telling of these few but tumultuous hours, I ask condescending tolerance from sailor men.

The Hans Brinker had a motor auxiliary installation, never used. I believe that Pappas the Pink knew little of engines or motors, and distrusted them. Or it might have been the fact that there were no convenient oil stations in the waters where his dubious activities took him. I never learned. At any rate, dawn was coming. The moon had set.

THE reason that I learned about the engine was my one stroke of genuine luck—but I'll wait a moment to tell of it. Pat had been bundled aboard and tossed carelessly against the removed cover of No. 3 hatch.

When I was being brought up to be thrown beside her, I saw a strange thing happen. For some reason the rope had been cut from her ankles. A spare, still youthful Chinaman I knew to be Loochee, was bending over, thrusting a brocaded silk pillow behind her tousled auburn head.

Just as I got there, carried by two blackboys, a little sick from the blow on the head and the stench left for always by that awful business in the hold, Pat went into action. She still wore rolled stockings, and slippers which had lost both their three-inch wooden heels.

Her hands still lashed, she threw herself aside. Then she launched a kick with her right foot—and believe me, Benny Leonard never swatted a ham contender any harder!

Her instep and heel took Loochee squarely just under the left ear, and the Chinaman crumpled, moaning and spitting out saliva as he tried to prop himself on hands and knees to stave off oblivion.

Pappas, who had been salting down my gold somewhere, came along then with his elephantine, thumping stride. It was getting light in the east. He was smoking a long, ineffective appearing cheroot made in Wheeling, West Virginia, back in the States.

"What t' hell—hey, douse a bucket on this seedwart here!" He commanded his personal blackboy, and kicked Loochee, not gently. The Chinaman stirred. He seemed about to awaken, but he got the bucket of sea water just the same.

Loochee struggled up, sputtering and almost strangling. But he was a Manchu by birth and early training, and knew the civilities. He braced himself and bowed.

"A slight accident," he said, rapidly gaining control of that poise and tranquillity which is the caste mark of blood in the three most civilized provinces of China.

"It is nothing, most sacred master. I have fulfilled your resplendent and honored request. I would ask one favor, though, from your munificence. It has come to my humble knowledge that you do not desire this woman, or even this man we have taken captive.

"For ten strings of cash—five given for each of the honorable captives, will

you let me have them for my own? I fancy the woman, though she is of white skin. Never have I seen hair of this color, or skin so pallid."

"Hold on, Loochee. I'll have to think that over," said Pappas in his rumbling, reflective tone. For the first time I really credited him with some reasoning power, and I prayed that it would hold sway.

For the fact that he obviously looked on Pat, not as the prettiest and most delicious bit of feminity ever invented by a really Divine Creator, but as just a sort of chattel, gave me a shred of hope. If he had fancied her and taken her for himself—well, let's not talk about that!

"No, Loochee, you'll have to wait. I think these youngster interlopers are just what I need. In bargaining. You go for'rd—and stay for'rd!"

With one last, bleak glance at the bared knees of Patricia, the Chinaman obeyed. But I knew with a sickening heart that this was not the end for him; nor even for Pappas the Ogre, who looked on this slip of a girl as something beneath his personal desires.

Damn him! I still hate him for that. The stage, the movies, and all the parades of beauties on Fifth Avenue, at Atlantic City, at Deauville, oh, hell, anywhere, cannot match Pat in my estimation. But one gross animal thought her of no interest whatsoever.

I haven't any particular belief in hell; but if in the hereafter I get a chance to thrust a three-tined fork into the fatty layers of *one* big beast I know, believe me the job will be done to Persephone's taste!

CHAPTER VIII.

VOICE OF THE 401.

IT was dawn. In the papers and magazines back home they used to make fun of the movies for captioning "Came the Dawn of a New Day!" But it is just like that in the low lati-

tudes. No long, gray, reverse English twilight. It is blue black cool one minute. Then the sun comes up, a ball of molten orange, and it is hot again.

Though we did not know until afterward, affairs back at the copra plantation had been most hectic. Believing me on guard, Den Treleven had not awakened for his watch at the appointed time.

It was not until about an hour before sunrise, when the blackboy besiegers left by Pappas had just convinced themselves that there was no risk in climbing the bamboo barricade, that Den awakened.

At that it was sheer luck. One of the blackboys slipped and skewered himself on a sharpened point of bamboo. His screeching howl of pain and surprise would have awakened a mummy.

Den sprang up, rifle in hand, and gazed blinking through the lattice of the veranda. Out there the howling continued. Four dark shapes appeared: one running silently toward the house, the other three perched atop the bamboo, two of them vainly trying to help their luckless companion.

Crack!

Den's Winchester spoke. The flitting shadow tumbled headlong, squealing and thrashing like a disemboweled pig. Then suddenly it lay silent.

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

The voice of the .401, sending soft-nosed bullets into those dark blurs atop the bamboo. Two of them fell. One remained, crucified but dead.

Then the click of a fresh clip, the levering in of a cartridge—and Jessie was beside the man she loved, her striped silk pyjamas identical in pattern with those she had loaned Treleven.

"Oh! Where is Patricia?" she cried. "And that young friend of yours?"

"Nemmind 'em right now, Jessie. Take the back. Shoot to kill! I think they're all coming!" Treleven almost

snarled, for he was damning me for an utter fool, which I had been, and including Patricia. Funny thing, but Den never so far has achieved more than a passive tolerance toward red-heads; and that is the only grievous fault in his taste.

FORTUNATELY there had been just one more blackboy left as guard; and he legged it as fast as he could for the protection of the jungle, once he had seen his companions perforated. When the sun came up Den walked around to the other side of the house. He went down rather awkwardly on one knee beside the woman who still held the shotgun just as if she would have to kill some one the next second. The striped pyjamas fitted her lovely figure; but Den Treleven sprouted out from his in all directions.

"They've gone—if there were any more of 'em, my sweet," he said, taking the shotgun and laying it down beside the Winchester. Then he reached up an arm and brought down her tumbled hair to his lips.

"Jess! Jess!" he said. "Where did our chicklets go? Have they wandered out into the moon and been captured?"

Jessie was crying. Hopelessness, loyalty, and the overpowering desire for at least a kiss from the man she loved had made her something less than the strong woman she was; something less, yet even more lovely.

"Den—" she sobbed. "Den, we're going to die anyway. I love you." She threw back her long hair with a shake of her head, and her arms went around his neck. "Nothing matters—does—it?"

"Yes. Honey, I'd give my worthless heart to any heathen god next morning, if I could—oh, sweet, I don't even want to say it! Jessie, no matter if we die two minutes from now, I want to turn your breast this way, press it into mine—so my heart will never forget—and kiss your lips. May I?"

There was a poignant, wistful smile at the corners of the lips of the beautiful Jessie. She said nothing. She lifted her arms and her half parted lips to him.

Cyclone, earthquake, tidal wave, pestilence—anything might have come to the island during the next few passionate minutes. Two people who loved each other would not have known or cared.

But that madness had only two ways to go—and with Den and Jessie, only one way. They drew apart.

Honor is a strange quality; oftentimes it benefits most those without honor.

ALITTLE later the two of them, drawn of countenance from the repression which was agony to them both, had determined that by no chance either Pat or myself remained within the house or stockade.

"We'll have to try for 'em, Jess," stated Den in a grim voice. "I'm going out. And I'd rather have you along than leave you here alone. But—if we run into an ambush, you know what to do?"

Jessie looked at him long and bravely. Then she smiled a little. Without speaking, she turned and ran into the house.

A moment later she was back before him, holding out two slender, three-inch long phials of colorless liquid in the palm of one graceful hand.

"Take one of these hellish things, Den dear," she said. "The idea came from Russia—the Battalion of Death, if there was such a thing—but it's just as good anywhere in the world that savages reign."

"What is it?"

Involuntarily he stepped back a pace. Not from cowardice, but from revulsion. Poison—youth and love. Are there greater antitheses?

"Concentrated hydrocyanic acid. They say one drop will kill certainly in

ten seconds or less. Either in the mouth or through the skin."

Womanlike, Jessie now was completely matter of fact.

Den nodded slowly. He took one of the phials and thrust it down into the upper angle of his left ear, where it clung as securely as the pencil of a stockbroker's clerk.

"Careful not to break yours accidentally, Jessie sweet," he admonished. "For most part I prefer powder and lead, but this is a measure of self-defense—maybe. He enunciated the last word below his breath.

"And now—get your gun, my girl!" A swift note of alarm leaped into his voice. "Under that palm—there—the brush moved! There is no wind! They have come back!"

But a long pole of bamboo, atop of which was tied a dirty pair of white trousers enormous in size, poked out and waved from the shrubbery. A glint of sweating brown arms. How any native had got inside the stockade was a mystery.

"Flag of truce. Pappas wants to palaver. All right, Jessie, keep your gun ready. It may be a trap laid by these devils to capture us."

"Oh, Den, don't trust them!" she cried, but she was too late. The tall man had stepped out, throwing up the green bamboo lattice and leaping the eight feet to the ground.

He did not think for a second that more than one or two of the natives had been able to scale the upright bamboos without detection; he could not know that this particular envoy had spent most of the late hours of the night burrowing under the barricade—and even now was shivering with a terror only less than that he felt in the presence of his tyrannical master, Pappas the Pink.

It took even Den Treleaven more than half an hour to convince the envoy that sudden death did not await him under the flag of truce. But then an Eurasian with some English finally ap-

proached the white man who held his empty hands high.

THE envoy's language was none too good; but Den Treleven was trained through fourteen years in understanding all the patois of the islands. He had no difficulty. Reduced to narrative English, the tale was this:

Pappas had indeed captured Pat and myself, but he had no particular or personal use for either of us. There was an exiled Manchu, however, the fellow Loochee, who already had expressed a fancy for the charms of the slim red-head—but thus far both she and I were safe aboard his vessel. Pappas proposed to let us live—under certain conditions.

Those conditions were bound up with twin desires. He wanted the copra plantation, for it was bearing richly now, and because a certain atoll just outside afforded a safe anchorage and hiding for his big vessel. Also he wanted Jessie; the cool scorn with which she had treated advances made years ago, repeated months ago, somehow had pierced his blubbery hide.

The scoundrel had an even greater card up his sleeve, though this much probably would have been enough to move Den Treleven to the uttermost of desperation.

Pappas's messenger coolly assured us that the pirate chieftain had a secret island in waters marked "inaccessible" on all the charts, where Den, Pat and myself might live out our lives in comfort. He had nothing in particular against us—except that he had to be assured of no further interference with his plans.

Of course, if we agreed to the bargain, we would be kept in stores by Pappas himself—he did not say how long, though Den could make a grim guess.

Then came the blow. I translate and paraphrase, for the envoy's words would be next to unintelligible.

"Pappas the Pink, he says he has your husband and little boy over on the island." This was addressed directly to Jessie, who had come out, still holding her shotgun. "Maybe you would like to see them? If so, I am ready to take you out to the ship."

And that was the mystery of Jessie—the tragedy of Den Treleven! Den uttered a savage curse, then whirled, just in time to catch the woman as she crumpled toward the ground.

Den glowered at the envoy. "All right, damn all of you!" he snarled. "We'll be with you in a few minutes, as soon as this woman is herself again!"

Then he reached over, found her phial of cyanic acid, and thrust it over his other ear. He appeared to stumble. One hand which went to the ground picked up Jessie's shotgun, however.

CHAPTER IX.

HON THE DEADLY.

AFTER carrying Jessie back to the bungalow, Den appeared to desert her needs in a most callous manner. He just dropped her on the nearest couch. He worked feverishly. He took her shotgun, unloaded it, and, with one calculated blow, smashed the chased double barrels over the edge of a marble washstand. Then he took a hatchet and chopped away almost all of the walnut stock.

Next he took a knife, and cut out the paper wads in the ends of two twelve-gauge UMC shells, tossed the buckshot over his shoulder, and then, with the aid of several rubber bands, affixed the two glass phials of deadly poison against the powder charges of the two shells.

A "sawed-off" shotgun ready to spray a full two ounces of powder-driven cyanogen gas! Enough to kill a platoon of men.

With a little readjustment of his belt, Den hung this ugly, terrible weapon

down the inside of his trousers, just within his left thigh.

Then he went back to Jessie, swiftly resuscitating her with whisky. "Come now, dear," he told her in a low, tense whisper. "Hold yourself together. I've got a card to spring on them. We'll go. We'll see your boy—and your husband. And if I fail, here's this. Not as good as your phial, perhaps, but sure. You can hide it in your hair."

He handed it over to her. "If necessary, use it on your wrists; cut deep!"

Jessie took the tiny rectangle of metal, and her pain-dulled eyes promised compliance. "You know best, Den Treleaven," she said in a voice which had gone into apathy. Then she thrust into her billowing hair the safety razor blade.

THE compartments between the cabins aft on Pappas's ship were of six-thickness plyboard, the outer skin on each side being paper-thin Circassian walnut. They were a new addition, the sort of partition that metropolitan business offices erect any afternoon a new efficiency expert or production manager is hired.

From the mate's cabin you could hear plainly when the captain fizzed seltzer into his brandy. By listening closely you could tell how much brandy, almost to the drop. I had listened to that happen exactly nine times; for the albino was the hoggish kind who drank on deck or ashore whenever liquor was handy, but never missed his swigs while on board.

I'll say this much for him, and I quote: "He was never sober, but never too drunk to sail his own ship through the wildest hurricane that ever came out of Samoa!" A British consul said that, later.

Pat and I had been thrown into the mate's cabin, and after one sniff of the misty air I knew that the yellow devil called Loochee must have the certificate. The twin portholes apparently never had been opened. A dead smell,

something between decaying rat-tails and the tuberoses wilting on a day-old grave, hung heavy in the air. Opium.

Usual enough, of course, as I had come to know. Still and all—I suppose even Irishmen have their prejudices—I decided then and there that if I got one decent swing at one of two men, I'd leave Pappas till second, and smash the jaw of that sneering, half-rebellious Chinaman back through his spine and medulla oblongata.

Loochee had made one bid for Pat and myself—why I was worth a single *cash* to him I never did find out. Perhaps his rat eyes saw that I loved the woman he wanted, and he thought to induce full compliance on her part by a little Chinese torture on myself.

At any rate, we were left alone for a time in the mate's cabin, bound so tightly with silk cords that numbness had crept into my arms to the shoulders. For one thing only I could be thankful: we were not gagged.

I talked to Pat, and she smiled back bravely at me. Perhaps I became almost eloquent, for there is no more tongue-loosening mixture than love and hopelessness.

Beside the bonds on our ankles and wrists, we were tied above and below to becketts which held us well-nigh spread-eagled. I could turn to my left side, but this increased the tension on my arms. Pat was a trifle freer; she could almost sit up, and her wrists were bound in front instead of in back.

"If I had time enough, Spark, I think I could get free!" she suddenly whispered. "By stretching I can just reach this—rope—"

I stared, all in a second snatched from my speechmaking. It was true! "Try anything, dear!" I whispered back. "Anything!"

She just nodded and strained upward and back, seeking the intricate and tight-drawn wall knot. She could just reach it with her bared teeth. They bit and tugged at it.

Her slender body, supported only on

elbows and heels, struggled and stretched to the last quarter inch. Skirts were forgotten. There was the creamy ivory of slender, rounded knees and thighs, and the deeper pink of an undergarment of silk. And then I looked away. Her loveliness, and her struggle for our lives both aroused the last ferocity in me.

I chewed savagely at the silken rope which tied my wrists to the wall becket; but one might as well have tried to dive and bite through the gutta percha and wire of the Suva oceanic cable. I was helpless.

NOT for long. Minutes passed. Pat was loosening that knot! Fascinated, scarcely breathing, I watched her now. It was yielding. Getting a hold with her teeth, she shook her head this way and that, only relaxing the splendid arch of her body when one loop had come free—and then only for a second, while she breathed terribly, like a boxer just saved by the bell.

The knot gave, the silken cord pulled free! Pat slumped, pulling down her bound wrists from their uncomfortable position over her right shoulder.

"Oh, Spark!" she breathed.

"Easy does it, honey," I cautioned her, holding my own impatience in leash. "Now if you can inch over toward me just a little."

She obeyed swiftly then. Her breath was coming in short, rapid gusts, and the color was high in her cheeks. "Oh, I hope you can, Spark!" she said, and looked me fair in the eyes. Was she almost smiling?

I did not answer, except to kiss the back of one of her bound hands. Then I was chewing and biting savagely at the tight knotted silken ropes. Damn any one who could be beast enough to cut this deep into the wrists of a girl!

This was a clove hitch, a far simpler knot than the wall knot Pat had solved. But I did not have her cleverness. I

chewed and blundered and tugged—and once even drew the knot tighter.

"To the left—yes, that way. Now keep pulling!" Pat whispered.

That was what gave us our little chance. Under her directions I finally drew the last strand away. Her hands were loose.

Of course, it was only a short matter then. She freed me first, then bent over to remove the lashings from her feet. I crawled upright, unbelievably paralyzed from finger tips to shoulders. I banged my half closed, numb fists, up and down my arms. I clenched and unclenched my hands. I massaged my biceps muscles, and was rewarded for all these efforts by feeling electric tingles race up and down these members.

At the last I tore the final lashing from Pat's left ankle, and brought her to her feet. She was exhausted, and dropped back limp for a second in my arms. I kissed her.

Possibly that was more than a second; when Pat is in my arms I am no judge of time. But at any rate the door was unlocked. It opened and closed, and I did not hear it.

But I saw. I pushed Pat suddenly from me. There, grinning and enormous, stood the colorless monstrosity, Pappas the Pink!

WELL, ain't this just too top-hole!" he chortled, booming out the words as he laughed, and hitching his thumbs into the waistband of his whites. "Think of me, imaginin' I had a couple of aching prisoners in here. It ain't so bad, eh? Not so bad as what Loochee'd like to do?"

I found my voice. "Just where," I asked, "d'you think you're going with this sort of thing, Pappas?" I demanded. "I know you're rich. What does my gold, or the capture of this girl mean to you? The penalty for kidnapping, robbery and piracy is pretty well defined in these seas."

Pappas wayed a heavy hand. He grinned. "You are right, little man," he said, with elephantine graciousness. "If they could capture me and then prove against me one thing out of ten I have done, I would hang; that is sure.

"But why be afraid to hang? I must die some time in the next year—or the next ten years. I have wanted one woman more than any of the others.

"Ah, but not your half pretty little redhead; don't worry! This woman now I can get. Also the troublesome man whom she has loved more than her own wedded husband. Him I shall kill."

Pappas made a menacing gesture, lifting his great hands.

That was the chance I had awaited. I leaped. My right fist, driven with every ounce of weight and force I could summon, buried itself to the wrist in the fat of his belly.

"A-ah!" he grunted, and grabbed for me. He did not crumple, or even seem much bothered! I was to find him armored with plated muscle deep down beneath those layers of fat, well-nigh impervious to the punishment I was able to administer.

I put a left uppercut to the chin, broke from his clawing fingers, and then went seriously to the business of killing him.

God, what a giant he was! He grinned at me—and kept grinning and coming after me, his great telephone poles of arms outstretched, even when I smashed blow after blow into his face, drawing the claret from both nostrils.

He came slowly, crowding me into a corner. I hit him with everything the Lord gives a man of my poundage, and he did not even try to hit back.

He just came on, grinning through the blood on his ghastly, eyebrowless countenance. And Pat, hastily making a slip noose of the silk ropes we had

shed, dropped that over his enormous neck and pulled.

The cords in his neck stood out as he resisted all her strength, but it did not seem to bother him much, if at all. He got me.

Of course, I fought to the last second—and at infighting I was pretty fair just then. But my best punches elicited only a grunt or two, and then he had me by the windpipe.

That was all. I gagged and danced when he lifted me from the floor. Helpless.

"Damn you! Don't *kill* him!" screamed Pat, and rushed at Pappas with fingernails flying.

He brushed her away—and she went half unconscious against the wall she had struck. She fell to the floor.

PAPPAS let go his hold on my throat. "Don't see no use in killing you, at that," he said reflectively. "Might give you a job; you know how to use your fists pretty well. How'd you like that, eh? Be second mate on a pirate ship?"

"Try me!" I managed to articulate hoarsely. "Anything that'll give me a good chance to hit you again will suit!"

He grinned again. "I think you have a job, Mr. Starke," he said. "You can handle natives, of course. And I like men about me who value something, even a woman, more than the continuance of life.

"And you may keep this woman you seem to fancy. This one," and he gestured at Pat. "If you come with me she is yours as long as you really want her."

I looked him straight in the eyes, and oddly enough knew he was making a promise he would keep. In our straits of desperation, what could I do—beyond what I did do?

"Pappas," I answered slowly, "I'll be your mate, and fight any of your enemies except Den Treleven, if you'll let me take this girl as my own, and

marry her the first chance we get! If you and all the rest will not bother her."

To my surprise he did not balk at the condition. I could not know the bargain he had already proposed to Den and Jessie.

"You've taken a job, Mr. Starke. Keep that red-headed woman as long as you want her. You can marry her right now, if you wish. I am a master mariner."

So then and there I married Pat. She held her head up; but I saw tears welling from the corners of her eyes. The service was curt. In five minutes Pat was mine—as far as word of mouth could make her mine.

"So! I leave you for your honeymoon!" said Pappas, grinning widely, and slamming the door as he left the cabin.

"Go to hell!" I flung after him; but I doubt that he heard the defiance. Then I turned to Pat.

Her red hair was tousled, but her eyes were bright. "And now what, husband of mine?" she asked, just a trifle shakily. She lifted her arms. Her lips, half parted, offered the delights of love.

I caught her savagely and kissed her. But then I broke away.

"You are free now. You can wriggle through that porthole; it's too narrow for me, and anyway, I am a pirate. Drop overboard—and then tell Den Treleven that I'm one of the pirate gang. He'll know what to do."

Bar one, that kiss from her trembling lips, was the sweetest I ever got from Pat—and I never have kissed another woman.

With my help then she got out of the porthole, and dived into the water. No one heard her.

My heart sank. Married to the one woman I loved, and I had sent her away with no more token than a single kiss!

I practically forgot all about Den Treleven and Jessie.

But Pappas the Pink had not forgotten them!

CHAPTER X.

TONGUES OF FLAME.

THE fight ashore started and ended so suddenly that it is hard to describe. To bargain with Jessie and Den, Pappas sent ashore Loochee and four blacks.

Den did not palaver; he had made no promises. *Bong!* went one barrel of the acid charge.

After a terrified second or two, the yellow man's face contorted; it writhed in a peculiar, unknown agony. Then Loochee slumped amid the blackboys whom he had brought. They all were dead in less than twenty seconds. The liquid cyanogen carried on tiny fragments of glass, played no favorites.

Dusk, then swift darkness had come, when Den took out the *una* boat. Fortunately there was a slight breeze from the east, which allowed him to sail out this tiny craft without benefit of the oars which had been used by the blackboys. Otherwise he might have had grave trouble even reaching the ship.

"Ahoy!" there came a faint hail. From a dark blob in the water a hand raised. It was Pat, swimming away from the ship.

"It's Pat! over there!" cried Jessie. "I know her voice!"

So did Den, fortunately. Without questions, Pat was hauled aboard the boat and given a drink of brandy. This certainly unleashed her tongue, and she told them everything—that is, all but one thing. I still wonder why she did not reveal to Jessie that she had married me?

But women are strange and delightful creatures always.

The *una* boat came through the shoals. Den had some trouble, even with benefit of Pat's excited directions, for behind the breakwater where Pappas anchored his ship, rotten coral

gave him shelter on three sides. Feathery palm fronds camouflaged his masts, except from the sea. And it was an empty sea.

But at last came the dark loom of the vessel, located because out there a blackboy saw us first on the phosphorescent water, and let loose a high, shrill jabbering.

Den took in the sail. Standing erect in the stern, a long scull in his hands, he directed the slowing way of the little sailboat.

"Who are you?" rumbled forth a hail from the throat of the huge albino.

"Just a few enemies, coming to pay a formal call," responded Den, a savage note in his voice which could not be misunderstood, except for the element of surprise that these wanted persons had come at all.

THERE was a skittering and slapping of bare feet, and a hoarse command. A group of blackboys came to the rail, seizing the line Pat threw aboard. The *una* boat was drawn alongside, and a ladder thrown down. Jessie, sitting straight and silent, could see the huge bulk of the man she hated, slopped over the rail. Pappas flourished a revolver.

"All O. K.—Jessie there? Yes, O. K. if you're coming peaceable. Huh, how the devil did *you* get ashore?"

His red eyes, seeing far better at night than in the glare of day, somehow had discerned Pat's identity. It was now or never!

Den's arm swung up. The short gun belched its deadly spray, straight into the huddle of blacks about the pirate captain!

That same instant—or a split second before—Pappas had divined what was coming. He swung his revolver. Orange flame tongued downward in the darkness. Den staggered and fell, being kept only from going overboard by the quick, frantic grasp of Jessie's arm.

Pat had the automatic rifle. She pumped three fast shots upward, the recoil nearly spinning her about at each explosion. Then she leaped for the ladder.

"Don't go aboard yet!" Den's voice came thickly in warning. "The gas—"

But the impetuous redhead knew nothing of the cyanogen, that lethal stuff which arises from sprayed hydrocyanic acid. As agile as a monkey she swarmed up the ladder, pausing only to jerk an unaimed shot upward.

The deadly stench of bitter almonds, and the sight of those blackboys thrashing in the last agonies of a terrible death made her dash aside, holding her breath in horror. This doubtless saved her life. On the deck were seven men, dead almost as soon as she saw them.

Pappas, however, was not of the number. He had dodged aft, holding a limp and useless left arm, calling hoarsely and in vain to the remainder of his crew. One or two of those rallied momentarily, but had not the courage to go up against that terrible, death-spraying gun another time.

Splash after splash told how they sought to escape. There were left on deck just Pat, with one shot left in the auto rifle—and that crouching, wounded beast up there beside the taffrail!

AFTER pushing Pat through the porthole, and hearing the splash of her dive, I had been about as sick at heart as a man can become. I thought first of sharks, and shuddered. What if one, hanging around the ship for the daily ration of garbage, should come across Pat swimming bravely for the island?

Then I had been bothered, too, by the bargain I had made with Pappas. With Pat near me, all other considerations had seemed as nothing. Just to save her from harm I should have gone before a firing squad with defiance.

Yet the implications of the agreement I had made troubled me.

I did not understand the big, hideous looking captain. Most of the time he seemed a thoroughgoing beast. I had Den's word for the fact that he was the worst wanted man in the islands. And then, the whole of this ship reeked of the slave trade; from the open hatches came that stale stench which could have only one interpretation.

Yet, after all, where his own intentions were not directly concerned, the big albino had exhibited something at least akin to human sympathy and generosity. It seemed to me then, and still does seem, that Pappas the Pink must have been, at one time, an essentially decent man, twisted and turned vile by the fact of his horrible appearance.

In the quiet of the evening, the sudden hoarse challenge from Pappas, and Den Treleaven's terse reply, came to me plainly. I leaped to my feet. What on earth was happening? Had my friends dared to make some insane attempt at a rescue? I knew that Den would never tamely submit to the capture of himself and Jessie. What could it be?

I ran to the door—but I knew beforehand. It was locked from the outside. A scuffling, and mingled voices from the deck, sent me desperately searching for some means of egress. My shoulders were too wide to slip through one of the portholes. The door was of solid hardwood; teak, probably. With nothing heavier than a camp stool and a green topped card table I could not hope to batter through its panels.

The lock?

Once, some three years before, I had seen an ex-burglar show a gang of men how any ordinary door lock could be opened, with no greater tool than a stiff hairpin. I had no hairpin, but I did have one of these tool kit jack-knives with everything on it from a pair of scissors to a corkscrew. I

yanked it out, went down to my knees before the keyhole, and tried one thing after another.

It was a heavy, old-fashioned Dutch lock—perfectly simple except for the fact that it seldom had been used, and the flanges were rusty. After one blade broke, I finally got it with the corkscrew, however. It creaked open. Twirling the knob I jerked the door open—and heard a booming shot—two shots—then rapidly three more!

Of course I knew nothing at all about the gas. I reached the deck, and smelled this stench of bitter almonds everywhere. A terrified blackboy came running straight at me, yelling something I could not make out. I let him have a straight right that sent him head over heels into the scuppers. Then I felt along the rail. I could see little, but I knew where to get a marlinspike. With its big wooden handle in my fist I went on. There seemed to be a confused huddle of groaning, dying men, there amidships. A single lantern burned below the rail, but did not provide enough light.

And then I almost fell over the toad-like bulk of Pappas, crouched there behind the taffrail of the stern. He was bellowing at some blackboys; and as I reached him he fired a revolver at a flitting shadow further forward. I did not dream that this could be Pat, or I should have gone stark insane.

As it was, I launched myself upon Pappas, bringing down the marlinspike like a dirk. I felt the dull point sink through flesh and grate against bone. Then I jerked away and struck again, again!

One of those huge arms came up and infolded me. A revolver went off beside my head, but Pappas the Pink had struck his last blow. Just like a bloated balloon that has been punctured, he folded up and dropped face forward to the deck.

He recognized me. "Damn mutiny

—mate," he rumbled hoarsely through the bubbling froth that ringed his lips. "Hah-hah-h-h!" The laugh ended in choking.

His big legs lashed out in their last dance, smashing his feet into the taffrail; then he was quiet.

I rose unsteadily to my feet.

CHAPTER XL

LOST ISLAND.

PAT fired her last bullet at me, before she recognized me. Then I had her in my arms. "Glad you missed, sweetheart," I whispered. "Where is Den?"

But she was done up. I laid her down gently on the deck, and went to the side.

"Looks like we've got possession, folks!" I called with what cheer I could muster.

"That you, Spark?" Infinite relief was in Jesse's voice. "Den's got a bullet in his shoulder."

"Oh, I'm all right. Look out for that gas," said Den weakly.

Then Jessie explained. I understood at last. I took Pat up farther forward and let her rest. We would wait for dawn before trying any further procedure.

There really is only one more happening which must be told. With the day we explored the ship, and heaved overboard all the bodies save that of Pappas.

We covered him with a hatch tarpaulin. For certain reasons which had to do with the authorities he would be left in sole possession of his big vessel.

In his cabin we found my gold, and likewise a huge store of moneys, jewels and other valuables which we did not disturb. These would have to be administered by the representatives of the island government; restored to their respective owners wherever possible.

3 A

Next morning, after Jessie and Den were installed aboard, I and Pat went ashore, fully armed. We managed to capture a pair of the deserting blackboys who had been part of Pappas's crew.

They were terrified, expecting death, but I bargained with them. Assuring them over and over again that hanging would be the penalty suffered for disobedience, I sent one to the office of the resident agent on the other side of the island, bearing a written report of occurrences.

The second blackboy, under pain of death, agreed to show us the island where Pappas had taken Jessie's husband and son. He said it was not far.

So on the third day following, with Den able to climb into the *una* boat, we set out for Lost Island, as the rendezvous was known, Jessie white-faced and silent, Pat reaching over to squeeze my hand every now and then, blushing with a happiness I prayed I could make hers in full measure for life.

Den lay stretched full length. The bullet was still in his shoulder, and he had nothing to say. What could he have said? Here was definite information at last; he was attending his own funeral, one might say—going with the woman he loved to the island where her husband and son had been marooned by their enemy. I think that through those long hours Den prayed for death. But it did not come. His constitution refused to surrender.

LOST Island, a trifling seedwart of sand and coral in the midst of a dozen barren islands, had a tragic history of its own, little of which is pertinent here. Once it had supported a colony of thirty or forty blacks. Then it was submerged by a tidal wave, swept clean of human life. Later it was found and used as a hide-out by Pappas the Pink.

It had no vegetation; nothing but one brackish spring of water. Pappas

carried there all the supplies that were used.

Tears spring unbidden to my eyes every time I think or speak of our first sight of Lost Island. A queer, choked cry came from Jessie's throat, as our Ellice Island blackboy assured her that this was indeed the lonely spot on which her husband and son had been marooned.

"Oh, where *are* they?" she cried once, sweeping the bare expanse in vain for a glimpse of the pair.

Well, I am not going to tell about that terrible search. We found no trace of the man; and for my part I could not grieve over that. I cared too much for Den Treleaven.

Back beside the spring we did find a pitiful, emaciated mite of humanity—a child of no more than five years, wasted almost to a skeleton.

When Jessie found him, Pat bearing the poor kid out to where we could get him food and immediate attention, I thought the older woman would go mad with joy and pity and mother love.

She threw herself to the ground and wept and hugged that frail little chap till I was afraid she might do him added injury. Children seem to take to this sort of treatment, however.

The kid's drawn face was smiling.

"Mumsie, I wanna go home. Is tiffin ready?" he said weakly.

Well, it was full ten days before either the youngster or Den Treleaven was ready for regular tiffin, but in the meantime we fed them all their systems could stand. The boy was a wiry specimen—plenty tough or he could not have survived that awful week of loneliness on Lost Island. His hide filled out gradually.

In time we got from him a brief word concerning his father's fate. It seems the man, dependent for sustenance upon sea food until the forgetful Pappas should return once more, had gone diving for clams. There had been

a swirl, red upon the waters—and he had come ashore no more.

ON the way back to Erromango, and Jessie's plantation, the three sat together in the bow of the *una* boat. Pat and I and the blackboy managed to find our way, though it is the truth that many times we escaped piling up on reefs just by sheer luck.

A British-French Commission cruiser was waiting when we returned, and a dapper young ensign had many questions to ask. He had a doctor handy, however, and so Den was put to bed, while a detachment of sailors under a second ensign was sent to investigate the vessel and remains of Pappas the Pink.

The first night Jessie's bungalow was a trifle crowded. Jessie was going to nurse Den whether he liked it or not—and of course he did. Pat and I were there when Jessie showed the ensign to his room and the doctor to another.

"I'm sorry, Spark, but rooms are scarce now," said Jessie. "Pat, you take that one at the end of the hall. Sparks, you turn in on the couch outside. In a day or two it 'll be different."

I heard Pat laugh a little to herself and glance sidewise at me.

"I—I don't think that will be necessary," she said, coming and putting one arm around my shoulders.

For one silent second I saw Jessie look shocked and even Den turn away a little. They were not prudes, these good friends, but they liked both of us. They were astounded.

"Maybe you don't know!" I found my voice at last. "Captain Pappas married us. This is Mrs. Spark Starke. And long may she wave!"

I bent and kissed my lady.

Out of somewhere I heard Den's weak voice. "Well, God bless you both! Pappas the Pink did the world one good turn in his life!"

THE END



The Farewell Song

In sentimental Mexico, a condemned man had a right to a final "request" song—and unsentimental Mack picked "Home, Sweet Home" for reasons of his own

"Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home—"

By J. LANE LINKLATER

MACK wasn't there at the time, and neither was Bill, otherwise Two-Finger would not have done it.

Two-Finger had just paid two bits for a glass of Jake Mudd's disguised vitriol and was feeling aggressively disconsolate when he noticed that the big safe at the end of the bar of the Money Girl was open. One of the men had been gathering some of the surplus cash at the gambling tables which drew so many visitors from north of the Rio Grande, and Jake himself was stuffing this cash into the safe. Silently, Two-Finger began to ease himself along the bar until he came to the end, directly behind Jake and his man.

The first part of the operation was easy. Two-Finger caught them off guard. He was immediately to the rear of them, and he stuck his gun between them as he leaned over.

"Both of you guys," said Two-Finger, "sit down on the floor here behind the bar and put your hands up."

He said it very quietly, so that nobody noticed what was going on. Jake said something, but he said it under his breath, which was just as well.

Then Two-Finger reached out and took all the paper money he could see in the safe and stuck it in his pockets. Just then one of the bartenders turned around and was so astonished that he made a loud remark that was theological in its implications.

Two-Finger started to back out, but he had over a hundred feet to go, with gambling paraphernalia and a mob of patrons in his way; so to make things easy he shot twice into the air in a haphazard sort of way.

Well, for a minute everybody was trying to get under the same table or out of the same door. It began to look as though Two-Finger was going to make it to the door all right. He had less than ten feet to go when a gun popped off and plunked him in his right arm. Some bar-swipe that Two-Finger hadn't noticed had shot at him and ducked behind the bar.

Two-Finger dropped his gun and he looked right angry. Indeed, he looked angry for about three seconds, which was two seconds too long. He stooped to pick up his gun with his left hand—the one that was short on fingers—and he was just straightening out again when a whole regiment came into action, as well as a couple of the Mexican cops who had just come around on the outside.

When Mack came in, less than a minute later, Two-Finger was lying there as dead as a hunk of Swiss cheese, and as full of holes.

Two-Finger's remains were removed promptly by the authorities so as not to interfere with business. Everybody made a rush for the bar to get their courage back—that is, everybody except Jake himself, who didn't have courage enough to drink his own stuff, and Mack, who was thoughtfully scrutinizing Jake.

Jake smiled, but any one watching him would have liked it better had he kept his face straight. There was an air of benevolent respectability about Jake that was deceiving until one noticed that his eyes were never still and that one end of his mouth hung down too confidentially when he conversed with any one.

There was no smile on Mack's long, lean face, and the conversation that ensued was brief and one-sided.

"It ain't possible," said Jake, with a shrug, "for any one to stick up the Money Girl—and live."

Mack said nothing, and Jake suddenly turned and walked away.

ALL this happened about ten o'clock in the evening, which was usually considered far too early for normal excitement in the Money Girl.

Along about midnight Mack was one of an illustrious company of three dining in the back room of Hop Ling's, which was right alongside of the Money Girl. Mack was silently listening to the torrid comments of his two friends as they discussed the distinctly lamentable passing of the careless Two-Finger.

"Shot full o' holes, he was, the bloody fool," said Bill, whose great bulk overflowed onto the table, his booming voice floating out of the door and across the desert.

"And," he added, with great solemnity, "he didn't even get a farewell song."

Carl, who was once described on the Los Angeles police blotter as "a visiting desert rat, age unknown, height five feet two inches, booked for drunkenness and starting a riot in the Mandarin Noodle Palace," looked shocked.

To forfeit the privilege of the "farewell song" added pathos to an otherwise sufficiently regrettable event. It was the custom in Mexicoro, when any one but a rank stranger ran afoul the law to the extent of facing a firing squad, legal or extra legal, to invite him to name his favorite song. Thereupon an impromptu solo was arranged to solace him in his last hour—and to give color to a drab affair for the further entertainment of visiting patrons.

It was, indeed, a custom that even Jake Mudd did not dare defy.

"How'd it happen?" squeaked Carl.

Thereupon Bill, with many verbal flourishes, began to tell the story. Bill had hurried over from Calimoro,

Texas, as soon as the news had floated across the line, bearing a dozen accounts that bore no resemblance to each other except for the one particular that Two-Finger was "shot full o' holes." For Carl's benefit Bill was now merging all of these stories into one grand narrative.

Mack, at the head of the table, was gazing thoughtfully upon the somewhat torpid scene in the front of Hop Ling's.

A fat, porky-looking gentleman, stripped to his undershirt, was performing with remarkable dexterity on the piano, and a dilapidated young man, whose trouble seemed to be a combination of bad whisky and *yen she*, was singing "Home, Sweet Home" with that strange passion common to people of deranged nerves. Close by, a dance hall girl who had dropped in for a dish of Hop Ling's pork spareribs, was almost overcome by the familiar melody. She began to sob violently.

It was now past midnight, but hot with that persistent heat characteristic of the imperial desert. Bill, approaching the climax of his story, unfastened his shirt. Carl wiped his brow with one of Hop Ling's napkins.

"Well," Bill concluded, "Two-Finger was within three feet of the door when some dirty bar-swipe fired three times and plugged him in both arms and just above the right eye. Then seven Mexican cops come rushing in back of him and each and every one of them got busy with their irons. At the same time all of Jake Mudd's men come out from under the tables and let loose.

"And Two-Finger, he just looked at them like he didn't know 'em and didn't want to, and uttered one glorious last word—which he hadn't ought to, considering he was just about to cash in—and then set down on the floor. Didn't even get a farewell song, the bloody fool."

Carl swore vividly, in a sort of high

soprano. Bill returned to his ham and eggs. Mack said nothing.

"Must've gone plumb crazy," muttered Carl. "Why, they ain't no more chance of pulling a trick like that in the Money Girl, and getting away with it, than I got to date up the Queen o' the May—"

"Why not?" asked Mack quietly.

IT was the first time he had said anything, which was not unusual; it was his habit to let the others talk themselves out before concluding the conversation with a few brief remarks of his own.

"Why not!" Carl looked at him with friendly scorn. "Why, figure it out for yourself, Mister Mack. In the first place, that dump is lousy with Jake's watchers and with the Mexican Governor's armed and obliging representatives of law and order, as interpreted by Jake Mudd.

"Then, supposin' that you do what ain't anywheres near possible and get outside the Money Girl with a large part of Jake's folding money on your person—where are you going? You can't go east, you can't go west, and you can't go south, because this filthy desert has you all bottled up."

"And north?" suggested Mack.

"Well, if you can reach the line ahead of about two hundred ardent and admiring followers, get safely past the Mexican customs officers on this side and the American customs officers on the other, then walk, trot or canter through the picturesque village of Calimoro, and get out into the scenic beauties of Imperial County—why then maybe you could hide under a cantaloupe tree, or something—always providing there's a sandstorm on at the time."

Carl finished as though the matter had been quite thoroughly disposed of. Bill shook his head in agreement.

"I was just thinking," said Mack, reflectively, "that I would do the trick myself."

Bill stopped in the act of mopping up some loose egg with a chunk of bread. Carl drew in his breath sharply, like a schoolgirl at her first round-up.

Mack, they knew, never said he was "just thinking" of doing something unless he had fully decided to do it, and not even a very thin smile disturbed his leathery face into indicating that he might be jesting.

"You mean," said Bill at last, in a low voice—that is, as low as he could make it; it didn't penetrate quite as far as the Mexican barracks—"you mean that you aim to stick up the Money Girl?"

Mack inclined his head slightly in affirmation.

"Why?"

"Well, Jake Mudd robbed Frank Sloan of the best cotton ranch south of the line, didn't he? Then Jay Hoke tried to get it back for him and Jake killed him, didn't he? Then Jay's girl Peggy tried to get the U. S. people interested and Jake spoiled her name, didn't he? Then Peggy's pal Two-Finger took a couple of Jake's bum drinks and tried to get even and got a nice new shirt all burned up, didn't he?"

"Right, so far," said Bill.

"Well, Jay was Frank's friend, and Peggy was Jay's friend, and Two-Finger was Peggy's friend."

Mack signaled to one of Hop Ling's boys to bring him another cup of coffee.

"And I," he added, "was Two-Finger's friend."

Bill and Carl looked at each other and nodded. Mack had made it quite clear. His reasoning was perfect and his conclusion inevitable. It also dawned upon them that they, too, had been Two-Finger's friends.

"And so," Mack summed up, "Jake Mudd has got to pay for Frank's ranch, Jay's funeral, Peggy's reputation and Two-Finger's new shirt—which he borrowed from me."

The fat piano-player was now reclining heavily against the bar. The in-

spired soloist had disappeared through a side door. The plump girl from the dance hall had ceased sobbing, being actively engaged in disposing of the pork spareribs.

"And another reason," Mack thought aloud, "for making Jake Mudd pay is that Jake says it can't be done."

"As I see it," commented Carl, "Jake is danged near right, which makes it a good reason, and I'm with you if I can stay sober long enough."

"Me, too," said Bill, "as soon as I've had another order of ham and eggs."

AT two o'clock in the morning, business was good in the Money Girl.

In the front end of the establishment was the gambling hall proper—several roulette wheels for the genteel visitors, a few crap games for those whose gambling was in the nature of a pagan rite, here and there a blackjack stand for those who demanded quick turnover, and over in a far corner a solitary faro bank layout for the old-timers.

Along one side of the hall was the hundred-foot bar, now the scene of much activity. In the rear was the dance floor, where a curious mixture of ranch hands, Mexican soldiers, bank clerks and barbers from across the line, and thirsty pilgrims from all the arid territory to the north, were dancing with little grace and not much merriment, but strenuously and perspiringly.

There was just one front entrance and one at the back, and both of them had been purposely made narrow to make hurried departure difficult.

At the end of the bar, close to the safe, Jake Mudd was carrying on a furtive conversation with a young Chinaman—the same who had been silently serving ham and eggs to a distinguished group of three, some two hours before.

The Oriental was talking in a low tone, and Jake was listening with ap-

parent carelessness, but his eyes were slicing here and there, paying particular attention to the front entrance.

Presently Jake nodded curtly, and the Chinaman made his way through the crowd to the back door that led, through a short alley, to the kitchen of Hop Ling's restaurant.

"Bugs," said Jake, quietly, but loud enough to be heard by a large young man with a strangely misplaced nose, who was standing several feet away.

Bugs responded by strolling toward Jake and leaning on the bar beside him.

"Bugs," said Jake, "you know Silent Mack? He's going to try to stick us up."

Bugs grunted. One gathered from his general demeanor that it was all the same to him.

"He'll probably try it most any time now," observed Jake. "That bird don't usually wait long when he makes up his mind."

"Safe locked?" asked Bugs, whose voice suggested that it had once been operated on with a large coarse file.

Jake broke out in a lopsided smile, and even Bugs could see that he was finding no little satisfaction in the situation.

"No. I'll leave it unlocked. I'll even leave it open a little."

"Put it out on the street, why doncher?" suggested Bugs, faintly sarcastic.

"You don't understand, Bugs," said Jake, shaking his head playfully. "I want to make it easy for our dear friend Mack. I want to encourage him to put his hand in that safe and grab a large mess of coin."

Jake chewed reflectively on the end of his cigar.

"That 'll give us a good chance to get him with the stuff. There ain't no chance of his getting out of here, anyway—not now that we know about it."

Bugs squinted humorously at Jake.

"Want me to stick around here?"

"No. He'd figure there's only one way out that he could make a get-away,

and that's out the front door. You stand alongside that roulette wheel right near the door, and—"

"I wan' whisky!" shrieked a hysterical voice a few feet along the bar. Jake and Bugs both turned to look.

It was Carl, and he was standing precariously on the rail, half-sprawled over the bar, the better to draw his five-feet-two up on a level with the bartender.

"I wan' whisky," he repeated, quite as emphatically as the first time, but not quite as clearly.

Jake Mudd's dispensers were usually remarkably liberal in interpreting a customer's fitness to prolong his entertainment, but Carl had progressed so far toward inebriety that he might now be designated plain drunk. Indeed, the man in the white apron had just experienced no little difficulty in persuading Carl to pay for his last drink—and that, in Jake's place, meant the end of everything.

In short, Carl was taking up room that could be more profitably assigned to patrons who were still able to reach into their pockets, so the bartender gave him a push, and he was heaved violently into the mob behind him.

Slowly, uncertainly, Carl picked himself up, and stood facing, in a very general way, the unfriendly bartender.

"Take glashesh off," he demanded with dignity, "and cummout here."

Everybody laughed. The bartender, who did not wear glasses, smiled genially, and proceeded to "draw one" for the flunky serving the faro table.

"If," went on Carl, deliberately, "you're 'fraid to cummout here, I will mo' shertainly cum back there."

This apparently, was no idle threat. He managed to wheel around and take several determined steps, somewhat in the manner of a toe-dancer not quite sure of herself, toward the end of the bar, with the obvious intention of getting on the other side of it and making a fearful example of the bartender.

At the point, however, where his progress necessitated his entering the opening leading around to the dispensing side of the bar, Carl found himself face to face with an obstacle, which was no less than Jake Mudd himself, not to mention Jake's companion, the hearty Bugs.

For a moment Carl looked them both over very carefully, and with much disdain.

"I," he announced, "am goin' kill bartender. Get out my way."

This sanguinary threat somehow failed to impress either Mr. Mudd or his handy man, and they gazed at him in unsmiling silence, which evidently made Carl deeply indignant. The little man drew himself up and squared his shoulders with solemn dignity. Deliberately he raised his right arm to strike the waiting Jake—and then collapsed in a heap on the floor.

Jake shrugged his shoulders. Bugs snickered.

"Better throw him over in the corner, Bugs," said Jake, indicating a small roped-off section which was thickly piled with the incapacitated. "He's plumb gone, and—wait a minute!"

Jake was glancing sidewise, but with keen interest, in the direction of the front door. Bugs's gaze followed his.

THE front door had been closed a few minutes before because of the sudden advent of one of those regularly irregular Imperial desert sandstorms. Jake had observed the door open quickly to admit Silent Mack, who closed the door behind him and stood for a moment making a casual survey of the interior of the Money Girl. Then Mack began to stroll carelessly through the crowd, stopping at one of the blackjack stands to watch the play.

"Beat it, quick!" said Jake.

Bugs stooped over and picked up Carl's inert form, dropped it a little to one side of the bar opening, and began

to edge his way quickly through the throng toward the roulette wheel nearest the door.

Jake maintained his position at the bar, apparently engaged in watching the progress of the various gambling devices. In reality his attention was fastened on the movements of the tall, quiet visitor at the blackjack stand.

Presently, smiling at his own sagacity, Jake deliberately walked away, leaving the safe obviously unprotected, and stood watching the dancers. Very, very casually he moved so that, by means of ocular gymnastics, he could see what was going on in the gambling hall.

In a few minutes he had the satisfaction of observing Mack unobtrusively desert the blackjack stand and saunter toward a crap table—some twenty feet nearer the safe. There he stood for several minutes, exhibiting interest in the fevered antics of the gamblers.

Then he moved again. Jake found it difficult to suppress an exclamation of triumph. Soon Mack was standing at the bar, directly in front of the safe. Indeed, he appeared to be staring at it—and all around it.

A minute later, however, brought surprise and annoyance to the waiting Jake. Mack's eyes suddenly left the safe as if he had no interest in it whatever, and he turned on his heel and walked slowly away in the direction of the front entrance. Jake's astonishment was so great that he turned completely around to watch the retreating form. Had Mack suspected something?

Mack was tall, but the crowd was thick and the gambling hall was at least a hundred feet deep. Jake lost sight of him as he neared the door. Apparently Mack was leaving without making the attempt of which Jake had been warned.

"Yaller!" he muttered. "Who'd have thought—"

A shout interrupted him. Something was happening at the roulette table where Bugs was stationed. Those in

that section of the hall began to mill around in a way that indicated that something was providing even more excitement than the games. For a moment there was an ominous silence at the front of the hall that was noticeable to Jake at the rear, in spite of the continued bustle elsewhere. Then the noise increased to a confused roar.

Jake plunged through the crowd.

MACK was standing at the end of the table, both hands extended slightly in the air. His gun was resting on the table. The estimable Bugs, grinning pleasantly, was covering him. Just as Jake arrived a Mexican policeman turned up to assist the course of justice.

"What happened?" demanded Jake.

"This bird," said Bugs, indicating Mack, "tried to stick up the dealer at the table here—guess he didn't spot me standing right here by the door."

Jake looked from the few stacks of silver piled in front of the dealer to Mack, standing motionless and expressionless. He was puzzled—and pleased.

"You sure took a big chance for that little pile of coin," Jake told Mack.

Mack said nothing.

"Guess you picked on this table account of its being so close to the door?"

Mack didn't even seem to hear.

"Well," concluded Jake cheerfully, "that's about all for you. Better take him along, boys, and—"

"Wait a minute!" boomed a lusty voice that drowned out every vestige of sound in the Money Girl, including the dance orchestra, which was just concluding a particularly exuberant number.

The mob turned to look. Bill had managed to hoist his broad anatomy onto a now deserted crap table.

"That guy," shouted Bill, "is entitled to a farewell song!"

For a moment there was silence. Then the crowd took up the cry.

"Give him a farewell song!" they insisted.

Jake wavered. He wanted no delay. He glanced at Mack, but that ill-fated adventurer did not move a muscle. If he had either thought or feeling, not even the twitch of an eyelash betrayed it.

"All right," grumbled Jake. "Name your choice."

For an instant Mack appeared to be engaged in reflection.

"'Home, Sweet Home,'" he decided, at last.

Bill turned his attention to the rear of the hall.

"Let 'er go!" he yelled, and he clambered off toward the orchestra.

The regular orchestra, however, appeared to have taken advantage of the lull in business, and were lined up at the bar.

Apparently, however, Bill had foreseen this possibility—it may be that he had even paid for the drinks. In any case, under his direction a very fat, porky-looking gentleman, the same who had performed next door in Hop Ling's, seated himself at the piano, and alongside of him stood the neurotic young man who had sung before.

THE pianist led off with a few preliminary flourishes. Then, with a strange earnestness, rendered more powerful by the recent indulgence in some powerful stimulant, the singer's clear tenor rang out softly but distinctly, and by the time he had reached the end of the second line the entire audience had been reduced to utter silence.

"Amid pleasures and palaces though
we may roam
Be it ever so humble there's no place
like home."

Immediately several hundred minds floated off on the wings of fancy, and each of them lingered dreamily over the place its owner thought of as home—when he thought of it at all. A potent word, "home," and even Bugs fidgeted uncomfortably.

At the end of the first verse some of

the dance hall girls, and one of the bartenders, unable to stand the strain on their emotions, slipped quietly out of the back door leading to Hop Ling's.

But by the end of the second verse no one was able to move at all. One girl, who was standing almost directly in front of Bugs, was weeping softly, but quite audibly—the same lady who had wept in Hop Ling's at midnight.

Mack had not changed his position, except that his arms were lowered a trifle, apparently unmoved and immovable. Bugs was slouched forward, and his mouth took on a peculiar slant.

"Home! Home! Sweet, sweet home!
There's no place like home!"

The song was ended, but no one moved except Jake, to whom it was only an irritating formality anyway.

"All right," said Jake briskly. Even the dealer at the roulette wheel looked at him angrily for so abruptly breaking into the prevailing mood and bringing them all back to the Money Girl. "Let's get—"

"Wait a minute!" roared Bill, for the second time. "Let's have that song again!"

A hundred voices seconded this unprecedented proposal. No one so revels in sentiment as the wayward wanderer; and out of several hundred in the hall, almost all were wayward wanderers, except, perhaps, the Mexican policeman, who didn't count anyway.

Jake swore, but it was impossible to disregard the unanimous and imperious demand of the mob. Anyway, Bill had already issued instructions to the musicians who, still further intoxicated by this tribute to their powers, were not slow to begin again.

Jake waited impatiently through the second rendition. No sound interrupted the singer, except the somewhat more pronounced expressions of mental anguish of the girl standing in front of Bugs.

It was the artist's supreme effort. Nothing could have been more emo-

tionally convincing. The fat man at the piano shivered a little. It would have been a good time to take up a collection—a collection for the musicians, for the drunks, for broken-down bartenders, for anything or anybody except perhaps Jake Mudd, who somehow had, in a few short minutes, come to typify the destroyer of sentiment and the enemy of humanity.

AT last the soloist reached the concluding line of the song for the second time, and it hung in the air like a vision of childhood:

"There's no place like home!"

There was a piercing shriek. It was the lady in front of Bugs. She had been, apparently, completely unnerved by this final reminder that home was sweet, and she slumped in a faint in Bugs's arms, almost knocking the revolver out of his hand.

"Let's have that song again!"

Bill's voice zoomed down the hall imperatively. Bill had shifted his position and was now close to the door, but he could have said it in an undertone and made himself understood. At once the pianist struck the first note, and they were off again.

Jake Mudd swore violently. To permit the second performance had been an unwilling concession on his part, and he had no intention of waiting any longer.

"Stop that!" he bellowed.

But the music continued, and the singer was well along in the first verse:

"A charm from the skies seems to
hallow us there."

Roughly Jake began to elbow through the crowd. He had jostled his way until he had almost reached the musicians when a clatter and a bang brought him to a halt. The front door had been opened and shut!

Mack's tall form had disappeared.

With Jake gone, the Mexican policeman lulled half asleep by the music,

and Bugs with his arms full of distressed femininity, it had been easy for him to slip away, although Jake thought quickly that it should be easy enough to catch him—if they could get within gunshot before he reached the line.

"Get him!" he called urgently.

"Get him!" repeated Bill, with beligerent enthusiasm.

There was a rush for the narrow doorway. Unfortunately, the door opened inward. Still more unfortunately, the first man there was Bill, who appeared to be more anxious than any one to lead the chase. With Bill's massive torso almost covering the door, and pressed against it by at least a hundred eager pursuers, it was quite impossible to open the door.

When finally the perspiring Jake, the startled policeman and the disgusted Bugs managed to relieve the pressure enough to clear the entrance and get out into the blinding sandstorm that was still raging, Jake realized that Mack was out of reach.

"He's way over on the other side by now," observed Jake bitterly, "and on his way north. Them guys over there don't like me none too well, anyway."

The pursuit was left in charge of the Mexican policeman, and Jake and Bugs walked gloomily back to the bar.

"Well, anyway," said Bugs, with an effort to be cheerful, "he didn't get nothing out of it."

This remark served to remind Jake of something. He glanced at the safe. Somehow it looked different. He had left the safe door open a little, and it was still open, but—or so it seemed to Jake—at a slightly different angle.

Anxiously he opened it up and peered inside. Then he straightened up and glared at Bugs. One word was enough to tell the story.

"Cleaned!"

"What?"

"Are you deaf? I said 'cleaned'!"

Everything but the nickels and dimes! You—"

"Never mind that," said Bugs aggressively. "It ain't my fault, and—say, what happened to that little runt that I chucked down in this corner?"

"You mean," interrupted one of the bartenders, who had been listening in, "that squirt that I pushed off the bar?"

"Yes."

"Why, I went around to Hop Ling's for a cup o' cawfee when that music started, and just before I come back I seen the little rat come in by the back way, and he goes right by me through the restaurant and marches out to the street."

"Him! Why, he was too drunk to crawl," protested Jake.

"Drunk, hell!" said the bartender. "He was as sober as a parson's grandmother!"

THREE gentlemen occupied a booth in a Los Angeles restaurant the next day. One of them was very large and hearty, another very small and squeaky, and the third was very lean and humorless.

On the table were three piles of currency, of varying sizes, and one five-dollar bill that occupied a position of solitude.

"That," said Mack, indicating the largest pile, "will buy Frank a nice ranch—north of the line. This little bundle will fix Peggy up with a cute little tea shop on Spring Street. The other little package will pay Carl back for what he spent on Jay's funeral. And the five-dollar bill will buy me a new shirt—Two-Finger hadn't oughter 've borried my shirt anyway, if he was going to get it all mussed up."

"And I," said Bill, banging on the table with his knife, his voice completely subduing the noise of a street car out on Fifth Street, "will have another order of ham and eggs."

THE END



Thirty Years Late

Young Steve Tanner went off to the Spanish-American War on a bicycle built for two—and came back to a world gone lopsy-turvy

By GARRET SMITH

Author of "You've Killed Privacy," "The Joke at 'Upset J,'" etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD DOANE HOUSE.

STEVEN TANNER held his breath as he cautiously lifted his heavy tandem bicycle over the roadside ditch in the solid darkness and leaned it against the bank. Behind the cedar hedge he crouched motionless. For several minutes he listened to the shivering whisper of the night breeze in the black pines around the sleeping farmhouse.

Steve shivered a little himself. Even so hardy a dare-devil as Steve Tanner could not approach the old Doane house at midnight overconfidently. There was too good a chance of meeting a flock of buckshot in full flight. Had he known, however, the tragic train of circumstances this raid of his was setting in motion, he would have turned and fled as if his life depended on it. But he was no prophet. At length, hearing no sound but the moaning of the pines and the remote sleigh-bell chorus of the peepers in the swamp lot, he struck a sulphur match and, cupping it in his palms, he crept along the tall cedar barrier till he found a narrow gap through which he wriggled.

Inside the hedge the marauder stood

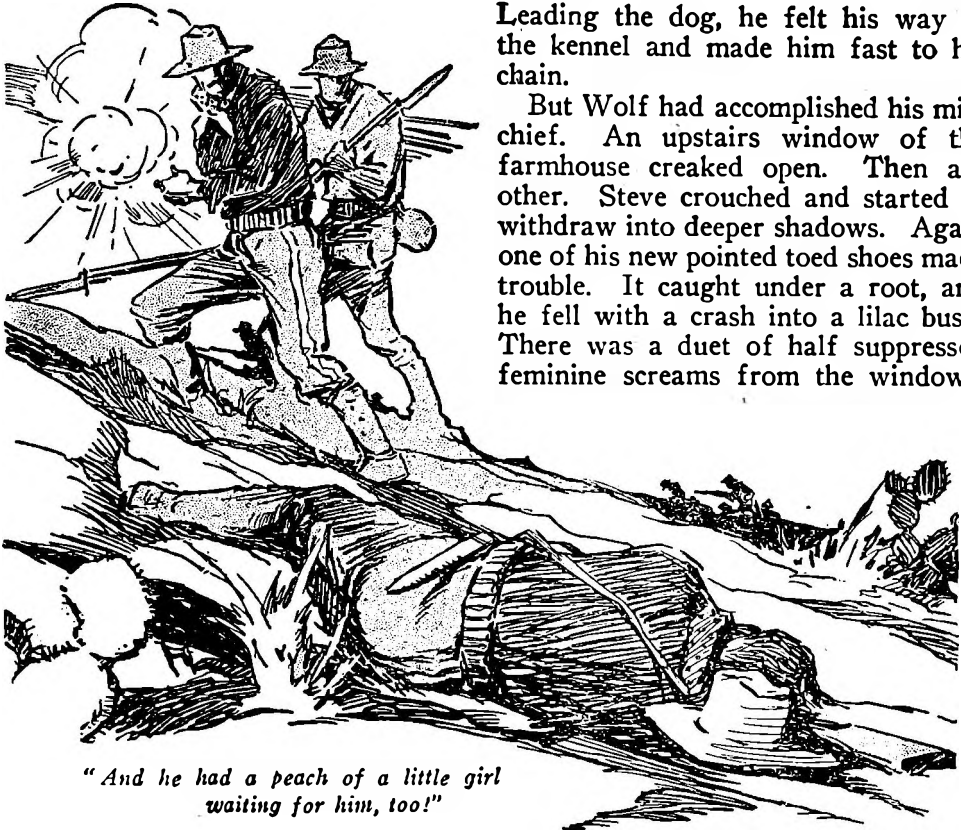
upright and listened again, peering toward the rambling house that bulked dimly against the skyline. Then, inch by inch, he tiptoed back toward the open shed beside the carriage house. There he knew he would find a necessary ladder.

But to reach it he must pass the kennel of the able and ready Wolf, a big shepherd dog whose loud bark in no way overadvertised the quality of his bite.

And in the loft of the carriage barn, sleeping lightly beside a ready shotgun, lay Pete Whalen, the gorilla-like hired man and guardian of the two redoubtable Doane sisters.

There were only the faint shadows of roofs and tree tops to guide him. Underneath was black nothingness. He bumped his forehead against a corner of the windmill frame. A boulder caught the toothpick toe of one of his shoes and nearly sent him sprawling. The handle of a grindstone reached out and barked his shins. Still no alarm sounded.

Then, just as he was within a few feet of his first objective, he stepped on a fallen dead branch of the big oak. It snapped with a report that brought Wolf out of his kennel at a flying leap



"And he had a peach of a little girl waiting for him, too!"

with a protest that reëchoed from the wood lot a half mile away.

Steve could see nothing of the brute, but a murderous growl was coming swiftly and unerringly toward him through the darkness.

Nevertheless Steve stood his ground. He ripped the paper off a package he was carrying under his arm and held it in front of him.

"Be still, Wolf!" he whispered hoarsely.

At the same time the dog caught the odor of fresh meat, mingled with the scent of a friend. For Steve had been cultivating Wolf's acquaintance surreptitiously at the line fence separating the Doane and Tanner farms. Wolf's snarl turned to a bark of joy and his jaws closed on the beef bone.

"Still, sir," Steve whispered again, patting the animal's flank and slipping his other hand through his collar.

Leading the dog, he felt his way to the kennel and made him fast to his chain.

But Wolf had accomplished his mischief. An upstairs window of the farmhouse creaked open. Then another. Steve crouched and started to withdraw into deeper shadows. Again one of his new pointed toed shoes made trouble. It caught under a root, and he fell with a crash into a lilac bush. There was a duet of half suppressed feminine screams from the windows.

"Peter! Oh, Peter!" called a high-pitched voice.

That would be Miss Mary Doane.

"Percival! Is that you?" followed the throaty contralto of Miss Sarah Doane.

Simultaneously two other windows opened, one in the lower floor of the house, the other in the loft of the carriage barn.

"Comin', Miss Mary!" boomed Pete's bass. "Don't you be scared, ma'am. Prob'ly that fool dog worry-in' a skunk agin. Don't smell nothin' at that. I'll take a look in a jiffy."

"What's the trouble, Cousin Sarah?" drawled a drowsy tenor, which, by process of elimination, Steve judged to be young Mr. Percival Doane, though he had never met the gentleman. He had understood, however, that this distant-cousin of the spinsters, from Buffalo, had lately

come for an extended visit. Steve had good reason for being prejudiced against Percival.

THE door of the carriage barn opened and heavy steps approached across the yard. Lighter treads were heard coming from the house. Steve made a strategic detour and reached the carriage barn just as the two inspectors met near the kennel. He heard a low conversation, mingled with mumbling growls of protest from Wolf. A sulphur match glowed for an instant.

"It's all right, ma'am," Pete announced. "Wolf's caught something an's eatin' it. 'Taint a skunk, though."

"You take a good look around just the same," commanded Miss Mary.

"That's right," chimed in Miss Sarah. "I was sure I heard somebody. There's a tramp or something around."

Percival gave a guarded chuckle.

"All right, Pete. We'll take a look. If we find a tramp, it'll be twenty-three for his. Don't point that confounded shotgun my way, though."

Steve chuckled in his turn as he heard them start toward the front yard. Then, with sudden inspiration, he chuckled again and slipped into the carriage barn. Time was when Steve had been a welcome visitor at the Doane place. He was quite at home in the carriage barn. Swinging the door to, he struck a match, displaying the complete fleet of Doane road vehicles, the canopy-top surrey, the single-seated top buggy, and a Democrat wagon.

The intruder held up the match long enough to locate the tool box against the right-hand wall. Then he worked quickly in the dark, listening for the return of Pete Whalen. A few minutes later he slipped out of the building, holding in his hands some greasy hub nuts, one from each of the three vehicles. These he dropped among the bushes at the edge of the garden.

"Now let 'em try to chase the fleein' culprits," he chuckled, and crouched behind the bushes just as he heard the man hunters approaching again, having completed the circuit.

"Coast seems to be clear, cousins," Percival called, going toward the house. A low toned argument followed between him and the ladies at the windows. Pete returned toward his quarters.

Satisfied that the search was over, Steve slipped into the tool shed and presently found the ladder among the collection of reapers, mowing machines, plows, and other farm implements. Making no sound, he cautiously extricated the ladder and carried it around to the far side of the house. There was a dim glow in a little window under the eaves over his head. Steve set the ladder lightly against its sill and clambered up. He gave three hardly audible taps on the pane.

Instantly the light went out. He heard the shade rise cautiously, then the window. Two soft, tiny hands met his big horny ones across the sill.

"Rosemarie, darling!" he whispered.

"Oh, Steve, dear! Why did you?" came an answering whisper.

"They might find you any minute! You must go quick! That terrible Pete would shoot you quick's he'd wink!"

She tried to draw her hands from his—to send him away.

"Listen, Rosemarie," he persisted. "We haven't a second to lose. I had to see you to-night. It may be my last chance. Now don't be scared, honey, and don't feel bad, but—I've got to tell you something. I—the United States declared war to-day."

"Oh!"

It was a cry of pure anguish. She was suddenly clinging to him desperately as if she would never let him go.

"Oh!" she repeated. Then, "Steve, you're not—"

"Yes, Rosemarie, I'm going. Of course I am. You wouldn't have any

use for me if I didn't. I got the news down at the store to-night. Several of the fellows are goin'. I haven't told the folks, won't till I'm safe enlisted. Dad won't try to stop me then. I'm goin' in to Buffalo in the morning and sign up."

For a long minute she wept on his shoulder before she could speak.

"You're right, Steve," she choked finally. "Of course you must go. My aunts will hate you worse than ever, though. They don't believe in the war."

"They wouldn't," Steve commented grimly. "And they're goin' to have an even worse reason for hatin' me. Rosemarie, this is the big show-down. Rosemarie, you're goin' to run away with me and marry me to-night before I go."

"Steve!"

"Yes, you are. Don't argue. It may be now or never. You can see me off to camp to-morrow as my wife or else maybe never see me again. If I know I've got you sure, I can go away happy. Hurry. Don't stop for extra clothes."

For several minutes he argued with her before she finally yielded. Then her surrender was complete.

"Steve, I'll do it. Those two old fogies have been smothering the life out of me ever since father and mother died. Why should I mind them? Wait just a minute."

She turned away and he heard for a moment the frantic swish of garments in the dark room. Then she was back at the window thrusting a bundle in his hands.

"All right," she whispered tremulously.

Steve backed down the ladder a few rounds. Peering up he saw against the sky-line the silhouette of a dainty foot followed by a few inches of gracefully slender calf. He looked down hastily, a modest flush burning his cheeks. Since Rosemarie grew into long skirts, he had almost forgotten that she possessed such members.

They were halfway down the ladder when they heard the ominous creak of a door over their heads. The blank open window suddenly went light.

"Rosemarie!" chanted a horrified soprano and contralto duet.

The night-capped heads of two austere middle-aged ladies peered over the sill; a kerosene lamp in the hand of one shed a ray of light on the startled pair clinging to the ladder.

"Rosemarie, you come back this instant!" commanded Aunt Mary.

"Immediately! This is disgraceful!" supplemented Aunt Sarah.

"All right! I got 'em!" bawled Pete Whalen, as two pairs of running feet rounded the corner of the house.

"Well! Well! Little Romeo and Juliet!" chortled Percival. "Don't shoot, Pete. You might hit the lady."

"Come down there, young feller, me boy! I got a bead on ye!" Pete commanded.

CHAPTER II.

ON A BICYCLE BUILT FOR TWO.

NOT till many years afterward did Steven Tanner realize how momentous was to be the effect on all his future life of his manner of obeying Pete Whalen's command. Fate, the all-seeing, held her breath in suspense while he hesitated. Nevertheless the grotesque vision that flashed upon his startled gaze was to haunt him many times through the years.

Below him his eye caught the glimmer of the lamp light on the gun barrel, the ugly, whiskered visage of Pete, and in the shadowy background the slender figure of the grinning Percival, dapper even in his impromptu negligee. Above him like two night-capped gargoyles the outraged faces of the Doane sisters. In between, the fright-paralyzed Rosemarie, clinging to the ladder with one hand, with the other clutching her skirts about her ankles.

Should he descend in meek surren-

der or to hopeless combat? Either course meant undoubtedly the end of his dual dream of becoming a soldier and the husband of Rosemarie. Steve was a pretty tough customer in a fight, but he was no match for Peter Whalen, even had Pete been unarmed.

Steve's hesitation was only instantaneous. He decided to obey Pete's summons to come down. But he obeyed it in a manner not calculated on by Pete. He obeyed it suddenly. He came down all at once by the simple process of letting go of the ladder.

His one hundred and eighty solid pounds hit Pete squarely and the belligerent giant went down and out with a grunt. The shotgun went off in the air, barely missing the girl on the ladder. Aunt Mary screamed and dropped the lamp. Mercifully it went out in flight, merely breaking beside Steve and spraying him and his foe with its rank oil.

Steve sprang to his feet, leaving Pete out of commission for the time being. The two aunts were shrieking orders at Rosemarie, Pete, and Percival in turn out of the upper darkness. But before Steve could get in a word he was suddenly set upon by a wild fury who seemed capable of hitting with unerring accuracy and amazing force without the aid of eyesight.

From that moment on Steve Tanner experienced a new respect for the "city dude." For his assailant was none other than the elegant Percival. That young man went at the business in hand with the cool precision of the gymnasium-trained boxer and wrestler.

For long minutes, Steve made no headway with him. The fellow's blows seemed to come from every direction at once. Again and again Steve found himself in a clinch and on the under side of a fall. But in the end his farm-hardened strength prevailed. In one clinch too many for Percival, Steve caught him by the collar and wrenched him loose, planting a smashing uppercut on his chin with his free fist. The

Doane defender went limp and was tossed into the discard with the still breathless Pete.

"Rosemarie, where are you?" Steve called above the tumult of the aunts.

"Here," replied a faint voice just over his head. "I'm afraid I'm going to fall."

Which Rosemarie promptly did. Steve spread his arms just in time to catch the limp little figure. Without stopping for further battle or parley, he gathered her to him tightly like a sleeping baby, found her precious bundle where it had fallen, and strode off around the corner of the house, heading toward the spot where he had left his wheel.

He had nearly reached the road before he felt Rosemarie stir in his arms. Then she suddenly stiffened with a little cry and struggled to release herself. Gently he placed a warning palm over her lips and lowered her to the bank where his wheel lay.

"All right, honey," he whispered. "Steve's got you. Feel better?"

"Oh — why — why — I must have fainted. Where are we?"

"We're on our way to the minister. We'll have to move quick's we can, too," he added as the renewed clamor of the aunts reached their ears, mingled with masculine mumblings that indicated that the defeated warriors were returning to their senses.

"Don't worry, though. We got the drop on 'em. I took the nuts off the buggy-hubs and I've got a tandem here. Traded my old bike with Tim Durkee to-night, only give him twenty dollars to boot. Got one of those new acetylene lights on it, too. Think you feel fit to ride if I do most of the pedallin'?"

"I guess so. Yes. I can't go back. I'm all right now. What a baby I was!"

"Oh, you'll look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two," Steve hummed, helping her into the saddle and hooking her bundle to one of the handle-bars. Then he boldly lighted his

lamp, mounted his own seat and pushed off.

"But, Steve," the girl whispered after a moment. "You didn't know Percy brought a saddle-horse with him and he's an awful good rider."

"Darn!" Steve mumbled. "Oh, well, I've licked Percy once to-night and maybe I can do it again. He'll have to ride some to catch us once we reach the cinder-path. But say, honey, I take back a lot of things I said about Percy. He's a reg'lar fellow at that. Jiminy Crickets! How he can fight! Maybe I could get to like him if he didn't like you so much."

THE young woman made no reply to that. The business of steering the wheel through the ruts and sand was for some time too engrossing for further conversation. Again and again the front wheel slewed perilously.

Rosemarie was a novice on a wheel. Her aunts held wheel-riding unlady-like, in keeping with all other "new-fangled notions;" it was almost as bad, indeed, as those "terrible round dances," the two-step and waltz, then so popular among "the wild young people of this godless age."

Their ward's practice in all such matters was limited to surreptitious experiments away from home.

Rosemarie's tendency to clutch the handle-bars rigidly at critical moments was particularly disconcerting to her companion. One of those crises occurred, unfortunately, at a sharp bend in the road beside a deep ditch. The wheel gave a lurch, hung for a moment on the verge, then toppled over.

Steve scrambled up uninjured, then bent anxiously over the girl. She was weeping copiously.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What shall I do!" she sobbed.

"What is it, darling? Are you hurt much?" he asked, breathless with dread.

"No, I'm not injured, but I caught my toe in my skirt and pretty near

ripped the darn thing off! No wonder some girls wear bloomers to ride!"

When the inhibited Rosemarie said "darn" and spoke tolerantly of the all but unmentionable "bloomers," she betrayed the depths to which this sudden revolt against her aunts had shaken her being.

Steve pulled the wheel up to the road again and turned his back while Rosemarie stood in the light of the acetylene lamp and did first-aid work with pins. Then, just as they were about to push on again, there came to their ears down the night breeze the distant clatter of hoofs.

"What did I tell you!" the girl wailed. "There comes Percy on his pony!"

Steve was a little irritated by the delay.

"All right!" he snapped. "Let him come. It'll be twenty-three for him for keeps this time. After I get through with him there'll be nothing for him to do but go way back and sit down."

"But it isn't just Percy," Rosemarie reminded him. "He'll set the constable on us and get out a posse, or whatever you call it, in the village. Aunt Sarah reminded me when I was on the ladder that I'm not quite eighteen yet and that you could be arrested for abduction or something. Steve, they'll put you in prison."

"Aw, shucks! They ain't caught us yet! Ready! All right. Let her go, Gallagher!"

They were off again, wabbling down the sandy road, the hoof-beats gaining steadily behind them. When they reached the corner where the road joined the main highway and cinder-path leading into the little hamlet of Burdenville, Steve stopped and put out his headlight.

"He might be near enough to see us take the turn," he explained. "If we do it in the dark he'll have to stop and try to figger out from our tracks whether we turn toward Burdenville or go the other way to Horton."

"I'd rather go to Horton where we're not so sure to be known," she suggested.

"We better take the nearest place," Steve persisted, trundling the machine along in the grass till they were on the firm cinder-path. They then rode cautiously in the dark till a bend around a wood-land hid them from the corner and it was safe to light the lamp again. After that they made top speed, the cinders crackling merrily under their tires. The hoof-beats had faded out.

BUT within half a mile of their goal, the wheel tricked them again. There was a sickening pop and the rear tire went flat.

"Gosh Almighty! Now what 'll we do!" Steve exclaimed. "If we try walkin' and he guesses the right turn he'll catch us in no time. It ain't safe to ride it flat. Guess we better pull back into the woods here and fix her."

Just as the repair work was nearly finished, they heard the hoof-beats again and the invisible rider swept past toward Burdenville.

"That settles it," Steve decided. "We'll go to Horton. It's only five miles. We can make it in less'n half an hour, be married and away again before he discovers his mistake and gets there."

"But you forget, Steve, that they got a telephone in the store at the village now. He could telephone over to Horton. There must be several telephones in a town that size."

"Telephone, your grandmother! It's out of order most of the time. Besides, it takes forever, they say, gettin' anybody at night. Besides who'd they get? The stores over there's got telephones, and the railroad station, and there's maybe a scattering half dozen besides in rich men's houses. But who's going to get up and chase after a constable even if they wake up anybody?"

They made good time on the back track to Horton and without further mishap stopped at length before the

little parsonage of the Episcopal church, the only ministerial residence they could locate positively at that hour in the strange town.

Rosemarie slipped down from the saddle a little limply. Her pretty, piquant face showed pale under the flickering gaslight of the street lamp. Steve himself took an undue time fidgeting nervously with the bicycle-lock.

"Ain't scared, are you, honey?" he asked, turning toward her at last.

"Kind of," she admitted.

"I almost wish myself you hadn't made me promise not to smoke any more," he sighed. "Two, three puffs at a cigarette right now would help some!"

"Oh, Steve!" she admonished. "Please don't think of such things. And one of those nasty little cigarettes, too! Remember you're a man now. I wouldn't feel quite so bad about pipes and cigars, things grown men smoke."

"Oh, darnation! Another lecture!" he thought to himself. "All right. I promised and I won't," he added aloud.

"You'll be good, won't you, Steve? I couldn't stand it if you took to smoking and playing pool and cards and all that again after we're married. I'm not narrow like Aunt Sarah and Aunt Mary, you know. I love to dance and go to the theater and all that, and I don't think it's wrong either, when we do them together. We can have a good time without doing any of those low things. Do you promise?"

"Of course I do. Now, let's go in and see if we can wake up the dominie," Steve hurried on, leading her toward the house. "And, by the way, you better give your age as eighteen, so there'll be no trouble about it. You are practically eighteen, you know."

Rosemarie was silent for a moment, then reluctantly agreed.

After repeated rings a sleepy and none too amiable old clergyman responded. He melted at once, however, when he learned that here was a young

man on the way to the army and wanting to be married before he went. Rosemarie with her precious bundle disappeared upstairs with the parson's wife, to "tidy up a little," and the parson departed on a similar errand.

Steve had little tidying to do. He straightened out his new bat-wing tie, dusted off his clothes with his fingers and wiped his shoes on the tops of his socks. Then he sat waiting and chafing at the delay. Every moment he expected to hear sounds of the pursuit without.

But at length the other members of the wedding company returned. Steve gasped in surprise at the transformed Rosemarie who floated shyly into the room in the wake of his hostess. He had a sudden awesome respect for the bundle he had been carrying.

She was a vision in dainty pink from the high collar tight under her chin and the bow in her auburn pompadour to the bottom of her belled skirt from under which peeped her patent-leather toes. Steve opined this was the new pink challie she had described so enthusiastically the last time they had enjoyed a stolen meeting.

As he took his place beside her he wondered how those huge puffed sleeves had retained their crispness in the bundle. Anyhow, he mentally forgave her for the delay.

The rector began reading the service. Steve had just remembered the ring he had bought from a mail-order house the week before and was fumbling for it in his pocket when they heard a heavy step on the porch. A violent ring at the doorbell interrupted proceedings.

Rosemarie's face lost its pink flush and a look of terror came into her eyes. Steve's own countenance paled a little. The rector paused in the service and regarded them critically.

"You were expecting some one?" he asked.

"Oh no—that is—not exactly," Steve stammered.

"I think I'd better see who it is before we go on with the ceremony," the clergyman decided and strode to the door.

"Excuse me, reverend," they heard in a deep masculine voice out of the dark of the porch. "I'm Constable Price. I got telephone orders from Burdenville to arrest a couple that's elopin'. The man's charged with burglary and abduction. I figgered from your light and the bike out front they might be in here."

CHAPTER III.

PARTED.

FOR the second time during this fevered evening Steven Tanner was called upon to make a swift and far-reaching decision. Had he known how long it would be before he saw Rosemarie or talked to her again, and under what circumstances, he would not have parted from her so peacefully in tow of Constable Price. As it was, her last words began to rankle in his mind the moment he had departed.

"Don't make a fuss, Steve," she had warned him. "It's no use. We ought not to have done it anyhow. And if we promise not to try it again they won't be hard on you I'm sure. We'll just have to wait, Steve, dear. Don't worry about me. Percival will see that I get home all right."

She seemed, as Steve thought of it afterward, altogether too anxious to placate Percival Doane, who had thundered in on his pony a few minutes after the arrest. Percy, to be sure, had acted decently enough. He did not seem to take very seriously the technical charges he made in behalf of Rosemarie's guardians.

Nor did Steve at the moment. His father was an influential farmer in the county. He'd see that his son received bail promptly, and would doubtless get the charges dismissed without much contest, now that the aunts had their

seemingly repentant ward back, still unwed.

Steve felt disappointed in Rosemarie, now that it was over. He had hardly expected her to yield so easily. However, he could only make trouble for her and accomplish nothing by resisting arrest or by hanging around her afterward. There was no immediate hope of spiriting her away again. The two gargoyles would keep her an even more closely guarded prisoner.

So he took what comfort he could from her implied promise in her "We'll just have to wait," and departed trundling his wheel beside the constable toward the village jail. Of course, he assured himself, she felt worse than she pretended over the separation. Anyhow, she'd have to appear in court when his case came up, so he'd at least see her again before he left.

But he might not be going to the war now, came another gloomy second thought. Steve himself was not quite twenty-one yet. He knew his father was opposed to his enlisting and would be pretty likely to prevent it now.

"The dominie tells me you was on your way to enlist," Constable Price broke in on his thoughts. "Is that straight goods?"

"That's right," Steve admitted. "I suppose my dad will break that up, too."

"I'm goin' to enlist myself," Price confided. "Heard about war bein' declared when I came on duty to-night. Decided to resign this job first thing in the mornin'. It's a darn shame for you to be beat out of it. Worse'n losin' the girl, to my way of thinkin'. The girl'll keep. The war won't."

They reached the little combination jail and court building at this moment.

"Just lean your wheel against the hitchin' post there," the officer told Steve. "I'll take care of it."

He ushered him into the office where he presided at night when not out on rounds. Constable Price constituted one-half of the Horton police force.

"Have a chair," he invited casually and then sat down at his desk and became absorbed in a literary effort of some sort. Presently he passed the result over to Steve.

"Might like to read that," he commented. "It's a letter to my side-partner, the day man."

DEAR BILL:

I'm quitting the job and am off for the war. This will do for my resignation to the village board, as I haven't time to write another letter. I would wait till you came on, but I've got a chance to ride into Buffalo with a pal and time's precious. It's 'most mornin' anyhow, and everything's quiet. Good-by till Cuba's free.

Yours,

JIM.

P. S. I made an arrest to-night, young fellow named Tanner, charged with abduction, burglary and what not. But he got away from me on the way to jail. Present my apologies to the complainants and the judge.

J.

Steve read the letter and looked up with a grin. Price grinned back.

"I take it you're fleein' to Buffalo, young fellow," said the constable. "If you don't mind I'll pursue you on the hind seat of that tandem."

"That suits me first rate," Steve agreed. "Let's start."

TO Steve that night ride opened up a new world. He had come to manhood during the dawn of the Machine Age which in a generation was to transform American life. But having been born and reared in the back country, the first wonders of the new era had as yet touched him but little.

So far, the bicycle was the only one of the modern miracles with which he was familiar. And even that had not added to his range of vision as it had to the town boy. To the boy on the farm, Sunday was the only day of comparative leisure during the bicycle season, and he was too tired from his week's work to indulge in the popular

"century runs," even though Sunday pleasure riding was tolerated, as it was not in Steve's pious home.

So up to the time the weary pair peddled the tandem into Buffalo that memorable day, Steve had never before in his life been in a town larger than Horton, a village of less than ten thousand population. Just inside the suburbs he saw his first trolley car, that wonderful self-propelling vehicle invented some ten years before and recently put into operation in many of the larger cities. It was his first sight of anything, other than a steam engine, that seemed to be moving itself.

The streets, crowded with endless streams of horses and carriages, wagons, trucks, bicycles and dodging pedestrians, and overhead the towering buildings six and eight stories high, bewildered and confused him. In the course of enlisting he had his breath taken away by his first elevator ride.

Thousands of country boys hurrying to Uncle Sam's colors were having the same experience these fevered days, but to Steve it seemed that he was the only greenhorn in all the population.

Bands everywhere! Excited crowds cheering the colors, shouting, "To Hell with Spain! Remember the Maine!" Endless singing of "There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight."

In the excitement of it all his heartache over his separation from Rosemarie subsided a little. But when he was once safely enlisted and had time for reflection, an overwhelming doubt and loneliness gripped him again.

He decided audaciously to telephone to his father. It was his duty to let him know what had become of him, anyhow, and, through his father, he might get word to Rosemarie. There was no use in writing to her. Her aunts would intercept the letter.

It was Steve's first experience with a telephone, to say nothing of a long-distance call over a hundred miles of country. Although this instrument had

been invented about the time he was born and was now a familiar device in limited numbers in cities and villages, it was still a novelty to country dwellers. Not till two years before had a line gone through the principal towns in Steve's country. A telephone on a farm was unheard of.

The more sophisticated Jim Price coached him in the use of the strange affair and at last he got the toll operator and made his wants known.

"Don't yell so," warned Price at his elbow. "You sound like you had to make your own identical voice carry the hull darn distance!"

But it was a three hour wait while he got connection with the Burdenville store, and a clerk drove out to the Tanner farm to call Steve's father to the phone. At length he heard a voice faintly in the midst of a tumult like a visitation of seventeen year locusts. An operator assured him it was his father speaking.

Then Steve was stricken with a strange shyness. Moreover, he could make nothing out of what his father had to say, couldn't even recognize his voice. But at last he managed to shout: "Good-by, dad. I've enlisted in the regulars. Can't hear you. I'll write soon. Tell Rosemarie to write me, care of the army." Getting no intelligible reply after that he hung up in despair.

SUDDENLY he was definitely homesick. Why had he rushed away like that without at least seeing Rosemarie again?

But the renewed excitement of swiftly moving events quickly bore him above his nostalgia. There was entraining for camp and his first ride on a trunk line railroad through many big towns and beside strange rivers.

Once the troop train lay on a siding while the famous new Empire State Express flashed by at the hitherto unheard of speed of sixty miles an hour.

"Gosh!" Steve exclaimed. "She's

goin' fer fair! Just like Mark Twain's rabbit—a whiz and a vanish!"

"Wait till you see a Spanish shell comin', boy!" shouted somebody. "You'll guess that train's slow."

"Yes, I suppose that does go to beat the cars," Steve agreed.

He was beginning to get acquainted, and was already well liked by the rest of the company.

But if Buffalo had awed him, New York City overwhelmed him. Perhaps there were only a little over three million people there, as Steve was told, but it seemed to him as if all the nation's sixty millions had been gathered in one spot. New York had just taken in its surrounding cities the year before to become Greater New York, the second largest city in the world.

Here were buildings ten and twelve stories high, two or three of them even higher, and the famous elevated railroads with their funny little engines puffing along on a level with second and third story windows, and the sky above some of the streets still cloudy with telephone wires.

But with training camp and the endless monotony of drill, bad food, sickness all around him, Steve's homesickness returned in full force. His tough young body kept well, but as the days passed with no word either from Rosemarie or his father, life began to be almost unbearable.

At length came a letter from his father, forwarded from point to point and delayed long in reaching him. With trembling fingers he opened it and hastily read through the paternal censure and grudging forgiveness for his joining the colors without consent.

Under it all, however, Steve detected a hint of the elder Tanner's pride in his son's action. But the vital part of the letter, for the young soldier, came at the end:

You needn't worry your head any about those old maid Doanes making any more trouble for you. They was glad enough to drop the charges the

next morning when they found you had skipped out. Everybody's understood they was set on the girl marrying that young city dude cousin of theirs, but they seemed considerable upset when she up and eloped with him the next week after you went away.

Steve's breath suddenly left him at this point. For a moment the letters blurred and became unreadable. Then he read the last sentence over again, unable to believe he had got its meaning right. But there it stood in cold ink. Rosemarie had turned him down after all! He read on:

They haven't been heard of since, far's anybody round here knows. So it's good riddance to bad rubbish, son, as far's you're concerned. She couldn't have cared much for you after all. I never did set much store on your marrying into that snippy Doane tribe. You're too young to be marrying yet anyhow. There's as good fish in the sea as ever was caught, anyhow.

Steve read no further. The letter fell from his shaking hand.

"Have a cigarette," suggested Price, who had come up unnoticed and had seen at a glance that his pal was receiving bad news. He held out a pack of the forbidden nerve-soothers. "Better break over and use the little ol' coffin-nails while you're in the army. Good for the nerves."

"Darned if I don't!" Steve exclaimed and took one. "Let's get in a little poker before taps."

And he picked up his father's letter, tore it into bits and scattered it from him.

AFTER that Steve Tanner was the life of his company and the terror of his officers. All the wild impulses of his nature, which had made him so undesirable to the conservative Doane sisters and had even troubled their more progressive ward, the infatuated Rosemarie, were allowed full swing again. He was released from his promises to the perfidious Rosemarie and trying his best to forget her.

But forget her he couldn't. She was with him during his days of grueling drill and brief, hectic play during rest periods. She haunted his dreams when he dropped into his blanket dog-tired at night. She danced before his vision over the widening strip of water as he stood at the rail of the troopship when General Shafter's little army sailed for Cuba and the siege of Santiago.

And then he saw her!

Incuriously his eyes fell on a couple on the pier waving frantically at the receding ship—a little figure of a girl in the white uniform of a nurse, a tall young officer in khaki beside her. Then he recognized them—Rosemarie and Percy! They were waving at him!

A moment his heart stopped beating, pounded wildly for another moment, then again went cold and leaden. Why had they come there to mock him? He could not turn his eyes away, but he kept his arms tense at his side, making no reply to their greeting.

He watched them until they became a faint blur in the distance. Then he heard a sailor paging him. He acknowledged his name and a letter was thrust into his hand.

"Lady on the pier gave it to me to hand you just as the gangplank came up," the messenger explained.

Again Steve's heart did unruly things as he recognized Rosemarie's writing, in a hasty scrawl:

DEAR STEVE:

We got here just too late to find you, but Percy learned which ship your company is on and I hope this little note will reach you so you won't go on thinking dreadful things about me as you must have if you've heard from home. For I'm sure you never got my other letter or I'd have got an answer before this.

I suppose I'm a wicked girl, but I ran away from the aunts after all, and deceived them dreadfully in doing it, too. But I did it for you, dear boy, and I hope to be with you soon. Percy was awfully sweet about it all when he found I really loved you and would

never be anything but a distant cousin to him.

And he was very indignant when the aunts shut me up in my room after you and I tried to run away. You know my aunts were bound I'd marry him, both because he has money and because they think he's an old-fashioned gentleman, not wild and modern like you and me. Ha! Ha! So he slipped a note under my door, suggesting that if I'd pretend to them that I'd given in to marrying him he'd help me get away to you.

Well, it worked. We went out for a drive and never came back, just let everybody think we'd eloped. Percy got a commission as a lieutenant in the army and got me into the Red Cross as a nurse. We just reached Tampa and I'm to go to Cuba with the next hospital ship. So the minute you whip the Spaniards, get a furlough and we'll be married by an army chaplain. I'll be waiting for you, lover mine.

Cousin Percy really is a dear, but I find he's really not as pious as he seemed, now that he's away from the aunts. I've made him promise not to smoke, though.

Good-by, dearest. I shall pray every minute that you'll be kept safe and be waiting for your sweetheart when I get there.

There was a little more that was intimately personal. Steve read it all twice, then tucked it away over his heart. It was there when they landed under fire at the squalid little coast hamlet of Siboney, near Santiago, and in that first short, sharp fight in the jungle. Somehow Steve felt it was a protection against the bullets that sang over his head from the unseen foe in the thicket.

Once Steve caught himself wondering if, in case he was hit, he would find Rosemarie at the temporary hospital ready to nurse him. But he wouldn't be hit. He mustn't be, with Rosemarie waiting for him and her letter over his heart.

But Rosemarie's letter failed to ward off the bullet that found him halfway up the dim trail. One instant he was pushing rapidly up the slope with his company, straining his eyes ahead for

a sign of the hidden enemy. The next instant, a blank. He spun half around and fell beside the trail, a ghastly gash in the side of his head turning his dark hair crimson.

Jim Price, the next man along, gave him a hurried, heartsick glance as he passed.

"Poor devil!" he called to the man behind him. "Never knew what hit him! And he had a peach of a little girl waiting for him, too!"

CHAPTER IV.

STRANGE AWAKENING.

BUT Steven Tanner was not dead. Many times afterward he wished he had been. Slowly he came back to painful consciousness and to one of the strangest and most tragic experiences that ever befell mortal man.

He was in the grip of a heavy weakness that made it seem hardly worth while to open his eyes. Nausea racked him. There was an odor in his nostrils other than the pungent fumes of gunpowder that stung them, seemingly, a moment before. A sharp pain clawed at the side of his head.

For several minutes his confused brain struggled with recollection. Oh, yes, the battle! A picture flashed to his mind of the dim jungle trail with its long line of running soldiers. Poor old Clem Martin had staggered back and fallen a moment before with a bullet through his thigh. And then another ball must have found him. As Jim Price had said, Steve never knew what hit him.

But now it dawned on him that he was surrounded by a strange silence. When consciousness had so suddenly left him, his ears were ringing with the crash and rumble of artillery, the staccato ripping of rifle fire, the tread and shouts of his fellows. Was he only half-conscious or had the Spanish bullet destroyed his hearing?

Curiously he raised his heavy eyelids, expecting fully to find himself lying in the lush tropical foliage of the Cuban jungle, the dusky vista of the trail stretching away toward the unseen riflemen, one of whom had brought him down. To his intense surprise, he saw instead the bright-tinted walls of an airy sunlit room. Steve was lying in a wide comfortable bed opposite an open window through which came the scent of bloom, the drowsy note of bees, the familiar song of a robin, and a glimpse of a pleasant garden.

His sick brain dazed with the surprise of it, he closed his eyes again. He must, then, have been unconscious for hours while he was being removed to a hospital. That accounted for the absence of sound of battle. Either the battle was over or he was too far away to hear the firing. He was suddenly overwhelmed with longing for Rosemarie. Of course she had not had time to get here yet, but she would soon. Would they let her nurse him, he wondered?

His head was a little clearer now and his nausea had subsided a bit. That odor must be ether or chloroform. Perhaps they had to operate on him. Then another disconcerting thought! This pleasant room with its cheery outlook suggested nothing of the dingy temporary hospital they had established when they landed. Could it be possible that the Americans had been driven back and that he had been picked up by the Spaniards and taken a prisoner to a hospital in Santiago?

It was an appalling thought. While his confused brain was still dwelling on it he fancied he heard a stir in the room. His eyes opened more easily this time and he managed to turn his head in the direction of the sound.

Steve's pulse jumped with surprise and joy. A little beyond the window he seemed to see Rosemarie, her eyes fixed intently on him.

"Rosemarie!" he whispered.

As he spoke, the girl's eyes appeared to open wide in terror. Without a word she turned and vanished from the room. Steve stared after her, bewildered for a moment. Then he chuckled and a little flush of embarrassment came to his pale face. Of course Rosemarie or any other modest girl would disappear as quickly as possible, when a supposedly unconscious young man suddenly came to and caught her practically undressed.

For the girl who had so suddenly vanished, he realized now, had nothing on but a little white slip, exposing bare arms and shoulders and knees. Probably she was allowed to be his special nurse and slept in a room near by. She had doubtless been so eager to see how he was that she had slipped into his room a minute before dressing, not expecting him to wake up. She'd dress and be back in a minute.

He chuckled again as the memory of that night on the ladder came back to him. How anxious Rosemarie had been to cover up even her ankles to prevent his catching a glimpse of her silhouette in the darkness. How shocked she must be now! But it was not like Rosemarie to come into a man's room, even her lover's sick room, when she thought him unconscious, in such a state of undress.

When minutes passed and Rosemarie did not return, he began to have his doubts. His brain was not clear yet. Perhaps he had imagined Rosemarie. He hadn't expected her to get to Cuba so soon.

Perhaps this was one of those Spanish girls who, to his confused mind, had looked a little like Rosemarie. His impression of Spanish girls was that they were pretty free and easy.

STEVE'S spirits sank again. Then nausea gripped him once more. In the midst of it he was conscious that some one was bending over him. He saw a close-cropped iron-gray head,

then a fine, kindly face. This must be the doctor, Steve thought.

"Feel better?" the stranger whispered.

"Is Miss Rosemarie Doane here?" Steve asked ignoring the query.

For a long moment the other did not answer, but stared at Steve with an expression of tender pity and solicitude, then finally whispered, "she'll be here in a little while, but you mustn't talk now."

There was something hauntingly familiar about that face but Steve could not place it at first. Then as the stranger started to turn away, he caught a glimpse of the profile. Miss Mary Doane, one of Rosemarie's aunts, was undoubtedly the person he was reminded of. This man looked enough like her to be her brother.

But at that "the man" stood up and Steve gave a startled gasp. This was no man but a woman, and most certainly not Miss Doane. This strange person was also undressed or nearly so, much after the fashion of Rosemarie—or of the vision he fancied was she. For he began surely to doubt his sanity.

And this person showed not the slightest chagrin at being caught in such a state, though she plainly saw Steve's gaze upon her.

Steve blushed for her and closed his eyes. He was conscious that she continued to stand over him. Once she felt his pulse but he pretended to be sleeping. Then he heard her tiptoe across to the window and sit down. After a little he ventured to peep at her cautiously. Again he was startled. The brazen woman sat, one frank knee across the other, hurriedly painting her face! Surely a Spanish woman, Steve decided. They did those things as a matter of course, he understood. And yet she had no accent.

He had to admit she did a good job of it, removing at least five years from the fifty he had credited her with. But what an absurd performance for an old woman!

Had he any further doubts that he was in the hands of a strange alien enemy, they were dissipated when, the painting job done, she satisfied herself once more that he slept, then took from her bag a cigarette-case, selected a cigarette and lighted it.

Steve watched the strange sight through half-closed lids for some minutes. Then his mind began to seethe again with questions he wanted to ask. He was about to put the first one, when the strange woman suddenly threw her half-smoked cigarette out the window, leaned her head on the sill, and wept convulsively, great silent sobs that shook her whole frail body.

She quickly controlled herself, however, and was drying her eyes when there came a slow heavy step outside the door. It opened, and an old white-haired man came in. This time Steve nearly relapsed into unconsciousness. Here, seemingly in the flesh, was his grandfather, who had lived with them for some years after Steve's mother died, and had himself died when Steve was ten years old.

Steve's blood froze as the old man came to the bedside and, taking the patient's limp hand in a horny palm, looked at him speechlessly for a moment, tears streaming down his face.

"Well, my boy," he whispered finally, "I'm glad to see you better."

Then abruptly he dropped Steve's hand and stumbled out of the room. At that moment there was a strange throbbing rumble outside the window.

"Here comes the doctor now," whispered the woman, and hurried out after the old man. Steve, now filled with the ghastly certainty that he must be insane, presently saw a big, comfortable-looking man come into the room.

"Well, well, glad to see you so much better," said the new-comer. "I'm Dr. Mercer. Now we're just going to keep you quiet for a little while and then you're going to feel fine as they make 'em. Don't remember much lately, do

you? Well, you've been out of your head ever since that bullet hit you—quite a little while now, quite a number of days.

"But we operated on your head, and you'll be all right now. You're here with friends, and as soon as you're a little stronger we'll tell you all about it."

While he was talking he dexterously thrust a hypodermic needle into Steve's arm.

"Now you're going to take another little nap and I will see you again this afternoon."

Steve presently felt an uncontrollable drowsiness steal over him. He hardly knew when the doctor left the room. But suddenly at the sound of a familiar voice outside the door he roused himself for a moment by sheer will power.

It was the voice of Rosemarie.

"Doctor," she was saying, "do—do you really think he'll be all right now?"

"Absolutely. I don't want to test him yet. He's had shock enough for a starter. Don't try to tell him anything till I give the word; but don't get him puzzled and brooding over it. He must not know the truth until his head is pretty well healed. I've given him a little shot to put him to sleep again. A lot depends on you, my dear."

"Oh, doctor, I can't stand it, now that he remembers. I can't face him after he finds out everything. I'll stay near by till he's surely recovering, then I'll have to go away. It will be easier for us both."

Then the drug overcame Steve and he fell into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER V.

DEEPER MYSTERY.

STEVE was awakened by a blare of martial music in the next room.

It was night now. His room was dark except for a beam of light from the half open door, through which he

got a glimpse of the apartment beyond. It appeared to be a pleasantly furnished living room of a private home. And yet it apparently contained a full-sized brass band playing a stirring march.

The march came to an end amid a roar of applause, as if from a large audience. The thought flashed through his mind that he might be in an insane asylum. Perhaps they were giving a concert for the inmates.

The noise of the clapping was suddenly cut off as though some one had closed a sound-proof door. Then a heavy rumbling voice burst in on the sudden silence.

"This is station WYX of Buffalo broadcasting. You have just listened to Morley's Marine Band in Carnegie Hall, New York City, playing 'The Honolulu March' by Selski. Their next number will be Marlow's popular fox trot, 'That Radio Jazz.'"

This was certainly talk that belonged in an insane asylum, and the music which followed was nearly as insane to Steve's unaccustomed ear, though it reminded him a little of the "rag-time" melodies that were beginning to take the popular fancy when he went into the army. Rag-time gone mad, he would call this.

But this musical selection stopped suddenly in the midst of a strain, smothered as instantaneously as the applause for the other number. There was dead silence in the next room for a moment, then a dimly outlined figure of a woman passed through the door.

He saw her press her finger against the wall just inside the door-jamb, and to his amazement a light flashed on at the opposite side of the room. He blinked at it stupidly till his eyes became adjusted to it, and then saw that it came from a small globe of glass screwed into the wall. Then he understood. It was one of those new incandescent electric lights. He must be in a city, then.

The woman was bending over him now and he turned his bewildered gaze

on her. She was a pretty woman and a young one, with a white nurse's cap perched on her head. But, like the old woman he had seen first, her hair was cut short like a man's, and she too was nearly undressed and apparently altogether unashamed.

He wanted to ask about the mysterious music in the next room and the joker who talked about its being in New York and Buffalo at the same time, but the young woman thrust a thermometer in his mouth.

"Feeling a lot better, aren't you, Mr. Tanner?" she said. "I'm your new nurse, Miss Merton. I'm sorry to wake you up when you were having such a good sleep, but it's time for your supper, so I gave you a little music. Now I'll run and fix you a little food, and then give you an alcohol rub ready for the night. Won't be gone long."

And she tiptoed lightly out of the room. Steve's mind was seething with questions he wanted to ask the nurse about all this mad business; but as he thought it over he decided to wait. Everybody treated him so strangely, as though they thought he was crazy and mustn't be told things. He remembered the warning of the doctor to Rosemarie which he had overheard when they thought he was asleep.

Maybe they thought he was crazy, and would only be more sure of it if he asked questions. If he wasn't crazy, everybody else was. He decided to say nothing that might give him away—just wait and see what they would tell him when they got ready. What was that terrible truth which the doctor warned them Steve mustn't know till his head was healed?

As a matter of fact, he was feeling much better. His nausea had disappeared and the pain in his head was much less. On trial he found he was stronger, could move his arms and legs. But if all this was not an insane dream, why had Rosemarie run from him? What did she mean by telling the doctor she couldn't stand staying with him

and was going away? Had she been untrue to him, after all, and married Percy?

HE digested this thought a little. Then another occurred to him. Perhaps he had been terribly mutilated by his wound so that she could not bear the sight of him! Or perhaps he was never going to be well again, mentally or physically or both. He found by experiment that all four of his limbs were intact and in working order in spite of their weakness. It must be his face, if anything physical. The nurse returned at this moment.

"I would like to look at myself in a mirror," he said firmly.

"Why, all right," she agreed after a momentary hesitation. "You haven't had a shave in a couple of days, but you look pretty good to me otherwise. Let me smooth your hair a little first."

She applied a brush sketchily to the uninjured side of his head, then, turning on a bedside light, held a hand mirror above his face. Steve heaved a sigh of intense relief. Except for a big pad of gauze on one side of his head and the unusual paleness that showed through his tan and black stubble of beard, his face looked as usual.

He handed the glass back to her and went at his simple supper with a relish. He couldn't be very badly off physically, he thought, to have such an appetite. But where in Heaven's name was he? Why did everybody act so queer?

"Oh, the devil!" exclaimed the pretty nurse. "I forgot to order alcohol."

Steve was startled and disappointed. This had seemed like such a nice girl. Only very low women used such expressions. But he immediately became interested in her next move. She picked up a little black instrument from the table beside the bed and began talking into it. This was evidently a telephone, but unlike any such affair that Steve had ever seen.

He had seen a few of the clumsy contrivances attached to a box on the wall with a bell-crank that you had to turn before you made a call. But she had rung no bell, nor was she shouting into the thing, just talking almost in a whisper as though she were speaking to him right there in the room. This house was certainly fitted up with all sort of newfangled contrivances.

"Burdenville 23," said the nurse.

Why, he was in some house right down in his home village, he thought.

"Hill's drug store?" the girl went on. "Miss Merton speaking, up at Tanner's in Truell Road. Please send over a quart of alcohol right away. I'm going to need it in about ten minutes. . . . Oh, damn! Well, I'll have to order it in Horton, then. They always deliver promptly.

"Hill's delivery boy is out, of course," she grumbled as she hung up.

But Steve was puzzled. His father must have moved down to the village since he went away, if they expected to get anything delivered from there in ten minutes. And it was something new for old Hill to have a delivery boy.

Yet she had said this was the Tanner place. It was all more and more puzzling. But the girl had called a Horton number now, and her next words were not merely puzzling but positively insane. Horton was a good six miles from Burdenville, and no store there ever attempted to deliver outside the village as far as he knew. It would take nearly an hour with a fast horse.

Yet this surprising young woman was calmly ordering a drug store there to send over a supply of alcohol in fifteen minutes. And he had never heard of Truell Road, where his father was apparently supposed to live now. It was all a mad dream.

"They'll have it right up," the girl said calmly. "Burdenville is such a one-horse little town. You'd think a drug store in a town of three thousand

population would have a better delivery service."

More insanity! Burdenville would have hard work mustering over five hundred without counting the graves in the little cemetery.

He finished his supper in silence, his mind seething with questions he hesitated to ask. If he was just imagining things he mustn't give himself away. The girl left him alone, occupying herself filling in her chart.

Then suddenly he heard a sound that upset all his estimates as to location. From somewhere in the distance came to his ears the staccato drum-fire of a Maxim machine gun. It couldn't be anything else. It was the sound that had filled him with a cold chill when the troops were landing at Siboney. Then he was still in Cuba and a battle was on. He looked toward the nurse and saw no sign of alarm in her face. She calmly went on with her notes. Was he imagining this?

The terrifying noise was approaching rapidly. In a minute or two it seemed right next to the house. Still the nurse made no sign. Then the racket stopped and the next moment he heard the trill of a small bell somewhere in the house. The nurse glanced at her wrist and saw that a small watch was strapped there. Another curiosity.

"There's our alcohol, in just fifteen minutes," she remarked rising. "That new druggist in Horton sure knows his onions."

EVEN the slang of this amazing young person was a new language to Steve. He had not recovered from his daze when the nurse returned with the bottle of alcohol. At the same moment he heard another sound, the purring rumble he had noticed the last time he was awake, he remembered. He also recalled that it had meant the arrival of the doctor.

Again he heard the little bell ring. There was a heavy step in another room and the opening of a door.

"Good evening, doctor," said some one, and Steve's heart leaped and then sank again. That was his father's voice! But if his father was here why hadn't he come in to see him?

A low rumble of talk followed, then the doctor entered with a cheery greeting. After examining Steve carefully and attending to the dressing of his wound, asking him a number of casual and seemingly meaningless questions as he worked, the doctor sat down by the bed.

"So you don't remember anything since that bullet hit you, until you came out of the ether yesterday? Well, that's just as I thought. But you're all O K now, with your reactions perfectly normal and your mind clear as a bell, I'd say. There isn't a thing the matter with you now except a sore spot in your head that will heal up quickly.

"You haven't been sick, you know. You feel a little weak just now, but you'll get your strength back in a few days and be as well as ever. You've simply got to keep perfectly quiet until your head heals up a little and you've recovered from the shock of the operation.

"Meanwhile you're wondering what it's all about. You would better not have much talk yet or any excitement. I'll just tell you the facts in a few words so you won't be puzzling your head over it. When you're a little stronger, your people will give you the details.

"That bullet fractured your skull and pressed a bone against your brain, destroying your memory. You were apparently all right every other way, though, and when you came to that day you must have wandered into the Spanish lines. They kept you a prisoner till after the war. Meantime your people thought you were dead. When they found you and brought you home, they had an operation performed on your head, but it wasn't successful. Then I got hold of you and seem to have turned the trick.

"But all's well that ends well. You're in perfect shape now and have a long life ahead of you, I hope. Ought to have. You've got a constitution like iron. You're making a remarkably quick recovery. There isn't another case on record of a man going through what you have and being affected by it so little physically. You're famous as a medical case.

"Meantime, everybody you love is all right. Your father has prospered a lot since the war. You're going to find them changed a little, though, your father and the lady who's so fond of you. They were pretty badly knocked out when they thought you were dead. Just now I'm making them rest up a little before they see you, so don't worry about them. You'll see them soon. They've both been here to see you while you were sleeping and know you are all right."

While the doctor was talking Steve was beginning to gather a little of the truth, though many mysteries were left unexplained and the absence of his father and Rosemarie was not satisfactorily accounted for.

So the war was over. He must have been out of his head for a long time. He began mentally struggling to recall some of the events that had taken place since he was shot. The doctor divined this.

"Now you mustn't puzzle over things, if you want to get well fast," he warned. "I've told you enough now. You take this medicine and sleep on it."

He thrust a small pill between Steve's lips and handed him a glass of water to drink.

"But, doctor!" Steve spoke at last. "If all that happened since I was shot it must have been quite awhile ago. How long ago was it?"

The doctor was fussing with his medicine case and didn't answer at first.

"Just a minute," he said at last. "I've got to telephone."

The physician was busy at the telephone for some minutes and Steve felt himself getting drowsy. But he forced himself to stay awake to get the answer to his question. He realized that he was being put off again. They really thought he was still a little out of his head and Steve suspected that they were right. How else could he account for the strange irrational things he seemed to see and hear.

The doctor finished telephoning and turned to say good night, apparently forgetting the question.

"Doctor," Steve drowsily reminded him. "You didn't tell me how long I was—that way!"

"Oh, yes. You did ask me. Well, it was quite awhile for a fellow not to know anything; over a year. Now don't puzzle over it. Get a good night's sleep. Good night."

And the doctor was gone. And almost before the sound of his footsteps died away, the sleeping potion triumphed over Steve's amazement and he fell asleep again. But, with his last conscious thought he realized that he hadn't yet been told that mysterious truth.

CHAPTER VI.

UNBLINDFOLDED.

THE days that followed only confirmed his belief that some terrible secret was being kept from him. Dread of the revelation became an added reason for his refraining from asking questions. He was soon able to be about the room, but remained a prisoner, seeing only his doctor and nurse.

He was regaining strength rapidly, however, and beginning to feel like his old robust self.

The morning after the doctor's restrained explanation there had been two notes on his breakfast tray, one from Rosemarie and one from his father. Both said they had been in to

say good-by for a few days, but found him asleep, so had not disturbed him.

Rosemarie's note was full of the old affection, written as if no time had elapsed since their last meeting. Apparently she was under the thrall of her aunts again, and they were still opposed to Steve, for she said they were taking her away for a little time to rest. Remembering what he had overheard her tell the doctor, Steve was not much reassured.

His father expressed deep gratitude for his recovery and regret that business called him away for a little time.

Certainly a strange way to treat him! What did it mean?

And so weeks passed, his waking moments enlivened as much as possible by his agreeable nurse who alternately played cards with him and read to him, or turned on selections from the mysterious music-box in the next room. He was told that the doctor didn't want him to use his eyes at present. He had the feeling that even the reading matter was being carefully selected. Even the frequent but noncommittal letters that came from Rosemarie and his father were read to him. They were always saying they would be back soon.

Then one day he caught another mysterious glimpse of Rosemarie, a glimpse that once more threw him back to the old doubts of his sanity. He was sitting by the open window brooding over the limited view it gave, listening to the variety of strange sounds that had been haunting his ears for the last three weeks. In his lap lay a book his nurse had carelessly left behind, not one she had been reading to him, for a good reason, Steve opined, when he sampled its contents.

It was an amazing novel dealing with subjects Steve had been used to discussing with men only and then rather shamefacedly. He was about to put it back where he found it, for fear he might be caught reading it, when a sud-

den swaying of a big syringa bush caught his attention.

A leafy branch swept aside and there for an instant stood Rosemarie, staring straight at him. He could only see her head and shoulders this time. She was the same little Rosemarie, though, none of the change about her that the doctor had warned him to look out for, excepting that her auburn hair was done up a little differently, though, thank Heaven, it wasn't cut off like that of the only two other women he had seen since he came to his senses.

Only an instant he saw her, then the bush snapped back into place and the vision was blotted out. But this time Steve meant to find out whether he was really seeing the girl he loved or if this was an illusion. Luckily this room was on the ground floor.

Unhesitatingly Steve ripped the wire screen out of the window and clambered over the sill. The next instant he was running across the narrow strip of lawn toward the syringa bush, calling Rosemarie's name.

But when he reached it there was no one in sight. Beyond and both sides of it was a tangled border of shrubbery through which she must have escaped. There was no way of telling which course she took. He worked through it to an extensive garden patch, and ran across that without seeing any one.

Then there burst on his ears from just beyond the garden fence one of those sounds that had mystified him so much ever since he came to consciousness, a rhythmic puffing and rumble, a little like a defective steam-engine and yet not quite like it. He pushed through some bushes to the garden fence and stared across into a half plowed field and at one of the most amazing things he had seen yet.

A big gang-plow was just starting across the field, a driver on the seat with his back toward the startled onlooker. But he was apparently driving nothing! For there were no horses

hitched to the plow! Steve rubbed his eyes and looked again. There it was, moving steadily and powerfully along with no visible means of traction.

HOW do you do, Mr. Tanner," spoke an unfamiliar masculine voice at his elbow.

Steve whirled about and gasped in surprise as he saw a young soldier standing beside him. His ideas instantly underwent another adjustment. Then he was still in the hands of the army! Perhaps the doctor had lied about the war being over.

At any rate the young man was in an American uniform, so Steve at least was not a Spanish prisoner. And now that he thought of it, the foliage he saw everywhere was not the tropical verdure of the Cuban landscape, but the familiar growth of his boyhood home country.

"Excuse me, but this is Mr. Tanner, isn't it?" the young soldier inquired. "My name's Dixon. I work for your father here. Miss Merton, your nurse, missed you out of your room and sent me to look for you. She's worried about you, so don't you think you'd better come back?"

He took Steve gently by the elbow and started to guide him along a path leading back toward the house. Steve perceived he was being treated like an invalid, and something more, like a child, or one not quite right in the head.

"I see you're in uniform," Steve said. "They told me the war was over."

"Oh, yes, the war's over. You've been sick a long time, haven't you? It's tough luck to lose track of things so long. But they tell me you're getting well fast now. I'm glad of it.

"I'm just wearing this uniform for the Memorial Day parade down to Burdenville to-day. Our post marches. It's time I started. Parade begins in twenty minutes now. There's Miss Merton now. Well, I'm glad I met

you. I suppose I'll see a lot of you soon."

He started for the barn in the rear of the house, but Steve, instead of returning to Miss Merton, who was waiting at the back door, followed him. He wanted to ask a dreaded question.

"Would you mind telling me how long the war's been over?" he asked when they were out of sight of the nurse.

"Ten years this fall. They haven't told you much yet, have they?" Dixon said, eying him curiously. "Well, I got to go. See you and give you an earful later."

"Just a minute," Steve persisted. "I saw Rosemarie Doane a minute ago! Where did she go?"

"You must be mistaken. She went away several days ago."

The soldier went into the barn. Steve felt his knees going weak under him. He sat down suddenly on a bowlder by the door and held his swimming head in his hands.

Ten years! He'd lost all that time out of his life! Perhaps more! No knowing how long the war had lasted.

But before his dazed brain could grasp its full significance, a roar of rapid explosions broke out right in front of him, the same noise he had taken for machine-gun fire when he first came to himself. Dixon had rolled out of the barn some sort of a giant bicycle, twice as large as the tandem on which he and Rosemarie had ridden away that night over ten years before. Dixon jumped into the saddle, waved his hand at Steve, and was off at a terrific speed. In a minute or two the sound of the marvelous contrivance was lost in the distance.

But Steve was suddenly beginning to understand a little of many things. Ten years had been lost to him, and in that time much had happened. There had evidently been many curious new inventions brought into use while he was unconscious of everything around him. He looked about him with a new

vision. Could it be possible that he was back in his old home after all, but a home so changed that it was hardly recognizable?

For the first time he got a good look at the outside of the house. After a little study he recognized in one end of it the familiar lines of the old building. But a big new wing had been added. The grounds and outbuildings were all different. Many of the old trees were gone. There were good-sized new ones in their place.

But all these thoughts and impressions flashed through his mind in an instant and were overwhelmed by one over-mastering idea. If this was in fact his old home, then the home of Rosemarie was near by. In spite of her letter about going away, he knew Rosemarie was here yet. Perhaps, though, she had just returned.

He was willing to credit his senses now. Rosemarie was seemingly not changed in appearance in ten years. Neither was he. Then the mystery of her avoidance of him was deeper than ever. He decided to probe that mystery to the bottom and at once. They couldn't keep him a prisoner and deceive him any longer. He was in his right mind, and he was of age. Thirty years old in fact!

It didn't seem possible. His mirror assured him he did not look thirty. Nor did he feel it. Thirty had always seemed to him an advanced age. One was a settled family man with half grown children by then.

But with his mind made up he took direct action. Walking boldly over to the waiting nurse he told her calmly: "I'm going for a walk, Miss Merton. I'll be back in a little while. I'm all right. Don't mind me." And he went rapidly around the corner of the house and headed toward the road, paying no attention to her futile remonstrance.

"Guess I've lost my job," the girl remarked nonchalantly at last, gazing after his retreating back. "It certainly beats the devil! He doesn't look a

day over twenty or twenty-one, nor act it. Lucky he's through needing a nurse. I could fall for him easy. I could kill that old hen!"

BUT Steve failed to hear this cryptic remark. He was standing beside the highway in front of his old home, again lost in amazement. Instead of the narrow, dusty, back-country by-way, there was a broad concrete pavement lined with street lamps. It might have been a city street except that there were no sidewalks.

He was staring at this new marvel so abstractedly that he was quite unaware of the swift-moving peril speeding up behind him along the smooth highway until the hoarse blast of a horn sounded within a few feet of him. Steve whirled around, but it never occurred to him to jump one side. A huge, black, self-propelling car, looking like a horseless hearse, only twice as big, came to a dead stop with a screaming of brakes, its front almost against his shins. An angry, frightened driver thrust his head out and glared at him.

"What's the matter with you, boy? Walking in your sleep?" he demanded.

Steve dodged back. The driver did things to levers. With a grinding roar the monster shot away, disappearing in the distance before Steve recovered his breath. While he was watching it, two more of the bewildering contrivances passed him. Steve cautiously took to the roadside.

He remembered that during the year he went to the war there was some newspaper talk of a crazy man who had built what he called a horseless carriage run by a little steam engine. Everybody had laughed at the idea that it would ever work practically. His invention must have worked, and everybody seemed to be using it now.

But there couldn't have been a steam engine on that bicycle nor on that gang plow. A big truck came lumbering slowly by at that moment.

and Steve got a chance to study it a little more closely. Certainly no engine there, no smoke or steam, just plain magic, as far as he could see. Gosh, he thought, what a world he'd waked up in after ten years! Buggies and wagons, bicycles and even plows running alone!

Electric lights and telephones right out in the country! And the farms that had looked so poverty-stricken ten years ago were so prosperous looking! Steve felt forlornly alone and out of place in a new world.

But as he walked along the great highway rapidly readjusting his mind to the changes, there were still things to puzzle him. He stopped suddenly and looked around him, struck with a new thought. This highway followed the same route as the old road, except for taking off some of the sharper curves and cutting through the crests of the steeper hills.

There had been no trees left along the old road, however. The new one was lined with them, their great spreading branches almost meeting over its center. He thought of the big new shade trees he had just seen in his father's yard. Off in the distance he noted stretches of forest where there had been barren fields. He was too much of a country boy to believe that trees like that could have grown up in ten years.

"They are still lying to me," he said to himself. First they had let him think he had been unconscious just a short time. Then the doctor had admitted it had been over a year. Now this young soldier was in on the conspiracy and had lied in his turn when he said only ten years. How long had it really been?

But, on the other hand, the soldier was still young, and he claimed to have been in the war. Rosemarie, judging from his brief glimpses of her, was still a young girl. And he himself certainly had not grown older. Again Steven Tanner wondered if he was not after

all suffering from insanity. Had he really seen Rosemarie at all?

And then he came to a spot that had not changed. It was the old Doane house, still sprawling behind a high cedar hedge among its dark evergreens. He stood for several minutes peering through its gate into the yard that seemed untouched by time since the night, how long ago he did not know, when he had stolen Rosemarie only to lose her again. He was so absorbed that he failed to notice the car that had been slowly trailing him and now stopped just at the corner of the hedge. A young man got out and appeared to be tinkering with his engine, but his eyes were stealthily watching Steve.

ALL unaware that fate was again lying low at his elbow, Steve turned in the gate and approached the front door. Resolutely he pulled the handle of the old doorbell. Its clang was answered after a moment by a shuffling step within. A bent and wrinkled old woman opened the door, peered at him nearsightedly, then drew back in alarm and started to close the door again. But Steve checked it with his foot.

"I want to see Miss Rosemarie Doane," he said firmly.

"She's not here," quavered the old woman. "She won't be here. She's gone away to stay."

"Then I'd like to talk to Miss Mary Doane or Miss Sarah Doane," he persisted with sinking heart.

"You can't see anybody. Go away," the beldame snapped, and this time succeeded in slamming the door shut and locking it.

Slowly Steve stepped down from the narrow porch, considering what he should do next. He was being lied to again, he felt sure. As he stood by the front gate speculating, his eye fell on a circular tin box attached to the top of the gatepost. On its face was painted in red letters: "U. S. Mail. S. &

M. Doane." But the thing that awakened his attention was a letter lying on the top of the box waiting to be collected. He snatched it up and read the address:

MISS ROSEMARIE DOANE
36 East 10th St.
New York City

So that was where Rosemarie was! They were sending her a letter! Then he hadn't seen her outside his window after all! Or was this another trick? Or perhaps she'd come back and they did not know it yet.

"I'll take that, sir," an authoritative voice spoke up at his elbow.

Steve faced a man in postman's uni-

form, who took the letter out of his hand and thrust it into his pocket. Then he fed some mail from his bag into the box and laid on top of it a newspaper that would not fit into the slot. He caught a glimpse of Rosemarie's familiar writing on one of the envelopes.

So this letter to Rosemarie wasn't a hoax. And they had postmen even in the country now! The man climbed into a car and drove off. Steve's eye fell on the newspaper, and a shock like a bolt of lightning passed through him. His trembling hand snatched up the paper and thrust it before his eyes. He held his breath and read the date again.

"May 30, 1928."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

The House That Jack Built

THE celebrated house that Jack built was constructed at Sandy Hook by an old sailor who still clung to things of the sea, though he was too old to brave its dangers any more. When he left the sea he carried all his worldly possessions in a canvas bag; but there were the wrecks of seven ships to furnish material for his home ashore.

Strictly speaking, it was not exactly ashore, for it was a comfortable little houseboat moored to a tall pine in a small creek flowing inland from the sea and sheltered from its gales.

The wreck of the lumber schooner, Harding, which collided with another schooner off Sandy Hook and broke up in a northeast gale, gave Jack most of the lumber for his house; from other wrecks he salvaged chairs and tables, pots and pans, blankets and mattresses, a clock, and even a razor. The doors were from the captain's cabin of an Italian ship that met her doom on Romer Shoals; they were splendid affairs, with polished walnut molding and silver knobs.

Not all this flotsam that went to build Jack's house was a gift from the sea; Jack sometimes bought a wreck as he did the schooner Youngs, which went on the beach three miles south of the point, and for which he paid the owners twenty-five dollars, including her deckload of lumber.

When his house was completed, Jack also built a nineteen-foot launch out of wreckage. The deck was of teak, part of the deck of the North German Lloyd liner Saale, which was borne down to Sandy Hook by the tide after the great Hoboken fire. The only thing the sea refused to give Jack was a pet for a mascot; he rescued a hog from the Harding and kept it for a pet without a thought of future bacon, but the animal died of cholera from eating too many beach plums.

Minna Irving.



"I marry you to prevent bloodshed," Father Felicien said

When Trails Were New

Deadly peril surrounds Louis and Daphne—while Sully plots and Black Hawk's hostile Sacs prowl through the Wisconsin forest

By TALBOT MUNDY

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LOUIS D'ARRAS, hunter in the Wisconsin woods in 1832, loves Daphne Beaucheval, whose father is heavily in debt to Simon Sully, shrewd trader who owns most of St. Pierre des Boeufs. Louis has some staunch friends—the Sac, Blue Heron; Bizard the brawny blacksmith; Conrad, agent of the Astor Company, which plans to rival Sully in that section.

Father Felicien, whose mission has an ancient privilege of marrying girls

without parental consent, agrees to let Daphne marry Louis, if he will vow not to fight Sully. Louis swears.

Conrad brings word that Black Hawk, enraged at Sully's plowing up the Sacs' corn, their resultant famine, and the Governor's orders to keep west of the Mississippi, has gone on the war-path, ambushing troops. Louis announces he is going to Black Hawk, in hope of peace.

Meantime Sully has sent a renegade Indian to kill Louis. Instead, d'Arras

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 27

and Blue Heron kill the scamp; and when Blue Heron shoots the scalp into Sully's store, there is consternation in the fortified settlement. Crawford, genial, hard-fighting drunkard, calls it "Dec—hic—declaration of war."

Louis finds Black Hawk encamped at the Pinnacle, his lofty rock by the river, with more than five hundred braves. He starts a powwow with the Sac chief, who has revolted from Keokuk and is really on the warpath; Black Hawk angrily recites his wrongs.

CHAPTER VII (Continued).

A BIVOUC THAT SEEMED TO NUMBER UPWARD OF FIVE HUNDRED BRAVES.

DO you force your friends—Bizard and me—and others—to fight against you?" Louis asked the angry chief.

Black Hawk answered with an exclamation not unlike a laugh; but Louis continued before the Indian could commit himself by a reckless answer.

"I am Black Hawk's friend. Bizard, Crawford, Conrad, I, and some others will not fight against you if you will make me a promise in the presence of these chiefs."

Louis made a gesture toward the seated semicircle. Black Hawk slowly turned and sat down.

"What is the promise?" he demanded. "The white-faces make promises they never keep."

Louis sat down facing him. "This is between you and me," he answered quietly. "If you will not attack Fort St. Pierre des Boeufs, and will leave my cabin unmolested, I will keep as many as I can from fighting you."

"How many of you will not fight?" he asked, and Louis repeated the short list of men whom he knew he could count on.

Black Hawk's restless eyes glanced from left to right and his parted lips took on the semblance of a smile. He had at any rate five hundred men there,

and there was no need to boast about how many more might be within hail. The inference was as plain as daylight.

"You think I come to you because I am afraid?" asked Louis. He foresaw he must bluff to the limit.

"If you would rather fight Bizard and Conrad and Crawford and me—and others, you have only to say so," he went on. "But we think you have been wronged. We would rather go to St. Louis and take up your case before the Governor."

He sounded and looked bold enough, but he was nervous. He knew Black Hawk—knew that craftiness was at war with primitive honesty behind that mask.

The red man knew that Louis and his particular friends would keep any promise they might make, whatever the consequences to themselves; he also knew that four such men, dependable and thoroughly versed in wilderness conditions, might possibly in a pinch outvalue as many hundred raw militiamen. But Black Hawk's bane was his irresolution, that only toughened into recklessness when any one challenged his supremacy or doubted his judgment.

Wa-bo-ki-e-shiek, on Black Hawk's right, chose that inauspicious moment to signal for caution; he moved his right hand up and down, grunting something almost inaudible. Several others agreed with him in low tones and Black Hawk's eyes glazed, but he could not ignore the request for a conference. He summoned the man who had guided Louis through the bivouac and motioned to Louis who walked away some distance, where he sat down again, eyed by his motionless guard.

Louis could not hear, but he could watch what happened. Something very like a quarrel was taking place within that circle of bowlders. It was ten minutes before Black Hawk felt he had ascendancy enough to send again for Louis; but by the time Louis resumed his seat in front of him all faces except that of Wa-bo-ki-e-shiek were un-

der absolute control, and Black Hawk's voice had lost the harsh notes. After the inevitable minute's silence he addressed Louis by his Indian name:

"Wide-awake is my brother. His word is like the sun, that sets at night and rises in the morning. My brother and his friends will not take the warpath against us?"

"If Black Hawk and his braves equally agree not to take the warpath against the Fort of St. Pierre des Boeufs or any of its people."

"My brother and his friends will speak for us before the white-face chief?"

"Yes, if Black Hawk makes the promise."

"It is a long way to the lodge of the white-face chief," said Black Hawk. "When will my brother speak for us?"

Louis's face brightened as if the sun had risen on it. Here was the whole solution of his difficulty! He would marry Daphne and hurry away with her straight for St. Louis, leaving the fort safe from attack and Sully out of reach! One night of the three was gone already. This night would see him home again; the next night married.

"Two sleeps from now Bizard and I and another will take the trail," he answered. "But my brother must first make the promise and must give me a safe-conduct."

He dug down into his pocket and produced the steel-handled, imported clasp-knife with his name engraved on it, that a Governor of the State had given him in recognition of his services as guide. Aside from his rifle, which was almost as much a part of him as his right arm, that knife was his most prized possession.

It cost him a pang to lay it on the ground in front of him, but he contrived with a straight face and Black Hawk's manners were too good to permit the least expression of emotion to escape him. The chief laid a belt on the ground against it—a belt that was

passed to him by one of the braves—not the war-belt he was wearing.

Louis held his right hand up and looked Black Hawk in the eyes. Black Hawk followed suit. Each picked up the other's pledge, and the conference was over. Black Hawk rose and turned away.

Louis was not quite satisfied, but there was no opportunity for further talk. They had hardly exchanged pledges when an Indian on a bare-backed pony galloped up; and was instantly surrounded by about a hundred bucks.

Black Hawk waved Louis imperiously homeward, not offering to shake hands and hardly answering his farewell salute; so he went away quickly, looking straight in front of him to avoid suspicion of being a spy. By the time he reached the forest there were not ten Indians in sight. They had disappeared full pelt after something.

He caught sight of a few of them on ponies skirting the edge of the trees to the westward, and saw two—he guessed they were the last two—disappear on foot into the woods.

"Are the Armstrong outfit close on their trail this soon?" he wondered. But somehow he doubted that. Neither militia nor regulars in his experience were given to sudden, swift or silent marching.

Knowing nothing whatever about the date on which Sully expected his four-wagon train, it did not enter his head that that might be the cause of the hurried departure.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I WILL SEE WHAT CONRAD HAS TO SAY BEFORE I YIELD TO SULLY."

BIZARD returned to the fort before morning with only one man and the boy. Crawford had stayed with the brandy, for he and Conrad were of one mind, to wit: that the

fate of the fort was safe in Louis d'Arras's keeping; and if not, and in either case, the time to get drunk was now. Bizard had agreed with half the verdict, so the news he brought back was reassuring.

"Leave Black Hawk to Louis," he said confidently. "He carried lots of meat to him last winter when the tribe was starving. Black Hawk will remember that."

Fear, on that frontier, came and went with almost equal swiftness, and there was hardly ever any certain news. Living on the verge of danger all the time, men, and even women, grew as used to it as the animals that fled when hunted and resumed their normal occupations the moment the apparent danger passed.

The messenger of the previous night had hardly ridden on at dawn toward the lead mines when the men of St. Pierre des Boeufs began to doubt the crisis altogether. Who was the youngster anyway? He didn't look like much. They agreed, too, that Black Hawk had no numerous following, and not much ammunition—no supplies. He had been thoroughly defeated hardly a year ago, and had signed an ignominious treaty.

"He ain't got no more influence than 'ud make his squaw tote her own papoose," said some one. "Raid? Who'd follow him? It's one o' these here reg'lar scares."

That was the consensus of opinion. They went out to their plowing, merely carrying their rifles over-shoulder instead of fastening them to plow-tails as before. Bizard seemed to be the only cautious one, despite his earlier air of confidence.

"One half of you stay in the fort," he advised.

But Sully jumped at the chance to minimize Bizard's influence, and he had his own reasons for wanting as many men as possible afield. It was the custom to work all together in each clearing in turn, and on this occasion

they were to plow Ticknor's holding, which was the farthest away in the direction of Fort Armstrong, and on rising ground, sloping toward the west.

"It's my belief it's all a lie!" he shouted. "If Black Hawk really beat Stillman's outfit, and had fifteen hundred bucks with him, then it's sure he's scared up every living Injun who'll follow him, and just as sure Louis d'Arras won't diskiver him this a-way. He can't be in two places.

"That move o' Louis's is a bluff to make himself popular. He'll come back chock-brim full o' lies. You fellers go to your plowing, and say: keep an eye open for my wagons. They're about due. If you see 'em, bring 'em safe in."

Sully felt disturbed about those wagons. Their contents, in the form of trade goods, represented a whole year's profit on fur shipments. With those, and the four wagon-loads in hand, he proposed to launch the most ambitious venture he had ever yet attempted, and a mere haphazard raid by starving Sacs might upset all his plans.

His impatience had to find a target somewhere. He could not sit still in his store and do nothing, and he was just sufficiently frightened not to care to trust his valuable person outside the stockade. The net result was an unreasoning irritation. Anything he had seen would have annoyed him.

WHAT his eye did light on as he left the store was three Indians of the hanger-on type. They had sold him their winter's catch of fur, and had elected to loaf around the settlement until next season rather than to be caught in any turmoil of Black Hawk's making.

They might have made good spies for the fort if carefully handled, but it occurred to Sully on the instant that they might be spying for Black Hawk, so he took a running kick at the nearest and drove the three, dogs and all, out of the fort without a word of ex-

planation, cautioning the lone lame man on guard at the gate not to readmit them on any pretext.

"Shoot any damn Injun who comes near enough!" he ordered, and the man being a protégé of Sully, the order was accepted without argument.

Every one else within the stockade was busy with the daily round. Bizard's hammer was ringing musically. Only the fort philosopher found time to set his heels on a window sill and ruminate.

Sully broke in on his meditations, snatching away the book with an attempt at rough good humor and pitching it into a corner. "Books—always books! That; what makes your side ache! Your head's too full and the sharp sayings have overflowed!"

He glanced around the clean-swept cabin, noticed the clean curtains and the kitchen things, each hanging in its place, and let his eyes rest finally on the neatly mended breast of the philosopher's shirt.

"Daphne's a good girl," he said bluntly.

"She will make a good wife if the Injuns don't get her!" agreed Beaucheval, looking around fearfully.

"But she is like her mother, inclined to choose for herself and headstrong," he added. "I had a devil of a time to persuade her mother," he mused reminiscently.

Sully spat tobacco juice on the empty sheet-iron stove and sneered:

"You'd have managed easier if her parents had owed you a bill they couldn't pay!"

"You cannot take blood from a stone, Sully," he answered. "This cabin is yours. Daphne is mine. Louis d'Arras is in love with her, and I am told that Louis has his prospects."

He could not have pulled a more effective trigger. Sully went off with a bang—bombastic—furious.

"*Sacré loup!* Is it prospects that you want?" Sully roared at him. "Listen to this then."

He kicked odds and ends of things around the floor until he had them where he wanted them, and then began to expound his plans to Beaucheval, using books for places and twine for streams and rivers, with a stool to represent a mountain and a box for his own store.

"A trading post here—another there—connected by this river—see?—with only a short mile portage—and I'll cut off the Astor people south and east o' that line. Then a line up this way, straight between their posts, and I'll pay twice their prices; that 'll get the trade—"

But philosophy is strange stuff and flies off at unexpected tangents. The more Sully boasted of his plans, the less he impressed Gaston Beaucheval with anything except the grave risk he intended running.

"Enough is as good as a feast," he objected. "Why risk what you have toiled to win?"

"Enough?" roared Sully scornfully. "There is never enough for a man like me! A man goes forward, or he wilts and rots, as you have done, Père Beaucheval. I'm for progress! And remember this: you have promised; don't you dare try any tricks with me!"

He shook his fist, and, thinking that, perhaps, a bit too arbitrary at the moment, brought it down with a crash on the table. "You've agreed to give Daphne to me. The sooner now the better."

"Why?" asked Beaucheval, making Sully snort with irritation. "Haste is not good counsel. The girl must be persuaded, and I have told you she is headstrong."

"Bah! Let me have her for a week and I'll break her of that!" Sully answered. "When this flurry with Black Hawk's over I'm off on a long trip. She comes with me. Make your mind up to it! Put that in your pipe and smoke it! See if in all those books of yours there is a recipe for cancelling a debt or a way of undoing a felony!"

Beaucheval flinched at last. It had been so long since Sully reminded him of that past page of history that his philosophic mind had come near to forgetting it.

But even Beaucheval had spirit of a kind, and resentment blazed in him as soon as Sully slammed the door. He shook his fist at the adze-hewn panels. "*Sacré biche!*" he snarled. "I would do a lot to be able to laugh at you!"

But he shuddered to think what might happen if Sully should write to certain people "back in the States" and casually mention his, Beaucheval's, whereabouts. It was true, it was only a little *lâche* he had committed, and a long, long time ago—a mere trifle of a thousand dollars that had long since vanished in ill-fated efforts to succeed in business; but it is best to let such things be forgotten.

"However, a man must face dilemmas; he must face them," he admitted to himself. "I will see what Conrad has to say before I yield to Sully."

He forced his resolution almost to heroic heights, and vowed nothing should dissuade him, but his scalp twitched ominously as he thought of what might happen on the way to Louis's cabin in the dark.

CHAPTER IX.

"LOUIS'S BEN AN' FIXED A PEACE FER YER!"

CONRAD and Crawford were playing cards noisily with an ancient, dog-eared, greasy pack they had found in a corner of Louis's cabin. It was nearly nightfall of the day following Louis's departure, and the game had proceeded without interruption since Crawford turned up with Bizard. Blue Heron lay on a blanket on the cabin floor, like a dog with one eye open. The stone jar of brandy stood on the table half full, betraying unconscious moderation, consciously assisted by Conrad's squaw.

While the players argued Running Caribou emptied the contents of their tin mugs down her own throat.

"You old mole, it's—hic—a five!" Crawford shouted. "You're drunk! Can't you count?"

They both grabbed the card to examine it, and it tore in halves.

"Drunk, am I?" Conrad laughed, catching up a bow. "Watch this!"

He filled his mug full with the potent liquor and drank it.

"Now let's see who's drunk! Hold that cord up to the wall. 'F I miss the spot I'll give ye Running Caribou an' all the brandy, an' ye can have my job with the Astor Company!"

The squaw tried to interfere, but he pushed her aside roughly, and Crawford leaned back against the wall, holding the card in his right hand resting on the lower edge of one of the window gaps to keep it steady.

Conrad drew the bow as one of the dogs outside barked excitedly, and Blue Heron sprang up from the blanket with a cry of warning. Conrad let fly and the arrow cut clean through the middle of the card.

"There—who's drunk?" he asked triumphantly.

"Two at least—maybe three of you," a voice said through the window. "Is there any brandy left?"

Louis d'Arras looked in, laughing, with the arrow stuck like a war feather through the top of his beaver cap.

"'Twas a darned weak pull, Conrad, or you'd have knocked the cap off," he added casually.

Followed a reunion, considerably livened up with brandy. Blue Heron learned by one brief nod from Louis what the outcome of the interview with Black Hawk had been and resumed his snooze on the blanket, but Crawford and Conrad demanded details ten times over—wanted to know why Louis hadn't said this and hadn't threatened that—and gave their own separate versions of how they would have managed it.

"Yer shouldn't ha' swapped him that good knife against a wampum belt. Boy, that was no kind of a swap!" yelled Crawford. "The Injun skinned yer! 'Sides, it ain't *his* belt anyway."

"How could he give me his war belt?" Louis objected.

"You should ha' took it, son! The Lord helps them as helps theirselves, and an' Injun don't part with nothin'—unless yer take it from him. Black Hawk skinned yer!"

"I got his promise anyhow. The prophet tried to talk him out of it, but Black Hawk passed his word," said Louis. His back was toward Blue Heron. None but Conrad's squaw noticed the expression on Blue Heron's face, and she made no remark.

"They'll be nervous at the fort. They'll be waiting for the news," Louis said, picking up his rifle with the habitual slap that shook the priming down.

"Hell!" remarked Conrad, eying the youngster quizzically through brandy-reddened eyes. "That's—hic—why I recommended a squaw. Squaws sure don't smell sweet, but they're awful comfortin', an' lets a feller sleep! All right, boy—me an' this drunkard here'll keep you comp'ny. We'd better eat first."

So they devoured enormous slices of cold venison. Then Conrad and Crawford reached for their rifles, and Blue Heron followed the three at a safe distance.

THE moon rose and cast a pale shimmer on the marsh, stirring up the chorus of a million frogs, as they reached the open after a steady tramp through the forest in single file that sobered up Conrad and Crawford considerably. Frog tune and the cool night air, however, suddenly revived the brandy fumes and Crawford began singing:

"Oh, boys, I been ter Buffaler, where rot-gut ripens best!

Oh, boys, I been ter Buffaler, which the Yankees tell yer's West!

Oh, East I been to Buffaler; to see them falls I went;

They fell, I fell, I fell like hell, an' all my money's spent!"

Satisfied at first to rival frogs, Crawford felt the spirit of emulation grow as he gave it rein.

"I kin shoot the moon! I kin hit the same mark with two rifles to wunst! I kin—" He stopped suddenly and listened—"I kin spot that whip-poorwill an' split his neck!"

Peering about for the bird, he spied Blue Heron, who promptly disappeared into the nearest cover.

"Wow! I kin hit that Injun's feather!"

He yelled for Blue Heron to stand up and show himself, but Blue Heron was too wise. An owl swooped by out of range. He fired at it and missed.

"Shame an' sorer smite me; I'm gettin' old!" he murmured, beginning to cry as he rammed a new charge home.

Conrad, taking pity on him, threw his own cap into the air, and Crawford hit that easily, but he was inconsolable; all the way to the fort he kept picking out marks and shooting at them "to make sure nobody had put a toe into his eye," as he explained it, and the shots echoed and reechoed.

"They'll kind o' guess we're comin'!" Conrad hazarded.

But the fort folk had placed their own construction on the echoing din that reached them. They had manned the stockade and the women were out with water buckets and to reload rifles. Not a man showed himself, but every one was shouting, dogs were barking, and it was a risky business to approach within hail.

Crawford yelled, and was answered with three shots instantly, none of which came even approximately in the right direction. Conrad diagnosed it, with an owlish air of wisdom.

"Skeered crazy!" he commented. "Too many women an' kids, an' not enough hard liquor!"

Louis went on alone, and by creeping from cover to cover contrived to get near enough to the gate to make his voice heard. He was fired at twice, but at last he dared to stand up and some one within the stockade recognized him. Several minutes after that two men came out with pine torches to reconnoiter, and even then they would not admit Blue Heron.

"Bring no Injuns with yer! Scalpin' varmints—they're all spies, or worse!" some one shouted.

So Blue Heron had to hide himself in the outskirts of the woods. The gate bars came thumping down; Louis, Crawford and Conrad stepped through the gap one by one, and in a moment were surrounded by a small mob of men and women, all expecting to hear accounts of desperate skirmishing with Black Hawk's men.

"Bah! There ain't an Injun nearer than the river!" Crawford yelled at them. "Louis 's ben an' fixed a peace for yer! Git back ter bed!"

Daphne spied Louis the instant he showed in the gate gap, and the other women followed as she ran to greet him. So the women had the story first. Sully did not learn a word until Crawford's version reached him at third or fourth hand. It was ten or fifteen minutes before Louis reached the store.

"**Y**OU'LL make a fine negotiator!" Sully sneered. "Did you include my wagons in the bargain?"

"Never thought of them," Louis answered.

"I'll wager you did! I'll bet you told Black Hawk about 'em! I'll bet you bought him off with 'em!"

"I never thought of them," Louis said again, looking straight at Sully.

"Huh! Where *are* the wagons? Why don't they show up?" Sully retorted, working himself into a rage, and beck-

oning a man who had arrived that noon on horseback. "Didn't *you* pass 'em on the way?"

The man nodded.

"What's happened to 'em then?" demanded Sully. "Tell you what, you men: This is a trick to get out o' fightin'! He never saw Black Hawk—he never went near him! He figures he'll take a nice safe trip with Bizard, an' leave the rest of us to lose our scalps! He's just sneaking out o' trouble!"

Louis leaned back against the counter, swinging the wampum belt to and fro in his left hand, the beads glittering in the candle-light. His eyes sought those of the other men one by one, and his face lit up with a sudden laugh as he saw they were taking his side of it. Sully, noticing that, too, strode away to the end of the store, where he kept his account book.

"Suit yourselves!" he shouted. "You're fools if you believe him, that's all. I'd guard the fort closer than ever!"

Louis caught sight of Felicien standing by a torch outside the store, talking to the women. He slipped out and repeated to Felicien the account of his interview with Black Hawk, but the old priest shook his head.

"My son, I knew Black Hawk before you were born. He is a creature of passions—impulses. He changes his mind overnight. He sees imaginary insults and forgets kindnesses. He is jealous—ambitious. Such men's promises are void before the lips close."

"Well—mine's good," said Louis. "I'll keep mine, and I know Bizard and the others will, as long as Black Hawk keeps his."

"Not long then!" said Felicien dryly. "Meanwhile, of course, you will postpone that other little matter?"

"The wedding? To-morrow night? Not I! That's all I'm waiting for!" he answered laughing. "To-morrow night we're married, and we're off next daybreak for St. Louis, out of Sully's reach."

The priest shook his head and walked away. Louis turned to Daphne, who laughed like a co-conspirator, letting him draw her aside into the deeper shadow of the chapel wall.

"Oh, if you had only seen them, Louis!" she said giggling. "When the rifle shots rang out, Sully kept himself inside the store and shouted through the window. Bizard was the only man who kept his head at first; the others all ran to the stockade and saw Indians every time a blade of grass moved! I knew it was all right! I knew you would manage Black Hawk! But to-morrow—tell me quickly for Père Beaucheval is coming."

"Crawford's already asleep; let him stay here. They won't let Blue Heron near the fort, so Bizard and Crawford must bring Beaucheval to my cabin to-morrow night. I'll talk with Bizard presently. I will be inside the stockade two hours after dark—"

"But how, Louis?"

"Leave that to me. I will be here. You will be outside for the last time, twenty minutes later, so have ready whatever you want to bring away with you. Quick, I hear Beaucheval!"

"But Bizard was to be our witness."

"Well, now he can't be; he's got to get your father out of the way. We must find some one else. Bring a woman—is there one who won't talk?"

"Elizabeth Turner," said Daphne, and ran. Her father's voice came sharply complaining through the dark in search of her:

"Daphne! Daphne! Go home at once! What are you doing, gossiping outdoors this time of night?"

Louis strode out to meet Beaucheval.

"I heard her over that way a minute ago," Louis said. "Conrad says he'll save some brandy for you to-morrow night; Bizard and Crawford will bring you to my place, and you can talk with Conrad all you want to before witnesses. Don't leave Daphne alone, though. Let Elizabeth Turner stay

with her. I'm afraid of Sully, if he learns you're absent."

Beaucheval, no less afraid of Sully, nodded curtly and Louis went back to the store to instruct Bizard, before rounding up Conrad and taking him home to the round cabin in the woods.

CHAPTER X.

"STAND HERE THEN—AND YOU HERE
—AND YOU THERE."

SULLY put more faith in Louis d'Arras's bargain with Black Hawk than he chose to admit. There had been a time when he himself could have talked Black Hawk in to or out of any course, but those were the days when he was promising to help Black Hawk against Keokuk, and Black Hawk had well learned since then what the promises were worth.

And that, of course, gave the trader one more ground for jealousy. But what rankled most was the thought that his precious wagons were not included in the compact. That night he did not sleep. When morning came he was ready with an ultimatum.

Any man who owed him money might come with him to meet the wagons and escort them in, or could reckon his account closed and due. He put it bluntly.

"I've staked most of you. Half o' my year's supplies are on the way. It's up to you."

So there was no plowing that day. Five men were left with Bizard to take care of the fort, and the rest, sixteen all told, went off with Sully, some using the plow-horses for mounts and the remainder trudging along behind, grumbling as they went and laughing when Sully urged them to march faster.

So it was three in the afternoon when they at last found all that was left of Sully's wagons. The bodies of four white men, two Indians, and two 'breeds lay scalped and swarming with flies.

Parts of the wheels of the wagons were left, and there were three dead horses. All the other horses had been taken along with the loot; brushwood had been heaped against the emptied wagons, and the lot set fire to, nothing but a few charred planks and beams remaining amid the ruins of the wheels.

There had apparently been no fight—hardly even a struggle. One driver had been killed by a blow in the back of the neck from a tomahawk, and not one man had a bullet in him. They had simply been ambushed and tomahawked, very likely without time to fire a shot, Black Hawk's men springing without warning from the bushes on either side of the road.

IF Sully had played his hand even reasonably well that minute he could have undone all the ill will of the morning, for his loss was heavy, and those were not the fellows to see without fervid emotion, old acquaintances on the ground, and blue flies where their scalps should be. They would have sympathized with Sully, too, if he had let them.

But he began by abusing them for having been so slow on the march. Then he thought of Louis.

"This is Louis d'Arras's doing!" he swore excitedly. "That treacherous young devil tipped off Black Hawk that these wagons were on the way!"

"Thought you said last night he'd never been near Black Hawk," retorted one of the men who had been the chief butt of his anger that noon.

The answer enraged Sully all the more. "Sure he never went near him!" he shouted. "He sent that stool pigeon of his, Blue Heron, to talk with Black Hawk while he stayed home and got drunk with Crawford and that spy of Astor's!"

"He weren't drunk las' night, an' he was all wore out with journeyin'," said another of Louis's advocates.

"He's a good play actor! He's

worse than any Injun when it comes to trickery!" Sully answered, climbing on his horse. "Who'll come with me to his cabin? Who'll bet we don't catch him up to mischief?"

Only four men agreed to go, and none of those were mounted. The others had begun to be too anxious for their wives and children in the fort to care for Sully's personal feuds. The burning of the wagons and the massacre of eight men looked like treachery, but by Black Hawk, not by Louis d'Arras. They were off and away without argument.

IN spite of previous heroic resolutions, Gaston Beaucheval made up his mind not to leave the fort of St. Pierre des Boeufs that evening. He was too afraid when the time came for action in place of philosophy.

"It is dangerous," he objected. "The woods may be full of Indians. *Mon Dieu*, a man has—"

"—Has his scalp to think of? Not you anyhow!" laughed Bizard, running fingers through his own tousled black hair, that was so long it nearly fell into his eyes.

"No Sac would waste time clawing for a hold on your bald crown! He would have to take you by the beard, which is unorthodox. Ho-ho-hah! They are great fellows for their orthodoxy!"

"But Sully's wagons! Sully is—"

"That's it!" Bizard shouted. He always used his arguments like hammer blows. "Sully has taken nearly everybody with him. You'll be safer with us in the woods."

"But the women—"

"Are safer without you! You and I and Crawford, like brave fellows, will draw the Injuns off in another direction!"

Nonsense though it was, it served. The very thought of Indians on the warpath made Beaucheval's flesh creep. If there had been a cellar anywhere he would have preferred to hide

in it until the return of Sully's party. But Bizard looked huge and protective; there might be safety in his company.

"Let us take Daphne with us!" he suggested.

That nearly floored Bizard, whose wit was heavy and not swift. He liked time to ponder his retorts, but time was pressing. It was Crawford, peering blear-eyed around Bizard's shoulder, who thought of the right argument:

"That's no way ter treat a young gal!" he shouted. "There's goin' ter be brandy an' doin's! Shame on yer!"

And that was the argument Beaucheval needed. To drink good brandy, to have a chance to air his views; the physical protection of men who knew how to look after themselves; and a dignified excuse for leaving his daughter behind—that settled it. He sent Daphne for Mrs. Turner, cautioned them both to remain indoors, put on his beaver cap, let Daphne wrap a shawl over his shoulders, and went off arm in arm between Crawford and Bizard.

It was no fun getting him to the destination, for he was out of condition, and had to be almost dragged along between them, and he gasped and shuddered whenever a twig snapped or the wind sighed through the trees. Where the trail turned into the forest toward Louis's cabin, he screamed aloud, swearing he had seen two Indians.

"*Mon Dieu*, they stood there looking at us!"

"Bucks," said Bizard curtly.

"Buck Indians!" he answered.

"Buck antelopes, you fool! Hold y'r row—I'll go and look," sneered Crawford, making a pretense of stalking something carefully. In a clump of pines that projected from the forest he came face to face, as he expected, with Louis d'Arras and Blue Heron.

"Ye damned young fool!" he whispered, shaking his fist and grinning. "We'll never get him to the cabin if ye scare him thataway! He thinks

there's Injuns in every shadder. Duck, ye young varmint! Don't show y'rself till we're out o' sight an' hearin'! Then git spliced with Daphne an' jine us 'fore he swallows more brandy than he's worth!"

IT was after nightfall when those who had left Sully, after finding the remains of his wagons, arrived at the fort gate, and even to accomplish that those who had horses were obliged to pick up the unmounted men and ride double, one horse carrying three. At the gate, while they put the bars up, there was an expectant crowd, all anxious for the news, eager to know where the wagons and Sully himself and the four missing men were—for the women on that frontier counted heads as their men came through the gate of an evening.

Louis d'Arras also counted heads, from behind the dead stump of a tree in the clearing between fort and forest. The confusion, talking and tumultuous barking at the gate suited his arrangements perfectly, although he was puzzled to know why Sully did not appear.

Why had he not returned? It gave Louis a pang of disappointment to think that Sully was not in there to have his intended wife stolen from under his nose. It would have made the theft doubly piquant.

However, he crept around the fort close under the stockade and, leaning a slab of wood against the uprights at the corner near Beaucheval's cabin, set his foot on that and vaulted over.

None but Blue Heron saw him. The Indian came creeping through the darkness and removed the slab of wood, putting himself in place of it and hugging the stockade close.

The rest was a matter of minutes—twenty at the most. Daphne, nearly bursting with excitement was waiting in the cabin with Elizabeth, the twenty-year-old wife of John Turner, already the mother of three children. But

Daphne came out quietly, too used to emergencies and too much mistress of herself to giggle, Elizabeth Turner helping her to carry the canvas bag that held the whole of her belongings—until Louis seized the thing and threw it easily over his shoulder.

There was only time for a whispered word of confidence. Then a low whistle from Louis, and Blue Heron came leaping like a ghost over the stockade, dropping silently behind them and following into the mission inclosure, where Father Felicien paced to and fro with hands behind his back.

Felicien's greeting was curt. He was nervous and his wrinkled smile was missing, but he led the way into the chapel, wrenching back the door on its weak hinges and saying nothing until he had lit candles. Then:

"What is this news at the gate?" he demanded.

Louis did not know. None knew—not even Blue Heron, and Felicien grew testy.

"What is *he* doing here?" he demanded. "He is not a Christian."

He pointed, but Blue Heron took no notice of him, standing stock still like a graven image.

"He's my friend. He's a witness," Louis answered.

"He cannot sign the book," said Felicien sternly.

Louis laughed at that; he had not imagined there was to be so much formality. "Why, no," he agreed. "Blue Heron can't write."

"Let him wait over there then." Felicien pointed to the darkness near the door, and Blue Heron glided away into it.

"This is only a lesser sin than con-
niving at murder," Felicien went on. "Daphne has been to confession, but how about you? You are almost an infidel. I marry you to prevent bloodshed. Promise me again that you will not fight Sully."

"I won't fight him, and I'm going so far away from him that he'll never

find me!" he said, forcing out the words between his teeth.

"Stand here, then—and you here—and you there."

Felicien arranged them near the plain pine altar, and hurried through the marriage service by the light of two dim candles. He had married tougher men than Louis, and to women who had none of Daphne's honest reputation, but he had never before used the mission's almost forgotten privilege of performing marriages without consent of parents, if there were a parent living; and he liked at least an outward observance of religious orthodoxy, whereas Louis had offered none.

But Louis did press into his hand after the ceremony two French gold coins that had fallen to him along with his mother's wedding ring and the strangely worked gold and tourmaline necklace that he clasped on Daphne's neck; and he listened respectfully to the old priest's short, blunt discourse afterward on the amenities of married life.

Then—no less a ceremony—came the shaking hands with Blue Heron in the doorway, and the signing of the record book—a task that Louis found by no means easy.

It was Daphne who filled in the details of Louis's parentage, in her own free-flowing hand, and Louis set his own name on the line in printed capitals, cut into the paper by the force with which he bore down on the pen, and sealed with a sumptuous blot to record where he threw the pen down and took Daphne in his arms.

There should have been a courteous leave-taking, but some one sounded an alarm, using Bizard's anvil for a gong—which probably meant only a summons to conference, for no shooting followed, and the opportunity was too good to be missed.

Louis seized Daphne's hand, picked up her bag and ran, Blue Heron following. In a minute all three were

over the stockade and had vanished into outer darkness, leaving Felicien solemnly cautioning Mrs. Turner.

"Not a word now! Not one word of this! You understand me?"

BEAUCHEVAL needed brandy badly by the time he reached d'Arras's cabin; fear, fat and a short wind had reduced him to a state of gibbering helplessness, and their progress was so slow that Beaucheval's escorts began to fear that Louis and his bride would get to the cabin first—"and find us all rotten-sober" as Crawford phrased it. But they threw the philosopher on the bunk, gave him one stiff drink, and let him lie there shuddering each time the wind made the rafters squeak, and calling God to witness it was Bizard's fault that he had left his daughter unprotected.

There was sufficient brandy left for something like a party, but Beaucheval's moans were depressing and Crawford swore strong drink didn't taste good to that music.

"This'll spile Louis's weddin'!" he grumbled. "We'd all ought ter be cheerful when the gal comes."

"Wedding?" Beaucheval sat up, staring with blanched face and parted lips.

"Sure! Your gal's gittin' married. Grin, gol darn yer!"

Crawford set him an example, grimacing through a maze of red whiskers and dancing a sort of cross between a nigger break-down and a Highland fling. "Git up an' dance!" he yelled. "Come on, all of ye!"

But Beaucheval looked almost like a corpse. His only stake in the world—his bargain counter—had been stolen! He flopped back on the bunk, and Conrad came to sit beside him, trying to offer comfort.

"She's marryin' Louis d'Arras. He's a good boy," he said quietly.

"Marrying Louis? She can't!" shouted Beaucheval, sitting up suddenly. "I won't give my consent! I won't,

I tell you! I'm her father—she's not of age—it's no marriage! It's not legal!"

"Law!" laughed Crawford scornfully. "A gal's a gal, an' a boy's a boy. Ye're lucky there was a priest. I've known o' cases—"

Bizard, grinning hugely, told the story of Le Sieur de Frontenac and of the mission's unwithdrawn prerogative.

"They'll be married tighter than I can weld iron!" he said pleasantly.

"But Sully! Sully will believe I planned this! Sully will ruin me!" Beaucheval cried out, clapping his hands to his face, almost weeping.

Crawford shoved a tin mug half full of brandy under his nose. "Drink, man, drink!" he shouted. "Then think o' somethin' horrible!"

Beaucheval gulped the brandy down and at once the fear began to leave him. Philosophic optimism sought the line of least resistance—even as the liquor did. He almost forced a smile, but checked it, remembering in the nick of time that that might not be dignified. Business first—smiles afterward!

"D'Arras said—he said something about the Astor Company—was he lyin'?" he asked, looking hard at Conrad.

"Anything Louis said that consarns me, I'll stan' behind," Conrad answered. "Allowin' he lied, I'll make the lie good. What did he tell you?"

"Yow!" yelled Crawford. "That's talkin'! Conrad, ye're a blasted ijjit an' I like ye! Shake!"

He seized Conrad's shoulders and tried to make him dance, but the older man begged off on the ground of "rheumatiz," so the toper took hold of Bizard, who picked him up and crammed him on the bunk alongside Beaucheval. Outside, the dogs began barking furious, but that was to be expected.

"Louis said—" Beaucheval began.

"Said what?" cheerfully called Louis through a window gap.

"There! Why ain't we drunk an'

"dancin'?" yelled Crawford, and ran to the door. He dragged Louis in and Daphne followed, out of breath from the speed at which Louis had brought her, but none the worse for it and prettier than ever with the color in her cheeks.

"All kiss the bride!" yelled Crawford. "Me first!" But Bizard forestalled him, thrusting Crawford back against the wall with one hand. He helped himself liberally, and before Daphne could escape from the giant's embrace the door opened again with a sudden jerk that called every one's attention.

The dogs were barking again furiously. Blue Heron's arm came through the opening, and beckoned.

"Lights out!" yelled Crawford and flattened the top of the nearest candle with his fist. Conrad blew out the other one.

"What the devil—*Mon Dieu*—" a voice came terror-stricken from the bunk.

Conrad whispered something. The squaw gagged Beaucheval suddenly with his own beaver cap. Louis went out and closed the door behind him and the ensuing silence was only broken by the squeaking of the roof. Beaucheval's heavy breathing through his nose, and the click of three rifle locks. There was not a sound from Daphne. It was several minutes before Louis came in again.

"Sully!" he said curtly. "On horse-back."

"Alone?"

"Four with him—dog-tired—making more noise than a barn-raising."

CHAPTER XI.

"SACS!"

THEY listened, hardly breathing, Daphne groping for Louis in the darkness and standing beside him. The heavy footfalls of four tired men and a lame horse stumbling along an

unfamiliar path disturbed the silence as distinctly as if they were stray cows grazing.

"Clumsy fools!" said Conrad under his breath, but no one else spoke. There was something altogether too ominous about the arrival of Sully; but Bizard, feeling for Daphne in the dark to reassure her, discovered she was not trembling. She squeezed the blacksmith's hand and reassured him. She had crossed that river Louis spoke of, and would face whatever happened, with a high chin.

The trembling of undergrowth ceased and Sully's bull voice roared out of the night:

"Who's in there?"

Nobody answered, but in the middle of a window-gap Blue Heron's hand appeared, signaling for caution—desperate signals—danger imminent; and the dogs barked more angrily.

Louis spoke three words in a low voice in the Sac tongue, questioning. Blue Heron's head showed in the gap, back toward them, first his right hand, then the left making a circle around his scalp—the tribal sign.

"Sacs!" exclaimed Louis and Bizard in one breath, and Blue Heron's hand made another signal.

"On the war-path!" said Louis, and ran to the window and shouted: "Hey, there, Sully! Come inside here—quick!"

"Ye damned young fool!" yelled Crawford. "Sully's brought 'em to murder ye!"

"Not he!" Louis answered.

"Not he!" Bizard agreed.

Both men were watching Blue Heron's signals through the window.

The hand disappeared as a blood-curdling yell split the darkness. Three shots rang from the trees simultaneously. Sully cursed at the top of his lungs, somewhere about fifty yards away, and four shots answered the three.

"Boys! Louis has laid a trap for us! My horse is done for! Quick—"

Sully's shout was interrupted by the sound of scuffling and another burst of yells more savage than the first. Louis's rifle spoke through one of the windows, and the stinging smell of powder filled the cabin.

From the black shadow under the window at which Louis stood Blue Heron's bow twanged and twanged again; he had the advantage that he could reload swiftly, and his arrows were quite as effective as bullets in the dark.

"I can't see a damned thing!" Crawford grumbled.

Suddenly he thrust his rifle through a window, and he, Bizard and Louis fired all together.

"'Tain't fair!" Crawford yelled. "Here I sees an Injun an' Blue Heron tomahawks him 'fore I— Conrad, see that one—there—see him? Quick, man, quick!"

He hurried to reload, but Conrad forestalled him. A shadowy figure that was flitting from tree to tree vanished and a deathly silence followed, broken by Sully's voice again, shouting to his own men:

"Are ye all there? Anybody hurt?"

All four answered. One man cried out his jaw was broken by a tomahawk.

"Did ye get him?" asked Sully.

"I did!"

"Well, boys, let's out o' this!" Sully raised his voice purposely, directing his words rather at the occupants of the cabin than at his own men.

"Ye can all swear Louis fired at ye. The reptile's leagued up with the Sacs to murder me! Does any of ye doubt now who tipped my wagons off to Black Hawk? We've beat him and his varmint—"

Disillusionment came swiftly. Another burst of yells—a crashing through the undergrowth—and Sully and his men were fighting back to back against an enemy whose numbers they could not guess. But the men of that frontier—axmen all—could, use a

clubbed rifle to purpose, and even in the dark it was no easy game to overwhelm them.

"COME on, fellers!" Louis was first through the door to the rescue, shouting over his shoulder to Daphne to crawl under the bunk and stay there.

Bizard, close on his heels, almost tripped over him. Conrad cannoned into Crawford, and in ten seconds all four men were charging, yelling like madmen, toward the clump of trees where Sully was at bay.

It was no use shooting; there was nothing a man could see. Bizard's butt thwacked on a skull that broke like an egg under the blow, and Crawford, swiping vainly at the dark, cried out that he was still a virgin—"Awful! Can't kill nothin'! Hold one, some of ye! Hold one while I plug him!"

"I've got two here, Sully!" That was Bizard shouting; two of Sully's four were down and Bizard had stumbled over them. Bizard gathered up both wounded men and started carrying them toward the cabin, and the next voice raised was Louis's, face to face with Sully.

"Get into the cabin. We can beat them off from there."

But Sully was in too big a rage to see reason.

"You damned young—"

His rifle was empty, but he raised the butt. Crawford seized it and hung on.

"In ye go!" he shouted. "The devils'll be back afore we know it!"

Sully made his mind up suddenly and rushed for the cabin door without another word. His two uninjured men were there ahead of him, and he slammed the door in Bizard's face; but he reckoned without the squaw, who sprang out of the gloom and thrust him aside, while Daphne reopened the door and cried "Louis! Louis!"

Before Sully could recover from that astonishment they were all inside

the cabin, and the only sounds for a minute were heavy breathing and the groans of one of Sully's four—then Bizard's heavy footfall as he laid the wounded man on the bunk, and a sharp cry of panic from Beaucheval:

"Oh, my God!"

Beaucheval struck out right and left at anything—at nothing—screaming. Then Daphne's voice:

"Don't, father, don't!"

She began to talk to him in French, persuading him to get off the bunk and make room for the men who were hurt. Just as he yielded to her coaxing, standing up to stare through the darkness with terror-widened eyes, Blue Heron's hand holding five scalps appeared in a window-gap.

Beaucheval opened his mouth to yell; fear gripped his throat, but no sound came. He seized Daphne and tried to drag her under the bunk with him; she broke away and he scrambled under it alone.

"Can't I have some light?" asked Daphne a moment later. "John Turner seems badly hurt."

Nobody answered. Louis stepped to the window and whispered; Blue Heron, crouching in the pitch-black shadow of the eaves, answered in monosyllables.

"They've drawn off," said Louis over his shoulder. "Blue Heron thinks they'll come back. I guess he's darn right."

"Damn right—I'll bet ye!" said Crawford. "They gotter come on agin—I ain't killed one o' the varmints yet!"

Sully's voice boomed out of the dark:

"What's doing here? What's Daphne doing? Come here, Daphne!"

Bizard answered him. "She's looking after Turner and Leary. Let her alone!"

"Why did she come here is what I asked!" Sully retorted angrily.

"No, you didn't!" Crawford shouted at him. "See here, Sully, I ain't

killed no man yit ter-night, an' it's irkin' my innards. When folks gits inquisitive it irks me desp'rate! Yea—that was my lock clickin'!"

Sully grounded his butt in the dark—grounded it twice to make sure Crawford understood. "Can't I ask a question?" he demanded.

"There's questions a man might ask you first!" Crawford retorted. "What was you doin' here? If Turner an' Leary wasn't cut up bad I'd ask, if it was you as brought Injuns ter 'tack this cabin!"

"The brutes burned my wagons, killed eight men and looted everything," said Sully. "I brought four witnesses to look—"

"To look fer the loot here? D'yer want a candle lit ter hunt by?" Crawford inquired sarcastically.

"Sneer all you like—it's a hanging matter!" Sully answered. "We've got evidence enough—if Louis ain't guilty, what for did he fire on us?"

BIZARD interfered before Crawford could answer:

"One quarrel at a time!" he warned. "Let's finish with the Sacs first." There was silence after that for about a minute. Then:

"Turner is dead!" said Daphne suddenly, in an even voice, almost without emotion.

"Louis shot him!" Sully thumped his rifle butt on the floor three times. "You hear that, all of you? Turner's dead, and I say Louis—"

"Here they come!" said Louis suddenly and there was instant silence, each man watching at an opening. But the dogs did not bark.

It was Blue Heron and Conrad's four friendly Iroquois, who had crept up unseen. Blue Heron's hand rapped quietly on the door, and Louis opened it cautiously. Blue Heron slipped in like a shadow.

"Are we all that sober they can creep up on us that-away?" asked Crawford plaintively. "Can't see a

blamed thing! Can't even find the brandy crock! Has that there Sully ben an' found it?"

Louis whispered to Blue Heron, Bizard listening with his eyes fixed steadily on the nearest opening. Daphne came and watched through the opening Louis had left. "Leary's lower jaw is broken, but it doesn't hurt him much," she said quietly.

"Blue Heron says"—Louis's voice was almost casual—"that he and the Iroquois think the Sacs have set an ambush for us atween here and the fort. He says—and I think he's darn right—that they figure we'll run for the fort before morning."

Conrad broke silence at last from across the cabin, where he watched at a window-gap opposite the door.

"That's good Injun argyment," he commented.

"Blue Heron thinks," said Louis, "they're a small party who have left Black Hawk to raid outlying settlements."

"Black Hawk havin' promised you he wouldn't fight!" sneered Sully with what he intended for withering sarcasm. "How many's outside there? Four? Iroquois? Give 'em to understand if we're attacked again they'll all be shot dead. That 'll fix things! Blue Heron's treacherous—I've had my eye on him a long time."

Conrad cleared his throat sharply and Daphne squeezed Blue Heron's hand.

"Whoever teches my Iroquois deals with me!" said Conrad dryly.

Sully swore into his beard and began growling to his own two friends in undertones.

"Shall we stay here till daylight?" asked Louis.

"No!" said Bizard. "We'll be needed at the fort."

"We'll soon need liquor here!" said Crawford. "A loon 'u'd know we can't hold this place! Hey, Beaucheval! Come out from under there an' give us yer philosophy!"

He prodded with his rifle and Beaucheval crawled out from under the bunk. "I made room for the wounded man," he explained with an attempt at dignity, and everybody laughed, except Daphne, who went over and tried to reassure him.

"Father's not brave, he's a scholar," she said as soon as the laughing ceased. "He's a poet. He doesn't pretend to be a fighting man."

There was another laugh at that, during which Bizard took hold of Louis's shoulders and shook him for emphasis, whispering lip to ear:

"Fort up! You've got to fort up, Louis! When a plan goes wrong, say nothing and begin again! Say nothing—understand me? I'll caution the others. You make Daphne hold her tongue. I'll watch Sully. Now—think, boy! You've the brains. How do we reach the fort?"

LOUIS turned to Blue Heron, whose eyes gleamed in the dimness from a window, and they talked in undertones. They appeared to agree.

"It's my fault you are caught here," Louis announced after a pause. "I'll do my best to set it right. Blue Heron can guide you all by a way that 'll bring you to the far side of the marsh. I'll stay and try to make 'em think we're all in here. If I can get through I'll join you in the morning."

Sully snorted. Daphne gasped and started toward Louis. Crawford laughed aloud:

"That's talkin'!" he said. "I'll stay with ye!"

"I'll stay, too!" said Daphne in a low voice, reaching Louis's side. "Father and I will stay."

Beaucheval heard that, for his ears were sharp enough for anything that concerned him. He began to remonstrate, but was interrupted by Sully:

"Louis d'Arras comes with us! If he stays, I stay! Some one's goin' to answer for the burning of my wagons!"

Bizard strode heavily across the floor and stood in front of Sully:

"I stay with Louis, and I answer for him!"

Sully and Bizard with their faces close together growled in undertones, the note of threat predominating. Louis drew Daphne close to him.

"Be brave now, little wife," he whispered.

"I'm brave, Louis! Your wife's place is with you!"

"No, Daphne, go back with your father. Conrad will look after you. Blue Heron shall watch Sully. I'll be with you in the morning. This is just a party of young Sacs who've broken away from Black Hawk. Don't you see that if you stay here I'll not be free to deal with them, whereas if you're in the fort I'll know you're safe?"

"But Louis, how can I go and leave you?"

He threw up his head and gave that silent laugh she knew so well—the laugh that challenged danger for the love of doing it.

"We're married, so why can't you? There's nothing Sully can do to upset it now, so fort up, Daphne! You've had to trust me lots o' times. Trust me again. I'll come for you whatever happens."

He kissed her silently, and though he knew he was making her suffer he stuck to the plan that seemed wise and right.

"So go with Conrad and your father and the others," he said quietly.

"Louis, it's like tearing out my heart to leave you here!"

"I'd be a coward to let you stay," he answered, "Be brave, little wife! You know—if a woman's brave it makes a man braver!"

She shuddered, as if she felt the icy foretouch of disaster, but Louis called to Conrad, who came over and stood peering at them both, puckering his eyes, trying to read both faces.

"Too bad!" he said grimly. "But ye got ter leave him, little woman!"

"You'll fort up, won't you?" Louis asked. "Will you and your squaw keep an eye on her?"

Conrad nodded. "A squaw ain't much to look at, but she's got four eyes!" he said calmly.

Blue Heron grew impatient and began calling in a strange, soft voice in the Sac tongue that it was time to go. Bizard agreed with him, and Crawford backed up Bizard.

"Git out, all of yer, afore the brandy's finished!" he urged. "Sully's ben an' swigged it all but about a cupful. Gol-darn your hide, yer greedy drunkard!"

LOUIS and Daphne hugged each other behind Sully's back. Beaucheval was told to help the wounded Leary; they were to keep together and set the pace for all. Sully shook his fist under Beaucheval's nose.

"Just a bleat from you—just one yawp from you, and the Sacs'll scalp the lot of us! You'll get yours first if I hear as much as a belch from you, d'you hear me?"

Beaucheval was too scared to reply. He clutched at Daphne's arm as if he were a small boy and she his mother. Sully swaggered out.

"Let Turner lie there—but remember I said Louis shot him!" he said.

Fish and Milligan, the two unwounded members of Sully's party, followed; then Daphne, with Beaucheval and Leary, the latter holding a broken jaw with his left hand, but still clinging to a rifle with his right; then Conrad and his squaw, the squaw carrying Daphne's bag as well as Conrad's.

Blue Heron went out last, stopping to exchange a farewell word with Louis, who shook hands with him. Then Blue Heron hurried to the head of the procession, and he and the four Iroquois led the way.

Thwack came Bizard's hand on Louis's shoulder in the darkness as the door shut.

"Too bad, Louis, but you did right, boy! You'll see her in the morning!"

"Have a drink, boy—have a drink!" said Crawford, clinking in a tin mug on the table. "Conrad took beddin' an' left good liquor—did ye ever hear o' such an ijjit! Split my gizzard—did ye hear that?"

It was not much of a noise; it sounded as if some one—Beaucheval most likely—had tripped and fallen where the track left the clearing; but it was enough to have warned Indians a mile away.

"Boys—act quick or there'll be a massacre! Come on—we've got ter make them varmints think the hull party's still in here. Light a candle, one of ye!"

Bizard did it. Louis was already outside, crouching low and listening. By the dim candle rays Crawford raised Turner's dead body and propped it on the table with his back against the tree that supported the roof.

"Can't kill a feller more'n wunst," he said apologetically.

Bizard found a piece of raw-hide and lashed the body to the best advantage. Crawford poured out the last of the brandy, and tossed the drink down.

"Come on—outside all!" cried Louis through the door.

Shutting the door quietly behind them they followed Louis to the far edge of the clearing, to where the usual track turned toward the fort—a direction almost opposite to that the others had taken. Crouching there under the pines to listen, they could hear foot-falls and the occasional snapping of a twig, as Sully and the others followed the four Iroquois.

"Yer'd think it was the State militia!" Crawford grumbled. "A herd o' steers 'ud be a cat after a bird compared to it!"

Louis, saying nothing, picked up a piece of dead wood and hurled it away among the trees in the opposite direction to that the sound came from.

"Steady!" warned Crawford. "Our lot will figure we're Injins an' git that skeered—"

"Conrad and Blue Heron will know what we're doing," Louis answered.

"Too much noise 'll make the enemy suspect a trick," Bizard whispered.

Louis glanced over at the cabin. "It has got to seem like a trick," he answered.

THE moonlight now was bathing half the clearing in mellow light, but the half in which the cabin stood continued in pitch darkness, in which the square windows shone yellow and distinct with the one flickering candle behind them.

Like a man asleep with his chin drooping on his chest sat Turner's corpse, weird because they knew he was a dead man, yet lifelike because the candle flame burned unsteadily in the draft and the corpse seemed to move as if it breathed in sleep.

"I know two dead trees that'll serve," said Louis, and, crouching in the deepest shadow, threw three more heavy pieces of wood in different directions. "Now—listen, fellers. I know these trails. Those Sacs look to me like young ones—they've no experience—they'll be ambushing the path to the fort, but they'll have heard the noise and they'll be back in a minute. Follow me, and crawl quietly.

Bizard, despite his weight, made no noise whatever, but Crawford had drunk enough brandy to dull the edge of skill, and more than once a dry twig cracked under him. The third time that happened Louis pitched a heavy piece of wood as far-away among the trees as he could throw it to distract the enemy's attention from the real objective—two dead hemlocks, recently fallen, that lay one on the other—a black mass darker than the night. Crawling in, and peering through the withered branches, they could see Turner's body distinctly through a cabin window.

Louis threw two more sticks, one to the left and one to the right as far away as he could hurl them.

"Now, if my figuring's right," he whispered, "them Sacs'll think our whole party's ambushed all around the cabin, and they'll waste time investigating. Don't shoot until I give the word."

"That was my idee ter set Turner there. Good, eh? They'll think he's alive an' a bunch of us in there with him," Crawford said, chuckling.

"You can't fool Injuns that-away," Louis answered. "They'll know he's dead, and they'll suspect a trick. We've got to double trick 'em. Quiet now, fellers."

They lay amid mosquitos for what seemed half an hour before there was sight or sound of an enemy. But there was too much silence; the voices of the night were still; the very shadows seemed expectant, and the moonlight creeping inch by inch across the clearing was like the curtain rising on tragedy.

Louis touched Bizard at last and the blacksmith moved his hand by way of answer, nudging Crawford in turn; but Crawford was fast asleep and Bizard let him sleep on rather than risk the noise he might make if awakened.

Three Sacs, creeping like shadows, seeming to move scarcely faster than the edge of the moonlight, had emerged from the woods in the direction of the path leading to the fort. They were naked to the waist and had no bow and arrows, but they were carrying something beside their tomahawks, though what that something was it was impossible to see.

"Hard to draw a bead on 'em in this light," Bizard whispered.

"Don't shoot!" Louis answered. Then, suddenly: "Damn the devils! Curse their varmint hides! They're going to fire the cabin!"

"Better shoot then."

"No!" Louis whispered. "Wait. We'll have to let 'em do it. Damn

them—there's a keg o' powder in there and my other shirt, to say nothing o' blankets and—"

EMOTION silenced him. With an ax and a week or two to spare he could build a better cabin somewhere else, and he had intended to leave this one like an empty bird's nest to rot and fall to pieces; but no more than a bird did he care to see it destroyed before his eyes, and there were things in there he cherished—things that had been his mother's, that he intended for Daphne.

"Curse their deceitful souls!" he muttered. "And to think I fed the swine and called 'em friends!"

"Wake Crawford!" he whispered.

Crawford awoke with a start and grabbed his rifle. "Sacs?" he whispered. "Oh, all right—I see 'em!"

"Shoot when I give the word!" Louis whispered. "Paul—you take that Injun on the left—Crawford, take the right-hand one—the middle varmint's mine! Then follow me quick without reloading."

"Law-sake's what yer waitin' fer?" Crawford growled.

"There'll be more light in a minute," Louis whispered.

Two of the Indians began blowing punk-wood into flame and setting fire to dry pine twigs, which they thrust in a hurry into the cabin crevices and under the eaves where the timbers of the roof were dry. The third man—he who had been in the middle—opened the cabin door and entered.

"Thought they couldn't resist a scalp!" Louis muttered. "Wait a second, fellers!"

It took time for the fire to lay hold of the solid timbers—more time than it did for the Indian inside the cabin to reach his objective. In a moment his head stood framed in the cabin window with his tomahawk raised and his fingers in Turner's hair.

"Now!" exclaimed Louis.

All three rifles barked at once, and

Louis's bullet, with a perfect target in the four-square window-gap, drilled straight into the head of the buck inside the cabin. Bizard's victim fell head-forward into flame he had just kindled. Crawford's man fell backward and began to crawl away.

"Wait!" Crawford yelled excitedly, hurrying to reload. "Wait, fellers! I ain't no more quite a virgin! Wait while I kill the varmint!"

But Louis was on his way already—gone before six rifles belched from across the clearing. Bullets and a shower of arrows spattered among the hemlock branches. Louis's rifle answered from new cover, fifty yards removed from where he had been.

Crawford reloaded excitedly and fired again, but missed his crawling target; Bizard hurried after Louis, and by that time the whole cabin was ablaze and the Sacs had to shoot with fire-light in their eyes. Their second flight of arrows whistled overhead.

"I get yer, boy! I get yer!" Crawford panted. "Plug 'em again. Move on. Plug again. The varmints 'll think we're fifty men!"

"Double back!" Louis answered. "If we get behind 'em next, they'll really think there's more than three of us. Wait here a minute—and don't shoot!"

HE ran off into the woods, crying out once or twice and kicking at the undergrowth, stopping presently to throw stones and heavy sticks in several directions. It sounded as if at least three men were changing ground at top speed. Then silence, and he crept back stealthily to join his friends, dropping down full length between them.

The cabin was a blaze of crackling flame and a golden-yellow tongue curled skyward wrapping itself around the tree that formed the roof-prop.

"I'd admire fer to see that—"

Crawford shut his mouth as the

thing he looked for happened. A roof-beam curled in the heat and dropped, filling the interior with sparks. Sparks, or heat, or both combined exploded the powder keg with a report like thunder, that awoke every crashing echo in the woods.

The roof lifted in a gorgeous splurge of flame and scattered itself in a meteor-shower all over the clearing—which was too much for Crawford; he stood up and yelled.

An answering yell from a dozen Indians broke from the far side of the clearing, as they rushed into the dull-red cloud of smoke. Louis caught sight of them as the smoke billowed upward for a second.

"This way!" he said suddenly, and started flitting from tree to tree around the clearing toward the Indians' rear.

But they did not go far. They lay down and watched. The Sacs seemed to go mad. Yelling and leaping, they rushed into the clearing and began to dance around the blazing ruins, looking like red devils in a smoky hell, splitting the air with war cries.

"That big brute's mine!" said Crawford, snugging his chin down on the rifle butt.

Louis stopped him. "We're between them and our friends now," he whispered. "Watch 'em awhile. The longer they dance that-a-way the better the chance for our folks to reach the fort."

"There's more of 'em somewhere," Bizard whispered. "It's another trick!"

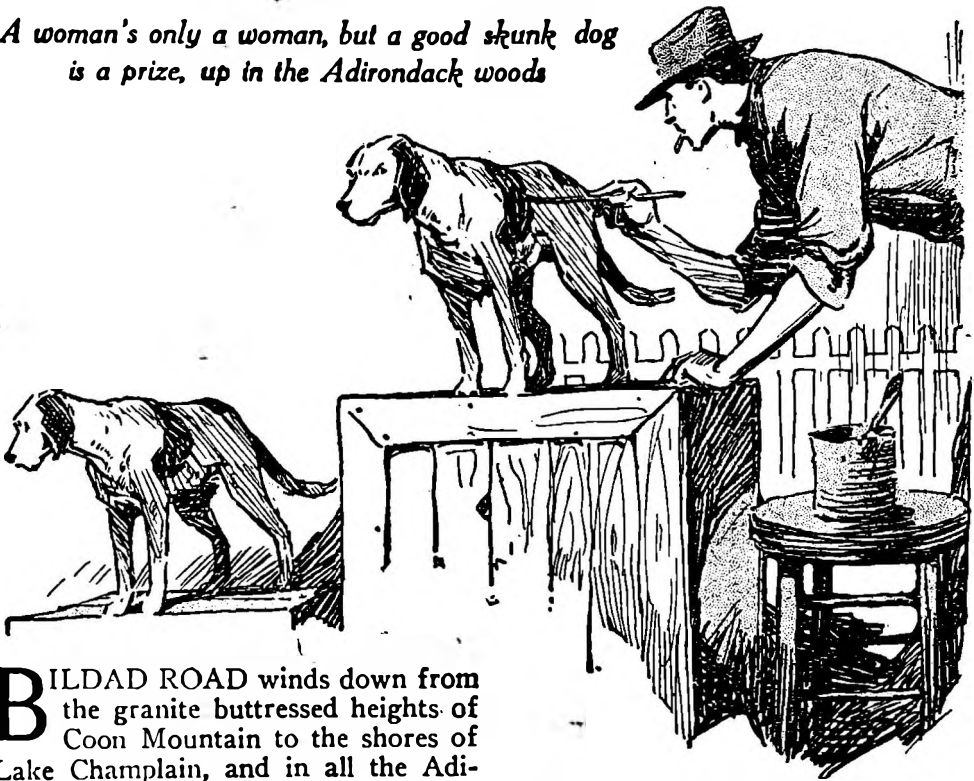
He had hardly spoken when a dozen Sacs sprang from the bushes behind them. Six pounced on Bizard who fought like a bull; Louis was pinned to the ground before he could move; Crawford was knocked down by a tomahawk that grazed his skull—and in a minute all three men were prisoners bound hand and foot and being dragged by their yelling captors toward the blazing ruins of the cabin.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Painted Pup

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

A woman's only a woman, but a good skunk dog is a prize, up in the Adirondack woods



BILDAD ROAD winds down from the granite buttressed heights of Coon Mountain to the shores of Lake Champlain, and in all the Adirondacks there is no more joyously unregenerate highway. Nowhere in all the vast sea of blue peaks does the hard cider ripen to a richer power, or the girls step faster to the music of a fiddle. A man needs little more than a good dog and plenty of chewing tobacco in order to be happy.

Of all the young men on Bildad Road there was none more popular than smiling Jim Kenyon. He could lick anything that walked on two legs between Coon Mountain and the lake, as he had proved when necessary, but good nature so filled him that he seldom had trouble. He owned a neat shack, and worked enough to keep himself in salt pork and corn meal.

However, even the bright virtues of Jim were somewhat overshadowed by

Before dark, Petey was outwardly the exact duplicate of Spark

the genius of his skunk dog, Spark. A dog like this one can provide his master, in a good year, with enough pelts to do away with the necessity for work through many weeks. Spark was a noble animal, knee-high to a man, with brown spots on a white background. A kindly wisdom beamed from his eye. Jim Kenyon was envied by every man on the road.

One crisp fall morning Jim started for the Corners to buy tobacco and groceries. Spark walked behind him with the dignity befitting his place in the community. Jim felt himself filled with an extra special happiness which may have been both a warning and a

promise of what was to come. He lifted his voice in song:

"O! Deacon Grimes, that good ol' soul,
His face we see no mor-r-r-re!
He wore a long blue overcoat
All buttoned up befor-r-r-re!"

Kenyon came to Whisker Nugent's place and stopped his song. He halted. Whisker, who consisted of two hundred pounds of solid bone and brawn, was in the dooryard humped over a soap box. The glistening blue-black brush that ran from throat to eyes almost touched some small object which seemed to be sun drying on the overturned box.

"What you got, Whisker?" asked Jim.

Nugent looked up. He might have insulted another man, but Kenyon had thrashed him three times already.

"Well, sir!" He shifted his chew of tobacco and chuckled. "I'm getting me a collection of ears. I read about one of them pirates that saved ears, and I chawed this one off last night when a poker party busted up."

Jim leaned on the fence and Spark sat down beside him.

"Maybe somebody'll start collecting whiskers," he suggested.

"Anybody's welcome to my whiskers if they can take 'em!" said Nugent. "Don't want to sell that dog?"

"No!" Jim laughed. "Not for a million dollars!"

He moved on. Two hundred yards beyond the weathered Nugent place, where the valley road began, he saw a girl sitting on a rail fence. Her eyes were amber, and her hair was more red than gold. This girl was small, and extremely neat, in a dress which looked foreign to Bildad Road; yet there was something vaguely familiar in the unwinking scrutiny of those amber eyes.

"If you stand there with your mouth open much longer," she said pleasantly, "chipmunk 'll come along and den up for the winter."

Kenyon grinned; and decided not to go to the Corners that day.

"What's your dog's name?" the girl asked. "Or can't you talk?"

"I call him Spark because he's so bright," Jim told her.

"Now I know you ought to be put out of the way," she remarked. "Pop's got a muzzle-loader that would make a good job of it."

"Who is your father?" asked Jim.

"I'm Rose Jellup. Not that it's any of your business. I've been away working in the valley for a long time."

"Henry Jellup's kid!" exclaimed Kenyon. "You've done a handsome job growing up."

"I'm sorry you think so," replied Miss Jellup. "For I don't like your face. Your nose is bent a little to one side and your hair's too long."

"My nose was bent in a good fight, anyway!" cried Jim, indignantly. "Is your father home?"

"Yes!" She slid down from the fence to stroke one of Spark's ears.

"I guess I'll go see the old cuss."

"He's watching," sighed Rose. "He sent me out here for bait. I been sitting there off and on for a week, waiting for you to go by."

"What?" stammered Jim. "Henry never liked me!"

"Nor now, either. He said if the handsomest dog I'd ever seen come along with a young roughneck that grinned like a half foolish tomcat, I was to hook 'em."

"Oh—I see!"

"It's the pup's beauty, not yours. They all know you got eighteen skunk pelts last fall."

"And nobody will get my dog!" He wondered why she was trying to block her father's game, whatever it might be.

She laughed unpleasantly as they reached the Henry Jellup residence. Henry was seated on the dejected front porch. His jaws moved in a slow rhythm and a white goatee moved with them.

"Flirtin', hey?" said Jellup, ignoring Jim. "I thought I told you to let these Bildad Road burns alone?"

"Don't blame her, Henry," exclaimed Kenyon. "I followed her along home."

Rose bent upon him an inscrutable look. With deliberation Henry Jellup put down the pine stick he had been whittling; he squirmed on the porch until he could reach inside the doorway. His hand brought forth a muzzle-loading shotgun.

"Jim," he said, "she's loaded in one barrel with rock salt and in the other with bird shot. If the salt don't work the bird shot will. I don't calculate to have you hanging around here after Rose!"

KENYON sat down on the porch. He stared thoughtfully at the little foot of Rose, tapping the trampled grass.

"Henry," he began, "I got good intentions."

"You don't know what a good intention is," Jellup told him. "But even if you did I don't want my little Rose to get married. I'm a lonesome old man, and I need her."

"You're an old liar," said Jim sadly. "Too old for me to give you a licking, and so crooked you can't lay straight in bed. And so lazy you'd carry a kitten under each arm to breathe for you, if you could."

"Mebbe them things is true," admitted Jellup. He cocked both barrels of the shotgun. "And then agin mebbe they ain't much to do with what we're getting at."

"You wouldn't be lonesome if you had a first-class skunk dog to keep you company!"

"Mebbe I be all you say." A humorous gleam came into the eye of Henry Jellup. "But you can't say I ain't smart!"

"No," agreed Jim. "You're smart." Jellup laid his gun down carefully and bit off a fresh chew.

"Now we're getting down to hoss sense, my boy! It's the dog or the gal! You can't have both!"

"He'll be sorry if he gets me!" blazed Rose. "I 'spose you can make me marry him, but he'll lead an awful life!"

"If he don't give you a licking every day he'd ought to lead an awful life," replied her father.

"Any kind of a life with you would be all right," Jim told her.

"How about it?" demanded Henry. "I ain't a man to arger, an' fool around."

Jim Kenyon looked down and met the soft brown eyes of Spark. In them he read loyalty to the death, a devotion which money could not buy nor time change, love that would choose hunger with him rather than ease and plenty with any other master. This was his best friend, whom he was tempted to betray. Spark put his head on Kenyon's knee and whined softly.

"I can't do it to-day," said Jim, unsteadily. "You got to give me overnight, anyway."

"Will ye trade to-morrow?"

The very air seemed to be fine drawn. Rose leaned forward.

"I won't promise!" groaned Jim. "I'll tell you to-morrow!"

"You'd think I was a heifer calf!" The cheeks of Rose grew crimson. "I hope you keep your dog, Mr. Jim Kenyon! I hope he goes mad and bites you!"

"I thought you didn't want to be traded!" cried Jim.

"I don't, you dumb-bell! Anyway, not to you!"

"Don't arger with a woman!" snorted Jellup. "Go on home, afore she bites you and the dog, too. Then you'd both have the hydrophoby!"

THE feet of Jim Kenyon were slow as they stumbled toward home; his head hung mournfully. Spark, reflecting that mood, trailed his ears. Jim sat down on a stump and Spark

leaned against him with the silent sympathy of a good dog.

It was while Jim was miserably contemplating the activities of two late bumblebees that the great idea came to him. They looked just alike. Probably only their close bumblebee friends could tell them apart. Kenyon considered his dog—brown spots on a white ground! Why not?

As Jim resumed his journey along Bildad Road he began to sing the praises of Old Deacon Grimes:

"Whene'er he heard the voice of pain
His breast with pity burned;
The large round head upon his cane
Of ivory was turned!"

The remainder of that day was full of hard work. Kenyon went to the northern end of Coon Mountain and brought home Petey, a brother of Spark. Except that Petey had no spots, he and Spark were exactly alike.

Jim hurried to the Corners and bought paint, dryer, and brushes. Before dark Petey was an exact duplicate of Spark, outwardly. He had squirmed and found fleas at unexpected moments and Kenyon was tired, but the work was a triumph.

The next morning Petey still needed time to air so Kenyon went to the Jellup place and announced to Henry that he was willing to trade, but that he wanted to use his dog for one more hunt.

"All right," agreed Henry, grudgingly, "but bring the dog when you show up again, or don't show up."

"And I don't care if you never show up!" added Rose from a lower window.

"A good dog's wuth ten wimmin!" snorted Jellup. "Only some folks ain't got sense enough to know it!"

Jim Kenyon turned homeward, and found Whisker Nugent picking cider apples. Whisker bellowed a question from his orchard.

"Heard you sold your dog to Hen Jellup?"

"Yep," replied Jim.

"Then I'm going to get that pup off'n him if I have to mortgage my house!"

Kenyon went on without replying to this. He felt that it was better to avoid all discussion until after the trade had been made.

The following day Petey was practically free from the odor of paint. Spark, who had refused to have anything to do with him, made playful advances. But Petey was of a stolid nature. He preferred to lie behind the stove.

The morning was still bright with its first sparkling freshness when Jim appeared at the home of Henry Jellup, with Petey attached to him by a stout cord. Into the eyes of Henry came an almost human gleam as he knotted the cord to a porch post. Petey lay down.

"Come on out here, Rose!" shouted Jellup.

She came, but a kitchen knife with a nine-inch blade dangled nervously in her hand. The red-gold hair was damp in little curls against her white forehead.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"You!" cried Jim.

She glanced at the dog, at Kenyon. Her eyes called him a worm of the dust.

"Folks don't always get what they want!"

"No girl, no dog," said Jim. "Henry, you can't frame me!"

"If I lose that dog on account of her tantrums I'll take the buggy whip to her," said Jellup, "and then I'll marry her to Whisker Nugent!"

The head of Rose Jellup bowed. She dropped to her knees beside the dog and leaned against the post. Her voice filled with tears.

"Give me a day or two longer!" she pleaded. "You two men—what can a girl do!"

Up to that moment it had seemed to Jim that a girl could do plenty, especially Rose Jellup; but, as he himself well knew, his heart was as soft as but-

ter in August. A proper Bildad Roader would have taken that girl by the hair and led her before a justice of the peace.

"Don't cry!" he growled. "I'll wait till to-morrow, Rose!"

"Now I know you're a dam' fool!" said Jellup. "Fust you trade a good dog for a woman and then you let her have her own way!"

Rose smiled through her tears. At that smile Jim could hear birds sing where there were no birds.

Kenyon turned away again, happy in spite of his disappointment, and went chittering down to the Corners to prepare for his wedding. He bought a brass-studded collar for Spark and a new shirt and necktie for himself.

IT was one of those fair, smiling days which by contrast give greater strength to drama when Jim Kenyon set forth to get his bride. Spark was tied up in the woodshed, unable to understand the curtailment of his liberty and none too well pleased with the new collar. Jim did not worry about what Rose would think when she found him in possession of a dog exactly like the one her father had. On Bildad Road a man's wife is not supposed to think unless she's told to.

Jim saw little of the autumn glory of the mountains that morning; the delicious odors of the forest were lost upon him. He passed Whisker Nugent's place without so much as glancing that way. It was only when he approached the dejected house of Jellup that he gave attention to his surroundings. In a way he was forced to take notice, for he was met by that condition of the atmosphere which proves that a skunk is or has been present.

Rose came around the corner of the house. Her handkerchief was at her nose, and she shrank as her father stepped forth from the barn. He carried his shotgun, and there was something ominous in his measured tread as he came toward Kenyon.

"Jim," began Henry, as he cocked both barrels, "they's only one thing I can say this morning that you'll want to hear. You ain't quite such a fool as I thought you was!"

It seemed to the puzzled mind of Kenyon that there was a faint hint of amusement in the eyes of Rose. They appeared to have warmed a little; and that made them even more beautiful.

"What's on your mind, Henry?" asked Jim, uneasily. "Been skunk hunting?"

"They was a skunk come around the dooryard early last evenin'," said Jellup, fingering the triggers of his gun. "I thought I'd give the best skunk dog on Bildad Road a chance at him, so I got me a club and a lantern and went out.

"A skunk dog is supposed to kill his skunk, ain't he? So a man can walk up to the critter and pick up the carcass without getting into no trouble. Ain't that right, Jim?"

"Well, this four-legged limb of hell you traded to me jest barked around and fooled me. He went and hid himself. And when I stooped over to pick up that skunk he was lively as a cricket. I never see a more able-bodied skunk. Consequence is, my boy, I won't go nowhere into human society for about six weeks!"

"That's too bad, Henry!" cried Jim, with all sympathy. "Maybe Spark was lonesome for me, or something!"

"No, my boy! Spark ain't lonesome for you. Because this dog ain't Spark! Rose, she tried a little turpentine on one of them brown spots. They didn't grow there. She said she noticed a leetle smell of paint yesterday when she was a-weeping you into making a fool of yourself!"

Jim Kenyon suddenly found his mouth parched; the brightness gone from earth and sky. He looked at Rose, and met a profoundly speculative gaze which told him nothing.

"Henry," he began, "that dog is the same litter—"

"I'm glad he ain't no good!" interrupted Jellup. "Because now you're going to bring me a dog with spots that don't come off or you don't get Rose. This time both barrels is loaded with shot and I'd like to use 'em!"

Rose Jellup laughed. It was the laugh that did it. Jim began to shake with rage.

"I DON'T want her!" Jim thundered. "I got to go and apologize to my dog now for almost going back on him! I was going to trade off a critter that cares something about me for one that don't care whether I live till supper time! Once a bull took after me in a place where there wasn't any cover and Spark hung onto his nose till I got away! I'm going home to my dog, you horse-faced old reprobate!"

Jim turned and walked blindly toward the road. But not half a dozen times had his feet set themselves down when a weight hurled itself against him. The arms of Rose were around his neck, and before his blurred vision her face swayed mistily.

"Oh, Jim!" she cried. "Take me home with you! Jim, dear! I wouldn't marry a man that would go back on his dog! Don't you see?"

Kenyon held her out at arm's length to make sure that this was real. Then he gathered her up against his breast. For a matter of three seconds he was the happiest man in the world. That brief joy was ended by the roar of Henry Jellup's muzzle loader. A charge of shot whistled past—all but three or four of them. They found a lodging in Jim's legs. He put Rose down.

"I'm a fair-minded man, Henry," he yelled, "and I'm willing to pick a few shot out of myself. But not any more'n I've got now!"

"Rose ain't quite eighteen years old," snarled Jellup malevolently. "You're kidnaping her, and if I shoot you on my own property I ain't going to get into much trouble!"

From one Bildad Roder to another

there were few things meaner than invoking the aid and protection of the law. Kenyon's patience with Henry was gone. He calculated the distance between himself and the old man.

"Get out of the way, Rose," he said.

"Wait!" she whispered, dragging at his arm. "Look!"

Whisker Nugent had come out of the woods behind the house and he was cat-footing over the turf toward Henry Jellup. There was a wild glare in the eyes that peered over his whiskers; his hairy fingers worked convulsively as he drew closer and closer to his victim, who remained intent upon the two in front of his shotgun.

Suddenly Whisker plunged. There was a squawk, as of a dying hen. The shotgun went off and plowed up a strip of greensward. But Henry escaped for the moment and ran with the legs of a twenty-year-old for the nearest tree. He fairly flew from the ground to comparative safety among the higher branches. Whisker Nugent bayed and frothed beneath him.

"What's the matter, Whisker?" asked Kenyon. "You seem to be all excited."

"No!" bellowed Nugent. "I ain't excited, nor I ain't mad! But I'm going to feed Henry Jellup to my new dog! That's all! I wouldn't even put one of Henry's ears in my collection! He's so mean it would spile the rest of 'em!"

"Henry must be working overtime at his meanness," said Jim. "He shot me a little a few minutes ago, and he was fixing to do it some more."

"SHOOTIN' ain't nothing!" snorted Whisker. "That wouldn't call for the kind of hard feelings I got! Smell of me, Jim! I won't be able to go to the Corners, nor into anybody's house, for a couple of months! Last night Jellup sold me that dod-ratted dog of yours for twenty-five dollars, good money! Said he's jest got a skunk, and showed me the hide!

"It wa'n't late, and I was so tickled I took the critter right out hunting for skunks. I got one! I guess I did! The dog he barked, and I thought he'd killed the skunk, the way he'd ought to. No! All he done was to get him excited! The dog went and hid. And I reached for the skunk—and I got to shave off my whiskers! What'll I be without my whiskers? The whiskers is the reason why I'm going to feed Henry to the dog!"

"Pa Jellup," said Jim, gazinz soberly upward, "it looks as though your sins had come home to roost!"

The tableau remained practically as it was for many seconds. For Jim Kenyon, with Rose hanging on his arm and her father up a tree, life was very agreeable. Whisker Nugent rolled up his sleeves and waited. He was too big to climb fast. But if he waited long enough his quarry would have to come down.

"Ain't you got any heart, Jim?" pleaded Henry at last. "Help me out! You're the only man in the world that can do it!"

Nugent looked uneasy, and indignant.

"Henry," replied Jim, "I like to see you right where you are now!"

"I got to drop sooner or later! Then you won't have no father-in-law!"

"I can get along, and I'll bury you as decent as I can," Jim promised. "I'll even let Rose go to the funeral."

Whisker Nugent whooped and chuckled, and nearly choked in his mirth.

"They won't be nothing to bury!" Whisker Nugent cried.

Henry Jellup groaned a groan of real distress. Rose stood on tiptoe and pulled Kenyon's head down to her lips. First she kissed him, and then she whispered:

"Please, Jim. We're so happy!"

Jim looked into the deep, amber pools which were her eyes. Spark's

eyes were like that, when they looked at Jim Kenyon.

"WHISKER," he said slowly, "I hate to spoil any man's fun, but Rose and I are going to get married, right off this morning. She don't want a death in her family the same day. Now I feel just as you do about Henry, only not so violent. Besides, if you feed him to that dog it's going to poison the dog, sure!"

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars for the pup, so you won't lose anything, if you'll go home and leave Henry alone. Otherwise you and me'll probably have an argument. You can be thinking it over while we're gone to get married. And Henry can rest up there."

A pat from Rose was Kenyon's reward. Whisker Nugent squinted up at his captive. Well he knew what would be the result for him of an argument was smiling Jim Kenyon.

"Jim," he said, after a long period of inward struggle, "when you get back from being married I'll be a-setting here, and Henry'll be a-setting up there. Probably I'll be thinking agreeable by the time you come. But they's one thing I'm going to have, or fight. I've got to lose my whiskers and Henry Jellup's got to lose his! If he'll shave that billygoat thing off his chin when you get back I'll let him go. Otherwise I'll get him if it takes the rest of my life!"

"Not my whiskers!" cried Jellup. "Jim, I wouldn't look human without 'em!"

"You don't now," Nugent assured him.

More and more during the past quarter of an hour Jim Kenyon had come to believe that all things work together for good. This was a perfect day. He reached across a wide space and shook hands with Whisker Nugent.

"It's a trade," he said.

Then he led Rose down the blissful aisle of Bildad Road.

THE END



"Good evening, nephew," he said in a sharp, contemptuous tone

The Golden Burden

Ninety million dollars bring ninety million troubles, Glenn Brooks discovers as he tries desperately to escape the sinister menace of his uncle's curse

By FRED MacISAAC

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

GLENN BROOKS, young law student, is amazed when his uncle, who has always hated Glenn's family, dies, making him sole heir to his ninety millions. In Chicago, Glenn reads his Uncle Peter's letter, which says that the purpose of the bequest was to wreck Glenn's life with wealth greater than he can manage, wealth which will poison all friendships, destroy all incentive to work, make him the target of every crook in the country, and will unquestionably make him useless, a libertine and a drunkard. In short, his uncle fastens upon him the curse of Midas—all Glenn touches will turn to gold.

Glenn accepts the challenge, swearing to go straight and make good

use of the spiteful bequest; but the funeral is scarcely over before beggars and swindlers are besieging him; even his lawyer Walker proves greedy. Glenn disappears, hiding in a New York room under the name of George Phillips. Restless and lonely, he finds some joy in rescuing Pa and Ma Milligan and putting their restaurant on a paying basis.

Meantime, Lily Lockhart, aloof and independent reporter on the *Chicago Blade*, has been sent to meet Glenn—they've learned his address—and stay with him till he makes a front-page scandal. Demurring, she finally goes. She learns of his café affair when he and Ma Milligan outwit two holdup men; but she doesn't file the

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for October 20

story—partly because Glenn may well get into a bigger mess later—and partly because she likes him.

One night Glenn, lonely, goes to the "Hyacinth" dance hall. Recognizing Rose, a waitress who helped the crooks in the holdup, he leaves, and escapes from her three boy-friends at the door with the loss of his gold watch.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE TRAIL.

AS the police can testify, the criminals who fall into their hands, having been caught cracking safes or skulls, picking pockets, climbing porches, holding up shops and stores, are a low browed lot, stupid, ignorant, often little more than half witted. Some of them are dope victims, some hooch addicts, human dregs whose audacity itself is based upon lack of intelligence.

Yet many thousands of crimes are committed in New York every year, and you would have a lot of trouble in persuading the police to admit how low is the percentage of arrests and convictions.

The reason for the success of the average holdup, whether in store or apartment, is the reason for success in any business; intelligent planning, keen careful forethought, knowledge of conditions, and ability to choose the proper moment at which to strike. And this implies a directing intelligence not to be found in the captured criminals.

It is probably untrue that there is in New York any one supreme marshal of crime, although it is a picturesque notion; but there is no doubt whatever that there are a number of gangs in the great city, each ruled by an individual of a very different type from his tools.

Now it happened that Jake Baumgardt and Bill French, who were taken redhanded in Ma Milligan's kitchen

with their inside worker Rose Moran, were members of a gang whose operations were arranged by a certain Louis Gandy, a French Canadian whose ostensible business was managing Hyacinth Hall; and Louis Gandy in turn took his orders from Giovanni Perini, who owned a night club called "Livorno" and a string of west side speakeasies as well as the refined Palace of Dance into which Glenn Brooks had wandered.

Perini, in turn, occasionally mentioned "the man higher up" and a certain percentage of the receipts of his organization were supposed to be passed up the line, but whether there actually was a greater chief than the Italian, his humble followers did not know.

Giovanni Perini, usually known as "Joe," was a native American and therefore eligible to be President of the United States. His father came from Calabria and his grandfather had been a noted brigand in that district; his mother was a Sicilian girl whom the elder Giovanni Perini had met on the boat.

They settled in a basement room on Houston Street where they had seven children, of whom the eldest was the gentleman who concerns us.

Times were hard when Joe was a boy, and at the age of five he was selling newspapers. At seven he was a bootblack and at nine he had learned to pick a pocket. He never attended a school, for in those days it was impossible for the school authorities to check up upon the progeny of the Italian quarter, yet mysteriously he learned to read and write as he learned to shoot craps and snatch purses.

The army got him when the war broke out, for the draft organization was far better than the old school system had been, and for a year he wore the brown uniform and nodded understandingly when the British drill sergeant emphasized to the rookies the efficacy of cold steel. It was not nec-

essary to preach such a doctrine to the descendant of Calabrians and Sicilians.

Joe never got to France, but the army did him a lot of good. It made an excellent physical specimen out of a weakling, and it turned him loose with liberal ideas about killing. Of course the army instructors had worked hard to persuade mild mannered Americans that they must fight fiercely and slay or be slain; but Joe didn't see much difference between military slaughter and killing for one's own personal benefit.

WHEN Joe was mustered out the problem of his future was solved because a new and profitable business had grown up during his patriotic service: bootlegging.

As physicians aver, we take nourishment to supply our system with heat units called calories to replace those burned up by our exertions. The Anglo-Saxon race has always considered food the proper way to supply the necessary calories and looked upon drink as a beverage to be consumed for the kick there was in it.

The Latin races, on the other hand, omitted meats very generally from their diet and replaced them by red and white wines, which also supply plenty of heat units, combined with bread and cheese, thus saving the price of beef-steaks and being just as well off as their Yankee neighbors physically and much better in pocketbook.

Just before the saloons were put out of business the temperateness of the French and Italians were always pointed out as an example to the sodden Anglo-Saxons who reeled through the streets by the hundreds of thousands and the reason was evident; the Latins considered liquor a food and the Americans a beverage.

So the shutting off of about fifty per cent of the Italian food supply was bitterly resented by the Italian population of New York, which went in for bootlegging upon the same principle as our American forefathers went in for

revolution against the British. But Joe Perini went in for it because there was money in it. He was cynical and practical.

Joe was very intelligent and very smooth and he soon rose to be a master bootlegger. From that he broadened into the speakeasy business, just as a shoe manufacturer opens a chain of stores—to get all the profits all along the line.

The best people in New York, financially the best anyway, patronized speakeasies and night clubs, and Perini found his dens wonderful information bureaus for other kinds of lawbreaking. The whole underworld of New York was mixed up with the bootlegging profession; and Joe had no difficulty in securing workmen when he had wind of a nice business opportunity such as breaking into Ma Milligan's Kitchen.

Giovanni Perini was rather a remarkable-looking person to come out of a cellar room on Houston Street. He was short but slim, with a strikingly handsome face, very large limpid black eyes, a shock of jet curly hair, a straight nose, gleaming white teeth, a firm pointed chin. He resembled a poet or a musical composer. In evening clothes he was of very romantic appearance, and a favorite with the ladies of Park Avenue and the theatrical district who rubbed shoulders at the "Livorno."

Joe's income was rumored to be enormous, but his prosperity did not curb his activities. His mob was said to number several hundred workers, and this did not include his bootlegging gang. He operated criminally over an area of about two square miles and was careful not to work outside his district.

In his employ were attractive-looking women who secured information, smooth young men who studied the lay of the land, and a band of cracksmen and gunmen to do the dirty work. He ruled firmly and had no mercy upon traitors or quitters. When he suspect-

ed a follower of double crossing he assigned a few men to "get him" and the double crosser landed in the morgue.

The New York police knew that Joe was a bootlegger and the owner of a string of dives and they suspected that he was responsible for much of the crime committed between the West Seventies and One Hundred and Tenth Street, but they had to have more than suspicion to lay hands upon such an influential individual; as for the bootlegging, let the Federal folks worry about that.

This is quite a lot of space to devote to Joe Perini, but it is necessary to make you understand what followed the assault upon Glenn Brooks.

JOE had a system of checking up his workmen, and violation of the rules was severely punished. Chief of these regulations was that anything which was taken in the way of business must be turned over to Isaac Goldman for appraisal, no matter how valueless it might appear to the mobsman who had acquired it.

Joe trusted Ike, and he had a lot on him. Goldman was a well-educated, intelligent and capable young Jew who had served time in a pawnshop and in a Fifth Avenue jeweler's establishment, but not yet in any state institution. He was ostensibly the proprietor of a secondhand clothing store, but he received many more things than clothing in a small back room.

To him came a young man who explained that he had snatched a cheap gold watch from a patron of Hyacinth Hall. He told Ike that Rose Moran had pointed the fellow out as the restaurant man who had mixed into the fracas at Ma Milligan's Kitchen, as a result of which two of the best gunmen in Perini's squad were in jail. Rose was only out on bail through the influence of Joe Perini himself. They had beaten the guy up and got his ticker.

Ike turned it over in his hand.

"Not worth much," he said. "Fourteen carat gold, only seven jewels, didn't cost more than forty dollars when it was new. Let's see, here's an inscription:

Presented to Glenn Brooks by his father upon the occasion of his graduation from Elmhurst High School.
June 19, 1918.

"Ten dollars you get," he declared. "And there is no profit in it for us."

The yeggman did not demur, for he knew the watch was of little value, so he pocketed his ten spot and left the place by the rear door. Mr. Goldman put the watch in a drawer of his desk and went back to a column of figures, but presently he frowned, drew the watch out again and studied the inscription, shaking his head in perplexity. Finally he whispered a number into the telephone.

"Joe there?" he asked softly. He waited.

"Hello, Joe. Ike talking. Did you ever hear of a feller by the name of Glenn Brooks?"

"Sounds familiar. Wait a minute. Say, that's the bird that just came into ninety million dollars in Chicago."

"Sure. I read about him. Lissen, Joe. Gyp Levine just come in here with a watch, see. I gave him ten bones for it, cheap ticker. He took it off a guy at Hyacinth Hall. It has an inscription in it: to Glenn Brooks from his father. What town did this Brooks come from?"

"Somewhere in Connecticut."

"Elmhurst?"

"That's it." Joe's excitement made his voice crack.

"We got this multimillionaire's watch," declared Ike.

"Gyp's holding out on us. He must have had a roll."

"He says this is all he got. But lissen. He says the feller is George Phillips, that owns part of Ma Milligan's Kitchen. Rose Moran spotted

him in the dance hall and Gyp and two others laid for him to beat him up."

"That guy!" Joe growled. "It's too bad they didn't croak him. What's he doing with the other feller's watch? If he swiped it, we might bring that out at the trial of the boys. Get his evidence thrown out on the grounds he's a crook.

"Bring this watch down here right away. I'll get hold of Rose and get a description of Phillips and we'll see what we can turn up. Most likely she made a mistake and it was Brooks himself they tackled. If that feller was in Hyacinth Hall and got away with the loss of a ten-dollar ticker, I'll have to make a change up there."

JOE PERINI showed little trace of the Italian in his speech. He talked the slovenly language of Broadway with a trace of army influence. He hung up, and returned to his reading of a newspaper.

It was a large, opulently furnished room, looking down from a great height upon the Hudson River. Joe lived on Riverside Drive, at about the same elevation above ground as the top of the Bunker Hill Monument, which was the tallest thing in the world when it was built a hundred years ago. To be exact he had a front apartment upon the twenty-third floor, and he owned the apartment house he lived in. Ten years ago a doughboy, twenty years ago a newsboy, and look at him now! And he had only fractured two of the commandments, those about stealing and killing.

The apartment was full of expensive things, jammed in and screaming at one another, enough to give an interior decorator delirium tremens, but very pleasing to Joe and his friends, especially his women friends.

"Ninety million dollars," muttered Joe. "And that feller goes into Hyacinth Hall and escapes with his roll. That is, if Gyp isn't holding out on me." An unpleasant expression crossed

his face. It didn't pay to hold out on Joe.

"I got to speak to Gandy," he mused. "No sense beating up this feller if he was Phillips the restaurant man. Make things worse for the boys when the case comes up. What business did he have doing a thing like that, just because the girl told him to?"

"And how did Phillips come to have this Glenn Brooks's watch? Funny thing. Brooks must look like Phillips, if Rose made a mistake. If that's so—wonder if I could think of something. Ninety million dollars. Gee, I could retire."

Like most criminals, Joe was always planning to retire. At first he was going straight when he got ten thousand, then it was fifty thousand, a hundred thousand, a million. He had his million now, and got small use of it, for he worked and schemed twelve or fourteen hours a day.

He hadn't taken any exercise since he got out of the army, and he was only thirty-one now, but didn't feel any too well. In a few years he would retire. Go back and see what Italy was like, look up his relatives and give them all a few dollars each.

He rang a bell and a servant entered, a stolid, heavy-featured, middle-aged Italian, no fool though.

"Go down to the *Tribune* office and find out what day they ran a page of pictures about a man named Glenn Brooks, who inherited ninety million dollars," he commanded. "Get me half a dozen copies of the paper, and step on the gas. Before you go, though, call up Rose Moran and tell her to come up here pronto.

"Ninety million dollars," he said to himself. "In the hands of a kid. There ought to be some way—"

His phone rang. It kept ringing, and he was busy for half an hour issuing instructions. It was a private line the telephone company did not know existed, for Joe took no chances of listeners on this particular line. It

ran between his apartment and the house next door to the Café Livorno, and it had been strung by telephone company linemen with company materials on company time.

Presently a bell rang faintly in the rear of the apartment, and a moment later Rose Moran breezed into the room. She was smiling in apparent delight, but there was a look of alarm in her eyes. She was quietly dressed, wore no paint or lip rouge, and most of her face was concealed by a wide, floppy straw hat.

"Lo, Joe," she said cheerfully. "Must be something awful important when you want to see me."

JOE was lying on an embroidered satin French sofa with dusty boots on, and he did not stir. His black eyes glittered balefully.

"Where the hell do you get off givin' orders to my mob?" he demanded.

"I don't know whatcher mean?" she said with a catch in her throat.

"Last night you got Gandy to beat up a feller in Hyacinth Hall."

"Oh, that. Say Joe, that dirty scut that got us all pinched when we were on the Milligan job breezes into the place and is dancing with a hostess. Honest, I almost scratched his eyes out on the floor. I just tipped off Gandy, and he sent three of the boys down to do him up outside. Of course there was no rough stuff in the place."

"You're sure it was this fellow Phillips from Milligan's?"

"Why certainly, Joe."

"I think it was somebody else."

"Course it wasn't. Didn't I work for Milligan for a week and see this bird two or three times a day? Wasn't it him that grabbed me the night of the holdup?"

"You ought to know him. Sit down a minute. Here, read a paper if you know how to read."

"Aw, Joe, quit yer kiddin'."

In another ten minutes the servant who had been sent out for a back num-

ber of the *Tribune* appeared with the paper, and Joe sprang from his couch and snatched it from his hand. It was a syndicated page from Chicago, the same which had caused Glenn Brooks to depart hastily from that city, and displayed him in a dozen poses.

Joe drew a pocketknife and neatly cut out several of the figures, being careful to omit captions.

"Come here, Rose," he commanded. "Ever see anybody that looks like these pictures?"

Rose drew close and glanced. "Sure," she exclaimed. "It's Phillips! That's the same one they beat up last night."

Joe nodded. "Lay off this feller," he commanded. "One fresh move from you and I withdraw yer bail, see. I want him let alone. Beat it now."

"Just as you say, boss," said the girl. "I'm glad he got a few smacks before you give orders about him."

When she was gone Joe studied the pictures again. "It's him or his double," he declared to himself. "I got to find out which and then—"

He didn't finish, because he didn't know what would happen then.

Meanwhile Glenn Brooks had dismissed the loss of his watch from his mind nor did it occur to him that the inscription might betray him. Upon the day when his father presented it, he read the engraved lines with some emotion, for he knew what a tug it must have been for Elbert Brooks to get money enough to buy the watch. But though he cherished the watch, he never again gave any attention to the inscription.

CHAPTER XII.

LILY COVERS HER ASSIGNMENT.

THE evening following Glenn's experience at Hyacinth Hall, he opened the door of his room to discover Lily Lockhart descending the stairs arrayed in a lavender confection

topped by a wide-brimmed limp hat of yellow straw. Most likely she was on her way out to dinner.

"Hello," she greeted him with a friendly smile.

"Oh, how do you do, Miss Lockhart. Going out?"

"As I live, *Sherlock Holmes*."

"I was just going out myself," Glenn added.

"Hatless?" she mocked.

"That can be remedied," he grinned, although his cheeks grew hot. "I wondered—I thought perhaps—have you a dinner engagement?"

She continued her descent and faced him in the hallway. "Really, Mr. Phillips, do you think you know me well enough to ask about my engagements?"

"I beg your pardon," he muttered, much confused.

"But I don't mind telling you that I expect to dine in solitary state."

"Will you dine with me?" he blurted.

"Why that's nice of you, but, frankly, I do not feel in the mood for Ma Milligan's Kitchen. I yearn for French cooking."

"We'll go to the Ritz," he promised joyously.

"But as one of the owners of a restaurant, isn't it your duty to sample your own food, perhaps you may save some of your patrons from—er—"

"Being poisoned? Ma Milligan will attend to that. I'd like to dine to-night in a big cool room with wonderful service and an orchestra softly playing in the background."

"Say no more. I accept your invitation," she laughed.

"And afterward we might go to a show?"

"We'll see."

Half an hour later they sat in the big oval dining room of the Ritz, where the music was politely subdued, the service soft and swift, and their fellow diners distinguished looking and in-souciant.

Lily looked very young, very soft, very sweet and desirable as she gazed at him across the table and exchanged the meaningless phrases that are the prelude to acquaintance between a beautiful girl and an attractive young man.

How many exquisite-looking young women have been besought until they have agreed to a tête-à-tête dinner, and have tried, oh, so hard, to captivate further the interested males, have chatted and giggled and rolled their pretty eyes and been escorted home confident of conquest—only to find that this first dinner was also the last! Their zeal had scared off their intended victims, or their incessant laughter had jarred, or their chatter revealed feather-weight minds, so that the canny males sheered off.

Lily Lockhart was cool, reserved, pleasant and self-possessed. It was her business to fascinate Glenn Brooks so that she might become his friend and confidante; and, aside from her business, she wanted him to like her, because she liked him. But she knew too much to appear eager.

The young man intrigued her. She was eager to learn why he had stepped out of the position his newly acquired fortune had established for him, to set up under a new name in apparently moderate circumstances in New York City.

Why did he live alone in a lodging house and bother about a queer little restaurant when he should be interested in large affairs? Her paper wanted to know these things, but she was personally more interested.

Glenn regarded his vis-à-vis with content. She was lovely, she was charming, and she had both intelligence and wit. She was the sort of girl he had always admired, the type he some day hoped to wed.

Of course he knew nothing whatever about her, where she came from, who were her people, what was her occupation, her source of income, why she

lived in a lodging house. Her clothes looked very expensive, but that was only because she was so clever. Undoubtedly she had her own way to make in the world, and she knew how to take care of herself.

FEW young men set out deliberately to find a wife, least of all one who has been lifted suddenly from poverty to great wealth; but it grew upon Glenn, as he studied this smiling vision in lavender, that marriage would be his salvation, and why look any further!

Uncle Peter had jeered that he could find no woman to love him except for his fortune, and he recognized that the wicked old man was probably correct; but here was a girl who did not know he was Glenn Brooks, who supposed him a struggling young man in no better circumstances than she, since they lived in the same lodging house.

If he succeeded in winning her love, what a triumph over his uncle! And with Lily Lockhart at his side he would be safe from the sort of temptations which ruin rich young men, for he was confident that he would never be interested in another woman.

Wife had never tempted him, but women were fascinating; the wrong sort of woman might bring about all the evils predicted by Uncle Peter. Lily was the right sort: gentle, loving, a home maker if ever there was one.

The staff of the *Chicago Blade* would have roared if they had known how this youth read the character of efficient, hard-boiled, mannish Lily Lockhart; but Lily would not have laughed, because she knew that she was exactly such a girl for the right man.

A woman can be anything that the man she loves wishes her to be, and it is not mere acting either.

They talked of books upon which both were well informed and of plays regarding which the girl knew much more than the youth from Elmhurst,

and gradually, without his being aware that he was being cross-examined, she drew out of him the full story of his connection with the Milligans, a tale which lifted him high in her respect.

Her skillful questions regarding his past he parried gently. She did not strike him as more curious than any girl who was making the acquaintance of a man, but he did not wish to tell her, yet, about himself, he could not without betraying his identity. Already he was assuring himself that wealth or poverty would make no difference to a girl like this, but it would be so much nicer to win her as an ordinary person.

He began to question her and found her rather reticent, too. She came originally from Tennessee, she said, and had arrived in New York to prepare herself for a secretarial position, possibly work as a librarian. She did not know whether she would remain in New York or move elsewhere; it would depend upon what positions were open. She was an orphan like himself, she was a college graduate, and she had means enough to enable her to live comfortably until she was self-supporting.

Lily, who had never hesitated to prevaricate in the way of business, found herself hating to tell this boy lies, but, like him, she had to avoid the truth. And as woman's intuition informs her when a man has serious intentions, it came to her that she might step into half ownership of ninety millions if she choose, but that prospect did not thrill her, in which she was perhaps unique among women.

Glenn told her about his experience in Hyacinth Hall, the appearance there of Rose the waitress, who had set thugs upon him in revenge for her arrest at Milligan's, and how he had lost his watch.

"It wasn't worth much," he stated. "But it was a gift from my father at a time when he was pretty hard up, so I cherished it for that reason. He gave

it to me when I graduated from high school."

LILY shot him a keen glance. "It's such a shame," she said. "But you may recover it from some pawnshop. Was there anything in it to identify it—an inscription perhaps?"

He started. She saw his surprise and how he covered it up. The inscription would identify it, he realized, but it would also identify him as Glenn Brooks.

"Y-yes," he admitted. "There was. But, after all, I don't believe I'll do anything about it. In fact I'm ashamed to admit that I entered such a place. It was disgusting."

"On the contrary, you should try to get it back. And I don't see why you should be ashamed to admit that you have inspected a dance hall. You are a young man, single, I presume, and you ought to learn as much as you may about people if you expect to succeed as a writer. How the lower and middle classes exist and amuse themselves is the principal subject of modern novelists. Didn't you see any beautiful girls there? The sort who might serve as a heroine for your next book?"

"Oh, I'm not presuming to write a book yet. I'm only a beginner," he protested uncomfortably, for she had such clear eyes that he was sure she would detect a lie.

"For my part, I have an insatiable curiosity to know about people, all kinds of people," she declared enthusiastically. "I want to delve into every sort of den. I yearn to poke my nose into dangerous places. I suppose I should have been a man."

"You are the most feminine person I ever met," he replied.

Lily Lockhart, who had exposed a Chicago opium den by risking her life and her virtue by pretending to be a drug habitué to obtain admission to the place, smiled complacently.

"Of course a girl may not do every-

thing she might wish to do," she said smugly. She imagined the real Lily Lockhart was standing behind her laughing, but the remark struck Glenn as eminently sensible. He nodded.

"By the way, you are the first man with whom I have dined who did not have a flask on his hip," she observed.

"I'm sorry. I did not think. Do you mind?"

She shook her head. "The modern girl has to pretend to like liquor or be dismissed as a prune, but I assure you I can get along without it. But don't you drink yourself?"

"I used to take a little, for no reason at all, but I decided not to touch the stuff."

"Then you are in danger of being set down as a prig," she warned with smiling eyes.

"I'll have to risk it," he said indifferently.

"You are really a very strange person. You appear to have plenty of money, but you live quietly and don't seem to have any friends except those quaint old restaurant people. Where do you come from, anyway?"

"A small town in Connecticut. I don't know anybody in New York and my tastes are quiet. But I would like very much to step out with an agreeable companion."

"You are looking at me. Is that an invitation?"

"I should like to spend a good many evenings with you," he admitted frankly.

She reached across and patted his hand as it lay on the table.

"Bless his heart, perhaps he may have the chance," she cooed.

From dinner they went to a musical comedy; Glenn, without batting an eye, paid a preposterous price to a speculator for a pair of front row seats. With this girl beside him it seemed the most delicious entertainment he had ever attended. The critics differed with him, by the way, but they probably saw it with their wives.

Lily vetoed a suggestion to visit a night club. It seemed to her that they had done very well for the first evening together and she must not appear too eager to remain in his company. They paused in the hall for a handshake, and she tripped up the stairs while he watched her until she vanished in the hall above.

CHAPTER XIII.

INTRODUCING UNCLE PETER.

THAT night Uncle Peter Brooks appeared to Glenn. The old man looked as he had looked in his coffin, pale, wasted, and worn, but his eyes were open and they burned with a baleful light. He seated himself upon the edge of the bed, and shook Glenn by the shoulder with a skinny hand until he opened his eyes and sat up on one elbow.

"Good evening, nephew," he said in a sharp contemptuous tone. "I hope you are glad to see me."

"I am not," Glenn retorted stoutly although the goose flesh was crawling on his back and arms.

"What a fool you are," snapped the old man. "And a coward. You ran away from your responsibilities. Just what I might have expected from your father's son."

"You leave my father out of this," he answered angrily. "And why do you come here to torture me? You've done me enough harm."

"I left you a great fortune," replied his uncle. "Do you call that harm? Where is your gratitude?"

"I'm not grateful. You said in your letter you wanted to ruin me. I'm going to fool you."

"Bah. You ran away and changed your name. Do you suppose that will save you from the vampires, the leeches, and the parasites? They'll drag you down, young man, they'll fasten on you and drink your blood until you are as I am."

"They won't. I took an oath," he replied excitedly.

"An oath. The place where I am is filled with people who took oaths. This fortune will strangle you as sure as I am a dead man."

"No!" he protested.

"It takes brains to keep a fortune. You have to be strong and bitter and without a heart, as I was. Nephew, they'll tear that money from you. They'll break your heart and your spine, they'll squeeze you to a jelly. You poor, pitiful, cowardly pup, what chance have you got?"

"Go away," implored the victim.

Uncle Peter immediately began to bounce up and down, shaking the bed.

"And I'll laugh. I always told Elbert that he was a helpless boob and you're just like him. Yes, the leeches will suck away every one of your dollars."

"They can't," retorted Glenn triumphantly. "You fixed it so they can't. The automobile stock isn't controlled by me and they have to pay me the income."

The old man cackled joyously. "Can't they?" he retorted. "That will go first. You don't suppose business men are going to pay the income of that sixty millions dollars very long to a thing like you? Why, nephew, my board of directors is scheming right now how to shake you out. You can't interfere with them, and they'll first arrange the business so that it makes no profit, then reorganize it, so that your stock is worthless. They will know how to do it."

"I don't care," replied the victim. "I didn't want your money. I only took it to show you I wasn't afraid of your threats."

"You're afraid," replied the vision grimly. "Everything I prophesied in my letter will come true. Women? You are already in love with a woman. You were thinking to-night that this girl upstairs would make you an ideal

wife. She would protect you from other women. You coward!

"Who is this girl? Where does she come from? How does it happen that this blond beauty comes to live in your lodging house a few days after you settled here? How do you happen to be acquainted with her? Do you suppose it is an accident? Imbecile! It's a plot. She knows you. She's after your money, and if you escape her there will be another and another and another—"

"You get out of here, you old beast," he sobbed.

Uncle Peter, who was now standing on the bed, stepped upon Glenn's chest and began to jump up and down on it.

"You lost your father's watch," he exclaimed. "That will give you away. The hounds will be after the poor little fox. The wolves will come. And the werewolves. They'll drag you down, down, down!"

GLENN was grasping at the feet of the ghost. Curiously enough, he wore evening clothes as he had when he was buried, but his feet and ankles were bare and they burned the boy's hands when he grasped them. Nevertheless he managed to topple the dancer over and he landed on the floor with a crash.

No, it was Glenn who was on the floor. He had fallen out of bed. The darn thing was a nightmare. He groped around and found the light button; the room had seemed to be illuminated, but it was now in darkness. He pressed the button and flooded the chamber with light, looking fearsomely around for Uncle Peter; but the old fiend had vanished.

Although the visitation was undoubtedly a dream it had been so vivid that he was still terrified. He was perspiring at every pore. His heart was beating violently, and he knew that he couldn't sleep any more that night. His watch said three o'clock.

Glenn slipped on a dressing gown

and seated himself at his table while he chided himself for being such an idiot. Indigestion was responsible for Uncle Peter. Glenn had eaten rich food, a lobster cocktail, a steak with a cream sauce and fried bananas, an indigestible mess, and this was just an old-fashioned nightmare such as visits small boys when they have eaten too much mince pie.

Only it was so vivid. The vision was so full of malice. He could remember every word of the extraordinary conversation and that was strange because his dreams were usually very vague. That part about the automobile company. It made sense.

As a law student he knew that his ownership of the Brooks Motor Company without control was a dangerous thing. If the directors were crooked they could steer the concern into shoal waters. They could run up expenses so that there would be no dividends, and they could sell the company's assets for whatever they pleased. Put the concern into a receiver's hands perhaps, or arrange some sort of wash sale by which he would receive whatever they choose to give him.

As he had devoted no thought whatever to the Brooks Motors, and as Uncle Peter had positively not appeared to him, it must have been his subconscious mind which warned him of this possibility. Well, he would look after his property. They could mismanage it only if the owner was not on the job; he had the right to demand an accounting and send them up as criminals if they were caught at their wrecking work.

Now if he could marry Lily Lockhart before she learned the truth about him, he could go back to Chicago, get the best legal advice—not his uncle's lawyers, and take care of his own.

Stay. The fiend had informed him that Lily was a vampire; that she had come to this house because she knew he was living here and she knew who he

really was. That was utter nonsense. If his subconscious mind was responsible for this idea he would like to kick it. Lily was innocent, unsuspecting, pure and sweet, and their acquaintance was an accident so far as she was concerned.

Curious what strange quirks there are in a man's mind. He had every confidence in the world in this girl, yet he had dreamed that she was untrustworthy.

He dared not go back to bed, for Uncle Peter might return. Instead he smoked cigarette after cigarette until he was surprised to hear the telephone ring in the hall. It was 4 A.M. Who would phone at this hour? It might be important. He had better go out and answer it.

"Hello," he said into the mouth-piece.

"Telegraph company speaking," said a male voice. "Does Miss Lily Lockhart live there?"

"Yes, but she is asleep."

"Got an important telegram for her. Marked urgent. Want to take it over the phone? You a friend of hers?"

"Yes. I'll take it," he said. "I'm sure it will be all right."

He wondered if it was bad news for Lily. A death in the family perhaps.

"All right. We'll send a copy around in the morning. Here's the message:

"Wire immediately developments in Brooks matter. Keep in touch with us—MADDEN."

"Repeat that, please. 'In Brooks matter,' did you say?"

"That's it." The operator repeated the message and Glenn wrote it down upon a pad with the pencil always to be found upon the shelf in the booth.

SHAKING like a leaf he returned to his room to study this damning telegram.

Somebody named Madden was telegraphing Lily Lockhart to wire developments in Brooks matter.

The Brooks matter. That might mean Glenn Brooks. The message was dated Chicago, from which city he had fled. Brooks, of course, was a common name and the telegram might be entirely innocent, but they wanted her to wire immediately developments in the Brooks matter.

Lily had said she had come to New York to study library work, that she was unemployed at present, yet this telegram seemed to prove that she was working in some capacity upon a case regarding which she had to wire a man named Madden.

Of course there was no reason why Lily should tell him her business, but she had volunteered the information that she was in New York to study library methods.

It is possible, even in the face of this telegram, that Glenn would have continued to believe in Lily Lockhart, but it happened to come within an hour of the dream in which Uncle Peter had assured him that she was aware of his identity and had scraped acquaintance with him, and it shook his confidence sorely.

What would he do about the message? If he presented it to Lily and it did happen to concern him, that would betray to her that he was aware of some conspiracy concerning him. It had been careless of the telegraph employee to telephone the message to anybody except the person concerned, but that sort of thing happened now and then, as he knew from previous experience.

In the morning the telegram proper would be delivered. Most likely Lily would not suppose that it had been telephoned in the small hours of the morning, or if she was informed of the fact she would not know which of the inmates of the house had received it.

Glenn was more unhappy during the next few hours than at any time since the death of his mother. If he was not actually in love with Lily Lockhart, he was tremendously attracted by her; and

with a few more days of propinquity he would have been her captive.

He had been eager to fall in love with her, he had been sure she was exactly the woman he needed, and to have her prove untrustworthy would distress him profoundly. He clung to hope that the message did not concern him, and he cursed the poison instilled in his veins by his uncle's letter which made him ready to suspect anybody.

Although he thought he had dismissed the missive of Peter Brooks from his mind, it was evident by the nightmare that it continued to disturb him subconsciously, souring a naturally ingenuous soul and urging him to turn a frozen face on all his fellow creatures.

Over and over again he argued the case of Lily Lockhart pro and con, and the diabolical suggestions of his uncle in the dream blackened her despite all he could do.

It might be a coincidence that this young and beautiful girl should have come to live in his lodging house, and that he encountered her, by chance, unable to open her front door, and then met her again in Milligan's, but wasn't it stretching the long arm of coincidence too far to suppose that she was employed upon a matter concerning a person named Brooks and still know nothing about Glenn Brooks?

He asked himself whether a girl of her exceedingly discreet and refined character would go out to dinner and to the theater with a man she had met so casually if she had no previous knowledge of him, and decided in the negative.

Yet, on the chance that she might be innocent despite appearances, he must not judge her without further evidence. In some manner he must find out the facts, and about breakfast time a method occurred to him. He would wire his attorneys in Chicago to make inquiries regarding Lily Lockhart and inform him if she was known there.

He was very wealthy and could afford to hire detectives to search for

this man Madden who seemed to be interested in him as well as Miss Lockhart. It seemed a rotten thing to set detectives on the track of a charming young woman who had been pleasant to him, but he was doing it to vindicate her. That is how he salved his conscience.

DRESSING shortly after seven o'clock, he went to Ma Milligan's Kitchen for breakfast and there couched a telegram which ought to get action in a few days. Lest the same fate befall this telegram as that addressed to Lily, he instructed the lawyers to send it to Milligan's Kitchen.

As it happened no detectives were necessary to discover Lily Lockhart in Chicago. Mr. Walker had been interviewed by the lady not so long ago and the city editor of the *Blade* belonged to his luncheon club. So he wired the following telegram immediately:

There is a Lily Lockhart employed as a reporter on the Chicago *Blade* and a Bert Madden is city editor of that newspaper. Regards.

Glenn found the message waiting for him when he returned to the café for lunch. After reading it he ate no lunch but went out to walk the streets and try to recover from the blow.

There was no longer any doubt. 'As Uncle Peter had told him—by this time he was crediting his uncle with actually visiting him in a dream—the girl upstairs knew who he was. His idiotic notion that it was his personal attractions which had won him her companionship was blown to pieces.

So she was a newspaper reporter set on his trail by her city editor; just a spy to report upon his actions. Why, it was perfectly outrageous! What right had that newspaper to ferret out his hiding place and dog his footsteps? And how could this sweet and lovely and apparently ingenuous young creature be a woman journalist?

He swore under his breath. So he

wasn't making news for them fast enough. The poor little spy had received a call-down from the brute who employed her because she had no scandal to wire about him. Maybe she was placed in his house to make him fall in love with her so she could tell the readers of her newspaper how the owner of ninety million dollars made love.

He grew red to think how he had been approaching the love-making stage. Had it not been for that betraying telegram he might have proposed to her in a couple of days. Then he would have been caught. Of course, she would accept him. What woman wouldn't? Just as Uncle Peter said in his letter, no woman would love him, only his money.

Uncle Peter's venom, however, was defeating its own ends, he thought with some satisfaction. If the old man had stayed where he had gone when he died, Glenn might have walked into this trap; but he had come back to taunt and jeer at his unfortunate nephew and instead had warned him.

Because he had liked the girl so much, a great wave of what he thought was anger against her rose within him. She was worse than a vampire, she was a spy. He would like to give her something to report to her employers. How he would rejoice to show her that she hadn't made much of an impression on him!

She thought she could worm her way into his confidence, did she? Considered him a poor sap to be ensnared by the first pretty face? An honest working girl. A library student. So timid. So trusting. So gol-darned beautiful.

Glenn Brooks was a job to her, just the same as a murderer or a crank or any sort of a newspaper assignment. Well, he'd get even with her. He would make her fall down on her job. He remembered now her crafty questions at dinner. Why, if he had answered them, she would know all about him.

Most likely the confounded newspaper was wild to discover why he had changed his name and was living inexpensively in New York immediately after inheriting a great fortune in Chicago. They expected Lily to come through with the dope and she hadn't got a thing out of him.

Last night he had been too much for the sly creature, and that was her one chance. Because now she was going to lose her victim. The trailer would be left lamenting. She would have to go whining back to her boss to admit that she didn't know what had become of Glenn Brooks.

He hailed a taxi and was driven to his residence. In his room he proceeded to pack his belongings in great haste. He was going to vanish again. As yet he had no plans. He would decide where he was going in the cab which carried him away.

Hold on. The girl might shadow him. He had often read how a detective trailed a man in a taxi by another car. At present she was unaware that he suspected her and the thing to do would be to wait until she was out of the house and clear out before she returned. First he must discover whether she was now in her room. He would ask the maid. He opened his door to see Miss Lockhart entering by the front door; she had been out, then.

LILY had been to the telegraph office where she had sent a message that would settle Madden if it didn't burn the wires on the way. The girl had risen late, to find a copy of the message which had been telephoned to Glenn pushed under her door in its yellow envelope, and she had pounced on it as newspaper people always grab at wires. She frowned as she read it. Madden had taken a few drinks, perhaps he had a call-down from the managing editor, and had been stupid enough to send a wire to the address at which her quarry lived as well as herself.

To send any message was bad enough, but the contents of this one were objectionable. It was what is termed in newspaper parlance a "Why-in-hell" message intended to remind languid reporters that there is a God of Vengeance in the city room. Lily was too good a reporter to be treated in this manner, and she resented it. She tore it into a hundred pieces and flung them viciously into her wastebasket and decided to ignore it.

She went out to lunch casting a benevolent glance at the closed door of Glenn Brooks. Presently she returned and proceeded to make herself comfortable until it occurred to her that Madden might send more wires if this one was not acknowledged, so she put on her hat and sallied forth again. At the telegraph office she broke the point of two pencils in her vehemence and this is what she sent:

Shall wire developments when there are any. Highly indiscreet for you to telegraph to my address for reasons known to you. Object to being heckled. If you want my resignation you may have it.

"That will fix Mr. Madden," she decided.

Her usual good temper was restored by this action and she remembered that last evening had been very pleasant, but not very informative.

"He's a very nice boy, but quite a clam," she decided. "I bet I've made more progress than any male reporter in Chicago. As for the girls, he wouldn't deign to look at any of those frumps.

"How do you do, Mr. Phillips?" she said cordially.

It was policy for Glenn to dissemble, but he couldn't resist her smile anyway. "Hello!" he replied. "I see you've been out."

"You are so observing," she mocked. "I enjoyed our little party last night very much."

"Ha! Fishing for another date," the suspicious man informed himself.

"You bet," he said aloud, but there was something in his manner which did not escape her.

"What's the matter? You look disturbed."

"Oh, nothing. That is, nothing to speak of."

"Well, you act sort of queer. No bad news, I hope."

"Yes," he said boldly. "Rather bad news. Some one I liked turned out to be different from what I supposed."

"Oh, I'm sorry. It's always distressing to have a friend fail one." She hesitated, then as he said nothing, she nodded brightly and ascended the stairs. He watched her as usual until she disappeared; shook his head sadly and returned to his room.

"It doesn't seem possible," he muttered. "If I didn't know absolutely, I just couldn't believe it."

His bags were packed; all he had to do was notify Mrs. Gloster of his departure and go, but he lingered. "Got to throw her off the track. No sense in letting her see me leave. Probably she'll go out again in an hour or so."

For a little while he got a somber satisfaction from consideration of Lily's distress when she found her prey had slipped out from beneath her claws. Then, despite her unscrupulousness, he began to feel sorry for her.

"Poor kid, she'll probably lose her job," he opined. "When a newspaper sends a reporter all the way from Chicago to New York they expect results, for it costs a lot of money. I suppose the girl had to take the assignment and she has nothing against me personally. Maybe it's the only work she knows how to do, and she'll be up against it."

Somehow he did not like to think of Lily as up against it. Well, he would give her a chance to see how good a trailer she was. He would depart now, while she was in the house. Everything being ready he summoned Mrs.

Gloster, paid her off, stated in a loud clear voice in the front hallway that he was called away, phoned for a taxi and waited ten minutes with his bags inside the front door until it arrived.

Actually he had to force himself to leave the house. As the taxi started he glanced up at the second story front to see if her white face was pressed against the window pane, but it wasn't.

"It's a shame to take the money," he muttered. "She can't trail me now."

He had given the driver the address of an uptown hotel, and, upon arrival, engaged a room in the name of George Phillips.

"Let's see how good she is," he said to himself. "Here I am registered at a New York hotel under the same name I used at Mrs. Gloster's. If she can't find me, she deserves to be fired."

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHANGE OF BASE.

THE old-fashioned hotels possessed a huge register, in which all the guests signed their names, and which lay upon the counter that all who came might read. One could find not only the guests of the day, but of the month, and sometimes the year, by turning back the pages. The ponderous tome still survives in some small town hotels and summer resorts, but the big caravansaries have banished it.

When you arrive now at a hotel desk you are asked to write your name and address upon a small card, which is immediately placed in a cabinet, or else you sign upon a single sheet of paper with a dozen other guests, and when the sheet is filled it vanishes.

Hotel men say that competition is the reason for the change. Other hotels secured the names of guests and circularized them. Newspapers copied lists of guests and published them, to the extreme mortification of certain persons who wished to avoid publicity.

Business enterprises swooped upon the register and stuffed the new arrival's mail box with advertising matter.

Who is living in a hotel to-day is nobody's business except the management's. So many business concerns wish to reach hotel guests that there is a service in New York supplying a very incomplete list of daily arrivals, but many hotels refuse to supply the information at all, and others furnish only names of celebrities who will advertise the house.

As there are in New York five or six hundred first-class hotels and several thousands of minor importance, Glenn was setting the girl sleuth a terrific task, for it would be necessary for her to telephone to each hotel in turn to ask if Mr. Phillips was registered. Besides, having located him first in a lodging house, she would naturally suppose he would shun hotels.

By this time Glenn had decided to play hide and seek with Lily for a few days and then go back to Chicago, resume his own name, make a careful study of his affairs to be sure they were in the right hands, and travel. His uncle had delivered a challenge when he placed a mighty fortune in his hands, and it was not exactly accepting the challenge to seek immunity from the perils of wealth by changing his name and station.

Of course, he owed his dead uncle neither gratitude nor fair dealing, but the old man had bet ninety million dollars that his brother's son could not carry the load. In that unknown land he might now be taunting Elbert Brooks with the cowardice of his boy; that is, if the spirits of the good and the wicked are ever given a chance to exchange ideas.

Besides, he couldn't hide successfully. Within a few days of his new existence Lily Lockhart had been upon his heels. It would do no harm to wait a few days longer. If the girl turned up and attempted to resume their acquaintance, he would confront her with

his knowledge, bow coldly, enjoy her chagrin with an unexpressive face, and then take a train back to Chicago.

If only she had been different! Pshaw!

Glenn Brooks, in making his plans, did not count upon the attitude of Joe Perini, naturally, since he had never heard of the fellow; but Joe was devoting a lot of attention to the question of Glenn Brooks.

At first the distinguished crook had assumed that George Phillips must be a double of the Chicago multimillionaire, but within a day or two he was convinced that the pair were one; and it was only a matter of deciding what was the best and most profitable way to "take" him."

He considered the feasibility of kidnaping. It would be a simple matter to get possession of the person of Glenn Brooks and keep him hidden until a great ransom was forthcoming, but there were strong objections to the plan.

In the first place, kidnaping is now punished in most States about as severely as manslaughter. There is always the possibility of the victim escaping and identifying his captors, and the arrest of one of them might end by involving the promoter of the plot.

Then there are all sorts of traps set for kidnapers in connection with the payment of ransom, and the most astute criminal might walk into one of them.

Most important of all, however, was the possibility that no ransom would be paid for Glenn Brooks.

THE young man was alone in the world and there were no loving relatives to give up their last cent for his return uninjured. His attorneys who had his property under their management could not legally pay a dollar without his authorization, and might refuse to recognize his signature authorizing such a payment.

After all, they probably didn't care much for the safety of their client, and his heirs, who were distant cousins, might be glad if he was murdered.

Assuming that Glenn Brooks was properly kidnaped, and agreed to pay half a million or even a million for his release, and the check was acknowledged by the banks and the money reached Perini's hands, it was still unsatisfactory.

What was a million when ninety millions was available?

Joe wanted a plan which would really pay big; kidnaping was piker's stuff. He required something which would place Glenn Brooks in his power and force him to keep paying heavily—not one ransom, but dozens, scores, until as much of his property as could be turned into cash had come into the possession of the Italian gentleman who once on a time had been a bootblack.

Joe spent several days considering the matter, consulted his lawyers. One of the most capable firms of corporation lawyers in New York represented him, and he had access to a criminal lawyer of world-renowned astuteness. In the meantime the spy he had set on the trail of George Phillips reported that the young man had moved from the lodging house to the Orleans Hotel.

At the end of a week he had evolved a scheme which ought to be very profitable, provided Phillips could be made to play his part, and Joe did not think that would be too difficult.

In the meantime Glenn was getting very bored. Lily had not put in an appearance and he wanted to see her. He thought of sending an anonymous letter giving his new address, but he feared she might divine the author. Deliberately he passed the house of Mrs. Gloster upon several occasions to give her a chance to trail him, but the girl seemed hopeless as a sleuth. And now he was worrying lest the poor child had been recalled to Chicago or had been fired by wire. He was almost

ready to call upon her and offer to aid her in her enterprise.

CHAPTER XV.

A KITTEN THAT LOST HER MOUSE.

ABOUT two hours after the departure of Glenn Brooks from the lodging house of Mrs. Gloster, that able business woman knocked on the door of Lily Lockhart. The girl reporter was lying on her bed in a dressing gown, reading a new book, and she frowned at the interruption; but she invited the landlady to enter. Mrs. Gloster came in with an air of apology.

"Excuse me for bothering you, Miss Lockhart," she began. "But I always try to make my guests as comfortable as I can. Do you like this room all right?"

"It isn't bad," replied the girl indifferently.

Mrs. Gloster drew over a chair and sat down, uninvited.

"The stairs are a trial, though," she declared. "Don't you think you would be more comfortable on the ground floor?"

"I hadn't thought about it. I thought you said this was the best room you had available."

"It was when you came, but now I've got the front parlor, as lovely an apartment as you will find in a day's walk."

Lily sat up suddenly.

"The front parlor!" she exclaimed. "But that's Mr. Phillips's room!"

"He's gone! Just packed up and got out without giving me any notice, though he did pay me a week extra when he settled."

"You mean he has left the house?" said the astonished sleuth.

"Bag and baggage. No reason at all. I think he's kind of queer."

"Very extraordinary," murmured Lily.

"Before I advertised a vacancy I

8 A

thought I'd give you the preference. It's only five dollars more a week."

Miss Lockhart shook her head. "I don't care to move," she said. "It is possible I may have to leave town in a week or two myself."

"Oh, indeed," exclaimed the landlady, losing much of her manner of benignity. "I'm sure I'm glad you happened to mention it. I wouldn't want these two rooms thrown on my hands at once."

"I'll give you ample notice, or cash in lieu of notice, when I leave," Lily assured her rather absent-mindedly.

When the landlady had departed the girl bounced off the bed and began to dress in haste. Upon her pretty face was an expression of annoyance and perplexity. In view of their delightful experience of the night before it was very strange that Glenn Brooks would give up his lodgings and depart without trying to see her or at least leaving her a note of explanation.

THERE had been no doubt in her mind that she had made a powerful impression on Glenn; her attraction for him was evident in his eyes. Lily had experience with the male sex, and she knew when she made a hit. She was still certain that Glenn Brooks was still immensely taken with her at the moment when she bade him good night and climbed the stairs to her room.

What had happened to cause his flight? Why had he left without saying good-by? What was the matter with him anyway?

She had not seen him all day, so she could have done nothing to offend him.

Had he fled because he was afraid he was falling in love with her? That was possible. Men often try to escape from their charmers, but they always come back.

Had something happened? Had he learned who she was? That was impossible— But was it? She remem-

bered the telegram. Suppose he had read that telegram!

No, it was sealed and tucked under her door in the morning. She wished she had not torn it up, but she could find out the time of delivery by telephoning to the company.

In a few moments she was holding the line while the telegraph clerk looked up his records.

"That telegram came in about three thirty this morning," he reported. "As it was a press message, it was immediately telephoned to you."

"Telephoned?" she exclaimed. "I did not receive it."

"Somebody took the message and agreed to repeat it to you. It is marked as having been accepted over the telephone."

"I see. Thank you very much," she said as she hung up.

The situation was now clear to her. At four in the morning Glenn Brooks had been awakened by the ringing of the phone in the hall outside his room, and had answered it. He had agreed to give her the message rather than wake her, which was considerate of him, she told herself sarcastically. When he found his name mentioned in it, when he learned that she was working on the Brooks matter and was expected to telegraph results, he had understood that the sweet little woman upstairs was not what she claimed to be.

Lily did not know whether Glenn was intelligent enough to figure out

that she was a reporter on his trail, or whether he assumed she was inimical to him in some other way; but the result was the same. He had left the house to get out of her reach.

The girl's face was hot; she knew she was blushing with humiliation, and her abasement was not professional. At the moment she was not considering that she had failed upon an assignment, but that a man she liked probably despised her. Probably she could locate him again, but to what purpose?

Madden could thank himself for the collapse of his scheme; his idiotic wire had fallen into the enemy's hands. She was glad she had sent him an insolent message and threatened to resign. Now, before the *Chicago Blade* was aware that she had lost her quarry, she would follow up with her resignation. They would suppose it was due to anger, and her record of never falling down on an assignment would be clean.

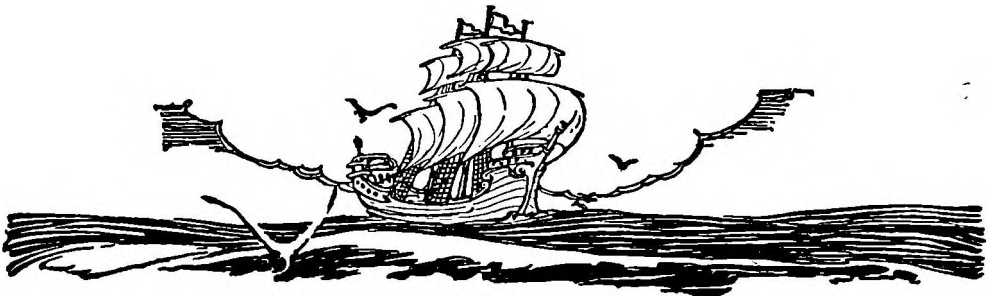
Besides, she had to take out her chagrin upon somebody; and who deserved it more than the city editor of the *Chicago Blade*?

She returned to her room, donned her hat, and walked briskly to the telegraph office, where she slashed off her telegram.

I am resigning from the *Blade* for reasons which you may figure out for yourself. Am mailing a check for \$240.00 unused expense money.

LILY LOCKHART.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK





Even in the semidarkness there was something ominous about their manner

Justice

The innocent bystander usually gets it in the neck—but nobody ever fixed up a stranger alibi than did these two unwilling actors in a murder drama

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

LISTEN!" Bill hissed the warning and dragged me back into the shadow just as I raised my hand to rap on the door.

It was nearly midnight and this was the first house we had come to since we left Bantam some eight miles back. A dim light was burning in one of the windows and I had visions of a shake-down in a cozy farmhouse living room or perhaps even a pair of beds with real mattresses.

There had been a light fall of snow, but this had ceased and the moon was shining brightly again. We had mounted the back porch and I was all set to evoke the joys of rural hospitality when Bill broke in with his interruption.

We crouched silently in the shadow of a big stack of wood at the edge of the porch as the dark figures of two men, silhouetted in the bright moonlight against the white background of the snow, slouched up the driveway. There was something menacing about their manner. In the semi-darkness I sensed that as soon as I saw them.

They obviously were on familiar ground, but they slunk along and glanced frequently over their shoulders, as though something which inspired them with terror was dogging their footsteps. They kept closely together, shoulders touching, like a pair of schoolboys passing a lonely graveyard, finding courage in physical contact.

One of the men was tall, close to six feet I judged, while the other was short.

"You're shaking as though you had a chill." It seemed to be the tall one who was speaking. There was a note of scorn in his voice.

"Shut up!" snapped his companion in guarded tones.

"What are you afraid of?" retorted the other. "There isn't a person"—he amended this—"there isn't a living person within ten miles of this place. You can holler if you want; nobody will hear you."

"What's the use of taking any fool chances? Keep your trap closed until we get into the house." The note of apprehension was evident in the short fellow's voice.

The tall man chuckled nervously. "This thing is air-tight, absolutely air-tight." He seemed to gain confidence as he repeated this.

They had stepped on the porch and paused. For some reason or other they seemed to be reluctant to go inside the house. Bill and I crouched ten feet away from them, scarcely daring to breathe. We, too, suddenly had lost all desire to seek shelter in this particular house, if this pair lived there at any rate.

"Suppose somebody is prowling around?" The short fellow was as uneasy as a guy with an ulcerated tooth.

"Who'd come prowling around here on a cold winter night?" said the tall man. He had taken out a pipe and was jamming tobacco into the bowl.

"D-d-don't light a match out here." His companion's teeth were chattering.

"Why not?" The tall fellow coolly struck a match on the leg of his trousers and in the yellow glare as he held the light to the bowl we caught a glimpse of his face, a thin, hard, cruel face. Then the light went out and he tossed the match aside, the red spark breaking almost at our feet. The pungent aroma of burning tobacco was wafted to us.

"We don't have to be afraid of anything." The tall fellow puffed complacently. "Somebody will find him—it, I mean. Nobody seen nothing and nobody 'll suspect nothing. There's not a mark in the house, no fingerprints, no nothing. After this thing blows over we can move those boundary posts to where we blasted well please and no poor fool will come around shooting off his face about his rights and what he thinks. Maybe he was right, but it don't do him no good, now."

He gave one of those mirthless chuckles which sent a chill down my spine.

"Let's go in." The short fellow was shuffling about uncomfortably. It was plain that his conscience was uneasy.

IT was with relief that we saw them turn toward the door.

"It's absolutely perfect," continued the tall fellow as he fumbled with the latch and opened the door. "We've foreseen every possible slip. There's no more chance of anybody tracing this to us than—"

The door closed behind him, cutting off the rest of his remarks to Bill and me.

For a second or two we stood there without speaking.

"What'll we do?" I whispered finally to Bill.

"Do?" echoed Bill. "We'll mind our own gol-dinged business and get away from this place as quickly as we can. I don't know what these birds have done, and I don't want to know. Whatever it is, it is nothing for a pair of drifters like us to get mixed up in."

I realized the wisdom of Bill's remarks. We have been traveling about the country long enough to know that there's plenty of trouble floating around without going out of the way to stir up more. It may be all right to be an innocent bystander with a big bump of curiosity, but lots of innocent

bystanders are carted away in ambulances, and those that the ambulance doesn't get usually land in the police court as witnesses or prisoners.

"We've got— Hello, here comes a car," whispered Bill.

Again we crouched in the friendly shelter of the woodpile. The car shot past on the State road.

"We've got to get away from here without being seen," Bill resumed.

"If they"—I jerked my thumb in the direction of the house—"if they happen to be looking out of the window, they'll see us going down the driveway, sure."

"We don't want to go down in the main road anyhow," said Bill. "We don't want any motorists to see us within a mile or two of this dump. Something rotten has been pulled off in this neck of the woods, and strangers who are seen now are likely to need ironclad alibis later, after the authorities get busy. We'll go out across the yard, keeping the woodpile between us and the windows, so they won't see us from inside. After we get a good safe distance away we can hit back into the main road again."

We started cautiously through the back yard and across lots, and did not breathe easier until we passed over the brow of a slight hill and the house was hidden from our view.

"This is awful traveling," muttered Bill at the end of about fifteen minutes as we clambered over about the tenth stone wall surmounted by barbed wire. "What do you say if we try to get back into the road?"

"There's another house," I exclaimed.

Some hundred feet ahead were the dark outlines of several buildings. The farmhouse was distinguishable from the barn by a light shining from one of the windows.

"I'm colder than blazes; what do you say if we try to get a shakedown there?" I suggested.

"Nothing doing," said Bill inexor-

ably. "Our move is to get out of this section without being seen by anybody. Innocent men get hanged sometimes, but here's one bird who figures on climbing to eternity without the aid of a rope."

We swung toward the road to our right, but paused simultaneously, our teeth chattering with the cold. We both had noticed the same thing at the same time.

"That window's open," said Bill. He pointed toward the house to the window from which the light was streaming.

"Probably a fresh air fiend," I whispered cheerfully.

"Why didn't he put out the light then?" demanded Bill.

"Maybe he's reading in bed," I ventured.

"Farmers don't read in bed late at night by the light of an oil lamp with the window open," said Bill shrewdly. "There's something strange about this. We'll go over and take a look through the window."

FOR a guy who is always preaching the beautiful gospel of "mind your own business," Bill sometimes shows as little judgment as a boy who wants the distinction of being the first skater of the season on a pond. However, there's no use of arguing with Bill once he decides to do anything. The only thing to do is to let nature take its course and trust to luck.

We clambered over still another barbed wire fence, traversed a yard cluttered up with old wagons, wood and other odds and ends.

"This is like that other house back there," whispered Bill, as we cautiously picked our way among the rubbish. "No women around here, I bet."

"S-sh," I warned.

Bill approached the open window and peered inside. Then he dropped back with a gasp.

"Take a look inside there, Jim," he directed. His voice trembled. I

glanced at his face. Even in the dim moonlight I could see the horror depicted there. He moved aside to make way for me.

I approached the window gingerly and looked in.

Before my eyes was a large, low-ceilinged room, one of those old-fashioned country living rooms, but like the backyard it was cluttered up and untidy. At the opposite end was a table littered with dishes, amid which stood a nicked lamp with dirty chimney. Beside the table was a cot, on which sprawled the figure of a man lying on his back, dressed in overalls and coat. Apparently he had just lain down to sleep.

In fact, at first I thought he was merely sleeping, but suddenly I observed a dark streak down the side of his face and realized that the streak was blood. At the upper end of the streak, just above the left eye, was an ominous round black mark.

"He's dead. Somebody shot him," I gasped. "We'd better notify the police."

"They'll discover it to-morrow," said Bill. "It won't do any good for us to notify them now. We'll be held as suspicious characters if we do. Whoever did this thing probably didn't leave any clues around, and we don't want the lightning to hit us. The first thing the police would ask us would be what were we doing prowling around here at midnight."

"We'll tell 'em what we overheard back there," I said, jerking my head in the direction of the house from whence we had come.

"Yeh, and it 'll be our word—the word of a pair of strange drifters—against that of a pair of natives. We'd have as much chance of pulling through without trouble as a green driver crossing Fifth Avenue against the traffic lights at Forty-Second Street during the theater hour.

"Those birds back there have fixed this up airtight. They shot this poor

fellow from this very window and then sneaked back home. There's been a boundary line row, but only two persons alive know of any such trouble, and the authorities will be up against a stone wall—no clues, no motives, no nothing.

"The countryside will be stirred up. There will be hints of mysterious strangers being seen. You and I will be the mysterious strangers. If we exercise judgment and get out of the way before we are stopped and questioned, the affair will go down in local history as one of those unsolved mysteries which the newspaper feature writers revel in."

"But justice should be done," I protested.

"It should be," Bill admitted. "But if we are hanged by mistake it won't help justice any. It's up to us to get away from here without attracting attention."

WE turned into the road and resumed our journey toward New Milford. Neither said much. Bill, like myself, I knew, was thinking of that figure lying on the cot back there in the lonely farmhouse, with the dark streak extending downward from the black hole over the eye.

Three or four times we stepped hastily from the road and crouched down while automobiles sped past.

A feeling of helplessness assailed me. Here were Bill and I, the only persons who could give the information which would lead to the capture of the murderers, and we did not dare to open our mouths or, for that matter, even allow ourselves to be seen. If a pair of old drifters would be eyed with suspicion in these rural towns under normal conditions, what chance would they have after a mysterious murder had been uncovered on the route they had just traversed?

On the outskirts of New Milford we sought shelter in a barn and crept up into the hayloft. It was bitterly

cold, though we uncovered a couple of horse blankets which afforded a little protection. Dawn was just beginning to break when I finally sank into uneasy slumber.

I awoke shivering. Bill was still asleep. In the distance a church clock was striking twelve. It was noon—noon of a cold, drab New England day.

My thoughts turned immediately to the tragedy of the night. Had it been discovered yet? There was a chance that it hadn't, but in any event it behooved Bill and me to get under way as soon as possible. I crept over to Bill and shook him until he awoke.

"We'd better be moving, old pal," I reminded him. "It's noon."

"The best thing for us to do is to hide here until dark," said Bill. "We'd be taking the devil of a chance if we tried to go through town by daylight. Remember, those two guys committed an air-tight crime for which somebody may have to pay the penalty."

"Holy mackerel, man," I protested. "I've got to eat. I'm so hungry now I could tackle some of this hay."

"Do you want to hang?" snapped Bill.

"I'd just as soon hang as starve," I ventured.

Bill shrugged his shoulders, but he was as hungry as I was, so we finally descended from the haymow and headed for the village.

"News travels slowly out here in the country," said Bill as we turned into a restaurant on the main street. "They probably won't hear about the murder until some time next week."

BILL'S optimism proved ill-founded, however, for we had no sooner seated ourselves at the counter—had not even had time to put in our orders—when the man behind the counter bubbled over with the news with which he was fairly bursting.

"Hear about the shooting?" he asked.

Bill gulped convulsively. I tried to act naturally, but realized all of a sudden that my appetite was gone. After all, starvation was nothing compared with hanging. My collar felt uncomfortably tight. I glanced at Bill. He looked as guilty as a small boy caught in a jam closet.

For a minute there was silence. Then Bill tried desperately to change the subject.

"Two bowls of soup," he said.

I wondered if the restaurant man had been asked to watch out for any suspicious characters.

Perhaps Bill had made a mistake in trying to change the subject. I tried to remedy it.

"Never mind the soup. Tell us about the shooting," I said airily.

The restaurant man eyed me in surprise; and I realized with a chill of horror that my remark perhaps was a bit too nonchalant.

But the restaurant man was anxious to get the news out of his system.

"Ray Gisselbrecht was shot through the head over at the old Peterson place on the Bantam road. Instantly killed, the doctor says."

Bill coughed nervously.

"They'll probably never catch the persons who did it, eh?" he ventured.

"Never catch em?" echoed the restaurant man. "They've got 'em—Harry Potter and Archie Bollano, who live over at the old Knickerbocker place next to Peterson's."

"They were cornered and confessed this morning an hour after the body was found."

Bill and I looked at each other in mingled astonishment and relief. Could there have been a hole in the air-tight crime?

"These country sleuths must be good," conceded Bill sagely. He turned to the restaurant man. "Are you sure those guys confessed?" he asked anxiously.

"The constable told me so himself," declared our informant. "They

couldn't help but confess. They were cornered."

"Cornered?" echoed Bill incredulously. "Didn't they go home after the shooting?"

"Sure they went home. That's how they came to be caught."

It was getting beyond Bill and me. We waited expectantly for the dope.

"A wise pair of fools they were," said the restaurant man contemptuously. "They almost got away with the shooting. They planned it carefully—foresaw every possible clew which might lead to them, with one important exception, and that gave them away and they finally confessed. Do you know what those boobies did?"

"Spill it," urged Bill impatiently. Our soup was forgotten for the nonce.

"Instead of going to Ray's place by way of the highway, where their tracks would have been hidden by morning, the poor fools apparently walked across lots in the snow, and their tracks led right from their house to the window through which the shot was fired. It was a dead give-away."

Bill looked at me and I looked at Bill.

"Well," he remarked finally with a grin, "we may not have volunteered for service with justice, but the old dame certainly drafted us."

And we turned our attention to the soup.

THE END



Oregon Salmon

UP the Mackenzie River about twenty miles from Eugene, Oregon, can be seen a sight which is astounding to those heretofore only acquainted with the salmon as he comes from the grocery in a can. Here the State of Oregon has built weirs, or fences, across the river which prevent the salmon going farther up the river to spawn.

Below this weir are literally thousands of salmon, vainly trying to pierce the obstacle so as to reach their spawning grounds. The State has men employed here who take up the salmon, squeeze out the eggs and, after fertilizing with the male sperm, place the eggs into the State hatcheries to be used in restocking the waters.

These salmon are totally unfit for food, having great sores on their noses and sides. After laying their eggs they die. This all happens in their fourth year of life. The female points her nose in a selected place in the rocks, and, holding it in one place, revolves around it on an axis, until she has scooped out a hole. In this hole she deposits her eggs, after which her lifework is done.

Trout fishermen farther up the Mackenzie bitterly resent the act of the State in closing up the spawning grounds, claiming that the trout will not remain in the river without salmon eggs to feed upon. In fact, a few weeks ago some one broke down a section of the weir at night and thousands of salmon escaped up the river.

It is a wonderful sight to see hundreds of these great fish lying closely packed in the water, some apparently weighing forty or fifty pounds, and to see them incessantly jumping up in the air, coming down in the water flat on their sides. At this period in life they do not feed, so they are not jumping for food. Just why they do it is one of the unanswered questions of life itself.

Dan Youngs.



They heard the sharp command, "Stick 'em up!"

Wolves of the Ranch

As Gilbert's unscrupulous greedy talons close on the broad acres of Plateau Ranch, Ted and his friends stake everything on one last desperate effort

By C. C. WADDELL

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

SPRING floods wash out a Montana bridge and destroy ten carloads of easy-going "Pop" Trevor's cattle, plunging his one-hundred-thousand-acre Plateau Ranch badly in debt; banker Pohlman, secretly acting for Pop's avaricious brother Gilbert, gives Pop thirty days to pay off the mortgage.

Pop Trevor's son Ted comes home from college with his two chums, Jim Barnes, engineer, and Herb Crawford, math shark and amateur efficiency expert, to see if they can help. Ted has written his *fiancée*, Phyllis Duhamel, an actress, telling his predicament and breaking the engagement.

But she and the rest of her company, including the treasurer, Arthur Blake, who is in love with Phyllis, arrive at Plateau Ranch, having abandoned their tour because of the washouts. She has not received his letter; Pop, greatly taken with Phyllis, optimistically tells her to suggest any changes in the ranch and he'll make them; and Ted backs him up by not telling her their troubles.

She points out what a fine golf course and bathing pool could be fixed up, and Ted, stalling, promises to start work on them. Herb figures out that the ranch is not a paying proposition.

Ted catches Uncle Gilbert spying on the crowd at the swimming pool, and

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as the others come up, Gilbert snarls out the truth about the ranch's involved state—but Jim covers it up by signaling that Gilbert is crazy.

Jim finally figures out how they could make a resort by building a paved short cut through the ranch from the State highway which circles it, building a golf course, and fixing the pool. The cost Herb fixes at two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Pohlman refuses to finance the venture; but Jim resourcefully gets the railroad people to give him the dangerously swinging bridge span if he will remove it from the flooded river; the cowboys, with the town's fire engines and derricks, hoist it to safety.

Meantime Phyllis has secretly gone for a ride in Uncle Gilbert's flivver, and wheedles the whole story of his treachery from him. When he makes advances, she escapes with the car; and is just crossing a ravine when a cloudburst wrecks the dam.

Searchers from the ranch trace them to Gilbert's cabin, then find him as he is about to set fire to the battered wreck of the flivver, found at the bottom of the ravine. They ride on to the river, in time to see a barge breaking loose and starting downstream, with a woman aboard. Ted and the cowboys manage to lasso posts and stanchions of the barge and pull it ashore, saving Phyllis!

CHAPTER XI.

DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP!

ONE might almost have found it in his heart to pity Uncle Gilbert as the miraculously rescued girl was carried ashore.

His face turned a pasty gray; his lips went blue. His eyes, bulging almost out of his head, darted hither and thither in terror.

He knew the West's chivalrous regard for womanhood. When Phyllis told the story of her adventure and

charged him with responsibility for her jeopardy, what would these cowboys, emotionally on edge as they were, do to him?

They were stamping, shouting, whooping now in a very delirium of joy over her rescue. He knew how little it would take to pour that exuberance into grimmer channels.

And there was no chance for him to get away. If he attempted to make a break for it, those hard-riding fiends would overhaul him, and it would only be the worse for him in the end.

"Hadn't ought to pester her with no questions," he protested shrilly, as Ted waded up out of the river with her in his arms. "After what she's been through, it might bring on a brain fever or somep'n. Don't let her talk, I tell you. Wrap her up warm in blankets and get home as fast as you can, and then keep her quiet."

For once the old fellow and his nephew were in accord. Ted heartily seconded the suggestion; but he spoke from a true solicitude for her welfare, Uncle Gilbert out of selfish panic.

But Phyllis put aside their remonstrances with a wave of the hand.

"Nonsense!" she said, slipping out of Ted's hold to stand upon her own feet. "Of course everybody wants to know what happened to me, and there is no reason why I shouldn't tell it.

"And yet," she gave a wan smile, "there is so little that I can tell. I was driving down through the ravine, and heard a great crash and roar behind me. Looking back, I saw an avalanche of water sweeping down at me, and I drove for all I was worth to try and outrace it. But I don't suppose I had gone a hundred yards before it was upon me. I felt the flivver go over. I was swept out of it in a rush of icy water, tons and tons of it. It seemed as if I would never come up, and the water was full of stones and timbers and things knocking and grinding together. How I escaped them I don't know.

"Then at last," she went on, "after what seemed centuries, I got my head above the surface and could breathe. But it was impossible to swim. I could not even dodge the drift that kept coming at me. The water was so swift it held me like a vise. I could not move an inch to right or left; only keep up, and let myself go with it. I had no hope."

She brushed her hand before her eyes as if to dismiss the nightmare memory.

"Suddenly I felt myself scooped up," she continued. "A big, uprooted tree came shooting down the current and picked me up in its branches. I pulled myself out of the water and climbed up among the boughs; but I was shivering so with the cold I could hardly hold on."

"I DON'T remember much for a bit after that," she broke off. "The leaves were so thick about me that I couldn't see anything; but presently I realized somehow that I was out in the river. I was frightfully seasick from the swaying and pitching of the tree. Then there came a bump, not a hard one, and I felt myself falling."

"I learned afterward," she explained, "that the tree had struck the barge; but at the time I did not know what it was. I heard the branches under me crackling and breaking as they took up the shock, and I was flung from my perch to land on my hands and knees on some boards."

"At first I just lay there; but after a minute or two I began to get my bearings and realize what had happened. That friendly tree, after picking me up and carrying me securely along, had deposited me in safety. As it slid away from the barge and went booming off down the river, I was almost sorry to see it go."

"Well, there I was." She gave an expressive gesture. "But the barge, I discovered, was moored quite a way out from shore, and even if I got there,

I didn't know what I'd find. Besides, I was all in, my shoes gone, and my clothes torn to ribbons. The barge seemed stoutly tethered, and I felt safest to stay there until morning."

"I found this old coat," she indicated the grease-stained, fleece-lined, bargeman's jacket she wore, "and wrapped myself up in it. I must have fallen asleep, because the next thing I knew, I was awakened by the snap as the hawser parted, and found the old barge heading out into the river. I ran to the tiller to try and steer back to shore, but I wasn't strong enough."

"And then," she concluded briefly, "you came."

"But where was the man all this time?" questioned Pop. "What became of him?"

"The man?" She looked puzzled.

"Yes; the man you left the ranch with, the fellow in the green suit?"

"Oh, that man?" In a flash it came to Phyllis that the identity of her companion was unknown. Her glance shifted for a second to Uncle Gilbert, as he stood ashy-faced and cowering in anticipation of her expected revelation; then she looked away.

After all, this was an affair among the Trevors, something that reflected on the name she was about to assume. Why wash the family linen in public?

"Oh, that man?" she repeated easily. "Why, I let him out quite awhile before all this happened. He was—well, a sort of manager who wanted me to take a new rôle under his direction; but it was different from anything I'd ever played, and I didn't think, from what he told me, that I'd care for it especially."

"So we called the deal off," she shrugged, "and I left him at a camp up in the hills where he wanted to stop. I was to ride home in the flivver, and leave it at the ranch until he came for it; but I lost my way on those mountain trails, and by blundering into that road past the fishing lake got into all my trouble."

It was a plausible enough explanation, and she recited it so glibly, that her audience was completely taken in by it, except for Ted. He noticed various flaws and discrepancies in the story which left him still questioning.

However, his trust in her never wavered, and he was willing to leave anything she had left untold, until she herself was ready to disclose it. As he reminded himself, he had not been so candid with her as to be in a position to call for a show-down.

AFTER all, these phases of the situation rather dropped into insignificance in the joy and thanksgiving that filled him to overflowing. It was enough for him that she whom he had regarded as dead was alive again, and that, although lost to him, she had been found.

His one solicitude now was to see that she suffered no ill-effects from her experience; so he promptly bundled her into a car which one of the cowboys had commandeered in the neighborhood while she was talking, and rushed off with her to the ranch to put her under the soothing ministrations of Mom.

Meanwhile the rest of the party dispersed, the cowboys whooping off in a bunch as gayly as if they were just setting out, instead of returning from a long, hard night's work.

Pop and Arthur Blake followed less friskily, and Uncle Gilbert ambled along on Ted's horse, which Pop generously loaned him, as he'd had to ride double with one of the cowboys ever since he joined the party back in the ravine.

But this bit of consideration gained no appreciation from the skinflint's curdled soul, any more than had Phyllis's forbearance in not giving him away. It was always his habit to look for an ulterior motive.

"Cute as a fox," he muttered now, as he thought how she had framed her story so as to shield him, while yet

adhering strictly to the truth. "Didn't take her a split second to drop to it, that nobody knowed who the man in the green suit was, and then make me out a theatrical manager.

"Little baggage had a purpose in that." He wrinkled up his hickory-nut face knowingly. "She ain't letting me go; but she ain't taking no chances. Not until she's plumb certain that I'm the owner of Plateau Ranch and that a wedding ring is what I mean, will she come down.

"Yep." He nodded. "She's got to be showed, and I guess I might as well see Pohlman, and find out if there ain't some way to have that foreclosure rushed. I'm getting kind of sick of Henry's airs, anyhow. Acting like he was doing me a favor to let me ride what is practically one of my own horses."

And so, working himself up into a lively sense of grievance, he rode his borrowed horse on into Laidlaw, and to the bank.

This left Efficiency Herb and Jim Barnes as the only members of the party remaining at the scene of rescue; and they were already down at the shore elatedly examining the barge.

"A godsend!" Jim ran his eyes along her bulky lines as admiringly as if she were a cup defender. "Just what we need. And dropped right into our laps, so to speak. That girl is sure Lady Luck herself to Ted Trevor. It was she who really suggested our scheme, and now she has made it possible for us to carry it out."

"Don't be too sure of that," Herb exclaimed with something like dismay in his voice; for by this time they had clambered aboard the vessel, and were looking over her interior. "We've got the hippopotamus all right, but no bridle to ride her with. She runs with a motor, and it's been taken out."

"Yes," Barnes showed no especial perturbation; "I rather expected that from the fact that no one was left aboard as a watchman."

"But what are you going to do?" Herb exclaimed. "You know what tug hire would cost you, even if you could get one."

EXACTLY," Jim nodded, lighting his pipe. "So, as the river works for nothing, I am going to let it handle the job for me.

"You notice," he pointed out, "that now, with the flood at its crest, there is a stretch of backflow between the current and the shore. Well, I figure that by steering the barge in and out of that, we can drift her down to Laidlaw without any great risk."

"But, see here!" Herb spoke skeptically. "You're forgetting something. The current sets right in to the shore there at the site of the railroad bridge where you've got to land to take on the span. You try to put in there, and—Zowie!—there'll be a crash that'll muss the landscape for a mile around."

"No." The engineer puffed placidly at his pipe. "Because I'm going to have you go to the nearest telephone right now to call up the ranch and tell Ted to get about twenty yoke of his steers down to that landing place as fast as he can drive them there. Then, when we've worked the barge down to that inset of the current, I'll steer her into the slack water just above it. By running cables from her, around posts, to the cattle, we'll let them warp her along the shore until we get her right where we want her and tie up.

"Then, with the span loaded on her," he continued, "we'll cut the barge loose, and let the current carry her down to the mouth of the stream that runs out from the ranch through the ravine. There's no flow to that at present, as the river has backed up in it clear to the site we've picked out for the bridge. So, with nothing but still water to navigate, we'll hitch on to Ted's steers again, and have them tow us up to our destination.

"There's my plan," he challenged, knocking the smoked out ashes from

his pipe. "Now what have you got to say against it?"

There was a good deal that he might say, Herb felt; and yet he could not deny that, given a lot of luck, it could be accomplished. Under the circumstances, and without a bank roll, it really seemed as feasible an expedient as could be suggested.

Accordingly, after entering an objection or two, more by way of form than from conviction, he set off to hunt up a telephone, and having found one at a house down the road, he notified Ted to bring on his steers, and returned to the barge to assist Jim in preparing for their hazardous voyage.

But with everything in readiness, and just as they were about to cast off the spliced hawser, they were interrupted by an angry shout from the top of the bluff.

"Here! What do you guys think you're doin'?"

Two men, red-faced, burly and belligerent, hurriedly set down a burden they were carrying between them, and came scrambling down the bank.

"You keep away from that barge," stormed the larger of the two, brandishing a fist like a ham as he advanced. "It's mine."

"Well, it is, and it isn't." Herb faced him, slim and spectacled, but undaunted.

"'Tis and 't isn't?" sputtered the bargeman. "What kind of talk is that? Guess I know my own proputy."

"Yes," said Herb, "but it happens to be under salvage at present."

"Salvage?" The bargeman let out a string of blistering oaths. "You're a damn' four-eyed liar."

FOR answer Herb pointed to the roughly-spliced hawser, and briefly recounted the circumstances of the craft's rescue.

"I have twenty witnesses to prove what I say," he clinched the argument.

"Told you last night you'd oughta reeve another cable onto her, Joe," the

barge owner's companion reminded him gloomily.

The other merely grunted; he had cooled off considerably by this time.

"All right," he grumbled. "Much obliged for what you done. But I'll take her over now. Here's a hundred for your trouble."

He grudgingly pulled a roll from his pocket, and peeling off a yellow-backed bill, held it out.

But Herb contemptuously waved the proffer aside.

"Not on your life," he said. "We don't want money. We want the use of your old scow to-day. That's the only terms we'll settle on."

The bargeman protested that he'd see them in perdition first. He had a contract to deliver a load of coal that day, and it couldn't be put off.

"Very well," said Herb coolly. "Then we'll put our salvage claims in to court for adjustment; and if I know anything of the law, it'll be more than one day that you're out of your barge."

"Meanwhile, we're in possession," he went on, "and bound to look out for her safety. So, as this place don't seem safe to me on account of the drifting logs, I think we'll take her down the river, and then up into that ravine at Plateau Ranch, and moor her there."

"And," he added as if with an afterthought, "since it's directly on our road, we can stop at Laidlaw, and take on a bridge span that we want to get out to the ranch."

The barge captain turned the air blue with his profanity. For a moment or two, it looked as if he would resort to more forceful measures; and Jim Barnes hurriedly grabbed up a couple of belaying pins from the deck to be prepared for emergency.

A thought suddenly presented itself to the bargeman, however, which caused him to break off in his tirade.

"Take her around into Trevor's ravine? Like hell you will!" he grinned sardonically. "You dern' fools, don't

you know you can't run her without the motor? And I've got that up on the bank."

But his triumph was short-lived.

"Oh, that doesn't bother us in the least." Herb shrugged. "We can get along without the motor. Tell him what we figured on doing, Jim."

Barnes, with a preliminary puff or two at his pipe, obligingly detailed the venturesome scheme of navigation he had evolved, and added a few extra features to make the attempt seem even more hazardous.

The barge owner listened to him aghast.

"You're a pair of ravin' lunatics!" he gasped. "Going joy-riding on a river like this! Why, even if by a miracle you got her down to Laidlaw, that inset the current takes there'd smash her sure—bust her into kindling wood."

"Not with our luck," declared Herb lightly. "It isn't everybody that can have a hundred-foot barge come drifting up to them just when they need it."

"Humph!" the bargeman growled. "I might be lucky enough to fall off a house, and not get hurt; but that's no sign I'd oughta go fall off a steeple. Still that's neither here nor there," he went on. "What I say is that you ain't goin' to try no such crazy stunts with my barge."

"C'm on, Andy," he capitulated, with a jerk of the head to his companion; "help me down with the motor. We'll have to let that coal contract go to-day, I reckon, and run her for these two 'sylum escapes. Else all we'll have left is mebbe a bunch of souvenir tooth-picks down by the railroad bridge at Laidlaw."

It took much time, however, to get the motor aboard and installed; and even with that accomplished, the captain was so carefully slow in working his clumsy vessel down the flooded river, that Ted, hurrying his steers along, arrived in town with the barge still nowhere in sight.

With his accompanying cowboys, he

drove the yoked cattle down to the river bank where the bridge span rested, and settled himself to wait, wondering anxiously meanwhile whether anything had happened to Herb and Jim to cause the delay.

His mind pictured all sorts of catastrophes, as he gazed upon the booming river, sweeping it at that point with such tremendous force, and freighted with all manner of wreckage.

A drowned calf went circling by, a hen-coop with the fowls still fluttering wildly inside it, stove-in boats, farm implements, the ruins of a summer house, and always the great plunging logs banging and crashing into one another, and destroying everything they struck.

Ted's uneasiness grew as the moments passed; and by the time he had lighted and thrown away half-smoked a full package of cigarettes, he could stand it no longer, and decided to ride out the river road and see if he couldn't locate the belated barge and his pals.

But as he stepped over to his horse, a hand suddenly dropped on his shoulder; and turning, he looked up into the face of the county sheriff.

"Guess you'd better come with me, young man," said the officer.

CHAPTER XII.

LEGAL BOMBSHELLS.

TED had no other idea than that the sheriff was joking.

"Go with you?" he laughed. "I'm not that kind of a girl, sheriff; I've got my reputation to think of. Besides, I'm in a hurry right now."

But the officer did not smile in response, or relax his tight grip on Ted's shoulder.

"Do you mean," Ted looked a little startled, "that you are pinching me?"

"Well, I wouldn't exactly call it a pinch." The sheriff eyed him ominously. "But you're wanted over at the court house. Better come along peace-

able. You'll find out what's wanted, when you get there."

With visions of everything from an accusation of murder down, Ted accompanied the slouch-hatted official over to the stone temple of justice set back from the main street; but when he started to head for the court room, the sheriff seized him by the arm and steered him into a chamber where the county commissioners were in session.

The chairman, a man by the name of McGillivray, looked up at his entrance.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Trevor," he said. "We're engaged with another matter just at present. But we'll be ready for you in a few minutes."

They were discussing a question of some bonds to cover flood ravages; and as Ted listened to them, he gathered that all three members of the board were inclined one way on the subject, and as it seemed to him toward a very fair and equitable decision.

But just then Pohlman, the bank president, came in to join them, and after conferring with them in whispers, the three voted exactly contrary to the way they had originally expressed themselves.

Ted remembered then what his father had said about the county commissioners being absolutely under Pohlman's control; and it made him a little sick to see such abject "yessing" as they gave him.

The sly-faced, thin-lipped banker did not glance in his direction; but Ted knew that Pohlman was conscious of his presence.

The bond question settled, the chairman of the board looked toward him, and cleared his throat.

"Mr. Trevor," he said, "we understand that you brought a drove of draught cattle into town this morning."

"Yes, sir." Ted bowed. "We have the privilege like other ranch owners of driving cattle through the streets."

"No doubt, no doubt," assented McGillivray hastily; he was a cattle man himself. "But that is not what I was

getting at. The question is—er—what are you planning to do with those cattle?"

"Not giving you a short answer, sir," said Ted, "I think that's my own business."

"Not entirely," the chairman frowned. "We are informed that you propose to use these animals in transporting a bridge span over the roads of the county; and that cannot be done without the permission of this board."

IT was on Ted's lips to disclaim any intention of the sort ascribed to him, and explain that the span would be transported by water. But just then he saw the chairman steal a glance at Pohlman as if for approval, and the latter give an almost imperceptible nod in return; so he decided to hold his peace.

Perhaps, if he disclosed his actual program, Pohlman would find some way to crab that, too!

Therefore, instead of speaking out, he pretended to be taken aback at the chairman's intelligence.

"Oh, I didn't know," he stammered. "I beg the board's pardon. But, of course, the permission will be granted."

"No," said McGillivray, "I am afraid we shall have to refuse."

Ted feigned consternation.

"But—but," he protested, "what am I to do? I have this span down on the river bank, and the mayor tells me it will have to be taken away to-day. This throws me into an awful hole."

The commissioners looked at one another, and it seemed for a minute as if they were going to weaken. But Pohlman's cold eyes shot a coercive glare at them, and they huddled back into line.

"No," repeated the chairman. "We are sorry if it puts you to inconvenience. But we have the roads to think of, and—er—the interruption to traffic."

"But you have given this permission to lots of other people," Ted argued.

"I remember about a year ago Mr. Pohlman there was moving a house, and he blocked off one of the main highways for more than a month. What's the idea of making fish of one citizen, and fowl of another?"

"That will do, sir!" McGillivray spoke up with an assumption of flouted dignity. "The permission is refused you. And that's all there is to it."

"Oh, no, it isn't." Ted had risen and advanced toward the table.

"What do you three stiff think you are, anyhow? You had me haled in here like a criminal, and have been acting generally like three little potentates. Well, you're not. You're public servants, and unfaithful servants at that. Do you think I don't know what is behind this slimy move? Pohlman doesn't want anything done that might help my father lift the mortgage he holds. And when Pohlman cracks his whip, you three have to jump through the hoops.

"Well, let me tell you something, you miserable poodles." His eyes blazed. "Pohlman or no Pohlman, permission or no permission, that span is going to be transported out to Platteau Ranch to-day. So put that in your pipes and smoke it."

He turned on his heel as he finished, and with head lifted high, he strode out of the courthouse.

Looking back as he walked down the street, he saw that the entire crowd was following him, the sheriff, the three county commissioners and Pohlman, all conferring earnestly together; and again a sense of anxious misgiving smote him.

Suppose something had happened to the barge in the 'prentice hands of Herb and Jim, what then would become of his bold defiance?

HE hurried on to the river bank to get his horse and gallop off to find out what was the trouble. Lower and lower his heart sank with every step. Surely, unless there had

been a wreck, the boys would have been here by this time.

He reached the waterworks pumping station, and rounding the corner of it, looked about for Sim Bradley to tell him where he was going. But the cowboys with their horses were gathered on the edge of the bluff watching something out in the stream—probably a house going down or something of the sort.

Ted called to Bradley, but the latter was too intent on the spectacle in the river, whatever it was, to pay any heed to him; so he impatiently pushed on past the cud-chewing oxen to where the group of absorbed punchers stood.

Then, as he reached them, he stopped suddenly and stood staring with bulging eyes, his heart doing a flip-flop almost out of his bosom in his revulsion of feeling.

There in the slack water just above the approach to the vanished railroad bridge was the old barge chugging warily along. And, as Ted watched, the red-faced man at the tiller barked an order over his shoulder, and swinging out, steered into the current.

The swift rush of the inset caught the lumbering craft, and sent her shooting toward shore like a surf-board. But with masterly skill, the captain righted her at just the correct second; and with her propeller backing water like mad, and Herb and Jim dancing like maniacs on her deck, she slid in beside the bank and held.

A couple of cowboys scrambled down the bluff, and catching the ropes tossed ashore made her fast.

Glancing back over his shoulder, Ted saw the county commissioners, Pohlman and the sheriff, with a knot of hangers-on, just coming around the corner of the pumping station; and a stratagem occurred to him.

"Hey, Bradley!" he hissed at the foreman. "Take one or two of the boys, and line up the cattle like we were going to start them to hauling."

Joining in the ruse himself, he began

cracking a long whip and bawling out excited orders, as the bunch of officials and spectators paused involuntarily to watch his frenzied activities.

"Get the rollers ready, boys!" he shouted. "We'll hoist the old span up over the bank, and set her on them. Then we'll be all fixed to start."

The sheriff stepped forward.

"Better not try it, Trevor," he warned. "The minute you start out I will have to jug you, and you'll get soaked for the limit."

But Ted, with a mutinous toss of the head, merely went on giving his directions.

Meanwhile, the work of loading the span upon the barge was rapidly proceeding in a sort of sulphurous reek, as the barge captain vehemently kept urging speed, since he did not know how long he could hold against the pouring sweep of the flood.

Fortunately, though, everything was in readiness, the stout cables fastened about the span, the derrick still standing where it had been set up the day before.

THE derrick's long arm swept out, and the knot of tense scowling officials stood watching it, expecting to see the heavy span come swinging up over the edge of the bluff. But instead it was gently lowered to the deck of the barge.

Word was brought to Ted that it was safely aboard and the lines being cast off; and he tossed his cow-whip to Sim Bradley with a laugh.

"Drive the steers home," he said. "I guess we won't use them to-day, after all."

He was backing toward the bluff as he spoke, and at the edge of it he paused to kiss his hand ironically to the pop-eyed officials.

"Show's over, you poor boobs!" he jeered. "I told you that, Pohlman or no Pohlman, I'd have that span out to Plateau Ranch to-day; and here's where I keep my word."

Then he sprang down the bank and leaped aboard just as the last line was cast off, and the old barge, yielding to the impetus of the current, shot away down stream.

The rest of the voyage was made without misadventure or particular incident. Naturally, the stretch to the mouth of the ravine did not take long. Herb said afterward that he hadn't been so near flying since he had coasted down a very steep hill as a boy.

But after they struck the still water backed up into the ravine and had to depend on the motor to kick the barge and her weighty burden along, progress was necessarily slower. The captain, fearful of snags or other submerged obstacles in these unknown waters, kept his speed down practically to a crawling space.

It was sunset before they finally reached the spot between two cliffs of equal height, which had been selected as the site for the bridge.

Jim Barnes wanted to defer the unloading of the span until next day, since, although the granite walls of the ravine were amply able to sustain the weight, he wished to make doubly sure of it by putting in some concrete reinforcement.

But the barge owner strenuously demurred to any suggestion of delay. He had agreed to furnish his boat and services in settlement of the salvage claim for that day alone, and if he was held over to another day he vowed he'd have to be paid an all-fired stiff price.

Also, he swore vigorously, he "did not intend to do it nohow." No telling just how soon the flood would turn and start to go down; and when she did, the water would run out of this variously qualified ravine so fast that he would be stuck up there high and dry, until mebbe in a dozen years or so another blank-blanked flood came along and floated the old barge off.

He'd filled his contract and delivered the span where they told him; and now if they didn't want to accept it and

take it off his hands, he'd freight it back where it came from and chuck it in the river.

IN view of this attitude on his part, there seemed nothing for Barnes to do but accede, especially since he admitted that whatever concreting was necessary could be done after the span was in position.

Accordingly the ranch derrick which Ted had sent word by Sim Bradley to have set up, and which now stood in readiness on the edge of the ravine, was put into action, and the work of hoisting the span off the barge was commenced.

But first Ted raced away to the house to get Phyllis and bring her to the scene.

"This bridge is the corner stone to a new and more prosperous Plateau Ranch," he said, "and it wouldn't be fair not to have our mascot with us—the one who really brought it to pass."

He found her on the veranda with Mom, looking none the worse for her ordeal of the night before.

"Of course I'll go." She rose eagerly as he explained what he wanted; and laughed to scorn some fears he expressed that it might possibly be too much for her.

"Bunk!" she scoffed. "I've felt far more all in many a time after a night of strenuous dancing. Come on." She waved her hand gayly to the rest of the house party. "Let's go!"

So Ted loaded them all into the station wagon, a jolly, laughing company, and drove them out to the ravine—Phyllis and Mom, Dad and Mrs. Wilson, and Rose Regley, Pop and Arthur Blake—arriving there just as everything was in readiness for the hoisting of the span.

"Hold on a minute." He turned to Jim Barnes. "Are those cables absolutely safe?"

"Sure," the engineer nodded. "They'd hold up the Leviathan."

"All right, then," said Ted; and

picking Phyllis up in his arms, he carried her swiftly down the steep path at the side of the ravine, and stepping aboard the barge, set her down in the middle of the span.

Somebody had brought out from the house a string of signal flags used at some birthday celebration at the ranch, and these were quickly festooned along the steel work. Somebody else had fastened the Stars and Stripes at the top of the derrick. So, with the colorful costume of the cowboys who had all assembled to witness the spectacle, and the light dresses of the ladies, it was quite a gala affair.

Then Jim Barnes gave the word; the winches began to revolve, the cables to tighten. Slowly the steel span rose between the walls of the ravine.

Higher and higher it came, with Ted and Phyllis standing in the center of it, until at last it rose above the tops of the cliffs on either side.

As it hung suspended there, Phyllis suddenly pointed, and everybody turned to look. The daily shower of the region had as usual passed around, leaving a mass of dark clouds piled up on the eastern horizon; and now against this the last rays of the setting sun were throwing a great, beautiful rainbow—the symbol of promise.

But Jim Barnes was interested less in promise than in performance. He gave a wave of his hand, and the long arm of the derrick moved around to swing the span across the ravine.

"Steady on the guy ropes there! Easy, everybody! St—eady!"

Barnes's uplifted arm dropped slowly, and with it the span came down gently as a feather to rest secure on the exact spot chosen for it. The bridge was an accomplished fact.

TED proudly escorted Phyllis to the farther side, and then back again to receive the congratulations of their friends, while the cowboys fairly split the air with their yells and whoops of approval.

So great was the din and excitement that nobody noticed the arrival of a car, upon the scene until its three occupants, Pohlman, the banker; Uncle Gilbert and a Laidlaw lawyer, shouldered their way through the crowd up to a family group where Ted and Phyllis, Pop and Mom stood with their arms around one another.

At the sight of Pohlman's pale, sly face, Ted's eyes blazed, and he took a hasty step forward.

"It just needed you sticking your nose in here," he shouted angrily, "to make this the end of a perfect day; for it gives me a chance to get at you. The law's on my side this time, and I order you off our premises. If you don't go, I'll throw you off and have you arrested for trespass to boot. Get off this ranch, I say."

"He! He!" cackled Uncle Gilbert malignantly. "Derned if he ain't taking the words right out of the man's mouth. Why, you impident young whippersnapper, that's what Mr. Pohlman has come here to do, order the whole wuthless bunch of you off'n this ranch."

Meanwhile the Laidlaw lawyer had pressed forward and thrust a paper into the elder Trevor's hand.

"What's this?" Pop gazed at it blankly.

"Why, it's a formal notice we are serving on you, Mr. Trevor," said the lawyer glibly. "You will recall, no doubt, that clause in your mortgage which provides that in case you make any changes or alterations on this estate which the mortgagee regards as prejudicial to his interests, he shall have the right to call upon you for their prompt abatement, and on your failure to comply, may enter an immediate foreclosure.

"Now this bridge"—he frowned at it severely—"Mr. Pohlman regards as distinctly prejudicial to his interests. It means the cutting up of the ranch by a public road running across it, and is the initial step, as we understand, in a

program of other features which we consider extremely detrimental.

"Therefore," the lawyer drew himself up, "we serve notice on you, Mr. Trevor, that unless that bridge is removed by noon to-morrow, we shall take possession of the ranch."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INTERRUPTED CONFERENCE.

POP wilted. For once all his happy optimism was dashed. Something had turned up this time; but it had turned up the wrong way.

He drew Ted aside, the fond pride with which he had been regarding his son's achievement changed to dismay.

"Looks as if they had us, boy," he whispered miserably. "I'm afraid your bridge 'll have to go. Still," he made a feeble attempt at his customary buoyancy, "something may turn up. I am going to take 'em over to the house and see if I can't talk 'em into some kind of a compromise."

Pohlman, when the suggestion for a conference was broached, stiffly declined.

"I really see nothing to be gained by that, Mr. Trevor," he said coldly. "The matter simply stands that this bridge must be removed by to-morrow noon, or else as the representative of the mortgagee, I shall take possession of the ranch. All the discussion in the world will not change my determination in that respect."

But Uncle Gilbert proved more amenable. He knew from experience that as soon as they were settled, Kwen Lee would be called upon to pass refreshments; and he was not overlooking any opportunity to warm his withered innards with Henry's Scotch or to fill his pockets with Henry's excellent cigars.

"Aw, give him a chance to talk, Pohlman," he urged, hypocritically. "Mebbe he can show you where this

bridge ain't going to do you no such damage as you think."

The bank president looked up in quick surprise at this leniency from such a source; but catching a wink from Uncle Gilbert, gathered that trickery of some kind was afoot, and therefore conceding the point, asked Pop to ride back in their car with them to the house.

The others followed more slowly, and stood around outside the house, silent or talking in suppressed tones, much after the manner of mourners at a funeral.

To Ted, that was just what it was—the funeral of all his hopes. He had no idea that anything would come out of this conference; for he realized from the venomous glances Pohlman had cast at him that the latter's merely passive dislike of him had been turned by their two recent encounters into an active enmity, and that the bank president would spare no pains to hurt him.

Also, he sensed a new and more intense hostility in Uncle Gilbert's manner, although he did not understand the reason for it, naturally never dreaming that it was the rankling of a shaft of Cupid that had started this wrinkled old wretch on the warpath.

As a matter of fact, he and Phyllis, between them, had precipitated the whole crisis; he by his hot-blooded flinging down the gauntlet to Pohlman, and she by her misunderstood tolerance in shielding Uncle Gilbert.

Ted did not comprehend entirely the motives back of the demand upon his father; but he shared none of Pop's hopes that those two vultures could be induced to relent.

As he saw it, he was done so far as Plateau Ranch was concerned. If the bridge was not removed, then Pohlman and Uncle Gilbert—for Ted was confident that Uncle Gilbert was the man behind the guns—would come in and take possession at the end of the thirty days.

You could pick either horn of the

dilemma you chose. It did not really make much difference.

AS he stood in moody reflection, he suddenly felt Phyllis's arm slip into his.

"Never mind, old dear," she said softly. "No matter how it comes out, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you've put up a gallant fight."

"A gallant fight!" he repeated bitterly. "I've been a coward and a pup and a double-distilled idiot. You know the truth now; but it will always be a shameful memory to me that you had to learn it in such a way, that I didn't have the spunk and the decency to tell you myself."

"But that's just what you did do, poor lamb."

And, with a laugh, she drew from her pocket that letter he had written her from Seattle.

"You got my letter?" He stared at it incredulously. "And you knew all the time?"

"Right on both counts." She laughed again. "You are not the only one who has been playing a part. As a matter of fact, dearest, it was this letter from you more than the high water that induced me to close my tour and come scooting down here to see what was back of all your tale of shipwreck and ruin.

"Then, when I got here, and discovered the line of false pretenses you were following with me, I thought, 'Far be it from me to crab his act,' so I stood pat.

"Besides," she unconsciously repeated the argument Herb had made, "I felt, maybe, if you thought I didn't know, there would be a greater incentive for you to fight your way out of the muddle. And, even if I hadn't known, I couldn't condemn you very severely, Ted, because I have been playing a part myself. Perhaps, more of a part than you dream."

"Applesauce!" scoffed Ted. "You are only trying to let me down easy."

"Is that so?" she countered. "How about the man in the green suit? Haven't you any curiosity to know who that was?" There was a teasing, little twinkle in her eye.

"Not until you choose to tell me." Ted shook his head. "I'm not bothered."

She stamped her foot in pretended exasperation.

"Was there ever such a man? I simply can't make him jealous."

Then her glance softened, and she gave his arm an affectionate little squeeze.

"But you're right at that, Teddy boy. There's no need for you to be bothered about anybody else, and never will be. And you and I are going to have a grand show-down and clear away all the misconceptions for good and all.

"I only hope," she added a bit anxiously, "that you'll forgive my duplicity as fully as I do yours. After all, the motive with both of us was unselfish and with the thought of the other in mind.

"Only never get the idea into your head again, Ted," she warned, "that you can put anything over on me. No man can do that with the woman that loves him. Even if I had never got your letter, I would still have known that something was wrong here. Do you suppose that Pop, the darling old humbug, ever fools Mom? Why, she's onto him like a thousand of bricks; but, wonder that she is, she never lets him guess it.

"So in the future, sweetheart, you and I are going to play straight; we—"

But Ted, recalled by this to the black situation at the ranch, gave a despairing gesture.

"THE future?" he groaned. "What can we look to in the future?"

Everything I told you in that letter is still true—more so than ever. It may be years before I can think of getting married.

"No." His voice broke slightly. "It would not be fair to hold you. We must break our engagement."

But she refused to take his tragic view of the matter.

"Seems to me, I have something to say on that," she retorted. "Suppose I decline to be freed? You don't want a breach of promise suit on your hands, do you, with all your other troubles?"

Again she snuggled close to him.

"Things may look pretty desperate, Teddy, dear," she murmured, "but we'll face them together. And, for once, I stand with Pop; I believe that something is going to turn up. Perhaps Arthur Blake will—"

He drew back from her as if he had been stung.

"Blake?" He gave a vitriolic laugh. "Lord! He'd do anything to help the smash along. Why shouldn't he? Wouldn't he figure that it give him a better chance to win you?"

"Win me?" Her eyes dilated; then she giggled. "Gee! I really have the man jealous, and didn't know it. Oh, you black *Othello!* But where are your eyes, you poor fish? Didn't you know that Arthur Blake is hopelessly gone on Rose Regley?"

"That little, dumpy, brown thing?" Ted exclaimed incredulously. "What does he see in her?"

"Lucky we all don't think alike," Phyllis laughed. "He probably wonders what you see in a scrawny, faded blonde like me. And the tragedy of it is, that Rose is completely taken up with that pipe-puffing Jim Barnes. Poor Arthur! I think he has been behaving beautifully under the circumstances.

"Oh, Ted, isn't it wonderful," she drew his arm around her, "that you and I had nothing of that kind to contend with? We knew from the very first moment that we were meant for each other. And don't tell me," she added triumphantly, "that any such scum as Pohlman and Uncle Gilbert can prevent it."

So engrossed were they, that neither

of them had noticed a telegraph messenger boy on a bicycle pedalling up the drive toward the house, until now he halted beside them, and caused them to draw hastily apart.

"Mr. Arthur Blake?" he said inquiringly, as he drew a yellow envelope from his uniform cap, and read the superscription.

Ted pointed out where Blake stood talking to Rose Regley over by the steps of the veranda, and then turned back to resume his conversation with Phyllis.

But she laid a quick hand on his arm to stay him.

"Wait!" she breathed excitedly. She was watching Blake as he opened and read the telegram.

AFTER a moment, he finished and slipping the message into its envelope, lifted his head, and glancing across to her, nodded in answer to the question in her eyes.

"From dad!" cried Phyllis joyously. "Then there's no further need to worry. Everything is all right."

Ted couldn't quite make that out. Just what Phyllis's father could accomplish in the present situation, he failed to see.

True, he knew very little of her father. In their brief and rather hectic acquaintance both at Seattle and here at the ranch, there had been scant opportunity to go into the details of family relationships. They were content to take each other at face value, and it was so much more interesting to talk about themselves.

Still Ted had somehow gathered a vague impression that Mr. Duhamel was a minor railroad or steamship official of some sort, whose nose was pretty close to the grindstone; so much so, in fact, that it had been absolutely necessary for Phyllis to earn her own living. And how could a man of that type be of any especial aid in straightening out this muddle at Plateau Ranch?

It must be, he decided, that Phyllis meant everything was all right with her father so far as their engagement was concerned. But would the man look with the same favor on the arrangement, when he discovered that his prospective son-in-law was a bankrupt?

Before Ted could question Phyllis, however, and get at a solution of the puzzle, Blake came swiftly over to them.

"Come on, Trevor," he said. "We're going to pull the teeth of those hyenas."

And without giving Ted time to ask the nature of the move, or what was expected of him, he hustled him over to the ranch house and into the office, where the group of elders sat in conference.

At their entrance, Pohlman, the banker, rose quickly with an irate exclamation.

"I thought this was to be a private consultation," he said sharply, "not overrun with a pack of hobbledehoy boys. I, for one, decline to sit in the same room with that insolent cub." He cast a baleful look at Ted, and picked up his hat.

"Just a moment, please, Mr. Pohlman," Blake stayed him suavely. "I beg the pardon of you gentlemen for butting in; but I have news of such vital bearing upon the matter you are discussing, that I felt you should know it at once.

"The question, as I understand it," he went on, "is whether this bridge that has been set up, shall remain or not. Well, that's settled. The bridge stays right where it is. I have a telegram here from Mr. Cyrus J. King—"

Pohlman sat down abruptly, his eyes mere slits as he watched Arthur Blake draw the inclosure from the envelope. Uncle Gilbert took advantage of the general preoccupation to help himself to another brimming glass of Scotch and sneak another bunch of cigars.

"A telegram from Mr. Cyrus J. King," proceeded Blake, "who, as you all probably know, is in charge of build-

ing and laying out this section of the new highway. Shall I read his message?" And without stopping for permission, he did so:

• "ARTHUR BLAKE,

"Plateau Ranch, Laidlaw, Mont.

"If bridge project proves feasible, have engineers change line of new highway, so as to cut across Plateau Ranch as you suggest, paying Trevor any reasonable figure for right of way. Resort plan seems excellent scheme. Give young men engaged on it every encouragement.

"CYRUS J. KING."

POHLMAN and Uncle Gilbert both looked as if something had violently disagreed with them.

"What I want to know," rasped Uncle Gilbert, "is how Cyrus J. King, clean on to New York; knowed anything about that pesky bridge?"

"Easy," said Blake. "I wired him."

"And you mean to say," Uncle Gilbert gasped, "that a man like King, a big highway builder and railroad president and multimillionaire, is paying any attention to a cheapskate theatrical manager like you?"

"Shut up, you fool!" Pohlman jerked him by the sleeve. "He's King's personal representative. Showed me his credentials when he was at the bank yesterday."

The banker had recovered from his first shock by this time, and was acting rather like a man who had swallowed a bitter pill, and was endeavoring to appear as-if he liked it.

"I must confess, Mr. Blake," he smiled wryly, "I am somewhat surprised. You really said nothing in our talk yesterday; but I rather gathered that like me you were opposed to the Trevors's visionary schemes. But since I was mistaken, I suppose there is nothing to do, but close the business up, as your telegram seems to suggest.

"You intend, I take it, to pay Mr. Trevor for this right of way an amount

sufficient to cover his arrears of interest, and so allow him to keep the ranch in his hands?"

"Yes," Blake bowed. "That is, provided he will accept it." He glanced at Pop.

"Sure, I will!" shouted the latter vehemently. "Lord! I knew all along something was bound to turn up."

"Then," said Pohlman, rising again, "since there seems nothing more to detain us, I will bid you all good evening."

"Oh, just one more thing, Mr. Pohlman." Blake lifted a detaining hand. "It may interest you to know that I purchased to-day from various stockholders a controlling interest in the Laidlaw Bank, and will call a meeting to-morrow to elect a new president and directorate."

The banker's steel-like control shattered at that. His mask of a face twisted into a scowl of murderous fury, and for a moment, it seemed as if he were about to make a savage onslaught at Blake.

"You did what?" he snarled hoarsely. Then without waiting for an answer, he grabbed the lawyer, and hurried him out of the house.

Uncle Gilbert, seemingly almost as thunderstruck, stopped only to gulp another drink of Scotch, and scurried after them.

All three piled pell-mell into their car, and with a clash of gears, swept off toward Laidlaw, as if the devil himself were in pursuit.

Ted, like the others, stared open-mouthed a moment at this abrupt exit; then, gathering himself together, started to go in search of Phyllis.

But as he passed Blake, the latter seized him by the arm.

"Listen!" he whispered, speaking close to Ted's ear. "How far would you go to help your father, and at the same time put over this scheme you have for the ranch?"

"To the limit," said Ted promptly.

"All right, then. Come on."

And with his hand still on Ted's elbow, the other hurried him toward the front door.

CHAPTER XIV.

WOLVES AT BAY.

MA TREVOR came bustling out on the veranda, as Ted and Blake went down the steps.

"Teddy! Arthur! What on earth are you thinking of? You can't go away now. Supper's on the table."

Supper was supper at Plateau Ranch, even though the heavens fell.

"Sorry, Mom," Arthur called back. "But you'll have to save ours for us. We're going hunting for wolves. Maybe we'll bring you a nice wolf pelt to make into a rug."

Then he pushed Ted into his big touring car, and drove away.

"Such goings-on, I never saw!" The good lady shook her head; as she went back into the house. "Seems as if nobody was on time to meals any more. And that boy was up all last night. Yet here he goes off wolf-hunting with never a wink of sleep. Why, they'll have to go sixty or eighty miles back into the mountains to find any wolves."

She would have still been more puzzled, perhaps, if she had known that instead of heading for the mountains, Blake turned the nose of his car toward Laidlaw.

"No use being in too big a hurry," he said, settling down to a comfortable gait. "We want to give them time to get there well ahead of us. And meanwhile, we will have a chance to talk. There are probably several things you want to know."

"Well, yes; I guess there are." Ted laughed a trifle uncertainly. "Although, I can hardly think what I want to ask first. My head is in a whirl.

"How does it come, though," he said, "that you told Phyllis you had a telegram from her father, and then read

that message from Cyrus J. King? Did her father get Mr. King to send his message?"

"Not at all," smiled Blake. "Her father is Cyrus J. King."

"Oh?" Ted was a bit stunned. "But," he stammered, "her name is Phyllis Duhamel?"

"Phyllis Duhamel King," corrected Arthur. "When she went on the stage, she shortened it for several reasons.

"Probably we'll get at it best if I tell you the story," he said. "Phyllis, like most girls of her age, was badly stage-struck. She'd had some success at amateur theatricals, and imagined she had a career ahead of her. The old man, who is one of the finest fellows alive, but as hard-boiled as they make 'em, was willing to give her her chance, but he didn't want any foolishness about it.

"If she was any good, he didn't see the necessity for her to waste time traipsing Broadway to the different agents' offices, and possibly getting an occasional small bit; yet he didn't want her boosted on the strength of his money and prestige like the ordinary social aspirant.

"Finally," said Blake, "he hit upon a scheme for letting her prove herself. He sent her to dramatic school, gave her a season in stock to gain practical experience, and then sent her out at the head of a road company. If she made good, he was prepared to back her for a Broadway appearance; but she had to make good.

"He stipulated, though, that there must be no publicity for her as Cyrus J. King's daughter. She had to appear under a different name, play in a territory where she was not known, and promise him that under no circumstances would she reveal her true identity to her associates or anybody else.

"She was not only to represent herself as the daughter of poor people and obliged to earn her living; but she was actually to live the part. Although, of course," added Blake, "he sent me

along to see that she didn't get stranded, or get exploited in any way." Blake paused.

"WELL," he continued, "we started out. I got a competent staff for her and a company of seasoned players, and we trouped up the coast with varying success. Ultimately we came to Seattle and met you, and then it was all off. The old man was in England at the time; but she had me keeping the cables hot with messages to him begging to be let off her promise, and he kept firing cables back at me: who was this fellow Trevor, and what was he like?"

"I was noncommittal," he grinned. "To tell you the truth, my boy, I wasn't so strong for you at the start, although I'd had you pretty rigidly investigated out at the university, and couldn't find a thing against you. But it wasn't until I got to Plateau Ranch, and saw how you were working to pull the old wagon out of the mud, I came over definitely to your side.

"But that is getting ahead of my story," he broke off. "We left Seattle, still up in the air, and ran smack into the high water, and your letter calling off the engagement. Nothing would do then with Phyllis but that we should close our tour, and go skating off to you. She didn't want to be an actress any more; all she wanted was to be at your side, and comfort you in your trouble.

"That suited me finely," said Blake. "I'm bound to admit that we'd done a little better than break even on the trip, and that our audiences seemed to think they got their money's worth. I have to hand it to her, too, that she was game in every emergency. But I was satisfied by this time, that she was no world-beater—no Maude Adams or Ethel Barrymore, what I mean."

"I think she is wonderful," declared Ted loyally.

"Yes. You probably would," said Blake. "But the critics weren't all of

your opinion. At any rate, I was glad to be out of it, and to get to Laidlaw. The old man had been cabling me to take time off for a run down here to do a bit of investigating. You see, he aims to make Laidlaw a sort of center of operations in the North West, and he didn't altogether like the way his plans were being mangled by the people he had in charge.

"The rest of course you largely know. What I wanted was to get a straight line on you, and also on the situation in regard to Mr. King's affairs.

"And strangely enough the two lines of investigation ran right together. Didn't take me long to find out that the same people who were responsible for the trouble in the King proposition were also responsible for the difficulties at Plateau Ranch."

"It might have taken me a little time to dig it all out," he conceded; "but I had what in one way you might call a stroke of luck, that gave me the low-down on enough of their operations to let me piece out the whole story."

Then he went ahead to relate the story of Phyllis's ride with Uncle Gilbert, and of the revelations the old pirate had made to her in the effort to impress her with his shrewdness—revelations which, knowing the work that Blake was engaged upon, she had lost no time in communicating to him.

"And you say that she is no actress?" gasped Ted. "All I can say is, that I'd like to see Maude Adams or Ethel Barrymore put it over on Uncle Gilbert.

"But that old devil!" he broke out. "Just wait till I get my hands on him, I'll break every bone in his body. I'll—"

"**E**ASY. Easy," laughed Blake, laying a hand on his knee, for in his wrought-up excitement Ted seemed about to jump out of the car. "If all goes well, you are going

to hurt him worse than if you removed his vermiform appendix without ether. You are going to take away some of his ill-got gains.

"You see," he went on, "by graft and bribery those two buzzards, your uncle and Pohlman, got the highway laid out far from its proper course, and along a lot of land which they had bought up cheap. They stood to make millions on it. But here is where we make them disgorge that, and along with it, all that your father's careless, easy-going methods have allowed them to gyp him out of.

"I threw a bomb-shell into them to-night," he chuckled, "when I advised them of the change in the line of the highway. But I threw a bigger one when I told them that the bank would be reorganized to-morrow and all its officers changed.

"As I figure, the two would lose no time in getting there, and putting in a busy night destroying papers, altering records, and getting rid of all proofs of their skullduggery. Our business is to catch them before they get away with it, and while they have the stuff all out and easy to get at.

"In other words, I'm planning a bit of burglary," he said searchingly. "Are you game to go through it with me?"

"I said I was with you to the limit," replied Ted without a moment's hesitation. "Bring on your jimmy."

"I think these are all we'll need." Blake handed over a revolver and a square of black cloth with eyeholes in it to be used as a mask. "Slip those in your pocket until we have need of them."

Then he proceeded to outline his plans.

"I have the lay of the land pretty well," he said. "They will probably be in the back part of the bank in the president's office, and we want to come in on them through the side door that opens on that little dark alley running back from the main street.

"The watchman, I've learned, comes

out of that every night at half past nine," he glanced at the clock on the dashboard of the car, "to make a tour of the outside of the building. It'll be your job to tackle and overpower him, and do it without the slightest noise. He's pretty husky, and he'll be armed. Think you can handle him?"

Ted flexed the muscles which had stood him in such good stead on many a hard-fought football field, and had won him the title of the Varsity's champion athlete.

"I can make a stab at it," he said.

They had reached the outskirts of Laidlaw by this time, and as it was already after nine o'clock, they parked the car a block or two away, and proceeded to the bank.

Blake took his post on the opposite side of Main Street across from the mouth of the alley to serve as a lookout, and stood there loitering as if waiting for some one.

Then Ted, watching his opportunity, ducked up the dark passageway, and concealed himself behind a pile of boxes.

AS he stood there waiting in the darkness, he made up his mind that he would never take up the rôle of burglar as a serious profession. His heart was pounding so madly that it hurt him; his pulses seemed to be beating in his ears that staccato burglar music one hears on the stage. His imagination pictured all sort of evil consequences that might come from this escapade.

Would half past nine never come? Or had the watchman abandoned his inspection tour for that night? Hours seemed already to have passed.

But at last he heard the opening of a door, the click of the spring lock as it was closed from the outside, and then the shuffle of footsteps as some one came down the alley.

Ted was trembling as if he had a fit of ague. He was afraid the man would hear the chattering of his teeth.

Then he suddenly stiffened to steel, and became cool and controlled. The watchman was abreast of him.

Ted let him get about a foot past him; then he sprang. One hand closed over the watchman's mouth to shut off any outcry; the other arm gripped around the fellow, pinioning him helpless in a bearlike hug.

He put up a savage struggle, trying desperately to get at his gun.

Then Blake came hurrying over, and without difficulty they gagged and tied the unfortunate watchman, relieved him of his gun, his keys and his police whistle, and stowed him away behind the pile of boxes.

After that, of course, it was easy. All they had to do was to open the door with his keys, step inside, and then, donning their masks, proceed to the back room.

Pohlman and Uncle Gilbert, seated at a table, and busily engaged over a mass of documents, never suspected that anything was wrong, until they heard the sharp command, "Stick 'em up!"

Trembling, they were backed up against the wall, and were searched to make sure they had no weapons. Then Blake and Ted threw off their masks.

Pohlman stared as if he could not believe his eyes.

"You have come to rob the bank?" he gasped.

"No," said Blake, "you've attended to that job already. We are merely here to see how much you have got away with."

With a squeak like a frightened rabbit, Uncle Gilbert made a dash for the table, and began scrambling the papers on it together; but he was speedily stopped and made to stand back.

JUST then there came an imperative knocking at the outer door of the bank. Ted and Arthur looked at each other, startled and with paling cheeks. It appeared as if their little game of masquerade had been dis-

covered, and the results might be far from pleasant for them.

Ted tiptoed over to the partition and peeped cautiously around the corner of the doorway. Then, with a gulp of relief, he hurried out to the main entrance, and, flinging it wide, admitted the whole party from Plateau Ranch.

"Phyllis told us what you boys were up to," Pop explained as they trooped in, "and, thinking you might need reinforcements—or somebody to go your bail—we all came along."

With the aid of the pointers furnished by Phyllis from Uncle Gilbert's disclosures, and with the records of their dishonest transactions spread out there on the table, it did not take Arthur Blake and Herb long to figure out the defalcations.

"I figure, Mr. Trevor," said Blake, "that they have got from you something over one hundred thousand dollars, most of it by methods that make them amenable to the criminal law. Shall I telephone for the sheriff?"

"No," said Pop. "Provided they make full restitution, I say let 'em go."

Naturally, the two culprits were ready to save their skins by so easy a let-down, and an agreement as to amount having been reached, Blake started to draw up the papers to bind them.

"And say," Pop suggested, "have that money made payable to Ted here. I want him to have it for a wedding present, and he's sure earned it, if anybody ever did."

THIS seemed to conclude the evening's entertainment; but just then Blake, as with an afterthought, turned to Pohlman.

"Oh, by the way," he said, "how would you two like to get rid of that worthless land you took up along the now abandoned line of the new highway? I'll give you what you paid."

"Well, I don't know," Pohlman, from force of habit, started to haggle.

But Uncle Gilbert, frightened lest this bit of salvage from the wreck escape them, broke in:

"Take him up!" he squeaked frenziedly. "Take him up. The land's your'n, Mr. Theatrical Manager."

"I thought you'd sell," smiled Blake, "and so I have the deeds and the other papers all prepared. And since Pop here has a notary's commission, we can close without delay."

So the transaction was put through, and the signatures of Pohlman and Uncle Gilbert duly attached.

"And now," said Blake, "I may as well tell you that Mr. King is going to use that abandoned line of highway as a right of way for a cut-off he is planning for his railway system. He wants to use some of that land I have just bought as a site for railroad shops and yards, and the rest will, of course, be more valuable than if the original highway plan had been followed."

That was perhaps the bitterest draft of all to the worsted conspirators. They saw the millions of which they had dreamed slip away from them like an iridescent bubble.

"I'll make a hundred thousand dollars on that deal," Arthur turned to Ted. "How about my putting it in with your hundred thousand dollars and all of us going ahead to push the resort scheme to completion?"

"You're on!" Ted gripped his hand. "We'll start right in the morning, and keep at it."

"But you're going back to finish at the Varsity, aren't you, Ted?" demanded Herb.

"He is not," declared Phyllis stoutly, "and neither are any of the rest of you."

"Ted Trevor is going to stay right here and be married just as soon as Cyrus J. King can be hustled out here. The Varsity, indeed! The Varsity was never like what Plateau Ranch is going to be; and neither, for that matter, is Heaven!"

THE END



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



PERHAPS the illustrations at the head of our stories often are taken for granted, but they contribute a lot to the enjoyment of the magazine as a whole. Mr. Glasser is one of the many who appreciate how much the work of the artist, R. D. Morrison—or "Mori"—adds to the magazine:

Bronx, N. Y.

I am inclosing herewith the necessary number of coupons, and I would be glad to receive one of the heading illustrations, if they are still available. These drawings are not only artistic and decorative, but they enable the reader to visualize the author's description. The artist, Mori, is deserving of much praise for his excellent work. He can portray a scene on Mars or Venus with as much facility as one on Broadway or in a Western town. In short, his drawings are up to the ARGOSY standard, and there is none higher.

A. L. GLASSER.

THE four-serial policy now seems to meet with universal favor. Whenever possible it will be our aim to start and finish a serial in each issue.

Elizabethtown, Pa.

My subscription to ARGOSY expired about a month ago and at that time with the featured novelette and three-serial idea going strong it was my intention to discontinue my membership in the ranks entirely. Your promise a bit later to return to the old policy was received with pleasure in that worthwhile readers' department that you had resurrected, and we changed our minds to the extent that we are inclosing a check to cover another year's association.

As I have said before, I and my associates who read the magazines that come to this address are all in favor of the long story, no matter whether continued or complete. However, you could not print a story such as Burroughs's "War Chief" in one issue of the magazine if for no other reason than that it would make a magazine that lacked variety. The ARGOSY does not lack variety, and therefore is thought of as a member of the family almost anywhere it is read.

While we play no favorites in our circle it seems that the stories by Seltzer, Burroughs, Merritt, Franklin, Brand, Perkins, and the other

old-timers are most favored, with MacIsaac doing fine. I wonder if many of your readers know that First National is preparing Merritt's "Seven Footprints to Satan" as a special mystery picture for winter release.

We rather favor Modest Stein on the covers because they were more richly done in detail and coloring and with less of the white space than has been observed lately. In every other way the magazine is much improved by the changes in headings, readers' departments, particularly the "Looking Ahead" page, which might be a bit more detailed, and the bits of articles that are used in the place of poetry.

HENRY W. NAUMAN,
Speaking for "Our Circle."

WE try to make each issue of ARGOSY the best to date. When we succeed in making an old-timer like Mr. Newman feel that the current issue is the best ever we feel we are getting somewhere.

West Lafayette, Ind.

I have been a reader of the ARGOSY for so long that I seem to have grown up with one by my side. This is my first attempt at voicing my approval of the magazine you are editing.

This issue I have at hand—September 22, 1928—seems to me one of the best I can ever remember being published. The assortment is perfect. If this issue does not please every one, I will miss my guess.

I am backing ARGOSY to the finish.

J. VERNON NEWMAN.

HERE'S a fan who would rather read than eat. Perhaps we should advocate ARGOSY as a weight-reducer!

Clearwater, Fla.

Have been a reader of the ARGOSY since the *Golden Argosy*, and I can do without one or two meals, but I have to have my ARGOSY.

I am working at Joyland Amusement Park and when I get through with my ARGOSY some of the fellows see it laying around and begin to look through it. I think I have got you at least ten new ARGOSY fans.

I like your book the same as it is, including some Western stories. Enjoyed the "Return of George Washington" better than any of them. From a loyal supporter.

E. H. WELCH.

WE are hoping that Mr. Carter will be well pleased with the fall crop of football stories:

Livermore Falls, Maine.

I can't read your stories fast enough, they are so good. I like every one of them and haven't missed one since I first subscribed. The magazine, to me, has all others beaten, because it contains what it says—all stories.

I have a preference the same as the rest and am always waiting for stories like George F. Worts builds around *Gillian Hazeltine*, and those unfathomable mysteries of *Mme. Storey*, who is a superwoman to all her readers.

Fall has come, and we expect some interesting football stories to take up our time we set aside for the ARGOSY.

C. CARTER.

INDEED, we are always glad to hear from our Canadian friends. It is a physical impossibility, however, to print more than a very small percentage of the letters we receive. More than five hundred a week reach our desk—so what chance have we to give every one the floor?

Three Hills, Alberta, Canada.

This is the second letter I have written under the Readers' Viewpoint. I suppose you threw the first one in the waste basket, not considering one from far-flung Canada of sufficient interest to publish because too near the Indian and the wandering bear.

I have been reading the ARGOSY for years and, although we have to pay twenty cents here per issue, I consider it the best for the money I expend. Fred MacIsaac is by far the best writer, and the next is Richard Barry. I would like to see more of *Mme. Storey*, and I am disappointed that more ladies are not employed, for their stories have a very attractive flavor about them.

Publish more Western stories, for they are full of life and action and are peculiarly attractive to certain temperaments. Many of the short stories are not worth publishing.

Yours very truly,

A. J. ROBERTSON.

AND here is another letter from Canada, with a good list of "favorites" listed:

Billings Bridge, Ontario.

Although I have never written to you before, I feel that you are an old friend, as I have been reading ARGOSY-ALLSTORY for nearly ten years.

Early in 1919, as I was returning from overseas—after spending three years there—I made the acquaintance of the *All-Story* at a newsstand.

Since then I have not missed a single copy

and have converted many of my friends into ARGOSY fans.

In all the copies that I have read I have found only one story that I really disliked.

I am not strong for Westerns, but if they are good ones by all means let us have them.

The best story I read in ARGOSY was "The Ramblin' Kid." Next, "On Swan River." I also enjoyed Max Brand's series on "Whistling Dan," Footner's "Self-Made Thief," the *Roundsman McCarthy* stories, "Shadows, Inc.," and "Ashes to Ashes."

My favorite authors are MacIsaac, Worts, Coe, Lawrence, and the "impossible" authors, Burroughs and Smith.

Wishing you as long a life as ARGOSY, I am, an ARGOSY fan for life.

C. F. CLARKE.

THIRTY years for Mr. White. Always it is a pleasure to hear from these old-time readers—for there is no other all-fiction magazine published to-day that has such a fine background and such a loyal body of old-timers behind it as ARGOSY:

Greensboro, N. C.

Inclosed herewith I hand you my check in payment of renewal of my subscription to the ARGOSY. I refuse to call it by its present name, for old friends are best.

My favorites as a boy thirty years ago were the ARGOSY, *Youth's Companion*, and *St. Nicholas*, and if there are any issues that I have missed I don't remember them. I discontinued the others years ago, but still look forward each week to the arrival of the *cleanest* as well as the most entertaining story magazine in the world.

V. BEN WHITE.

MANY traveling men find that ARGOSY helps them along the way—even when to read the magazine means snatching a few moments here and there:

Bluefield, W. Va.

I have been a reader of the ARGOSY for the past fifteen years, that is since eight years of age, when my father first brought home an ARGOSY. My personal opinion of the magazine is that it is one of the best fictions on the market at any price.

I am a lover of variety. I try to do different things for enjoyment. The ARGOSY helps me wonderfully. I am fond of reading and include each week a copy of the ARGOSY in the few articles I have time to read. When one must cover a territory of seven States once per year, reading must be limited to make time for business. I read in snatches and enjoy the ARGOSY as much as ever.

Variety is the spice of life, they say, and I really enjoy reading as part of life.

One of the things that impress me most is

the lack of space given to advertising. That is my work, I advertise Camel cigarettes, and I am very glad to have a Camel ad on the back of the ARGOSY that I may do a little off-duty work without effort.

You are the editor and you know the magazine world and how to make a magazine better than any of the wonderful dumb critics who write you about how to handle your work. If you did not know more than the critics writing you one of them would be the editor, not you. If you can't handle your job without help of so many critics step aside for another.

My one request is that the space given to Argonotes be used for such articles as "Whisky Jack" or "Old Book Bound with Human Skin." These articles are worth while and the Argonotes are sordid and useless.

Use your own judgment and give us all you have, as you seem to try your best to.

Here is to the ARGOSY as of days gone by, wonderfully different always and real joy to me.

Very truly yours,
PATRICK IRELAND.

AN on-and-off fan, Mr. Shepard calls himself—yet we imagine he is "on" most of the time:

Pasadena, Calif.

After reading the delightful Argonotes in the August 25 issue, I feel impelled to write to you. My testimony may not be as compelling as some I have read, because I cannot be called a true ARGOSY fan. I read very little fiction, and consequently, very few magazines; not regular at all.

However, when I do want some fiction, I can always rely upon one faithful source, the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY. It never fails to give me just what I need in the way of honest relaxation and enjoyment.

Once in awhile I start a serial—that's a mistake, for your serials are so blamed intriguing that I invariably buy the rest of them.

I notice that a Mr. Corey expresses his contempt for Westerns. Humph! Your Westerns are by far better than what I can find in a magazine devoted to that type alone.

Personally, I almost become a fan every time I get a copy, because the stories are really worth while. I would not like the job of having to select them. It must be an arduous task, with every one having a different opinion about what should be in it.

It does not hurt me any to skip over a story that does not appeal to me; it was good enough to pass ye editor so some one will enjoy it, if I do not. There are plenty more to choose from. You strike a happy average and give good, consistently fine stories. What more does one want?

And further, if you always have an Edgar Franklin serial running I will surely become a fan. He writes such clever, originally plotted things.

Excuse me if I have been too long-winded, but I felt like getting it off my chest.

Sincerely yours,
EVERETT SHEPARD.

MRS. TIERNEY doesn't care for the filler articles we use, but, judging from our correspondence, she is decidedly in the minority. How do you like them?

Fort Wayne, Ind.

Am glad that you are continuing four serials, because, frankly, there wasn't much to the ARGOSY with but three serials. We all prefer more serials rather than short stories. Another thing, the sketches about various educational things between stories are rather tiresome. Would like to see more poetry.

Now, this letter isn't meant to be all criticism, because, personally, I think, and all of us think, the ARGOSY is one of the best, in fact, the best of all magazines with unexcelled fiction.

Our favorite authors are E. R. Burroughs, A. A. Merritt, Ray Cummings, and the author of "The Radio Planet," *et cetera*, whoever he be. You will note by that our favorite stories are the "impossible" ones. We also like Mac-Isaac, Worts, Footner, McMorro. Then next come Loring Brent, Edgar Franklin, George M. Johnson, Richard Barry. Western stories are not exactly taboo with us, but we don't crave them as we do some by the first four authors above.

Hoping the ARGOSY will soon publish at least one "impossible" story each month, I am
MRS. D. J. TIERNEY.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

I did not like _____

because _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____



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In the ISSUE OF NOVEMBER 10th

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

contributes the complete novelette for this issue

BARE HANDS

is a tale laid in the bandit-ridden hills of Northern Mexico. You who have been calling for a two-fisted hero will find him here—a hero who wades in barehanded!

THE THIRTY-FIRST PIECE OF SILVER

by DON MCGREW

is the feature short story of this issue—a tale of the Foreign Legion in North Africa and on the Western Front.

ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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And after direct contact with others, rinse the hands with it—especially before each meal. In this way you render germs harmless should they enter the mouth on food you handle. Not for candidates alone is this advice. We are certain that anyone who will use Listerine, systematically, during winter weather, will materially lessen the risk of colds and sore throat. Isn't it worth trying?

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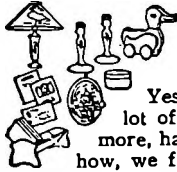
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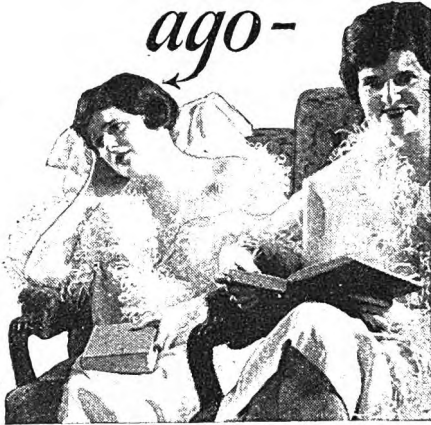
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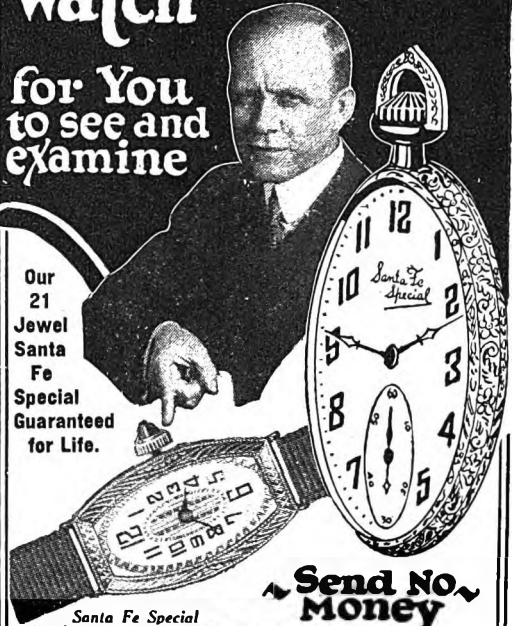
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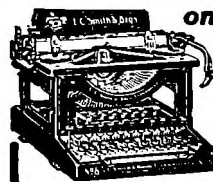
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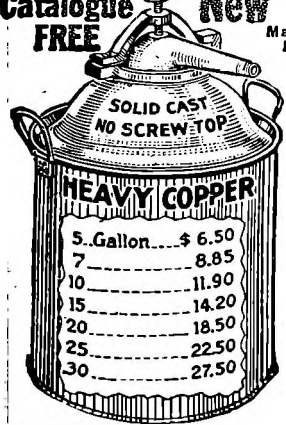
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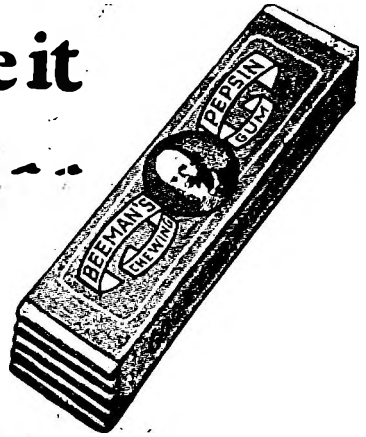
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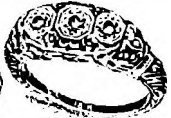
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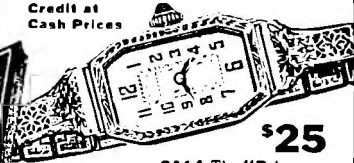
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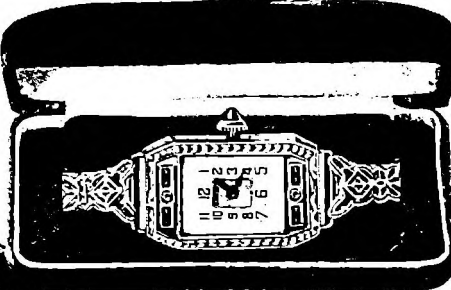
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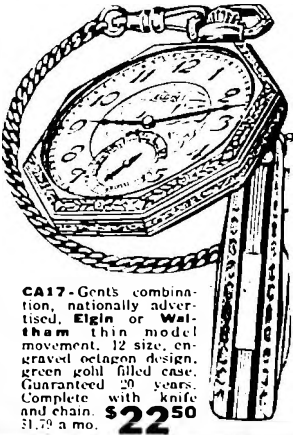
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