ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Two-Gun Sue

by Douglas Grant

The Fight of a Western Girl Against Great Odds

10¢ PER COPY FEBRUARY 4 BY THE YEAR $4.00

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For your Baby, use the

Mellin's Food Method of Milk Modification

Let us send you our book, "The Care and Feeding of Infants," and a Free Trial Bottle of Mellin's Food.

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A Big-Pay Job is Waiting for You

ELECTRICITY IS THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Don't wish any longer, BE a success! I'll show you how!

If you are ready, I am. You don't have to know the first thing about Electricity **right now.** I will train you in a few short months so that you can step right into that big pay business—the job you have always wanted.

"Electrical Experts" are in big demand—more jobs than men to fill them. It doesn't make any difference what you are doing, or what you have been doing, if you want to succeed—if you want big pay—I'll show you how because **I know I can teach you Electricity.** Opportunities in Electricity, great as they are today, are nothing as compared to what they will be tomorrow. Get ready for tomorrow! Get started now! Get in on the ground floor—ahead of the other fellow—jump from a "bossed" into a "bossing" job—jump from $3 to $5 a day to $12 or $30 a day. I know you can succeed once you're a "Cooke-trained man."

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You want to get ahead—you want to make more money — big money—Electricity is the field for you! It is the big pay profession of today; **but you must be trained;** you **must know** Electricity from every angle to hold down a big-pay job—the job that pays.

Earn $12 to $30 a Day

Compare your present salary with these big pay figures. How does your pay envelope "stack up" with that of the trained "Electrical Expert?" Is his pay twice, three or four times as much as you now earn? Don't envy him, don't just wish for pay like his — go after it yourself! You can get it because

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Yes sir—right in your own home in your spare time I will make you a Certificated "Electrical Expert"—a "Cooke-trained man." As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works I know exactly the kind of training you need and I will give you that training. My system is simple, thorough, complete—no big words, no useless theory, no higher mathematics, just compact common sense written in plain English.

Save $45.50 by Enrolling Now

If you will send this coupon today, I'll show you how to save $45.50. Write today for full particulars — also my big FREE book, "How to Become an 'Electrical Expert'." It's the first step towards that big pay job of yours.

L. L. COOKE, CHIEF ENGINEER

CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS
INCORPORATED

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I Guarantee Satisfaction

There's no chance for failure with me. I train you RIGHT and furthermore I agree, if you're not entirely satisfied, to return every penny you have paid me. No other school will do this for you.

FREE Electrical Outfit

To make your success still more certain I give you free a splendid outfit of tools, materials and supplies —you do practical work right from the start, and pick up extra money doing spare-time work.

Mail This Coupon Today

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Dear Sir: Send me at once your Big Free Book, "How to Become an Electrical Expert," and full particulars of your Free Outfit and Home Study Course — all fully prepaid, without obligation on my part.

Name.....

Address.....

180

THE "COOKE" TRAINED MAN IS THE "BIG-PAY MAN"

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXL CONTENTS FOR FEBRUARY 4, 1922 NUMBER 3

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

FOUR SHORT STORIES

"FROM SIX TO SIX"

is the title of a four-part serial starting next week. It is the thrilling story of what happened on a certain winter's night. A new and delightful detective, unlike any other in fiction, penetrates to the heart of a mysterious crime, and unearths clews that lie hidden beneath the white mantle of the snow. The name of

W. BERT FOSTER

is known to all our readers, but in this story Mr. Foster sets a faster and more thrilling pace than ever before.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1922

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

It's a Shame for *You* Not to Earn $10,000 a Year

—When Others Do It So Easily

He Does It

Last week my earnings amounted to $564.37; this week will go over $400."—E. Wynn, Portland, Oregon.

So Does He

"I had never earned more than $60 a month. Last week I cleared $308 and this week $218."—George W. Kearns, Oklahoma City, Okla.

And He—

"The very first month I earned $1000. I was formerly a farm-hand."—Charles Berry, Winterset, Iowa.

And He—

"After spending ten years in the railway mail service at salaries ranging from $900 to $1600 a year, I decided it was necessary for me to make a change. . . My earnings during the past thirty days were more than $1000."—W. Hartle, Chicago.

WHEN a farmhand steps from $50 to $1000 a month—when a fireman jumps from $60 a month to a job paying him $500 for two weeks' work—when a former railway mail clerk at a yearly salary of $1600 changes his job and earns $1000 in thirty days—and when hundreds of others quickly jump from small pay to magnificent earnings in the same way—then it's a shame for you not to earn *your* $10,000 a year.

There is nothing exceptional about these men. They'd tell you that themselves. Many had been clerks, bookkeepers, mechanics. Some had been policemen, farmhands, firemen. And then in one swift stroke, they found themselves making more money than they had ever dreamed possible. The grind of routine work—the constant struggle to obtain even a small increase—all this was left behind. Today they know the thrill of independence; they are no longer ruled by an office clock. There is genuine enjoyment in every hour of the day, for their work is filled with real fascination. They have found not only the most interesting, but the best paying branch of all business.

A field that they had never dreamed of as theirs they found to be easy and uncrowded. Earnings that they had always *hoped* to reach were right there in this new field waiting for them. Hundreds have found this new easy way to $10,000 a year. You can too—let us tell you how.

How You Can Do It Too—

What these men have done, hundreds of others have done, hundreds are doing to-day, hundreds will do tomorrow. And you may be one of them! For now the same opportunity that put these men into the big money class is open to you.

In the first place they discovered a vital fact about business. They discovered that the big money is in the Selling end of business. In the second place they discovered a new and amazingly easy way that will make any man a salesman, no matter what job he held before.

Salesmen are the very life blood of any concern—upon them depends the amount of profits made. No wonder that man for man Salesmen receive the highest pay. For the men who are in the "Star" class—who are Masters of Salesmanship—there is practically no limit to their earnings. Some receive almost fabulous amounts. And that is how these men and hundreds of others like them have found the way to their present handsome incomes.

They are all Master Salesmen Now!

Yet previously they had no idea of becoming Salesmen. If you had told them success awaited them in the field of Selling, they would have laughed at you. They would have told you that it was absurd to think of it—for they had never sold a dime's worth of goods in their lives! Then they learned of a great organization of top-notch Salesmen and Sales Managers formed for the express purpose of fitting men for the great opportunities in the field of Salesmanship and to help them to positions in the lines that most appeal to them. Step by step—in their spare time at home—this great organization, The National Salesmen's Training Association—took them thru every phase of selling. Then as soon as they were qualified and ready, the Free Employment Service of this Association helped them secure good Selling positions. Almost before they realized it they were in the big money class.

FREE BOOK Starts You for YOUR $10,000-a-Year!

The same opportunity that has brought hundreds of others their good fortune is open to you. Whether or not you have ever thought of becoming a Salesman, you should examine the facts about the tremendous possibilities for big earnings in this fascinating field. This will not cost you a penny and places you under no obligation. It simply means that you will receive, **entirely free**, a remarkable illustrated book, "The Knight of the Grip," and the personal stories of men in every part of the country who today are enjoying splendid success and earning five, ten and fifteen times as much money as ever before. Make a start now for **your $10,000 Year.** Mail coupon at once to The National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. 2-B, Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Association
Dept. 2-B, Chicago, Ill.

I simply want to see the facts. Send me FREE your Book on Salesmanship and Proof that I can become a Master Salesman. Also send list of lines with openings for Salesmen.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

State.....

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

SALESMEN: EARN $3,500 TO $10,000 A YEAR. City or Traveling. Experience unnecessary. Quickly qualify through our amazing system. Free Employment Service to Members. Send for Salesmanship book, list of lines and full particulars. Nat. Salesmen's Tr. Ass'n, Dept. 133-B, Chicago, Ill.

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. $2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made $813.00 in one month. Nissen $19.00 in three hours; Purviance $207.00 in seven days, $5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y-150, Dayton Ohio.

350% PROFIT: QUICK, EASY SELLER. Kleanrite Magic Washing Wonder. Washes clothes without rubbing. Women wild over it. Big repeater. Distributing Samples Free. Write quick. Bestever Prod. Co., 1947-W Irving Park, Chicago.

AGENTS: SELL FULL LINE OF GUARANTEED HOSIERY for men, women and children. Must wear 12 months or replaced free. All styles, colors and finest line of silk hose. Often take orders for dozen pair in one family. Write for sample outfit. Thomas Mfg. Co., Class 407, Dayton, Ohio.

Photo Pillow Tops, Portraits, Frames, Sheet Pictures, Pennants, Religious and Negro Pictures, Medallions, Merchants' Signs, Specialties, Waterproof Aprons, Gold Window Letters. Samples, Catalog free. 30 days credit. Jas. C. Bailey Co., Desk A-2; Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: Reversible Raincoat. Two coats in one. One side dress coat, other side storm overcoat. Guaranteed waterproof or money back. Not sold in stores. Big commission. Sample furnished. Parker Mfg. Co., 106 Rue Street, Dayton, Ohio.

$1.95 FOR MADE-TO-ORDER PANTS—Special 30-day offer to prove our marvelous values in made-to-measure tailoring. **Agents Wanted, Earn $30 to $35 Extra Every Week,** taking orders for our high-class, made-to-measure clothes. No experience necessary. Write for samples today. The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. B-104, Chicago.

SALES AGENTS WANTED in every county to give all or spare time. Positions worth $750 to $1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

MEN'S SHIRTS—Big sellers—Factory to consumer, $15.00 daily. Undersell stores. Complete line. Free Samples to workers. CHICAGO SHIRT CO., 208 So. LaSalle, Dept. 101, Chicago.

$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lucassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—FREE TRIAL OFFER. HARPER'S COMBINATION BRUSH SET AND FIBRE BROOM. Consists of five parts, has ten different uses. It sweeps, washes and dries windows, scrubs and mops floors, and does five other things. Over 100% profit. Write for our free trial offer. Harper Brush Works, Dept. Y, Fairfield, Iowa.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

NEW OIL LAMP BURNS 94% AIR. S. Y. Johnson, 1400 Aladdin Building, 609 W. Lake, Chicago, Ill., inventor of wonderful new oil lamp that burns 94% air and beats gas or electricity, is offering to give one free to the first user in each locality who will help introduce it. Write him for particulars.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

Land Opportunity! 20, 40, 80 acre tracts in Michigan, rich clay loam soil, only $15 to $35 per acre. Easy terms. Write for free booklet giving full information on how to get a farm home. Swigart Land Co., Y-1245, First Natl. Bk. Bldg., Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; $10 TO $500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

SEND ME YOUR PHOTOPLAY PLOTS and Short Stories. I'll revise and typewrite in correct technical form and help you sell. Send manuscript or write for details. H. L. Hursh, Dept. 4, 123 So. Third Street, Harrisburg, Pa.

AUTOMOBILES

Automobile Owners, Garagemen, Mechanics, Repairmen, send for free copy of our current issue. It contains helpful, instructive information on overhauling, ignition troubles, wiring, carburetors, storage batteries, etc. Over 120 pages, illustrated. Send for free copy today. Automobile Digest, 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AGENTS—Make $7 to $14 a day. Brand new Aluminum handle Cutlery Set. You take orders, we deliver and collect. Pay you daily. Full or spare time. No experience necessary. No capital. We need 1500 Sales Agents, men or women, to cover every county in the U. S. Demand enormous. Write quick. Jennings Mfg. Co., Dept. 1809, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS—MAKE $50.00 A WEEK AND UP IN TAILORING BUSINESS. Get our big swatch sample outfit—110 powerful fast selling fabrics to retail at $23.00—$27.50—$34.50—$37.50 per suit. $15.00 to $20.00 cheaper than store prices. You keep $5.00 deposit on each sale. We deliver and collect balance. Write D. A. Kennedy, L-202 S. Green Street, Chicago, Ill.

LIVE AGENTS MAKE $10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. A. D. Seed Filter Company, 73 Franklin, New York.

AGENTS! 1922's GREATEST SENSATION. 11 piece toilet article set selling like blazes at $1.75 with $1.00 dressmaker's shears free to each customer. Line up with Davis for 1922. E. M. Davis Co., Dept. 58, Chicago.

FASTEST SELLING SANITARY BRUSH LINE in America. Huge profit-making opportunity for live workers, with advancement. Other specialties. Get complete details. Act quick. Best season at hand. A. E. Sliver-Chamberlin Co., Clayton, N. J.

WE PAY $200 MONTHLY SALARY, furnish rig and expenses to all who qualify introducing guaranteed poultry and stock powders. Bigler Company, X-506, Springfield, Illinois.

AGENTS, $60 TO $200 A WEEK, Free Samples. Gold Sign Letters for Store and Office Windows. Anyone can do it. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431H N. Clark St., Chicago.

AGENTS—Signs for Stores and Offices—entirely new. $50 week easily made. Also Sign Letters at honest prices. Chicago Sign System, C150 W. Austin Avenue, Chicago.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—An ideal product. You can't lose on this one. High quality ink powder sells at bargain prices to homes, offices, and schools. 100% profit. Knox Chemical Co., Dept. 1, Rockland, Maine.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. Acme Letter Co., 2000 F Congress, Chicago.

$10.00 A DAY EASILY EARNED: Seven Bar Boxes, Assorted Soaps, Perfumes, Combination Boxes; Selling like Hot Cakes. Men, Women, 100% profit. Catalog mailed free. Crofts & Reed Co., Dept. 251, Chicago.

AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for Civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalogue. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

LANDS FOR SALE—FLORIDA

ORANGE and truck lands for sale in best section of Florida; 5 acre tracts and up. Small payment down. Balance terms. Fine opportunity for returns on investment. John S. Cadel, Kissimmee, Florida.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and record of invention blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

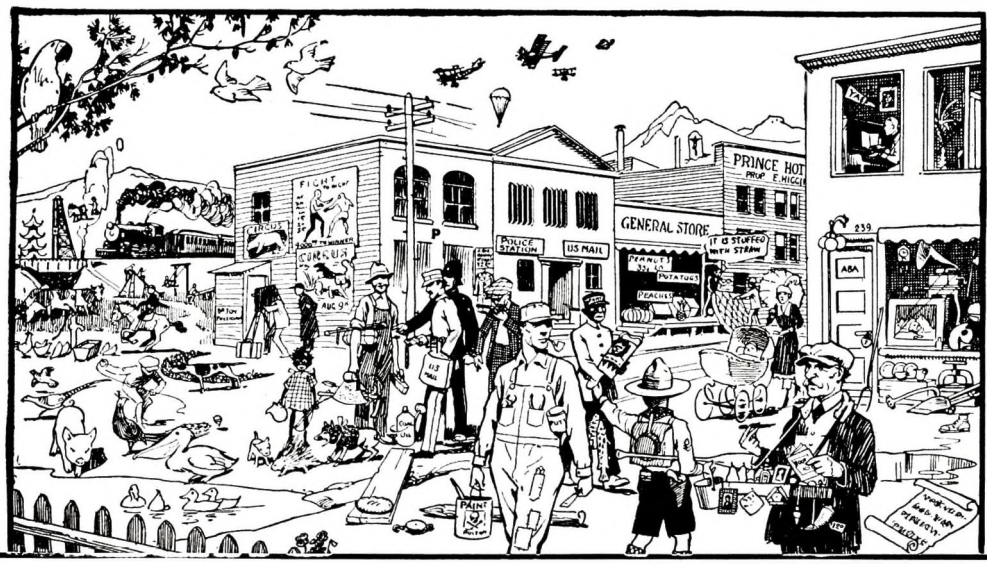
PATENTS PROCURED—TRADE MARKS REGISTERED—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. Richard B. Owen, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 2278-J Woolworth Bldg., N. Y.

RAGTIME PIANO PLAYING

RAG JAZZ PIANO OR SAXOPHONE taught in 20 lessons. "Christensen" schools in most cities. See your phone book, or write for booklet about mail course. Teachers wanted in unoccupied cities. Christensen School 441, 20 E. Jackson, Chicago.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

WIN $5,000



HOW MANY OBJECTS BEGINNING WITH "P" CAN YOU FIND IN THIS PICTURE?

Follow These Simple Easy Rules.

1. Any man, woman, boy or girl living in the U. S., but residing outside of Batavia, Ill., who is not an employee of the Household Journal, or a member of the employee's family, may submit an answer. It costs nothing to try.

2. All answers must be mailed by May 30, 1922.

3. Answers should be written on one side of the paper only and words numbered consecutively, 1, 2, 3, etc. Write your full name and address on each page in the upper right-hand corner. Do not write subscribers' names or anything else on same paper with list of words; use separate sheet.

4. Only words found in the English dictionary will be counted. Do not use compound, hyphenated, or obsolete words. Use either the singular or plural, but where the plural is used the singular cannot be counted, and vice versa.

5. Words of the same spelling can be used only once, even though used to designate different objects. The same objects can be named only once; however, any part of the object may also be named.

6. The answer having the largest and nearest correct list of words of visible objects shown in the picture that begin with the letter "P" will be awarded First Prize, etc. Neatness, style or handwriting have no bearing upon deciding the winners.

7. Candidates may co-operate in answering the Puzzle, but only one prize will be awarded to any one household; nor will prizes be awarded to more than one of any group outside of the family where two or more have been working together.

8. All answers will receive the same consideration regardless of whether or not subscriptions for the Household Journal are sent in.

9. Three prominent business men, having no connection with the Household Journal, will be selected to act as judges and decide the winners, and participants agree to accept the decision of the judges as final and conclusive.

10. The judges will meet directly following close of the contest, and announcement of winners and correct list of words will be published in the Household Journal just as quickly thereafter as possible.

Larger Puzzle Pictures Free on Request.

FIRST PRIZE $3,000

Costs Nothing to Try—You Can Win $3,000

This is, perhaps, the most liberal, the most stupendous offer of its kind ever appearing in this magazine. It is not a dream but a reality, a golden opportunity for you to help yourself to $3,000.00. It will be easy! Think what you can do with this young fortune and then help yourself.

It costs nothing to try. In this picture you will find a number of objects and parts of objects whose names begin with the letter "P." Pick out the objects like "Pie," "Plank," etc. It's easy, isn't it? Of course it is. The other objects are just as easy to see, but the idea is to see who can get the most. This is not a trick. You don't have to turn the picture upside down. Put down each word as you find it and watch your list grow.

Get the family around the table—see which one of you can find the most "P" words. You will be surprised to see how fast your list of words will grow in just a few minutes. Try it today, right now, as you will never have an easier chance to get a big cash prize.

Send in your list of words and try for the big prizes. This is not a subscription contest—you don't have to do any canvassing. You don't have to send in a subscription to win a prize unless you want to, but our Bonus Rewards for you make the prizes bigger where subscriptions are sent in. For example, if your puzzle answer is awarded first prize by the judges you will win $25.00, but if you would send $3.00 worth of subscriptions for our big monthly magazine you would win $750.00; or if your answer is awarded first prize by the judges and you have sent in $5.00 worth of subscriptions, you would win $3,000.00. See list of prizes above. Nothing more will be asked of you—it's easy, isn't it? I don't care how many similar offers you have seen and read, this is the most liberal of them all.

The Prizes

Winning answers will receive prizes as follows:

	If no subscriptions are sent	If $3.00 worth of subscriptions are sent	If $5.00 worth of subscriptions are sent
1st Prize	$25.00	$750.00	$3000.00
2nd Prize	20.00	250.00	1000.00
3rd Prize	15.00	125.00	500.00
4th Prize	10.00	75.00	250.00
5th Prize	5.00	50.00	125.00
6th Prize	5.00	25.00	50.00
7th Prize	3.00	15.00	30.00
8th Prize	3.00	10.00	20.00
9th Prize	2.00	10.00	15.00
10th Prize	2.00	10.00	10.00

(In the event of ties the full amount of the prize tied for will be given to each of those so tying.)

BIG $200,000.00 COMPANY BACK OF THIS OFFER—This offer is made and published by a big $200,000.00 Illinois Corporation of years standing. A company widely known for its liberality and honest dealings.

The Household Journal is one of the best home magazines published. Filled with fine stories, fancywork, fashions, Home Helps, Gardening, Poultry, etc. The subscription price is four years (48 copies) for $1.00.

Puzzle Editor - THE HOUSEHOLD JOURNAL
Department 1101 BATAVIA, ILLINOIS

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. BE A DETECTIVE. Great demand everywhere. Excellent opportunities for travel. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, New York.

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

MAKE MONEY AT HOME. You can earn from $1 to $2 an hour in your spare time writing show cards. Quickly and easily learned by our new simple method. No canvassing or soliciting. We teach you how and guarantee you steady work at home and pay cash each week. Full particulars and booklet free. American Show Card School, 202 Ryrie Bldg., Toronto, Can.

BE A DETECTIVE OR FINGER PRINT EXPERT. Nice work; large pay; great demand everywhere; experience unnecessary; we show you all. Write for free particulars. Write Wagner, 186 East 79th Street, New York, Dept. 505.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan 301, payment after securing position. CSS, 1017 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

HELP WANTED—MALE

RAILWAY MAIL AND OTHER GOVERNMENT CLERKS needed soon (men, women). $1600-$2300. Permanent. Write quickly. Mr. Ozment, Former U. S. Government Examiner, 198 St. Louis.

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY; good pay; travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

MEN WANTED, WHITE AND COLORED. Railway Train Service. Eastern or Western roads. Name your color. Experience unnecessary. Write, Railway Institute, 14, Indianapolis, Ind.

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR! $110 to $250 monthly, expenses paid after three months' spare-time study. Splendid opportunities. Position guaranteed or money refunded. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

MEN WANTED TO MAKE SECRET INVESTIGATIONS and reports. Experience unnecessary. Write J. Ganor, Former Government Detective, 107 St. Louis.

HELP WANTED—FEMALE

GIRLS WANTED—Clerks, Typists and Stenographers. Examinations monthly to fill Government vacancies. Write for free list and plan F, payment after securing position. CSS, 1017 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

AUTOMOBILES & ACCESSORIES

AUTO OWNERS WANTED TO USE AND INTRODUCE our new 6,000 and 10,000 mile guaranteed Cord and Fabric Tires. Make big money, part or full time. Free tires for your car. Write quick for special agents offer and low wholesale prices. It will pay you to answer this little advertisement now. Reliable Tire & Rubber Co., 35th Street and Michigan Avenue, Dept. 110, Chicago, Ill.

SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. Submit your song-poems to us. We have best proposition. Submit poems on any subject. Bell Studios, 1490 Broadway, Dept. 723, New York.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We will compose the music, secure copyright, and print. Submit poems on any subject. Seton Music Company, 920 S. Michigan Ave., Room 190, Chicago.

WRITE A SONG POEM. You can do it. Write about Love, Mother, Home, Childhood, Comic, or any subject, and send words today. I compose music and guarantee publication. Edward Trent, 652 Reaper Block, Chicago.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. WE REVISE POEMS, compose music for them and guarantee to secure publication on royalty basis by New York music publisher. Our Chief Composer is a song-writer of national reputation and has written many big song-hits. Submit poems on any subject. Broadway Studios, 238A Fitzgerald Building, New York.

TELEGRAPHY

Telegraphy (both Morse and Wireless) and **Railway Accounting** taught quickly. Big salaries. Great opportunities. Oldest and largest school; established 46 years. All expenses low—can earn large part. Catalog free. Dodge's Institute, 26th St., Valparaiso, Ind.

WANTED—MISCELLANEOUS

MAIL OLD GOLD, unused postage, war and thrift stamps, Liberty Bonds, silver, platinum, diamonds, jewelry, watches, false teeth, magneto points, etc., new or broken. Cash immediately. Held ten days, returned if unsatisfactory. Ohio Smelting Co., 254 Lennox Building, Cleveland, Ohio.

Two Hundred Years

Trade Mark WURLITZER Registered

of Musical Instrument Making

Your Choice, On Trial

THE Wurlitzer plan gives you *any instrument* with a complete musical outfit for a week's Free Trial in your own home. No obligation to buy. Return the instrument at our expense at the end of the week, if you decide not to keep it. Trial won't cost you a penny.

Monthly Payments

Payments are arranged in small monthly sums A few cents a day will pay for your instrument and complete outfit. The Wurlitzer plan gives you all at direct cost. You get the outfit and instrument practically for the cost of the instrument alone.

Artistic quality of Wurlitzer instruments is known all over the world. Wurlitzer instruments have been used by artists and in the finest orchestras and bands for years. The house of Wurlitzer has made the finest musical instruments for more than 200 years.

Complete Outfits

The new plan includes with the instrument everything that you need—velvet and plush lined carrying case with lock and key, all accessories and extra parts, self instructor, book of musical selections, etc.

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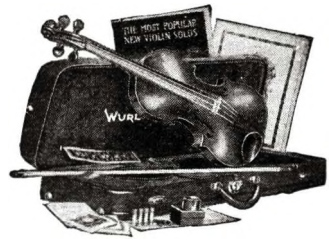

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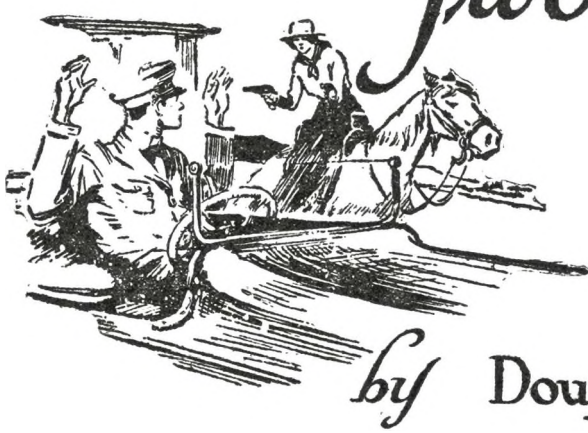
WEEKLY

VOL. CXL SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1922 NUMBER 3



Two-Gun Sue

Part I

by Douglas Grant

Author of "The Fifth Ace," "The Single Track," etc.

CHAPTER I.

NIPPED WIRES.

"TAKIN' 'em by and large, there ain't a female in the county can ride like our gals of the Circle Six!" Tad Mason stretched out his short, plump legs in the shade of the bunk-house wall and watched with admiring approval the slim, graceful figure loping out through the ranch gate. "The little one just sits that there bronc like she was part of it!"

"She shore does," Link Dole agreed, but without enthusiasm as he shifted his quid from one cadaverous cheek to the other. "She'll be ridin' out to meet that Easterner again, the one that's stayin' down to the Central Hotel. Beats all how they'll take to somethin' different, don't it? Ever sence that dance over to the Bar D, where this Chanler hombre showed her them new steps it looks like us punchers wasn't no more account than a bunch of yearlin' shorthorns to Miss Sylvie!"

"Oh, well, it ain't often anythin' as citified as him drifts out to a cow-town, Link, and fur as we know there ain't nothin' ag'in' him," Ted remarked easily. "He looks you square in the eye when he talks, and though he don't go moseyin' around with no chip on his shoulder there's a set to him as if he could take care of hisself when it comes to a little mix-up."

"What's he here fur, anyways?" Link spat copiously, and a nondescript dog which had been hovering about ingratiatingly betook himself out of range in haste. "He ain't after cows or white-face and he don't 'pear to be a lunger, while as fur ranchin', the Triangle Four has been on the market sence Jed Price died and he ain't even looked it over. It ain't noways likely that he's stayin' at the Central Hotel fur the sake of the grub and the p'ints of interest around

Dexter! Folks usually declar' theirselves one way or t'other in these parts."

"S'pose you ast him, if you're so plumb cur'us!" Tad rose as a grizzled, weather-beaten individual sauntered around the corner of the bunk-house. "Clint in yet from ridin' line, Wes?"

Wes Hayward, foreman of the Circle Six, shook his head, but turned once more to scan the grassy, rolling plain before he replied.

"No. Don't expect him back before sundown, but it's Lee I'm studyin' 'bout. I told the kid there was enough of the boys to ride line without him takin' things into his own hands, especially now that there's bad blood between him and Jake Brower, but he allowed he was boss of the ranch and he warn't afered of Jake and his pack of thievin', rustlin' greasers. He's just naterally brash and lookin' for trouble!"

"Ole Man Poindexter wouldn't have dodged any that was goin', and his boy ain't likely to," Tad observed. "He always was a game little cuss, but I thought that college would have put kid gloves, la-de-dah idees in his head. It ain't, though, not a mite; he wants to take holt, that's all."

"He ain't no more boss of the Circle Six than his sisters are, and Miss Susanna leaves everything to you, Wes. You've been runnin' the ranch ever since the three of them was knee-high to a coyote; why don't you speak to Miss Sue if the kid's hankerin' after a showdown with Jake and his bunch?" demanded Link.

"Because I aim to keep him out of trouble without tattlin' to his sisters." Wes scratched his head reflectively. "You two boys are the only ones of the outfit who was here in the old man's day and you know same's I do how his fool notions 'bout breedin' fancy cows ate up all he could borrow on the land. Last year's drought kind of got us behind-hand with the interest, that and keepin' the kid in college, and that lawyer feller down to Mammon City has been pesterin' Miss Sue again. She's got enough on her hands, and I ain't goin' to worry her none about Lee; if I can't keep him from a run-in with Jake and his outfit there's nothin' she could say to him."

"There ain't been no more rustlin' than in other years, and nothin' to connect up Jake and his greasers with it 'ceptin' that talk of Rosa del Rio's after Felix Mesega give her the go-by." Tad's good-natured face had lengthened into lugubrious lines. "It's a plumb, almighty shame 'bout Miss Sue havin' everythin' on her shoulders, scratching dirt to put the kid through college and learnin' Miss Sylvie all she got herself from those two years' schoolin' in Kansas City, where her pa sent her that time. Jumpin' snakes! I'd turn rustler myself if it would help her keep the Circle Six!"

"There ain't no question of losin' the ranch." Link's habitual drawl quickened with emphasis and he turned to the foreman suddenly. "Wes, you been hearin' anythin' 'bout that hombre from the East who's stayin' down to the Central Hotel?"

"Cain't say as I have," Wes responded cautiously, and his shrewd, kindly eyes narrowed. "I've seen him lookin' on in Faro Jim's wunst or twice, but he wasn't playin'. What you been hearin' 'bout him?"

"Nothin', nor nobody else. He's kinder took up with some of the Bar D outfit, but the sucker's such a bum rider that his pants achully fit him!" Link spat once more in supreme contempt. "Chanler, his name is, and he allows to come from New York, but that's every livin' thing he's let on 'bout hisself. He ambles off every day on one of Sim Moser's broncs, but nobody savvies where, lessen it's to look at the scen'ry! What's he doin' round Dexter, anyways?"

"Link's afered he's nosin' round our corral!" chuckled Tad. "Miss Sylvie ain't had eyes for none of us sence she met up with him at the Bar D dance, and it's only nateral, for she's known us all her life, and there ain't a man-jack of us that she ain't been able to wrop round her finger from the time she could sit her first pinto. She's plumb tickled 'cause he treats her as if she was a growed-up young lady, and I suspicion she'd like to rope him and then turn him loose agin just to show she can; gals acts thataway, mostly."

"A heap you savvy 'bout 'em!" Link snorted. "They's plenty of likely young ones in this country without Miss Sylvie ropin' no strange maverick. What's that?"

He had jumped to his feet, and now the foreman wheeled and followed the direction of his gaze.

"It's Clint!" the latter exclaimed. "Clint, and he's a-comin' hell-for-Sunday! Somethin' broke loose!"

The puff of white dust upon the road had spread into a swirling cloud and from it materialized the form of a rider bent low over the neck of his running horse, whose sudden, wild spurts indicated the dig of spurs. Tad made one leap in the direction of the corral and then paused, and all three men waited until the horse swerved in at the gate and drew up on sliding haunches before them.

"Wires down over beyond the crick!" the rider announced breathlessly. "They was O. K. at sundown—"

"Ground ain't trompled none?" Wes interrupted tersely.

"Only on t'other side, and the trail leads north." Clint Beckett's good-looking, boyish face was set in grim lines. "Moreover, them wires ain't tore loose; they been nipped clean!"

"Clint, you didn't see nothin' of Lee—" Tad began anxiously, but again the foreman interrupted.

"He's ridin' line on the east section. Link, you shoot in to Dexter for Matt Cooley and a couple of his dep'ties! Get a fresh bronc, Clint, and you and Tad come with me! We'll show them —— rustlers!"

The men raced with one accord for the corral and presently the dust rose again thicker than before upon the road, to settle slowly while quiet brooded once more over the Circle Six.

Meanwhile, on the highway which skirted the little cattle town of Dexter—local usage had years since abbreviated its name from that of its founder, the late owner of the Circle Six—out beyond the Eating House and the railroad, a girl had halted her broncho in the shade of a clump of mesquite bushes. She was winsomely pretty, with a mutinous, provocative curve of her red lips and an imperious tilt of the small, pointed chin which argued an already awakened knowledge of her power, despite the boyishly immature figure that betrayed her extreme youth.

The road in each direction stretched deserted and still under the glare of the sun, and Sylvia's blue eyes snapped with vexation as she pulled off her broad-brimmed hat and pushed back the damp golden curls that clustered about her forehead with an impatient hand.

Then all at once her eyes softened, and with a little smile she slipped lightly from her saddle and engaged herself busily in an elaborate pretense of cinching her girth. A lone figure on horseback had rounded the bend ahead at an easy lope, whistling a catchy melody that more properly belonged to the environment of Broadway than the plains.

At sight of her the whistling stopped and he urged his broncho forward, flinging himself carelessly from the saddle before he had fairly reined in beside her. The newcomer was a clean-cut, athletic-looking young man attired in the faultlessly tailored riding clothes which had aroused Link Dole's contempt, but although his glossy brown hair had been sleekly brushed until it shone there was nothing weak or foppish in the expression of his steady gray eyes and firm though humorously mobile mouth.

"In trouble, Miss Poindexter? Will you allow me—" His voice was pleasantly modulated and the crisp enunciation was in marked contrast to the nasal masculine drawl to which the girl was accustomed.

She blushed and drew in a little quick breath.

"If—if you don't mind, Mr. Chanler. I think the girth has got loosened some way."

He adjusted it gravely and, although there was a gleam of amusement in his eyes at her transparency no hint of it betrayed itself in his tone as he remarked:

"There! It only needed taking up a bit, you see. You don't often come by this road, do you?"

Sylvia shook her head.

"You don't either! I—I mean, I've never seen you out this way before," she amended hurriedly. "I thought I'd ride out and see old Mrs. Bently this afternoon, but it got so hot, and my saddle kept slipping—"

"It was fortunate for me that I happened along. May I ride back a little way with

you if you have decided to return to the Circle Six?" Garrison Chanler had familiarized himself with the roads about Dexter and he knew that the one upon which this innocently beguiling infant had waylaid him was a roundabout way indeed to the Bently ranch, but there was only grave deference in the manner with which he cupped her tiny foot in his hand and assisted her to mount once more.

"It—it seems to me there's a little breeze coming up, don't you think so?" Sylvia turned the full battery of her limpid, round eyes upon him as he stood for a moment beside her. "We could take the trail over by Grosscup's Pool if you're not in a hurry to get back to Dexter?"

"Indeed I'm not. Grosscup's Pool sounds refreshing. It lies to the north, doesn't it?" He turned his broncho's head, vaulted into the saddle, and they cantered off side by side at an easy gait.

"It's where the creek which crosses our ranch winds around to the northwest and widens out in a basin of rocks in a gully," Sylvia explained. "Grosscup was a prospector who came looking for gold ever so long ago and was supposed to have discovered it there and gone crazy from joy over it, but nobody else ever found any. I like it because it is cool and shady and mossy, and it's so out of the way that hardly anybody goes there."

She did not add that, as the one spot in the vicinity which most nearly approached her conception of a romantic setting, she had led more than one awkward and bashful swain thither to torment him with her newly found coquetry. She meant to test its effect now upon this maddeningly cool, self-contained denizen of a world which she knew only vicariously, through the medium of magazines and best-sellers. Without knowing why, she resented the fact that his amused, tolerant attitude should disconcert her, and more than anything else in her humored young life she wanted to bring him to her feet. Tad Mason's estimate had not been far from the truth.

"I haven't seen your brother since I met him at the Bar D," Garry Chanler remarked when they had turned from the highway into the lesser trail.

"Oh, Lee is riding line," responded Sylvia absently. "He is getting back into harness again so as to take over the management of the ranch, now that he has finished college."

"But your foreman—"

"Wes Hayward is all right, of course, and I don't suppose we should know what to do without him, but it is not like having an owner at the head of things. You don't know much about ranching, do you, Mr. Chanler?"

He shook his head smilingly.

"I've had my first glimpse of it during these last few weeks, but it seems to be a great life; a real man's game! I should imagine, though, that a girl would find it monotonous and a trifle lonely."

"It's—unspeakable!" Sylvia gave a vicious little jerk on her broncho's mouth. "Never going anywhere or—or meeting the right sort of people! I wonder that Lee can settle down contentedly to it after having been away to college, but he is like Susanna, just simply crazy about carrying out father's plan to make the Circle Six the greatest ranch in this section of the State. Sue has managed it ever since father's death, you know, and Mr. Hayward says there isn't a better man on the place. I—I hate it!"

"I have heard a great deal about your sister, although I haven't had the honor of meeting her yet." The easy tolerance was gone from Garry's voice and he spoke with unconsciously quickened interest. "The other ranch-owners hereabout have a tremendous respect for her; they tell me that she can rope, and brand, and cut cattle out of a milling bunch as expertly as any puncher could, and that she is quite a remarkable shot, too."

"Yes!" Sylvia's keen ear had caught, and as instantly resented the change in his tone, and her own was edged slightly with sarcasm. "You can imagine how proud you would feel to hear your sister called 'Two-Gun Sue'! Oh, I know it was only meant for a compliment, and Sue just laughed when she heard about it first, but I think it's a—a disgrace! As though she were some sort of a dreadful hold-up person! And she needn't have bothered with

the ranch at all, for Wes Hayward was perfectly able to run everything, but she simply *would!* Of course no—no girl back East where you come from would think of doing such things."

"I doubt if many of them are strong and clever enough to be able to learn; certainly none that I know would be capable of running a great cattle ranch." Garry smiled to himself at the mental picture which rose before him of some of the feminine members of his own set, with whom he played about in town and at the seashore and country clubs, if they were suddenly to be transplanted to the Circle Six; stately, languid blondes like Daisy Acheson, and dark, vivid, sensation-seeking neurasthenics such as Alix Westervelt! What could she be like, the hard-riding, straight-shooting sister of this animated pink-and-white doll at his side? For the first time since he had heard of her, Garry felt an active curiosity concerning Susanna Poindexter, and a whimsical determination was born to meet this elusive amazon.

"Your sister wasn't at the Bar D dance, was she?" he asked, pursuing his own train of thought. "Doesn't she care for such things?"

"I suppose so; I don't know." There was a trace of petulance in Sylvia's tone. "Sue hardly ever goes. She is out and about the ranch from dawn, you know, and evenings she fusses over the accounts and talks business with Wes Hayward. She hasn't been any fun at all since father died, and she won't let me do half the things I want to, or go visiting anywhere. You see, Sue brought me up, and she can't seem to realize that I'm not a child any longer."

"Elder sisters cannot, sometimes, I'm told," Garry laughed. Could it be that Susanna was a dour, weather-beaten old maid? Somehow that was not the impression he had formed of her from the honest if rough admiration he had heard expressed by the boss of the Bar D outfit and more than one of Dexter's leading citizens. Sheriff "Big Matt" Cooley, for instance, had boasted with respectful pride that it was he who had taught Miss Susanna to shoot from the hip as soon as her small finger had strength enough to pull the trigger, and Big Matt himself was obviously not far over the forty mark. Miss Susanna could therefore not be as much older as her little sister had unconsciously given him to infer.

But had it been done quite unconsciously? Was there latent if crudely practiced guile beneath this ingenious unsophistication? Garry turned slightly and glanced at the young girl by his side, to find her staring straight before her with a little angry light in her eyes and her rosebud mouth drawn down resentfully at the corners, but as though conscious of his gaze she turned to him with a smile half mirthful and half defiant.

"Sue will have to realize that I am grown up soon, for when I am of age I mean to sell out my third of the ranch and go everywhere and have everything that other girls have," she declared. Then her eyes fell and a dainty flush swept over her cheeks. "But you—you're not interested in the troubles of poor little me!"

"Indeed I am!" he played up mechanically. "If you are not in sympathy with the plans of your sister and brother, and unsuited to the rough sort of existence out here, it would be a shame for you to bury yourself on the plains. It is a hazardous life, too, for a woman, isn't it? Of course, the dangers of pioneer days are long past, but there are tales of cattle thieves—"

"Rustlers?" Sylvia shrugged. "The half-breeds run off a few of our cows now and then, but I shouldn't be allowed out of a corral if there were any real danger. There's the pool, straight ahead."

The road dipped sharply and curved to avoid a gully walled with rocks, between which rose clumps of trees to shade the rippling pool below. The springs which fed it on either side had caused the creek to widen out here into a natural basin, and from the outlet the tinkle of falling water came refreshingly to their ears.

The bronchos picked their way eagerly though surefootedly down the steep path, and after permitting them to drink sparingly Garry tethered them and joined Sylvia, who had seated herself on a mossy rock beside a merrily bubbling spring.

"It's pretty here, isn't it?" she asked.

"An enchanted spot!" Garry agreed en-

thusiastically. "But I thought you said no one ever came here? Somebody has invaded your fairy land, Miss Poindexter; there are ashes over there on an improvised stone fireplace and the remains of food. Surely we are too far from the railroad for tramps?"

"Campers, maybe, or punchers hiking north," Sylvia replied indifferently. "Some of them are born rovers, you know, and won't stay long on any one ranch after the spring round-up."

"By the way, your brother invited me out to the Circle Six." With the riding-crop, which he carried in lieu of a quirt, Garry had been prodding the moss in a crevice between the stones at his feet, but now he turned and looked into her eyes. "Won't you, too, ask me to come before I leave for the East?"

"Why, of course!" she stammered, impatient of the blush which she could feel rising once more into her cheeks beneath his glance. "I—I should have asked you before, but out here we sort of expect people to take our hospitality for granted. You must have thought it dreadfully ill-mannered of me!"

"On the contrary, I've been curious about you ever since I met you, Miss Poindexter," he retorted truthfully enough. "At the risk of having you think me rude in my turn, I have wondered—you say you have never been anywhere, and yet your manner—you are not like the other young people I have met hereabout and in some of the boom towns."

Sylvia dimpled and then her lip curled slightly.

"Like the other ranch girls, you mean?" she supplemented. "I don't talk like a puncher or eat with my knife or wear cheap finery? Father was a professor down in a little fresh-water college in the South before his lungs gave out, and he came here ahead of the railroad and started the Circle Six with a few head of miserable, half-starved shorthorns. Mother followed him out West, then other ranchers settled around, and that brought a store and hotel, and—and some saloons and gambling places that strung themselves out on a single street and called it Dexter. It will never be anything but a cow town, of course, but father was always proud of it. After Sue was born he sent for books and taught her until it was time for her to go to Kansas City to school, and he prepared Lee for his entrance examinations for college before he died. We—we aren't just heathen, you see, Mr. Chanler."

"You know that I never thought you were," he responded laughingly, but his thoughts reverted once more to the unknown other girl. "So your sister went to school in Kansas City?"

Sylvia bit her lip. Bother Sue! Why would he keep talking about her when he hadn't even seen her? And he had spoken of going away!

"You don't expect to stay very much longer in Dexter?" She ignored his question.

"I must start for the East in a few days, a week at most," he replied. "I have idled about here longer than I intended as it is, but I found this part of the country unexpectedly interesting."

Sylvia promptly accepted the rather vague explanation as a subtle compliment to herself, but dismay at the concrete fact of his imminent departure swallowed up all other emotion.

"A week!" she repeated forlornly in naive self-betrayal.

"Yes. We'll have one more opportunity to try those new steps I showed you, though, if you will be kind enough to save me a dance or two on Saturday night." He spoke lightly, but in a trifle more formal tone after a quick side glance at her. Good Lord, the child wasn't going to weep over his departure, was she? A few dances, a ride or so together, with never a touch of the hand or a word which might remotely be construed as anything but the most casual friendly conversation, and yet those astonishingly blue eyes of hers had seemed to have suddenly misted with tears. Garry was not vain enough to be under any delusion that the girl had fallen in love with him, but he was touched by her attitude even while it discomfited him. Poor little thing! She was only interested in him because he was the first Easterner she had encountered, and she hadn't learned to dis-

semble with her first breath, like the girls of his own set at home. "You are going to that affair at the Triangle Four, aren't you?"

His momentary pause for reflection had given Sylvia time to recover herself, and she replied with elaborate indifference: "I suppose Lee will take me, but it is funny to hear you call it an 'affair,' Mr. Chanler! I am not ridiculing the hospitality of my friends out here, but a wheezy player-piano and an uneven floor and a supper that comes mostly from tin cans wouldn't be called just that back East, would it?" Despite herself, a note of bitterness had crept into her tones, and, as though conscious of it herself, she rose suddenly. "It's getting late, don't you think? If I am not home by sundown Sue will have the whole outfit riding the range for me!"

CHAPTER II.

THE HOLD-UP.

AT an hour before sunset another girl was approaching the Circle Six from quite a different direction. Long-limbed and deep-chested, with the superb lines of budding maturity, the carriage of her small head on its slender neck and the rounded slimness of wrists and ankles told of a line of breeding as fine and unbroken as that of the magnificent black mare which she bestrode with the ease of one born to the saddle.

Her skin was tanned a clear brown, and brown, too, was the soft hair, wind-blown now, although it glinted ruddily where the slanting rays of the sun reached it beneath her hat. Her eyes were gray blue and steady, with the depth of those which had looked into far, vast stretches, and her small chin was firmly dominant. Thoroughbreds both, there was no hint of weariness in either the girl or her mount, though they had ridden hard and far. As they came parallel with the first line of barbed wire which marked the domain of the Circle Six she patted her mount caressingly.

"Easy now, Moonlady! We are almost home, and the last few miles are always the longest, you know."

Suddenly she straightened in the saddle, shading her eyes with her hand, for from the midst of a dust cloud upon a branch road to the right there came the sharp, uneven pounding of uncontrolled hoof-beats, and the figure of a bay horse running crazily with empty saddle and swinging stirrup bore down almost directly upon her. As it neared, the girl saw that the white markings upon its breast and shoulder were splashed with crimson.

With a low exclamation she wheeled. The black mare leaped forward beneath her touch, and, riding in at a wide curve upon the riderless horse, she seized the loose rein and shouldered the crazed animal around the turn to bring him to a halt.

"Bull's-eye!" Something very like a sob tore its way from between the girl's set teeth, but her eyes flashed. "Bull's-eye, they've got you! Where is your master?"

The horse, trembling in every limb, whinnied softly with pain, but the wild look faded out of the great bloodshot eyes as he rolled them at her as though trying with all his might to speak, while she examined the wound in his shoulder and then cast the rein free.

"Home, Bull's-eye! You can make it, old boy! Go home and tell them what has happened to Lee."

Responding to the urge in her tone as to the sting of a whip, Bull's-eye gathered his all but spent forces and sprang staggeringly forward along the road which led toward the distant ranch gates, while the girl felt for an instant at the leather belt low-hung about her waist and then wheeled the black mare into the byway, straining her eyes through the settling dust ahead.

If Lee had been riding line at the extreme end of the east section and he had been as badly wounded as his horse, she might not find him in time. Even now it might be too late. The State road crossed this a mile or so ahead, and it might be that some one had seen the riderless horse, recognized his markings and given the alarm, but few of the neighboring ranchmen would be traversing it at this time in the afternoon, and the highway was principally given over to occasional touring motorists. If the darkness should come before she found Lee—

Stifling an unmistakable sob this time, the girl bent low over the neck of the black mare, urging her to the limit of her speed. The lines of barbed wire gleaming in the last rays of the setting sun flashed past her on either hand like streaks of fire, and the dust rose in spiral whirls behind.

She neared the State road, and then all at once above the rhythmic beat of Moonlady's flying feet there came to the girl's ears the humming roar of a high-powered car, still subdued by distance, but rapidly approaching. With a light touch she slowed the black mare into a loping stride and rode out upon the highway, where she halted squarely in its center with one hand upraised.

But the huge, oncoming car showed no disposition to stop. It advanced upon her with undiminished speed, while its driver and the figure beside him waved peremptory arms and a masculine shout was lost in the roar of the engine. The girl did not move nor lower her hand, but the other crept to her holster and came away with something leveled and gleaming. The car careened suddenly with a shriek of outraged brakes and came to a jarring stop not two lengths from Moonlady's tense but immovable figure.

"Sorry, but I'll have to borrow your car." The girl's tones rang out clearly and firmly above the imprecations of the man beside the chauffeur on the front seat. "There's a man hurt—"

"A hold-up!" The hysterical scream came in a high feminine voice from the tonneau. "Briggs, why did you stop? Why didn't you run the wretch down?"

"It's a—a woman!" the chauffeur began apologetically.

But the girl on the black mare was already returning her pistol to its holster.

"I didn't mean to frighten anybody, but you wouldn't slow up, and I've got to have your car," she explained. "There has been an accident—"

"Drive on, Briggs!" A bulky form, swathed in veils and a silk duster, rose suddenly in the rear of the car. "Dacon, are you a *worm?* Briggs, drive on, I say! If that creature doesn't get out of the road—"

Two hands flew to the girl's belt this time, there was a quick turn of the slender wrists, and twin muzzles gleamed straight from her hips at the occupants of the car.

"Get out." She spoke low, but very distinctly. "This is a hold-up, if you like, but it is a matter of life and death. There is a wounded man out there on the range, and I have got to reach him. Get out, all of you except the driver."

The large woman had shrunk back with a second horrified shriek at sight of the guns, but now a taller, more slender figure rose beside her, and a cold, languid, infinitely contemptuous voice drawled:

"Father, are you going to permit us to be despoiled of our car and forced out upon this road by any such flimsy excuse as that? The woman wouldn't dare to fire—"

The sharp bark of a single shot cleaving straight upward into the air caught the word from her lips, and the black mare's ears twitched, but she gave no other sign.

Not so the occupants of the car. The chauffeur settled matters for himself by promptly sitting back and elevating both hands above his head. The large lady shrieked once more and covered her eyes. The second man beside the driver opened the door and stepped spryly down into the road, sweeping off his goggles and cap as he did so to reveal a head sparsely covered with grizzled hair.

"We are at your service, madam," he remarked with grim humor and turned to the tonneau door. "My dear, you should know by experience that I never take issue with a woman, much less one who has so convincing an argument on her side.

The tall, feminine figure alone had remained unmoved, and now, disdaining his hand, it descended and stood waiting while the elderly man assisted the stouter occupant of the tonneau to alight.

Meanwhile, still covering them, the girl had slipped from her saddle. Replacing one pistol, she turned the black mare and then touched her lightly on the flank.

"Go home, Moonlady!" she commanded as she had Bull's-eye. "They'll know I've gone for Lee!"

The mare gave one questioning glance

from her mistress to the strange monster of a machine, and then trotted off obediently back up the side road while the girl approached the car and the trio who stood beside it.

"If you take that road to the first turning to your right, and then follow the wire fencing, it will lead you straight to the gates of a ranch where they'll take you in," she announced. "Your car will be brought to you there as soon as I have done with it."

The bulky figure had shrunk back in horror at her approach, but the taller one turned away with a mere shrug, while the elderly man asked:

"Can you tell me how far it is to the hospitable gates you mention?" He spoke with ironic courtesy, but the girl appeared oblivious to his sarcasm.

"About six miles; four after you strike the fence line. You'll find a town with a hotel of a sort a few miles farther, should you prefer that, and they'll lend you horses at the ranch if you can ride them."

There was no hint of contempt in her matter-of-fact tone, but the elderly man reddened slightly.

"If this ranch you mention is the nearest, I fear we must endeavor to reach it and throw ourselves upon the mercy of its owner, but you seem very confident of our welcome."

"In this part of the country we don't refuse our help in time of need, or close our doors to any one." She mounted to the seat beside the chauffeur, the pistol still resting lightly upon the hip farthest from him. "Turn this car and drive back as fast as you can until you come to a break in the fence where the wires are down on this side of the road; then cut straight through it."

"Yes, ma'am," he responded with celerity. "It's back about three miles. Saw it when we passed, and there's a dead horse lyin' there—a sort of a calico pony."

Without a word or glance at his employers, he turned the switch key and stepped on the starter, and with the first low humming of the engine the car began to back in a sweeping curve, to turn and shoot off down the highway in a screening cloud of dust.

A little later, when Garrison Chanler, having taken leave of Sylvia at the gates of the Circle Six, was loping slowly toward the Bar D for supper and a smoke with the boss of the outfit, he came upon a strange group in the road. A tall, willowy girl, whose loosened veils revealed hair of brilliant gold and almost classically perfect features, was moving forward with a languid grace which yet outstripped the pace of a small, elderly man and a massively stout woman who leaned heavily upon him and expelled each breath with a groan.

The young man pulled up his broncho at the same instant that the trio halted, and they stared at each other for a long moment in mutually astounded recognition.

"Garry!" the girl cried at last. "Garry, where in the world—"

"Chanler, by all that's wonderful!" The elderly man unceremoniously withdrew his arm from that of his stout companion and hastened forward while she echoed weakly: "Mr. Chanler!"

The young man had flung himself from his horse and grasped a hand each of the girl and her father.

"Daisy! Mr. Acheson! You are the last people one would have expected to encounter. And Mrs. Acheson, too!" He advanced toward her, his quick eye taking in their motor attire and generally dishevelled appearance. "You—you're not on a walking tour, surely!"

"Call it rather a forced march, my boy!" Dacon Acheson spoke with the same grim, dry humor which he had evinced a short time before. "We were held up a while back and our car commandeered by an enterprising young female road-agent—"

"Commandeered!" Mrs. Acheson interrupted in high dudgeon. "The car was stolen, Mr. Chanler, and our chauffeur kidnaped. We were compelled to abandon it and all our hand luggage at the point of a pistol—"

"Two pistols, mother," Daisy corrected. "Do let us have all the thrills!"

"And we were fired upon," supplemented Mrs. Acheson, her tones deepening tragically. "It is a miracle that we were not all murdered in cold blood!"

"What's this?" Garry stared from one

to the other of them in incredulous amazement. "You cannot be serious! There are no road-agents left in this part of the country, to say nothing of female ones."

"So I would have been willing to swear an hour ago, but I have had reason to change my mind," Acheson remarked. "The young woman most certainly meant business, even though the single shot she fired was into the air, and our chauffeur recognized the signs. You remember Briggs? I selected him to pilot us on this trip because I suspect him of an origin in the gangster element of the lower East Side, and although I did not actually anticipate trouble of this sort, I thought that he would have more nerve in a possible emergency than the impeccable François. He put up his hands without a murmur, however, and I cannot say that I blame him, considering that the lady had us covered from the start."

"But it—it's all too utterly impossible to believe!" Garry exploded. "You must have been mistaken for some other party and made the butt of a stupid sort of practical joke!"

"If you think it could be any one's conception of a joke to force a person in my state of health to leave her car at the mouth of a—a gun, Mr. Chanler, and walk for miles—" Mrs. Acheson's voice ended in a groan.

"You spoke of two pistols—" Garry turned helplessly to the younger woman. "Was there an accomplice? How many were there in the gang which held you up?"

"Only one," Acheson replied before his daughter could speak. "The young lady was alone on a great black horse, but she operated both guns most effectively from the hip."

From the hip! Two-Gun Sue! The thought flashed blindingly across Garry's mind, and for a moment his senses reeled. It was utterly absurd, of course, and yet what could be more unbelievable than the actual presence here before him in the Western wilderness of this astute Wall Street financier and his luxury-loving wife, to say nothing of the very girl who had been in his thoughts that afternoon as the epitome of incongruity when contrasted with his own immediate surroundings!

Choking back an almost hysterical tendency to mirth the young man eyed the older one speculatively. A girl on a great black horse; hadn't he heard somewhere, from Big Matt perhaps, that Susanna Poindexter rode a black mare which she had broken herself? If there could be some possible explanation—

"But—but didn't the young woman *say* anything?" Garry stammered at last. "You spoke of her commandeering the car. Didn't she offer any reason for holding you up in that fashion?"

"She blocked the road and drew her gun when Briggs wouldn't stop the car—" Acheson began again, but once more his wife interrupted.

"The creature uttered some far-fetched excuse about some one having been hurt and it being a matter of life and death, but any one could tell by the way she handled those dreadful pistols that she was a desperate character! She pointed both of them at us when I ordered Briggs to drive on and force her to get out of the way after he had stopped to avoid running her down, and on Daisy's further remonstrances she fired that shot! I consider it a mercy that we were not all killed outright!"

"The—the young woman said that it was a life-and-death emergency?" Garry repeated slowly. "She compelled you to leave your car and then drove off with Briggs?"

"Yes," Acheson affirmed. "After dismounting and sending her horse back along this road which she directed us to take."

"And where did she say that it would lead?" Astonishment had given place to eager interest in the young man's tones.

"To a ranch where she seemed quite assured that we would find hospitality." The financier was eying him narrowly. "Look here, Chanler, you know something! What is it? What did this melodramatic performance mean?"

"I have no more idea than you, Mr. Acheson," Garry responded. "Did this enterprising road agent offer any assurance of returning your stolen property?"

"She said that the car would be brought to us there when she had finished with it."

Daisy spoke suddenly. "She also mentioned a town with a hotel further along if we preferred that to the ranch. Who is she, Garry? She was quite a remarkable looking young person, who sat her horse like a man and issued orders as though she were accustomed to being obeyed. I believe that you know her!"

"I don't!" he exclaimed. "I never saw her in my life, but if it is the young woman I think it may be, I should feel inclined to believe that she had some very urgent reason which justified her, in her own mind at least, for commandeering your car even at the point of a gun—two guns! This road leads to the Circle Six ranch, and I have met the chap who owns it. Let me show you the way and I am sure that you will be received with all the hospitality in the world!"

"And it is actually your opinion that my car and the hand luggage will be returned to me intact, to say nothing of Briggs?" Acheson demanded.

The ghost of a smile flickered in Garry's eyes, but he responded gravely:

"If I were you I should feel quite as assured of both Briggs and the car as though they were in the garage at home."

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY.

THE heart of the girl in the car had given a wild leap of exultation when Briggs spoke of the dead "calico pony" lying by the road where the wires were down. Lee had been able to put up a fight, at least, and an examination of the pinto's body might reveal how far he could have run before he dropped so that she might calculate the approximate distance to where Lee must be lying.

She did not even glance back at the trio left stranded in the road, but covertly studied the part of the chauffeur's face which was visible beneath his visored cap and goggles. His nose was short and impudently upturned, but the smooth-shaven lips were firm and the square jaw lean and pugnacious and healthily tanned. The red-brown hair beneath the cap showed a tendency to curl, close-cropped though it was, and there was a boyish jauntiness to the set of his broad shoulders, as if instead of being cowed by this adventure he was thoroughly enjoying it.

"Was the man hurt bad, ma'am?" Briggs did not take his eyes from the road ahead as he asked the question, but the friendly interest in his tone was disarming after the strain of the last few minutes, and the girl replied frankly:

"I don't know. I'm afraid so. His horse was making for home, shot in the shoulder."

"I thought as much, when I see the other one lyin' there. I says to myself that there'd been some sort of a scrap and I would have stopped right then, only—well, you saw the kind of folks I'm workin' for, ma'am. Don't you think I'd have run you down, though; I'd have ditched this bus first!" He spoke with an honest sincerity there was no mistaking, and the girl relaxed her tense vigilance with a sigh of relief.

"I wasn't afraid, and whatever trouble there has been here, your people won't be molested. They'll reach the ranch I spoke of safely and be well cared for if the old lady can walk a few miles."

The shoulders beside her heaved slightly and a chuckle came from Briggs's lips.

"It would be worth a month's pay to have Mrs. Acheson hear you call her that, ma'am, and I guess she can make it, though I don't believe she has walked a block in ten years!" He added abruptly in a changed, sobered tone, "We're gettin' near there now, and you needn't keep that gun trained on me, for I'm with you! You may want both of yours if there's likely to be any little mix-up, and I guess from what I just seen that you're able to handle 'em, ma'am, but if you feel you could trust me with my own it's right under your seat there. Of course, you've got only my word for it that I won't double-cross you—"

He turned then for an instant to face her and the girl looked into a pair of deep brown eyes as confident of being accepted on good faith as those of a friendly, intrepid dog.

Accustomed to quick decisions the girl nodded and slipped her pistol back once more into its holster.

" Your word is good enough, I am sure, but I don't believe that there will be any further gun-play. The man we have got to find and bring in is my brother, and the only enemies he has are some rustlers—cattle-thieves, half-breed Mexicans, for the most part, who have been running off our cows," she explained quickly. " That is our ranch there, on the other side of the fence."

" Gee, all those miles! And my party thought first that you was stickin' them up for the bank-roll!" He chuckled once more and then exclaimed, " Here we are! I'll need the speed we've got to hurdle that ditch, but we can come back and have a look at the horse. Hold tight, ma'am!"

The heavy car swerved, tilted sickingly and seemed for an instant to hurl itself through space, landing with a crashing jar which shook every bone in the girl's body as it plowed through the break in the fence and over the uneven ground for a few rods and halted with another protesting screech of the brake.

It had scarcely come to a stop when the girl leaped from it and ran back with the chauffeur close at her heels through the gap with its trailing wires to where the dead animal lay. It was a Mexican pinto, a wretched specimen of its kind, the lean barrel and flanks roweled and scarred from past ill-usage and still flecked with bloody lather.

Blood had formed in a wide pool, too, from mouth and nostrils, and there was a bullet wound in the chest.

" Maybe you recognize him by the markings?" Briggs suggested. " He must have been stole, too, away back when he was worth stealin', for it looks as though some sort of a brand had been burned off him there, and again on the hoof."

The girl shook her head.

" Some of the punchers might know him, but whatever identification marks there were on the saddle have been ripped away. You can see where the leather is newly cut. He was shot through the lungs and can't have gone far—"

She rose from her knees in the trampled earth and stood gazing back over the range with straining eyes.

" That gang was pretty bold about it, or do they usually pull off a trick like this in daylight out here?" The chauffeur was following her gaze. " We didn't pass a livin' soul on the State road for more than fifty miles comin' along, though, so maybe they wasn't takin' so much of a chance at that."

" They must have known where my brother was riding line to-day and lay in wait for him." The girl's lips tightened. " We ought to be able to follow their trail in for a short distance, anyway."

" There was more than one of 'em, you think, ma'am? This tall grass is trampled down, but it's in kind of a narrow line." The chauffeur paused uncertainly as his unaccustomed eyes roved over the patches of crushed mesquite.

" There were two of them and they rode in single file." The girl went slowly forward, following the fresh trail. " The other horse was bigger, but the pinto led; see where he circled around and doubled back? That is when they were looking for their man."

" Gee!" Briggs remarked again in immense respect. " It don't mean anythin' to me, ma'am. I'd think I was goin' some if I could tell the make of a tire by the tracks of its tread in the road, but this beats it! Looks, though, as if they had made for that little hollow over there, doesn't it?"

The trail was indeed leading in ever narrowing circles toward a slight depression in the rolling ground fringed with low scrub brush, and as they neared it the girl paused and her breath caught in her throat. The rank grasses at her feet were blotched here and there with ominous splashes of reddish-brown.

" That's only where the circus pony back there got his, ma'am!" Briggs ventured consolingly.

The girl shook her head.

" These are the hoof-prints of a single horse. It must have been poor Bull's-eye, and my brother can't be far off, if—"

Her voice died away in her throat, and Briggs asked suddenly in a lowered voice:

" Do you know if there is a rock over there behind that bunch of bushes?"

She followed the direction of his pointing finger and her body tensed, for through the

elongated shadows cast by the low scrub she saw that just beyond them there loomed a darker form, as though something were crouched or lying motionless. Without a word the girl handed one of her pistols to her companion and then stooping low started to creep toward it, but Briggs placed himself before her.

"No, ma'am," he whispered determinedly. "I'm going first!"

Cautiously, crouching almost to the ground, he circled about the clump with the girl following closely after until they came upon the body of a man. He was lying upon his back with an arm thrown across his face and one leg doubled oddly beneath him, and at the first glimpse of the still figure the girl gave a little sobbing cry and darted forward to fall upon her knees beside it.

Gently lifting the limp arm she drew it down to the side of the unconscious form and raised the head to cradle it against her knee. The face so revealed was that of a very young man, scarcely more than a boy, and its resemblance to her own was unmistakable, even though cast in a heavier, masculine mold. His hair, however, was yellow save where an ugly crimson streak matted it dangerously close to the temple, and the lashes which swept the cheeks, unnaturally pallid now beneath their tan, glinted like gold.

"Is it him?" Briggs asked superfluously, and then laid a practiced thumb and forefinger upon the flaccid wrist. "He's got a nasty side-swipe on the head, ma'am, and I don't like the way that leg is crumpled up under him, but he ain't dead, by a long shot."

She glanced up for a moment and he say to his inward relief that there were no tears in her eyes, but rather a bright, hard light and her voice was curiously even and steady as she replied:

"It is my brother. His forehead and scalp were just grazed by a bullet, but his leg is broken, of course; I've seen more than one of our boys like that, and I know. We'll have to carry him back to the car."

"I forgot! I've got something there that 'll maybe do some good first." Briggs rose and then hesitated. "You ain't afraid of bein' left here alone with him for a minute till I come back, are you?"

A look was his only answer, and as she bent once more over the boy's body he turned and sped away to where they had left the car just inside the fence. When he returned, bearing a vacuum bottle and a small black bag, he found that the girl had somehow managed to straighten her brother out upon the ground and was cutting away the stained and sodden cloth from about his knee.

"Gee, that's bad!" Briggs knelt beside her. "Got another ball through the knee-cap, didn't he? It's luck Mrs. Acheson was such a bug about cartin' a first-aid kit with her; she's got enough in here for a young hospital, and there's hot coffee in that bottle."

Together they bandaged the boy's head and shattered knee and then raising him to a half-sitting posture they forced a little of the warm coffee between his lips. He gulped and moaned faintly, but gave no further sign, and the girl looked up once more at her companion.

"It will be just as well, perhaps, if he doesn't regain consciousness until we get him back to the ranch and one of the boy's can ride in to Dexter for the doctor," she remarked, still in that level, unemotional tone. "The pain is likely to be pretty bad in that knee. We can carry him between us to the car—"

"No, ma'am," Briggs dissented once more. "You just stand aside and I can carry him easy. Is Dexter the town you spoke about a while back to the old man—Mr. Acheson, I mean?"

"Yes. Hadn't you better get the car out into the road again before we put my brother into it? That hurdle over the ditch—"

"I did already, ma'am, when I went back for the kit." He paused and added slyly: "I wouldn't be surprised if the ranch we're headed for is the same one you directed my party to."

"It is. It's the Circle Six." The girl looked somewhat doubtfully from her brother's recumbent form to the chauffeur. "Are you sure you can carry him alone?"

"Watch me!" Briggs grinned, and

stooping, he gathered the boy up in his arms with a swift, gentle movement and strode off through the gathering dusk while she followed with the bag and bottle.

The car was at the side of the road headed once more in the direction in which it had originally been traveling, and the girl settled herself in the tonneau supporting her brother in her arms as the chauffeur eased him down beside her and they started slowly upon the homeward way.

As they turned into the branch road Briggs glanced over his shoulder.

"All right, ma'am? Ain't shakin' him up too much, am I?"

"No. My brother hasn't moved." For the first time she smiled faintly. "You've been awfully good; I don't know how I should have managed without you!"

"Any white man would have done as much!" That portion of his face which was visible beneath the goggles reddened, however, at her praise. "The reason why I asked you about Dexter was because this bus can travel faster than any horse, and if you'll send a man with me to show me the way so that I won't lose any time, I'll drive in for the doctor as soon as I get you to the ranch."

The twilight was deepening into dark when, just before they reached the gate of the Circle Six, a whirlwind cavalcade swept from it and dashed furiously down the road toward them, with Wes Hayward in the lead and Tad Mason, Link Dole, and several more strung out behind him. Briggs slowed down, and the group separated as they came on and drew up on each side of the car.

"Miss Sue!" Wes gulped. "You found him! Gosh Almighty, is he hurt bad?"

"I'm afraid so. A shot just grazed his head, but there's another through his knee-cap," Susanna responded.

"Who done it?" The others had crowded their bronchos closer.

"I don't know, but there's a dead pinto back there on the State road where our wires are down." She shifted her burden slightly, and a low moan came from the boy's white lips. "Some of you might recognize him by the markings."

"I reckon we don't need to see him to figger what outfit he belongs to!" Wes turned with a quiet menace to the chauffeur. "And you! You're the feller that had to be held up to make you stop! We been hearin' all about it from a gray-muzzled ole coyote that blew into the ranch with two females! You—"

An ominous murmur arose from the others, and Susanna cried:

"No, Wes! He only obeyed orders at first, and he's been splendid! I never should have been able to bring Lee in without his help! Let one of the boys lead your bronc home and you get in with me."

The change was effected, and as the car started off slowly once more the others fell in behind except for Tad Mason, who at a sign from the foreman, galloped off down the road.

"We'd ha' been out lookin' for you before this, Miss Sue, but Clint brought in word that the wires were down away over on the aidge of the west section, beyond the crick, an' we kited out there," Wes explained.

"That must have been just a blind to draw as many of you as possible from this end of the range." Susanna had lowered her voice. "You think it was Jake Brower?"

"Him, or some of that greaser outfit of his'n! Sheriff and two of his dep'ties are huntin' him now, but they say he ain't showed up around Dexter for two or three days, nor Pedro Ruiz and Felix Mesega either. We've just naterally got to run that outfit out of the county, but we can't do it on the say-so of—"

He hesitated, and Susanna finished for him.

"Of the Del Rio girl? She can't be so bad, Wes. Remember how she worked over the boys who were hurt when Montana Dan tried to shoot up the town?"

"Good or bad, Miss Sue, when a female gits mad at some pore feller 'cause she cain't put her brand on him, there ain't nothin' too ornery for her to accuse him of! But Felix Mesega is mixed up in this business with Jake, shore. When we got back to the ranch-house we found that Bull'e-eye had come in, shot through the shoulder, and then Moonlady. We knew you must be with

Lee somewhere's, then, and we was just ridin' out to find you when out of the ranch-house comes a little ole cuss madder'n a bobcat, with a yarn about bein' held up by a—a—"

Words evidently failed the foreman and again Susanna supplied them.

"A woman road agent. You knew, of course, that it was I?"

"I suspicioned it before he'd said ten words, of course, after them hosses had come in, and the look on Miss Sylvia's face when she follered him out would have told me, anyways." He paused as they turned in at the gates and added: "I opine the boys would've strung him up, but there warn't time."

"No, Wes," Susanna replied gravely. "These people are our guests as long as they remain at the Circle Six, and they must be treated with every courtesy, so please pass the word on to the boys. When we get Lee into the house Link or one of the others must go in the car here with this man to Dexter in order to show him the road and bring out Dr. Rankin."

"If the doc ain't off on one of his bootleggin' trips or hittin' up what's left from the last one," Wes responded skeptically. "He's the only one nearer than Mammon City, anyways, so we'll have to chance it."

Briggs had brought the car to a gentle halt before the door of the ranch-house and as he descended and opened the tonneau door the light streamed forth, and Sylvia's voice quavered:

"Oh, Sue, is that you? Has something happened to Lee? There are some perfectly wonderful people here from New York City and they told me of the dreadful thing you had done—"

"Go back," retorted Susanna briefly. "Lee is hurt, but not badly. Keep those people out of the way. I'll call you when I need you."

"I guess Lee is my brother, too!" There was indignant protest very close to tears in Sylvia's voice, but she retreated, nevertheless, leaving the door wide, and Briggs began tentatively:

"If you'll let me carry him in, ma'am—"

"I opine we can 'tend to that without your help, young feller!" interrupted Wes, jealously, as the rest of the escort drew up on their bronchos, but again Susanna intervened.

"Of course you and the boys can, Wes, but I told you before that if it hadn't been for this young man's help and kindness I could never have brought Lee home. Let him give you a hand and we'll put Lee on the couch in the living-room till Dr. Rankin comes."

Together Wes and Briggs carried the still unconscious boy into the spacious room while the punchers dismounted and crowded about the doorway, muttering in subdued fashion among themselves. Then the grimly, taciturn, Link Dole started off with Briggs for Dexter, the punchers turned their bronchos into the corral and made their way to the cook-house, and Susanna was left alone with her brother.

But not for long. Even as she bent over him to moisten the bandage about his head a quick but light step sounded behind her, and the little, elderly, grizzled man appeared.

"It seems that we owe you an apology, madam." He spoke in a subdued, dry tone. "My name is Dacon Acheson. I trust your brother has not been severely injured. Had you explained we should have been only too glad to take you back to the scene of his—er—accident."

"And subject your family to the possibility of a real little shooting party?" Susanna asked coldly. "As I remember, I wasn't given the opportunity for an explanation of any sort."

"That was entirely the fault of Amelia—my wife!" Acheson said quickly, but still in that subdued tone with a side glance at the still figure on the couch. "She has a—a most positive disposition. However, you will admit, my dear young lady, that your argument was most effective! I understand that my chauffeur has gone for a physician to attend your brother. My object for intruding upon you is to offer my services if I can be of use to you in any way."

"Thank you." Susanna added pointedly: "I hope that my sister has made you and your family comfortable?"

"Oh, quite!" he hastened to assure her, and then hesitated. "I have learned that

the hotel in the town a few miles away, which you sugested, while excellent of its type would not be—er—pleasing to Mrs. Acheson and our daughter, and the nearest one of the sort to which they are accustomed is in a place called Mammon City. Will you be so good as to tell me how far that is, and if the roads are quite safe at night? Mrs. Acheson, as you know, is nervous and highly strung, and in spite of her appearance, far from well—"

"Mr. Acheson," Susanna interrupted with a calmness bordering on exasperation, "such hospitality as the Circle Six can boast we offer you gladly until Mrs. Acheson feels able to continue your journey. Please make yourselves as much at home as you find possible in these unaccustomed surroundings. Cook will serve dinner in a little while, and in the mean time I feel that my brother needs my undivided attention. I hope that under the circumstances you will forgive my unceremonious appropriation of your car this afternoon, and if you require anything my sister will be only too glad to play hostess in my stead."

Stammering his thanks the elderly little man accepted the hint and withdrew, and a moment later Lee Poindexter opened his eyes.

"Sue, it was Jake Brower! He got me!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST STAND.

"HOW'S he comin', Miss Sue?" Wes Hayward lowered his voice sepulchrally, although the two were over near the corral separated by several rods from the rear veranda of the ranch-house. "Did Doc Rankin make a decent job of it last night?"

"Splendid! I don't think that even a doctor from Mammon City could have performed a better operation, and Lee is resting easily," Susanna replied happily. Then her brow clouded. "You haven't heard anything from Big Matt Cooley or his deputies about their search for the men who clipped the wire over beyond the creek yesterday, have you? I've been talking with Clint and he seems to think it was Jake Brower or some of his gang of rustlers, but Lee was away over at the other end of the ranch on the east section, you know, and yet his first conscious words to me last night were that Jake himself got him."

Wes chewed reflectively on the quid he had not been able to dispose of at Susanna's sudden appearance and then remarked:

"Wal, Miss Sue, I think it's like you said when we met up with you on the road in that car last night. Them wires acrost the crick was nipped by Mesega or some of the gang under Brower's orders just as a blind to draw as many of us in that *di*-rection as possible while Jake hisself went to settle up accounts with Lee. Thing is, how'd Jake know Lee was ridin' line on the east section yesterday, and alone, at that? Big Matt nor none of his dep'ties except Sim Moser was in Dexter last night when Link and Bill rode in for the doc."

"Bill?" repeated Susanna with a ghost of a smile.

Wes's weather-beaten face reddened, and then he chuckled.

"The feller who drives for them three swells you've got up to the house," he explained. "They call him Briggs, like he didn't have any first name to him, but he 'pears to be a regular hombre, and he says he'd quit 'em right now only he promised to get 'em home to New York. When he does, he wants to hike back here pronto, and if you say so, Miss Sue, I can give him a job. He don't know a shorthorn from a white-face hardly, but he'll learn quick, and if you're goin' to get one of them gas engines you was talkin' about—"

Susanna's own face sobered. "I—I don't know, Wes. You are the only one except Lee who knows how matters really stand about the Circle Six and the fight I've been making to keep it. It may pass out of our hands before the gas engine becomes a possibility."

"Oh, shucks, Miss Sue!" Wes spoke with awkward sympathy. "We're doin' fine this year, and that lawyer hombre in Mammon City can shore stretch things a little further!"

"I'm afraid not. Uncle Dave Hartwell would do anything he could for us, but he has already stretched things, as you call it,

just about to the limit. Has any one ridden in to Dexter for the mail yet this morning?"

"Tad Mason; he ought to be back now any time. And there's another thing, Miss Sue. It was Tad who rode back last night to have a look at that dead pinto by the break in the fence, and he found some one else there ahead of him—that Easterner who's stayin' down to the Central Hotel. Chanler, his name is. He 'lowed to Tad that he'd seen that pinto more'n once round Dexter, and the hombre that was ridin' him was small and quick as a cat, and darker than the ordinary greaser, like he wasn't altogether Mex, with thick lips and a flat nose and a scar down one side of his face."

"Pedro Ruiz!" Susanna breathed. "Jake's head man next to Feliciano Mesega."

"That's who it sounds like," nodded Wes. "That Chanler hombre's got sharp eyes if he is lazy-lookin', and moseyin' round Dexter with nothin' on his mind but his hat. You ain't met up with him, have you, Miss Sue?"

Susanna shook her head.

"No. Lee knows him, and Sylvia met him at a dance at the Bar D, but I never saw him. If he's sure about the description of the man he noticed on that pinto the sheriff ought to be told at once."

"I told Tad to leave word for Big Matt in Dexter this morning—" The foreman broke off and, shading his eyes with his hand, squinted at a faint puff of dust rising in little swirls far off down the road. "That must be Tad comin' now."

"Send the mail up to the ranch-house, Wes, and—I may want to talk things over with you later." Susanna moved off. "Let me know if there is any news from the sheriff."

After Doc Rankin's ministrations on the previous evening Lee had been placed in his own bed, and now as Susanna entered the dim, cool living-room a tall, brilliantly blond girl rose slowly from a low chair and faced her. There was thinly veiled hostility in that cold, supercilious stare, but Susanna regarded her serenely.

"I hope that you were made as comfortable as our conveniences here permit," she remarked quietly. "If there is anything that you or your mother require, please do not hesitate to ask for it. My little sister is inexperienced, and with sudden illness in the house one is apt to fail in the lesser considerations for one's guests."

"We only regret that we are compelled to force ourselves upon your hospitality for a day or two because of the severe nervous shock which my mother suffered yesterday." There was a palpable sneer in Daisy Acheson's tones. "Although we realize that the necessity was in turn forced upon *us*, you can appreciate the fact that we do not care to consider ourselves guests, and it is infinitely distasteful to us to accept any hospitality. We would prefer to pay—"

Susanna interrupted her, and now there was something ominous in the even, level courtesy of her voice.

"I'm sorry. I don't believe there is any boarding-place nearer than Dexter, where, besides the Central Hotel, you would find only Ma Hooper's. There is plenty of bootleg whisky in town, and as she caters mostly to greasers and punchers on a holiday, there are sometimes shots which are not fired into the air, and which might prove even a greater shock to Mrs. Acheson's nerves than she encountered yesterday. I assure you that your stay here at the Circle Six will be made as little distasteful to you as possible."

She bowed slightly, and without waiting for the other girl to reply, turned and passed around the gallery into her brother's room.

"Hello, Sue!" He greeted her weakly from among his pillows. "How is Bull's-eye? You told me he reached home—"

"He's all right, Lee dear." There was a surprising quiver of tenderness in Susanna's usually calm, capable tones as she bent to smooth the coverlet. "I've just been out to see him, and Wes says the ball only grazed the flesh without touching a muscle or tendon; he'll be as good as ever in a week or so."

"Thank the Lord! I don't think another horse could ever be the same to me as old Bull's-eye!" Lee kicked out his sound leg beneath the covers with a boyish-

ly impatient motion and added irrelevantly: "Sue, I—I wish you'd just forget what I told you last night about Jake Brower. I mean, don't let Big Matt know who got me, or even Wes and our boys."

"But, Lee, why?" Susanna's big gray-blue eyes opened wide. "Hasn't Jake made trouble enough?"

"It isn't that. The rustling is a different matter, but this is a personal affair between Jake and me, and I don't want him caught or run out of the country till I'm on my feet again. I don't believe I'll be laid up as long as that fool Doc Rankin says I shall, but I don't care if it's a year. Jake's my man, and I want to get him myself. We're Poindexters, Sue, and you know that our people for generations back in the South have settled their own scores." The boy's face flushed. "I don't need any sheriff's posse to fight my battles for me!"

"Yes, we are Poindexters." Susanna spoke quietly enough, but her small head was lifted proudly and her eyes flashed for an instant. Then she added: "I can't go out and get Jake and his pack of greasers for you, Lee, because I'm only a girl, and it is too late to keep it from the sheriff. You see, Jake wasn't alone last night when he lay in wait for you."

"I know it." Lee nodded in grim satisfaction. "Couldn't tell who the other fellow was, it all happened so quick, but I shot his pinto from under him."

"Yes, and that dead pinto has been recognized by an Easterner who is staying at the Central Hotel as one he has seen Pedro Ruiz ride. Of course, if Ruiz is caught he will give Jake away fast enough to save himself."

"Confound the luck!" Lee moved impatiently once more and then suppressed a groan. "An Easterner, you say? That must be Chanler; he's an awfully good sort, and I asked him to drop out to the Circle Six some time. Say, Sylvia told me this morning that we've got a real society couple from New York staying here, with a gorgeously beautiful daughter. How did it happen? She wouldn't give me any details."

"They—they're touring, and they had a slight accident to their car," Susanna explained faintly. "They'll be gone in a day or two and won't bother you. Try to sleep now, Lee. Wun See will bring you in some broth in a little while."

"Broth!" Lee snorted contemptuously. "I want some steak and pie! I tell you, Sue, I'll be out of this in a week, in spite of Doc Rankin, if I have to get Wes to make me a crutch!"

Smiling back at the rebellious patient, Susanna left the room, but her smile faded when on the back porch she found Tad Mason waiting for her with a long, legal-looking envelope in his hands. It bore the postmark of Mammon City, and in the upper left-hand corner the name of David Hartwell, attorney and counselor at law.

Without heeding the puncher's excited story of his conference with the sheriff, she tore open the envelope and read the brief, typed enclosure it contained, and as her eyes followed the lines they darkened and the color ebbed slowly from her face.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

POETRY *VERSUS* BUSINESS

SAID Poetry to Business: I frolic and fly
On Pegasus mounted I ramble the sky.
You revel in matters disgustingly tart,
I analyze Life with a consummate art!

Commercial relations no dignity bring;
I stride through the ages, the peer of a king.
Said Business to Poetry: Be reasonable, Pete.
I furnish the food, and I notice—you eat!

Philip Stiehl, Jr.

Always a Gentleman

by Robert Terry Shannon

CHESTER GIBBS, dead white in the face, trembling in the knees, walked with an effort at nonchalance into the office of Tom Andrews, chief of police. "The bull—I mean the officer—said you wanted to see me, chief."

Andrews ran a glowering eye over the somewhat frayed but faultlessly pressed attire of the youth. "Young man," the chief's voice rumbled, "I've got you on my list. We're going to make it blistering hot for the vagrants in this town. What ye going to do about it?"

Gibbs's eyes shifted slightly under the baleful stare of the officer. Nevertheless, he managed to smile, weakly but engagingly. "You know I'm no vagrant, chief. You know my dad—"

Andrews's heavy fist struck the desk with a bang. "You betcher life I know your dad. It's a wonder he don't wring your neck—him working ten hours a day in the machine shops and supporting you in your laziness. Why don't you go to work yourself for a change?"

"I do work," Chester Gibbs asserted, running a trembling hand over his well-brushed hair. "I—"

"Work! Don't hand me that. You lay around day and night in Walker's pool hall. Call that work?"

"Pool—pocket billiards—that's only a recreation with me."

"Recreation!" boomed the chief. "All you do is recreate. How'd you like some real recreation—on the rock pile, hey?"

Chester's voice shook. "I got a business."

"You got a profession—professional bum."

"I'm the agent for the Chicago Suit Club. You pay fifty cents a week for forty weeks, and when you're paid up, along next August, you get a fine Shantung China silk suit. Besides, we have drawings every four weeks, and you might win a suit free, even if you'd only paid in a couple of dollars or so."

A sudden gleam of interest showed in the chief's eye. At base he was a prudent, economical man; something in the proposition hit him. Perhaps it was the earnest brevity of Chester Gibbs. Chief Andrews scented a bargain. Momentarily he forgot his stern purpose.

"Say—maybe that ain't a bad scheme. I might need a cool suit next summer. They any good?"

The normal color came back to the cleanly chiseled face of the boy. The immature enthusiasm of a born salesman flamed in his gaze.

"Yes, sir! Tailored to your measure. Fit guaranteed. You ought to sign up on this thing, Mr. Andrews. There's a membership card you take out and—"

Chester stopped. Immediately he was aware that too much eagerness had frightened away his prospective customer. The chief's interest became a frigid zero.

"So that's the line of bunk you're peddling!" he remarked, brazenly harsh. "I was just trying you out. Now, look here, Gibbs—they want men out at the foundry. Three dollars a day. You'll get your pretty pink fingers dirty, but it's honest. I'm giving you a chance. You get a job inside of twenty-four hours, or you go in the jug—see?"

Under the castigation Chester had gradually paled until his lips were a blue, bloodless line across his face. At the angle of his jaw one small knot of muscle leaped spasmodically. When he spoke his voice was dry, husky.

"I'm not afraid of work," he said, "only—"

"Only what?" barked the chief.

"I'd be wasting my time in the foundry. I'm not too good to do manual labor, but I'm a man with ideas. The trouble is, it takes time to put across anything really big."

"You've got big ideas, hey?"

"Yes, sir. One of them's about streetcars. Everybody has loose pennies since fares jumped to seven and eight cents all over the country. I got an invention right now to put penny slot gum machines—small ones—over every seat. There's a fortune in it."

Andrews grinned sourly.

"How much work have you done on that scheme?"

"I'm thinking out the details—it's still in a preliminary stage."

The thick man got to his feet heavily and put a hand on the boy's shoulder. "You're naturally worthless—that's all. You're a good kid at heart, Chet, but you need a tough job—a man's job. You're too stuck up to tackle anything in overalls. How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"All right. You can learn a trade in three or four years. Suppose you go home to-night and think it over."

The youngster moved toward the door, his head bowed. "All right, chief—I'll think it over."

"Remember what I said about getting a job inside of twenty-four hours?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, don't forget it." Chief Andrews's eyes were flinty. "That still goes."

II.

Outside, Chester Gibbs was conscious of a burning sensation in his face. Now that it was over, he felt he must be scarlet. A sickness ached in his stomach. Getting off the principal street, he proceeded, circuitously, to Dave Walker's pool hall and slipped into the entrance.

At the back end, in a washroom, he took off his coat, collar and tie, and carefully rolled back his cuffs. With the utmost nicety he laved his hands and face; held his wrists under the cold stream from the spigot. The water soothed his feverish feeling. Dampening his hair, he combed it, and cleaned his nails.

Walker was behind a cigar counter in the front end as Chester, immaculate, reappeared.

"Dave," he said confidentially, leaning on the case, "slip me fifty cents, will you?"

Walker's face hardened perceptibly. "How's that?" he demanded.

Chester repeated. "I'll hand it back to-morrow sure. Just a little bit short to-day."

Walker rang up a "no sale," and passed over a coin. "Don't forget," he said.

The clock in the window of the corner jewelry store showed that it was half past seven. Across the street in the Athens restaurant the white-topped tables gleamed under the electric lights. Chester crossed over and affected to stroll by.

At a table near the window he saw a fat man being served with a begarnished platter of beef stew—glimpsed, even, the color of the carrots mingled with the steaming meat. A keen moisture assailed his mouth.

Thirty-five cents for the plate, a nickel for coffee, ten cents for a tip—Chester computed rapidly.

Resolutely he walked on.

Fifteen minutes later he reached a white one-story cottage set in a scraggly yard. Maybelle Jones, magnetic with the fresh beauty of eighteen, answered his peal at the doorbell.

"Oh, hello," she said listlessly. "It's you, is it?"

Chester smiled. "You act like you didn't expect me."

The girl hesitated a moment before she swung open the screen door. "Come in."

Following her into the golden oak parlor, Chester Gibbs saw nothing of its crassness in taste or furnishings; nothing except the smooth, budding charm of Maybelle—the gold glint in her hair, the trim lines of her figure. She sat upon a straight-backed settee, crossed her slender silken ankles, and adjusted her softly piled hair.

"How'd you like to take in a movie?" the boy asked. "They got a peach of a picture down at the Bijou."

"Sorry—I got another date to-night, Chester."

"You got another—say—what!"

"Yes, and I'm afraid I'll have to ask you not to call here any more. Mother, she asked me to tell you."

His brain reeled with the shock of it. Calmly, coldly, she—Maybelle!—had just said— A thousand memories of moonlight, of plans and dreams and pledges, eddied in a confusion of anguish.

"You—you don't care any more?"

The shadow of a smile revealed Maybelle's little, milk-white teeth.

"Let's not argue, Chester. Besides, it's almost eight o'clock."

"Who's coming?" he heard himself asking.

"Well—I suppose you'd find out anyhow. It's Harold Pudney."

Beyond any possible control, some furious, primitive anger flared through every nerve in the body of Chester Gibbs, electrifying him with jealousy. One fist clenched until the knuckles were white lumps of bone.

"That fellow—with his putty face and short upper lip!" His voice sank to whip-like intensity. "So *that's* who it is, eh? Harold Pudney, eh?"

Maybelle regarded him with the level eyes of a woman whose mind is set.

"The Pudneys are one of the finest families in town," she said metallicly. "Harold's in the bank now, and what's more he'll be its president some day."

"Yes, he will!"

Her exquisite lip curled. "Furthermore, he's a gentleman—if you know what I mean."

"A gentleman! Ha! Say, if I told you—but what's the use? It don't matter."

The little teeth clicked as though Maybelle Jones were determined to make a thorough job of it. Somehow, the thought that she was experiencing malicious pleasure came to Chester, and he bit his lip until the blood started.

"Harold Pudney," she was saying, "does not need me to defend him against your insinuations. He's got something to him—real character."

"I suppose your mother put that idea into your head?"

"Suppose she did? I'm the one that's got it."

Again the color was gone from Chester's face. As livid as he had been before Chief Andrews, he got unsteadily to his feet.

"All right, Maybelle. There's nothing more for me to say. My life is ruined."

"I guess not," Maybelle retorted, unimpressed. "I understand you're in lots of demand as a pool player."

With an upraised hand he stayed her.

"My love for you—that's killed. Time alone can heal the scar. But if you ever need me—if I can ever help you in any way—just call on me."

Impersonally, without warmth, the girl spoke: "Your fine talk don't mean a thing on earth to me any more, Chester. I've listened to you too long already. Words—words."

"My word"—his voice fairly rasped—"is as good as my bond. Remember that. I wish you all the happiness in the world. Good-by."

A revulsion toward the town, its lights and people, fell upon Chester as he turned

out of the gate to face life empty-hearted. Half in a stupor he wandered away from the more populous streets and toward the railroad yards. Farther on, where the high train bridge stretched across the river, he picked his way out on the ties to the center, and swung down carefully to the flat top of one of the great stone piers. There, with the dark, silent river slipping past him, he gave himself up to the brooding misery of youth.

At midnight he was aware that he was chilled through, and, turning up his collar, he started for home. Gradually his depression gave way to a feeling of lightness, and he was astonished to find that Maybelle, after all, was not indispensable. Without much trouble he was able to pity her a little. Merely, he had been deceived in the caliber of her affection, the timbre of her nature. As he walked he whistled.

When he reached home there was, unaccountably, a light down-stairs. A rush of apprehension for his mother—that she might be taken ill suddenly—swept over him, and he bounded up the porch steps. His father, grim and collected, was waiting.

"Chester," he said sternly, "where's my shotgun?"

The son stood, frozen, in the center of the room.

"I don't know," he answered in a voice scarcely audible.

"You're not only a liar, but you're a thief. I located that gun in a pawnshop to-day. What did you do with the thirty dollars you got on it?"

Their eyes met. Despite his shame, Chester Gibbs did not flinch.

"I'm not a thief, dad," he said quietly. "I asked you to lend me some money that I needed. You turned me down, and I soaked the gun. I'm going to get it out—I'll pay every cent and more. I'm calling on people—business men—every day, trying to sell memberships. I had to keep up my appearance, and I needed shoes and lunch money. That's why."

"You got to go."

"Got to go—where?"

The workman's deeply lined face was an implacable mask of condemnation. "No thief is a son of mine. You can pack your grip and clear out right now. I've stood for a lot, but for this—no!"

"All right, dad. Maybe you're right. All I ask is that you don't tell mother. Don't tell her why I'm going away."

Eben Gibbs sank wearily into a chair. "God, no! She's had enough to bear in her day."

In his low-ceilinged bedroom it took only a few minutes of the boy's time to pack an old valise. It was a light burden which he set outside his mother's door, upon which he tapped to waken her. A bit alarmed, she sat up in bed as he entered.

"Now, don't get excited, mother. I've got news to tell you."

"Mercy, Chester! What kind of news?"

"Good news, honey—the very best news. I just got a telegram to-night. They want me in Chicago. My firm—the suit club people. Right away. The Night Hawk comes through in an hour, and I've got to catch it."

"Why, that means—" Her voice broke with a quavering catch. "You're leaving home, Chester. Why, you're just my little boy."

In the poor light she could not see his pallor.

"It's my big chance, mother," he rattled on. "I'm going to get a big job where I can do big things. I'm going to work day and night, and I'm going to send you money home. Maybe pretty soon I can buy you an automobile—a little one. You're the only sweetheart I got. I'm going to make so much money that you and dad can take it easy for the rest of your life."

The mother drew up the corner of a sheet and dabbed at her wet eyes with inherent practicability.

"You'll need some ready money for your running expenses, and I know you ain't got it," she said tensely. "You reach in the top dresser drawer and hand me that old reticule."

When he had complied and the thin roll of bills was stowed deep in his pocket, his mother kissed him and smoothed back his hair.

"And remember, Chester," she said,

" you'll always be welcome right back here to home if things might just happen to go wrong up there in Chicago."

III.

A NEW world, rich and opulent, teeming with splendid activity, was opened up to Chester Gibbs within the ornate hotel at which he had registered in Chicago. Upon each and every guest was an indefinable aura of prosperity, of success. Once upon a time he had read somewhere it was both ethical and profitable to present an appearance of well-being when in distress. It was a pleasant philosophy, and it had lured him into quarters entirely disproportionate in cost to his purse.

At the longest, he could remain but a few days, yet in that time he was prepared to enjoy his surroundings to the fullest extent. The delicious resiliency of his bed, the stinging needles of his cold shower, great thick towels, soft rugs, mahogany furniture—all conspired to create the illusion that he was a natural part of his surroundings. The etchings on the walls of his room, the shaded lights, gave him a sense of infinite achievement—and the total effect of it all was personified in the rotund figure of Mr. Francis X. Tally, who occupied a suite across the corridor from Chester's room on a court.

Chester had observed the distinguished man at a distance in the lobby and at close range in the elevator; had marveled at the razor-scraped pinkness of his jowls and the elusive elegance in the fit of his garments. The time would come, he was confident, when Chester Gibbs, too, would be bland and smiling, correct, a man among men—and a gentleman. Always a gentleman.

So great was his veneration that he went numb with astonishment on the evening of his second day when some one opened his door without knocking and a Francis X. Tally, blanched, wilted, craven, tottered into the room.

" Young man, I need help, and I need it damn quick," he said in ghastly tones. " My wife's just come in from home and she'll be up on the elevator any minute." Mr. Talley endeavored to clear the dew from his forehead with a silk handkerchief. " And I got a hell-roaring party going on across the hall. There's a couple of friends of mine in there with a case of Scotch and five or six cabaret girls—all lit."

He advanced and clung to the shoddy lapels of Chester Gibbs.

" You got to save me, boy! Thank God—my brain still works. Lay down on the bed and pretend you're sick. I'll bring her in and tell her I'm 'tending to you—that I was called in—and Mrs. Tally, she'll sit right down and begin to nurse you while I clean that gang out. I'll pay you well—"

Chester extended a hand, which Tally pressed fervently. " You can't pay me a cent—"

" Heaven bless you!" The frantic one lumbered hastily to the door. " Groan!" he threw over his shoulder. " Groan and double up in agony!"

The patient, by midnight, was well out of danger. From the moment she had been ushered into the room the alert, maternal eye of Mrs. Francis X. Tally, the best nonprofessional nurse in Queensberg, Illinois, had not been diverted from the hypocritical sufferings of Chester Gibbs.

Taking advantage of her concentrated attention, Tally had escaped from Chester's room long enough to hustle his riotous guests protestingly from his apartment. Summoning a maid he had the place cleaned and aired, restored to the Puritanical sanctity befitting the husband of a plain, honest wife.

Chastened and humble, he returned to the sick bed; sat sympathetically through the long hours of Mrs. Tally's relentless ministrations.

" There now," she said kindly at last, " I guess you can get to sleep. Your cramps had me puzzled all right, but I knew those peppermint bitters would knock 'em if you took enough. Land sakes!" She turned to her hovering husband. " This poor child swallowed almost a pint before I could stop him."

It was true. Dosed and drugged into bodily inertia, Chester lay under the sheets, wan and drowsy. From time to time he gathered enough energy to moan feebly—loyally.

Tiptoeing, Mrs. Tally turned out all of the lights except the dim, silk-shadowed one on the writing table.

"You sleep tight, sonny," she said soothingly. To her husband she remarked: "It's a funny thing—it was you I got to worrying about. That's why I came so unexpectedly. And it wasn't you at all that needed me—it was this dear boy here."

For an instant Chester's befogged mind thought he was back home. "Good night, mother," he said faintly.

Sleep, sodden and dreamless, obliterated the night. The ringing of his telephone awoke him in the morning. It was Tally.

"I'm coming in to see you," the voice said. "Mrs. Tally's down in the dining-room."

Chester's brain roused itself; he drenched his body and dressed while Tally—again debonair and suave—burbled his gratitude.

"And I'm going to pay you well for what you did for me, son," he proclaimed. From an inside pocket he extracted a grained wallet, slid out a smooth new bill and put it on the dresser. "There's a hundred bucks, my lad."

A scowl gathered between Chester's eyes. Vaguely, he was disappointed in Tally—in the evident tawdriness of the man's standards of conduct; the assumption that mere money was involved in any part of the past night's transaction.

"You keep your money, Mr. Tally," he said. "I don't need it. Besides, I was tickled to death to do it on account of your fine little wife."

Tally's lips tightened; his eyes glinted from between fleshy lids. "I always pay for service. All I ask is that you keep your mouth shut. You know who I am."

"Yes, I know your name."

"Well—my identity's no secret. Even the bell-hops know all about me. I might as well tell you myself. I'm State Senator Tally and president of the Queensberg Interurban Traction Company. I offered you a hundred dollars—I'll make it two."

Chester wheeled—every nerve tingling, suddenly tense and vibrant. With a glittering eye he fixed Francis X. Tally.

"You can't give me a cent, but you've got to give me fifteen minutes of your time! That's all I want! I been waiting years to meet a man in your position! Listen."

The words sprang from his lips as he plunged recklessly into a rushing description of his great idea; the gum machine over every trolley seat. Never before, he was sure, had he talked so logically and convincingly. Tally listened patiently.

"So you want to sell me that scheme? Got the idea patented?"

"No, sir. Not yet. But—"

"Don't you know that's a general idea—that you couldn't get a patent on it? Or a copyright? Anybody you tell it to can take it and use if he wants to. How much money do you want for it?"

Against the self-possessed business solidity that had suddenly come to the surface in Tally, Chester's forces crumbled into disorganized futility. He had dreamed in gigantic sums.

"I'll take a—a thousand dollars," he said in a withered voice.

Tally eyed him shrewdly; picked up the forgotten hundred-dollar bill from the dresser, restored it to his wallet. For one poignant moment Chester Gibbs suffered the sensation of falling from a great height. His heart pounded in an expansive vacuum; a stifling constriction had him at the throat.

Then Tally smiled; produced a fountain pen and a check-book. Something, immediately released, hammered at the base of the boy's brain, flooding him with surge after surge of joy. His hearing, suddenly grown miraculously acute, caught every scratch of the pen.

"There you are!" said his visitor genially. "I don't hum and haw. You've got too much on me for me to set up a grudge in your mind. We simply put things between us on a business basis, eh? If I ever want to use your idea it's mine."

Chester was scarcely conscious that the other was speaking. The check was crumpled in his hand, as though he were fearful of losing it.

"Where—where can I cash this?" he gasped.

Tally half smiled. "Down at the desk—but I thought you said a while ago that you didn't need money."

A delirious face glowed back at him.

"Mr. Tally, you'll never know how bad I needed this money! It means more to me than it would to anybody else on earth—"

Tally motioned him to a chair.

"Sit down. I listened to you. You listen to me. I'm wise in the ways of the world. You're young—green—raw! You don't know what it's all about."

Chester flared. "You're a big man and a smart man and I just made you like one of my ideas—right out of my own head. I can do it with other people, too!"

The traction man shook his head. "I'm the only person on earth that 'd give you a cent for that idea. There's every chance in the world that it's not practical. You just made a thousand dollars on a fluke—a peculiar combination of circumstances. It won't repeat.

"I think you've got stuff, but you haven't proved it to me and, more important, you haven't proved it to yourself. You're not seasoned. Prove yourself to yourself first. Don't expect others to take you on faith.

"It takes time, kid, and work to get your balance; to be able to guide and control the stuff that may be in you. I'm just going to butt in on you a bit and show you the way. The publisher of the Chicago *Daily Sun* is an associate of mine. I'll give you a note and he'll put you on. They'll knock you into shape in a year or two over there. After that you come and see me. Maybe I'll give you a job."

Only a part of Chester's attention was involved in his consideration of the opportunity. "How much will they pay me?"

"At the most, thirty a week. That's more than most cubs get. In six months you ought to be earning forty."

Spreading out the rumpled check the youngster looked at it avidly. The thrill, the magic of quick and easy money ran up and down his spine like a vastly stimulating current. Tally's words lingered meaninglessly in his ears.

Mentally, Chester Gibbs was spending a thousand dollars. His tongue passed over dry lips. He would go back home and show them all! Two hundred and fifty dollars would garb him like a king! Elation dizzied him. The flivver—a coupé for his mother! The shotgun would come out of pawn. Chief Andrews—he'd smoke a fifty-cent cigar from the respected hand of Chester Gibbs. Not the prodigal. The conquerer!

"Where'd you say I could cash this?" he asked again, his eyes preternaturally bright.

Tally shrugged his shoulders and walked to the door. "You can get the money downstairs. So-long."

In a daze Chester handed the check to the cashier. The voice behind the wicket asked him how he'd have it.

"In fifties—and some twenties."

The currency bulked in a fat, conspicuous lump in his trouser-pocket; to touch it with his fingers gave him an undreamed-of, staggering sense of power.

"Who's the best tailor in town?" he asked.

"Bergson Brothers."

Chester turned away with the unsteady step of a drunken man; started for the revolving door. A voice, somehow familiar, yet belonging to an alien past, called his name. He felt a hand on his sleeve, and turned.

"Maybelle!"

Her eyes were red, swollen. The fingers on his arm sank desperately into the flesh. Despite the cheap finery of her attire he had never seen her so haggard.

"Come over here, Chester—I've got to talk to you!" There was terror, pain, in her speech. "It must be fate that I just happened to run across you here in the hotel. I've had you on my mind, Chester—I've had you on my mind!"

He led her to a deep divan behind artificial palms.

"You're the only person in the whole world I can turn to. I'm half crazy. It's—it's about Harold. Yesterday we eloped and got married."

A thin pang tore for an instant in his breast. "You got married?" he asked stupidly.

"He's upstairs now in our room. He's all broke up. He confessed to me this morning. They'll probably arrest us both. He—he took a thousand dollars from the bank. And you said if—if I ever needed

you just to call on you. You said your word was as good as your bond. Can't you get the money somewhere, Chester? I don't care how. If we can get back home before they find Harold out—"

Something leaden sank to the pit of Chester's stomach. Well he remembered that he had given his word; as he looked upon the misery of Maybelle Jones, he knew in his heart of hearts that she had no claim upon any real part of his nature.

An overpowering pity for her swept him. In the same moment his mind reverted to his mother—the stain of taunt and gibe waiting to be blotted out. Curiously, something else came to him; something Francis X. Tally had said, "Prove yourself first!" Slowly, mechanically, solely by the command of some inner self, the hand of Chester Gibbs moved toward his pocket.

"Take this and go back, Maybelle," he said. Then he added under his breath: "And get Harold a new job—where he won't have to handle money."

Tally was packing when Chester's bold knock brought him to the door. The sharp, experienced eye of the business man caught some vibration of character which, hitherto, he had not observed. Perhaps it was an effect that came from the new straight-squared set of the shoulders; the solid clamp of a solid jaw.

"Mr. Tally," said Chester Gibbs evenly, "I want that note to the publisher of the *Sun*."

Tally looked him straight in the eye, smiled slightly.

"What happened to your thousand?"

Chester's face was serious. "I invested it," he said.

"All right," said Tally. "I'll not write that note. I'll go over to the *Sun* with you."

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THE CHAMP

I SING you the song of the winner de luxe,
Who never has wilted or quailed,
Who holds each proud record from Adam to date
And laughs at the lad who has failed;
On land or on sea or aloft in the air,
In football or baseball or track,
He goes on his way with a nonchalant grin,
Forevermore leading the pack.

Great Sullivan withered before his fierce drives,
And Rusie and Mathewson, too;
McLoughlin and Jeffries, Tod Sloan and Frank Gotch
Were "has-beens" when he would come through;
He meets every comer with unconcealed joy;
They are only wet clay in his hands;
With no thought of mercy he batters them down
And back to the dim shadowlands.

He is the miracle-worker, the star,
Who never goes counter the dope;
He sets his own pace in his own waiting way,
Then smashes each challenger's hope;
His battles are legion, and yet no defeat
Has blemished his record sublime;
I give you *the* winner, the star of all stars,
The champ of all champs, Father Time!

Edgar Daniel Kramer.

The Bandit of Batakaland

Part II

by Victor Rousseau

Author of "While Dorion Lives," "The Big Muskeg," "Wooden Spoil," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

DEAN GERVAISE, American engineer, having lost his position in the New Krugersdorp Mine, because he had refused to certify to a false assay at the instigation of Eltzmann, the president of the company, finds himself black-listed and practically stranded in Johannesburg, the chief city of the Transvaal gold-fields, South Africa. Almost at the end of his rope, financially, he meets and rescues from the police a young girl—Lois Ashton—who has just aided her father to escape from prison, where he had been railroaded by certain big interests in an attempt to get hold of property to which he had a claim. Lois hires Dean to help her father and herself across the border into Batakaland. While buying the outfit Dean has a run-in with a crooked Dutch trader named Van Leenen, a bully and ruffian, but a man of wealth and political influence, and knocks him out, paying little attention to the braggart's threats to get even.

Meantime Lois disappears. Thinking she has joined her father and will meet him along the road he starts out, but almost reaches the border before he finds any signs of her. Then he is surprised and captured one night by Van Leenen and his henchmen, who bind him and his faithful Hottentot guide, Tietjens, to an acacia, on the bank of a river to be eaten by a crocodile, but they are saved by a devoted native servant who gives his life for them. Escaping, they follow Van Leenen, who has managed to persuade Lois and her father that Dean is a traitor and intends to turn them over to the police. Overtaking them, they capture the party, and convincing the girl that it is really Van Leenen who is the traitor, Dean leaves the latter and his men bound to their carts and hurries on toward the border with the girl and her father.

CHAPTER VII.

A DASH FOR FREEDOM.

IN a few minutes Tietjens had the four securely fastened. While he inspanned the oxen to the Cape cart, Dean took a last look at the prisoners. The Kaffirs, resigned to their situation, grinned amiably; Smit, who had been cursing and threatening, had subsided into silence; Van Leenen rested on the ground and rolled his eyes on Dean in vicious hatred. Dean recognized that he was getting off too lightly, but one cannot flog a white man.

Then the cart started, Ashton lying inside on the *kartel*, while Dean and Lois walked behind, discussing their plans. The girl told him that, watching for him near the house, she had seen him drive up with the policeman, and, in her fear, had gone immediately to the place where her father was hidden.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 28.

They had struck along the northward road, and had encountered Van Leenen and Smit, who were taking their wagon to Batakaland. Lois had known Van Leenen in Batakaland; he had recognized her at once, and known who her father was. He offered his protection, and they had been forced to accept it under the circumstances, offering him a large sum if he succeeded in getting them across the border.

During the past days, however, she had begun to suspect him. They had known Dean's cart was ahead of them, and Van Leenen had insisted that it was necessary to follow a day's *trek* behind, in order to be on guard against him. Actually, he had no doubt been planning revenge for his knock-out blow, as soon as a suitable spot was reached.

Lois and Dean discussed their chances. Van Leenen and Smit had sold their horses in Johannesburg, tempted by the high prices prevailing. Thus there had been no possibility of obtaining mounts. The question was whether they could reach the Limpopo border before the police came up with them. It looked as if it would be the closest of races between the two parties.

Dean tried to reassure Lois, though he was himself doubtful. He calculated that, if the wagon could make fifteen miles that night, the police, arriving at the last camp, would find themselves compelled to rest their horses several hours. By pushing the oxen to the limit, it should be possible to reach the Limpopo and safety the following evening.

They drove them hard all night, with a short rest at midnight, surmounting the steep pass by dawn. Thence the veldt undulated toward the lower hills bordering the Limpopo Valley, which could be seen in the distance, a stain of green against the uniformly yellow veldt. During the morning rest Dean made the acquaintance of Lois's father, and learned that he was a baronet.

Sir Philip Ashton, though he scornfully refused the title, was a man of about fifty years—for all his ragged clothes and convict years a gentleman.

"I can never thank you enough, Mr. Gervaise," he said. "If you were an Englishman it would be unbearable to both of us to owe you what we do. God has preserved me from that humiliation.

"I have nothing against any man, whatever his nation, but England, my own country, has served me so ill that I cannot think of her without repugnance. My daughter has told you something; I will ask leave to tell you more.

"I was expelled from England by an unjust charge. Until that time I had lived the average life of men of my class. I had not awakened. I left my country, renounced everything that I had held dear, and resolved to go to some place where I could be free to embark upon the realization of the great vision that had come to me. I planned to establish a sanctuary where the oppressed of all the earth should make their home."

Dreamer he was, yet there was nothing of the madman in the steady bearing of the man to whom Dean listened, overcome with a great pity for the unrealizable ideal, and more for the man.

"I went to Batakaland, then an independent kingdom. I laid my plans before the king. A savage—yes. But I believe there is no difference in hearts, whether a black or a white skin covers them. I asked him for a concession of a land large enough to afford asylum to all oppressed, whether by birth or race. He granted it to me. He, the so-called savage, grasped at the idea which centuries of civilization have not brought home to us of the white races. He became an enthusiast."

"Sir Philip fixed his eyes earnestly on Dean's face.

"My enemies," he said, "working on the old chief's cupidity—for he loved gold, the curse of the earth, and there is much of it in his dominions—induced him to retransfer the land to them."

"But can you not claim it by prior right?" asked Dean.

Sir Philip's eyes flamed.

"I can and shall!" he cried. "I have his mark upon the treaty that he made with me, and that holds good.

"But in order to establish my claim it is necessary for me to go to England and take the case before the Privy Council.

Much as I hate England, I know her judges are incorruptible. Yet I could not bring myself to do this. I waited. I temporized. Time and again the agents of my enemies endeavored to obtain the treaty from me, by fair means or foul. They never succeeded.

"At last they laid a trap for me. I had discovered gold on my own lands. I sold a nugget as a curio. They charged me with illegal dealing in gold, and their corrupt judge sentenced me to the breakwater. Then they sought the treaty. Lois was a child then, but she knew how to keep the secret. It has never been found. My daughter and I alone know where it is hidden."

Lois went to her father and sat down beside him, putting her hand in his.

"When they learned I had escaped they moved heaven and earth to capture me. But, please God, I shall escape them, and take the treaty to England, to prove my right. I loathe the task, but I have returned for that, because of the great free land that I shall build up for the oppressed men of all nations."

A dreamer indeed! Yet Dean felt moved to infinite sympathy as he listened to the story of Sir Philip's wrongs.

"I'll do everything in my power to help you," he answered, and saw the grateful look in Lois's eyes.

They inspanned before the sun was high, and continued on their journey. The wagon climbed the low line of hills, and now the Limpopo valley was plainly outlined beneath them. Freedom seemed in sight. Sir Philip, who seemed to be recovering his strength marvelously with every mile they traversed, left the wagon and walked beside them.

"We ought to reach the Limpopo at sunset," said Dean to Tietjens, at one of their brief restings.

The Tottie shook his head.

"*Baas,* we must go quick," he said. "Those *skellums* have got free. They are riding after us with men—many men."

"How do you know?" demanded Dean.

Tietjens did not know how he knew. It was part of the Hottentot's instinct, perhaps derived from obscure signs that never reached the level of his consciousness. Dean fell back to Lois's side, and they walked together through the declining afternoon, their eyes fixed anxiously upon their goal, the vast plain before them, now appearing, and now hidden by the undulations of the ground.

At the summit of a hill Tietjens left the oxen and came running back to Dean, uttering expressive clicks and pointing behind them. Turning, Dean and Lois discovered a group of horsemen upon a hilltop.

There was no need to speculate what they were, nor whether the cart had been seen. Sir Philip, who had also seen them, left the wagon.

"I shall fight for freedom to the last, Mr. Gervaise," he said, throwing open the breech of the Martini and inserting a cartridge. "But there is no reason why you should be implicated in this. Take Lois, if the chase grows hot, and—"

"I shall stay with you, father," said Lois.

"We'll fight it out together," said Dean, "if Miss Ashton—"

"I shall stay with my father," she answered resolutely.

Sir Philip tried to persuade Dean to leave them, but, seeing that he could not be changed, accepted the situation. And now the chase grew hotter. From the next elevation they could see the police plainly, riding along the road in a cloud of dust, through which perhaps a dozen horsemen were strung out.

"Push on!" Dean called to Tietjens.

The Tottie belabored the straining oxen constantly, but the beasts were exhausted by the long journey, and could make only a feeble response. An hour passed. The Limpopo was now no more than three miles away. Dean drew a breath of hope. Then the foremost of their pursuers came into sight, riding at a steady trot along the road, perhaps a half mile behind them.

Sir Philip left the wagon and kneeled down in the road, his rifle to his shoulder. A kick of the weapon, the following report, and Dean saw the foremost horse come crashing to earth, throwing his rider over his head.

Quick as a flash Sir Philip had reloaded and aimed again. At the second shot the second horse threw his rider likewise, and, plunging and rearing, galloped away across the veldt, the saddle swinging beneath his belly.

"Good shot!" cried Dean.

"I'm an old hand," responded Sir Philip calmly, as he loaded again. "I've picked off my man at greater distances among the Afghan hills. But I aimed at the horses. Next time it will be the riders."

Lois tried to take the rifle from him. "It will be murder!" she cried. "You can't run that risk—"

"It is worth it, Lois."

"It implicates Mr. Gervaise."

They looked at Dean. Dean glanced along the road. The horsemen were momentarily out of sight, and the wagon was descending the last slope into the plain. Hardly two miles below lay the Limpopo valley, heavily fringed with green, the waters of the river a shining streak in the sunlight.

"Let us run for it!" cried Dean.

Lois sprang to her father's side, and, hand in hand, they raced along the road, Tietjens whipping the oxen furiously. The heavy cart rumbled and creaked behind them.

There came a crack, and the whine of a bullet overhead. A last spurt, and a desperate one. Gasping, panting, Dean pulled Lois along. Sir Philip ran at his side, breathing like a man in the last lap of a Marathon. Dimly they sensed the oncoming horsemen. Dean ventured a glance backward. The police were almost upon the wagon. Then the foremost horse stumbled and fell. The troop was forced to draw up; the road descended between high banks, and it was impossible for them to make a detour.

On! The broad Limpopo glistened before them. Three-quarters of a mile, perhaps. Dean stopped and, drawing his revolver, fired three times. Another horse went down. Again a moment of delay, precious beyond all the gold in Batakaland. A volley hissed above his head. Far in front of him he saw Lois and her father running toward the river bank. But at this very moment the police were thundering beside the cart.

"Hands up!" shrieked a dozen voices in menacing chorus.

Dean sprang back to where Tietjens, running beside the oxen, lashed them with his whip. He grasped the thongs that dangled from the leading yokes, and, with a wrench, suddenly pulled the oxen squarely across the road.

So sudden was the maneuver that the police had no time to rein in. The leading horses dropped in a tangle among the ozen, and those that followed piled up upon them. Through the whirl of flying hoofs, among which he had fallen, Dean saw Lois and Sir Philip running into the drift. They were free! The police dared not follow them into Mashonaland.

And, wild with exultation, he scrambled out of the tangle, escaping the flying horse-hoofs by a miracle. Revolver in hand, he grasped at the bridle of a horse which had regained its footing and stood trembling upon the edge of one of the brush-grown nullahs—deep crevices running in all directions through the parched earth about the river banks, cut out in the wet season by the rains.

As he tried to mount he saw a policeman aiming a carbine at him.

He set his foot in the stirrup, and felt a stunning blow upon the head. The sound of the discharge went echoing into emptiness as he plunged forward and fell into fathomless darkness.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNEXPECTED OFFER.

DEAN opened his eyes, to see the pale light of dawn overhead through the bushes. He could not remember what had happened to him, and for some minutes everything was dominated by the throbbing in his head, which was like a succession of fiery stabs. He put his hand up to his scalp and brought it away black with congealing blood.

Along the scalp was the groove of a superficial bullet wound. The impact had stunned him, and he must have lain more

than twelve hours unconscious. With that, remembrance came creeping back. Little by little he recalled everything up to the moment of the escape of the fugitives. He must have been shot by the policeman who had aimed the carbine at him. He had toppled back into the hole and disappeared from view instantly. Either the police had thought him dead, or they had not been able to find him among the many gulleys that ran through the cracked earth in every direction.

Feeling a little stronger after a few minutes, Dean staggered to his feet and essayed to clamber out of the pit. After several attempts he succeeded, by dint of digging his toes and fingers into the stiff clay, in reaching the top. There, after scraping the glutinous material from his hands, he rested, and presently made his way down to the river, through a jungle of palms and tropical growth that had succeeded the thorny scrub of the high veldt. He flung himself upon his face and drank greedily from a pool, after which he proceeded to make his way across the sand ridges of the river bed toward the farther shore.

It was a two days' journey to Santa Maria, the capital of Batakaland, but there, Dean felt sure, he would be able to obtain news of Lois and her father and ultimately to rejoin them.

He felt that fate had linked their fortunes together, and he believed he would be able to right the wrong done to Sir Philip.

Buying food at native stores along the way, he succeeded in covering the distance in two days, and a little before sundown saw the iron roofs of Santa Maria dancing in the mirage before him. He entered the town as it was growing dark.

Santa Maria was certainly raw. The town consisted in the main of a great market square, formed out of the primeval veldt, with single-story brick houses fronting it on each of the four sides, except here and there where a two-story structure reared its head proudly above its neighbors, as if looking askance at the questionable company in which it found itself.

The side streets were occupied almost entirely by wattle and daub cottages, and everywhere were the "ice-cold drinks," and the old clothes shops, at whose doors bands of filthy natives stood chaffering with the proprietors and fingering their renovated goods, examining the lining of the armholes for signs of previous wear with a sapience born of contact with civilization.

Behind these shanties were shacks, dotted sparsely about the veldt, which seemed to have no appreciable boundary, but underlay and threatened everything, like an unconquerable brown flood.

The square itself was hardly more prepossessing. It was crammed with wagons and oxen, whose owners were preparing to retire for the night into their canvas-covered wagons. Natives were lighting little fires everywhere and swinging pots over them. Above all hung a cloud of dust, and miniature sandspouts, caught into being by erratic gusts of wind, traveled from side to side, involving occasionally dinner-pots in ruin.

But Dean perceived that something was astir in Santa Maria besides the dust. Crowds were collecting at the street corners, talking together in excited tones. There was a general suspension of ordinary interests. Here and there a street orator, mostly in prospectors' dress, was haranguing a crowd, who shouted emphatic approval. And, as Dean watched, there came a simultaneous movement of the crowd toward a corner block.

Before this two or three hundred men were already gathered, shouting something unintelligible to Dean. Caught in the movement of the crowd, he presently found himself wedged in tightly in front of the building, which he perceived to be the offices of the Batakaland Company from a large brass plate on the door.

The mob, which now blocked the entire street, was bellowing at the top of its lungs.

Dean turned to a man who stood near him. "What's the trouble?" he asked.

The man, letting the breath go with a gasp out of his red face, turned on him indignantly.

"You mean to say yer don't know what's up?" he demanded skeptically. "Where d' yer come from?"

"I've just arrived," answered Dean. "I'd like a chance to come in on the shouting."

"Well, you can shout all yer want. The damned company's busted!" yelled the man. "And Mr. Eltzmann's got control. There he is—God bless him!"

Which was satirical, for Dean realized that it was Eltzmann's name the crowd was shouting, and that it was bestowing anything rather than bouquets.

"Damn swindling company's busted, after hogging all the claims," said Dean's new acquaintance. "Eltzmann's collared the majority stock. That's what we're shouting for. We're going to make him give the Independent Diggers fair play or know the reason why. There ain't no law in Santa Maria since England got out."

"Eltzmann! Eltzmann!" shouted the crowd again, and the man at Dean's side joined in with undiminished vigor.

"Why don't you show yerself, you cowardly fox?" questioned one of the mob near by.

Of a sudden, as if in answer, Dean was amazed to see Eltzmann's bald head, with the flaming fringe, appear at an upper window of the structure, before which was a little gallery. Deliberately Eltzmann opened the window and stepped out. The crowd set up a renewed roar.

Eltzmann leaned his pudgy body over the wooden railing. What words he uttered were inaudible, for a roar of denunciation broke forth, and two hundred pairs of fists were raised threateningly toward him.

Suddenly Eltzmann put himself in an absurd attitude of offense. He doubled up his fists.

"Come on!" he bellowed. "There ain't a man 'ere I wouldn't have taken on when I was younger. And there ain't one I'm afraid of now!" He pointed to a big farmer who towered head and shoulders above the mob. "Come up-stairs, Goliath!" he yelled. "Come on, boy! I'll fight you for 'arf a quid!"

"Good old Eltzmann!" yelled the crowd, instantly won. "Good boy, Eltzmann! Fair play for us, that's all we're asking."

Eltzmann folded his arms. Instantly he had become the grave and serious magnate. His answer came to Dean's ears in snatches as the renewed outburst died away.

"... Fair play for all residents of Batakaland, white, black, green, or yellow ... new blood for the company ... justice for every white man ... free nigger labor and prospecting ..."

The wild, irregular cheering for the little man upon the balcony swelled into a full-throated pæan. And Eltzmann, laying one fat hand upon the region of his stomach, bowed.

"How about the Fulani Goldfields, Eltzmann?" shouted a bearded prospector from a wagon, which he had driven up the street and brought to a halt in the middle of the road.

Eltzmann made a trumpet out of his hands. "... Company considering," he yelled. "Fair play for all ... do my best for you, boys ... free drinks for every one in the King George till midnight."

The crowd emitted a tremendous cheer that drowned all further utterance. In a twinkling it had dissolved, the street was cleared, and a frantic mob was swarming into the bar of the King George Hotel at the opposite corner of the Market Square. Eltzmann stood alone upon the balcony. Behind him Dean saw a lighted room, with half a dozen men seated at desks. Eltzmann was elated with his triumph, and the leer with which he looked after the stampeders was more eloquent than speech.

Suddenly he looked down and caught Dean's gaze. He recognized his victim instantly; he betrayed his momentary surprise by the slight start he gave. Then he seemed to be considering. Finally his look became almost benignant. And, nodding to Dean, he jerked his thumb after the crowd with an indescribably vulgar gesture, as if to say:

"Go and have a drink on me!"

Dean almost reached for a stone to fling at him. But Eltzmann had gone waddling back into the room, and Dean turned away, conscious of the same unaccountable feeling of amusement that always mitigated his rancor. Eltzmann was at once rascal and clown, a combination as original as it was baffling.

But he swore that Eltzmann should never blacklist him in Batakaland and get away with it.

He fumed as he strode down the street and began to scan the hotels along the side of the square for lodgings. He was engaged in this occupation when a passer-by stopped, looked round at him, and called him by name.

Dean found himself looking into the face of Wimborne.

It was the second meeting with an old acquaintance, and it did not arouse any more agreeable sensation than the first. Dean nodded and was about to pass on his way when Wimborne laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Well, young man, what have you got to say for yourself?" he asked insolently.

"You go to the devil!" shouted Dean.

Wimborne cringed at once.

"Now, Mr. Gervaise, don't take that attitude," he said. "I thought we settled all that at our meeting. And when you didn't turn up I—but come up-stairs with me and have a talk anyway. I want to see you very importantly."

Dean, wondering, suffered Wimborne to take him to the offices of the company. They went up one flight, passed through a room in which one or two clerks were still working, and into a smaller one with "General Manager" upon the door. Wimborne waved Dean to a chair, and sat down at the desk.

"Possibly you did not receive my letter," he said.

"What letter?" demanded Dean.

"The letter that I sent to the post-office box you gave me, notifying you of your appointment as manager of the Fulani Mine," said Wimborne.

Dean was thunderstruck. It had never occurred to him that Wimborne had had any intention of employing him after the close of their interview.

"I didn't go for the letter," he admitted. "I thought from your manner at the interview, especially after I told you I had had some difficulty with Mr. Eltzmann, that the position would be filled by some one else."

Wimborne smiled, and his shifty eyes wandered all round Dean's face. Dean noticed that he had begun to breathe heavily, as if he was under the influence of some emotion.

"I sent you the appointment and a hundred pounds for outfit and passage money," he said. "The letter was returned to me, but we have not yet filled the appointment. As you see, it is with the Batakaland Company. Naturally, we have to be careful in our selection of men. You were the most satisfactory of all the applicants. You're not engaged?"

"Not yet."

"Might I ask what you were thinking of doing, Mr. Gervaise?"

The insolence was now quite gone out of Wimborne's tone; he seemed almost subservient.

"I had thought of prospecting."

Wimborne made a deprecatory movement of his thumb and forefinger.

"Mr. Gervaise, there's nothing in the prospecting line," he said. "The Independent Diggers have got some sort of an organization, but there's no alluvial gold worth speaking of, and the company controls the rich deposits at Fulani. Those who have come up here on false reports have already moved on.

"We'd better get this straight. From our viewpoint, the company has offered you a six months' contract at a hundred pounds a month to take charge of the Fulani Goldfields. And, as for your trouble with Mr. Eltzmann, at the time"—he emphasized the word—"nothing could have been a better recommendation than your quarrel with him, because Mr. Eltzmann was trying to get control, and we were fighting him tooth and nail.

"However, the situation has changed since then, as you are probably aware. The fact is, the miners are making so much trouble with the company, we had to let Mr. Eltzmann in. However, I don't believe he bears any malice toward you; I've talked with him, and if you're willing to bury the hatchet, I have no doubt he is."

"I'll have to think over it," began Dean. "I wasn't expecting—"

He was surprised at the look of disappointment on Wimborne's face.

"I hope you'll decide to come in with us," he said. "You see, we're in a difficult position just now, and we need reliable men. In fact, they're almost worth their weight in gold to us.

"England and Portugal are in dispute over the ownership of Batakaland. England's claim is undoubtedly the stronger. But England can't afford to take harsh measures. So it's going to be arbitrated by the League of Nations, and that may be a matter of years. Meanwhile, both sides have withdrawn their troops, and are pledged not to occupy the country.

"That puts us in a tight box. The settlers don't love us, because the company was forehanded enough to get possession of the best tracts of gold-bearing land, especially the Fulania Gold-fields. We've had to close them down because our employees were intimidated by them. And that's why I asked you the questions I did that day in Johannesburg. We want a man who can hold his own, who won't allow himself to be bluffed. That's why I tried to bluff you—to see if you would take it."

Wimborne's shifty eyes met Dean's for a moment. What he said might be true; but Dean had the suspicion that there was a good deal of the natural bully in him.

The sound of shouting came from the street. The two men went to the window, and saw the disorderly mob streaming out of the King George, howling and hooting. But being three-parts intoxicated they had largely lost their power for mischief, and two or three mounted troopers from the barracks were slowly shepherding them away from the company's headquarters.

"You see, Mr. Gervaise!" said Wimborne, pointing toward the crowd. "And we are only allowed a small police force. If the settlers should turn against us—what could we do? That's why we let Eltzmann in. We had to. Now—will you call upon Mr. Eltzmann in his office here at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, and go into the matter with him?"

Dean hesitated. "I'll think it over to-night," he answered, and if I can see my way clear Mr. Eltzmann won't be the hindrance."

"I hope you will, old man," answered Wimborne, patting Dean lovingly upon the shoulder; and the shifty eyes met his again and dropped once more.

CHAPTER IX.

SIGNED UP.

DEAN found a room at a hotel near by, and as the result of his reflections decided to call upon Eltzmann in the morning.

He disliked the idea intensely, but he had his living to earn, and what decided him was the reflection that six months' experience at the Fulani Mines would teach him a good deal of knowledge that he would require if he was to start prospecting on his own account. Besides, six hundred pounds would materially change the financial situation.

When he sent in his card in the morning Eltzmann received him at once. The little man seemed bubbling over with good humor. He grasped Dean's hand and shook it up and down. Then he made his visitor take one of his choicest cigars, and lit it himself for him.

"Sit down, Mr. Jarvis!" he exclaimed. "Well, well, well! To think that we should meet here again! And we're going to let bygones be bygones, eh?"

"I'm willing," answered Dean, again conscious of an odd and inexplicable sort of respect for the little rogue. He could not bring himself to mention his grievance of the blacklisting, though he was sure Eltzmann knew all about his attempts to obtain a position.

"So the company's engaged you to be manager of the Fulani Fields, eh, Mr. Jarvis?" asked Eltzmann. "Thought at the time that they were putting one over on me. T. Eltzmann ain't caught napping that way. I tell you one thing, boy: learn to use your enemies. I'd have that maxim writ up in letters of gold all over the offices, if there was enough gold to do it.

"Well, the company couldn't have got a better man, and so I told Mr. Wimborne meself," Eltzmann went on. "Of course, it 'urt me, that stubbornness of yours about the assay, which I won't deny, but we fixed

it all right with the new chap's name. I put him out next month. I won't have crooks working for me. Well, after you'd gone I said to meself, 'That young feller has a mind of his own. He's straight as a die.' And you mayn't know it, but it ain't an easy matter to find a honest man in this damn country. If you hadn't shook me, I'd have called you back and took you on again. But my pride wouldn't let me."

Dean, interested as he was in studying the human phenomenon before him, was at the same time keenly alert. He wondered why Eltzmann was laying it on so thick.

"So, as I said," the little man continued, drumming his fingers nervously upon his desk, "I was glad to hear we'd got you. Couldn't have done better. When can you start in?"

"At once," answered Dean. "But I'd like a little more information first. I understand that the Fulani Fields are not being worked at present?"

"Well, we have stopped work just now," said Eltzmann, "but we're going to start up again just as soon as we get these troubles settled. There ain't any good rock drillers up here. They're mostly Cornishmen, and Cornishmen's like sheep—either you've got them or you ain't. And the niggers is scared away by something or other. That don't matter, Mr. Jarvis."

He turned upon Dean sharply.

"All we want you to do," he said, "is to go out there and take general control. You won't be responsible for nothing until we've started operations again. We want you on the spot. There's a watchman there, and there's an engineer feller to see the machinery's oiled. You go out to be boss. And if the pay ain't enough, I'll make it a hundred and fifty. How'll that suit you?"

It suited Dean admirably, but the eagerness of Eltzmann to engage him, coming on top of Wimborne's, puzzled him considerably. There were plenty of mining managers to be had, even in Santa Maria.

"The only thing," continued Eltzmann, "is that we expect you to stick to it, and not leave your job. A six months' contract at a hundred and fifty, and a hundred pounds for your outfit and passage money —'ow about it?"

"I'll take it," answered Dean.

Eltzmann smirked all over his face.

"Good boy!" he said, clapping him on the shoulder. "Can you start in to work to-morrow? It's fifteen miles from here, but the coach 'll drop you."

"To-morrow will suit me," said Dean.

"You'll start to-day, so far as the pay goes," said Eltzmann. "'Ere's the contract. Put your name there. 'Arf a mo', Mr. Jarvis."

He rang his bell, and a clerk appeared from the adjoining office. "I want you to witness a signature, Mr. Gibbons," said Eltzmann.

Dean was glancing over the contract. It embodied exactly what he had been told, but there was a clause absolving the company from all liability in case of his death or injury. Dean, who had no mother or potential widow to hold in mind, did not care about that. He signed, and Gibbons witnessed the document in duplicate, and Dean put a copy in his pocket.

When the clerk was gone, Eltzmann wrote Dean a check for a hundred pounds, and handed it to him, together with a bunch of keys, which he took out of a little safe.

"The watchman has duplicates to most of them," he said. "But this 'ere's the key of the company vault at Fulani. The safe combination's F7M. Good-by, Mr. Jarvis, and I wish you joy of your new undertaking. You won't need to show no papers."

There was a touch of the magnate about Eltzmann's farewell. Dean, seeing that he was not expected to shake hands, turned away. He had almost reached the door when he heard Eltzmann call him. He turned back. The financier had risen, and was standing beside his desk, his face white and strained.

"Come 'ere! You — damn — fool— boy!" he said.

He laid his hand upon Dean's shoulder. Dean was amazed to see something like a tear in Eltzmann's eye.

"I called you a damn fool to go and take a job like that!" blustered Eltzmann. "'Ere's your damn contract. Tear it up and get out!"

Dean was too staggered to know how to take Eltzmann's attitude. Eltzmann's hand came down hard on Dean's shoulder again.

"Three months' pay if you want to break it!" gobbled the financier.

"Why?" inquired Dean.

"'Cause I led you into it, and you're as green as young grass. You don't know what's ahead of you. Them independent diggers, as they've got the cheek to call themselves, are a tough crowd to handle. They'll ride all over you. And they won't stop at nothing—murder, maybe. Don't say I didn't warn you, when you get laid out."

"I understand all that," said Dean, wondering at what appeared a spasm of conscience on Eltzmann's part.

"The political game out here ain't a gentlemen's game, like in your country and mine," Eltzmann went on—and there was no hint of irony in his tone. "We're all in this business for what we can get out of it, and we ain't using kid gloves, neither. And we shut our eyes as far as we can. Look 'ere! 'Ow about that Ashton business?"

Dean looked at him steadily. "Well?" he demanded.

"You knew Ashton was fighting mad with the company, because we sent him up for I. G. B."

"No."

In fact, Dean had not connected the company with Sir Philip's persecution at the time he had told his story, and he had not stopped to think about it. He had imagined Sir Philip's feud was with one of the independent mines dotted sparsely over Batakaland.

"Pore damn beggar!" soliloquized Eltzmann. "Got it in the neck, because he's one of them idealists. But you ought to have known, seeing that you was on the road with him. When you told Mr. Wimborne you'd think it over whether you'd work for us or not, I thought you were playing a double game. Now I see you're just green. Don't you know Sir Philip 'd give his soul to bust us, and that we're out for his head?"

"I didn't," answered Dean, "but, under the circumstances, you are certainly right about tearing up that contract. I shouldn't care to go on."

"'Old 'ard!" said Eltzmann. "Who said you wouldn't go on? When I offered you the chance of tearing up that contract, I wasn't doing it for nothing. I guessed you wouldn't want to hold the job when you knew I was on to that Ashton business. But you can't go back on the company like that."

Dean felt himself becoming enraged. "Just as you like, Mr. Eltzmann," he answered. "I'm willing to serve as mine manager, or I'm willing to get out. But anything I do will be straight and aboveboard."

Eltzmann uttered one of his characteristic explosions of disgust.

"Now I'll talk straight to you," he said. "If you're a friend of Sir Philip's, you know he's running his fat head against a brick wall. And you yourself might be laid by the heels to cool in jug for a year or so, for aiding and abetting him. Not that I'm a going to 'ave you pinched, whether you work for us or no. But what I told you in Johannesburg stands good up 'ere, and all over the world, and that's about sticking by one another. When you become an employee of the Batakaland Company, the company's interests are yours."

"Let's come to the point," said Dean.

Eltzmann looked at him warily, remembering his experience in Johannesburg. He laid a finger crookedly on his coat lapel.

"Now don't take this wrong, Mr. Jarvis," he said, "but you know as well as I do what sort of man that Mr. Ashton is. And I hadn't no share in putting him away. I don't doubt it was crooked business, but I didn't own a rod of land in Batakaland then, nor a single mining share. You know, Mr. Jarvis, that he ain't fit to fight the world, with his head in the clouds about that there concession of his. Suppose I was to promise you upon my soul that I'd see he got pardoned, and a nice fat little sum in full compensation for everything — would you 'elp to give me the chance of a talk with him? Or with that girl of his? You can do that, Mr. Jarvis."

"You want me to bring one or both of them to Santa Maria under a pledge of immunity?"

"Damn it, I want to get hold of the man!" cried Eltzmann. "For his own good, and the company's good, so that we can talk the 'ole situation over face to face and come to terms. You don't think I want to jug the pore beggar again, do you? I ain't got nothing against him. You're always misunderstanding me. And I never talked confidential like this to any employed man before, so 'elp me, and I'm damned if I know why I do it to you."

"Without beating about the bush, I suppose you want me to entrap Sir Philip and his daughter," said Dean.

"Get 'em 'ere!" roared Eltzmann. "I don't care how you bring them. I'm in the company to clean up the mess Wimborne's made. That's all."

"No," said Dean. "I don't suppose I'll see them, and I shall not try, while I am serving the company. No's the answer."

Eltzmann glared at him. Then he threw up his hands with his characteristic gesture.

"All right," he said. "I'll hold you to that contract, Jarvis. Go your own way. I was sorry for you, and I warned you. Now it's off my conscience. Good-by!"

"Any time," said Dean, "that you wish the contract abrogated, you'll find me ready. Any time within the next six months—seeing that you made it in the belief that I'd be willing to try to betray your opponent."

Eltzmann burst into choking laughter. "Oh, Lord, boy, you're like the young grass that withereth," he said, apparently under the impression that he was quoting the Bible.

But, as he closed the door, Dean saw Eltzmann sitting at his desk, and the look of guilt upon his face puzzled him.

CHAPTER X.

THE FULANI FIELDS.

HE was still wondering the next morning when he started on the road toward the Fulani Goldfields. He had bought a horse out of the hundred pounds bonus, a fairly serviceable Colonial, hard-mouthed, but well set up, and looking like a stayer, and had decided to travel before the heat of the day became oppressive.

The road was full of prospectors, journeying back toward Santa Maria. Some came in ox-wagons, some walked beside pack donkeys; some simply trudged along, their packs and spades over their shoulders. There was dejection on their faces as they looked up to exchange curt greetings.

Not long after noon Dean came in sight of the Fulani River. Beside it was a city of the dead.

He had learned that the Fulani Fields, outside the company's concession, were valueless, the deposits consisting, apparently, of a pocket reef of quartz, and that a new stampede had drawn the rush further up the country, but he had had no idea of the mushroom town that had sprung up and had then been abandoned, until he came upon it.

An entire square mile of mining claims had been pegged out and abandoned. The terrain was littered with old packing-cases, tin cans, and other débris. Huts, half constructed, were still standing everywhere. On either side of the road was a long line of buildings, erected out of every conceivable material. Some were of wood, some of wagonloads of damaged bricks, hauled in from the discard heap of the Santa Maria brickfields, some of wattle and daub, built in the bee-hive shape of the natives.

Outside the abandoned structures the eternal "saloon," "restaurant," and "ice-cold drinks" still flaunted themselves, and foreign names indicated the store where the eternal Hebraic proprietor of the eternal old clothes shop had lavished his eternal blandishments upon the eternally wary child of Ham.

There were shanties of brick and corrugated iron labeled "dance hall," and there were isolated, disreputable cabins with dirty lace curtains still strung across cracked window panes. But they, too, were empty.

Here and there, amid this confusion, however, a figure could be seen working. A few of the gold-diggers were still loath to abandon the dying El Dorado for that

which had just been born. On the edge of a dried up confluent a bearded old prospector was rocking a cradle as tenderly as if it contained a cherished child. In the middle of the road a man who had just emerged from a patched, tattered tent, was sluicing out a stone mortar and peering into it anxiously in the hope of discovering some trace of color beneath the grit.

And a third was fanning his dirt beside a shack of packing-cases, as if winnowing corn.

The territory of the company could be measured at a glance in the midst of this disorder. It consisted of about three-fourths of a square mile of ground, crossing the Fulani at the bend, through which the road ran. Here the snow-white tailings were already beginning to accumulate about the stamp mill and extraction plant. Near by were the shaft head, the pumping house, and the empty mule stables and wagon sheds.

A large enclosure within barbed wire, containing a long building of brick, showed the quarters that had been occupied by the natives. The cottage of the manager stood just outside, and further back were several isolated brick cottages, some half completed.

Fronting the road along which Dean was riding was the company store, locked and shuttered. There was no evidence of any intention of resuming operations at a near date.

Dean made his way toward the stamp mill, on the near side of which a red brick building began to stand out. Near this was a little shack, the door, of packing-case lids, swinging open in the breeze. Dean dismounted and tied his horse to a sapling close at hand.

Inside the shanty two men were playing cards upon a packing-case table. They did not pay the least attention to Dean as he approached, except to glance up at him casually, and Dean stood in the doorway, waiting until the round was finished, and taking them in.

One, evidently the engineer, for his finger-nails were black with oily dust, was a rat-like little man, of indeterminate age, with a bloated face, and, as he raised his heavy eyes, Dean perceived that he was half drunk already.

The second was an old man in a patched flannel shirt, with a whitish yellow beard stained with tobacco juice.

As the engineer began to deal again, Dean stepped forward.

"Don't let me interrupt your game," he said. "I'm Mr. Gervaise, the new manager, that's all."

The little man stumbled to his feet.

"Well, you needn't be so damned nasty about it!" he hiccuped. "You ain't the first manager of the Fulani Fields by a long sight."

"Five of 'em since we been here," muttered the old fellow. "Ain't that right, Jim?"

"I've give up counting them," answered the engineer.

Dean swept the cards into a heap. "Now, boys," he said, "I may be the sixth manager of the Fulani Fields, as you say, but so long as I'm here I'll have respect—else you can pack your bundles. Am I clear?"

"That's talking! That's the stuff, boy!" hiccuped the engineer. "I didn't mean no harm. It's so infernal slow here, one acts kind of queer at times. I'm the chief engineer, Jim Newman. This fellow's Tom Binns, the watchman."

"Aye, I'm Tom Binns," answered the old watchman, in a high pitched, quavering voice. "There ain't many men this side of the Limpopo don't know Tom Binns, nor t'other side neither. It was me found these here Fulani Fields eight year ago—"

"Ah, dry up, Tom! We've heard that yarn before," interposed the engineer. "They ain't run away agen, so I don't see what you're grousing at." He turned toward Dean. "I s'pose you'll want to have a look over the plant," he said, swaying to and fro with a gentle undulation as he spoke.

"A little later," answered Dean. "Perhaps Tom Binns can give me something to eat."

"Aye, that I can, sir," answered the watchman. "You go take a rest, Jim."

"I b'lieve I will," answered the other, and made his way unsteadily out of the

shack toward the brick building. Tom looked after him.

"P'raps you wouldn't mind eating here, sir, till we get things ship-shape for you," he said.

"I'll eat anywhere," answered Dean.

Tom Binns took down a can of bully beef from a shelf, lit a fire in front of the shack, and boiled a kettle of tea. In a few minutes Dean, seated on a packing-case, was eating with a relish. Ten minutes later he leaned back with a sense of intense satisfaction, and lit his pipe. He was conscious of the old watchman's eyes turned suspiciously on his.

"I suppose you don't want any papers to show who I am?" he inquired. "Mr. Eltzmann said they would not be necessary. I have the keys."

"No, Mr. Gervaise," answered Tom. "I was just wondering where you come from. You don't look like these here managers from Johannesburg as we've been having."

"I'm an American," said Dean, "but I was in Johannesburg for some time. This is a pretty rich mine, I understand—I haven't been through the reports yet."

"Richer than the Rand, boy!" answered Tom. "We got gold enough here to mint all the money the world's a going to need for the next hundred years."

"You don't look very busy," said Dean, glancing about him.

Tom seemed disconcerted at the remark.

"They'm waiting for new machinery, maybe," he answered. "What you ask me for?" he continued with sudden ferocity. "You ought to know, sir. The company don't tell me nothing. I'm only the watchman. And it was me that found it."

"You located this mine?"

"I did that!" shouted Tom. "Eight year agone, when they was saying there was no gold in Batakaland."

"You ought to have held on to it."

"Held on to it? There was half a dozen more besides me that was a-holding on to it—damn 'em all!"

He slammed his fist down on his knees, and then shot a glance at Dean so full of suspicion that Dean came to the conclusion the old man was a little deranged.

"I think I'll take a look over the place, Tom," he said, "to get some sort of idea of it. Then to-morrow we'll take it up in detail."

"Very well, sir," answered the other, who seemed ashamed now of his outburst.

He accompanied Dean into the stamp-mill, which he unlocked with the keys that he carried. Dean went through it, inspecting the machinery carefully. It was small, but of the modern kind, with gyrating rock-breakers for crushing the ore, which was then passed to the storage bins, and from here fed to the stamps. Next it was passed over the concentrating tables, where the gold was extracted with sodium cyanide, a final quantity being recovered from the tailings in the amalgamating pans.

From the mill Dean went over the territory, looking at the empty mule stables and taking a cursory glance into the mine. The headgear was in good order, but no ventilation had been installed, and there was stagnant water in the bottom of the shaft.

"When do you expect to start up again?" Dean asked.

Tom Binns tapped him on the shoulder. "Never!" he hissed in his ear.

"What d'you mean?"

Tom became evasive instantly, and Dean could get nothing more out of him. He led the way toward the brick building.

"This here's your quarters, sir," he said as they entered.

The building consisted of two rooms. The outer was a cheaply furnished living-room, with a few plates and dishes on a buffet. The inner contained a cot bed and bureau; clothes were scattered about the floor, and on the bed lay Newman, fast asleep.

"Jim's been a-sleeping here, Mr. Gervaise," said the watchman apologetically. "He had a touch of rheumatiz, and didn't like his quarters over yonder. But he'll be turning out this afternoon, and then we'll get the place shipshape. I'll cook for you; there ain't no boys here, Mr. Gervaise, at present."

Dean was wondering what had become of Tietjens. He would have given a good deal just then for the services of the Hottentot.

"Where does this door lead to?" he

asked as they went back into the living-room, in which a second door was set opposite the entrance.

"That's the comp'ny offices, sir," answered Tom, unlocking it.

The bare room, whose floor was laid immediately upon the ground beneath, contained a huge, dusty desk, and a few tattered papers, principally receipted bills, hung upon files; but it was evident that everything of use had been removed, and that the company was not contemplating the resumption of operations at any early date.

"And this?" Dean asked, indicating another door in the rear of the office.

"That's only the comp'ny vault, Mr. Gervaise. There ain't nothing in there," replied the watchman.

Something about Tom's manner aroused Dean's curiosity. "I'll go down and have a look," he answered.

With manifest reluctance Tom took a fragment of candle from a shelf inside the office, and unlocking the door, lit it and preceded Dean down a flight of concrete steps into a concreted cellar. There was nothing in the place except a huge iron safe in one corner.

"Anything inside?" asked Dean.

"Now it ain't no good askin' me!" the watchman almost shouted. "It ain't my business. I'm the watchman! I ain't in charge of nothing that's locked away, except to see that it ain't unlocked only by them as has the right to."

Dean, still more curious, took the candle from Tom's hand and went toward the safe. It was of American manufacture, but an old patent—one of the earliest of the dial locks, having a combination of three letters or numbers, corresponding to three wheels within the lock. It was not even of hardened steel, and a perceptible crack was visible between the door and the frame. Yet the safe was doubtless serviceable enough in a country where no skilled cracksman was likely to go, and where, even if he appeared, he could have made his fortune honestly by putting his trade to lawful uses.

"You don't know what's in here, Tom?" asked Dean, to try the watchman again. His suspicions were growing that Tom was in possession of some knowledge that it might be useful for him to share.

"When I seed the last manager, Mr. Briggs, close it there weren't nothing inside," answered Tom morosely. "That's all I can tell you, sir. They used to keep the gold here when they was waiting for shipment."

Dean adjusted the combination, hearing the telltale revolutions of the inner wheels, and turned the handle. There was a small shelf near the top of the large interior, with a compartment for papers, and a small tin box, open. Below were two coarse burlap bags, tied tightly about the necks, and bulging.

Dean drew the strings. Each of them was full of gold-dust, just as it had been precipitated by the zinc from the sodium cyanide solution. The value of the two must have run into more than a thousand pounds.

The look on Tom's face showed Dean that the watchman must have been aware of the contents of the safe; why he had lied was at the moment unfathomable.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE NIGHT.

DEAN put back the bags and closed the door. "How long has this been here?" he asked quietly.

The watchman was trembling.

"I dunno, sir!" he cried. "It ain't my business. I told you that much afore you opened it."

Dean handed him back the candle.

"All right, Tom," he answered. "That's all I want to see to-day. You have the inventories, I suppose?"

"We never had none of them things sence I been here," mumbled Tom.

"I mean the list of all the properties of the mine. Isn't there a list hanging up on each of the premises?"

"I never seed none," answered Tom.

Dean went past him up the stairs. It was characteristic of him, before considering these matters, to do what there was to be done. He had off-saddled his horse, and

now he placed the saddle and bridle inside the brick cottage, led the beast down to the stream, and watered it. Afterward he knee-haltered it, so that it could not stray far, and turned it out to graze along the river-bank.

He brooded over the situation all the rest of the day. Decidedly there was something queer about his job. It was incredible that neither Wimborne nor Eltzmann should have known about the gold. Yet, why had they not informed him?

Eltzmann had hinted at a raid by the prospectors, but he must have known that the mining camp at Fulani was broken up.

Then there was the knowledge that he was working against Lois and Sir Philip. He had signed the contract without realizing that the company was undoubtedly responsible for the latter's persecution. When Sir Philip told him the story he had not known enough of conditions in Batakaland to understand this. It was Eltzmann's demand that had given him light; but the contract was then already signed.

At sundown old Tom brought some provisions, lit a fire before the cottage, and cooked him a mess of bully beef and canned vegetables, with damper of his making, canned butter, and tea. Dean sat over his fire, smoking, and still brooding.

He had never felt so miserable, and the mystery worried him profoundly. One thing was clear: he must learn all he could from the watchman.

A little later, when it had grown dark, he went toward his shack. Tom Binns was seated on the step, crouched over his fire, now dying to an ember. A candle, flickering in the interior behind him, flung his face into a silhouette that startled Dean as he looked at it.

He had thought of Tom as the typical time and toil worn prospector in harmless old age; the features that the candle-flame disclosed were those of a man haunted by a consuming devil. A devil of greed! Even the fingers, crooked upon Tom's knees, seemed yearning to grasp something that evaded them.

At Dean's approach Tom started, as if from some disturbing thoughts, looked up, and nodded.

Dean handed him a piece of plug tobacco as a propitiatory gift, and old Tom cut a thin slice with a clasp knife and began rubbing it slowly between his hands, preparatory to stuffing it into the burned-out pipe upon his knees. Dean sat down on an adjacent packing-case and watched him apply the match.

"Looks as if the rains are going to break to-night," he said, glancing toward the western horizon, where vivid lightning played among the thunder-clouds which for days past had hung more and more heavily over the veldt. "It will be a good thing for the miners," he added, thinking of the fanner, and of the old prospector rocking the cradle at the edge of the dried-up stream.

"It 'll be a good thing for them as knows," muttered Tom. Then he broke into a sneering cackle. "Them fools has gone on to look for the alluvial," he jeered, "while all the time it's lying thicker'n salt in a salt-mine, if they knew where to look for it."

He turned his old eyes malevolently upon Dean's face. "I was a-telling you, sir, as how this mine was a little Rand on its own," he said. "God forgive me for that lie. This here property's a fake, Mr. Gervaise," he continued in a low voice. "A swindle clean through. There's gold in it, but it don't pay to work it. The company purtends as it's the richest gold-mine in Batakaland. Gol-conda, they calls it, signifying I don't know what, save that it's rich. Well, it ain't rich. It's just the sort of quartz with a streak of color in it that you can pick up anywheres along the roadside."

His cackle sounded horrible in the darkness.

"Aye, it was me found this here Golconda," he cried, "but I warn't sich a fool as the comp'ny thought I was. When they thought they knew where this here Golconda was they pushed me to the wall and grabbed it. But it ain't here. It's nigh here, but this ain't it. Lord, how I laughed when I seed 'em begin to sink the shaft and set up the stamp-mill!"

"But why does the company pretend that the mine is rich?" asked Dean.

Old Tom drew a skinny finger across his

hand. "That's the regular game, Mr. Gervaise," he answered. "Chiefly, because of their investors. But they knows there's a big pocket of alluvial somewheres along the Fulani bed, only they don't know I knows where it is. It's been known for years past. And it's known that there's just the one pocket and no more. So, by purtending that they've found it, they've skeered away the little fellows who was hangin' on to 'em and can't find nothing."

"So the other managers left because they discovered that the mine was not going to start up again?"

"They guessed it was a fake, and they didn't trust the comp'ny. This mine will never start up, Mr. Gervaise. It's bluff—bluff all through, like the comp'ny itself. When the little fellows' abandoned claims fall in the comp'ny will take them over and search. But they won't never find nothing unless they come to Tom Binns."

"And nobody knows but you?"

"Me and Sir Phil Ashton—and he's in jug and can't tell. Damn him! I told him afore the comp'ny men come in that if he and me went partners we'd be millionaires in a few years. Wouldn't listen to me. Didn't care nothing for gold. Head all whirlin' about freedom and oppressed races, and sich damn nonsense, when there was the gold a-lying at his feet for the picking up. Damn him!" he raved malevolently. "Gimme a knave rather'n a fool every day, sir!"

"Look here, Tom," said Dean, "if you know where this pocket is to be found, why don't you give up your job and work it?"

Tom turned his face upon Dean's scornfully. "Look here, boy—I mean Mr. Gervaise," he said, "it's clear enough to me you're a raw hand at this game. That's what made me take to you. I wouldn't ha' told these things to nobody but you. Eight years agone I found this here pocket of gold. And I went to the king to get the concession. And there was others had wind of it, and was buzzin' round the old king like bees. Time was when Sir Phil and I could have pulled off the trick. But, as I was a-sayin', he wouldn't come in with me. He had other fish to fry. And he got the concession, and wouldn't let me in—me that could have made him a millionaire inside of a year.

"Why didn't I take out a license and work my claim after his concession fell through and the comp'ny grabbed the land. You heard what they did to him?"

"I've heard something."

"Put him away in jug, because he'd got a treaty from King Matsucbenga, and they wanted his land. Jugged him for trading in a lump of gold he'd picked up on his own land! There ain't no law nor justice in Batakaland sence the British got out. Why don't I work that mine? You think I want to serve five or ten years on the breakwater at Cape Town? Them as knows things like that finds it pays to keep quiet. I'm a going to let that thieving comp'ny look for the gold, and I'm a going to set back and laugh. I'm the watchman—that's me!"

"And now," said Dean, "I want you to tell me what you know about that gold inside the safe."

Tom turned his face suspiciously upon Dean.

"What you ask me that for again?" he demanded. "I told you—"

"Yes, I know what you told me, Tom. But I want to know how long that gold has been there. The company told me nothing about it. They must know it is there. A thousand pounds' worth of gold isn't put away and forgotten."

Old Tom was trembling.

"Look a-here, sir," he began, laying his forefinger on Dean's hand again. "I just told you how the comp'ny jugged Sir Phil Ashton for selling a lump of his own gold. That was a plant, same as this. They want to jug me, 'cos they guess I know where the alluvial lies and won't tell them."

The suspicion flashed through Dean's mind that it was himself the company wanted to implicate, that this was Eltzmann's revenge for the incident in Johannesburg. But he dismissed the idea as too fantastic.

"I've been thinking it over," quavered Tom. "It's a plant, like that one. And I'm a going to leave. They wants to jug me. They're a going to say as they weighed it, and some of it's gone. I'm a going to leave, sir. And if I was you I'd leave. I

wouldn't wait for my pay, I'd leave as quick as I could go, 'cos the comp'ny's got it in for you, or they'd never have made you manager, three months after the last manager left, and they said there wouldn't be no need of another till the mine started up again. They ain't hired you to set round twiddling your thumbs for nought, Mr. Gervaise. They'm slick, them comp'ny men, and they'm playing their own game, especially now that Mr. Eltzmann's come in.

"I ain't a fool, sir. There was two strange men here yesterday, riding on hosses. Great haste they was in, and they said you was a-coming, and great keer was to be took of you, and they'd drop in for a friendly visit soon. They laughed when they said that.

"And they opened the safe with their own keys and put the gold in, after weighing it before my eyes. And they made me give 'em a receipt for it, and said it warn't necessary to tell you, unless I was tired of my job. At first I'd thought they was independents, but when I seed that gold I knew they was Mr. Wimborne's men all right. And I heered them talking and laughing about you, and it wasn't no good they had in mind, so far as I could judge.

"I'm going, sir. I've seed that plant before, and they ain't going to send Tom Binns to the breakwater. You take keer of yourself, sir. You watch out for that damn comp'ny. Maybe it's just an old man's ideas, Mr. Gervaise. But you watch out—and keep your gun handy, sir!"

An old man, with the typical grievance and suspicions of the prospector. Dean could not determine how much of Tom's talk was a fixed obsession, whether he really had knowledge of the location of a rich alluvial deposit. But one thing was clear enough: the development of the Fulani Fields had been suspended indefinitely. And another—some plot was brewing, and Eltzmann had had a spasm of conscience before he implicated him.

But why had Eltzmann and Wimborne been so anxious to secure his services?

A few drops of rain had begun to fall heavily in the dust. That was the sign of the wet season's onset: once the rains broke there would be torrential daily downpours throughout the summer months till March. Dean left Tom muttering and made his way back toward his cottage, lit his candle, and went into the bedroom.

Profound and raucous snores greeted him. Newman, the engineer, was lying dead drunk upon his bed, an empty whisky-bottle at his side. He had hardly moved all day, and doubtless was on a periodical drunk.

The sight of him set Dean flaming into swift anger. The little annoyance seemed the culmination of the day. He strode to the bedside and shook the engineer vigorously by the shoulders. But Newman's head flopped back upon the pillow like a chunk of lead: the man was almost in a state of coma.

For a moment Dean was tempted to drag the man out of the cottage and let him sleep off his stupor upon the veldt, rain or no rain. But the engineer had gone there by force of habit, and the sight of the soiled bed, and the clothes scattered over the floor disgusted Dean too much to make the bedroom a possible habitation for him that night. The air, too, was full of the smell of exhaled whisky.

The place would have to be thoroughly cleaned before Dean could think of taking up his quarters there. He went out. There was a shack near by, and he guessed that Newman had previously occupied it. Probably it would do to pass the night in, since the engineer had not occupied it of late. He made his way toward it.

The sprinkle of rain was growing heavier, and Dean had just reached the shack when there came a resounding thunder-clap, and instantly the heavens were opened.

The water poured down in bucketfuls, as if some celestial housemaid were emptying giant pails. Instantly the ground was an inch deep in water, which went roaring down the dried gullies toward the Fulani. The ground was white with hail, which hammered against the little window-pane as if to break it. Vivid flashes of forked lightning pierced the intense darkness almost continuously. The thunder was like the roar of a dozen batteries.

Striking a match when he had closed the door against the wind, Dean found a candle

in a holder. He looked about him by its flickering light, and saw that he was in a dilapidated cabin containing little except dust and a large Boer bed, made of wooden posts with thongs of antelope hide criss-crossing it from side to side. It was clean, however, and looked fairly comfortable to one accustomed to camping on the veldt. Dean could manage without a blanket until the coach brought his things the following day.

He folded his coat and placed it at the head of the bed for a pillow. A little shamefacedly, but realizing that something might lie behind Tom Binn's warning, he placed his loaded revolver at his side, and lying down, tried to sleep.

But the mystery of the situation worked on his mind, perplexing him to the point of insomnia. A dozen times he dozed, and started up, listening to the steady patter of the rain and the roaring of the torrents through the gullies. And suddenly he found himself sitting bolt upright.

He had been dreaming of Lois. She seemed in danger, she seemed to be calling to him. Mixed with this had sounded the *splash, splash* of a horse's hoofs over the wet ground. He listened—he could hear nothing.

He lay down again, and was half asleep once more when there came an unmistakable sound. It was the long reverberation of a rifle-shot.

Instantly he was on his feet, slipping on his coat. The crack that had aroused him still echoed among the surrounding hills. It had seemed to come from the direction of Tom Binns's shack. Dean felt for a match, but then instinct warned him not to show a light in the cottage. Revolver in hand, he went out of the door.

Nothing was visible through the darkness except the faint outlines of the mill, save when an infrequent flash of lightning lit up the whole scene in an instantaneous picture. And nothing was moving. Dean trod on a bed of soft mud, deadening the sound of his footsteps, but clogging them, and now and again he went splashing into a gulley, deluging himself with water.

By the aid of the flashes he located Binns's shack. As he reached it a jagged fork of lightning illumined the entire interior. The door was wide open, and there was nobody upon the bed.

Dean went in, and waiting till the next flash came, glanced about him. The shack was stripped of everything except the bedstead. It looked as if the watchman had carried out his threat of departure almost upon the word.

Dean went toward the cottage that he should have occupied. The first thing he noticed was that the door of this was wide open, too.

He suddenly remembered that he had closed it to keep out the rain, and Newman had been too drunk to have been capable of rising from the bed.

Dean went into the outer room softly. He listened at the bedroom door, and heard the sound as of water dripping through the roof. He struck a match, shielding it with his hand so that the direct flame should not be visible to any one outside.

Then he saw Newman. The engineer would never rise from the bed again. He lay stone dead, with a bullet-wound through the heart, and the blood still dripped to the growing pool upon the floor beneath.

CHAPTER XII.

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

DEAN bent over the dead man and laid his hand upon the wrist. The pulse had ceased to beat, and the hand was beginning to grow cold. The engineer had been killed in his stupor instantly, for there was no expression of either fear or surprise upon his face—only a relaxation of the muscles about the eyes and fallen jaw. The dead man had not even changed his position in the bed.

Whoever the murderer was, it was evident that he had mistaken Newman for Dean.

Dean went to the door and listened. Not a sound was to be heard but the steady dripping of the rain. He pushed against the door that led into the company offices. As he had half expected, it was open. The door that led down to the vault was open, too. Dean struck another match and went

down. The safe door was wide open, and the gold was gone.

Dean had expected that, but he had also expected to find the safe blown open, not unlocked by somebody in possession of the combination. The murderer must have had that, and all the keys in duplicate as well.

Suddenly Dean remembered the look upon the watchman's face that afternoon, after he had first seen the gold. If ever a man had looked devil-ridden by greed, that man was the watchman.

Binns, then, must have killed Newman and ridden off with the two bags of gold.

Dean made his way out of the cottage and went to the watchman's shack again. This time he lit the piece of candle that was on the packing-case and examined the place minutely. There was no doubt from its appearance that Binns had deliberately prepared for flight. He had, indeed, advertised his intention. The murder must have been an afterthought. And yet it seemed purposeless.

Suddenly Dean heard the distant whinny of his horse beside the river. He remembered that the watchman must have seen him take the animal to the water and knee-halter it. It could not have strayed far, so fastened. And Dean was sure that there had been no other horse upon the property. Then there was the probability that Binns had meant to catch it and ride away; if so, it was clear that he had not yet had time to accomplish his purpose.

Then he would find Binns beside the river; or, if he had departed afoot, he should be able to catch up with him along the road.

Immediately Dean started running toward the stream, over ground which became more and more of a bog as he proceeded. The downfall had temporarily ceased, and by the faint light of a quarter-moon that flickered among the clouds Dean was able to avoid the gullies, through which miniature torrents were raging down to the Fulani.

The river itself now spread from shore to shore, covering the sand-bars, and the torrent was roaring down the channel from the hills.

Presently Dean made out the horse, standing with one leg drawn up by the halter, and its ears pricked back, listening intently. He ran to it, untied the halter from its knee, and began to lead it back to the cottage, where he had deposited his saddle.

If the saddle were still there it would show that the watchman had planned his flight afoot; there should be no difficulty in coming up with him.

He was halfway when his horse stopped, tugging at its halter. At that moment there came the faint whinny of a second horse somewhere near the stamp-mill. Dean's horse answered it.

Dean was alert on the instant. The second horse might belong to one of the prospectors along the road, and have strayed. On the other hand—he hurried through the mud until he saw in front of him the shack which he had occupied.

The candle, which he remembered to have left burning, had gone out. The wind had died down; the outer door was closed. Suspicion became acute instantly. He opened the door noiselessly and crept toward the bedroom, holding the loaded revolver before him.

At the door he stopped. It was pitch dark inside, but instinct told him that there was more than the body of Newman there. Straining his eyes through the darkness, gradually he imagined that he began to make out the form of a figure beside the bed. Yet he could not be sure, and he waited, all his muscles braced for instant action, and every nerve tense with expectation.

He heard a drop of blood fall to the ground, and after a long interval, another. But between these there seemed to be a slight, faint, regular sound, like the intake of breathing. Suddenly he sprang forward.

"Hands up!" he shouted. "Come out of there before I fire!"

He heard a gasp. A figure stumbled from its knees toward him. A woman—Lois!

"Dean!" she cried incredulously. Her arms were round his neck. Her face peered into his. "Dean! Thank God! I thought you were dead!"

She drew him to the little window, her

face against his own, staring at him until she was sure. Then she fell to sobbing in his arms.

He held her fast in thankfulness that made him momentarily forget the murdered man and all else. Yet there was no passion in his clasp. At that moment it seemed the most natural thing in the world to both of them. It was the spontaneous recognition of their comradeship, their common danger —their common happiness. Her tears fell on his face, and she could hardly find her voice for a long time.

"I thought that you were dead, Dean!" she wept. "I came in and saw some one lying upon the bed—a dead man, and blood; and I was frantic. I kneeled there; I could not think; then you came in."

"How long have you been here, Lois?"

"A minute. Five minutes. I don't know, Dean. I dared not move, I had no matches, and I was sure it was you. I nearly went mad when Tietjens warned me."

"Tietjens?"

"He learned of the plot to murder you, and came to tell me of it. Who is he?" she asked, shuddering, and turning toward the bed. "His face is cold. He is dead—oh, Dean, thank God it wasn't you!"

"He is the engineer of the mine. I never saw him until yesterday. He took my bed, and I went to another shack. He knew nothing; he must have been killed instantly."

"The cowardly murderers!" she cried. "They murdered a sleeping man whom they were afraid to face awake, because they thought that he was you. I know they were afraid. For a long time they refused to obey their orders, even though these were to kill you in your sleep. I know all their plans, and the rascal who is at the back of them and hired them."

"Wimborne?" asked Dean incredulously, because he could think of no one else.

"Yes. It was planned weeks ago, though the final arrangements were only made the day before yesterday. Dean, I want your help, but I must tell you first. I'll be as quick as I can. I know that nothing but this accident could have saved you. They went to the bedside in the darkness and fired into his body. And but for this cowardly mistake I should have been too late."

"Van Leenen and Smit?"

"Yes, Dean. This is how I know. When my father and I escaped the police made Tietjens a prisoner. He gnawed the ropes with his teeth that night and escaped. He followed Van Leenen's wagon. For three days he followed it, creeping up every night in the darkness and listening as those men talked of their plans. On the third night they camped in the Market Square of Santa Maria. You were in the town, although you did not guess that they were.

"Late that night Mr. Wimborne went to the wagon. He told them that he had had a talk with you, and that he thought you meant to take the position. He wanted them to fulfill some compact by which they were to murder you. Do you know why?"

Dean shook his head. "Wimborne is no enemy of mine," he answered.

"Because you are an American with influential connections in your own country. It was planned long ago to have an influential American murdered. Since England withdrew her troops from Batakaland the company has been powerless. The diggers hate it, and are threatening revolt. There is no law here, and the company needs law to protect it. By the murder of an American, England would be compelled to intervene and police the country."

Dean gasped at the revelation. It explained everything—Wimborne's eagerness to have him take the post, and Eltzmann's reluctance.

"And Eltzmann was in the game?" he asked.

"I don't know, Dean. Probably. They will stick at nothing—none of them, so long as they can secure their hold upon the land which is my father's."

"I certainly am like the young grass that withereth," reflected Dean. "Lois," he said, "when I agreed to work for the company I did not know it was they who had persecuted your father."

"Never mind, Dean! Listen until I finish. The men would not consent to kill you, not until Mr. Wimborne raised his offer to five hundred pounds. Tietjens will swear to that, though the oath of a black

man counts for nothing. Five hundred pounds apiece, and the promise of protection. It would be supposed some of the miners had killed you. Some gold was to be stolen, that they might give color to the scheme."

Dean whistled. "A neat, well-thought-out little game!" he said. "But how about you, Lois—how did you meet Tietjens?"

"After our escape my father and I hid in the bush on the Mashonaland side of the Limpopo. We returned later, after the police had gone. We were afraid you had been killed. When we could not find you we were sure you had been taken. Then there was nothing to do but to go on to a hiding-place in the mountains.

"When we got there my father collapsed. I was afraid he was dying. I resolved to go to Santa Maria to try to find a doctor. There used to be a good doctor there, a good man who, I believed, would come with me and not betray us. But when I got there I found that he had gone down-country.

"I was in despair. I did not know what to do—and then I met Tietjens yesterday evening. He warned me of the plot. He had been on his way to warn you. But he could not have reached the mine in time, so I sent him to my father, telling him to take care of him. He knows our hiding-place and worked for my father once. He will defend him with his life. That's all, Dean. But I must hurry back to my father. I am afraid he will die while I am gone. And I am afraid some evil may be planned against him. Come with me, Dean! My horse is tied to the barbed wire. I'll go for it. You'll come, Dean?"

"Yes, I'll come," answered Dean grimly. "Stay here, Lois—not here, but in this other room. I'll bring your horse and ride with you to your father. And afterward I shall go back and settle accounts with Mr. Wimborne and his hired murderers."

He led the girl into the living-room and closed the bedroom door upon what lay within.

He carried out his saddle and bridle, got the bit into his horse's mouth, and slipped the headstall on. He saddled, pulling in the girth an extra hole. Then he went for Lois's horse, and soon came upon it, fastened to the wire fence of the native compound. He led it back to where Lois stood waiting for him in the doorway.

The clouds had rolled back, and it was a little lighter now, though lightning still flashed along the horizon, and there came the low growl of distant thunder. A second storm was beating up out of the east.

Dean held his hand for the girl to mount. "How far is it?" he asked.

"There is a track across the veldt will take us there in four or five hours," she answered, springing lightly into the saddle. "But that is not the place where we had planned to go. If we could reach the stronghold in the mountains, which my father discovered long ago, before any other white men had entered this country, we should be safe against pursuit. But we had to stop at an abandoned kraal, because he was too ill to go further. That is why I am afraid he will be found, and—"

She shuddered, and took the reins. The horses started.

"The river is in flood," said Dean. "The crossing may be difficult."

"We do not have to cross the Fulani," she answered. "The place is on this side of the stream, toward the mountains."

They found the track and turned their horses along it. Presently Dean asked: "You did not hear the murderers?"

"No, Dean."

She knew what he was thinking of. She was afraid that Smit and Van Leenen had taken the same road; afraid for Dean's sake, and even more for her father's. Dean was exulting in the hope of squaring the account.

They rode for a long time in silence. Now and again there came a renewed downpour, drenching them to the skin immediately. The horses picked their way along ground which gradually grew rougher as they ascended the foothills of the great granite plateau of the interior, with its ranges of *kopjes* tossed everywhere, as if a giant hand had raked the face of the land. The trail was a Kaffir track, one of the old paths that intersect the interior of the Dark Continent; no wagon had traversed it, and often it was discernible only to the horses

as they followed its course between the bowlders.

It was not far from dawn when Lois pulled in her horse. They had reached the summit of the elevation up which they had been climbing steadily for four hours. Everywhere about them rose the granite hills, bare, save for thorn scrub and cactus.

"We must leave the path now," she said. "It lies over there."

She pointed toward twin *kopjes* that towered like pyramids in the distance, with wooded bush veldt between them. "It was a native village until the Portuguese raided it three years ago. My father knew of it; that is where he is lying."

They rested a few moments. On their right hand, in a deep gorge, the Fulani roared, now a furious torrent, impassable even at the drift, until the spate abated. Suddenly Dean's horse pricked up its ears and reared.

"What is that?" cried the girl.

Something was lying huddled among the bowlders. Dean dismounted and led the shying beast toward it. It was the body of a man—of two men.

One was Tietjens, the other the Bushman Swartz, and they were fast in each other's arms, but in no love embrace. Upon the face of each was stamped the last fury of the death struggle. Tietjens had a gaping gun-shot wound in the breast, such a should have killed a white man instantly. Swartz's head was nearly severed from his body by a common small clasp knife, held immovably in Tietjens's fingers.

Both bodies were cold, but they had not begun to stiffen. They had probably been dead an hour.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Feud for Thought

by *Jack Whitman*

THE younger generation sure beats all! I can't make 'em out. They don't vote like their fathers did, and they don't act like the men that made this great and glorious land of desert, sand, bunchgrass and scrawny cattle. Take for instance this young Bill Haskell. Understand I haven't got a thing against Bill—he's a good lad accordin' to his mazdas, which ain't mine, and I'm plumb satisfied to go on bein' foreman for him here on the Straight H, just as I was for fifteen years for his late lamented uncle, Steve Haskell. But Bill's always doin' things I can't make out. You never know what he's goin' to do next, or how. But there's one good thing about Bill, which is like old Steve—he sure gets things done.

Old Steve was easy to comprehend. You always knew just where he stood, and he couldn't be moved from where he stood, what's more. Him and I got along fine.

We knew who we didn't like, and kept our fingers trigger-wise to get 'em before they got us. Also, we knew our friends. But this boy Bill, which inherits the Straight H when Steve passed out in the saddle, like he always said he would, Bill don't know a friend from an enemy. He likes everybody, which ain't a good plan, because a lot of hombres in this wild desert ain't made for affection, no more'n a rattlesnake. And Bill's always grinning, which ain't exactly a grown-up-man way of lookin' unless there's something darn funny to grin about.

And there wasn't anything exactly humoresque, as the fiddler says, in the situation here on the Straight H when young Bill came on to take charge of affairs. He hailed from somewhere east of the Hudson River, so he tells me, but I don't know about the grazing back there, never going beyond Kansas City myself. He knew something about horseflesh, though, only he couldn't get used to a Mexican saddle right off. And he sure could shoot with a funny little toy gun, not more'n three inches long. Why, he could keep a tin can rolling in the air till it was so full of holes there wasn't any tin left.

What he got into out here on the Straight H was this: We had about a thousand yearlings here on the home ranch, and not enough food and water to take care of 'em proper. And we had to get 'em up to the range, ten miles up in the mountains, where the grass was green and long, and the water beneficial, as the drug-store says, in order to make 'em fat and get 'em ready for shipment East.

Not just because we wanted to cash in on the high price of beef, which is a natural thing to want, but also for humanitarian reasons. If we didn't, you folks back East would go without your porterhouse steaks, roast beef, or soup bones, accordin' to your economy, and turn vegetarian, which is the next thing to bolshevik, I understand.

Well, the fly on the ornament was this: The only way to get those yearlings up to the range was to drive 'em over the ranch belongin' to a female of the species called Old Rose. This Rose *señora* would be as sour by any other name same as vinegar. I've seen some ornery critters in my time, but this Rose lady sure took the French pastry and won the brown derby in the Ornery Sweepstakes. And as for lettin' us drive our yearlings over her ranch—say, if she'd been the Beligan Rose they sing about, the Kaiser would never have left his home town on that little invasion picnic of his!

We had to get those yearlings to that range, and we had to cross Old Rose's place to do it, because old Baldy, which is a mighty steep but good-lookin' mountain hereabouts, blocked us on one side and Lobos Cañon on the other. Rose had me stopped, I'll admit without a blush, and she had old Steve stopped in his time. I was all for passin' the buck to young Bill, but when I saw that grin of his and that friendly way I sad to myself, " Our yearlings are goin' to die!"

This here feud between Old Rose and Steve had been goin' on for as long as I can remember, and before that, and both of 'em seemed to enjoy it. Steve would have died ten years ago of plain humdrum monotony if he hadn't had this fight on his hands, and Rose too. Only Rose had a young girl she'd adopted to keep her interested too—a girl named Molly, darned pretty, with a lot of yellow hair and a way with her that was as different from Rose as could be.

I always wondered how they could love each other, as they sure seemed to. Molly didn't seem to have it in her to hate anybody, not even a Haskell like Steve, although Old Rose must have brought her up to shoot a Haskell on sight.

So far as water was concerned, Old Rose was in the same boat as we were, only she didn't have any stock to speak of. Her land, like the Straight H home-place, was dry. We got our water in barrels, three miles away, at the pump of the Valley Development Company, which is all valley and no development, since they went broke on an irrigation project before they even stocked their place. Many a time I've seen little Molly drive down there, with three big barrels on a cart, to get what water they needed. And she always had a smile for me and a pleasant word, except when Rose

was along to cuss everybody on the Straight H. Nice girl, Molly!

Well, to get back to Bill and his grin. I was in town waiting for his train to arrive, sitting in the shade, half asleep maybe, on the veranda of the hotel. The train got there while I was still taking it easy, and I didn't meet the boy just then. I woke up to hear a lot of uncouth hombres laughin' over in front of Jim Slade's store. Out in front of Jim's emporium was Old Rose's half-dead white mare, hitched to her cart. Then I saw Old Rose herself standing by, cussin' most unladylike and otherwise expressin' her opinion of a nice-lookin' grinnin' young feller whose clothes weren't made for battlin' with sage-brush. This was Bill Haskell.

Bill had stepped into the store, it seems, to look for me. There he had seen Old Rose, which he had never heard of, pickin' up a sack of flour she had just bought off Jim and startin' out the door with it on her shoulder. The other gents standing in front of the store, and knowin' Old Rose, made no effort whatever to be chivalrous, but Bill steps up to her like Mr. Galahad and says:

"Allow me, please!"

With that he takes the sack of flour on his own shoulder, not caring about the suit he was wearin' at all, and carries it out to the cart. Old Rose is too flabbergasted to say anything, but she don't like it a little. Her motto is: "I won't be beholden to ye!"

Bill puts the sack of flour on the cart, takes off his cityfied hat, and makes a bow like an actor I saw once in Kansas City.

"Who be ye?" Old Rose demands.

"Bill Haskell, ma'am, at yer service!" he grins back, not knowin' at all that the name of Haskell is a battle-cry to this here amazon. Well, she ups and slaps his grinnin' face, which goes on grinnin' just the same, and then she lets him have it. What she told him about the tribe he belonged to would sure fill one of these geeny-geology books.

Bill never says a word—just stands and grins at her, like she was Mrs. Vanderbilt handin' him a cup of tea and him the guest of honor at this barbecue.

That was where I woke up, when Old Rose had all those cracker hounds over at the store laughin' at the show. Then she gets into her cart, not stoppin' her cuss words at all, and leaves Bill, grinnin' and wavin' good-by to her, in the center of that gang of roughnecks. I get over to Jim Slade's just in time to hear him turn to the crowd and say: "What a splendid old lady! Can any one tell me her name?"

That's the way they bring 'em up back there east of the Hudson. That's the way this younger generation is. Along comes a young feller like Bill, with no appreciation at all for the historic significance of a feud that has been kept goin' nice for many years, and tries to spoil it all.

Well, I supplied the name of this splendid old lady and a lot of other information about her that wouldn't read well on her tombstone. Also, I went on to tell Bill about those yearlings and about gettin' 'em up to the range pretty pronto. He listened attentively enough, but he just couldn't get rid of that grin. If he stopped grinnin' with his mouth, his eyes grinned, and just to show you that he couldn't understand how a feud should be run here's what he said:

"I like Mrs. Rose very much. She has spirit. I'm sure we can come to some agreement with her."

Then he began to ask a lot of questions about huntin' and fishin' and such things, takin' it for granted that Old Rose was settled with. But I brought him back to those thirsty yearlings, which had me worried. I told him all about the water we didn't have, and how we got our slim supply from the Valley Development Company, and even took him past the pump to demonstrate just how tough a nut he had to crack. The same day I took him all over the home-place and on up to Old Rose's line, to make it clear just how bad things were.

Well, the boy had something above his necktie besides a derby, sure enough, for right away he discovered that Old Rose had to use our road in order to get from her place to the water supply. And when he found that out he goes on grinning more than ever.

"That's easy," he said. "She's got to let us cross her land with the cattle, or we won't let her out to get water. Of course, we wouldn't really stop her, see, but we'll make her think we would."

Which goes to show how little he knew about Rose and about the etiquette of feuds in general.

I let him think it would be easy, 'cause I wanted to see how long that grin would last. Bill went into town next day. He didn't tell me what for, but it turned out later that he had wired his home town across the Hudson, which was the home office of this defunct Valley Development Company, for an option on their property. He was going about it right to sew up Old Rose so she couldn't get a drop of water in the long summer spell.

Ridin' back from town it was just Bill's grinnin' luck to meet up with the prettiest girl in the State—Old Rose's Molly. The girl was on her way to the pump with three barrels, and Bill found her almost cryin' in the middle of the road because one of the wheels of the cart had come off and she couldn't put it back. With that Galahad way of his Bill got off his pony and repaired Rose's cart. From what I heard about it later I guess he didn't confine his attentions to the cart either, for it seems he made quite an impression on the girl herself. When he got back home he could not talk about anything but her, askin' who she was and describin' her yellow hair like a regular poet feller.

He had forgotten all about the yearlings until I brought him back to that subject. Then he said he had decided to drive 'em up to the range right away, startin' that night. He didn't think Old Rose would stop him, and anyways he wasn't goin' to be stopped.

Well, he was the boss, and I got ready to obey orders.

We started that night, sure enough, and everything was pleasant until we came to the dry creek bed that marks off the Straight H from Old Rose's parcel of desert. Then one heifer got iconoclastic like, and went right into Rose's garden patch and started to chew up the dry cabbage. Rose came runnin' out with that sure-shot rifle of hers in her hand, and in half a second that poor heifer was on the way to veal cutlets.

Bill heard the shot, which sure surprised his innocence, and rode right over to the heifer, at the same time driving the other strays back where they belonged. Rose let loose at him, but didn't hit him, although one shot came so darn close to my Stetson that it riled me, and I banged away at the three full water-barrels Molly had brought home that day, which were still on the cart in front of the house. I had those barrels imitatin' a geyser, believe me, with that precious water bursting out from a dozen holes.

Then Rose exchanged a few shots with me, politely missin' all vital parts, but comin' too close for comfort.

When Bill saw what I had done to the barrels of water, he got all riled and told me to stop. It was too late, of course, and I couldn't see his logic, anyway. Then little Molly came runnin' out with a dishpan, tryin' to catch what was left. She got half a panful, along with some tears she was sheddin', when Bill rode up to Old Rose, right in the face of that vicious-lookin' rifle, and actually apologized, and also offered to pay for the barrels and to get more water.

Molly was so surprised to see Mr. Galahad there on the side of the Haskells that she dropped her dishpan. If I'd had it my way Old Rose would have been in for some drouth, but you never can tell about these young fellers.

Old Rose cussed him and all the rest of the Haskells and ordered him off her land. She wouldn't accept his apology and she said she could get her own water. Then Bill sprung his surprise, which was that he had an option on the Valley Company and wouldn't let her have any water. Besides, he said, grinning all the time, he would have to prosecute her for trespassin' if she used his road to get to the pump. She wouldn't believe him at first, but then she saw he had no reason to lie about it and told him again to get off her place. She wouldn't let him drive his cattle through if he owned all the water in the desert. She would rather die of thirst than "be be-

holden to a Haskell!" What can you do with a woman like that?

When Bill didn't make any move to beat it, but got off his horse instead, like he intended to stay a while, Rose raised her gun and promised him a pound of free lead. That didn't bother Bill, 'cause he kept his grin and walked right up to Rose. I sure thought he'd be on his way to meet old Steve in a minute, but when she had the rifle leveled at him he sidestepped like one of these dancers, and bent over and kissed —yes, sir, kissed—Old Rose right on the cheek. Then he laughed and jumped on his horse, and rode back to me.

I don't know which was more surprised, Rose or me, but you could've knocked us cold with a love tap We both knew that was no way to run a feud. And little Molly was laughin' just like Bill, as though it was the funniest thing she had ever seen. Rose shooed her into the house and then went in herself. She couldn't figure Bill out at all, and neither could I.

We drove the yearlings into the corral at that end of the ranch and made camp for the night. Then Bill left me there and rode back to the home place. I didn't know what for, but I suspected he was going to replace the three barrels of water I had punctured with three of our own. You see, I was gettin' a line on Bill. That's just what he did, too.

He brought back three new barrels without disturbin' my slumbers and deposited them right in Rose's front yard. He didn't even wake her up, but I guess Molly must have been restless, the way things turned out. Bill came on back to me and was gettin' ready to turn into his blankets himself when we were both startled by a rifle shot coming from the direction of Rose's house. But she wasn't shootin' at us, although she thought she was.

As it happened Molly had been worryin' her pretty little yellow head about Bill's threats. She had a dream of dyin' of thirst, and so she got up to see what she could do about the water situation. She went out the back door of the house, so she wouldn't wake Rose, and out to the barn. Knowin' their water barrels were all punctured by my lead she got three five-gallon cans, put 'em in a little two-wheeled cart Rose had, and harnessed up the old mare. Going out that way she missed the barrels Bill had left there in the front of the house.

As Molly was drivin' away, to get some water during the night, before they all died of thirst, Rose woke up, grabbed her rifle and ran out in her red flannel nightie. She couldn't see anything but a dim figure beating it pronto, and she let fire, hopin' she'd get a Haskell. Naturally she didn't know Molly was up. Well, she hit Molly, in that round white shoulder of hers, and she startled the old mare so that she lit out down the road like a regular race-horse. And then little Molly lost her balance, fell backward out of the seat, and was dragged along behind.

Me and Bill couldn't see this, of course, and we didn't know just what to make of it. We didn't do anything for a while, and I was all for goin' back to sleep. But Bill had a hunch that something was wrong with Molly, and he jumped on his pony and beat it off after her. By this time the old white mare of Rose's was pretty far in the lead, and Bill didn't catch her for a long way. And when he did he found Molly in need of medical help. The only thing for him to do was just what he did. He took her on to the home place, where there's a telephone, and called the doctor.

I can't vouch for all that happened as he carried her in his arms, careful not to jar her at all, and later bathed her wound and soothed her moans until the doctor came. I can't vouch for this at all, because I only know about what followed. But from the look on Bill's face the next time I saw him whatever happened between 'em must have been pretty interestin'.

I went back to sleep again, after Bill rode off that way, naturally. The next thing I knew was being waked up—it seemed like only a few minutes afterward—by Old Rose kicking me. She had found that Molly wasn't at home and she suspected Bill of abductin' the girl. Can you beat that? She wanted to know where he was. How did I know. We passed a few compliments back and forth, gettin' nowhere, but havin' a lot of pleasure, and then Rose decided to go to the home place

to find Bill. She took one of our horses, which I didn't mind, although I put up a kick about it, and rode off. From her looks and the way she carried that rifle of hers I knew Bill would get his if she found him. But I couldn't do anything, 'cause he had told me to stay with the cattle. And, anyway, I wanted to see how long his grin would last. Maybe it wouldn't last so long without my assistance.

By the time Rose got to the Haskell ranch-house the doctor had been and gone, havin' patched up Molly and made her comfortable. Of course maybe it wasn't conventional-like for Bill to be there all alone with the girl, but in this desert it ain't always convenient to telephone for a nurse or call an ambulance.

Proper or not, it didn't seem to make either of 'em unhappy, from what I learned a little later.

Molly was sleepin' easy, with her shoulder bandaged, and her yellow hair loose on a pillow, and Bill was sittin' beside her, just gazin' at her and hopin' she'd be all well in an hour or two, and worshipin' her in general.

The Haskell house, which old Steve built, is like a lot of others down here on the desert—rambling and Spanish, with a veranda goin' all around and doors and windows openin' off it.

Old Rose got there when the sun was doin' magic tricks with the desert. In the mornin' and evenin' there ain't no prettier place anywhere. She got off our horse and left it out at the corral, and walked up to the house like an Indian on the trail. And she didn't forget her rifle, believe that. She was out to kill, Old Rose, and she was goin' to end, once and for all, the Rose-Haskell feud.

She got around to an open door on the veranda and looked in. Maybe what she saw would have made anybody mad, but Old Rose didn't have to be made mad—she was born that way. She saw Molly's yellow hair on the pillow in a bedroom in Bill Haskell's house—that was bad enough. But also, just at that minute, she saw Bill Haskell bend over and kiss Molly on the forehead. Of course Rose didn't know he worshiped the girl, and she didn't know that Molly was moaning in pain, and Bill tryin' to soothe her. All she knew was that Bill Haskell, the worst of a bad lot, had taken her Molly away.

She raised her rifle and leveled it directly at Bill's back. If she hadn't been shakin' with anger and righteous indignation and all that she sure would have hit him, too, but as it was the bullet lodged in the wall a couple of feet over his head.

He turned around and jumped up. Molly woke and saw Rose pointing the rifle at the man she loved. Bill lifted his hands, grinnin' as always, and waited for Rose to shoot.

"Mother Rose! Mother Rose!" cried Molly. "He saved my life! You shot me—I know it was an accident. But you shot me by mistake, and I would have died if he hadn't brought me here and called a doctor!"

Plainly, Rose didn't believe it—at first. Her rifle didn't waver from Bill, and Bill just kept on grinnin' with his hands over his head. Old Rose looked from one to the other, doubtin' 'em both.

Molly tried to get up, tried to put herself between Rose and Bill, but she wasn't strong enough to make it. She fell back, crying to Rose, and as the old girl looked at her again she saw that the bandage over her shoulder was gettin' dark with blood. She dropped her rifle without payin' any attention to Bill, and ran to Molly.

"Oh, my baby! My baby!" she cried out in anguish, holding the yellow head in her arms.

Bill turned back to the bed. He fixed the pillow, gentlelike, for Molly, and took her brown little hand in his. Then him and Rose looked at each other across the bed. Bill was still grinnin', and from what he told me afterward Old Rose began to grin, too.

"You Haskells has always been good enemies," she told him, puttin' out her hand, "an' I guess you can be good friends, too."

Which goes to show that not even Old Rose knew how to run a feud. Only her and I keep up our own private feud, and enjoy it a lot, so I guess we'll both live a long time yet.

The Night Shift

by

Kenneth MacNichol

Author of "That Kind of a Man," "Enough Is Plenty," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

THE HEIR TO HOBART.

SPEAKING with all possible charity, William Vanderpool Biddle, in the twenty-third year of his life, was a very much spoiled young man. Yet there was in him no natural depravity, even though he had accomplished many evil things. Nor could it be said of him that he had more money than brains, because it was his father's money that he spent so recklessly, and no son of John Biddle could lack intelligence.

But young Biddle's brains were used, apparently, only to invent new and ingenious ways of tumbling into trouble. Idle, careless, irresponsible, it was only because his father was the great John Biddle that the son was enabled to escape some, at least, of the usual consequences.

The father, whom the newspapers mentioned respectfully as the Copper King, decided presently that his worthless son had become too great a drain upon his vast resources, both mental and financial. Having made this decision, John Biddle passed his son along to a very competent confidential secretary for treatment. The great man could not be bothered by small affairs. Said secretary, also busy, confided his new charge to the care of Scott Hanley, harried superintendent of the Copper Butte Mine at Hobart, Arizona, some thousands of miles from Wall Street, and much farther from that section of Broadway where the white lights burn.

There was a general understanding about a meager allowance to be paid, to be increased when William Vanderpool demonstrated his fitness to labor in the Biddle vineyards, but which was to cease altogether should he acquire a new batch of trouble of any kind, particularly of the wine, woman, and song variety, for which possibilities in Hobart were considered limited.

There was also a very definite declaration that young Biddle should never have the pleasure of either spending or adding to the Consolidated Copper millions should he continue to inhabit New York or any other metropolis except Hobart, in Arizona, for some time to come.

This was the real, hard, irreducible fact which finally persuaded, if it did not recon-

cile young William to following his course of empire into the west, where he was firmly convinced that the Great American Desert began as soon as the Hudson River had been crossed.

Young Biddle's worst fears were confirmed when he first became acquainted with the Smell. It crawls like a yellow snake down sunburnt, Barren Seco Valley, from its lair on Seco Mountain; seeps through each tiny crevice into the cars of the narrow gage railroad climbing up from Prescott, and sets the passengers to coughing and cursing when they are yet five miles from Hobart, whence the Smell proceeds.

Choking fumes of sulphur are the body of it, but there are also bitter taints or arsenic and the metallic taste of copper dust. Day and night dense vapors pour from the great smelter stacks of the Copper Butte; no escape is possible except by flight.

But, after continued residence in Hobart, lungs become resigned. Older inhabitants even claim healthful properties for smelter smoke. Others, less kind, merely say that no one in Hobart ever dies a natural death, because sulphur fumes or Logger Shannon's whisky lays them low before they can arrange a decent demise by other means.

Hobart, the town, is a single street, crouching insecurely on the mountainside. On one side of the street the wooden houses, often guiltless of paint, are poised on stilts, and kitchen doors overlook the brown valley far below. On the other side front doors open on the street; there are no backyards at all, because the houses, cramped for space, have burrowed like moles into the flanks of Seco Mountain.

Above the street another ledge takes the place of the aristocratic suburbs of other towns, for here a row of neat cottages house the officials of mine and smelter, while, on a jutting shoulder of the mountain arises the huge, three-story Copper Butte Hotel, home of much of the skilled labor resident in Hobart.

The business section of the street is filled day and night with muddy miners, grimy smeltermen, and merchants of many wares, speaking all the tongues of Babel; crowded with the constant flow of pack-trains, patient, sad-eyed burros whose innocent looks belie the readiness of active heels.

At night the town is lighted luridly with sparking arc lights, yellow and blue flame of blast furnaces, and the dull red glow of superheated slag. At one end the double row of saloons, miners' boarding houses, and the usual stores is restrained only by a shaky iron railing from dropping giddily into space.

At the other end the street winds about a shoulder of the mountain past black iron buildings and flaming furnaces of the smelter and the tall hoist of the mine; skirts the brink of precipitous slopes of smoking slag; creeps along between blasted mountain and a concrete wall to the tiny station of the narrow gage which leaps out from the black mouth of the tunnel opening; then with many curves perilous to freighters, the road dips steeply down into the sage-planted valley where the Arroyo Seco, a watercourse with strange whims of its own, wanders at will, biting deep into the soft red soil.

At the station William Vanderpool Biddle alighted from the train, the cause of considerable astonishment to the station agent, who, in all his experience with many varieties of eastern "mining engineers," could not remember one who had been garbed so like the lily or shone so resplendent beneath the sun.

Even as he alighted, William coughed. It was not a delicate cough, daintily hidden behind a handkerchief; not the cough of habit, as it were, but a deep, strangulated cough; a pygmy protest, however, in full view of the belching smelter stacks.

"Damn!" said William. Then he coughed again. Meanwhile the train crew were busily engaged in dumping a truckload of baggage onto the station platform, four trunks containing clothing of sorts; three boxes, contents unknown; two cases possibly containing hats; three suit cases; an assortment of hand luggage of uncertain number and even less certain use; two bags of golf sticks; three gun cases; another box, long, wide, and deep, filled with fishing tackle; and one white bull pup unhappy in a crate.

In obedience to orders, William Vanderpool Biddle had come to Hobart to stay for quite awhile, although he began to be uncertain whether all the Consolidated Copper millions were worth the price. He had been quite unhappy when, upon inquiry from the conductor of the narrow gage, he had learned that there was no train leaving Hobart until the following day.

William Vanderpool Biddle looked about him hopelessly—and coughed again. The station agent was busy; the train crew were busy; the only idle individual in sight was a very rough specimen garbed in the cinder-scorched overalls of the smeltermen, who looked with amazement at William's baggage.

"I say," said William, addressing the idle one. Then again, with emphasis, "I say—"

The smelterman, huge, uncouth, a quite impossible person, turned, regarding William with cold, blue, fishy eyes.

"I say, my good fellow," said William most politely, once again, "could you direct me to a good hotel?"

The good fellow looked at William, up and down, from shining boots to nicely creased felt hat. William bore the scrutiny with patience. The man spat deliberately, shifting an enormous cud of tobacco in his jaws. He seemed very stupid.

"Well?" asked William, ever patiently.

"Naw," answered the good fellow with a surly grin. He slouched forward, brushing the astonished William to one side.

"But I say!" exclaimed William, grasping at his hat. Anger succeeded his surprise. "Look here now!" William reached out a detaining hand.

The smelterman spun on his heel with astounding swiftness for one of such bulk and seeming awkwardness. Thick neck hunched into massive shoulders, he thrust a smoke-grimed face within a half a foot of William's own. William glimpsed an uneven row of brown-stained teeth beneath a ragged yellow mustache.

"I tal you naw! You want I tal you somet'ing else now, heh?"

There was no mistaking the intention of this person, quite impossible. He positively meant to be insulting. Young Biddle stepped backward, his feet embarrassed by the luggage pile. Not until the smelterman had grinned his way from the station platform could young Biddle recover his wits sufficiently to remember that he owned, at least in prospect, the very ground on which the ruffian stood. Then it was too late for effective repartee. He addressed the station agent with firm intention and as much dignity as the circumstances would permit.

"Will you please tell me who that man may be?"

"Name o' Kowalski," answered the agent. "Sort o' straw-boss with the smelter gang."

"Thanks," answered William, who could not help feeling a little superior. "I shall have the pleasure of meeting him again. Baggage will be safe here, I presume?"

"Sure," the agent answered heartily. William might have been mistaken, but he was a little uneasy, not certain that there was not a suppressed grin on the freckled face of the station agent, too. "I shall send a conveyance for my things this afternoon," said William, with increase of dignity. Then, unbending momentarily: "Seems to be quite an interesting place."

"Sure," said the agent. There was no mistake about that grin.

William stepped from the platform into the road which spurted little geysers of fine red dust, destroying the resplendent polish of William's boots. The sun was glaring hot on the barren mountainside. William's face was red; the fresh collar assumed just before arrival, already wilting, became uncomfortable about his throat.

He kicked at a chunk of crumbling brown and yellow rock that nestled in the road dust. This failed to relieve his temper, but did hurt the kicking foot, and practically ruined the half of a pair of thirty-dollar boots. He drew a deep breath, and coughed again. Twice in one morning William Vanderpool Biddle, of Broadway between the Thirties and the Fifties, sought surcease from annoyance by saying "Damn!"

The station agent waved a mocking hand at the retreating back. "My *dear* Mr. Biddle," said that wag in joyous respect

for his own brand of humor: "if I ain't mistook, you *look* like the ol' man—some. An' you *act* almost exac'ly like he *don't*. Which bein' which, I do *hope*, my good fellow, that you have a *real* nice time in Hobart. It is *quite* an interesting place!"

CHAPTER II.

WILLIAM SHUTS THE DOOR.

SCOTT HANLEY, superintendent by title, but general manager of all Copper Butte by virtue of ability, was a worried looking little individual, now past the prime of middle age, growing a little bald, somewhat nearsighted behind his gold-rimmed glasses. His speech was precise; he very seldom smiled, not a man to win a great deal of affection from his subordinates.

This was given in whole and part to Hanley's motherless son, "Buddy," aged seven, idol of Copper Butte, and spoiled playmate of all miners and smeltermen. To them Buddy was the Kid; the extent of his dominion may be gaged by the fact that, while there were a number of other children in Hobart, it was only himself who proudly wore this designation as his right and proper name.

For himself Scott Hanley owned the respect of every one in Hobart, which, for his purpose, was much more valuable. His rule if absolute was never harsh; his decisions were carefully considered, almost always just, and usually irrevocable; among the men respect was not unmixed with wholesome dread, for there were those who had seen the mild blue eyes of the boss flash fire on occasion. Those occasions had been the signal for some very sudden and disconcerting happenings in Hobart.

"I know copper," Hanley had said, seeking a position with the Consolidated management eight years before. He offered this as his only recommendation for the job. And he told the truth; would still have been telling the truth if he had said he knew almost all there was to know about his specialty, as, good year and bad, the ever-increasing dividends of Copper Butte might testify. This was the man to whom William Vanderpool Biddle presented himself early in the afternoon of his arrival.

The barred window of Hanley's private office looked out upon a bare, black, cinder-covered yard crisscrossed with narrow tracks where electric trams loaded with molten slag proceeded slowly to the dump or hurried back empty to the furnaces. Looking out to the main office, the prospect was not more pleasing: rows of high, old-fashioned desks fenced in behind an iron rail, where habit-bound clerks scratched steadily in mysterious books.

William, facing the superintendent across his flat-topped desk, was not in a pleasant humor. His woes were numerous as those of Job, but he had not a tithe of the patience that supported either that grand old man, or his present unsympathetic audience of one.

First, the one possibly available room with bath at the Copper Butte Hotel was occupied by a rude person who showed not the slightest desire to vacate for William's benefit. His baggage was still at the station, and seemed likely to remain there, a calamity to which Hobart was most indifferent.

He had arrived too late for dinner at the hotel, and there was not a decent restaurant in Hobart. The day was hot; the stairs mounting to the hotel were inordinately steep; smelter smoke failed to improve on close acquaintance. William's feet hurt; his lungs were sore from the unaccustomed altitude. Then, too, there was the matter of Kowalski.

"I expect nothing less than that he shall be immediately discharged," asserted William. "Most impudent fellow—almost knocked me down—no excuse whatever—"

"I'm afraid," Hanley answered soothingly, "that the hotel is about the best we have, but I shall send a teamster for your luggage this afternoon. And about Kowalski, we'll see what can be done. It may be a little difficult to locate him—common name: there are probably six or eight Kowalskis on our books. We'll make you as comfortable as we can. I take it you will want to report for work to-morrow morning."

This was an unexpected blow to William.

However, he reacted quickly to the sting, retaining some measure of composure.

"Rather soon, that, don't you think? Take a little time to get located, y' know, and I thought I'd have a little shooting before I got nose to the grindstone—all that sort of thing."

"I've heard there are a few jack rabbits on the flats," Hanley commented dryly. "Don't know; never investigated for myself. My instructions are to offer you a position on your arrival." Hanley refrained from adding that in the drawer just beneath his elbow were a number of other instructions not intended to strew a carpet of roses on William's path.

"Matter of fact," continued William easily, "I'm not sure that I'll remain at all; really don't care for this place, y'know. Just about decided to draw on the governor for the necessary, and toddle back."

"My instructions," Hanley observed yet more dryly, "would not cover the matter of a draft."

William flushed. More impudence! Beastly place was full of it! He was prepared to retort hotly to this shot when a shadow passed across the dingy window. William stepped forward, pointing a finger toward the yard where a grimy workman sauntered toward the buildings whence the tram-cars came.

"There he is now—that fellow, Kowalski, y'know! Might call him in and have it over with!"

Hanley turned in his chair, looking in the direction indicated by the pointing finger. A little smile twitched at the corners of his lips. The change in his manner toward William was slight; not less polite, only a trifle more decisive.

"That is unfortunate. Now, if you had chosen some other of our Kowalskis—"

"What!" cried William. This was unbelievable! "But the man insulted me, y'know! I must insist, under the circumstances—"

"Under the circumstances," Hanley explained patiently, "discharging this particular Kowalski would probably mean the shut-down of the smelter for an indefinite period. He is one of our most efficient foremen, and in addition is secretary of the local union—a man of considerable influence, with power to call a walk-out at any time."

"Then I take it you refuse my request, absolutely!"

"Absolutely!" Hanley was rapidly losing patience with this young man. "In business personal feelings do not count."

"I shall appeal—"

"Your letters are ready now, Mr. Hanley!"

The atmosphere of the private office, rapidly approaching the boiling-point, suddenly fell many degrees with the intrusion of that cool, crisp voice. Superintendent Hanley's retort was never to be uttered. William was conscious of an impression that the dingy room had suddenly been brightened by a glint of sunlight, freshened by the coolness of an errant breeze.

The impression was identified with the entrance of a girl, young, attractive, clothed in a businesslike costume of blue serge. Her hair appeared to be an abundance of tarnished gold; her hands, extended with a bundle of letters were white and smooth. Her profile, William saw, was cleanly modeled—and there was the tiniest possible smudge of the all-pervading cinder-dust to draw attention to the rose and white of a perfect cheek.

When the girl stood beside the superintendent's desk, Hanley rose politely to his feet.

"Miss Ames—Mr. Biddle," Hanley interposed. "Miss Ames is our very efficient secretary. She is the encyclopedia of the Copper Butte."

Miss Margaret Ames smiled charmingly, in acknowledgment of the compliment. Her teeth were very white and even; her eyes deep-shadowed and transparent-blue. She extended her hand to the great man's son without a trace of self-consciousness, murmuring the usual platitudes. She noted in turn that he was rather a nice looking boy, but registered instant objection to the air of petulance not wholly vanished from his face, and the unseemly much-too-tailored appearance of his clothes.

"I am sure," Hanley continued smoothly, "that Miss Ames will be pleased to tell you anything you care to know about Cop-

per Butte, and to instruct you in the workings of the office in case you decide to remain with us."

"Surely." The girl smiled again. She seemed to take young Biddle's interest for granted. "You'll find it rather dull in Hobart, but being busy, we do not mind that." The amenities of the occasion concluded, she returned to her previous manner, businesslike. "Will that be all, Mr. Hanley?"

"Yes, thank you," the superintendent returned. William followed the girl's departure with his eyes. The voice of the superintendent jerked William sharply back to the exigencies of the occasion.

"Well?" Mr. Hanley was quite ready to close the interview.

After all, there was a considerable quantity of the Biddle sporting-blood flowing in the veins of his father's son. But there might have been a mixture of other motives.

"Little sudden and all that, y'know," he returned, preserving a fine air of carelessness. "But since there isn't any shootin' to be had, there's no use putting off the evil day. What time shall I toddle up tomorrow morning?"

Perhaps, William had considered, there might be compensations even in such a hopeless place as Hobart.

William's career as an employee of Copper Butte proved as brief as it was unsatisfactory. The first day he was fifteen minutes late. This passed unnoticed. By the second day the fifteen minutes had stretched to twenty-five. On the third day he had the merits and uses of the time-clock system thoroughly explained.

His feelings were hurt thereby. But the real cause for his failure in the rôle of an honest workingman was pointed out at the end of the fourth day, with a clarity and directness of which Scott Hanley was occasionally capable.

"Mr. Biddle," said Hanley, addressing the young man who stood before him without benefit of council; "my one excuse for being here is to produce dividends for our stockholders. Your one excuse for being here is to help me to produce those dividends. Any action on your part that does not contribute to that end marks me a failure as a superintendent and you a failure as an employee.

"Your contribution has been negligible. I observe no tendency toward improvement. I wish to remind you also that the young women in our employ are business women working in a business office. They are quite likely to resent any advances interfering with the efficiency of their work upon which their future possibly depends. I hope this frankness on my part will help to correct your present attitude."

The heir to Hobart had never been so astonished in his life, but his astonishment was swiftly replaced by unreasoning anger.

"With some people you may be able to get away with that high and mighty air," he blazed, his voice trembling. "But not with me! I'm through! You and your office and your young women can go to the devil! You'll hear from the governor about this just the same!"

"I would not attempt to influence your decision," Hanley remarked coldly. "There is four days' salary due you, which you can get from the cashier on your way out. Should you later reconsider your decision a position will again be open to you. That will be all, Mr. Biddle, for the present."

"If you think—" William persisted, perfectly willing to continue the discussion. Only then Scott Hanley, superintendent, pushed back his chair, rose to his feet, a visible embodiment of authority, seemed endowed wtih a blazing force that filled the office like a lightning flash. He flung out a sternly commanding hand.

"I said that would be all, Mr. Biddle. Close the door!"

William departed. His departure showed more haste than dignity. Not for a long time would he understand just how it was done. He did not forget to close the door.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE HORSESHOE CLUB.

IN the past William's correspondence with "the governor" had usually taken the form of a brief and peremptory "please remit." And this was the main theme of

the letter which he attempted to write within an hour of his interview with Hanley, but he found the composition difficult. The "please remit" motive was quite inextricably connected with his grievance; his grievance the reason for the "please remit."

He wanted to leave Hobart. He wanted Hanley to be disciplined because Hanley had committed lese majesty against his princely person. He felt that his anger was fully justified.

But Hanley had discharged him because he had not done the thing for which he had been sent to Hobart. Or, if he adopted the position that he had quit because of Hanley's insupportable nagging, Biddle, Sr., would be sure to ask why Hanley nagged.

The excuse that he merely was unsatisfied in Hobart was certainly not likely to bring a remittance from New York. While William labored, his aching grievance grew. He should not have been in Hobart, anyway.

"Damn!" said William, after his ninth attempt to explain the unexplainable.

He hated the scratchy pen that he jabbed viciously into the hated red cover of the cheap table in his room. He hated the room with its creaking bed and the queer curleycues on the cracked wall-paper almost as much as he hated the tin bath on which the chipped enamel imitated a map of the Arctic regions.

He hated the cold potatoes and the underdone beef to which he would presently descend. He hated Hanley and Kowalski and all the unknown inhabitants of Hobart, along with the Copper Butte and all its works.

All of which had he but known it, was only the reflection of William's hatred for the egotistic William Vanderpool Biddle whom he had to live with all the time and from whom he was trying to escape. When he failed miserably in his task of composition only one other way seemed open to him—the route that led to Logger Shannon's Horseshoe Club Saloon.

The Horseshoe Club was one of Hobart's institutions. Belle Shannon, Logger Shannon, and that curious old relic, "Limpy" MacVeigh, were institutions at the Horseshoe Club. It was the gossip in Hobart that Logger Shannon, red-headed, bandy-legged, and bold, owned and managed the Horseshoe Club, but Belle Shannon, his daughter, black-haired, brown-eyed, and likewise bold, managed the Logger with no lightsome hand.

Between them there was efficient partnership. Shannon sold the whisky; Belle promptly quelled any ensuing disturbance. Shannon, the easy-going, sold on credit, Belle made collections with unfailing thrift. It was hinted that Shannon made the whisky, but Belle added the water afterward—even so, no one complained that the whisky was too weak. Other than this, there was no whisper against her name.

"Limpy" MacVeigh, a pensioner on the bounty of Logger Shannon and the Copper Butte, deserves a notation of his own. One leg dragged haltingly; one arm was withered and hung helpless at his side, the result of a fall of ore, long since forgotten, when Limpy had been somebody in the mine.

It was proved that Limpy had been drinking at that time, and he had been drinking ever since; never drunken, never sober—sometimes less sober than at other times.

His brain, whisky-befuddled continually, functioned as three separate entities. Most sober, he was silent, morose, inclined to be quarrelsome on occasion—less sober, he became polite, polished, disdainful, speaking English more perfectly than it was ever heard from other lips in Hobart; least sober, his Scotch accent was a thing to wonder at, and he remembered volubly that he had earned and was entitled to write after his name the B. A., M. A., Litt. D., of the University of Edinburgh.

Then he began quoting at length otherwise forgotten passages from Burns, Shakespeare, and Pope, mentioning also Hesiod, Marcus Aurelius, Petrarch, Racine, Blake, and many another of whom, otherwise, Hobart had never heard.

Limpy was most amusing in this last condition, and thanks to the miners, it was his usual evening state. When he began speaking in unknown tongues, the entertainment was finished until another day.

The diversion had only started when William reached the Horseshoe Club. Hope-

well Davies, a huge, blond "cousin-jack," as hard-rock miners dub all Cornishmen, was tuning Limpy to the desired pitch. The bar was lined with miners and smeltermen. Shannon presiding, hurried between his rows of bottles and the cash-register. Davies had an appreciative audience.

"Will y' 'ave another?" he asked Limpy, winking at the group.

"I wull," declared Limpy, without hesitation, hastily gulping the last drops from an almost empty glass.

"Limpy tells me he's going to quit the whisky," Davies remarked casually. "Only he's na got the idea when."

"Ah ken weel when," Limpy declared gravely. "'Twull be when ye resign as president o' the union."

This created laughter, for it was common knowledge that Davies had clung to the office for an interminable number of consecutive terms. Once, and once only, there had been insurrection against his authority, and a disgruntled minority, by efficient log-rolling, had passed a motion demanding that he resign. Whereupon, taking the group severely and singly, the Cornishman had flung that minority out into the street; then, in the wrecked union hall, had passed upon a motion to reconsider the motion previously passed. There was never again any question regarding his authority.

In mere muscular efficiency, Davies was certainly the master of any one in Hobart, with one possible exception, a brown-bearded giant, who, paying no attention to the tumult, sat quietly reading at a table in a corner of the room. This was "Silent" Hugh McGregor, a champion driller and gang boss of the night shift at the mine.

William, crowded at one end of the long bar, was unable to command attention. On previous visits to the Horseshoe Club he had found the saloon practically deserted at this hour, when the second day shift had not yet come up from the shaft, and the "graveyard gang," who labored at night from eight to four, were preparing to go to work.

But this was a pay-day crowd; the night shift from mine and smelter had risen early from their daylight slumber to draw their pay, and were now engaged in spending as much as possible in the hour that remained. Their fun was as rough as the hard-rock in which the miners worked; would grow progressively rougher as the night advanced after the day men came down from the hill. Limpy, already partly illuminated, struck up a silly song, wheezing in a cracked, falsetto voice:

> "Ye a' hae hear hoo Scotia bled
> An' ne'er frae th' foeman fled—"

"Disgusting!" thought William, with growing irritation. He rapped sharply with his knuckles on the bar. Logger Shannon, looking sidewise, his hands burdened, dropped the emptied glasses beneath the bar, and with no waste motion, spun a partially filled bottle and a clean glass in William's general direction.

The fumes of the brown liquor, poured like oil, rose to the nostrils strong as vapor of ammonia. William drained the whisky at a single toss, and mechanically reached for the bottle again. After the fourth experiment the volatile poison mounted to his brain; sharp outlines of faces softened in a mellow haze; the tension of his angry irritation was dulled into a sort of somber content. Limpy was finishing his song, waving his good right arm in fantastic gestures of mock joyousness:

> "As sure as ocht I'm glad tae think
> Tha' I'm a Scotian bor-r-n."

Over the heads of the crowd William caught a glimpse of the dark face of Belle Shannon smiling in the background. He flung money on the bar, and passing behind the applauding group surrounding Limpy, came back to her as she stood in the doorway between the saloon and the rooms to the rear, where she lived with her father.

"Hello, kid," said William, addressing the girl with the cheap greeting of his Broadway nights.

"Hello," she answered. There was no particular welcome in her voice, but she did not cease to smile.

"Well, how is every little thing?"

"So-so. Well, you see—" The girl moved her hand in the slightest possible

gesture, but it embraced the whole room before them, the drinking workmen, Logger Shannon, white-aproned, behind the bar. William responded readily, as of old habit.

"A girl like you has no business in a place like this—"

"Sure, I know," she returned; "I've heard that from three drummers now this week." Nevertheless, her eyes beckoned as they beckoned to all men. She moved, leaning against the casing of the door. The firm, full lines of her body ran into subtle curves speaking at once of strength and yielding softness beneath the loose drapery of her gingham dress. William stepped nearer to the girl, enchantment dragging at his senses.

"It's true," he protested. "Why, a girl like you—you don't know what you're missing in this hole."

"No? Well, I've had plenty o' chance to learn." She flung back her head, her black hair blending as in a master's painting into the shadows of the darkened room behind. There was something of defiance in her manner, almost a hint of possessive pride.

"It's mine, ain't it? I belong here. I was born here. The Logger is my daddy, and my mother was a dance-hall girl—I can't change that, can I? I wouldn't want to; all of this here is a part of me."

William was helpless before such reasoning. "But I don't see—" he challenged. "With what you could have—"

"You wouldn't," she asserted. "You're a fool! I ain't. I hold to what I've got." Her eyes flashed. "All that you've got, you fling to the birds. Talk to me about what I could have! We sell whisky, but I'm not fool enough to drink the stuff, and if I caught the Logger at it, he'd hear from me. You pay two-bits for whisky, God-knows-what for leave to drink the stuff. Men make me sick."

Her contempt, contradicted by her eyes, maddened him. Falling silent, she seemed lost in some curious meditation of her own. William waited, passion mounting in his heated brain. He laid a tentative hand upon her shoulder. She did not move away.

"Maybe I'm a fool," he said, encouraged. "But I know a good-looking girl when I see one."

The girl smiled at him again, turning her head slowly.

"I think," she said, "you'd better run away."

"Why?" he demanded. "Don't you want me to stay a while?"

"Oh, I don't mind," she answered carelessly. "But there's some here might not like it much."

"What difference does that make?" he asked boldly.

"Some!" She smiled again. "There's Dave, for instance."

William felt very reckless. "Well, I don't give a damn for Dave, whoever he is, if you smile at me."

He accompanied the boast with a caressing pressure of the girl's firm arm. She did not resent the familiarity, but a dark bedevilment leaped into her eyes.

"Dave!" she called softly.

At the sound of her voice the huge, blond Hopewell Davies shoved out from the crowd.

"You, Belle, what's now?" he growled.

The girl laughed. "This here feller, Dave, he says he don't give a damn for you."

William stepped back, mightily astonished, more than a little dismayed at the threatening attitude of the great Cornishman, more than all fiercely angry at the action of the girl.

"'E'll gi' a damn, time Ah'm through—messin' abaht wi' Belle!"

Davies slouched forward. Whatever else may be said of William, he was not a coward in any sense. Perhaps, too, Logger Shannon's whisky, said to be capable of making a rabbit spit in a wildcat's face, had something to do with his access of courage now.

William turned to meet the giant's attack halfway. His lips were pale with anger, not with fear. Davies rushed, meaning to destroy this presumptuous youth with a single blow.

William sidestepped, aimed a vicious blow as the Cornishman swung past, merely grazing the point of a tightened jaw. Midway in the drive Davies, unbalanced for an

instant, was caught in the opened arms of Belle. She clung to him, laughing and excited.

"Lemme go!" he rumbled. "Ah'll flat 'im out, Ah will!"

"You'll not," she commanded. "Now, be quiet, Dave!"

His arms dropped to his sides. Puzzled, he looked down at the girl like a great, stupid dog who recognizes his master in a little child.

"Ah'll do 'im in, Belle, if y' say the word," he growled, still threatening. "'E'll na tell me 'e'll na gi' a domn!"

The girl's voice was soft as falling water: "He's not worth it, Dave—it was only a fool trick of mine." Again the girl laughed, conscious of her power, stepping back to the doorway again, leaving Hopewell Davies standing sheepishly.

William's face burned deep and ardent red. Then Limpy, foolish and reeling—it had taken all this time to get himself disentangled from the crowd—took a none too steady hand in the proceeding. He halted up to the side of the Cornishman, shaking an admonitory finger beneath his nose.

"Wha' y' mean," Limpy accused stutteringly, "ga'en awa' wi'oot yer whusky? We're frien's here—wah' y' wanna whup wee Wullie noo?"

A roar of laughter drowned his further stammerings. The excitement was over; there was a concerted movement toward the bar.

William stood where he had stopped, his hands twitching nervously.

The bearded man had not moved from his corner. Now he rose, turned down a page in his book, and carefully put the little volume in his pocket. "Time!" he called, without further explanation.

Some of the miners looked in his direction. One spoke:

"Aw, hell, Hugh, we got fifteen minutes yet."

"Time!" said Silent Hugh again, inexorably.

Miners and smeltermen began drifting toward the door. Belle Shannon had disappeared. Through the shadowed doorway where she had stood a dim light gleamed from the rear of the establishment. Pausing with the last glass filled, the Logger wiped his wet hands on a stained apron.

William, backed against the battered piano by the wall, watched the exit of the miners with smoldering eyes. He had been made to feel ridiculous and ashamed; more than that, he had been made to feel the sting of vulgar humor by a barroom clown. But how long that chance-hit name, "wee Wully"—which would become mere Willy bye-and-bye—would remain his peculiar personal possession he did not know. Nor would that knowledge have helped to soothe his feelings.

Presently William followed the miners from the room. Most of them had gone talking and laughing loudly "up the hill." Silent Hugh McGregor, conscious of his responsibility, hurrying the last of the reluctant gang into the street, was almost alone in being left behind.

The chill of evening on the Great Plateau was already descending on the mountainside. On the hill, about the smelter and the mine, a hundred arc lights winked like huge white fireflies against the dusk; now and then shining, white-hot floods of molten slag leaped from the dark summit of the dumps, fell down the black slopes in silver flame that cooled, descending, to an angry, lurid red until augmented by new lava torrents from above.

With each new display, hurrying pygmy figures could be seen poised on the brink of the precipice, gnomes who labored about tiny trains of cars that hastened backward and forward between the slag dumps and the furnaces.

The night breeze was cool on William's fevered face, the poison of the cheap whisky still busy in his brain. On the rickety board sidewalk he paused for a moment, uncertain what to do. Across the street the flutter of a woman's skirt passing before the lighted windows of a store attracted his attention.

He caught a glimpse of fine-spun, gleaming hair, a golden aureole as the yellow light shone through. He crossed the street hastily, and quite steadily.

Margaret Ames, hurrying homeward to a delayed supper, hesitated as he stepped

up to her side, a little surprised at this attention.

"'Lo, sister," said William, adding to her surprise.

Nevertheless, she said "Good evening," not too cordially.

"Saw you across the street," William informed her. "How about a little walk to-night?"

"I'm afraid," he was told, "that would be impossible."

"But I want to talk to you," he insisted. "I've wanted to know you better since the first day at the office—no other girl like you in Hobart, I'll say that." William's tongue was not quite responsible.

Now the girl stopped, facing William on the sidewalk, before they had gone past the last of the lighted stores.

"Mr. Biddle," she said, "I do not wish to walk with you now. And, if you will permit me, I should prefer to go on alone."

"Now, listen, sister—" William laid a detaining hand on the girl's arm. "Why can't you be a sport? I'm all right; just lonesome; have a heart! If I had a nice little girl to talk to for a while—"

"Will you please let me go?" There was a note of distress in Margaret's voice. The encounter was wholly unique in her experience.

"Not until you promise to talk to me. Come on now, be a little reasonable, that's the girl."

"Now," said Hugh McGregor, "that 'll do!"

William's voice, imperfectly controlled, had reached further than he had intended. The nature of his remarks was decidedly unusual here in Hobart.

"Drop it!" commanded Hugh, and there was a cold warning in the tone.

Once again, and once too often, William let his anger triumph over his discretion, of which he had never possessed a sufficient store. He turned away from Margaret furiously.

"What the devil have you got to do with this thing, anyway? Tend to your business, and I'll tend to mine."

"This is mine," observed Hugh quietly. Margaret was hurrying away. The bearded mine foreman drew back casually, then, swift as a snake strikes, delivered himself of one mighty blow.

Before it William was as chaff before the wind. After falling he rolled over twice, hung for a moment at the edge of the sidewalk, then slipped softly down into the powdery red dust of the roadway.

Ten minutes later dust-bespattered William, with a darkening bruise beginning to show above a collar that had once been white, was stretched at length on a blanket-covered bunk in the cabin at the edge of town where Silent Hugh kept lonesome bachelor hall.

The boss of the night-shift tore that collar from its place, felt William's pulse, threw a blanket over the recumbent heir to Hobart, and, going out to his delayed labor, closed and thereafter locked the door.

CHAPTER IV.

INTO THE DEPTHS.

WILLIAM awakened with the smell of boiling coffee and the sweet aroma of smoking bacon tickling his nose, after numerous half awakenings and confused dreaming filled with a partial realization that he was extremely uncomfortable. The cooking breakfast aroused no hunger pangs. William felt that he would desire nothing resembling food for days to come. There was a taste as of ashes of aloes in his mouth. His head was sore on top and exceedingly tender at the bottom, as he was reminded when an incautious hand came in contact with his chin.

"I feel rotten!" was William's first coherent thought. "What did I do?" as an exclamation followed after that. By no effort could he remember more than those four drinks at Logger Shannon's. "Awful stuff!" He knew that there had been some difficulty with Hopewell Davies, then the sidewalk, then oblivion. "I must have had more than that!" he decided plaintively.

The sunlight of early morning streamed through the single window of the little cabin with sufficient brightness to be painful in William's eyes as he followed the deliberate movements of Silent Hugh Mc-

Gregor about the room. The rude furniture, such as there was—a table, chairs, a bunk, and various shelves and boxes—had been constructed with no more elaborate tools than saw and hammer. A small camp-stove spraddled in one corner. Above the table were two shelves filled with well-worn books. There was an air of neatness about the place—Hugh McGregor was a careful man.

Noting that William was at last awake, Hugh placed his own breakfast on the table, then paused with the coffee-pot still in his hand.

"Coffee?" he asked, the pause an invitation.

"No," William replied shortly. Then, thinking he had been somewhat abrupt: "I feel pretty seedy—morning after, and all that, y' know."

Hugh offered no comment, but ate his breakfast in silence, a book propped up against the coffee-pot. Presently William gained courage to throw off the blanket and sit up in bed. Curiosity began to grow.

"Where am I, and how did I get here, if you don't mind?"

"My cabin—brought you," replied Silent Hugh, shuffling dishes into a waiting pan.

"Well," said William, regarding his soiled clothing ruefully, "I guess I must have had an awful time."

Hugh did not volunteer any further information. After some time William, now being certain that he was at least intact, spoke again, with more humility than was habitual.

"I believe I would like some coffee, please—and thanks for the trouble, old man. Then I guess I'll go along to the hotel."

Hugh poured the coffee into a bowl with condensed milk from a "tin cow" on the table.

When William had finished, as though with an effort Hugh remarked: "You'll be staying here with me a while."

William was not certain that he had heard aright. "What?" he exclaimed, startled into forgetfulness of his various tribulations.

"Once," said Hugh, "I used to prospect some with your old man. I fell in a prospect hole—he pulled me out." This was evidently no explanation. "I heard," said Hugh, "you came out here to work. You will," and with that again fell silent.

For five ensuing minutes William himself furnished all the conversation—a general statement to the effect that he was going at once to the hotel, had no intention of staying in Hobart, anyway; he did not know what Hugh's intentions might be, but they sounded positively criminal, and in any case he, William, offered violent objection.

"Hot stopes," said Hugh. "Like a Turkish bath. Sweat—all the meanness gone—no time at all."

And again William offered a series of remarks that seemed to him appropriate and in order.

"Shut up," said Hugh, "or I'll lay you out again." There was no anger in that voice; the remark was simply a calm and positive statement.

A great light dawned in William's unhappy brain. Again his hand explored his bruised chin cautiously. "You," he accused, "assaulted me last night!"

"You needed it," said Hugh in a contented tone.

William's comments became distinctly sulphurous.

Hugh was rapidly growing weary of the argument. "Better sleep," said he; "you will need it—bad."

It would be neither decent nor informative to record all the happenings of that day, or to divulge the methods by which William was finally persuaded to the viewpoint of Silent Hugh—that the only way men learn to appreciate great wealth is through intimate acquaintance with the methods by which wealth is won. It is enough that, near seven o'clock, two men, garbed in the copper-stained overalls of workmen in the mines, left Hugh's cabin, almost arm in arm, descended to Logger Shannon's, where they had one drink apiece, no more than that, and then ascended the hill to the shaft-house of the mine. There was no conversation between the two. One of those two men was Silent Hugh McGregor.

The single story shaft-house of the Copper Butte, black as the iron roofs over the smelter-furnaces, crouched on a little space of level ground. Below there was a steep talus slope of "muck" and tailings—worthless rock brought up from the mine. Above, the eroded, broken surfaces of Seco Mountain showed in daylight like great red and yellow wounds between gray patches of dusty scrub oak and buck-brush that ran up to a fringe of ragged cedars at the peak.

Over the shaft-house a towering steel "gallows frame" reared a hundred feet into the air crowned by the sheave, a grooved pulley over which the hoist-rope ran at lightning speed.

From inside the loosely constructed shaft-house came a glare of light. The cough and bark of the hoist engines, starting or stopping, alternated with a steady *put-put-put* of exhausting steam, when, with the cage in motion, the wire hoist-rope hissed like a monstrous snake, winding upon or unwinding from the giant drums.

About the wide-open doors the groups of the night shift were gathering, black silhouettes against the light; from the door the tracks of tramways, a far-flung spider-web, branched in all directions.

The second day gang began pouring from the mine. In the shaft-house near the engines of the hoist there was a gaping black hole cut into the floor where the swaying hoist-rope shot up endlessly. Suddenly, with a roar, the hole was filled, and a great steel cage stopped trembling, level with the floor. Men crowded from the cage, spattered and muddy, blinking in the light, plucking their lamps, a pale spark in the greater brightness, from their foreheads, dashing out the tiny flame with a sweeping, downward gesture of the arm.

Silently, or with raucous cries and coarser jests, they trooped to the washrooms, where presently, seen through a mist of steam, showers fell on deep-chested, naked bodies, streams of muddy water flowing from their feet. The cage was quickly filled again; engines barked; like a stone falling into space, the cage was gone, dropped with its living burden deep into the caverns of the mine.

William, crowded into the cage with Hugh, subconsciously aware of all the elevators he had known, was not prepared for that swift descent. For an instant he felt that the floor of the cage had fallen away beneath his feet; he had the positive sensation that his interior had been displaced; was partially aware of instantaneous alternation of light and darkness as the cage dropped past the various levels of the mine.

Sickened, he closed his eyes, clutching at Hugh, certain that in an instant more the cage would crash—somewhere—when, with scarcely a jar that was perceptible, the flight was arrested. There was a mighty roaring in his ears, the beat of cyclonic ventilator fans, that William took to be the surge of blood, the beating of his heart.

"Eighteen hundred level," observed the voice of McGregor in his ear. "Fast; drops in thirty seconds, running smooth." William opened his eyes. After all, then, he was not destroyed. The men pushed from the cage, their lamps glowing like dancing fireflies as they followed the tram-tracks along the level floor, or suddenly extinguished as they passed into the cross-cuts intersecting the level at various distances. Hugh gave William a moment to catch his breath, then: "Stick close," he said. "Keep on the plank—drain underneath. Copper water eats sores on your feet."

They proceeded about a hundred yards, following the line of planking between the tramway tracks. Once they stepped aside into an embrasure of the timbered passage to permit a car to pass that was loaded with chunks of ore, behind it a man who pushed against it with bowed head. Then they turned into a cross cut.

"Careful," said Hugh, pausing before an opening that sloped steeply down, a "winze" where descent was made by a shaky ladder to a "stope," or working, that lay between the eighteen hundred and nineteen hundred foot levels of the mine.

On the level there had been a constant wind, cool and fresh, especially strong near each cross-cut entry-way. Groping down the ladder, William noticed a growing sultriness; a choking in his throat; the pun-

gent odor of sulphur fumes, only a little ameliorated as they stepped from the ladder at the bottom of the winze.

"Hot stopes," Hugh offered laconic explanation. "Ore caught fire couple years ago. Can't put it out—too much sulphur. Deep rock gets hot—pressure, maybe; burns when it gets air. Losing lots of ore—had to block off some passages. Get what we can; then cave in the stope. Burns out the timber, and gets dangerous."

This was a statement that William could easily believe. Already his chest felt contricted, and he had difficulty in drawing a full breath. Sweat started from every open pore. His one desire was to turn back to the ladder as soon as possible. It was all strange, new, dark; there was something uncanny about the deep silences broken only by queer tapping and gliding sounds that seemed to come from immeasurable distances.

"Men can't work here!" he exclaimed in sudden panic at the idea.

"Men do," said Hugh, moving away into the deeper dark.

"But I can't—I sha'n't—I'm going back again!" These were the first statements of any kind that William had made since leaving the cabin for the mine.

CHAPTER V.

THE SWEAT OF HIS BROW.

HUGH stopped. His voice sounded hollow in the passageway. "All right. But be sure and take the turns. Man got lost—we didn't find him for three days."

"Are you trying to kill me?" William wailed. It seemed to him that this was a very present possibility.

Few men ever heard Hugh McGregor laugh. He laughed now, a quiet chuckle that, immensely magnified, went rolling down the cross-cut, echoed from inclosing walls of rock. It was born of sympathy rather than amusement.

"Jumpy? Don't wonder—feels queer, just at first. Get used to it later. Only had one accident this year. Not a coal-mine—safer down here than on top."

William was more reassured by the chuckle than by the explanation, even though Hugh's amusement stirred up his resentment once again. But Hugh had not made the mistake of underestimating the actual physical courage that young William owned; he had seen him stand up to Davies at the Horseshoe Club, and reckoned with a display of it on that same day. More than that, he had known the boy's father very well, and placed some confidence in heredity.

"Come on," said Hugh. William followed. Turning to right and left, the men passed through a series of stoppings and brattices, partitions of planking or canvas which controlled the ventilation in the passages of the stope.

As they advanced the sounds of tapping became more pronounced. Hugh allowed a few minutes' delay before the partially stopped entrance to an adit, a narrow drainage tunnel sloping steeply down, where a rush of cool, sweet air flowing from an unknown source carried with it the subdued roar of a distant ventilator fan.

Ten feet from this opening the heat and murky vapors grew more oppressive with each forward step. Here the workings were dimly lighted by electric bulbs at occasional intervals overhead; their light, however, was almost wholly obscured by metallic films covering the glass, deposited by the constant acid drip falling from the ceiling of the drift.

That drip annoyed William very much. It fell on his head, carrying with it a slimy weight of mud; where it fell hotly on his hands and neck, it presently set up an intolerable itching; it would, in time, blister the toughest skin.

But, despite his first uneasiness, William began to feel something of real interest in the working of the mine. Previously he owned no conception that all the dollars which he had spent so joyously in the light had once been hidden so deeply in this pit of darkness, to be painfully grubbed up by human moles, and thereafter, by means as yet unknown to him, cleaned and polished for his reckless use. He did not really understand this now, but dim realization began to stir in him.

Hugh pushed aside a brattice; a hot breath of sulphur-laden air came out. Beyond the brattice a narrow chamber was hewn into the rock; at the far end lights were dancing and flickering on the untimbered ore.

"Stope," said Hugh. "Burning out; work shifts half an hour at a time."

Crouching figures heaved at a machine, dragging it over a pile of broken rock to a position against the scarred face of the cut, setting it in place upon a tripod, like a machine gun directed at short range against the wall. A hose led from it, seeming instinct with life and movement of its own; in a moment the crash and rattle of the powerful air-drill in the restricted space drowned out all other lesser sounds.

There were five men who labored in this place preparing the holes which, filled with powder at the end of each shift, tore the metal down. Then they loaded the fallen ore and rubble into cars, pushing out those cars to a chute that carried the ore to the level below, where, on a "main-line" track, the "skips" into which it fell were "trammed" to the hoist to be lifted to the surface, and discharged.

Faint fumes of deadly carbon monoxide powder gas, from the shot set off by the departing shift, still lingered, mingled with the sulphur smell. Already William's eyes began to burn. His head was heavy as with unaccustomed drink—he was sure that his body had melted inside his sticky clothing, and would presently dissolve completely in that torrid heat.

The drill ceased clattering, creating a void of silence. Hugh touched a driller on the shoulder, addressing him as one who had authority with that "gang."

"New man for you here," said Hugh. "No miner—mucker. Let me know if he lays down on the job."

It made William intensely angry—that designation as applied to him. The only way he had ever heard it used was as being synonomous with cad. For the insult he was prepared to call McGregor to account—when he was taught a meaning even more unpleasant.

"A'right," grunted the driller without enthusiasm. "Shovel against the wall."

William made no move in that direction.

"Huh?" Then, with understanding: "Ever muck before?"

"No," answered William, indignantly astonished.

The driller grinned, gnomelike in the smutty darkness. "A'right—see this pile o' rock?" He pointed to the debris beneath his feet. "That's muck. There's more where that came from—got the whole inside o' the mountain to tear down. Load it in a car, an' after that ye load another one—see?"

William saw. He also saw the departing back of Hugh. And he heard again the rough voice of the driller near his ear: "A'right, get busy—we ain't got a' night. Them trammers don't get paid fer waitin' on no mucker—tell ye that!"

Some one tossed a shovel at William's feet. Again the air-drill filled the chamber with a crash of sound. William stooped over the pile of muck. The first heavy shovel-load clattered in the tram. That was an event, an epoch, a stupendous occasion from which he would number time through all his days.

It was the very first useful labor that the immaculate William had ever done.

There was a hell of minutes. There was a hell of years. It was a boiling hot and torrid hell where sweat flowed in rivers down an aching back, and drops of vitriol, hotter than that sweat, fell from living rock to burn a tender skin. There was a hell of sound that tore ear-drums to shreds; a hell of suffocation where strained lungs labored to get a breath of air, and the heart burst because there was no air to get. There were demons in hell who did not mind it much, but even laughed between the screaming periods of sound. A full twenty minutes had really passed when the chief demon, who labored at the drill, called "Time!"

Tools clattered on the rocky floor. There was an immediate movement toward the stopping, where the last man was just about to vanish before William realized that he was going to be left alone. He dropped his shovel thirty seconds late, and hurried after those departing forms—in that place

their company was much preferable to none at all.

Unused to the semi-darkness, panting, stumbling, his head whirling dizzily, eyes almost popping from his head, he had some difficulty in catching up to them. When he reached them they were grouped together close to the opening of the adit, whence came the bounteous mercy of fresh air. They drank it thirstily, filling their lungs deeply with the sweetness of it, exhaling in mighty gaspings distinctly audible.

"Gawd, that *is* hot!" the driller complained profanely. "Hotter'n ol' Billy-hell! Half an hour's too damn long in there!"

William, leaning helpless against the rocky wall, most fervently if silently agreed with him.

The driller flung the sweat from his face with a powerful hand. William was surprised to hear another say:

"You're gittin' soft—that's all that's wrong wi' you. You'd ought to try it below the nineteen hundred, where it's *hot*. I was jerkin' out timber for a week down there."

The driller paid no attention to such vain boasting. Besides, his head was sunken in a water pail.

There certainly was healing in that air, and in the blessed coolness flowing from the adit opening. Already William felt better by some thousand or more degrees. And now he began to think again. These fellows were probably loafing on the job—shirking almost as soon as Hugh McGregor had gone away. But that was no business of William's, anyway. It was sufficient that McGregor, calm and terrible, had gone. Now, if ever, was his chance to get away. Then, like a knife-thrust to his hopes, he remembered what McGregor had said before: "Man got lost—we didn't find him for three days."

Lost! In that labyrinth, deep underground! Why, the man might *never* have been found! William could easily imagine himself wandering, wandering in the dark for days and days. Even hell was preferable in company! Then, perhaps, they might not be going back.

"Time!" called the driller. "Half-hour is up."

"A half-hour!" thought William. "It isn't possible!" He was following the group toward the stopping again.

Eight times that night at half-hour intervals William learned what it meant to breathe again; eight times he spent a half-hour in the pit, and suffered as he had not known men could suffer and still live.

Once, and once only, Hugh looked in at him. The shift boss questioned the driller with his eyes, nodding toward William.

"No good," said the driller, without tact. "He's so soft that he ain't worth a damn."

"He'll learn," said Hugh, and went away again.

Then William thought a man-size miner's thought. "My God!" he groaned. "I'd love to murder him!" Which perhaps proved that he was capable of learning, just as Hugh had said. But so far all the profit that he got the whole night through was just one stupendous, fixed determination. He thought about it in every interval, mentally reviewed his ability to perform the feat.

Whatever happened, he would get away. Once safely on the surface of the earth, no possible power could get him in that falling cage again. He would leave Hobart if he had to walk—a comparatively simple exercise. Then walk, and keep on walking, until he was far away from there. As for what he might do afterward, William's project did not reach so far. And once, plunging his blistered hands into a pail of water to ease the pain, he had a rather curious idea: "If I could only beat McGregor up!"

There was a singular satisfaction in the thought. He remembered—it seemed not so long ago—that at college he had been considered "handy with the gloves." "I am soft," thought William; "that's at least half of what is wrong with me."

He pursued this thought no further. It did not help to ease his body's pain, nor did it subtract any part from his determination to depart from Hobart, by any means available, and as speedily as possible.

This, undoubtedly, William might have

done as expeditiously as he had planned, if at early dawn, when the cage shot upward like an arrow's flight, Hugh McGregor had not been waiting for him at the shaft-house door.

CHAPTER VI.

SPEAKING OF ACORNS.

IF Hugh McGregor had been a loquacious man, and Limpy MacVeigh been otherwise than drunken; if Hopewell Davies had been less ambitious, or found the eyes of Belle Shannon less alluring; if Jan Kowalski had been a gentleman; Margaret Ames not the little lady that she was; or, even more important, if William had not brought a white bull pup to Hobart—then the ancient saw about acorns and oak trees had been vainly written, so far as events in Hobart are concerned.

Limpy MacVeigh had spoken of the heir to Hobart as Wee Wully, and that name, transposed to Willy, stuck. It made William very peevish on occasion.

Scott Hanley, mystified by William's failure to depart from Hobart, even more mystified by finding his name on the pay-roll for the mine, but debarred by his high position from knowing all the labor gossip of the town, called Hugh McGregor to request some information.

"I argued with him," said Hugh. "He's doing well."

Further than this he would not commit himself. So that Hanley dictated a flattering letter to the office of his high superior, which completely neutralized the effect of the other letter which William finally wrote, for William, grown cautious, on second thought did not insert too much matter calculated to cause complications.

Hopewell Davies, as has been recorded, was president of the Miners' Union, and a person of some authority. Jan Kowalski was secretary for the smeltermen, who were, for the most part, aliens of Slavic stock, Huns, Croats, Ruthenians, Slovaks—all called "Hunkies" by the miners without distinction.

Once it had happened that the men in the smelter went on strike. The miners, led by Davies, for obscure reasons of his own, refused to strike in sympathy. This put a crimp in all Kowalski's plans. Davies was not forgiven for that defeat. Thus grew the feud between miners and smeltermen, that was not allowed to perish for lack of fuel.

At the smelter a heavy chain dependent from a crane, swinging a five-ton crucible of molten "blue metal" between cupola and convertors, snapped a link. Two men fell screaming beneath the white deluge. Some miner was said to be responsible; this from Kowalski, who of course confined the story to dark hints spread among his ignorant countrymen.

Such were the threats of vengeance the tale evoked that when the Miners' Union hall burned down—some one had carelessly thrown a smoldering cigar into a heap of trash—the miners immediately ascribed the loss of their papers and charter to spite work on the part of smeltermen.

The difficulty might have stopped with that if Belle Shannon had not entered as a disturbing factor. She could not, for mere business' sake, deny to Kowalski the privileges of the Horseshoe Club. Kowalski took advantage of his opportunities, which led to intense jealousy on the part of Davies, even to the point of believing that Kowalski's rivalry was dangerous.

With all credit to Belle Shannon, it was not. But Kowalski himself, encouraged by Belle's tolerance, began to entertain an idea that if Davies could be successfully put away Belle might look with favor in his direction.

Kowalski had no scruples in such a case—there was only the question of expediency and anxiety to escape all consequences. The feud, smothered, smoldering, slowly heated to the flaming point under Jan Kowalski's cautious ministrations.

William himself was not left entirely outside this controversy, although he had no active part in it. Because William, through his occupancy of a bunk in Hugh McGregor's cabin, had gained acquaintance with a different Limpy MacVeigh than the drunken jester of the Horseshoe Club, a shrewd fellow who knew books and men and who was Hugh McGregor's only intimate.

He alone had power to make the shift boss seem undeserving of his appellation, Silent. This intimacy Limpy shared with William, to whom he offered an early apology for his unintentional christening. Owing to his unusual opportunities, Limpy was a mine of gossip from the labor world; William heard Kowalski's various activities discussed at length as bearing on the working of the mine, which did not increase his admiration for Kowalski.

As for William, he was still determined to leave Hobart—but as he labored, one day passed after another, and presently, finding that living and labor were not impossible one with the other, he awaited the drawing of his first month's pay.

Fortunately, the amount was not quite enough to take William back to Broadway. Hugh's restrictions had grown less obtrusive; there came to be a measure of understanding between the men.

The hot stopes had done wonders for young William; boiled out of him the last trace of alcohol, added some inches to his chest, taken pounds of misplaced weight from his body. For the first time since college athletic days he began to feel that he was getting fit, and a healthy man finds it difficult to nourish impotent resentment.

Sometimes, feeling bulging muscles swelling beneath his shirt, William cherished a sort of hopeful vision that some day he would even pay Hugh McGregor for that unforgotten smiting of his princely chin—a design which Hugh, it is possible, suspected and encouraged. It is not, however, to be understood that William had conquered either himself or Hobart. The proof lies in this—that he was still Willy to the men.

In another direction William's efforts, however unintentional, displayed more indications of success. The first intimation that he had of this was delivered to him at the post-office, which, at certain hours, became the gathering place for most of Hobart.

It was nearly six o'clock. William, risen from his day of slumber, yet somewhat hopeful for a paternal passport to New York, was just leaving the post-office empty-handed as Margaret Ames was entering with a bundle of letters that Hanley had asked her to post on her way home. She smiled and nodded to William's rather embarrassed greeting. Thus encouraged, William, with a murmured "Please," took the letters and fed them through the narrow slot. They turned to leave the building together.

"And how do you like Hobart now?" asked Margaret in mere politeness, remembering, no doubt, the flattering letter dictated to her by Hanley when he had discovered William on his pay-roll.

"Not much," admitted William, "but better than I did."

This was true for the instant, at any rate. And if Margaret was willing to forget that he had been a cad, he should not this time remind her of it.

"I should have thought," said Margaret, "that you would have found it more pleasant at the office."

"On the contrary," returned William, "I find it much more pleasant in the mine."

The conversation seemed to promise well. However, they could not stand talking on the narrow sidewalk in the path of every passer-by. William fell into step at the girl's side. His last remark had caused a little puzzled frown to gather on her forehead. It demanded some further explanation.

"Surely you have not gone underground?"

"Hot stopes," said William, "eighteen hundred feet." He may be pardoned if he said this with an air of pride.

"But," Margaret objected, "I have heard that is the worst part of the mine, where the men can only work part of the time!"

"Well," William managed to say casually, "there may be something worse, but I don't think so. I don't think anything worse is possible."

"But why did you go there?" Here was indeed a mystery.

William could not be expected to make a direct reply to such a question.

"There is this about it," he declared; "knowing the worst, everything after that has got to be better. After the hot stopes, almost anything would be a treat."

William was certain of this, because only

a day or two before he had been promoted, and was now a " trammer "—which, bringing with it release from constant shovel work, he was disposed to consider mere child's play. Perhaps this was a part of the lesson that Hugh McGregor had attempted to convey.

William's attitude, even though partially assumed, proved a genuine surprise to Margaret.

" I did not think any one could feel that way. And I do think it is perfectly splendid—even Mr. Hanley never did all that!"

The tribute was genuine; there was charming flattery in the way she looked at him. William would have been more virtuous than human had he explained that the choice was not made of his own free will.

" Oh, it's all in a lifetime," he said airily.

They passed at the foot of the steeply ascending flight of stairs that, climbing upward, stage after stage, led from the street below to the Copper Butte Hotel, and thence to the " upper street " where the " high-collar " workmen had built their cottages.

The sinking sun, a great red ball resting on the top of Seco Mountain, shone ruddily through the vapors rising from the great smelter stacks, painting the sprawling black buildings of the smelter with pastel pigments of subdued colored light. Over them the leaping flame of the blast furnaces flowered green and crimson.

As they looked, one after the other, three rivers of fire spilled upon the dumps. The brown and yellow valley, a distant scenic painting, lay spread below them, remote and desolate, colored softly in the shadow of the peak, reaching away to meet the failing sunlight on the far slopes of a range of purple hills.

" Some people," said Margaret thoughtfully, " think all that is ugly—but I don't. I have friends who say ' How can you live in Hobart?' I shouldn't like to work anywhere else?"

" No?" queried William, astonished in his turn. " Just what is the—er—fascination, may I ask?"

" Why, haven't you ever noticed it? Just the color, and all that fire, and everything. It is never the same a minute at a time. And then, besides "—she became a little more serious, dreams passing behind her dark-blue eyes—" there is the idea of what we are doing here, even if I don't do a very big part of it.

" First, there is just the ore down in the mine, all in the dark that nobody can use. And then, when the men get through with it, all that copper is used in so many ways. I like to think, if we were not working here, there would be people all over the world who wouldn't have any electric light, or street cars, or—or pennies—you know what I mean? It just seems to me that we are not out of the world at all—but as close to the world as we can get."

She fell silent, looking at the picture with ardent eyes.

This was certainly a new viewpoint for William. But in the magic of the girl's imagination, with wider experience and richer material, he grasped a vision of more solidity: Broadway flaring in a blaze of light; stately ships in which men go down to sea; the flight of thought sped on wings of lightning around the world—made possible by the hidden wealth of Copper Butte. It brought to him, somehow, a curious sensation of humility. He looked with wonder at this fair young girl whose thought had leaped so much further than his own.

" I never did think of it that way at all," William confessed, stirred with the sense of new discovery. " I can see how that would make a difference."

" Of course it's only an idea of mine." Margaret smiled in whimsical apology for her fancy's flight. " Girls have such things."

This, too, was news to William, whose experience had been almost wholly with a type whose ideas were of an entirely different trend. But Margaret followed her fancy no further now. " You are on the night shift, are you not?"—looking at him with frank friendliness.

He nodded an affirmative.

" I thought so," she commented, " because this is almost the first time I've seen you since you left the office."

There was an unconscious confession here that gave William a delightful feeling of satisfaction. Margaret continued, a little hesitant:

"I know that you must find it dull in Hobart, but we really do have some nice people here. And sometimes there are little parties—if you would care to come when you have your evenings free?"

"That would be kind," said William most sincerely, quite unconscious of the fact that a half-hour before participation in the social activities of Hobart would have been remote from every desire of his heart.

"Then," said Margaret, "you must let me know when the night work is finished, in case I should not see you again."

She extended her hand frankly, as a man would do, in smiling ratification of the engagement, accepting him, as William could not fail to see, not at all as the prospective heir to Hobart, but simply as a fellow worker. In this, also, William sensed a subtle commendation.

"No," she denied him, "you mustn't think of climbing all these stairs with me."

William watched her as she mounted, instinct with strength and lightness as a young mountain deer. At the first staging she looked back momentarily, and William gallantly raised his cap before turning back into the town. It did really seem to him that smoke and slag and black-roofed smelter-sheds had acquired a picturesque quality never seen before.

"Some girl!" thought William. "I never knew they raised them in the sticks." The colloquial nature of the thought did not detract at all from the sincerity of his appreciation. He was basking in the remembered brightness of her smile. His chest expanded several inches in approval of one young William Vanderpool Biddle, laborer, who had been able to obtain that largess for himself. Forgetting to credit Hugh McGregor's work, he entertained, for the moment, a pretty good opinion of young William.

It was in this mood he met Kowalski.

Kowalski walked chestily on the street, overbearing, consciously important. At his heels trailed a dirty white bull pup which once had been the property of William. It was the same bull pup that William had brought to Hobart; the same that Kowalski had seen and coveted at the station before he had been released from the prison of his crate. Soon afterward that bull pup had oddly disappeared.

William, questioning the testimony of his eyes, whistled to the dog. The dog pricked up a cropped ear, frozen instantaneously in his tracks. William whistled again. The dog flung himself forward, a scooting streak of canine eagerness; hesitant, he sniffed for an instant at William's strange attire, then leaped and twisted like a dog possessed, whining in a passion of welcome for his long-absent owner.

William, walking forward, met Kowalski, advancing, face to face.

"I'd like to know," said William, "what you have been doing with my dog?"

Kowalski grinned. "Huh? You, Willy, what you got to t'ink you lose a dog?"

The grin itself was intentional insolence.

"You know damn well that's my dog," declared William. "And I don't want anything but an explanation out of you!"

"Mebbe you want somet'ing you don' get, huh? Mebbe you get somet'ing you don' want. Mebbe I tell you get t'ell away!"

Kowalski advanced threateningly. Then the bull pup growled. Kowalski kicked at the bull pup savagely. William crouched, tense with righteous anger. As Kowalski kicked, young William swung.

He caught Kowalski totally unprepared. Kowalski staggered; came back with a rush, arms flailing, attempting to get into close quarters. One wild blow laid open William's cheek.

Slipping from the impending clinch, William swung again. This time his blow, with all his new strength behind the impact, landed fair and square on a bony chin. Kowalski had no chance to get going good. It was a clean K. O. before the fight began—even though William's victory was almost entirely the product of fortuitous circumstance.

As always happens in like case, men came hastening from all directions. It seemed only a moment before there was a

crowd. At the sight of William, uninjured, save for his damaged cheek, looking down at Kowalski prostrate in the dust, questions rattled in the group like popping corn, those in the rear demanding information from the first arrivals who crowded to the front. Truthful reply offered no satisfactory explanation:

"Willy licked Kowalski."

"Like hell he did!"

"Cold as a fish! You done it, didn't you?"

"He stole my dog," said William, amazed at the excitement he had caused.

"Willy licked him. He stole Willy's dog!"

The thing was totally incomprehensible; something to be talked about and wondered over; a miracle that had happened here in Hobart. William, escaping interrogation, slipped through the crowd and proceeded to McGregor's cabin, followed by his dog. McGregor was preparing to go to work.

"Accident?" asked Hugh, noticing the blood on William's empurpled cheek.

"You might call it that," answered William with outward humility and inward exaltation. "I knocked over Kowalski—found him with my dog."

With an effort Hugh restrained his curiosity. "Put him out?" he asked calmly.

"Yes," answered William, feeling the fine edge of his rapture gone.

"Humph!" Hugh grunted. "Be a good thing if he'd stay licked—he'll be sore. Maybe you'd better keep away from him."

CHAPTER VII.

RED BLOOD AND BLUE STEEL.

IN the life of every boy there comes one occasion of supreme importance, marking the calendar with a red letter forever afterward. It may be one thing; it may be another—the first pair of long trousers, the first time he goes fishing with his dad, perhaps the first time he takes his sister's friend out to a party. It is when he begins to feel his oats, gains liberty from maternal leading strings—begins to feel that he is growing up.

As with men, so with nations. On one July Fourth now some time gone by, Uncle Samuel, then a gawky youth, stepped into the first long breeches that he ever wore. So vividly is the occasion remembered even now that in Hobart, at least, it still takes three days for commemoration; one, they say, for needful preparation, one in which to let the eagle scream, one more to recuperate from the effects. William originated an anniversary of his own on that same day.

The first day may be passed without extensive comment. There was some horse-racing, to be sure; much running to and fro on the part of racing committees, and entertainment committees, committees of everything and for everything that could contribute to the festival. The Horseshoe Club did a heavy business—also in preparation for the day to come. But the Fourth itself was the one great event.

See then the town of Hobart in festive garb. Only a feather of smoke floated bannerlike at the apex of the smelter stacks; no flower of flame blossomed above the silent furnaces. The day was clear, still, and intemperately hot.

Flags and bunting floated everywhere; the street was covered by an arbor of painted banners stretched between the roofs of the buildings on either side. No less gayly flower the motley crowd of as many races as there are principalities on European soil, all in holiday attire, usually ill-fitting "hand-me-downs" from Ignatz Levinski's New York Emporium, or, more picturesque and much more comfortable, belted corduroys and flannel shirts.

Shrill-voiced street vendors cried catchpenny wares; gewgaws of ribbon and celluloid to be displayed as personal decorations. There was a negro who dodged baseballs thrown with more force than accuracy at his head; "doll-racks," "knife-racks," and a "fortune-wheel"—tin-horn followers of Western carnivals.

Here and there the fresh white dresses of women swished above dusty shoes; children, if few, were much in evidence. Even before the Parade of Pioneers at ten o'clock a sufficient number of miners and smeltermen were as gayly illuminated as the street would be at evening.

Horse-races, games, speech-making, an Indian dance staged by Piutes from a near-by reservation, fireworks and a grand ball at night, were the order for the glorious day. Yet, all these happenings were comparatively unimportant. The one event, the great occasion that involved the honor of the town, was the champion drilling contest on the program for the afternoon.

For three years Silent Hugh McGregor had held the Arizona championship, not undisputed, but each year victorious—this for the " double-jack " event in which the two men strive against their paired contestants with all the power of brawny bodies and unbending will, to drive a bar of tempered steel through a block of quartz, fighting against time with each stroke of the sledge.

One man turns the steel in the deepening hole; the other swings the jack; they change positions at fixed intervals. Fifteen minutes is given to each pair before their hole is measured for decision—but fifteen minutes of such prodigious labor as few men could accomplish or endure.

The single-jack contest, where one man drills alone, is considered of minor importance. The peculiar interest this year was connected with the absence of " Dutch " Peters, Hugh's drilling partner on previous occasions, who, departed from Hobart, was now mining somewhere in the Teton Range. His place was to be taken by Hopewell Davies, a good man, as every one believed, but as yet untried in mighty struggle for the championship.

Which awakened ardent hopes in the hairy breasts of the drillers from the Copper Queen, who, thrice defeated, had thrice renewed their challenge. It was certain that if Worth Griffith, of Bisbee, teamed with Ladislaus Sissek, from Lowell, Cornish cunning and Slavonian brawn, defeated the previous year by a scant inch of hole, were unable to tear down the banner of victory, no other team in Arizona would dare to entertain a hope.

A raised platform, framed and floored with heavy timbers, had been erected in the street. On the platform a huge block of quartz was let down three feet beneath the floor, the surface made level with the extended arms of a man on his knees. At either side in even rows lay the sharpened " steel "—octagonal bars of various lengths, flattened and tempered at one end, to be used as the hole deepened under ponderous blows of a heavy sledge. A bucket of water and a long-handled " iron " spoon, would be used to clean the pulverized rock from the bottom of the hole.

Here, at two o'clock, all of Hobart found a gathering place. Men stood on the sidewalks raised above the street, jammed tight against the platform, covered the roofs of every building within sight of the stone. The " single-jack " trials aroused little enthusiasm; these were purely local contests, and the contestants received more badinage than praise.

But the appearance of Griffith and Sissek evoked a cheer. Even in Hobart they were popular—mighty men who had proved to be good losers in defeat. Davies and McGregor arrived a moment later.

The four contestants ascended the platform together, shook hands with the judge, and sat down on a rough bench built to face the major portion of the crowd. William, who had accompanied Hugh and Davies from the cabin, found a place near the platform, wedged in closely by the jostling crowd, noisy with comment and laughter, money changing hands as bets were posted on the result.

The judge, a gray-haired lawyer who had spent his life among the mining-camps, stepped forward to address the crowd after a whispered conference with the contestants.

" This contest is for the double-jack championship of Arizona, between Griffith and Sissek, champions of the Bisbee District, and Davies and McGregor, of Hobart, of whom Hugh McGregor is the present holder of the State record and one of the champions of the State. There are no rules except those usual in such contests. The men agree to drill with seven-pound jacks. Each team will select their own steel. All accidents will be counted as avoidable; no time will be ruled out. Griffith and Sissek, as the challenging team, will be the first team to pound steel."

The two men mentioned arose from their bench. They dropped their blue jumpers

and stood naked to the waist. Griffith, dark, grizzled, showing signs of age, was short in body, unusually long of arm; his arms, shoulders, and hairy chest were knotted with lumps of muscle bulging beneath the skin. Sissek, younger, and by far the larger man, was all pink and white; he was like a fighter at the peak of perfect form, and displayed feline control in every movement.

"Ready," called the judge with a stop-watch in his hand. The two men took their places by the stone. Griffith, lifting a heavy sledge, weighed its balance judiciously in his hand. Sissek carefully rearranged the steel more to his liking, lifted a short six-inch piece in one hand and held a twelve-inch bit in readiness in the other.

"Strike!" called the judge.

Instantaneous on the word Sissek slid the starting bit into place a little to one side of the center of the rock; Griffith struck, lifting the sledge barely to his shoulder, firmly, yet delicately, the second stroke dropping little more than the distance of the rebound from the steel. A tiny chip sprang from beneath the slightly slanted drill; then another at right angles to the first, smearing the smooth face of the rock with dust. *Clang! Clang!*

Each blow fell slightly harder than the last. Griffith was feeling out the texture of the stone, driving the start of the hole clean and even, letting the bitt bite for a firm support. At each blow Sissek lifted the short steel, holding it firmly with one hand, dropping it back after each blow with a sliding and turning motion of his wrist, slanting it a little with each turn. The white powder flew; a scar appeared on the face of the rock; became a circle, true and even, deepening with each turn of the drill.

"Steel!" cried Griffith when an inch was won. He heaved the double-jack high above his head. With a single motion Sissek swept the short drill from the hole, passed the longer steel from one hand to the other, and dropped it into place an instant before the swift blow fell.

Steel beat on steel like the sound of a ringing bell. Sissek grasped the longer bar in both his hands. Each blow found his arms as rigid as the steel itself, but as he jerked the bitt free from the cut to turn the drill each separate tendon seemed to crawl like serpents beneath the smoothness of his skin.

The drill bit deeper. Sissek dropped to his knees between two hammer-strokes. He drew the bucket of water nearer with an outstretched leg, and as he turned the steel with one hand, poured a cup of water into the deepening hole. The water, mixed with the powdered rock, splashed up and spotted the faces of the men.

Griffith, with unblinking eyes fixed on the brightening battered drill-head, was flinging the sledge far back behind his shoulders, to be whirled upward high above his head. Descending as the lightning strikes, the sledge bounced from the drill-head like a thing alive.

"One minute!" called the judge. The drill had gained two inches in the hole.

Clang! Clang! Clang! The blows fell with measured precision, behind each one all the strength of Griffith's knotted arms. He increased the time little by little as he gained his stride until the sledge was swinging rhythmically without the tenth part of a second difference between the strokes. The two men were working as one machine. Griffith breathed deeply, grunting with the labor of each stroke; sweat burst out on his body; his torso was like a bronze statue that moved gleaming in the sun.

"Two minutes!" Not quite eight inches of the twelve-inch drill still showed above the hole. "Steel!" Griffith panted. Sissek reached out for another bar. One twist only with a single hand snatched the quivering drill from the hole as the sledge uprose and Sissek slid a two-foot steel into place just in time to receive the impact of the descending jack.

"Three minutes!" At the cry Griffith dropped to his knees, following down the impulse of the swinging sledge. Even as his last blow was struck, he released the handle of his jack, and crouching, seized the drill. At the same moment Sissek had arisen, still crouching, with one hand on the drill, reaching for the handle of another jack held ready by his side.

As Griffith stooped, Sissek straightened—swung the sledge. He stepped into Griffith's

place, and swung again. Griffith, ducking, hunched into the former position of his mate. Steady as the ticking of a clock, the beat of the clanging hammer fell, without the loss of a single stroke. It was a beautiful change, and smoothly executed—a howling cheer burst from the crowd.

One or two blows only to get the " feel " of the jack in his hand—then, second by second, Sissek increased the swiftness of the measure, faster and faster until the flying sledge appeared to be a circle of whirling steel about his head. The *clank, clank, clank* of the repeated impacts rang like the drumfire of a great barrage. His skin glowed from pink to red; he seemed not to watch the drill at all, putting every ounce of flaming energy into those tremendous blows.

Sissek's breathing was like a sob deep in his throat; his great blond head rolled from side to side. Griffith, as he turned drill, poured more water down into the hole; the muddy spray, loaded with powdered quartz, sprang like a geyser from about the steel.

" Six minutes!" Sissek grabbed the sledge that Griffith had dropped down and leaned it against the stone ready for Griffith's hand again. Griffith snatched the old steel from the hole; grasped the spoon, and with half a dozen dexterous strokes cleaned the hole of accumulated slush. Sissek dropped the new steel instantaneously into place, and once again Griffith took the jack.

Steel leaped at ringing steel. There were disputatious comments in the audience. " Looks like sixteen at the six-minute pass!" " Nearer eighteen—did ye see that spoon?" " By God, that Hunkie, Sissek—he throws steel! We'll have to go some to hold the cup to-day!"

" Eight minutes!" The drillers changed again. Griffith had been but two minutes at the jack, and already showed some signs of fatigue. His face was drawn; his ribs strained outward from his heaving sides. But the brown and knotted hands that clutched the drill had lost no measure of strength or cunning. It was the intention of the team to save the strength of the older man.

" Ten minutes!" Once again they cleaned the hole. Now Griffith would pound steel two minutes more, then Sissek would take the last three minutes of the heat. The last drill used was more than a yard in length—before the final change two-thirds of it had been buried in the quartz.

" Twelve minutes!" Griffith almost fell beside the rock, sobbing with the deep intake of each breath. The labor of Sissek was terrible. He struck like some old half-human god or a wild demon of the elements, a youthful Hercules or Berserk Thor with his hammer of lightnings whirling about his head. Stroke by stroke, inch by inch, the steel bit deep, seeming to melt into the adamantine quartz. Sissek's face had aged, grown hard as the rock itself, the face of tortured Greek Laocoon, or of a runner in the Marathon.

" Time!" called the judge. On the stroke, Sissek dropped the sledge, staggered back and fell upon the bench, his head dropped into his hands; he labored, groaning, to fill his straining lungs. Sweat ran in streams upon his burning back.

Griffith, still panting from his own last heat, dumped a bucket of water over him, and Sissek looked up, trying hard to smile. A tumult of comment leaped upward from the audience as the judge dropped a measuring rod into the hole. He read the measurement deliberately, and stepped forward, holding up his hand, unnecessarily, to command attention.

" Sissek and Griffith drill forty-two and seven-eighth inches; three-eighths better than the champion's record for last year. There will be five minutes' interval. Davies and McGregor will then pound steel!"

There was a wild burst of cheering; expectant flowing of the masses below the platform; craning of necks to see better.

Hugh looked at Davies with significance. The two men rose together and laid their jumpers on the bench. Davies spoke to Griffith, also a " cousin-jack," his countryman, more broadly, perhaps, than he would have spoken ordinarily. " Ye din domn well—ee'l na be simple t' best ye, Griffith, mon—Ah'll gi' ye thot!"

" Na hart thots, gin ye do, tha' Ah'd like th' coop," Griffith answered heartily. Here were two very worthy Cornishmen.

Both Davies and Hugh McGregor were gigantic men, neither handicapped by the weight of years that had robbed Griffith of some endurance. But neither owned the splendid youth of Sissek, the Slav, making for almost instant recuperation with each breathing period holding drill. And, except in practice, they had never drilled together before this day and could not have that supreme confidence, each in the other, that is the very soul of a drilling team.

They had, perhaps, only one advantage—they could know and measure, minute by minute, the creeping inches that meant victory or defeat. But that knowledge might as easily prove discouraging in case they began to drop behind the minute by minute record that had been made.

"Ready!" The contestants leaped into place, Davies to strike, McGregor to hold drill, choosing these positions because McGregor was counted the more skilful man in opening the hole. "Strike!" bawled the judge. The first blow dropped down.

They were less spectacular than their competitors. McGregor relied more on skill than on brute strength in driving steel—drill bitts cunningly sharpened according to a theory of his own, tempered to the exact degree where the steel would neither break or batter in the cut. He taught the virtue of a steady stroke increasing in speed at exact intervals, mighty driving force behind each blow rather than intemperate swiftness at the hammer-head.

"The place for speed is at the bottom of the hole," McGregor had assured Davies many times. "Put strength on the drill-head and not in the air." And again: "A clean hole is a fast hole—time wasted spooning is time saved in the cut!"

Davies, following directions, struck with mighty power, not in too great hurry to get the double-jack away from the drill-head, but each blow fair and true, with an imperceptible interval in which to concentrate his strength between each stroke. Both Griffith and Sissek had used the usual method of striking, one hand near the end of the handle of the double-jack, the other hand sliding backward and forward between the end of the handle and the head.

Davies used the stroke that was McGregor's own, both hands at the end of the handle, swinging backward and upward the whole length of arms and sledge, not moving either hand at all, gaining more than two feet of added leverage. The stroke was noticeably slower, but in accordance with McGregor's theory, added many pounds at the head of the drill.

"Two minutes!" McGregor cleaned the hole, while Davies rested through three full strokes. Then again the battering of the drill. Some one more observant than others in the crowd shouted: "They're gainin' already—did you see that spoon? They've got five now if they got an inch!" "The hell you say—that Davies is crawlin' like a snail!" "Yeh—snail with a kick like an elephant! Wait till ye see ol' Hughie kill that steel!"

"Three minutes!" Davies dropped to his knees; McGregor took the jack. His movements seemed most deliberate. The new team changed steel much oftener than the old, which appeared to be a waste of time, but it was surprising how that steel seemed actually to fall into the rock under the pile-driver force of McGregor's crashing blows. Little by little his speed increased until the sledge was flying almost as fast as Griffith's own.

Hugh breathed deeply on the upward swing, expelling the air from his lungs with force at every fall. Here was perfect technique, perfect execution; old drillers in the audience who were capable of appreciation freely predicted victory at the end.

"Six minutes!" Davies sprang to take his turn at the sledge. McGregor fed the steel into the hole. At eight minutes there were more than twenty inches won. "Nothin' to it—they got a walkaway!" declared one miner who had noted carefully the discarded steel. "Mebbe—but seven minutes is a long, long time," said another, more experienced or more cynical. "Nine minutes," called the judge, holding the stop-watch in his hand.

McGregor snatched the dulled steel from the hole, straightened to position, swung the sledge. Davies, panting, fell into position, turning drill, while the blue steel bit and crushed into the living rock.

McGregor was not uneasy for the end. They had six clear minutes with neither striker winded much. Hugh was certain they were at least even with their contestants, and sure they were not in danger of falling behind. An inch, more or less, might tell the tale—he knew that he could add that extra inch. He swung the jack with comparative deliberation, making each blow count toward the desired end. "Ten minutes!" "Thirty-two now in the hole," thought Hugh. "Five minutes—not too bad!" The blue steel was biting perfectly.

How it happened McGregor never knew, nor could Davies afterward explain. "Steel!" cried Hugh, and Davies, without a false movement made ready for the change. The dulled steel rested loosely in the hole; Davies guided the bitt of the sharpened steel up to the edge, ready to snatch the old steel out with one hand, at the same instant drop the new steel with the other.

Once again McGregor struck. Davies jerked at the drill with his right hand, raising the new steel with the left. Perhaps there was a little fissure in the rock that pinched the bitt—the drill was rock-bound. Davies jerked again. At the same moment he had carried forward the new steel; the sharpened bitt wedged in the hole as he raised it up. His attention was on the rock-bound drill.

Hugh, striking, was unable to arrest his blow in time, although he did deflect it to one side. The hickory handle of the double-jack fell on Davies's arm, snapping one of the bones just above his wrist. It was an "unavoidable accident."

A roar of disappointment rolled outward to the edge of the crowd, for at that stroke the championship was lost to Hobart. Davies voiced his feelings with one expressive word:

"Hurt?" Hugh panted as he dropped the sledge.

"Domn thing's busted," answered Davies shortly, looking at the helpless arm as at a sort of curiosity.

"God, that's tough, Dave!" Hugh was sincerely sorry; that Davies knew.

"Ye've lost th' coop," mourned Davies—then, suddenly: "'Less ye can thraw th' jack on through! 'E'll be noomed for soom whiles; Ah'll make t' twust 'er, Hugh!"

"You can?" cried McGregor.

"Ah domn well can!" swore Davies. "Gin ye got th' guts t' strike for two?"

"Eleven!" the judge called. One minute lost! McGregor snatched the steel from out the hole; dropped the new bitt, ringing, into place. Davies crouched, his broken arm hanging at his side, his good left hand grasping at the drill. McGregor struck—and Davies turned the steel.

Many a manly contest had Hobart seen; nothing like this in all her history. Steel pounding sparks from steel; strength mastering the quartz of the everlasting hills; but more than that, man's courage conquering the eternal mastery of man's pain; brave men in battle against time itself, striving against odds to change defeat to victory.

"Twelve!" And all the inches yet to win! McGregor fought against them like a man gone mad, sparing neither strength nor steel in the unequal contest. His whirlwind sledge was a very part of him—one with his arms, his hands, a thing alive. It leaped and crashed; the blue steel cried and thundered, clangorous to the hilltops. Steel on steel, and steel on rock—singing the war-song of the triumph of man!

"Thirteen!" Strength driven by an unbending will, was Hugh; strength, steadfast with endurance — that was Davies, twisting at the drill. Sweat flew from Hugh and spattered on the stone. Blood dripped from Davies's arm and stained the floor.

"Fourteen!" There was a mist that trembled in Hugh's eyes. He saw nothing but the bright head of the drill. At that he struck, and struck, unendingly—in that last minute struck through years of time, drunken with strength that was destroying him.

"Time!" cried the judge. McGregor, with all the crowd before him a sea of faces spun round and round, dropped with his arms outspread upon the stone, choking for breath, holding fast lest he, too, should go whirling with the whirling world. In a moment the mist seemed to clear. He saw the measuring stick drop down between his hands. Then he heard the voice of the judge of contest:

" Forty-four and one-quarter—"

A wild yell burst from the throng below the platform, louder far than the thunder of the steel.

Sissek lifted Davies in his arms. Griffith pushed Hugh back upon the bench, holding a cup of water in his hand. In a moment the platform was covered by a swarming mass of men.

The championship would stay in Hobart for another year.

At evening there was music in the town, and presently a demonstration yelling and barking as the painted Piutes leaped about a huge bonfire built on the street. A glare of rockets rose against the sky; reverberating detonations of exploded giant powder rolled and crashed among the hills. The street was jammed with a moving mass of Hobart's population in whom the carnival spirit was flowing at high tide.

Davies had refused to remain at the company hospital, where an admiring surgeon had set his arm, but Hugh had finally been able to persuade him that the Horseshoe Club was not the place to carry a broken bone. Davies, not without some grumbling, accompanied by Hugh McGregor and William, who trailed along, decided at last to go to his room at the hotel while the night was young.

They arrived together at the foot of the stairway leading upward to the hotel. They stood talking for a moment; the noise of the celebration reached them only as a subdued murmur from a distance.

A group of roysterers, singing and jabbering in a foreign tongue, approached on the road that would take them to the smelter. There were five men in the group, each, apparently, carrying all the liquor that his skin would hold.

Near the stairway they stopped to engage in drunken disputation. One, it would seem, was demanding that his companions ascend to the hotel. They approached the foot of the stairway indirectly.

William was jostled by one of the drunken men—not so drunk as his speech would indicate. Then he was looking into the face of Kowalski, and in his hand Kowalski held a knife. Kowalski's attention was not for William, but directed at Davies, pushed against the railing of the stairway. Hugh was occupied with affairs of his own.

William struck the man who had jostled him; that man staggered, and came back again. No one, certainly, had ever taught William to fight as he fought now, with feet and hands and shoulders, teeth, if possible—but William had never fought for life before.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE END OF A PERFECT DAY.

HE opened with a drop-kick at Kowalski; heavy miner's boot reached Kowalski's elbow; the knife, released, leaped into the air, and falling, found a crack between the planking of the stairway. Davies finished that with a smashing blow from his good left arm that caught Kowalski midships and tied him in a knot. Hugh heaved one man over the railing bodily; William, meanwhile, had troubles of his own.

A living catapult caught him as he kicked, and William fell, squirming and twisting like a cat; it was some time before he could use his arms again except by way of protection for his head. At last he managed to roll over, and there were blows received and returned with usurious interest. Then a hand gripped at the collar of his foe; as the man rose, William struck again; there was no need to strike a second time.

And it was all over, with one man running rapidly away with infinitely better leg-control than that same man had displayed on arrival. Davies acknowledged a knife-thrust in his shoulder that had done little more than tear the skin; Hugh was untouched; William was a much battered young man. Kowalski, recovering, had crept away.

The man whom William had last struck showed signs of regaining consciousness. Beneath the stairway that assailant who had been tossed from the railing sat up in the weeds with a broken collar-bone.

" Let 'em go," said Hugh. " I guess they've had enough."

Davies laughed. " Ah'll gi' ye odds Ko-

walski's arm hurts worse nor mine, thanks t' the lad!"

It was on the way returning to Hugh's cabin after leaving Davies at the hotel that William received the guerdon of his valor, marking the day with a red letter for him. He had entered the ranks of hero-worshippers since watching Hugh and Davies labor that afternoon; now he had stood up and fought with them. He bore on his body the noble wounds of war. He hoped that he had not acquitted himself too meanly in their eyes.

"They really did mean to kill Davies, I believe," he remarked, in effect asking for corroboration.

"They did," said Hugh. "That was a good job of kicking, William—you did well."

After that a crown of gold, or, let us say, a commutation ticket to New York, could not have added richness to the ending of that day.

CHAPTER IX.

BELLE SHANNON—ARBITER.

ALL night the battle-cry of brawling miners echoed on the street of Hobart; the skirmish raged from the smelter dumps to the iron barrier at the other end of town. Smeltermen, casually leaving a saloon were set upon, mauled, and left lying without knowing what it was all about.

Miners roamed first singly, then in gangs, looking for Kowalski; failing to locate that cautious gentleman, any smelterman, they thought, would do. The miners' general theory seemed to be that if they could find enough smeltermen, sooner or later, they might inflict merited punishment on that man, or men, who, so soon after his honorable victory, had dared to lay an impious hand on Davies, hero of the day.

The smeltermen did not take kindly to this idea. When once they learned what the ruction promised and implied, they, too, began to go about in gangs, with sad results for certain mining men. Not until gray dawn laid a pallid finger on Seco Mountain were the streets quieted; even then the anger of neither miners nor smeltermen was yet appeased.

In the morning Hopewell Davies sat in a back room of the Horseshoe Club; opposite to him, across the kitchen-table, sat Belle Shannon, and they talked of many things. Presently the conversation ran to the affairs of men; business which, to Davies's mind, did not concern a woman. And Davies became more decided than was his habit, especially with Belle.

"Ee's na the business for the weemen t' be mixin' in," he declared. "There's soon wad na expect to find me hidin' behint your skirts—Ah'll na think t' be creepin' there myse'n!"

"Most of the men know you better than that," said Belle.

"Most is na a'," returned Davies doggedly. "Th' mon, Kowalski, is seekin' trooble, an' ee'll be findin' it, Ah'll gi' ye thot!"

"Now, look here," said Belle; "let me show you how this thing stacks up. Kowalski is out to get you—I know that. But he was drunk when he tried to do it with a knife. It hasn't helped his feelings any to have your miners hunting him all night. What would you do if you was Kowalski? You'd get a gang, and talk big, and stir up more trouble for yourself and everybody else. That's all the sense a man has, anyway.

"A woman would get rid of him with no trouble at all. Kowalski is crazy jealous; that's the reason he tried to put you out. But, then, just because your men can't find him—oh, I know you had nothing to do with that—they go out last night and beat up any smeltermen they see. That's sense again! Now, all the hunkies are sore at all the miners; that makes it safe for Kowalski to come out of his hole.

"The way things are going there'll be shooting before night; then Kowalski will have a chance to lay the blame on you. And if you get hurt, so much the better for Kowalski. He coppers the bet to win either way while you play his game the way he wants you to—that's brains!"

"Ah did na start the trooble, and Ah would na stop it gin I could," said Davies.

"You can, and will," returned Belle with decision. "And the time to stop it is now, before there's murder done."

"They'll say Ah'm feert o' thot mon Kowalski—"

"Brains—that's all you need! But you need a lot," declared Belle. "Dave, I guess I'd betted run this thing. Get this in your thick head now—there'll be no more trouble if I can help it, and I guess I can!"

"Ah'll na ha' ye mixin' into this!" Davies growled, raised up on his chair. He was ready to pound the table with his fist. "Ah'll mind ma business—Ah'll flat Kowalski aht!"

"You look silly," remarked Belle calmly. "Now sit down." Davies sat down. Master of most men, he was like a lump of clay in this girl's hands. "Now," said Belle, "I'm going to tell you what you're going to do."

"Ah'll do as Ah domn please," asserted Davies with a last flash of stubborn defiance.

"Sure you will," agreed Belle sweetly, "and you'll please to do what I tell you to."

"Ah'll fight!" Davies grunted. "Ah'll fight any mon!"

"Now you're talking," Belle laughed. Nevertheless, there was tenderness in her eyes. "When you fight, though, I like to have you fight to win—and that don't always mean beating the other fellow up. I remember," she said, "one time when I was a kid there was just some such row as this—it started over a horse-race; some old thing, miners and smeltermen. Before they were through they tried to burn the town.

"They had to send in the rangers—and they shut things down; everything closed tight for a month or more." Her voice became very gentle now. "I've told you that I don't aim to stay here running the Horseshoe Club, not all my life. This is no place for a family, Dave. I've promised you that we are going to leave the mining-camps when we have money for a real home outside. I think you want me to keep my word to you.

"Now, suppose you go ahead and stir up all the trouble you can? What happens? Maybe a dozen killings and the rangers in; lid on everything; mine shut down—men can't fight and work at the same time. Things aren't run as loose as they used to be—I don't want to visit my friends behind the bars. Then everybody is drinking, and nobody pays; before the shut-down, the club slate full of accounts it may take a year to get collected. I tell you I'll not have it, Dave—you can bet on that!"

To Davies this was an entirely new aspect of the problem. Being certain in his Cornish mind that an eye for an eye and tooth for tooth was the only fitting miner's law, Davies had been very eager to gather his men about him like some old Celtic chief, and go forth to battle until he had scattered his enemies to the winds. His enemies, it may be said, were any smeltermen who dared oppose a miner. But he had not thought of the riot he projected as affecting either Belle's personal interests or his own. Before the weapon of her gentleness his defenses capitulated instantly.

"Wha' ha' we got to do?" he asked, deferring to the superior wisdom of Belle.

"Just how much of a man are you, Dave?"

"Ah'm a domn good mon," returned Davies solemnly. Then, with an access of modesty he added: "For the things Ah knaw."

"Could you lick Kowalski, even with one arm in a sling?"

"Ah'd fight for the chance!" adding again, with Cornish canniness: "An' Willy gi'ed th' mon a kick last night—he'll ha' an arm hisse'n thot's na so strong."

"Then what does a man hate worst in all the world?"

Dave pondered over this. "T' lose his money," was a natural conclusion. Belle laughed at this. "An' t' lose his lass." Belle waited. "An' t' want t' fight an' na ha' the chanst."

"There's worse than that—than any of those things. To be called a liar or a coward and to be laughed at," said Belle wisely.

"'Tis the same thing," Davies answered. "Ee'n a coo'rd wants t' fight, an' would fight, gin he had the nerve."

"All right," said Belle; "then we can start with that. But first, your men would rather fight than work; they would rather work than lay idle; they would rather have one big fight than a lot of little ones."

"Coorse warkin' is business, whiles a fight is fun." Davies knew hard-rock psychology.

"Well," said Belle, "that is a chance that I will have to take. Now, I'll tell you what you are to do: You send a message to Kowalski; tell him that the town of Hobart isn't big enough to hold you both. Only, you don't believe this should make trouble between miners and smeltermen. Man to man, you offer to fight it out with him—and the man that gets the worst of it leaves the town. He is to hold his men quiet, and you'll do the same. He's got to take that, or leave it alone. And if he should happen to get the best of it—"

Davies raised straightly from his chair; on his face was an air of terrible injury. "Happen ee'd get the best o't—Ah'd be domned glad t' leave th' toon myse'n—Ah'm a mon, lass, gin Ah ha' a crackit arm—"

"Not that I think he has any chance for that," Belle added graciously.

"An' gin Ah canna put 'im aht," growled Davies, "this toon will na be healthy for Kowalski nor for ony smeltermon!"

"At any rate," said Belle, "that would make one big fight, and have it finished." Davies looked at her darkly, but could discern no hidden imputation of his prowess. "Of course," she added, "if he should refuse to fight—"

"Ee'll fight," said Davies. "Ee'll need t' fight gin 'ee stands oop t' me!"

"But if he should refuse," said Belle thoughtfully, "or if he does fight and gets licked—or, anyway—he'll have the worst of it; and there'll be no further trouble among the men."

Only then the full nature of Belle's strategy began to dawn on Davies; his blue eyes sparkled with the flavor of the thing. "Whins!" he chuckled. "In ony case Kowalski's in a hole! Ye ha' a heid, Belle, lass, Ah'll gi' ye thot!"

"We need one, Dave, between the two of us." And now, having gained her point, wily Belle could afford to be kind. The next question was asked when she had come around the table and held Davies great blond head between her hands.

"Then it's agreed you'll try to hold your men?"

"Ah'll try," promised Davies. "Ah'll do more nor try—Ah'll hold 'em gin Ah ha' t' lick 'em a' myse'n. Ah'll na spoil ma own hand wi' Kowalski!"

So far Davies saw; no further now. It was just as well for his own peace of mind that the full measure of Belle's scheming to keep the peace—even while she seemed to foster war—hatched in her feminine brain for the better protection of her man, was not apparent even yet to Davies. It was Belle's intention it should not be so, not now, or at any future time.

Within the hour grave conference was held at Hugh McGregor's cabin, the roll-call showing Hugh himself, Hopewell Davies, Limpy MacVeigh, who just happened to be there, and William, who listened, and said never a word.

It is to be remembered that although every one in Hobart knew now that "Willy" was "ol" man Biddle's son," in this talk of feud and war between these laboring elements, even though in the last contingency company property might be threatened with some loss, neither Hugh nor Davies thought of him as being other than a miner like themselves. Perhaps on this occasion William himself had no other thought, which goes to show the progress he had made.

"So," said Hugh, "you're sure the hunkies are on the warpath right?"

"They are," said Limpy. "I've been speirin' round. That deil, Kowalski, he's been talkin' to 'em—the auld tales aboot the hoistin' accidents an' a'—an' they're feert to death an' wild at the same time—wi' oceans o' drink tae keep their spirits high. Hell wull be a-poppin' when th' nicht comes doon, if na before. They'll follow like sheepies if Kowalski gi'es the word. 'Twill na be clean fichtin', but murder runnin' fou' wi' a stick o' giant in each hand."

"How about your miners?" Hugh asked Davies. "This begins to look dangerous."

"There'll be na trooble," said Davies with a grin. "Ah coomed t' th' decision 'twill na be best."

"Then you think that you can hold the men? I know you've done nothing to stir them up so far?"

"Ah'll try domn hart—wi' promise o' other entertainment. 'Twill be na trooble—whiles Ah ha' a plan." Then, chuckling still, Davies disclosed the secret of Belle's strategy—or, as much of the secret as he knew. The men agreed that Belle's diplomacy was good.

"There's one thing, though," Hugh added thoughtfully. "You're in no shape to fight—still, I don't know—"

"'Tis neither here nor there," proclaimed Davies with the touchiness of injured pride. "Ee'll do the wark, that plan, and us 'll ha' na killin' o' miners or smeltermen. Will ye ha' more nor thot? Ah'm lookin' na furder for myse'n."

"All right," said Hugh. "We'll play it as it lays. I guess you'll take care of yourself, one arm or two. Limpy, here, can get word to Kowalski—any time before noon will do." Then they began speaking of other things.

The talk became a curious jargon concerned chiefly with "strata," "faults," "dips," "fissures," and names of strange ores ending in "ite" or "tite." When compounded with the clipped syllables of Cornwall, and Limpy's broad vowels and gutturals, it might as well have been Sanscrit in the ears of William.

After a while he departed quietly, strolling down from the cabin through the street littered with debris from the celebration of the day before.

Here and there a patched window and broken glass strewing the board sidewalk testified to the activities of the night. But for the most part both miners and smeltermen were absent from the street, and the town seemed to slumber in a state of truce. Which only meant that the clans were not yet gathered for the expected forays, or not sufficiently imbued with the spirit of the occasion thus early in the day. William spent no great amount of time with investigation of the battle's wreckage.

Near the top of the flight of stairs that led upward past the Copper Butte Hotel he met Margaret, to whose home he had been going as directly as his feet would carry him, even though his strolling might have appeared to be without direction.

Margaret, laughing, and a little out of breath, had just succeeded in capturing a truant, red-cheeked youngster, Hanley's son, known to all of Hobart as "The Kid," whose grimy hands and stained overalls showed recent and intimate evidence of earthy pursuits.

Margaret gathered the youngster in her arms. "Don't you know, Buddy, that you mustn't run around this way?" She referred to the condition of his clothing, that was, to say the least, not quite presentable. She greeted William with a little smile and nod, accepting him as a third of the trio.

"I been a-diggin' me a mine," Buddy announced, submitting graciously to capture. "Out back of my house I betcha I got fourteen or nine feet already—it will be awful deep when I get done."

"Aren't you tired, dear, with all that work?" Margaret asked, smiling.

"No, I'm not tired," he declared manfully. "But my dog, he got tired, and he runned away. And daddy hasn't got home yet, and that woman, she went to the store, and she told me I mustn't go out of the yard, so I saw you coming and runned to meet you then."

Which was not strictly true, for Buddy had been making for the stairway straight as he could run. Margaret chose to ignore the indirection.

"That's not really running away, is it?" the child demanded with all innocence. "Not if we go to your house and get a cake?"

Buddy, it may be seen, was an incorrigible little adventurer, a vice in which he was sadly encouraged by all miners and smeltermen; the life of "that woman" who was good Mrs. Pratt, Hanley's housekeeper, was made miserable by Buddy's vagabond escapades.

"I'm afraid," chided Margaret, "that is running away." Her tone took the sting from the admonition. Buddy, with his thoughts fixed on cake, would probably

have taken it lightly, anyway. And besides, he was gravely inspecting this new man, William, whom he did not know. Not to be known to Buddy was the same as social disgrace in other spheres. Margaret set him down, and hastened to remedy this defect in William's eligibility.

"Buddy, this is Mr. Biddle, and this is Buddy, who is going to be a miner, too."

"You bet I am!" said Buddy, in whose mind there was no doubt as to the proper vocation for a man. William took the child's hand with the seriousness befitting the occasion.

"I shouldn't think it would be very long now before you will be big enough for that," William declared. The subtle flattery won instant approval.

"Fellers gets to be miners 'fore they're old as me!" exclaimed Buddy in his proudest manner, as if echoing some dimly understood story told by his father. "But daddy says I got to go to school." The child looked again at Margaret. "I haven't runned away, not once to-day. And I think I ought to have some cake."

"I believe," answered Margaret, smiling, "there might be some. In just a minute we shall go and see." She addressed William again. "Haven't you just come up from the town?"

"Yes," answered William; "just a few minutes ago."

"Are things quiet now?"

"Just now they are. Of course there is more or less excitement since last night."

"I've been afraid to go down into town all day," Margaret confessed. It is too bad they can't have a celebation without some one getting hurt. Mr. Hanley is very much worried, because he doesn't know how this trouble is going to end—he says that they can't ever tell, especially if the men are drinking. Perhaps you might know what the miners are going to do?"

"Well," said William, remembering the talk he had heard in McGregor's cabin, but uncertain as to the ethics of the case, "I have heard some talk; nothing very definite. I don't believe, though, that the miners will make any further trouble."

Margaret brightened; then, still a little doubtfully: "You are quite sure of that?"

"Perhaps," William assured her, "it wouldn't be quite fair to tell you just how I know."

"You think they'll be going back to work to-morrow morning? And may I tell Mr. Hanley that?"

"I don't think it could do any harm," said William, cautiously, "if he would be willing to accept it as coming from me."

"I am sure he would," Margaret replied graciously. "You would know, working with the miners all the time. I shall not be nearly so uneasy now."

The way she looked at William was sufficient assurance of her confidence. More formal expression of his growing favor was interrupted by Buddy pulling at her skirt. "I suppose," she declared gayly, "I shall have to go and get the child his cake."

"Cake, by all means," agreed William, smiling. "And I hope," said he to Buddy pleasantly, "that I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again." Then Margaret spoke impulsively:

"I'm so glad that I met you to-day—I was really worried about all that fighting; and I think I had cause to worry, too. And of course you do know what is going on."

Thus easily may bearers of glad tidings be suddenly exalted to the status of an important personage without regard to the source from whence their knowledge springs. In justice to William the good effect of his imparted information was not the product of deliberate intention. Indeed, he himself did not know that he was merely quoting at a distance the words of Belle Shannon—arbiter—who in turn would have been surprised to know how far this ripple of her strategy was now extended.

That her plotting was already working actively William became visually aware when he arrived at the foot of the stairway. There, nailed to the blackened trunk of a stunted tree, was a new, rudely lettered sign:

NOTICE

Miners of the Copper Butte are requested to meet at the Horseshoe Club 4 P. M. for important business

The "request" was signed by Hopewell Davies, as President of the Miners' Union,

It was only natural that the name of Belle Shannon should not appear.

CHAPTER X.

THE HEIR—HIS HERITAGE.

BELLE SHANNON'S talk with Hopewell Davies was not her last voyage on the troubled waters of diplomacy for that day. Indeed, no sooner had Davies departed from the Horseshoe Club than she dispatched a message to Kowalski. It was sent via a bartender in an adjoining saloon, relayed then through several smeltermen, and finally came to Kowalski as he lay only more or less in hiding in the cabin of another smelterman.

"Belle Shannon," ran the word, "says she'd like to see you right away."

It was the first message of this nature that Kowalski had ever received from Belle. Therefore he hastened to reply in person. Discretion led him to approach the Horseshoe Club by devious ways. He entered at the rear of the premises, where he found Belle awaiting his arrival. Then he sat in the chair so recently vacated by Hopewell Davies. Belle gave him no great while to add fuel to the flame of his curiosity.

"I wonder if you've heard from Davies yet?"

"No," answered Kowalski, who in truth had not, since Limpy had not as yet been able to locate him.

"Well," returned Belle with some show of indifference, "that big jack has a bug in his head. He was in here a while ago looking for trouble, and hoping he was going to find it, too. I thought I'd let you know. He thinks you two ought to scrap it out among yourselves and not get a lot of men shot up that haven't anything to do with your private rows. I'm with him on that; thought I'd let you know that, too. Them fools have a way of getting careless when they get heated up. And I, for one, don't want any of my property destroyed. So, if you start anything, Kowalski, why, you want to keep your men away from here."

"Sure," agreed Kowalski readily, surprised and pleased that Belle should acknowledge his authority. "You know w'at else Davies t'ink he want to do?"

"Oh, he's sore," said Belle. "I don't blame him none. Same as I'd be if some one tried to stick me with a knife. But that's no row of mine—go ahead and kill each other off. Then we might get a little peace in this town."

Belle's declaration of indifference toward himself was more than offset in Kowalski's mind by her assumed indifference toward Davies. But, at mention of Davies, his deep-set eyes sparkled combatively.

"He wants fight, eh? Wall, good fight, da's me." He leaned pugnaciously across the table.

"You don't get me yet," said Belle. "And you needn't look so rough at me—it's not me you'll be fighting, anyway. Nor anybody else—not right away. That's what I called you down to say."

"I fix that feller Davies, all same," grunted Kowalski.

Suddenly Belle lost all appearance of indifference, leaning across the table, every muscle tense—she was a most capable actress. Kowalski started before the blaze of temper in her eyes.

"You will not—get that out of your head now, right away." Belle's attitude was in itself a command. "I know that crazy cousin-jack is brainless, but I kind of thought you had some sense. That's the reason I sent for you."

Her voice softened almost insensibly. "Suppose he does want to fight it out with you—him with his arm in a sling and all. Well, what happens? You'll lick him, sure—then, because he's hurt, the miners will be out to get your skin. The smeltermen, they'll stick with you, of course. There'll be fightin' all over the place. That's what I'm trying to prevent. Do you suppose I want this place blown up around my ears?"

"Then w'at you like for me to do?" asked Kowalski, dismayed at Belle's display of temper; encouraged at the same time by her show of confidence in him.

"That's easy," said Belle. "You're not to fight. Not now, anyway—patch it up—clear out—anything you like. But when Davies shoots off his mouth, you keep yours closed. As long as you do, you're welcome

arounq nere. When Davies is all right again, then fight it out, when it can't get the whole town in a mess. Until then you keep away from Davies—see?"

"But if he calls me—hall! I gotta fight!" Here was a most bewildered Kowalski.

"All right," said Belle, indifferent again. "Then I'm through with you." Then her voice became caressing. "Look here, Kowalski—we've been good friends now for quite a while. Mebbe not as good as we could be—but this is the first thing I ever asked of you."

A threat crept into that soft voice. "But I'll tell you this right now—and I mean it, too. I'm tired of these rows here, anyway. And if you, Kowalski, start another one, now that I've told you that I want it stopped—well, Davies has been at me to leave Hobart for quite a while. If you want to see any more of me you'll lay low and do just what I've laid out for you. You can take that or leave it, Kowalski, as you like."

Belle leaned back in her chair, as one who has said the final word, and what is more, intends to keep that word to the last letter.

"W'at?" cried Kowalski. "You marry dat feller—an' you go away?"

"Just that," said Belle. "And I will, even if the prospect doesn't please me much."

"Dan, you don' like, why you not marry me?"

"Sure," said Belle sarcastically, "and the first thing I want you turn me down!"

Was ever man in a more sorry plight—here, at the beginning of hope, to have hope snatched away? Kowalski, as was only to be expected, fell promptly into the trap that Belle's scheming had set for his unwary feet.

"I don' let you do w'at you say," he cried, much worried. "I do w'at you say—you don' do dat. I mek no trouble—I keep shut my mout'! Mebbe you t'ink better for me, eh?"

"Good!" Belle flashed an ardent smile at him. "You'll both forget it by next week. And when things get quieted down a bit, come around as often as you like."

"Mebbe," said Kowalski doubtfully, "I have some trouble wit' my men?"

"Oh, well, I can leave it to you to manage them," Belle returned confidently.

Kowalski, in that moment, was sure he could. He gathered his cinder-burned hat into his hand. "Dan I see you in a day or two?"

"Fine!" said Belle. "But remember what I said." Then Kowalski departed the way he came. Belle smiled enigmatically at his departing back.

"Well," said Belle to herself, "that settles that." Even Kowalski, self-congratulatory, thought the same himself, until he was some distance from Belle's door, when he grew doubtful. Not even then did he gage the full extent of the promise he had made to Belle.

One thing Kowalski had forgotten that he was to remember with terror later in the afternoon after Davies's challenge had been delivered. Those who would rule the mob need a strong hand. Even in seclusion Kowalski had been very busy sowing the wind among his smeltermen, thinking the whirlwind might be ready for his reaping before night. Now, how to escape that harvest he did not know. He foresaw a busy afternoon ahead. What might come after that, the night would tell.

It is certain that Kowalski was no coward; no man could be who ruled the smeltermen as Kowalski ruled. But it presently appeared to him that the keeping of his promise involved at least the charge of cowardice before his men. Or else, if he fought, then he had lied to Belle, which promised consequences that he did not care to contemplate.

Within an hour after leaving Belle, Kowalski was a sorely troubled man, exactly as Belle suspected he would be. It may be mentioned that after this interview, when Kowalski had talked to some of his men, blowing now hot, now cold, there were many smeltermen not less puzzled than was their natural leader.

The meeting of miners at four o'clock was well attended. A condition of truce held the town in thrall. The committe on entertainment, prompted by Scott Hanley,

had called off the tag-end program for that day; carnival booths were closed, and the itinerant hucksters had silently gone away.

Davies's calling of the meeting had aroused much curiostiy, for there were many rumors afloat in the town—the smeltermen, it was whispered, were preparing to venture abroad in mass; dire calamity for miners was predicted. Miners in turn, not willing to become victims of calamity, threatened reprisals of portentous kinds.

Here and there in passing men eyed each other sullenly; wandered aimlessly in and out of the saloons; stood about, hands in pockets, discussing the latest rumors, and waiting for the coming of the night. There was powder in the air, attending only the match of a blow to fling the whole mass into destructive explosion.

At the Horseshoe Club, Limpy held the men with foolish entertainment. An hour passed before Davies appeared with Hugh McGregor—Davies was playing for delay. Most of the men had heard of the challenge sent forth to Kowalski; some grumbling that Davies was trying to deprive them of warfare honorably theirs. Others admired the courage of Davies, with much free comment on the chance he would have against Kowalski, considering that he had only one useful arm.

All awaited the word that should be returned from Kowalski. That word failed to arrive—Kowalski did not know what word to send. It became certain that no answer from Kowalski would be received. Davies himself was uneasy about this. It might mean the gathering together of the smeltermen; some new danger or unexpected treachery.

The idea that Kowalski would not accept the challenge did not occur to either Davies or his men, for they did not know all the ramifications of Belle's strategy. From time to time she looked in at the miners through the door at the rear. Only the popularity and established leadership of Davies and McGregor could have held the impatient men so long.

Lamps were lighted in the saloon, dimly illuminating the unshaven faces and mud-encrusted hats of the men seen mistily through the fog of rank tobacco smoke. Logger Shannon, watchful and attentive, moved behind the bar. Hugh McGregor rose from his usual place at a table in one corner; rapped with his knuckles on the table to establish order.

"Nothing happens," he said briefly. "I propose the night shift gets to work again."

There was some muttering; heavy boots scraping on the rough boards of the floor; uneasy movements throughout the mass of men.

"Hell!" said one, and spat disgustedly. "Not till somethin's settled," another said. There were some who crowded toward the door. Hugh sat down again. He sensed the futility of argument.

But Davies was unwilling to let the gathering terminate this way. Belle's plan had functioned well so far. But should the miners depart in such unsettled state, it would only be toward trouble of their own seeking.

"Afore ony ga'es aht, Ah ha' a word t' say!" Movement ceased. "Ah ca'd this meetin' t' tell ye summat ye'd a' like t' hear, but happen we've na word fra' Kowalski. Ah want na trooble wi' th' smeltermen o'er me. But like it will be more peaceful for a day or two gin na miner ga'es aboot by hisse'n."

For a moment there was silence; then a voice profanely questioning: "Say that again, Jack. What the hell's that talk?"

"Ah said," repeated Davies cautiously, "gin we want na trooble, us 'll stay soom distance fra' th' smeltermen."

This was immediately answered by an angry voice: "If they get that idea, some o' them hunkies better go an' climb a tree!" There was general agreement with the sentiment.

"Ah've heard," continued Davies, "gin we seek trooble, the company will shut doon the mine. Happen then, us 'll na be warkin' for soom whiles. Ah think, myse'n, 'twill be better t' ga' to wark all quiet-like, gin Kowalski's na prepared t' fight wi' me. Happen he'll na be fightin' all o' we."

No one saw the canny twinkle in that Cornish eye; Davies knew that if Kowalski failed to fight, it was more than likely his power was broken for all time.

"Sure o' that, Jack?" some one called

abruptly, with the thought that was in the minds of all.

"Ah'll na say for sure," returned Davies earnestly. "Ah telled wha' Ah've heard—na more, na less. But Ah've heard thot wi' good authority."

Every man knew that Davies was, in a measure, intimate with William, and William was the son of the "old man." How wide was the gulf that separated William from the office of the Copper Butte was something that they did not know at all. Davies let them draw their own conclusions.

"How about that, Hugh? Tell us what you know?"

"Davies," said Hugh, "may have some correct information."

From Silent Hugh no windy speech could have been more effective. Comment burst forth from the miners crowded close to Davies near the bar.

"Stacks up that it 'll cost our jobs to lick them smeltermen." "Damn set o' hunkies—an' that's the way they get away with it!" "Just as soon go out an' beat 'em up—they'll be tryin' to burn us out again!"

Davies interrupted: "Happen, then, Ah've got an idear." The idea, it may be said, was Belle's. If there was to be a fight after all, he wanted that fight finished, and at once.

"Th' smeltermen 'll be ga'en t' wark tonight. Ah'm a' for peace myse'n. If they'll ca' it off, we'll a' ga' peaceable t' wark again. If soom coom along for a committee, us might argue wi' the smeltermen."

The idea on the face of it was appealing—and it offered possibilities. There were those who expressed profane doubt as to the final nature of that argument.

"Argue with a hunkie—hell! It can't be done!" Davies himself illuminated the general feeling.

"Happen," said Davies, "after a' there might be a fight."

He could have offered no inducement more attractive. The committee when it started with or without express appointment, was composed of almost every miner who had crowded into the Horseshoe Club saloon.

Over the smelter dumps and cinder-covered yard the arc lights blazed. Only a thin yellow smoke hovered above the black roofs of the smelter, faint gaspings of the furnaces. Just enough smeltermen had remained at work to keep the giant Bessemers from cooling; only enough ore was fed in at each charge to produce a few rough copper ingots cooling in the runs and a few cars of slag to be run out to the dumps.

Lights blazed at all the office windows. Hanley was in conference with Kowalski, who, as the last resort of a puzzled man, had gone to the superintendent, based his plea on the possibility of damage to company property, and asked that Hanley, by virtue of his authority as the only law in Hobart, should deputize armed neutral guards to keep the peace between miners and smeltermen.

He confessed that he might not be able to control the smeltermen, whom he had inflamed against the miners on that same day and throughout the night before. The demand only added to the worries of Hanley, who had not believed the trouble to be so serious and who was angered at Kowalski for his part in the disturbance not less than he was surprised at Kowalski's sudden change of front.

The whole attitude of the smelter boss, apologetic, at the same time defiant, was not soothing to the superintendent of the Copper Butte.

Davies had timed the arrival of his committee to the minute. That committee was a delegation—had rapidly grown to be two delegations, one of miners, one of smeltermen, the smelter workers of the day shifts following the miners at some distance, prepared to assist their fellows of the night shift already gathered at the smelter in case of need.

They were very uncertain what this gathering of miners might intend. Davies's group was, as Limpy declared, truly representative, every man being represented by himself, with the miners of the night shift most in evidence.

They halted near the shaft-house of the mine; the smeltermen, following, swarmed thick about the buildings of the office. Be-

tween the two groups extended the yard with its steel spider-web of tramway tracks. Having learned that Kowalski was in the office, Davies sent in word that the miners would like to have him come outside.

Kowalski came, uncertain of his reception, followed at a nod by several of his retainers. From the doorway behind them, revealed by the interior lights, Hanley looked out, thin and worried, but prepared for any eventuality that might arise. Both miners and smeltermen suspected the presence of a picked gang of boilermakers and firemen armed for the protection of company property somewhere in the offices behind, for these men were a secretive and clannish folk who had no sympathy with either miners or smeltermen.

The few miners who had been timbering on day shift began coming from the mine. Hasty remarks made them acquainted with the situation. The whistle over the powerhouses blew promptly at eight o'clock, but the smeltermen made no move toward the smelter; the night-shift miners showed no disposition to hurry underground.

Hugh and William stood together at a far edge of the miners' grouping nearest to the dumps, Hugh with eyes fixed on the entrance to the office, William trying to see everything at once, losing no detail of the scene, which he found delightfully exciting.

Kowalski with his men, Davies, his arm in a sling, with the committee which he had appointed, drew away from the masses of which each was a part; approached each other across the neutral ground of cinderland. It was as though two knights rode out beyond the forefront of their respective armies—knights of toil, in cinder-burned denims and muddy overalls, their weapons words, and horny fists to follow after that.

"Well?" growled Kowalski, ominous, threatening, at the same time fearful, not indeed of personal injury, but of the consequences this movement might involve.

Davies sensed at once that truce between himself and Kowalski was impossible. But truce among the men—that might be realized.

"Ah coomed," said Davies, "t' ask ye gin ye ha'ed ma word?"

"Yes," said Kowalski, with no change of tone.

"Well?" It was Davies's turn to question now.

There was a drawing together among the groups, a feeling of tenseness electric in the air. The two groups were like dogs straining at the leash awaiting only a word of command.

"I fight no cripple," said Kowalski sullenly. "An' I don' want no trouble wit' the men. I tol' my fellers we all quit it, eh?"

"Ah coomed t' say thot myse'n," said Davies abruptly. "But Ah'm na creeple gin Ah ha' a crackit arm—an' gin Ah am, ye've changed soom since las' night."

The Cornishman was determined to press his moment of advantage. "Creeple or na, Ah'll fight ye noo wi' pleasure—then happen th' men 'll ga' back peaceable."

Kowalski, trapped in the network of Belle's secret weaving, saw again her face before his eyes; heard again her ultimatum in his ears. Yet this was more than man could easily endure; each moment of hesitation was increasingly destructive of his leadership. And he had never been a patient man.

But once more he tried, rudely as might be, to break away from the enclosure of that silk and iron mesh into which he found himself betrayed. He spoke lowly that his men might not hear.

"Mebbe I don't fight—tha's my business, eh? I fight damn soon w'en you got good arm."

"Ye fight me noo!" repeated Davies, and his voice was loud enough for all men to hear.

Kowalski, trembling, his clenched fists aching with the withheld blow, gulped, turned contemptuously halfway. But, because he was an immoderate man and sorely tried he could not resist the impulse natural to his kind.

"The hall you say!" he cried, goaded beyond endurance. From out the corner of his twisted mouth he hurled at Davies the one supreme insult that no man will bear. And having spoken he spoke once again, flinging his arms wildly in the air. "Da's for you all—I don't give a damn!"

There were those among his alien followers who knew the nature of that insult, although they knew scarcely any other English word. The repetition of it ran like a volley of scattering rifle fire throughout the ranks of smeltermen—and to that word no answer save one is possible. Others of like kind grew to a roar of passion on the miners' side.

"Noo," cried Davies fiercely, "ye domn well fight!"

Even as Davies advanced there were those who broke away from the grouping and advanced more swiftly, silently, menacing. Then the mass moved, faster and a little faster still, flowing, a growling sea; drifting toward the dark mass opposite that gathered into battle groups of smeltermen and bulged outward to meet the miners' onslaught—behind them the black shadows of the buildings where the office windows were patches of yellow light. Davies was swallowed up in the mass as it rolled over him.

The first blow, if blow there ever was, was arrested midway by the knife-thrust of a woman's scream:

"Buddy!"

Then came a man's great cry:

"Oh, God! The kid!"

The silence thrilled with the mischievous laughter of a child.

There was a shadow that moved in the semidarkness toward the dumps; a train of two slag-cars with the tiny electric locomotive had been left neglected on a track. Buddy had been a passenger with smeltermen before; an amusement no sooner discovered than forbidden—not before his curious little hand knew the location of the switch that made it go. But to stop! Childish investigation did not extend so far.

When daddy did not come home he had been lonesome. It had been easy to elude the vigilance of Margaret, who had volunteered to amuse him for a while. A joyous runaway, he came to look for daddy.

Then there was that glorious train of cars, all unattended. Margaret, too, pursuing, close behind.

The train gathered speed, moving down the incline of the smelter dump. A spot of wavering white, a woman's skirt, running frantically after it. And leaping, hopping, grotesque and absurd, a shape formed in the shadows of the sputtering arcs that approached fantastically at right angles to the track—a shape that fell, and falling clung, crept and crawled on the moving iron toward the control-box where the child knelt down. The trolley of the tram sparked lividly, a prolonged lightning flash of blue and white—

"Limpy!" The cry arose from a thousand aching throats.

The speed of the train increased more rapidly. Limpy, the jester, with his withered arm, creeping—creeping—now there was only a single mass of men, all in motion, moving toward the dump. There was a hundred feet between the train and the talus slopes of smoking slag; then fifty—then, was there anything at all?

Something white that fell from the car at the volcanic edge—Buddy, who rolled over once or twice, and got up crying with fright and the pain of a few scratches from the cinder-bed; fright was the larger part of that.

But of the train there was nothing—a dull crash as the cars leaped from the track, and a curious crackling beyond the edge of slag. Then the crowd, and Margaret, who gathered Buddy in her arms and alternately laughed and cried with him; Hanley, very white and inarticulate—

And Limpy, still clinging to the cars some twenty feet below the lip of the slope, gray smoke whirling about his grizzled head, the car-wheels sunken in the lava of the slag that slid like ice where the cars had cracked the crust, bubbled red and angry about the wheels.

"Ye'll ha' tae get me oot," cried Limpy faintly. "I canna endure a muckle while."

There were those who ran along the edge and yelled; others looked dumbly at the man below. It was Hugh McGregor who brought the plank—thick mine timber more than long enough, to which Davies fastened a chain at one end. They slid it down across the crust of slag. It touched the car which trembled—settled deeper into the semiliquid mass.

"Carefu', mon," called Limpy; "it's na greet push this stinkin' stuff 'll stand." His

voice was weaker; it scarcely carried to the men above.

"All right, Limpy—can you make it now? We'll toss a rope to help you up the plank!"

"I canna—micht weel na fash yoursel's—my shoulter's broke—dinna ye worrit—"

There was no more to say; Limpy could say no more; he had slipped down, unconscious, in the car. Davies felt a touch on his shoulder at this time. He looked around.

"Mind the plank," said William. "And when I yell that I'm ready, throw the rope."

"Ye'll be boornt!" cried Davies. "'Tis na fast i' th' slag! Happen 'ee'l rool t' hell."

"I'm going down," said William. "You mind that plank!"

William went down. It was easier than he expected when the thought first came into his mind. It was a thing more difficult than he had believed a man could do. It was easy because in going he had given his life away—and it mattered little if the slag beneath the car glowed red or white or the slide below was ten feet or the depth of eternity. He had no thought except to bring Limpy back.

William brought him back, a loose bundle that lay in his arms, scarcely knowing that the flesh of his hands had smoked white on the iron car, or that Limpy's clothing smoldered against his breast. He brought him back over the narrow bridge of plank that flamed where it lay on the crust of the crackling slag.

Then they cut the smoking leather from William's feet and carried him back to the office to wait for an ambulance.

William Vanderpool Biddle lay flat on his princely back gazing unblinkingly at a perfectly smooth white ceiling. The walls about him were white; the covers on his narrow bed were equally unblemished; the wadded bandages that inclosed his hands and feet were guiltless of mark or stain. And in another little white bed by his side lay Limpy, jester and sage, also all in white and beautifully spotless.

This was just a week to a day since the accident feud between miners and smeltermen had expired in a brotherly feast of thanksgiving and gratitude, all rancors forgotten, all disputation allayed. Only because, as Limpy declared, one wee reckless kid and one worthless old pot-licker had unaccountably failed to arrive at their doom. Although neither miners or smeltermen, speaking just for themselves, had any objection to wiping each other out for the fun of the thing.

Which proves, quoting Limpy again, that man is a creature entirely unreasonable in either his loves or his hates, and as an intelligent being is wholly beneath contempt. Which didn't keep Limpy from being eternally grateful.

Limpy and William, on this first day that visitors were allowed, were holding a royal reception. An imperious nurse who posted herself at the door strictly limited all to a scant two minutes of conversation. If there were exceptions, that cannot be blamed on the nurse.

There was Davies, for instance, who came in the afternoon. And he said nothing at all, but gulped as is scarcely befitting a champion driller, and still said nothing, and so went away until he could bring Belle, who would talk for him.

And there was Logger Shannon himself, who brought a "quart of the best," "and not," said he, "the stuff I sell over the bar." And the freckled station-agent, William's first acquaintance in Hobart, who apologized for his thoughts on the day William arrived, and talked, and talked, until the nurse led him out through the door.

Presently Hanley appeared, dry and precise, who thanked Limpy for giving him back his boy with tears in his eyes, but with manner and accent as formal as though he was discussing the latest situation in copper with the cashier of a bank. And then, to William, much to William's surprise: "I have a telegram which I thought you should see." It ran:

> Proud of my son. Advance cash for return.
> BIDDLE.

William had no more than glanced at the thing; rolled the first sweet savor of it under his tongue, when Hanley, more stiff and formal possibly than before, remarked: "I

have prepared an answer which, with your permission, I should like to dispatch." The answer was this:

Cannot spare William.—Scott Hanley.

"Send it," said William, smiling. At last these men understood each other.

Margaret came late in the afternoon, and with her was Buddy, manfully proud of his position as escort. Buddy thanked Limpy briefly but with effect, and then kept Limpy amused for full fifteen minutes while Margaret chatted with William. It is doubtful, however, whether Limpy or Buddy was most amused, for they were friends of old standing who never lost interest each in the other. After a while Margaret called Buddy over to William's bed—where, as youngsters will, he became immediately embarrassing to Margaret at least.

"Your bandages is bigger'n Limpy's," he gravely remarked. "But Limpy, he broke a bone, an' you didn't do that."

"This gentleman," Margaret hastily parried, "is Mr. Biddle, you remember, who saved Mr. McVeigh just like Mr. McVeigh saved Buddy for us."

"Oh, I know," observed Buddy, with a superior air. "He's the man that carries all your bundles for you. Margie cried when she heard you was hurt, so she did. I never cried—only just a little, at first!"

Margaret blushed, and hurriedly sent Buddy back to Limpy again. And notwithstanding the fact that she had asked the very same question three times before:

"How are you feeling? They'd not let us come before. And so I thought it must be terribly bad—"

"Well, you see—" said William, moving his arms. "A cat with his feet in walnut shells has nothing on me. But that will only be for a few days more."

"I think it was—wonderful!" said Margaret breathlessly. And this, too, she had repeatedly mentioned before.

There didn't seem to be very much they could say. William was thinking calmly, delightedly, how like the sunlight were the colors in Margaret's hair. But he couldn't say that. And Margaret wondered how she could ever have thought that William appeared to be a too-tailored man—she couldn't say that.

And then—she didn't know that she could, and certainly William never suspected she would—Margaret glanced at Limpy and Buddy occupied with each other; leaned over; kissed William—fair on the tip of his nose. Something like that is likely to happen when people get to the point where they have nothing to say. But immediately afterward Margaret snatched Buddy from Limpy at risk of his limbs, and terminated the visit without any more ceremony than that.

"Margie," said Buddy, before they were out of sight of the nurse, "your face is red! When my face gets red that woman makes me come in out of the sun. But you haven't been in the sun?"

"Buddy!" exclaimed Margaret. "You mustn't talk about things—"

"What things?" asked Buddy with the innocence of his age.

William lay on his bed and looked at the ceiling. "Well," thought he presently, "I'm altogether defenceless. I hope that she comes back and does it again. And takes better aim. Some time, real soon, I'll have to say that to her—but I'll not stop with that—"

The last visitor of the day was McGregor himself, who came in just before going on shift.

"Feeling all right?" asked Hugh, when for two minutes he had said nothing at all.

"Fine as a fiddle!" said William, who spoke the truth.

"Soon back on the job?"

"Not on the night shift," replied William, and smiled as he spoke.

"Didn't suppose so," said Hugh. Then again silence for two minutes more. "Well—got to be moving. See you to-morrow. So-long to you, Bill."

After a while there was a voice in the gathering darkness—rather a childish voice:

"'Night, Bill."

"'Night, Limpy, ol' scout."

William Vanderpool Biddle, prince of his house, heir who had entered into his heritage, turned his head on the pillow and peacefully went to sleep.

(The end.)

Fortune Unawares

Part III

by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "Salt of the Sea," "The War Cloth," etc.

CHAPTER XI *(continued)*.

"RED" AND "WHITE" TREASURE.

I COULD hear shouting from the junks and sampans as we sped with the current, well out in mid-stream. A low craft shot out across our course and hovered, cutting us off. En Sue was less than two yards from me, the nearest pursuer a dozen yards behind. I trod water, hoping to pot one of them before they got us, but En Sue's voice, low-pitched but distinct on the surface, reached me.

"Our boat, Ned. Come on."

Some one thrust out a sweep toward me and another at En Sue. Arms dragged us aboard, the sampan swirled around and went swiftly down the current. The man at the steering-oar called, and En Sue jumped to the stern, firing an effective shot at Shang Wa's follower who had caught at the blade.

The bobbing heads were soon left hopelessly behind. I turned from watching them to greet Meng Fu, his face no longer green, his verdant attire covered up or replaced by more sober garments, and smiling.

Half a mile, and we landed at the Bund within a hundred yards of where Li Yuen's motor-car was parked. Meng Fu mounted beside the chauffeur, En Sue took seat beside me in the tonneau, and we started out along the Bubbling Well Road, both soaked, but unscratched. It was getting on toward morning, and we went fast, the air drying us. En Sue had a faculty for silence that I respected and, to some extent, tried to imitate. I was anxious to find out what he had learned aboard the junk, yet, somehow, the face of the slave girl occupied my mind for most of the ride.

Hot tea and food, a change of clothes, and a plunge left us fresh. En Sue continued to audit his mind and I to ponder over the unhappy fate of a white woman, with any sense of decency left unsubmerged by opium, who was forced to cater to the desires of the habitués of such dives as that of Wuk Cha.

I knew En Sue's contempt for the mind that would bother with minor incidents until they became part of a worth-while fact, and I waited for him to speak. There was a private balcony to our joint suite that looked toward the east. Here we reclined on low bamboo lounges and presently I lapsed into that delicious state that lies between sleeping and wakefulness.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 21.

I opened my eyes to the creak of En Sue's lounge as he rose to his feet to meet his father. Dawn was reddening the sky, streaking in through the bamboo tatties, flushing the face of Li Yuen. Father and son looked at each other with the quiet of perfect understanding, and as he turned to me I felt again the emanation of wisdom and benevolence that always inspired in me a certain reverence and affection toward him. I had yet to see the other side of him.

"Shall we go down?" he asked.

As we descended to the walled-in garden I understood why En Sue had not yet talked of the events of the night. His filial respect had demanded that he reserve the story for his father.

The three of us sat down on a deep-curving seat of carved stone that faced a sunken basin where goldfish, trailing fins and tails so voluminous they suggested silken robes, swam through grottoes under the flat lily pads. Over the seat arched a great willow, its branches trimmed to form a natural sun-shade. The air was delicious, charged with garden scents.

"You have not asked me where the ruby is," said Li Yuen.

I answered him truthfully that I had not thought of it.

"It is within five feet of you," he told me. "Not on my person."

I looked at the lily pond, but he shook his head.

"Too easy. I often play gardener here. I graft and prune and try to hybridize. This morning, before I came to you, I was grafting. Look."

I turned to where he touched the bark of the willow tree. It was slightly corrugated, and here and there gnarled and twisted where the growth had been coaxed into characteristic Chinese oddities of form. This part of the garden was entirely privy, shut off from the rest by screens of stone openwork, backed and fronted by close-clipped growths. And the great willow shut us off still more completely. But, at a look from his father, En Sue made a quiet, effective scout.

On his return Li Yuen produced an ivory-handled knife with a blade as flexible as that of an artist's palette-tool, and set to work to raise a portion of the stringy bark already incised and cemented in place with a brown clay or wax. It came away to disclose apparently nothing but the inner bark of the tree. But behind this was a cavity, scooped out in the wood and filled with a plastic substance that made the recess hard to distinguish, so closely did its tint, and a texture imparted to the surface of the filling, match the surroundings. This stuff Li Yuen took away from the cavity and handed to me. It felt surprisingly heavy.

"The ruby?" I asked.

"Is inside the wax. That is plastic and will keep so. It is easily soluble. The sealing clay that holds the outer bark will harden in a few hours." He took back the gob of wax and opened it up with his knife, displaying a glint of crimson in its heart. Then he put back jewel and inner bark and then the outer strip. It was impossible to distinguish the slightest hint of a crevice. The Blood of Buddha was safely shrined in a tree.

"Now, my son," said Li Yuen, "what did you learn?"

"Ned, here," began En Sue, "recognized Shang Wa as we went into Wuk Cha's, where I had hoped at least to find trace of him. As it was, I missed him myself and had to follow close and fast to the rendezvous to which I imagined he was bound.

"Ned went in to watch the fan-tan. Meng Fu and Fung were trailing us. They had the password to enter Wuk Cha's gate. They found some suspicion attached to Ned, some fault in my disguise, and were able to divert the crowd while Ned got away to the place where he was to wait for me until I came back after establishing Shang Wa's whereabouts."

"Just a moment," I broke in. "Did Meng Fu expect to play that juggler's rôle? I suppose he did, since he was dressed for the part."

"How dressed?" asked En Sue.

"In vivid green. Clothes and face."

"Meng Fu is a man of many parts," said En Sue. "And he is quick-witted. The main thing was to get the crowd's attention

away from you. I fancy that Fung picked up the brass gong from the restaurant as they went in. There was a gong used, wasn't there?"

"Most decidedly," I answered.

"But the affair was largely impromptu. I am sure that Meng Fu did not change his costume for the effect he produced."

"But he was wearing green, bright green," I insisted. "I am not color-blind."

"Green is the suggestion of growth, is it not? You hinted at hypnotism last night as the basis of Meng Fu's illusion. Suggestion would be the better word—sublimate suggestion. Requiring certain conditions of time, place, excitation and opportunity. The gong had a good deal to do with it, you know. Vibratory orchestration."

I shrugged my shoulders. I could dimly see how the thing might be done, as I can dimly understand the existence and certain qualities of the fourth dimension. En Sue continued:

"I traced Shang Wa to the river front, where a man was waiting for him. Both set out for a two-masted junk that had its rudder up and was close-moored to the bank. Its sails had not been furled, but I set that, in combination with the lifted rudder, to laziness rather than readiness to clear. I was in error. I saw Shang Wa go aboard and forward. I heard the sound of several voices talking the Macao dialect. It seemed that I was on the right trail. I returned to the gate and found Ned, and together we managed to screen ourselves behind a sail, close to the cabin where Shang Wa and some of his own men were interviewing the visitors from Macao.

"I learned much, but not everything. You were right, father. It was T'ang Seng who desired the stone. He knew that Raymond Dean bought it and had it with him aboard the Zuleika. I think he got that news from Manila. At any rate, at Manila, Dean made up his mind to visit Borneo with an idea of seeing the burial caves in the Valley of Kinabatangan. These had been described to him as very wonderful and containing certain buried treasures, including jewels.

"I have pieced things together, Ned, by inference and deduction," En Sue explained. "I did not hear all of this in detail, but sufficient to make me feel sure of T'ang Seng's mode of procedure. Without doubt he sent some man in Manila to Dean with this talk of Kinabatangan and the treasure caves. Also, he arranged either for a treacherous pilot or the deliberate shifting of lights—perhaps the placing of false ones. The Zuleika ignored Balabac Strait and wandered into the maze of sea jungle between Balambangan Banguey and Mallewalle Islands and the mainland. Somewhere in there she lies with a broken back.

"Something went wrong just about the time she struck. Either the Bajaus misunderstood orders or failed to arrive on time. These men from Macao were only repeating a story second-hand, though they appear to have been mixed up in the piracy in some manner, for their trip up from Macao to Hongkong and thence to Shanghai was on some errand connected with it, an errand that has been successfully carried out and which they alluded to last night only casually.

"But they told Shang Wa of the escape of some of the white men aboard the Zuleika, bearing off the ruby; the chase after these same men, and a vague account of the fight at the lighthouse. Whether Shang Wa connects you with the lighthouse-keeper matters little; he has seen the Blood of Buddha in your possession at Lung Hi's. As a pirate Shang Wa is jealous of his reputation, or his lack of it. He resents the fact that T'ang Seng did not employ him in the matter, which seems to have been bungled in a way Shang Wa doubtless prides himself would never have happened had he been called in. Now he thinks he can get hold of the ruby, sell it for a price to T'ang Seng far exceeding what he would have been paid for his services; vaunt himself and show T'ang Seng what a mistake he made in not taking him in the first place. On top of that he knows that T'ang Seng is a protector whom he may need, for he has been sailing pretty close to the wind with his piracies of late.

"Doubtless they killed the rest of the Zuleika's complement and looted the yacht,

There was talk of a 'white' treasure as well as a 'red.' It was the white treasure these men brought up from Macao. Dean may have had a wonderful diamond as well as the ruby. This has been delivered to some agent of T'ang Seng here in Shanghai, and I imagine Shang Wa would like to get his finger in that pie. He got hold of the men from Macao too late, or he would have relieved them of their delivery. And, having pumped them of all they would or could tell him, he put them out of the way so they could not tell any one else. There are other pirates besides Shang Wa who have an eye for the main chance."

"Will not this other agent of T'ang Seng, to whom the white treasure was delivered, avenge their death in any way?" I asked.

"I imagine Shang Wa would be careful how they were coaxed aboard that junk. He is clever at details like that. Also, they were merely messengers, trusty enough but unknown to T'ang Seng's agent. Now, what do you want to do in the matter, Ned?"

"I should like to clear up the matter of what has happened to Dean," I said. "I do not think he was one of the men in the boat, though that is only guesswork on my part. I suppose we can communicate with Dean's attorneys back in the States and deliver the ruby to them."

"That is a long way round," said En Sue. "With all respect for your American attorneys, Ned, I believe if I had a stone worth a quarter of a million I should prefer personally to deliver it to Dean—or, if he is dead, to his heirs. And we do not know if he is dead. It is not such a long way to Borneo. Let us go over there and clear up the fate of the Zuleika and your countrymen. I imagine father can provide the vessel. What do you say?"

I didn't know what to say. Here was En Sue calmly proposing, and Li Yuen acquiescing in the suggestion, to outfit a ship and provide a crew for a visit to the wrecked yacht, merely to further my expressed desire to clear up the mystery of Dean and endeavor to find the legitimate owner of the ruby.

Doubtless Dean would be willing to repay reasonable expenses and provide a reward for his recovery of the Blood of Buddha, but it was a long chance that we should not do anything else on the trip but determine that he was dead. His heirs, when they were found, might not prove so liberal. Li Yuen was rich—richer than Dean; he would audit the cost of this voyage as a chance for En Sue to repay what the latter considered his debt to me, but it was a different matter for me to see it in that light. The expedition presented altogether too doubtful an issue, and I said so. Li Yuen read my mind better than I spoke it.

"Your affairs and ours are tied up strangely in this affair," he said. "If you had not found the ruby, we should not have had an opportunity presented to us that we have long looked for. Mr. Kennedy, America and Europe have often wondered why China sleeps so long, why we have allowed Japan to come up and overtake us. The answer to me is simple.

"Japan is an island; we are an empire, with an interior where the old customs prevail, and coast provinces closer in touch with new thought. We are a divided people. I, En Sue, represent the modernists; T'ang Seng belongs to the old régime. He is opposed to progress, to any suggestion of altruism or socialism. Japan needs more land for her increasing population; we have a vast area of our own to exploit. She *must* expand or perish. She has one race, practically one religion.

"We are a mixed people—Tartars, Tibetans, Burmese, Shans, Manchus, Arabs, Persians and even Japanese have mingled with our indigenous population. The Manchus are the ruling race. In religion Taoism and Buddhism have interchanged their features. The pure philosophies of Lao-Tsze, of Buddha and Confucius have degenerated. Among our four hundred million people, how many really worship, how many chose the way. Superstition has blinded faith. We have much to overcome.

"Once we were self-sufficient, ahead of the world in science, art and letters. Those who cry 'China for the Chinese' would shut off all intercourse with the outside world. Japan has done more wisely. She

has sent her sons abroad and admitted foreigners, learning from them, weighing their strength as well as weakness, and adapting, not adopting, what is best for her own progress.

"But we, a divided people, are bound with prejudice. In the interior the people resent Occidental influence. The peasants represent the bulk of the population. Yet we are not barbarians. Our civilization was old when Britain went half-naked. Our trouble is that we live along the lines of age-old tradition. The liberty of the individual is yet unknown. Our governments have always been paternal, and must be until education awakens individual ambition, and danger of absolute conquest arouses us to meet modern conditions. It will come; it is coming. But the leaven is scarce and the mass large and stolid.

"T'ang Seng is of the old régime. He lives in his own little kingdom far up the Yangtze River, in the province of Sze-Chuen, not far from the borders of Tibet, in the manner of medieval times, despotic, all-powerful, his people serfs. He fiercely resents any movement that will strip him of his privileges and restrain the sources of his enormous wealth. About him rally those of his own class, and with them are the priests. They are interwoven with secret societies and their scope is wide and far. To T'ang Seng the Blood of Buddha means more than a ruby. In the hands of his party it would be a mighty symbol, a powerful fetish, strong as the lost Banner of Genghis Khan or the Coffin of Mohammed.

"Its possession would cement his following and increase it, while depleting ours. That is why he has been so eager to obtain it, and how his plans were so ably laid, only to fail at the last.

"That is why we are so glad to aid you restore the stone to its owner. Our republic is new, it is only a toddling child, but it is in power. If we can discredit T'ang Seng, keeping from him this talisman, finding out something of his methods and his agents, perhaps achieving his punishment, we can thwart the power of his party, inimical to the interests which we uphold and believe best for the development of China before it falls too far behind in the race for a place in the sun."

I suppose I looked puzzled. I could see how they might, by helping me, keep T'ang Seng from getting hold of the ruby, now guarded by the Chinese hamadryad of Li Yuen's willow tree, but I could not understand how he could be discredited so easily. Li Yuen went on patiently.

"China must awaken now. The Chinese are brave, but their courage does not naturally find expression in war. The empire was organized for peace; our arts of war have been well-nigh forgotten; under our philosophy and ethics soldiers have become the most despised of all classes. We must obtain recognition in a pact. Germany, organized for war, has been crushed. America and her ally, Great Britain, fighting for the downfall of offensive militarism, are and must be our best friends. Through them we must gain our national identity and preservation. Our present government knows this. Friendship with them will set us firmly in place to carry out our reforms.

"The Zuleika was wrecked on the coast of North Borneo, owned by the British North Borneo Company, a territory under British protection, in so far as its foreign relations are concerned.

"Raymond Dean is an American. There is every reason to believe that T'ang Seng's far-reaching plot to obtain the Blood of Buddha was furthered in Manila, an American city, by an agent of T'ang Seng. Both the British and the American governments are likely to resent an act of piracy committed against a well-known American citizen on British territory and planned in America. Particularly since murder has accompanied the piracy. Especially if a strong appeal is made by Dean or his heirs. Our government will be forced to clear its skirts by the punishment of T'ang Seng. We need something of the sort to bolster up our officials to such a decisive and necessary step. I propose to furnish the evidence that will convict T'ang Seng, at the same time aiding you to restore the ruby."

And En Sue, presenting that evidence, would be *persona grata* with the Reform government. I could see that clearly. My

finding of the ruby had brought me into a big game played for international prestige. I was only a deuce in the deck, liable to discard as the game progressed, but I was a part of the game nevertheless.

En Sue leaned forward earnestly.

"Do not think, Ned," he said, "that we are in any sense making a cat's-paw of you. We are more indebted to you than ever. The ruby opens up a road for us we have long sought, provides us with a weapon that we shall be prompt to sharpen. We should in any event have done all in our power to aid you in finding Dean or determining his fate.

"It is fortunate for us that our plans run parallel. And I am proud, as my father is proud, to have for a friend a man whose sense of honor is so keen. There are few who, finding sudden wealth, would not have considered it theirs by right of discovery. Under the circumstances it might almost be classed as flotsam and jetsam," he went on more lightly. "Undoubtedly most people would think your course quixotic, rather than highly scrupulous."

I had the grace to flush, remembering my vacillation, knowing that I had played up to Li Yuen's and En Sue's expectations of me rather than from any inherent exactitude in the matter. Li Yuen's eyes were kindly as he noted the color rising on my face.

"Honor that is not tested, my son," he said softly, "is like a sword that has not been tried in battle. It is only well-tempered metal that wins the victory."

CHAPTER XII.

THE ZULEIKA.

BY efforts that I later knew must have been prodigious, though I saw nothing of their working, we set to sea within thirty-six hours. The ship that Li Yuen provided was called the Little Dragon. Like the Zuleika, it had been designed for pleasure cruising. Its original owner, living more well than wisely, had been overhauled in Shanghai by an accumulation of widely scattered debts. Li Yuen had acquired the bottomry bonds and taken the craft over to use as the flagship of his own coastwise trading-fleet. Meng Fu we left in stewardry of the villa on the Bubbling Well Road. Shang Wa we saw nothing of, heard nothing from. It seemed that, under the new government, he was skating on very thin ice, finding himself unable to find protectors who would accept a bribe and promise him immunity, a situation that must have been new and puzzling to the pirate.

Li Yuen was very certain that he would not dare any attempt against the villa, even if he thought the ruby was concealed on the premises. To his mind it would be taken aboard the Little Dragon as the safest and most natural place. Not that Shang Wa was ignored. He had caught sight of the ruby and knew that T'ang Seng wanted it badly. He would not be likely to stop short at killing the messengers from Macao, but for the present he seemed powerless against us.

T'ang Seng's receiving agent at Shanghai, now supposedly in possession of the white treasure, was in no enviable position, according to En Sue. T'ang Seng was not forgiving of failures. Sooner or later the agent would have to report, and it would be hard to placate T'ang Seng with any substitute for the talismanic Blood of Buddha.

These were not our troubles, however, and we took them lightly. The Little Dragon slid out of Shanghai, and steamed at seventeen knots down the coast to Hongkong, where some additional members of the crew were to come aboard. All our sailormen were a picked lot, culled from various enterprises of Li Yuen's at short notice. I have never seen a more superb set of men. I imagine that many of them were occupying positions inferior to their regular ones—certain it was that they were all interchangeable. Hardly a man but could take his trick at the wheel, tackle any deck duty, or nurse a hot bearing. They were a quiet crowd, even in their own quarters. Sometimes they sang a Chinese chanty, but it was only because they could haul better to rhythm.

The motto of the Little Dragon was efficiency, and Li Yuen was the ship's auto-

crat. Here was a side to his character that I had never seen. There was an ostensible captain, but Li Yuen was in active command; the crew of brave men, all above the average height and weight, with swelling calves and sturdy arms, jumped to anticipate his orders, and the ship was ever ivory of deck and gold of brass, trim as a man-of-war.

The main factor that impressed me was the earnestness with which they went about their duties. It was not merely deference to Li Yuen—they acted as men with a mission. With one or two exceptions, all were between twenty-five and forty, a piratical-looking bunch to the Occidental eye, but ninety-nine per cent capable.

At Hongkong we lay in the roadstead, and a launch came out of the East Lamma passage to take Li Yuen ashore. There was a wireless aboard the ship, and I imagine a request had been sent ahead. En Sue and I went in the launch to stretch our sea-legs and parted company with Li Yuen at the door of a big go-down, one of the warehouses of the importing and exporting company that owned his control although it did not bear his name.

En Sue and I strolled idly along the higher terraces, verdant, fair with villas, arbors and gardens, passing the time until we rejoined his father at the landing. I asked him how they expected to get their clews, once we located the Zuleika. His reply exhibited a ruthlessness that was, I suppose, characteristic of the Chinese classification of life and utility, though I had never previously seen him display it. But I have never fathomed all the depths of my friend's nature.

"We shall examine the natives nearest to the wreck," he said. "They may deny all knowledge of it, but they will be lying, and we shall find ways to get at the truth. We must trace the man at Manila. There are several things to be cleared up—the identity of those two men in the boat, and how they happened to get clear with the ruby. We may have to be drastic, according to your standards, Ned, but necessity drives, and the peace of mind or body of a few Malayan *perompoks* must not stand in the way of a nation's progress."

His voice was cold, almost toneless, and even, but his obsidian eyes glittered with submerged fire that I set down as that of patriotism.

"How long will it be," I asked, "before you go into the active service of your government? Openly, I mean."

He stood for a moment, looking out over the harbor before he answered.

"It is my father's ambition—and mine—that I become president of our republic," he answered simply. "That is an ambition that may inspire any citizen of your own country. With us it is not quite the same, though we shall model much of our new constitution upon yours, with modifications as to the qualifications of a voter. That is necessary. Our peasants are not able to see clearly as yet, and we must not expose them to being shepherded by biased and selfish leaders. For the fulfillment of this ambition I have been educated at home and abroad. I trust I shall be given the opportunity and shall prove worthy. A great task, Ned, leading four hundred million people into the freedom of liberty and equality, to restore my country to its place among the nations of the earth. A task not to be completed in my time, nor perhaps for many generations, but I may help to break the trail, to point the way. In me is the spirit of my father. When he passes my spirit will be further strengthened. I shall strive to acquire all his wisdom." He paused for a minute.

"To lead them into the light! To set my people free! Four hundred millions that four million Manchus now rule." His eyes flashed plainly now, and I could see the ancient heritage of a warrior strain manifest itself. There was a bit of him that would have liked to sweep the Manchus from Mongolia and revenge the bitter defeats of the seventeenth century. I smiled, as I thought, covertly.

"The day of the sword is past, Ned," he said. "The minds of the world are slowly turning toward universal brotherhood. And that can come only through universal desire. The millenium is a long way off. But there must always be pioneers. China has slept, the Rip Van Winkle among nations. When she awakes she must learn fast. And

she needs teachers who understand her and her ancient ethics. There is nothing finer than her ethics and philosophies in their purity, but they must be purged of their grossness, of the tarnish of abuse. Shall we go down?"

Moving toward the water-front, we passed through the business portion that adjoins it. A Chinaman came out of a doorway a little ahead of us and suddenly darted for a narrow alley. The motion was so obviously one to avoid attention that I turned. The man collided with a big Sikh policeman, who caught him by the arm, shook him as a mastiff might shake a smaller dog in warning, and shoved him on toward the alley. He strove to avert his face, but I caught a fair glimpse of it as he twisted in the policeman's grasp.

"Did you see who that was?" I asked En Sue. "Shang Wa!"

"I saw him," he replied. "And I saw where he same from—the cable office."

He halted, as if about to go into the place, then moved on again. "It would be no use," he said. "They will not give out any information. But there is a submarine cable between Hongkong and Mampakul."

I nodded. I knew something about Mampakul. It was a port of Sarawak, just behind the isle of Labuan on the northwest coast of Borneo. Between Mampakul and Singapore steamers plied weekly, often bearing gold from the mines. I used to see their smoke to the northward from my lighthouse. It was in Sarawak that Rajah Brooke and Captain Keppel of the British navy broke up the Dyak and Malay pirates from the Baribas and Batang Lupar rivers, though they failed to exterminate them or stamp out their predilections. I wondered what Shang Wa was up to.

I did not hear En Sue mention the recognition to his father, but the next day developed the fact that Li Yuen was not likely to be caught napping by any deviltry that Shang Wa might be plotting with any of his pirate brethren on the Borneo side. Once straightened out for our southward run down the China Sea to Borneo, almost a thousand miles, the Little Dragon showed its teeth.

Certain racks were filled with rifles. Two Lewis guns made their appearance, and, fore and aft, two quick-firers were mounted, brought up from the hold, well greased. It was very plain that this was not their first appearance aboard the ship, for target practice was ordered and it would be hard for any crew to beat that practice. That crew could shoot. I was hard put to it to hold my own with three or four of the crack riflemen, and the gun crews would have been a credit to my own navy.

Halfway through the third day out we sighted the high peak of Kinabalu, nearly fourteen thousand feet above the sea—a blue cone, seemingly afloat between sea and sky, that rapidly took shape as we steamed over a sea that showed no fleck of sail nor plume of smoke. Soon the loom of the land took shape, and we changed the course to due east, heading up for Balabac.

It seemed probable that the Zuleika had taken the outside, western passage from Manila rather than steaming through the Sulu Sea, and therefore entered Balabac Strait from the west, as we would, expecting to pass through to Sandakan on the east coast, the government seat of North Borneo, at the mouth of the Kinabatangan, in the valley of which river are the celebrated burial caves that Raymond Dean had hoped to explore.

False pilotage led her to the south of Balambangan Island. So far the channel was fair, leading to Marudu Bay and the town of Kudat. It was beyond there that we must search for the remains of the Zuleika, among treacherous reefs and shallow waters.

The chart showed a number of small islets to the south of the main island of the Bangueys lying to the direct north of the eastern promontory of Marudu Bay. Farther east, Mallawalle Isle split the channel and offered two apparent passages. The natural one for the Zuleika to take would be the southern one, leading into Paitan Bay and so south to Sandakan.

Li Yuen believed that the attempt to navigate the Strait was made at night, when false lights would offset any misgivings that Dean or his skipper might have as to the course. It also seemed likely that a pilot

was in charge, either from Borneo or brought from Manila as part of T'ang Seng's well-engineered plan to secure the ruby.

Borneo rests upon a submarine plateau, and shallows prevail off most its coast line. It was going to be a ticklish job to take the Little Dragon over a route that had proven disastrous to the Zuleika, but we had a man aboard who had once served as quartermaster aboard the ships of a German firm that used to ply between Singapore and Sandakan, by way of Labuan and Kudat, another detail that Li Yuen had not overlooked. This man, named Taku, knew all the navigable channels, and as we neared the entrance to Balabac Strait he went on the bridge with Li Yuen and took charge.

Ammunition was served out to all the deck crew as they came on their watches, and the crews of the rapid-firers got ready for business. I had already selected a rifle for my share in any excitement that might be going forward. There was no especial token of excitement beyond the getting ready of the cartridges and shells, yet a certain air of expectancy permeated the ship.

"Just what are you expecting from Shang Wa?" I asked En Sue.

"Well," he answered, "of course we do not know that Shang Wa is certain where we are bound, but the inference would be natural to any one as eager as he is. He not only figures we have the ruby with us, and hopes to get hold of it in some way, but I fancy he may imagine we have inside information of other loot hidden on the Zuleika that was so well tucked away as to escape the search of the wreckers. Or, he may guess the real reason for our search. He is not an accredited agent of T'ang Seng, but if he procured the ruby or put us out of existence he would secure, at once, a powerful patron and a rich reward.

"He did not cable to Mampakul for nothing. There are a lot of Dyak and Malay pirates along the Sarawak coast who, to use your Americanism, would rather fight than eat. Also, there are a lot of Chinese miners on the west coast who come originally from the boundaries of Kwang-Tung and Kwang-Si provinces, and they are a turbulent lot. The Malays call them Kehs. Without doubt Shang Wa has affiliations with these.

"Some of them he may have worked with before; the rest could be hired easily enough. You saw some of them in the *prahu* that attacked the lighthouse. Those were not well armed, save for native weapons, fortunately for you, but there are plenty of rifles tucked away in the thatched roofs of the native houses.

"There is telegraphic communication between Mampakul and Sandakan. We don't want to forget that, nor that the Lanun pirates of the Sulu Sea have always been the worst kind of marauders. They used to go on piratical cruises that lasted two or three years. They are kept fairly well in hand by the fear of British gunboats, and they never do anything spectacular any more, but I should not be surprised to find a fleet of *prahus* hanging around, waiting for us, or appearing from either east or west. T'ang Seng may have a hand in this also, though he is sick of a malarial fever in Sze-Chuen, according to the latest reports.

"I have a distinct hunch, Ned, that there will be 'something doing' before we get away. My father thinks, if Dean was not one of the men in your boat, or was not killed outright, that he may have been taken captive into the interior. We shall get an angle on that as soon as we start to cross-examine the tribe nearest to where the Zuleika lies."

We were holding well up to the north and soon saw the extreme tip of northern Borneo, the western horn of Marudu Bay, standing up out of the sea to the southward, with bold, reddish headlands, sparsely clad with greenery. Back of them, hills covered with rank grasses led up to the main range, the shoulders covered with tropical vegetation, the great peak of Kinabalu towering above all. In the recesses dwelled the jungle-man—to literally translate the Malay word orang-utan—gibbons and other primates, the honey-bear, wild swine, elephants and rhinoceroses, with alligators in every river and boa-constrictors everywhere. A wild land, but beautiful and fruitful. Balabangan Isle showed like a sleeping turtle,

the greater bulk of Banguey back of it and, farther north, Balabac Isle was a misty mound of blue upon the purple sea.

Still there was no sign of sail or smoke. The absence of the former seemed ominous. It mean, in such weather, that the fishing craft were keeping harbor purposely, scenting something beyond the ordinary in the wind. We steamed on past Marudu Bay at a good clip, confident, under Taku's guidance, of a good channel. Li Yuen, En Sue, and myself continually watched sea and shore with binoculars for some sign of the wreck from the bridge, and a sailor was treed on each mast for the same purpose.

Off Banguey we changed the course to northeast.

" It seems plausible," said Li Yuen, " that they would have tried to wreck the Zuleika on the southeastern coast of Banguey, somewhere among the scattered islets of the coast. Not only would these hide it, but Mallewalle Isle would also serve as a mask and, though the German firm no longer exists, there is a fairly regular communication between Sandakan and Hongkong and they would not risk having their plans interfered with or reported by some passing steamer that might sight the wreck when making the South Channel.

Banguey turned out to be of volcanic formation, lifting to a central cone that was sharply serrated. The islets were almost entirely barren, some white with *guano*. On the foothills giant *tapan* trees and ironwoods lifted, while all the beaches were backed with palms. We picked up glimpses of huts in the lateral valleys that creased the island, but saw no sign of life, no smoke, not even a *prahu*. If the island was not deserted the craft were likely hidden in the mangroves that marked the mouths of rivers. According to Taku, nearly a thousand people lived there, normally.

The lookout on the foremast had the honor of discovery. He gave a shout, pointing with his free arm. I looked at En Sue for interpretation.

" It is the wreck," he answered quietly.

There was no sign of emotion among the crew, no chattering, only a strict attention to orders. Taku left the bridge and climbed the mast to join the lookout. Two sailors took station in the bows for soundings, and Li Yuen himself took over the wheel. All about us, as we edged in toward Banguey, the water was streaked and mottled, much as the shallows off my lighthouse. Under half-steam we carefully negotiated a narrow lane that twisted among the banks and reefs, many of them exposed, some creamy with foam—for the breeze was fresh enough to whip up quite a choppy sea, making our job of picking out a channel more difficult—most of them only indicated by the change of color. It was getting on toward sundown—Chinaway—and we had yet to choose a mooring for the night.

Presently the yacht could be plainly seen from the deck. She had been a beauty for line, but her back was badly broken and she lay with a cant to starboard that exposed her copper to the sunset, flashing like gold. Some plates were missing, torn off, so we found afterward, not by the sea but by tribesmen. Her rigging was slack and broken, her funnel was tilted and upheld only by its port stays.

Li Yuen was sizing up the weather carefully. The barometer, he said, was falling, though all seemed clear and fair enough, with a red sunset beginning to burn. But the " evening red and morning gray " prediction is not a sound one in the China Sea. The channel we were in widened out a little. We got up within a half-mile of the Zuleika. She must have driven ashore at high tide, for there were shoals between us and her that would have infallibly stopped her under other conditions. From the foretop Taku announced that there was passage for a launch.

Our engines backed, went forward, astern, then stopped, after two anchors had rattled out in twelve fathoms. It was good holding-ground, but we were in a nasty position if a storm caught us. To go much farther was impossible, for the channel nipped off to less than two fathoms wide, a mere volcanic rift. There was none too much room at the widest to swing about, and at nightfall the job would have been touch and go—probably touch and stay—even in the best of weather. But Li Yuen decided to take the chance. He consulted

with his skipper and then turned to En Sue and me.

"It is too early for a *pao-fung* or *kiu-fung*," he said. "Typhoons seldom blow before July, but I don't like the taste of the air, neither does Sang. There is something brewing, but unless the barometer drops again we'll stay here, now we've found the Zuleika. I have a feeling that it might not be so easy later. I don't like the quietness of our reception. I'm going aboard the yacht. Will you both come?"

The launch of the Little Dragon was waiting for us and a companion-ladder already rigged with the quiet speed characteristic of the ship. Ten men followed us, and besides rifles, they carried the two Lewis guns. As we went, conned by Taku, still in the foretop with a megaphone, I noted the crews of the quick-firers at stations. Twilight was holding, the sun, hidden by the bulk of the island, had not yet set and, above us and to the east, the sky was aflame with the afterglow. Fleecy clouds, pink as a flamingo's breast feathers, lay against a blue that was almost violet. Back of the great peak the west flared like a volcano. The seas ran purple, creaming and hissing, gilded in mid-channel on their western flanks. The gulls were still wheeling and complaining and once a flock of parrots rose with an explosion of discords, formed and started to fly to the mainland. As they went over us their iridescent feathers glowed with startling metallic brilliance.

The whole scene was eerie, almost unearthly, painted in colors that were nothing less than secondary. The wrecked yacht, once the home of absolute luxury, gave a tragic, melancholy note. It seemed surprising that her slanted decks did not suddenly teem with savages, springing from ambush, firing their guns, shooting dense flights of arrows while others stole out from the headlands in crescent-shaped *prahus* and cut us off from the ship. The stage was all set, but we were the only actors. Nothing happened. Rifles and Lewis guns and quick-firers were idle precautions, it seemed, as we got aboard the yacht, fairly easily, with the help of trailing tackle and gear.

The volcano back of the mountain had burned itself out. Already a star or two blinked down between the fading clouds. In the west a planet burned so close to the crest of the peak it seemed a watch-fire. We had but a few minutes to spare to assure ourselves that the wreck was untenanted. Those sufficed to show that the ship had been torn to pieces. Rather, it looked as if a gang of malicious, unreasoning orang-utans had been at work. Everywhere was confusion, breakage and filth.

"We'll take a closer look to-morrow," said Li Yuen. "I want to get hold of the log, if possible. Let's get back to the ship."

Within five minutes all the light had gone, save that of the stars. But a searchlight from the Little Dragon helped us back in safety. The ship's bell chimed eight times; it was eight o'clock, the end of the second dog-watch, as we went down to the meal, whose savors tempted us.

The last thing I noted as I entered the companion was the poor Zuleika, picked out by the ray of the searchlight. Then this was abruptly shut off and the broken hull vanished as if swallowed up by the mountain, bulking black behind it, framed by the golden stars. I remember how very dazzling the latter appeared, not as flattened studs pinned to a canopy, but suspended globes that shone in a vast perspective. I have never seen a more perfect night than this one. But the barometer was uneasy, the mercury would fall a variation and then regain it with a pulsing motion, and I caught Li Yuen watching it gravely, toward midnight, when I passed him, to go on deck for a moment before turning in.

The middle watch seemed to have been doubled. Groups of men were standing in what seemed appointed stations. At first I thought these weather precautions, but I saw the gun-crews, fore and aft, and the ray of the searchlight, trained low, constantly sweeping the strait.

CHAPTER XIII.

ENTER O'ROURKE.

EN SUE was below with his father, and I was the only English-speaking person on the deck, which turned out to be a very fortunate circumstance for Joseph

Francis O'Rourke, M. D. I had long ago discarded my own clothing for the more comfortable and sensible Chinese garb, though my facial disguise had not been renewed. Still, in the dark, I passed easily enough for an Oriental and it was no wonder that O'Rourke spoke as he did, fortunate perhaps that I was the only one able to understand what I did not either interpret or transmit to En Sue and Li Yuen.

I was watching the beam of the searchlight, idly enough, when it suddenly halted, wavered and then focussed on one spot, depressed to its lowest practical angle. In the ray I saw a man swimming, coming along hand-over-hand at a good clip. He had a crop of white hair and beard that gave him a weird and ghostly appearance as he plowed along for the Little Dragon.

I admired his nerve, for sharks were as plentiful in those waters as gold-fish in Li Yuen's fish-pond, and I wondered at the vigor he showed. The flailing arms were thin, almost fleshless, but they worked like steam-driven pistons. He was apparently a Malay, by his color, though his long beard puzzled me. As he neared the ship, about to get out of the zone of the ray, some one standing close to me aimed a rifle. On the instant, though he could not have seen the action and must merely have been waiting for the right distance for shouting, the swimmer called out:

" Don't shoot! I'm Irish!"

That he chose to say " Irish " instead of announcing his color was typical of O'Rourke. But it would have done him no good if I had not acted. I put aside the barrel of the rifle and used the best Chinese I could muster to make the watch understand. The only words I could think of were not overcomplimentary, but they were effective.

" *Yang-kwei-tze!*" I shouted. " *Yang-kwei-tze!*" They meant " white man " as the Chinaman puts it—" foreign devil." The men beside me got the inference and agreed with me. Two of them lowered the companion-ladder while another produced a pocket-flash and used it as a guide. The swimmer came up, his body ghastly with its winding sheet of greenish phosphorescence, grabbed at the ladder and emerged. He was six feet and some inches and his ribs looked for all the world like a cage wrapped in brown oilskin. His elbows and knees were knobs. Being stark naked we got the full benefit of his emaciation. The long white beard was wisped with the water and trailed to his waist. They turned the searchlight toward us for a moment and he stood hideously, piteously revealed, blinking, avoiding the direct glare and staring at us with a dropped jaw.

" By the Bell and Book of St. Pathrick," he said with the delicious brogue of an educated man, " they are all stinking Chinese haythens. Well, damn my luck!"

I laughed and he turned sharply, the water tapping the deck as it dripped from him.

" That's not a Chink's laugh," he said. " What are you?" He was eying my garments suspiciously.

" You can't judge by appearances," I answered. " From your skin you should be native, but you say you're Irish."

" Shave my armpits and you'll find I'm white," he said. " White and Irish. What are you?"

" American."

" Then for the love of Mike get me a slug of rye," he said. " If you've got any. If not, I'll make out with *samshu*."

He was beginning to shake all over, from weakness more than the immersion, and he slopped half of the cup of spirits that some one brought him.

" Come down to my cabin," I said, " and I'll get you some clothes.

" Another shot of *samshu* first, if you love me. Then some grub. Then your clothes and a pair of shears and the loan of a razor. Then I'll talk first, seein' I made the call. After that you can tell me what the devil you're doing with this ship and that crew in these waters. You look like an auxiliary cruiser, on deck."

I took him below and followed his suggestions exactly. I am over the average height and my clothes fitted him fairly well. I slipped into the main cabin and announced his arrival to Li Yuen and En Sue, which was quite unnecessary, but I explained—with some amendments, what he had told me.

"When he is quite ready," said Li Yuen with his ideal courtesy, "I shall be pleased to see him, if he feels equal to it."

While O'Rourke—for he had told me his name by this time—was dressing, I shuddered to see the marks of great scars all over his wasted limbs and body.

"Not pretty, are they?" he asked, cutting away at his beard. "Yet I used to strip pretty nicely not so long ago. Will you help me trim this hair of mine? The effect is somewhat Santa Clausy, isn't it, for a man of thirty-three? I got these white hairs and these scars in the last two years. At least, I think it's two years. You can tell me the date presently. I want to come back to humanity slowly.

"By the way, I came off for two things. For myself and also to warn you. No great hurry, after seeing that armament of yours, if your beggars can shoot?"

"They can," I said. "What's the warning?"

"There are somewhere in the neighborhood of a thousand murderin' pirates laying for you back of the island," he said. "More due before morning from Sulu way. They've been gathering for twenty-four hours. Going to attack at dawn. It 'll be some scrap. You'll lend me a gun or two?"

He had hacked off most of his beard and mustache and started in on the long hair of his head. I took the scissors to help him out and, as I carefully applied my comb to its tangle, I found it parted easily, being more long than thick. And, just where the skull rounded off at the back, I discovered a livid, puckered scar, bald and angry-looking, though it seemed to have healed up some time since.

O'Rourke was looking at himself in my shaving-mirror and caught the reflection of my face.

"Nasty crack, that," he said. "Nearly put me out of the way. I'm a doctor, Kennedy, or I was, and that ought to have finished me. At the least, it should have been trepaned. I hardly think it was treated at all. I was unconscious for many a long day after that, lying in coma, living off my reserves. When I came through I was a living skeleton, my hair was white and so was my sprouting beard. That is one of the reasons I want a gun for to-morrow morning. The other reasons are scored all over me—lest I forget. I won't. I sincerely trust to have a chance to settle up a lot of scores. If I can have a few drinks to get my hands steady I'll even up a few of them."

He fell silent while I played barber. He could never have shaved himself in the shape his nerves were in, and, as it was, I had a nasty job, finally having to compromise on a close-clipped mustache and Vandyke. He was a remarkable-looking figure by the time he was fully dressed and ready to go in to see Li Yuen and En Sue, after I had briefly outlined to him the facts of the trip, omitting its object. I wanted to see how much he knew about that. With his dark eyes, deep-socketed—eyes that somehow reminded me of a monkey's, eager, quick, but lacking something; his tall, lean frame in my linens and the white of his hair against the skin, burned as dark as if it had been stained by walnut, O'Rourke, looking very different from the specter that had clambered up the companion-ladder, stood bowing to Li Yuen with an air of distinction, both natural and acquired, that formed a fine foil to Li Yuen's quieter courtesy. O'Rourke's hands were shaking like aspen leaves in a wind, I remember.

En Sue saw this and brought him some rice brandy, which he swallowed with gusto and which actually brought a dull crimson flush under the brown of his cheeks.

"You'll want to know who I am," he said. "That's soon told and there isn't too much time to waste. My name is O'Rourke—Joseph Francis O'Rourke, of the University of Dublin. O'Rourke, M. D., once called 'Handsome Joseph' and supposed to be a devil among the ladies! Ha! M. D. standing for Doctor of Medicine, but in my case, really standing for Mad Dog. That's what I am and always have been. Mad Dog! Only I don't bite my friends. I have had one symptom of hydrophobia, conspicuously, from the time my whiskers were stiff enough to shave. Hatred of water as a beverage. I'm a drunkard. Born, perhaps, but personally developed.

"I have foozled a good many times, and

eventually I landed on Borneo at Sandakan as medico for a certain trading company which had large concessions and big plantations of tobacco and sago. I kept sober for a while. There was a girl—I got drunk, and I saw what she thought of me.

"She really cared—for what she first thought I was, a rolling stone of a mad Irishman who could sing and dance and ride and make poetry and love and who only wanted to meet the right girl. And then she hated herself. I don't think she hated me. Rather she had than the way she did look at me. Pardon this personal stuff. You see, I thought I loved her more than anything in the world, but I didn't—I loved liquor better. I got the chuck at the plantation and I went on the beach, mucking along. Never mind the details—I don't remember them. I got to be such a hound that I hung around a fishing village over here on Banguey for the sake of the liquor they forced me to manufacture. I'm a famous brewer on Banguey. I can make booze out of rice, millet, palm-juice, bananas, pineapples—that's the worst and strongest, next to sweet potatoes—and I've been steadily drunk for a year or so.

"Tell me the date presently and I can figure it. Call it two years. And I got my testamur at Dublin University! Oh, Lord! Only thing I didn't do was to tie up with a native woman. Between women and myself, black, brown, or white, there is a deep gulf fixed. Very deep. I dug it and I ought to know.

"That yacht, the Zuleika, was wrecked here some weeks ago. I don't know when. I was drunk at the time. Very drunk, after a pineapple spree. I've heard some talk about it since. There were lights changed over on Marudu Bay and one put out on Mallawalle and another faked on Banguey. A deliberate wrecking job. Some talk of a ruby that they didn't find. And when they didn't find it, killing and torture. I don't know much about the details. As I've said, I was drunk when it happened. But when I found out there were white men aboard and that these devils had murdered them in cold blood, after I'd been aboard the wreck, I told them exactly what I thought of them, with just enough liquor in me to aid my imagination and a good working knowledge of their own dialect.

"They didn't like it and they did me up pretty thoroughly. I managed to crawl away and I've been living under the headman's house lately, that being the last place they'd look for me. Not pleasant, you know, with the ticks and the fire and pepper ants, but safe. I hugged some idea of getting even with them and there was another reason—I'd found something.

"They gave me this wallop on the head a long time ago when I tried to cut loose from the tribe. It has left a clot there on the brain. May clear up some time, may not, but it has short-circuited some of the memory cells and there are some things I can't remember. One of these things is the discovery I've made. I know it's valuable, but I can't remember. If it ever comes back—but, as I say, I hoped I'd have a chance of getting even, especially with Balak, the headman, and I hung on. Sneaked out nights and got food, but I couldn't get any booze to speak of. But I overheard this talk about some ship being expected. Know anything about a man name Shang Wa?"

Li Yuen nodded.

"The tribe—Balak's tribe—are only supernumeraries in this thing. They got in on the wreck because it was piled up on their territory. But I gathered the job was done by Sulumen. This time the Sulumen are going to be in it, too, but the most of them came up from Barawak way. And you've got machine guns and two quick-firers! It 'll be a regular Donnybrook picnic in the mornin' for, mind ye, there'll be a hundred *prahus* at least and they'll swarm at us like a hive of angry bees, everywhere at once. Could I have another drink of that rice brandy?"

So, after all, O'Rourke did not impart much information nor did Li Yuen vouchsafe him any in return, but it was a great thing for me he swam off to the Little Dragon and that I happened to stop the bullet that would have made him shark-meat.

You are to visualize our position that morning. The Little Dragon lay head to the current, which was flooding, in a narrow channel off the southeast coast of Ban-

guey, between that island and Mallawalle. Down that same channel, or from the west, or up from the south between Mallawalle and the mainland, there were three roads by which the enemy could come sliding over the shallows in their light *prahus*. No better craft for the purposes of piracy has ever been devised than the Malay *prahu*, or *proa*, Doubled-ended, with bow and stem so upturned that they look like floating crescents, they can sail equally well and with an almost incredible swiftness in either direction. The lee-side is flat and the weather-side rounded, the one acting as a lee board, the other fine-lined for speed. Outriggers are sometimes used on both sides and the triangular sail of matting is enormous. They skitter along at anywhere from twelve to fifteen knots with a smooth sea and a fair wind, and of course there are always paddlers.

We were to anticipate the attack of a mosquito fleet of better than a hundred of these boats, of varying sizes, carrying from eight to twenty men, fighting with Moslem recklessness and the ferocity of wounded wildcats, and boarding us on all sides at once. O'Rourke seemed to regard it as a cheerful prospect. The Chinese seemed to regard it as expected routine, and I was far from comfortable. True, I had the fight at the lighthouse back of me, and I knew that once the thing was on I would be merely an animated slaughtering machine, but I could neither look forward with the equanimity of En Sue and his compatriots, nor share in O'Rourke's revel.

We soon got too busy to think about details of the fight. Li Yuen was an old hand at this sort of thing, and all of his men had at one time or another fought pirates to preserve his cargoes. The launch was sent out with one heavy kedge and a quarter-boat with a second. Still in the dark, with help from the searchlight, we warped the Little Dragon about so that our bows were westward in case we had to run.

All round the rail, on stanchions already prepared, the crew set up a fence of barb-wire, double-stranded, three feet high and, despite their modern weapons and the skill with which they could use them, cleavers were served out for use at close quarters.

"Looks as if it was going to be a nice, gory, messy sort of affair," suggested O'Rourke, hefting one of the hatchets. "I'll stick to my rifle and automatic. I'd be no good at grapples." His breath reeked of the rice brandy, but he appeared perfectly sober and his hands had stopped shaking. The only sign of his nervousness was an impossibility to keep still and he went pacing up and down the decks in long strides, cuddling his rifle, a cartridge-belt about his waist with spare slips for the gun and the automatic pistols holstered at each hip. Every man aboard had two automatics and every man could use them. I had seen them do it. All told we were forty-nine—against anywhere from one to two thousand!

Li Yuen was on the bridge, and En Sue, followed by a man bringing hot tea, came up to me where I stood aft, looking into the east. It was good tea and a good tonic.

"That's better than rice brandy," I said.

"It wouldn't help out the Irishman," said En Sue. "I like our new boarder. I fancy he'll do some fighting later."

"A good man gone wrong."

"If the fruit rots, look to the tree," capped En Sue. "The barometer is still fussing, Ned. Father does not expect a *tai-fung*—typhoon—but he says there will surely be some weather demonstration before the morning's out. Taste the air?"

It had a brassy tang. I looked up and saw the sky absolutely clear, the stars swimming like balls of white-hot metal. Where the searchlight touched the waves they were running crisply, but not angrily. But their crests were charged heavily with phosphorescence and where the tide surged about us the water was lambent with violet and greenish flares. Yet it looked fair, save for that rotten taste to the wind that blew a bit puffily out of the blackness of the China Sea. En Sue touched me on the arm.

"Dawn, Ned."

In the east the stars were dwindling swiftly as if being drawn back into the void by invisible wires. And the sky changed from purple-black to a hood of grayish-blue. This seemed to shake like a fabric. Then, as if it had been a canvas prepared and stretched for the brush, flecks and

streaks of rose, tipped with faint gold, began to appear, high up, then lower. The beam of the searchlight grew wan and was shut off. Light came with a rush. I looked off to the wreck and saw the white hull flash out as the sun jumped up with a dazzling glare, temporarily blinding me.

"Come on up to the bridge," said En Sue. "Here they are."

From the east, in the eye of the sun, black specks appeared, like the fins of mammoth sharks. From the west, around the south cape of Banguey, came a flotilla of some thirty *prahus*, and the breeze carried the far-off sound of their yelling. From the south, between Mallawalle and the northern horn of Paitan Bay, the channel was black with craft. The wind was against them, their sails were lowered and they were paddling hard, looking like water-bugs, coming on rapidly, the savage men of Sulu's scattered isles. This was the largest fleet of all, at least fifty of the big, outrigged canoes, with overloads of men sinking the freeboard almost to water level.

"Some scrap!" O'Rourke was by us, cuddling his rifle. "When do we open the ball?" he asked En Sue. "I'll get the range from the gun-crews and, for the sacred memory of Brian Boru, don't delay the game. Remember, man, I've got some accounts to straighten out."

"I think the Sulus and those in the eastern channel will join," said En Sue, "so as to keep us dazzled by the sun. Better come up on the bridge, both of you. Li Yuen will command the fight." He did not now speak of Li Yuen as father, I noticed, and I observed also the glad light of coming combat now displayed in his eyes. Every member of the crew was calmly preparing to be ready as soon as the order to fire was given and there was a reserved alacrity—if one may coin such an apparent paradox—in their bearing that made me take a dig at En Sue as we mounted to the bridge.

"I thought you said that soldiers in China were despised," I said. "Or, if you did not, your father did. But you seem as eager to fight as your crew."

"Chinese soldiers are hirelings," he answered. "The mercenary is never the equal of the man who fights with his body because his soul bids him. The Jews are not a fighting race, but they performed rare deeds of valor when they were put to it in ancient times. Besides, this is not a battle; it is an administration of justice."

"I'm glad I'm on the bench," said O'Rourke. "But this is no one-sided argument. Look at those devils!"

From our vantage on the bridge we could see the maneuvers of the pirates. Long generations of fighting had taught them what tactics to adopt without any special admiral of their combined fleets. As Indians surrounded a wagon train on the prairies, the *prahus* paddled up wind, hauled up their sails and shot before the wind, round and round us in a long and wide ellipse, keeping distance, yelling and shaking their weapons at us. We caught the furious beat of drums, and puffs of white smoke showed where they were firing their guns in the air and wasting cartridges. Slowly the ellipse narrowed with every evolution about the Little Dragon. The tide was at the full and the *prahus* paddling against the wind had the benefit of it. With sail or blade they must have made a good twelve knots. And still they swept nearer and still Li Yuen reserved his fire. He was waiting for them to bunch.

They divided into two parties, one against the sun, the other off to windward. Simultaneously they came down upon bows and stern, dividing into two opening V's. The rapid-firers started, finding and holding the range to a nicety. I saw the shells strike plump and fair and *prahus* blown clear of the water into the air, the men falling from them like so many aeronauts. But still they came on. Port and starboard the Lewis guns sprayed down a pattering death while rifles took individual toll. And still they came, yelling, firing, though none of their bullets took present effect. It was impossible to repulse them as they surged in from every point of the compass, ran their slender craft up to the sides of the Little Dragon and tossed a hundred grappling-hooks aboard.

The lines came snaking up with bamboo joints knotted into them, and as fast as the hooks caught, Dyak and Malay clambered to the rail. They had seen barbed-wire

before and they flung matting across it. Stink-pots were tossed aboard with their choking, suffocating fumes, and, back of this infernal barrage, every foot of rail had a savage gone amok mounting it.

Our sailors emptied their rifles, fired their automatics point-blank and caught up their cleavers, hacking at their foes. The smell of blood came up to us on the bridge where we could no longer fire for fear of shooting friend instead of enemy. I saw Taku lop off the arm of a Dyak and our boatswain slice another's head apart as neatly as you might divide a mold of spiced beef.

With a whoop, O'Rourke went into action. He, En Sue, and myself reached the deck together and made for the bows where the pirates were getting the best of it. Gradually our men were falling back from the rails, breaking up into little groups of hand-to-hand combat. More stink-pots added their sickening stench, and through the gusts of black, sticky smoke came clouds of arrows, fired upward from the *prahus,* descending in a deadly rain. Some of them inevitably killed their own, but those still in the boats were too maddened with their inability to get at close quarters to care for anything but the use of their weapons.

A shrill whistle came from the bridge where Li Yuen stood and his voice shrilled out like a trumpet. Instantly the Chinamen disengaged themselves, retreating toward the two Lewis guns, separating defenders from besiegers and raking the deck. The diversion gave us time to reload our guns and we poured volley after volley into them. The air was full of howls, blood trickled across the clean decks and gathered in the scuppers. Almost every one fought barefooted and crimson tracks were everywhere.

Now the archers had got to the rail and were sending their arrows to more direct targets. Spears were flying, and the rarer bullets of the Dyaks. The Sulus depended on their more primitive weapons, and, despite the swathes that went down before the Lewis guns, more came, ever leaping on with their snaky creeses winking in the sunlight. A Lewis jammed. The gun was rushed, the crew cut down. I found myself in the thick of it, firing my automatic. One pirate, his mouth and teeth stained betel-red, leaped at me with upswung steel, and I stopped his yell with my bullet. It entered his throat fairly and broke the back of his neck, but as he fell, he clutched at my legs and nearly had me down. I shattered the jaw of another and then my pistol wrist was prisoned. A few feet away a pirate was drawing bow on me.

There was the down-flicker of an ax and the arm of the hand that grasped my wrist was severed in half at the elbow. For a few seconds the fingers still clung while the man fell sidewise at the instant that the arrow, intended for me, was let fly. It took him between the shoulders with a *thwuck* I could hear above all the noise of the fight. O'Rourke, his hatchet-blade clouded with the steamy blood, hurdled the body, and I followed him, driving the mob away from the machine gun once more.

There were dead men all over the deck now, writhing or still. The naked pirates showed ghastly wounds from hatchet-blows or were riddled with bullets. Some of our own had half a dozen arrows in them. The shouting had died down as both sides realized the desperation of the fight and the shots punctuated the grunts and panting of tired men. Some one shouted my name.

"Ned, come up on the bridge with O'Rourke! Quick!"

It was En Sue. His light tunic was a smear of blood, his own, or a foeman's, and an arrow had grooved his cheek. I called O'Rourke and made him understand. For all his weakness he was fighting with a ferocity that matched the most rabid of his assailants. He had picked up a Malay creese and I saw him draw its keen edge across the tendons of a Dyak's wrist and then plunge the wavy blade downward into the man's belly.

We backed up the deck toward the bridge ladder. O'Rourke was physically exhausted, but his eyes blazed.

"Lost my meat-ax," he gasped. "Chap's skull—so damned thick—I couldn't pull it out! Some—fight! Give me a boost up the ladder, Kennedy. All right in a minute. All in now."

"We've got to get rid of their *prahus,*" En Sue greeted us. "Here are grenades."

There were four big baskets of the lemon-

shaped explosives. The purpose was clear. If we could drive off the boats, clinging like leeches to the carcass of a *caraboa*, we might discourage the attack. If we couldn't get rid of them the last resort would be to slip cables and steam out to sea, fighting as we went, hoping to shake them off. But every man had been pressed into service to repel the boarders and we had none to spare for the engines.

The grenades turned the trick. The *prahus* were joined together with coir yarns and the explosions tore them apart aside from maiming those who remained in them. Some sank, more drew away, with their occupants yelling at their fellows on deck. There was a moment of uncertainty. We began flinging the grenades at them as they swarmed back to the rail. Almost as quickly as they had swarmed up they retreated. The *prahus* paddled swiftly off to windward, separating as they went to diminish the effect of our rapid-fire in the bows, now at work once more. Westward and seaward they went, to gather in a cluster and disappear around the western end of Balambangan.

I looked at the sun. It seemed hardly to have lifted.

"How long did that last?" I asked En Sue.

He looked at his watch.

"Not more than fifteen minutes."

"Will they be coming back again?"

"I am afraid so. They have got a fair half of us out of the fight in dead and wounded. We may have killed a hundred of them. Even if we have killed twice that it leaves the odds greater than ever. They will quarrel among themselves for a while and each leader will blame the other. But they will come back."

I looked down on the deck of the Little Dragoon. O'Rourke was down there, applying his surgery. An awning was being already rigged up above our wounded, the pirates were being thrown overboard indiscriminately. Circling the ship were hundreds of sharks, swarming forward at each plunge of a body, shouldering each other out of the water. Li Yuen was gazing westward through his binoculars.

"I don't like the look of that sky," he said. "We may have to get out of here, though that means meeting them with a divided crew."

Chinaways, the sky held a peculiar coppery tinge that was swiftly spreading toward the zenith. Clouds that I used to call thunderheads, as a boy, were forming. And the brassy taste of the air was stronger than ever.

"Better get some food served out," suggested En Sue. "Our friends are about to pay us another visit."

Out from the far side of Balambangan came the pirate flotilla, once more in close formation. They were too small a target and too long a range for efficient work with the rapid-firer. A shell fell short and showed them their immunity. They came on in mass, ready to split for the rush. Through the glasses I could see them sliding fast before the wind, their prows feathered. I am sure that I was not afraid, but I was very certain that this time they would overwhelm us. En Sue seemed to share the mood.

"At any rate, they won't get the ruby," he said. "I think the grenades are our best bet, once they get to close quarters."

The first exclamation I had ever heard from Li Yuen passed his lips.

"Chai-yah!" he cried. "That's why the barometer was pumping. Look at that!"

The coppery sky to westward was still lurid toward the horizon, but at the zenith it had darkened and deadened to a slaty gray, which in turn blended into the blue of the eastern half. One-half the seascape smiled, the other threatened. From the darkest portion tenuous lengths of black vapor were swinging downward toward the sea, the main mass of cloud from which they took shape lowering with them. Lower and lower they crept with a swinging, pendulous motion that was irresistibly mindful of the action of an elephant's trunk, groping with an apparently defined purpose. I counted nine of them before things happened to take my mind off any matter of definite number.

As they gyrated on their practically vertical axes they formed a cordon on three sides of the flotilla of canoes that remained still huddled together like sheep at the ap-

proach of wolves. The water beneath the vaporous columns was whipped into spray, caught in the vortex and leaped up to meet the opposing and descending spouts, joining into pillars of air and spray and whirling water, advancing with great speed, spinning like dervishes, a sea tornado where liquid took the place of dust.

The sails of the *prahus* were suddenly raised like wings of floating gulls. There was still a gap through which they might escape toward us, but it was rapidly closing. For a few seconds the *prahus* rushed over the surface, and then the wind failed them utterly.

There must have been an almost complete vacuum between the waterspouts. Frantically the paddles went out, and the fleet looked like water-striders suddenly frightened by rain. But they were doomed. The spouts appeared to be dominated by some law of attraction, and they rushed together as dancers might in some wild revel. A waterspout can sink an ocean steamer—has done so, on verified occasions, with tramp freighters. Normally they last for fifteen to twenty minutes before they tumble, in tons upon tons of down-smashing water and foam, unless they meet an obstruction.

I looked at Li Yuen again. It was the first and last time I ever saw fear in his face. But there we were, in the grip of the titanic forces of an angry sea, doomed, we thought. We and our enemies together would go down into the sea's depths. It was as though Nature meant to teach us that she was supreme and we little squalling children to be chastised.

"Chai-yah!" cried Li Yuen again, and then his face took on the impassive calm of a Chinese gentleman facing death, the inscrutable look of one who has found the way.

And as the waterspout rose higher and higher, threatening us all with instant destruction, I could only stand there shivering, cursing myself for the quixotic folly that made me try to find the ruby's owner. If I ever got out of this alive— But I hadn't time to think about my future then. It didn't look like I would have any future.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

The Winning Punch

by *Harold de Polo*

CONSIDERING that only a scant six months ago he had fought the heavyweight champion of the world to a ten-round draw, it was decidedly an inglorious accident—even a ludicrous one, to be brutally frank.

He was plodding, slowly and wearily, along the roadway. It was a moonless night, with a dark and low-hanging sky, and the thoroughfare was unknown territory. Deeply immersed in his own glum thoughts, he did not hear the hum of the approaching

machine until the headlights, coming around an abrupt bend, struck him full in the eyes. Coming to with a start, he leaped nimbly to one side to evade the oncoming car—leaped, it might be said, directly into the arms of ironic fate. It was a ditch no more than an insignificant three or four feet in depth, yet his feet caught, his body doubled, and his left temple crashed heavily against a rock.

Clem Richards came to with the arrival of dawn. He stifled the sharp groan that instinctively escaped him, and brought himself stiffly to a sitting posture. His hand started up to the cut above his left temple, but swerved in mid air and came down gingerly on his right wrist. He winced as his fingers felt of the bones, and worry came to his eyes—then, with a grating laugh, he remembered that it didn't matter one way or the other if he were ever able to put on the mitts again or not.

"The Eventual Champ!"

He could see the words blazoned over his pictures in fighting pose on a dozen or more sporting-pages of the big dailies. That was what the ring sharps had called him, unanimously, after he had battled the title-holder to that famous no-decision. He wished now that he had lost the bout on points, or else been sent down to the rosin via the K. O. route. If either of the two had happened, he would still have been able at least to hold his head up and feel that he was a man. While as it was—

Clem had fallen for what many a better man has—and many a worse and many a just plain fair-to-middling. He had been in the most promising city in the world for perhaps exactly that stuff, and the New York fans had gone wild over him after his tilt with the big boy. The latter was an unpopular champion, and the public was madly clamoring for a more agreeable successor. As young Richards seemed to fill the bill, you can easily imagine how he had been deluged with "invites" and flattery and fawning.

The thing has happened countless times, and the sporting fraternity have killed many a top-notch scrapper, many a high-class ball-tosser, many a superfine athlete. Clem had been almost pathetically susceptible meat. A product of the farm—an orphan in his early teens—he had been forced to fight hard for a bare living. Therefore, when he had found himself a national figure at twenty-three after a whirlwind rise, he lost his head with a completeness that was at least utterly thorough.

He remembered, now, that a scant few had tried to stop him—his manager, a veteran sparring partner who had been through the same medicine, a newspaper man who had had faith in him from the beginning. But it's hard to talk to a youngster with the world, as he sees it, at his feet. His case was no exception. There had been a few hectic months, a sudden awakening to the fact that he was penniless and in debt, a further one that his popularity and his friends had gone—and then a hasty pulling up.

But this had come too late. No promoter would have anything to do with him, the sport-writers justly panned him, his former comrades of prosperity turned the proverbial cold shoulder. After that, he had once more lost his head. There had been a last carouse, another brief period of grim waking, and, possibly in the spirit of the mortally wounded animal that desperately tries to drag himself back to his den, he had made for the open country. He just wanted to wander—to wander where there were green trees, and running brooks, and broad meadows—and to forget the ghastly madness of the last half-year.

"The Eventual Champ!"

II.

"ARE you badly hurt?"

Clem Richards, as the words came to him, sprang to his feet with the agility that the ring had taught him:

"Didn't feel it!"

His answer was pure instinct. He had schooled himself to make this reply, no matter how serious the blow, during his few years in the pugilistic business:

"Maybe you didn't feel it, but it looks to me as if your wrist or your arm is broken!"

The down-and-out fighter flushed be-

neath the grime on his face. Oddly, almost incredulously, he looked at the girl standing before him. He got a hasty impression of a slim and straight figure, and clear blue eyes that gazed at him with a certain frank and kindly interest.

Unconsciously he straightened up, his shoulders going back, his own gray eyes meeting the girl's squarely. Then again he flushed, averted his glance—and spoke with the boyish bitterness of youth:

"I guess it don't make much difference what happens to a hobo, does it?"

"Not if he himself thinks so," she replied calmly. "But, if you need any help, father will be glad to give it. The nearest doctor is nearly six miles off, and he can drive you over there in the buggy. There's our place—over there!"

Clem mechanically followed the sweep of her arm. Possibly a quarter of a mile away, nestling in a grove of sturdy old oaks, he caught a glimpse of a low, white farmhouse. It reminded him, somehow, of the one he had known in what now seemed the very dim and very faraway past. His jaws clicked, his eyes hardened, as he told himself what a fool he had been ever to leave it, what a fool—

"I've got to get along now," he heard her saying. "I teach school over at the Corners, but I promised to drop in on one of my pupils who lives up in the hill country, who's sick. You'd better see father and have your arm looked at as soon as you can!"

Clem Richards felt dazed. It was hard, after his last few weeks of countless rejections by so-called friends, to grasp the fact that here was a stranger—and a girl, at that—offering him help after finding him in a condition that plainly told he was a wanderer of the roads. Somehow, it didn't seem natural; somehow, he kept waiting for the proviso he felt was coming:

"Better see father—and good luck!"

Dimly he heard her words, saw her turn, and then watched her go on, across the road and over a meadow that the sun was just beginning to touch. As his eyes followed her figure, a new light came to them, a new strength came to his body, a new note to his voice:

"Thanks," he called after her; "thanks! I will see him!"

With that he turned abruptly and strode off in the direction of the farmhouse.

Although his every muscle ached, although his wrist was giving him literal torture, he walked briskly and confidently across the fields. There was a grim resolve on his face, and when he came to the farm he went directly to the cow-barn, his past knowledge subconsciously informing him that that was where a farmer would be at this hour. As he reached it, he found that he was right.

An elderly man, with a milk-pail in either hand, was coming toward him—and Clem got to the point at once.

"I don't know your name, sir," he said. "but your daughter just told me, over by the road, to come and see you. I'm a—a tramp, I guess. I stepped out of the way of a car a few hours ago, fell into a ditch and struck my head. Your daughter noticed that I had something the matter with my arm, for it doubled up under me, and she told me that you might get me to see a doctor. What I want to ask, though, is if you'll give me a job? I know something about a farm, and I'm willing to work hard. As I said, I'm just a wanderer, but I never did a crooked thing, I promise, and I'm satisfied to work just for bed and food. Is there any chance?"

The prizefighter had spoken simply, quietly, with the ring of sincerity in his voice that cannot be counterfeited. The older man, who had the same clear blue eyes as his daughter, looked at him for the briefest instant.

"You speak right out, youngster," he said with a faint smile, "an' you sound like a man. Yep, there's a job here, for as much as I hear of this unemployment business it don't seem possible to gather in any unfortunates that wants to work on farms. I ain't able to pay much, I'm warnin' you. Tell the truth, I can just about give the long-before-the-war rate o' twenty a month an' keep, an' I ain't denyin' the work is hard. What say?"

Clem Richards could hardly believe it. The kindness of the girl had been difficult enough to realize, but this calm and sud-

den acceptance of him—of a hobo—by her father, was almost too much.

"I—I—yes, sir—and thanks," he managed to blurt out after what seemed an age.

"Good," nodded the other. "I'll be hitchin' up to tote this milk to the creamery, an' then we'll run on into town from there an' let Doc Meadows see 'bout that arm I notice danglin'!"

III.

MENTALLY, at least, Clem Richards was a new man within a week. Tyrus Babcock had surely given him back his faith in human nature; had given him, indeed, a bigger faith than he had ever had. He had insisted, when Doc Meadows had said that there was only a minor break to the wrist and that a rest of a week would completely heal it, in making Clem refrain from all work. The kindly old farmer added, on the other's expostulations:

"Reckon you can stand the strain of a rest, anyways, broken limb or not—you need it! Case you're worryin', though, 'member what I said 'bout plenty o' work later on. Cheer up!"

"And I can promise you that father's not exaggerating about the work, either," his daughter Alice laughingly put in.

"I guess I need a lot of it," Clem replied with a flush.

Certainly he bore this out when his wrist had healed. Almost fiercely, it might be said, he attacked his labors; almost, indeed, as if he were hammering down some powerful opponent of the ring. The truth of it was that Richards felt an overwhelming gratitude toward these strangers who had picked him up from the actual gutter, and was doing his mightiest to express it. Outside of that, his boyhood years came back to him, and the work that had then often seemed like drudgery now took on the aspect of healthy play. It was that, too, after his grind in the roped arena.

Clem enjoyed the evening, once that his almost morbid fear was allayed that he would be questioned about his past. He knew that the average person—and particularly the rural type—usually were sweeping in their condemnation of "prize-fighters." By Tyrus Babcock and his daughter, however, he was never bothered, and he simply made no mention of his previous life. He got into the habit of helping wipe the dishes, and after that they would sit around, the former mostly reading the news, while he and Alice talked. Gradually he came to look forward to this throughout the day.

By the time June arrived and he had been leading his regular, hard-working, even life for two months, the pugilist had entirely regained his physical condition. If anything, to be exact, he was in even more rugged health than ever in his life. Youth responds quickly. With the knowledge that he was as good as he had been formerly, there also came the age-old longing of the man who has once been beaten—to go back and conquer. It had been dissipation, of course, that had wrecked him, but he knew that already his name was nearly forgotten among the followers of his profession, and that it would be a hard and up-hill fight to gain even a hearing before trying to battle his way back. Grimly, though, he told himself he would do it.

"I will, too!"

He was alone when he had made his decision, watching the horses that he had taken down to the brook for their evening drink. As if to lend force to the words he had unconsciously spoken aloud, he had doubled his right fist and crashed it heavily into the open palm of his other hand.

A sharp and sudden whistle escaped his lips, and a worried frown creased his forehead. Gingerly, as he had that morning when the girl found him, he raised his right arm and felt of the wrist. A pain, fiery and darting, had gone through his entire forearm at the impact of his fist against his palm.

Very slowly, his head lowered, he walked with the horses back to the barn. He knew, immediately, that it meant that Doc Meadows, for all his good-heartedness, had not correctly diagnosed the break in his bones; he knew, too, that with his wrist in its present condition he would never be able to land another blow; and, to a man who had just made up his mind to fight his way up to another crack at the champion, this spelled doom!

After he had carefully bedded the animals down for the night, his mind in the grip of despair, a light of hope suddenly came to Clem's eyes. He remembered, joyously, that Bonesetter Patten, the man who was nationally famous for having patched up literally thousands of fighters and ball-players and other athletes, lived in a neighboring city that was not more than a scant forty miles away. And Clem had his pay for the two months he had worked intact!

Fortunately it was Saturday, and Tyrus Babcock observed his Sabbath as scrupulously as a farmer possibly can. Moreover, Clem had never asked for a day off. He did now, without delay, and added that he might not, perhaps, be back until late Monday. As usual, no questions were asked him, except that his employer generously wanted to know if he needed any cash in advance. Clem didn't—and he caught the five forty-two the next morning.

By four o'clock that same afternoon he had his answer. The wizard-like bone specialist, after having X-rayed and fingered and pulled and smoothed and massaged, delivered himself thusly:

"Richards," said the great man, a touch of kindness in his usually stern eyes and voice, "I like clean sports, of every kind, and I saw you carry the champion to a draw. I was sorry when I heard that you'd fallen for the bright lights, for I think the sharps were right when they said you'd eventually get the title. And you will, my boy, if you'll take care of yourself. Physically, I can see that you're as good as ever, for this wrist isn't serious. I won't go into technical details, but several minute bones have been shattered. It needs exactly six months of rest. I mean by that of rest from using it in any way that could be likened to a punch. Even gentle sparring, or practicing with a bag, might permanently injure it. You can go on with your work at the farm, though, for it's the best thing in the world for you. Do it for six months —and don't hit even a pillow with your right—and you'll be back at the title-holder. You've got the winning punch tucked away in you, boy, and I like to see a clean fighter win. Drop in on me every month—and good luck!"

Clem Richards went back to the farm a happier man than he had ever been in his life.

IV.

THE next three months to the pugilist were pleasant and very hopeful ones. His wrist was knitting nicely, and, according to Bonesetter Patten, would be as strong as ever when the half year he had at first prescribed was up. The knowledge of this, now, had taken on a new meaning, had given a new goal, to Clem. He wanted to get back to where he belonged—at the top of his profession—but he wanted the title and the money that went with it so that he might have the right to ask Alice a certain question.

It is true that he felt some trepidation as to what she might say when she learned of his calling, but he realized also that she was the type of girl who would never let that stand in the way if she ever happened to care. Without conceit, he thought that she eventually might. Certainly, whenever she was with him she seemed to like his company, and now that the vacation period was on she saw more of him. Indeed, most Sundays, after church, they took the buggy and the fast mare and went trailing over the country roads.

But Clem knew that all was not going well with his employer. It was the worst season of drought known in many years, and most of the crops were doomed to failure. He could not tell how badly it was going to affect the farmer, for Tyrus Babcock was a man who did not believe in showing anything but the sunny side. Clem, however, occasionally caught a worried look in the other's eyes, and more than once he had been on the point of asking for the truth. Through it all he railed at himself for his own inability to help should the occasion possibly arise.

He found out, just before Alice returned to her teaching in September, precisely how matters stood. She was washing and he was drying the dishes, after supper, and she was telling him of her interest in opening new classes and meeting new pupils. Her father presently came into the room. He had been visiting a neighbor for a few min-

utes, and his face, behind its kindness, was grave. He took out a few bills from his pocket, and, handing them to Clem, spoke with a certain sigh in his voice that he could not hide.

"Here, Clem," he said—and there was weariness in the accompanying smile. "I reckon I'm a day or two late, with this *munif'cent* wage; I reckon, too, lad, that maybe it's the last ye'll get from me. I've plumb failed. Crops are ruined, an' the bank won't lend another red, an' that mortgage o' two thousand is due in a week. Allie, it's good you can make your living teaching school."

"The bank refused, father?" There was a catch in Alice's voice.

"They did, Allie—an' I just asked Stebbins, an' he can't do anything."

Clem Richards stood, his face white, watching the man who now seemed suddenly old. The prize-fighter had seen men like this in the ring cave in without warning after having put up a game fight. Tyrus Babcock, probably, had been through several bad years, and had been counting on this one to pull him out. The drought had dealt the crushing blow, and his age was telling.

"I—I wish, sir—" he began.

"'Lo, Mr. Babcock; 'lo, Allie; 'lo, Richards. Thought I'd come in an' set a minute on the way home. Ain't this drought awful? Don't it just beat anything you ever seen? Gosh, pop tells me he can't recall nothing like it since—"

Clem was glad of the interruption. It was young Tucker, son of a farmer who lived perhaps a mile away. The boy was famous for his remarkable and breathless rattle of conversation, and he did not go back on his reputation now. He kept up a steady monologue for a generous half-hour, then he turned to Clem.

"Knew there was somethin' I wanted to say to you, Richards. Say, want to come with me to-morrow night. This here world's heavyweight champeen, Butch Dineen, is givin' a show over to Reedstown at the op'ra house. Say, it ought to be great. He's boxin' all comers, an' he's givin' any man who can knock him out in five rounds or less twenty-five hundred dollars. Yes, sir—absolutely—cash. Got it all deposited, he has, in the bank, to show he means it. Say, it ought to be *great*, 'cause I reckon some of the boys from around will take a chance. Hey, Richards—comin' with me?"

Clem Richards displayed the calmness, the rapid decision, for which he had been praised in his arena encounters. "Thanks, Tucker," he said cordially. "Be glad to go along."

V.

In the Reedstown Opera House, the next evening, Clem sat in a chair beside the boisterously conversive Tucker. He was not, however, listening to a word the other was saying; he was watching, with narrowed and penetrating eyes, the man on the stage whom he had at one time fought to a ten-round draw.

Butch Dineen, he saw, was in good condition. His shadow-boxing, his bag punching, his sparring in exhibition, all proved that. He proved, too, that he was the same needlessly cruel fighter as always. The first man to face him for a go at the prize-money—a heavy, slow-bodied, slow-witted farmhand—he knocked brutally out in the very first round. The next, although he lasted into the second stanza, was accorded the same treatment.

"Well," announced his manager, "we give three chances every night at the twenty-five hundred, but it don't seem like Reedstown is anxious for lucre, heh?"

The audience snickered.

"Well," continued the other, "where is he?"

"Here," said Clem Richards. Quietly, hastily he got up from his seat, made for the aisle, and walked up the plank that led to the stage.

Heedless of some taunting remark of the manager's, heedless of the questions and witticisms of the crowd, he started to remove his clothes. In a few seconds he stood in trunks and sneakers.

"Where are the gloves?" he asked the champion's manager.

"Richards!" came from the title-holder.

"Any trouble, Butch? Any frame-up?" queried the man Dineen had engaged to

handle him in his theatrical work, as he sensed something unusual.

"When there is I'll tell you," answered the fighter. "Get him them gloves an' shut up, so's I can murder him!"

"There's not going to be any murder, Dineen," said Richards; "there's just going to be a knocked-out champ!"

"That coke sure is the stuff, ain't it, kid?" was Butch's sneering rejoinder.

Clem paid no attention. He looked, once more, at the bandages about his right wrist, and his examination of the gloves handed him was so lengthy that several in the audience booed. A few more joined, too, when he discarded the first pair and called for a second. These proved satisfactory, and he laced them slowly, cautiously—then stepped out before the champion.

"Oh, boy!" yelled a man in the gallery; "somethin' tells me this guy's there!"

The man who had spent five solid months doing healthy work on a farm showed that he had forgotten none of his ring strategy. He was fighting for the woman he loved, and the man who had come to his aid when things had been at their darkest.

There is no particular need to go into lengthy detail over the bout itself. It has gone down in ring annals for all time, and is known to all who follow the sporting press. Clem Richards, they assert, fought one of the greatest whirlwind battles that was ever witnessed. From the beginning he took the offensive. He took, with it, a fair share of punishment, but he cleverly managed to evade and counter every blow that might have been serious. Also, it was noticed that for the first three rounds—and for most of the fourth—he himself struck only with his left. With it, though, he seemed able to inflict heavy damage. Constantly he was aiming for one spot—the jaw. And at last, not ten seconds before the fourth canto was about to close, he saw his chance.

They say that Dineen, in a blind rage, left himself wide open. Be that as it may, Clem's right fist suddenly crashed through the air, through the champion's tardy defense, and landed flush on the point of his jaw.

But all that Clem remembers, to this day, is that he dimly saw Butch Dineen crumple down, heard the count of ten that seemed hours instead of seconds—and then fainted.

VI.

Clem did not get back to the farm until sunset of the following day. His right arm was in a sling, hopelessly crippled as far as future fighting was concerned; his face, too, was cut and bruised, and his body ached; but, although he knew that he had given up all hope of ever winning the title, the loss of it, somehow, did not seem at all important. Twenty-five hundred dollars, in cash, was in a wallet in his coat.

"Well, sir," he said, putting it down before Tyrus Babcock, "I guess you don't need that darn bank, after all!"

"Lad, lad," answered the farmer huskily, his eyes moist, "you shouldn't have done it! We heard—we know all 'bout it—we know what it means—we— *You* tell him, Allie!"

The old man turned away, overcome by emotion, and Clem, his face crimson, was looking at the girl he loved. He saw in her eyes something he had never seen there before. She walked over toward him, very simply, very frankly, and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Clem," she said, "it's done, and we can only accept your help and say how we appreciate it. We heard—it's all over the neighborhood—how that, by holding off for three months more, you could have gone back to your profession and probably won the championship. It's all in the papers, and Dr. Patten is calling you all sorts of a fool. He says you had the—the 'winning punch,' and that if you'd only waited you could have done anything. Clem—God bless you!"

He took his plunge then. With his eyes gazing squarely into her own, he asked a question.

"It *was* the winning punch, wasn't it,—Allie?"

Alice Babcock flushed, averted her eyes, then let her hands steal down and rest on his bandaged arm.

"I think you—you delivered it, in your ring parlance, *months* ago!"

The Blood Call

Part IV

by *Kenneth Perkins*

Author of "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

LAVA COMES TO WORSHIP.

NOTHING could have suited Quade better than the truce which was proposed to him. He realized that to stay cornered in the little crevasse, with four men guarding the opening and a man above, meant certain defeat. If he refused to give fight he would be left to starve. If he offered to enter into a shooting-scrap with his five opponents the chances against him were insurmountable. Taurog, it was obvious, could get reinforcements at will. And he could send his men into the fight without for a moment endangering himself. Quade knew that he was beaten. To have this truce offered to him was something approaching a miracle. Without a second thought he accepted Taurog's offer: a fight with bare fists in a corral in the presence of witnesses.

Taurog rode back to the crater alone, and Trilles and the others escorted Quade. The latter was allowed to keep his gun. And his horse, which had been browsing on the weeds at the mouth of the crevasse, was brought to him. He mounted and rode up to the gorge trail with Pedro and Juan Scaly preceding, and the two stablemen following in company with Trilles and Kirbie.

No look was exchanged between Kirbie and Jim Quade. The latter still believed—as all appearances showed—that the girl had tricked him. He set his mind resolutely upon his affair with Taurog. He knew that it would be a fight to the finish—even though it was to be without guns. With the same resolute trend of mind he determined to see the girl after the fight and bring her around to his side.

The sun was fairly well up over the mountains when Quade first saw Taurog's house in the crater. The eastern rim of the crater cast a big gray shadow across the adobe walls, but the sun's rays slanted across the red tiles of the roof and a brilliant light was diffused through the skeins of smoke from the chimneys and the chuck-house. In one of these outer houses Quade was led. Here Pedro brought him a breakfast — pomelos, canned beans, coffee. Pedro's capacity was twofold: he served as Quade's valet all that morning and also—with the polite suavity that he always assumed when he was not sulky drunk or dogged—he served as the guard. Quade understood without being told that he was

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 14.

expected to remain in that little adobe chuck-house until the hour of the fight.

The fight was to take place at three that afternoon. Some time before noon Juan Scaly rode to the Dead Cow Saloon and announced to every one present that there was to be a big show at the crater. A large audience heard his announcement. Barkeeps were called from mopping up the pine boards, croupiers were summoned from their breakfast, sleepy dancing girls were awakened and called down from their bedrooms, and Jude Silent, the proprietor, left his work in the dance-hall where he was superintending the rehabilitation of the booth where Quade had fought the preceding night.

News spread all over the town of Lava that Taurog was going to give an exhibition of his fist-fighting prowess. The countryside was going to be shown once and for all that Taurog was master. Saloons were closed, chow-stands were surrendered to the flies; gambling dens were deserted and the merry-go-round in its huge striped tent on one of the street corners ceased for once to howl out its pipe-organ ragtime. By noon Lava was practically deserted except for an occasional drowsy Indian curled up in a red blanket. A glaring sun beat down on broad, dusty streets, on forsaken shacks, and a dozen lonely yelping dogs.

A long and continuous procession of riders moved across the plain toward Taurog's crater. And every kind of nag was used to transport Taurog's guests to the fight: buckskin pony, cayuse, and mule, not to mention the wagons and stages crowded with gamblers, freshly painted girls, and hilarious buckaroos.

The news radiated from Lava on every side so that rustlers and outlaws as well as the old cattlemen in their frock-coats, sombreros and jackboots, poured in through the granite gorge to see what they heard was to be a finish fight. It was already understood that Smoo Taurog's power had been challenged by some wildcat stranger who purported to be of the family of Quade —and a brother to Sterry Quade. Many of them had even seen the stranger engage in a barroon brawl at the Dead Cow. The disagreement was to be settled—so it was explained—by the time-honored method of a duel. This duel, however, was not to be a private affair at sunrise with the use of pistols. It was to be staged as near as possible after the manner of a prize-fight.

At two o'clock—one hour before the fight —Taurog gave a feast to the entire assembly. Most of the crowd was obliged to file through the chow-shed like picknickers at a barbecue, but a few of the nearest cronies of the host were invited into his house. At the head of a long table, laden heavily with plates of roast beef, potatoes, jerky and tortas, sat Taurog himself, proud, boastful as an old viking, flushed slightly with Juarez wine—which he had adopted for the day in preference to whisky. Redeye, as Trilles warned him, would get him " too het up to fight decent."

On Taurog's right was the proprietor of the Dead Cow, on his left little Jug Trilles, the calmest man there except for the excited twinkling of his brown eyes. Jug said little during the feast, but with his one hand he shoveled in prodigal chucks of beef and potatoes. Inasmuch as the deputy sheriff was not in training, he helped himself freely to the alkali whisky which Jude Silent passed to him from time to time across the seat of their host. The other guests with loud shouts and songs kept up a continual round of toasts to their leader, some of them swearing that if he did not win the fight they would finish it for him, using their gats. These vows, however, attracted little attention because at that table it was most objectionable to even suggest the possibility of Taurog's being defeated.

Taurog reacted to this homage. To be worshiped by all men because of his physical power was his greatest passion. It was this one trait which had been most important in influencing him to accede to his foster-daughter's request for a fair, man-to-man fight. When the yipping and the drinking and the worshiping of his guests were at their height, the host leaned over to little Trilles and whispered in his ear:

" I want for the fight to go on as long as it can," he said. " I'm going to beat the hell-bender up good. I'm goin' to wipe the corral with him so's the horses will wonder what the hell was pulled off there durin' their absence."

"Like as not you'll beat the bird to a pulp," Trilles said. "But they's a little tiny chanst you'd better not forgit. He may be lighter'n you, but he's got a rip-snortin' twirl to them fists of his."

"I'm thinkin' of that little chanst now," Taurog said under his breath. "These here men want to see me in action—and if I can beat the hell-bender it 'll mean they'll stand by me the rest of their days."

"And if you don't beat him?"

"We've got to win the fight so's the crowd won't think it's a frame-up."

"I've told you I ain't goin' to do no shootin' with the whole county as a witness," Trilles warned. "They's five hundred people out thar."

"I wanted them for witnesses. That's the reason I axed them to come to the fight. Quade ain't goin' to leave that thar corral alive and I axed the county to come and act as witness to the fact that Quade was killed by accident. You get my point, Trilles, this is all in case the fight goes ag'in' me. I ain't lookin' for to be beat up by a lanky young kid of twenty or thirty. But in case I lose my wind or don't come back good after punches or somethin' else goes ag'in' me, I want for the stranger to be finished up proper—"

"Chief," Trilles said resolutely, "I'll kill for you—any time and anybody and anywheres you say—so long as I can get away without some jury invitin' me to a necktie party. I've always done your orders, ain't I, chief? But here's one time when I cain't help you. They's too many people out thar waitin' to act as witnesses. Some is our friends and some ain't. They want a fight and they likewise want a murder. But they ain't goin' to keep neither secret. Chief, I'm afraid. That's what. I ain't got the nerve. You can't count on me."

"I ain't countin' on you for no murder," Taurog said. "What I want you to do is to act like a referee. Then if you see I'm gettin' the worst of the fight, I want for you to loosen a gate on the north side of the corral where I'm goin' to have a box. In that box is goin' to be put my jack-dog. As soon as the jack-dog is let out he'll see that I'm fightin' with some one. whenever he sees me wrastlin' with anybody—don't matter who—even a dance-girl that I'm tryin' to dance with—he makes it out that I'm attacked. And he jumps for their throat."

"Sure, I know, chief; I seen how he killed Gomez. But—"

"But what? There ain't no 'buts.' He'll jump for Quade's throat, and do you think I'll call him off? I'll call him off, all righto—like hell!"

The shouting and cheering died down as a new toast was being proposed. Juan Scaly had just sworn that if Quade were not killed in the ring by a blow of Taurog's fist, he would get some lead in his chin as soon as he started to walk out of the corral. The other guests shouted him down while the Dead Cow proprietor arose, and after drinking the host's health announced that every one present was invited to the Dead Cow dance-hall that night to celebrate Taurog's victory.

In one of the adobe out-houses, another dinner of a less festive sort was being served. Pedro, taciturn to the point of dumbness, admitted a woman who carried a platter with potatoes, a chuck of beef and a drink of mescal. Quade ate heartily of the food, but avoided the liquor. The woman waited, watching him eat, while Pedro stood as usual at the doorway—the only opening to the little hut—where he had been rolling innumerable cigarettes with Bull Durham.

"Close the door, Pedro," she ordered. "I want to talk to him alone."

The woman was dressed in the inevitable gingham dress, enlivened by a zarape of brilliant hue about her shoulders.

"I am Nell Gamble," she said. "I have come to bring you encouragement because you are fighting with five hundred people against you."

Jim looked up in surprise at the brown flabby face thick with brunette powder and the lips vivid with rouge.

"I don't know that I've met you before," he said.

"No. You have never seen me. There's no cause for explaining who I am. I'm just Nell Gamble, let it go at that. But I've come to tell you there's one person out of the five hundred that have come to the crater—one person who is on your side—

Nell Gamble. When you fight Taurog you are fighting for me."

Jim stared at her more intently and saw that one of her eyes was swollen and painted. "All right, Miss Nell," he said. "I'll listen to you cheering when the fight's on."

"It is a just fight—it is my fight and the fight of all women Taurog has wronged. And I am glad you were brought here. You will win."

"Then you know all about how I was brought here?"

"That foolish snip of a girl, Kirbie, was sent for you."

"I know that."

"But she would have failed. She would have freed you at the mouth of the gorge. I am glad now that Taurog and his men were there to catch you."

Jim stood up and walked over to the woman. She had said something which struck in sharp upon his understanding. The whole scheme of things at the crater as he had pictured them was suddenly upset. "You say Kirbie really wanted to free me?" he asked. In his brooding over the events of the preceding night he had stumbled on one little hope: there was a chance that Kirbie didn't know she was delivering him into Taurog's hands when she left him at the gorge.

"Kirbie is a silly child—her head has been turned because all the men flatter her, telling her she is beautiful. Lies! She is not to be trusted. I knew she could not be trusted to bring you here. I told Taurog this after he had sent her away."

"After he had sent her away?" Jim repeated eagerly.

"And Taurog came to his senses and knew that the girl could not be trusted. She is young and vain and frivolous. He took his men and laid in wait for you. And now I am glad he brought you here to fight him. You will win—he will be punished—for he beat me!"

"Cheer up now, Miss Nell," Quade said cheerfully. "Every blow he struck will be returned to him to-day—and it 'll hurt!"

"Thank you for that! You seem like a great man and a great fighter!"

Pedro opened the door and looked in suspiciously.

"I'm going now, Pedrro," the woman said.

Quade went to the door and watched the woman walking up toward the house. Pedro looked at him and saw a curiously grim set to his mouth. And he was afraid. He did not see the light in the eyes. From then until the time he was called out to go down to the ring, Quade kept doubling his fist and looking down at it. Pedro saw the fist—the size of it, the tight brown skin across the knuckles, the huge, hairy forearm.

"It 'll be a great fight," the Mexican said to himself.

At three two men came into the hut. They announced that Quade was to follow them. The crowd was waiting. Taurog was ready, and the time for the fight had come.

When Quade was escorted down the little winding path he had a view of the huge, bowl-shaped crater. It seemed as he looked down upon it as if it were a giant ant-hill teeming with ants. Around a small corral which had been barricaded with a paling of logs was a large motley crowd of cowpunchers, herders, and squaws They were perched in rows about the fence. Some sat on the roof of the long shake-barn near by, others stood up on the buckboards. Those on the outskirts even retained their saddles in order to get a better view of the ring.

It was a curious crowd that Quade saw as he approached. Every man for miles around had come to see the fist duel. And every color of skin and costume seemed to be represented. There were negroes from the dance-halls of Lava decked out in their check suits, red ties, and sombreros. Chinese cooks came from the outlying ranches. There was the civilized element from the region of Mule City—those who had been near enough to Lava to hear of the fight and who had summoned enough nerve to come into the crater of Taurog which had been declared an outlaw's nest by the better element of Mule City. There was even a sprinkling of sheepmen—but these few kept very much under cover, and were careful with their elbows. If asked their business they professed they were prospectors;

and their costumes did not belie their profession—baggy cord trousers, flannel shirts, torn, lop-brimmed hats.

The sun beat down with a desert's ferocity on the red and yellow blankets of the Indians and the crazy-quilt waists of the squaws. Mexican renegades were there, dressed as if for a bullfight with pompoms dangling from the rims of their sombreros, and vests of shabby velvet opening upon khaki shirts.

Behind the paling, with his arms resting on the edge, was the fat, towering form of the Dead Cow proprietor, and close about him was his coterie of croupiers and barkeeps. A few feet to one side was another figure considerably more sinister, but as eager and hilarious as any—Juan Scaly—swearing to every one within hearing that his master would win this fight or else the hell-bender would find himself hanging onto the corral dust wtih a slug of lead in his mouth.

To his left, hidden among the mozos of the Taurog household, a woman watched. This was Taurog's "housekeeper," Nell Gamble. Nell was thinking spells of her own—and they were cast upon the same fighter—but they had behind them a much more burning desire and hate than Juan Scaly's inspirations. Nell Gamble's black eye was painted with flesh-color, but there were broncho-busters there who thought her the ideal woman, despite the scowl and the set of the dark lips.

This lone spectator was on Quade's side—only one out of that yelling mob. But later there was another.

Every one there had looked around to catch a glimpse of Taurog's foster-daughter. Her appearance the previous night at the Dead Cow Saloon, and her dress, low-cut, brilliant, audacious, was still vivid in the minds of every one who had seen her. But Kirbie was nowhere in the crowd.

Until three o'clock she had remained in her room. When the time came for the fight she sent for one of the stablemen who attended to Taurog's thoroughbreds.

"Has Taurog given you orders about his blood bay?"

The stable-boy replied that he had not seen his master all day.

"He is thinking only of his fighting now," Kirbie went on. "But when the fight is over he is going to ride to Lava. There will be a big procession; everybody is going to celebrate the victory. Now Taurog said he wanted his blood bay. It is to be saddled and brought to the east of the corral, bridled and ready. You can cinch up that Visalia saddle and use the Spanish bitt."

"I will have him ready, *señorita*, and I will groom him again so that his fine brown coat will shine like otter skin."

"And I want my own horse, the red roan. Saddle her, too," Kirbie ordered. "I am going to ride with Taurog."

"I will groom your horse, too, *señorita*."

"And it might be best, if you are taking them from their stalls, to lead them to a quiet place—over there by the gorge. At least till the noise is over. They are nervous and fretful, and there will be a lot of screaming during the fight."

"Yes, *señorita*, I will take them to the gorge—it is quiet there. If I groom them by the stable where the crowd is, there is no telling what will happen. They fret themselves into lather at a sound."

Kirbie looked down from the house to the corral and noticed that the yelling and hullabaloo had suddenly dwindled to a deathlike silence. By this she knew that Quade had entered the ring and that the crowd had seen him and was waiting for the entrance of Taurog.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE JACK-DOG AS REFEREE.

QUADE'S entrance into the corral, accompanied by Pedro and the two guards, had put a stop to the excited babble of the crowd. The vacqueros quit their dice-throwing, and the crowd of sweating, quarreling men who were placing bets in the hands of Jude Silent—the self-appointed bookmaker—became suddenly mute. Every eye was intently focused on Jim Quade.

To all appearances the fight was to be informal to the last degree. Quade had not even stripped for the combat. He wore the

same khaki shirt—torn almost to shreds and revealing the clean muscling of his shoulders and the big chest. The sleeves were completely gone, so that his huge, sinewy arms were bare. One wrist, which had been wrenched in his fight at the Dead Cow, was taped. The power that was expressed in this figure—the height, the determined poise of the head, the magnificent, athletic slope of the shoulder, the narrow hips—elicited no response from the crowd. They stared with a certain admiration and a certain thrill.

He could put up a terrible fight, perhaps, against ten ordinary men—but he was going to fight Taurog. That was different. His litheness seemed to them merely a slender youthfulness that would count for nothing against the weight of their big, invincible ruler. And then the face was not a fighting face; the forehead seemed to them the forehead of anything but a fighter. It even seemed pale, as the sun beat down upon it.

The crowd suddenly broke out into a cheer when they caught sight of some one coming down from the direction of Taurog's house. This was Kirbie, whom every one had been eagerly awaiting.

Kirbie's relation to the people of Taurog's domain was something like that of a crown princess to her subjects. Her visit to Lava during the late hours of the previous night had put the whole affair in a most sensational light. The fight between Taurog and Quade, some of the cow-men said, had a lot to do with this girl. Perhaps Quade wanted to wipe out some ancient score—some forgotten quarrel of ten years ago—but here was something very recent and very tangible. The girl had come to Lava the preceding night and ridden away with Quade. What that meant only a few knew.

At any rate, Kirbie's popularity with her subjects was heightened by her visit to the Dead Cow Saloon. As she aproached they opened a lane for her, so that she could reach the corner of the ring where one of the servants had reserved a place.

During the tumult Quade caught no sight of the girl, but she watched him eagerly. From the moment she came to the paling by the side of the corral she did not take her eyes off Quade's huge muscles, his scarred arms, his fists. To her there was something miraculous in those arms. It would have been hard for Kirbie to explain why those naked arms had such a fascination. She had never before liked the big shapeless arms of men. They were generally ugly, heavily veined, hairy. When she had seen the vacqueros roll up their sleeves to wash their hands after their long days of cattle-lriving she had always hated their hairy arms: no soap and water could ever wash away their ugliness. But here were two great, heavily veined, hairy arms that seemed the supreme masterpiece of animal beauty. She was stirred with curious thrills—as if she had a passion within to feel those arms about her—bare, wounded, crushing her.

In almost shocking contrast to the powerful figure of Quade was the little stumpy man who next entered the ring. Little Jug Trilles was helped over the paling to the floor of the corral. He walked out to the center and removed his sombrero, revealing a shiny bald head. While he made his speech he constantly slapped his head because of the blow-flies with which the corral was teeming.

"Ladies and gents, bullwhackers, saloon men and all! And if they's any sheepmen in the audience, I'm includin' them too. I been axed to make a announcement. You-all have been invited to this here party for a very definite reason. They's been a lot of argufyin' up in the Mule City country, that a certain gentleman down thisaway ain't been actin' fair like to his associates. This gent is Mr. Smoo Taurog. Now, folks, cut out the cheerin' and the howlin' and let me finish. Mr. Taurog as you all know, ain't overly perlite to his enemies. That's why all you cow-gents and rustlers and renegades—if they's any in the audience—admire him so, and honor his name, and all that stuff!"

"Damned righto!" the audience shouted.

"The Mule City gang—reformers and sheepmen and other such like—have been accusin' Mr. Taurog of doin' off with his enemies in ways that don't stand the test of a Mule City jury. Well, gents, I'm

here to say that it's the truth. Mr. Taurog himself has give me directions to say that he admits it's the truth. Mule City is right. Taurog wouldn't hesitate to pot anybody. You all know that!"

"Hell, yes!" from the crowd.

"But here's what I'm here to say, gents. Mr. Taurog wants it made public that he ain't goin' to do away with his enemies thetaway no more. He admits it ain't legal. And he has decided to be converted to the side of law-abidin' men. From now on, gents, Mr. Smoo Taurog announces he's plum civilized. From now on he ain't goin' to use a gat. Instead he's goin' to smash hell outen his enemies with his bare fists!"

This announcement drew a roar of approval from the crowd, accompanied by the throwing up of sombreros and even the discharging of a few salutes from random six-guns. The announcement that Taurog had promised to be civilized henceforth even brought a response from the silent, furtive sheepmen. His avowed intention to beat his enemies to a pulp with his fists set the bettors wild again. There was a stampede in Jude Silent's corner where the bookmaking was going on.

"Now, then, gents, I will announce why you-all got invites to this here party: you are to witness the manner in which Mr. Smoo Taurog will deal with all such as come lookin' to him for trouble. This here gent in the corner, folks, has came from New York in search of Taurog for to wipe out a quarrel that was supposed to be finished ten years ago. He has said he wanted to meet Mr. Taurog, and we're givin' him a chanst. But let me say, folks, that Mr. Taurog could have potted this here bird last night a dozen times. Taurog captured him outside the gorge.

"I'll say that it's lucky for him that Taurog was generous, else the coyotes would be eatin' the nose off this guy right this minute. Now, gents, you're here to see a fair fight. It's goin' to be a fight with bare fists. They ain't goin' to be no referee—and there ain't goin' to be no seconds, nor no rounds. But when a guy flops, that's the end of the round; and when he's of a mind to get up, that's the beginning of another. Everythin's fair—kickin', scratchin', bitin'. None of your damn Queensbury rules here in the cattle country. It's a fight to the end, and me as deputy sheriff won't ask no questions. I thank you."

The cheering that answered Jug Trilles swelled into a thunder of shouting and yipping when Taurog entered the corral. Taurog had stripped himself of his chaps, vest and spurs, which left him clothed like his adversary in khaki shirt, open at the throat, corduroy breeches, puttees and boots. The proud poise of his bare head, the big shock of yellow hair, the thick wrinkled skin and the tiny squinting eyes gave him an air which suggested remotely the figure of an animal that is pestered by flies, but too proud to notice them. The big crowd thrilled to this picture of their "king," for his chunky shape, his wide, low shoulders and tremendous fists made the outcome seem certain.

The two antagonists immediately stepped to the center of the ring before the applause which had greeted Taurog's entrance had died down. Jug Trilles stepped between them. He seemed a little cowering dog between the two great men. Taurog and Quade both unbuckled their cartridge belts, and turned over holster and gun to the "announcer." Jug immediately scurried to a corner of the corral where he crawled under the fence.

Before he had time enough to turn around he heard the air ripped with the screaming and yelling of the mad crowd as the two men tore into each other. The fight was on.

All that little old Jug could make out was a big scuffling of dust and a sound of the ground being pounded as if two bulls had entered into a terrific combat. He saw the two forms of the men, dimly visible in the dust-clouds, hurling their fists at each other, clinching, hooking with vicious thuds to each other's hearts.

Jug could not tell who was winning. He peered anxiously out of his frightened little brown eyes. However the fight was faring, he knew that he himself had something very definite to attend to. He had announced that there would be no referee, but little Jug knew that, infinitesimal as he

seemed tucked away in a little corner of the corral, it was he who was to decide the destiny of that fight.

To Kirbie the conflict meant a good deal more. She had staked everything. She did not know that Jug Trilles was to end that mad, barbaric spectacle. All she knew was that she had started it. It was an abhorrent thing to her, and yet as she heard the frantic yells of the crowd and got the dust in her mouth when she herself screamed, she began to thrill to the glorious side of it.

She could see the big, looming giant of a man standing crouched in the center of the ring, and, circling about him, another form, slender, lithe, which danced about his adversary with the agility of a puma lion. On this gray, lithe image she based every hope and desire within her. She screamed with joy when he jabbed out his lightning hooks against the gray giant; and she gasped with pain when she heard the thud of fists against the youth's body. But it was a curious sort of pain—something in it was soul-satisfying. It was a pain which she felt for some one else!

As for Jim Quade, when the iron fists of his enemy crashed up against his ribs, his chest, his heart, he felt no pain at all. The joy of the combat was like an ecstasy when there is no physical feeling—when it is only a transport of joy, abandon, a rapture. Even a bone-crashing blow against his mouth could not wipe away his furious ardor.

Quade fell. He knew that. And he heard a thunder of shouts and howling, but he was up again, springing backward on his feet to avoid another smash. He regained his balance, circled slowly about, staying outside of Taurog's reach, and waiting for an opening. Taurog rushed him. Quade covered his head and let his enemy close in, pounding him mercilessly again in the sides, back, and stomach. Quade took his punishment, staking that much loss on the chance of a hook to the jaw. And then the chance came.

Taurog felt that he was winning until he was shattered by that left hook timed on the side of his head. He tottered back, and the shouting suddenly dwindled. Taurog fell smashing against the paling of logs, and Quade followed him, hooking him on the neck and face. The giant tumbled into his arms and clung frantically as Quade threw him around to the center of the ring. This respite was long enough to come out of his daze, and Taurog broke, windmilling his arms and yelling like a wounded ox. His fury and his next onslaught brought the crowd out of its stunned silence, and Taurog was inspired again by the thunderous applause of his subjects.

But the thunder was choked off as precipitously as before, and the giant felt his teeth smash together and his brain whirl dizzily in a white light of bewilderment. The corral ground heaved under him and boiled up clouds like a steaming sea. He saw the faces of his subjects circling past him as if they were flying. And that other face—the bleeding, streaked face of the devil in front of him—was bobbing up closer. He must avoid that face, Taurog knew with a sudden panic.

He brought his arms up to cover his eyes, and backed away. The distant thunder of his men had softened to a curious, thrumming noise—like the thrumming of guitars. He realized then that they thought he was losing. That must not be. He could not have his subjects see him beaten by a man—and in his own corral—in the crater! It was his crater—and these were his subjects. They were men who belonged to his kingdom. He let down one of his arms, as he was backing around the ring, and fumbled frantically for his revolver. But he could only clutch his thigh. A convulsion of madness swept over him, and he rushed into the fight again.

The face of the demon before him was floating away, then back again, malicious, bleeding, the black eyes smirched with blood but gleaming white fire. Taurog pounded at it, only lurching forward into the air.

"God! Why doesn't Jug Trilles come through?" he cried. "He thinks I'm winning, that's why—and damn it, I am! I am winning! I'm goin' to kill you with this here fist. It's worse'n lead any day. You're goin' to lie daid when this hooks into your teeth. There you go—"

But Taurog felt another crash on his own chin that knocked his head back as if to break his neck. He felt the same sledge-hammer on his mouth as he staggered forward, and again on his neck and cheek and heart.

"Thinks I'm winnin'! And dammit—I am! Nobody dast say I ain't." There was a cold feeling in his knees and he seemed to be sinking into terrific depths. "Nobody dast! I'd kill 'em if they said I was beat!" He was on his back trying vainly to get up, swearing and mumbling: "Damn them! I'd give them six plunks of lead—"

Quade stepped back as Taurog dropped at his knees. The fallen man was clutching handfuls of dirt as if trying to climb upwards. The whole mob was hushed, but Quade could hear a tingling in his ears. His brain was throbbing with pain, and he thought it was like the beating of a great drum. He knew he had won, but he could not understand what was happening. The dust-clouds were clearing away, and he caught a single glimpse of the hushed mob and something hurtling out of the side of the corral.

There was a yelp, a snarl, followed by a rising scream from the throats of many men. The men themselves did not understand. All they could see was a fresh scuffle, which churned up the dust, hiding the form of the prostrate giant, throwing the figure of Quade into a scrambling, shapeless silhouette, with the tawny body of Taurog's giant cur attacking him. There was a moment's vision of the dog's wide-spread legs, the taut muscles, and a gleam of teeth. Then the hoarse bang of a gun. The dog doubled up convulsively, its huge fangs glancing from Quade's shoulder, and its back twisting with the burn of the lead.

Taurog came to his senses slowly. He was still clutching at the dirt, at first with an intensity and a great desire to attain he knew not what. When he realized what he was doing he grinned sheepishly and looked up. It was a strange and puzzling picture that struck in little by little upon him. The corral was full of men, jabbering and elbowing each other. Above him was Jug Trilles keeping a space clear all about him. As he clambered awkwardly to his knees he saw the prostrate body of the hideous jack-dog, huddled on the ground in a pool of dusty blood. Beyond the corral men were scurrying every which way, vaulting to their horses and riding off toward the gorge. Others were shouting and quarreling about their surcingles and saddles. Women were pale, open-mouthed, frantic.

It came to Taurog now—the whole story.

He had fought. His subjects had seen him. He flushed mad and straightened up to his full height. There was a big shame connected with it, he remembered, a terrific humiliation which he had striven to avoid with the ferocity of a maniac avoiding some dreaded thing. But he had failed. The humiliation was there.

"Where is that hell-bender, and where is my holster and gun?" he suddenly cried. The crowd surged back, leaving a widening circle about the dazed, tottering giant and the ugly yellow carcass of his dog.

"Where is he and where's Jug Trilles—and my gun?" he roared out.

Trilles crept out cautiously.

"I got your gun, chief. Here it is, chief. I got it I kept it safe for you, chief!"

"Where's Quade?"

"He's went—out thataway."

"And this damned cur—" Taurog kicked at the streaked, blood-muddy carcass.

"It's stretched—"

Taurog looked puzzled. "Quade—"

"That's what I thought, chief," Trilles said placatingly. "But it couldn't have been Quade. He didn't have no gun. Here's his gun right here, chief. Some of these here men says the shot come from the direction of the gal—"

"Kirbie! She's gone back on me—I knew it all the time. Where is she? I'll cow-hide her! I'll show her! She's double-crossed me. I'll break every bone in her damned body!"

Taurog rushed to the corner where Kirbie had been during the fight.

"No, no, chief, listen. Kirbie and the hell-bender ran through the crowd with the point of her gun. A bunch chased 'em, chief. But they got on a couple horses which was standing saddled and ready. And they're escapin' through the gorge."

"Get me the blood bay!" Taurog ordered. "I'll catch 'em. I'm goin' to kill 'em both."

"The blood bay was one of the mounts they took, chief. The hell-bender himself is ridin' it!"

"Then the roan—the gal's roan. I'll ride it. I'll catch up to 'em if I have to kill the horse doin' it! They're both goin' to stretch. Horse-stealin'—and the gal's double-crossed me. I'll—"

"The gal herself took the red roan, chief—"

Taurog ripped the air with his oaths as the crowd melted away. He rushed down to the stable, followed by Trilles and Juan Scaly, Jude Silent, and the rest of his gunmen.

For a moment the huge, battered giant was in a quandary, his only thought being to plunge out on the trail after the two fugitives. He ordered the saddle-horses brought out, and as the men scurried frantically for surcingles, saddles and bridles, he took Trilles's whisky-flask from which he gulped big swigs. He wiped his face of its blood and sweat, rubbed his eyes, and doused himself with the liquor. This calmed him. He came to himself with a big shrug of the shoulders and then looked around at his men. His voice suddenly steadied to an inexorable coolness.

"Jude," he said to the Dead Cow proprietor, "you will follow the trail to Lava, taking with you as many men as can ride fast enough to keep up to your calico mount. You will cut off any chance of Quade and the gal's gettin' back to Mule City. Spread your men north and south in a long line, and give 'em orders to shoot—you can apprehend Quade for horse-stealin'. If the gal's shot—I won't ax for any apology from the guy that fires the shot." He turned to Juan Scaly. "You'll take a bunch of men and ride south, keepin' 'em from reachin' the Buzzard Mountains. I'm goin' to ride west—"

"It's there they'll be goin'," Trilles chimed in.

"You'll go with me, Trilles—you and my own posse. I'll ride till I get 'em—if I have to ride out of the State—let it be through to Arizony—and out agin—I'll git 'em if it's to the end of the Rockies—or the world!"

He mounted a long-bodied, rangy-looking mustang, with piebald hide of white and splotches of black. His men immediately jumped to their saddles, and in less than ten minutes the three posses were clattering into the gorge while Quade and the girl were riding out of it on the further side.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MOUNTAIN TRAIL.

As soon as their two horses had plunged out of the gorge Kirbie and Jim Quade branched off from the main trail which led to Lava. Kirbie leading the way, they cut back, keeping close to the cliffs of the crater, and rounded the great circular amphitheater of rock until they reached the plain on the western side. Here they looked down upon a long, sloping plain floored with sandstone and embossed with little mesas, colored with all the gorgeous rock formations of the desert. Sandy shales were cross-bedded with bands of red and pink; rocks stood out grotesquely from the sand dunes. And everywhere there was the cactus with its myriad of bright red flowers like butterflies perched at the tip of each stem.

Kirbie pressed her horse on, giving the mare no rest from the long trotting, and swinging into a gallop at every slight rise of the trail. The roan's hide became splotched with dark patches of sweat which soon lathered to white.

"The horse won't stand it," Quade warned. "These mounts are no good for rough traveling—they'll drop."

"Taurog will follow us," the girl replied. "And he'll bring his best riders and best gunmen with him. He's going to repay me for shooting his jack-dog and he will blame the theft of his two thoroughbreds on you. If he catches us he won't delay killing us at sight."

"Unless this revolver you have given me gets him first."

"No," the girl objected. "You must not chance another fight. We must ride—ride until the horses drop. Up there in the foot-

hills there is a water-hole and ten miles farther on over the divide there is a range with grama grass and some sheep ranches. We can get outfitted there with a grub-stake and three cayusses—perhaps a mule. We'll hit right across for Arizona."

A long, hot ride across the plain brought them to the rugged slopes of the foothills and the horses lagged. Sand hardened to sandstone, sandstone to rock. Cactus gave way to patches of scarlet sage and thickets of buckbush. Then higher up the two riders followed a trail through woods.

A half an hour later the horses stumbled to a slow walk and they arrived at a pool of creamy yellow water. The walls of the pool were steep, crossed with red and yellow strata. At the upper edge a jet of crystal sprang from rock.

Quade cupped his hands and let the water flow into them for the girl to drink. The two mounts were led to the upper edge of the pool where the water was not so bitter with alkali.

"They won't carry us much further—those mounts!" Quade remarked.

"They must—Taurog is coming. He'll kill us."

"Are you still afraid?"

"We've only ridden an hour," the girl began, but then as she looked up into Quade's face, she added quickly, "No, I am not afraid."

"You're going to forget about killing his dog—and about the 'terrible revenge'—and his chasing us and all that rot?"

"When you are here I am not afraid. But Taurog will not just sit down and forget. He was beaten in the fight. He had arranged so that he would not be beaten. That was something I did not know. You beat him then, but he will not forget—no matter if I tried to myself."

"You say you did not know he was framing me?"

"Why, no, of course not! No one knew—except of course the man who let the jack-dog out to get at you. That must have been Trilles."

"If you did not expect the fight to end that way—in a frame-up—you did some pretty fancy shooting—I've never seen any one think as quick as you thought. The yellow dog came flying at me through the air—I heard a shot—and that was the end of the fight."

"I wasn't entirely sure it wouldn't be a frame-up. You see, I had a holster and six-shooter on me. And I had the magazine turned with a loaded chamber opposite the bullet—they don't generally carry a gun like that around here. It is customary for most of our men to load every chamber except the one opposite the trigger."

"And there were the two horses—"

"I expected a fight if you won."

"Why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Make all those arrangements—to save me?"

"It was one man against five hundred. You needed somebody to help you."

"You're pretty game—to line yourself up with one man against five hundred—just because—"

"For the same reason that I wanted to see you win when you were in the saloon at Lava—"

"Just because you have the woman's instinct for sympathizing and protecting the loser? Not at all. There's no such instinct in a single cell of your body. An instinct for creating life and worshipping it—and an abhorrence for death, yes. That is in you—in every cell of you, and that instinct takes the form of love. Everything you said last night—in that saloon-booth and on the ride home was the truth. You thought it was a lie. You thought you were telling me you loved me just to entice me to my death. You couldn't do that. There are some women who can say those words glibly—but not you. I felt the truth of them—even when I was clutching you to me—there was the fire of truth which I felt in the heat of your breath against my cheek. You thought you were lying."

"No! I knew I was not lying—when you followed to the mouth of the gorge and said you would follow me further—into death because you wanted me to know you were giving me your life to do with as I pleased!"

"Why is it that then you broke out and said you hated me?"

"You were coming to kill Taurog. What

a horrible thought it seems to men now—that I should hate you for that! I hated you for it—but no, it was not hate. You know how to interpret what a woman says: sometimes a woman will mean she hates when she bursts out into a fury like that—and sometimes she means that she loves ten times more passionately than if she said, 'I love you'!"

Quade drew the girl to him, but as Kirbie lifted up her face she drew back. Quade turned to look in the direction she pointed. The two lovers could see the entire expanse of the great plain which they had just crossed. In the center they could see six little clouds of dust, each one spreading from a tiny dot to a thin wreath and then fading out to a purple smirch. The six parallel lines of smoke were advancing slowly across the face of the plain.

Quade and the girl immediately mounted their horses and swung back to the trail. They spurred their mounts up the steep incline until they reached a hillock from which point they could again see the desert valley. One cloud of dust was considerably in advance of the others.

"Taurog has sent posses in every direction," the girl said. "But our mounts are the best on the range—if they hold out."

They pressed on higher and higher until the foothills steepened and the two riders were obliged to follow the contours of stream beds. They plunged into the bear-brush of a steep cañon, gaining the upper edge as she shadows of the evening were lengthening to purple. Then another higher cañon, leading up onto the flat of a mesa. The low western sun beat into their faces as they topped this crest, and looking back they could see the long, mauve-colored darkness cast over the desert by the mountain. The first pursuer had reached the foothills and attained a sufficient height to remain still in the rays of the sun.

Kirbie looked back and saw the red light falling distinctly upon the tiny form of a horse—like a little speckled bug crawling over the top of a sand-pile. Kirbie recognized the horse—white with splotches of black.

"It's Taurog's piebald mustang," she said. "It can cover the roughest kind of ground. It can make as good time in this rough mountain country as our thoroughbreds."

"If it's Taurog," Jim said, "he better stay back with his gang. He's riding too fast."

They crossed the flat mesa and cut into an arroyo at the western end which wound upward to the crest of the Big Divide. As soon as they trailed in among the shrub junipers and chaparral of dwarfed evergreen oaks, the walls of the cañon enveloped them in a soft twilight.

"All this time that I have been with you," Jim said, "I have been thinking only of the luck that's come to me in winning you. I've been too happy to remember something else—that the fight I came here to fight is not finished. I came to repay Taurog for the wrong he did me years ago. I must not forget that."

"You must not think of that any more. We must escape—that is the only thing now. You have had your revenge. You started the cattlemen to rebel when you saved the Tumbling L ranch. Taurog's own gang—the people at Lava and his own gunmen have seen him beaten in a hand-to-hand fight. You have humiliated him. No revenge could be greater than that."

"There is only one kind of revenge for the wrong that I have come to right," Quade said. "And I am going back now. I am going to meet Taurog again!"

"You may be killed!"

"That is why I want to meet him before he catches up to us. I want to meet him alone. If you are with me—you are put in danger."

The girl went on without heeding him. "You must not go back! His posse is following him. They will kill you!"

"Better that I meet the posse—than to have them catch us together. I can take chances with my gun-firing alone—but not with you behind me. I must meet them alone. If I can get Taurog first, all the better. You must wait here for me. Wait where you can see the whole cañon. If I win, stay here till I come. If I am hit, ride on over the divide."

"Forget the fight and we'll both ride on—to a new life."

"The fight is not finished," Quade repeated firmly. "Taurog is ahead of his posse. It is the first time that I have had the chance to meet him alone. I am going back. I will come back on this trail and join you."

Kirbie drew her horse to the side of his and clung to Quade's arm. He reached over and the two embraced. She returned his kisses, fervently crying, "If you are killed—"

"The fight's got to be. It's the safest for your sake, and as for my part in it, Taurog and I must finish it out."

Quade broke from her embrace, dug his heels into the flanks of his horse and loped down the trail. In another moment he had plunged into the shadows of the cañon below and his form merged into the darkness of the bear-brush.

CHAPTER XXIII.

QUADE AT THE END OF HIS QUEST.

QUADE took a trail which, instead of leading him into the thick shrubbery of the cañon bed, followed the contour of the barer side slopes. He estimated that a two-mile ride would bring him to Taurog, who to all appearances had entered the lower opening of the cañon and was climbing the trail in the valley bed. When Quade met him, Taurog would be a hundred yards below—a slight disadvantage for him, which Quade did not wish to overlook.

But Quade's superior position was not worth the price he paid for it. He did not realize the fact that Taurog was skilled by many years of living and fighting in the desert country. Although Quade's eyes were the sharper they had not recently been trained in the ways of the cattle-country and desert. Quade had spent the last years in the city where no time was given to scanning evening horizons or distinguishing horsemen from tree yuccas and bear-brush. Added to this difference in their eyesight Quade had chosen a trail much more exposed to view. Taurog saw him first.

Upon making this discovery Taurog climbed up a little arroyo or gulch until he was on a level with Quade's trail. Here he waited, listening to the banging of the hoofs of Quade's horse. Quade was riding swiftly, but taking advantage of every shadow, and clinging to the background of bear-brush which he knew protected him from the view of any rider who chanced to be in the cañon. Presently he rounded a bend in the trail and came out in the open, and both men saw each other on the instant.

Taurog had the drop, and fired, although Quade was a long distance away. As Quade drew in his horse, Taurog fired again, then leaped from his saddle and hid behind his mount.

Quade returned the fire, his four shots cutting vivid streaks in the growing dusk. He did not fire the other two shots. Instead his gun dropped from his hand because of a wound which ripped the flesh of his forearm from wrist to elbow.

He was about to vault to the ground and pick up his gun when he realized this was impossible without making a target of himself. Taurog had chucked to his horse and was advancing under the shield the big animal afforded him. Quade knew in that brief second of deliberation that his gun was lost. There was only one move to make then; he yanked his horse's head up to his body, wheeled around, crouched low over the pommel, and galloped back up the trail while Taurog emptied his chamber in a rapid string of fire.

As Quade rounded the trail he spurred his horse on to the next cliff. He cursed his luck at having lost his gun, but he knew that if he had dismounted to regain it, he would most surely have been hit—and the wound would have been much more serious than that which was now drenching his shirt, trousers, and saddle.

What to do was a vital question. He could keep to the trail pressing his horse into its fastest gallop. The chances were strong of his rejoining the girl before Taurog could get within range. But then what? If he pursued this plan he would lead Taurog to the girl. There would be more shooting this time between the girl and Taurog—Quade being unarmed and helpless. This plan was perhaps the safest—but it was

putting the girl into direct danger. He decided that at all costs he would finish the fight before going back to her—at any rate, before leading Taurog to her. If he let Taurog follow him up to the crest of the divide, he argued, the girl might be killed. Another more desperate plan occurred to him—a plan of attack which would leave the girl out.

As soon as his horse rounded the trail and was out of Taurog's view behind the cliff, Quade dismounted, whipped the horse sharply with the bight of the reins, and sent it galloping up the trail. Quade waited at the turn of the cliff, and listened for the cautious approach of Taurog's mount.

Taurog was also listening, and he could hear the striking of the hoofs of Quade's horse against the rocky trail as it galloped on riderless up the cañon. He judged that it must be five hundred yards ahead on the other side of the cliff. Thus, without a moment's hesitation, he rounded the point of the cliff to meet face to face with Quade himself. Quade darted out to the center of the path; the horse reared, panic-stricken, and backed to the edge of the trail where the base of the cliff sloped down sharp to the cañon bed two hundred feet below. Taurog drew, but the reins which he had thrown over his arm were suddenly jerked and the gun shot futilely into the air. The horse had side-stepped, and with the added fright of the shot, it fell back to its haunches. Its weight started a tiny landslide of rocks and Taurog, firing wildly with one hand, clutched at his pommel with the other, fearing to be plunged down into the cañon bed.

Quade leaped back to the other side of the trail as he saw the horse pawing wildly for a footing. The big steed struck only at the loose dirt, doubled up convulsively as if back-jumping in the empty air, and fell backwards. Taurog tried to leap—but the leap was too late, and there were the reins about his wrist.

It was almost an hour later that Jug Trilles, with four other horsemen of the posse, came into the cañon. They took a longer time than Taurog had taken in riding the trail of the cañon bed. Night had fallen, and their progress was slow.

"If Taurog don't meet up with them afore pitch dark, it ain't no use," Trilles said. "Them nags the gal picked can walk away from us if they gits a night's rest."

"It's pitch dark now," one of the posse replied. "I'm gettin' all tore up with this here brush, and my nag's stumblin'!"

Halfway up the cañon Trilles made a startling discovery. He saw the shapeless piebald body of a horse sprawled upon a pile of rocks and rattleweed a hundred yards above the creek bed. He called to his men, and they hurried up, examined the lacerated carcass, the torn reins, and the saddle crushed beneath the horse's stomach. Trilles looked up to the cliff, which was now a huge, black indistinct form. Stars were beyond it.

The men dismounted, beat their way up through the brush and weeds, until they came to the naked granite jutting straight up above them.

Trilles stopped and called quietly:

"Taurog is here."

He leaned down over the prostrate still body, which he examined for a long time, while the men stood about silently waiting. Some of them held matches while Trilles examined Taurog's wounds.

"There ain't no gun-wounds," the little fellow said. "It's clear to me, men, that for some reason the chief climbed to the upper trail—maybe he wanted to make better time, and the darkness was making the travel hard down here in the brush."

"But I'll swear I heard gun-firin'," one of the men objected.

"Maybe so. His gun ain't in his holster, but then, might he could have lost it. The holster's tore—just like the saddle. He fell from up thar."

"He met up with Quade, that's what! It's up to us to go on with the chase."

Trilles stood up, ordered two of the men to put Taurog on a horse, and then looked up into the darkening recesses of the cañon. Quade and the girl were up there in the end of the cañon, he knew. Probably they were zigzagging over its steep, rocky bluffs to the western trail beyond. It was a difficult climb, Trilles recalled, and a dangerous one in the dark which was overtaking the pursuers.

"Yes, we ain't caught 'em yet," he said irresolutely. "But—"

Trilles did not say what he wanted to say. "We haven't caught them, and we ought to catch them," he thought, "but the truth of it is—I am afraid."

And furthermore, every man in that posse was afraid. They had seen Quade shoot; they had seen him fight a dozen men; they had seen him lick the "invincible" Taurog.

But Trilles spoke up, belying his own thoughts. "I ain't afraid of Quade, men. If it were daylight I'd go up thar alone and git him!"

"You've got a name as being plumb careful and consarvative like, Jug," one of his posse said. "Might we better play consarvative now!"

"You've said the word," Trilles rejoined eagerly. "The dark has caught us. Quade and the gal has got the two fastest mounts in the State."

"You're right thar, Jug. Whatever you advises us for to do, we'll do. You're our leader now."

Jug was silent a moment, and every one there hoped—and intuitively knew—that he would play a safe hand. Finally their new chief spoke:

"Who's fight was this, anyway, men? It wasn't yourn. I was potted by Quade—back thar at the Tumbling L last night. It was a gun-fight, and I ain't holdin' that pussenul like the way Juan Scaly, the Mex, holds his troubles. It was a fight, and I was hit. Well and good. But the real fight was atween Taurog and Quade. And Taurog's lost."

"Would it be legal to capture this here hell-bender, take him back to the crater, and lynch him?" another of the posse argued, helping to turn the argument in the direction every one desired.

"Lynch him for why?" Trilles rejoined.

"Because of the chief."

Trilles retorted dryly: "The chief ain't givin' us no orders for to lynch anybody, is he? Ask the chief that thar question and see what he answers."

They all looked at Taurog, whom they had placed in the saddle of a shaggy cow-horse. The stirrups had been hobbled and the dead man's arms tied about the horse's neck with latigos.

"We'll be ridin' back to the crater now, men," Trilles decreed. "We'll say that we couldn't get the gal back—nor Quade. The night's covered 'em, we'll say. In the mornin' they'll be over the divide, and thar ain't a horse in the range which could trail 'em."

Jim reached the crest of the divide when the purple in the sky had already turned black. Jim met the girl here. He could see the fright in her eyes as she looked up at his face. It was a fear that he was badly wounded and then that they were still being hounded to their death.

"Taurog hit me—here in the arm," Jim said. "It's only blood that I've lost, so let's not worry. Taurog is dead."

The girl covered her face with her hands. Horror, excitement, a terrific relief wrenched her till she broke into low sobs.

"Fate turned up with a little card that called everything," Quade said. "I didn't kill Taurog—that is, not directly."

The girl looked up, came to herself, and, seeing Quade's arm hanging limp, she jumped from her horse. Quade dismounted as she came to him.

"He got the drop on me. Hit me here. I lost my six-gun. Couldn't pick it up without jumping right into his range. I beat it back behind a jutting part of the cliff. Hid. When he came up I jumped for him, hoping for a hand-to-hand fight. His horse backed away, and the two scrambled at the edge of the cliff where the ground gave way. Both fell."

"How about the others? There were five others," the girl asked as she bandaged Quade's arm with her scarf, and ripped long strips from her blouse to finish the work.

"I rode on slowly, thinking I should go down to the cañon bed again to see how Taurog fared. When I looked back—it was very dark, but I could see some horsemen. Don't know who they were. They picked Taurog up, and the last I saw of them they were trailing down the cañon toward the crater again."

"Then they've given the chase up," the girl cried. "We are free!"

"Yes. The fight is finished. There is nothing more to call us back on this side of the divide. My job's finished, and we can ride on now. We are free."

They mounted their horses, and took the long trail over the shoulder of the divide. As they wound down on the western slope the keen night wind brought a fresh whiff of buckeye and mesquite. Another hour's ride brough them to the country of piñon grass and drouth-resisting forage. Here they found a sheep-herder's hut on the scarp of one of the lower mesas. Quade's wound was properly washed and dressed.

For supper the wizen little herder brought out a pot of Mexican beans and a jug of wine. Both the visitors ate hungrily. After the meal they rested for a while outside, drinking in the pure cool air and gazing far down into the valley which they were to traverse together.

Presently they could see a flock of sheep browsing on the fall of hillocks. The herder came out and stood behind them.

"You never saw a better flock than that," he said, as he puffed up a spark in his pipe. "You see, that flock has never been molested by rustlers or cow-men. Can't raise sheep over in the range you just been ridin'. There's a big boss there called Smoo Taurog—as maybe you know. Keeps sheepmen out. But this side of the divide we never hear of Taurog."

The girl turned her face toward Quade as the herder concluded: "And we never hear of Taurog's gang. We're free here."

(The end.)

By Way of a Chaperon

by Helen A. Holden

JACQUELINE pushed open the door of her room and peered out. Even the light from a heavily shaded lamp made her blink uncertainly. She had dressed in the dark. She wore her hat and coat and carried a traveling bag in one hand. In the other she had her shoes. The hall seemed endless as she tiptoed down its length.

She held her breath as she passed the doors behind in which the family slept. The stairs were broad and massive, and made no protest to her light tread. She had almost reached the bottom when a noise brought her to a sudden stop. She sank quickly to the step, holding her breath as she glanced back along the way she had jusst come.

There was no one in sight, and all again was quiet. She decided it must have been the slamming of a door by a careless maid in another part of the house.

Getting quickly to her feet again, she fled down the few remaining steps. A few

seconds later she had crossed the wide hall and stood facing the formidable-looking doors that were still to be reckoned with. She managed to slip the chain without much noise, but the key grated in the lock. It seemed to echo through the silent house as if giving a sudden alarm.

Without waiting to see the result, Jacqueline fled through the door and across the wide porch. She sat down on the step to put on her shoes, then jumped to the ground and started down the flower-boarded path to the road.

Before she had gone more than a few steps an Airedale met her, wagging a friendly tail.

"It's all right, Barney," she whispered, "only don't for pity sakes tell me how glad you are to see me."

She wished she had foreseen this emergency. She could have provided against it with a bone that would have kept Barney quiet. If he once started barking it would be all up with her.

Barney grinned and began frisking about.

"Barney, please, please," begged Jacqueline. "Give me a chance—just to the road."

She didn't dare run. She knew if she did Barney would come to the immediate conclusion that she was there simply for his pleasure. He would proclaim the fact proudly and insistently.

Step by step she moved toward the road, pleading, commanding, begging Barney to be quiet. In a short time she stepped from the private grounds into the public highway.

"Good old Barney!" She patted the dog's head. "Go back now. No, you can't come with me."

She left him a dim outline in the dusk, looking wistfully after her. As she walked briskly along the highroad she saw a rosy glow in the east and knew the sun would soon put in his cheerful appearance. The keen morning air made her eyes sparkle and her cheeks glow. She wondered why one never took wholesome, happy invigorating early morning walks unless driven to them by some grim necessity. The road was deserted. The places she passed were large estates, still asleep except for occasional lights in the servants' quarters.

Jacqueline had never walked to the station before, and was surprised to find it so much farther than she imagined from the trip in the automobile. Before she reached it she was thankful her bag was not packed more heavily. The station seemed quite wide awake for such an early hour. She found there would be a way train to the city in five minutes, or she could wait for an expresss that was due in thirty-five minutes.

"Much safer to take the local." She glanced apprehensively around. "There's no telling who will drop in during the next thirty-five minutes."

There were quite a few passengers, but among them no one she recognized. Nevertheless she sighed with relief when the train, after considerable hesitation, started for the city.

In an express it had never seemed a long trip. Jacqueline soon felt that the local was exasperatingly sociable. At any station it seemed quite content to wait patiently for friends to bid one another good-by before climbing leisurely aboard. And she never knew there were half the stations tucked away among those she was used to.

But at last New York was reached. She immediately inquired about the trains for Boston. This was no occasion for a local. She demanded the speediest express on the time-table.

When she found she had two hours and twenty minutes on her hands she almost succumbed to the way train again. But with the recent experience so fresh in her mind, she decided to stick out the two hours and twenty minutes. She bought her ticket and chair in the parlor car, then quite suddenly realized that she was almost famished. In the excitement of her early morning adventure she had forgotten all about breakfast.

Breakfast! What a good idea, anyway. It would help pass the time. She turned into the station restaurant. Breakfast would help pass the time.

She smiled graciously at the waiter as he placed her at a table commanding a sweep-

ing view of the room. She settled herself comfortably, with the idea of passing as much of the two hours and twenty minutes as possible.

The bill of fare received her undivided attention for the next five minutes. At last she gave the order for a hearty breakfast. The restaurant was filling rapidly. Idly Jacqueline watched the people coming and going. Then suddenly her heart almost stopped beating. She held to the edge of the table to keep from slipping out of sight underneath.

Some people she knew—a man and his wife, neighbors—had entered and were coming toward her, nearer and nearer. She glanced frantically around. Picking up the menu, she tried to hide behind it.

"If they come one step nearer, it's all up," she muttered grimly.

When she finally gained courage to glance over the top of the card a deep sigh of relief escaped her. The woman had selected a table at quite the other end of the room. She was hurrying toward it, followed by her husband and the resigned waiter.

"Now"—at last Jacqueline was able to turn her undivided attention to the breakfast the waiter was placing before her—"I am going to enjoy a long-drawn-out feast."

II.

SHE glanced up and frowned. The head waiter was waving a young man into the empty chair opposite her. There was absolutely nothing the matter with the young man. Ordinarily Jacqueline would have eaten her breakfast regardless of whether the place opposite was occupied or not. But to-day was different. She much preferred being alone.

Having poured her coffee, she took a hasty swallow. As she lowered the cup her eyes met those of the young man.

"I wish he'd mind his own business," fidgeted Jacqueline, knowing all the time it was unfair, as she was the central object of his vision and not easy to avoid. She turned her attention resolutely to her melon. It was not very ripe, so she gave it up and tackled her bacon and eggs.

"I wish he wouldn't watch me as if—if—I—" She glanced at the man with a questioning frown. Could it be possible that he was trying to identify her as Jacqueline Garfield?

Her family might have discovered by this time that she was gone—they might have phoned to some detective agency. She supposed that was what was done when daughters of rich families ran away, and the families had a motive for getting them back again.

Then common sense came to her rescue. It was absurd to think that they could be looking for her yet. Even if they had discovered her escape, how would they know where to begin looking? Having settled this firmly in her mind, she attacked her bacon and eggs again. But after a couple of mouthfuls she put down her fork and fell into a brown study.

Perhaps some one had seen her and recognized her on the road or at her home station. She supposed the New York stations would be the first places the agency would send detectives. They would know she couldn't have gone very far in so short a time.

The thought choked her. She was unable to swallow another mouthful. She must get away somewhere—by herself. She paid her bill; then she sat, undecided. Much as she wanted to leave the table, she dreaded making the first move. It would be a test.

If the young man let her go without a protest—well and good. If not— She got up. The waiter handed her her traveling-bag. She was turning away, when—

"I beg your pardon—" The young man pushed back his chair, rose quickly, and leaned across the table toward her. Jacqueline stood still, unable to move. "Are these your gloves?"

As Jacqueline took them a sudden irrepressible chuckle escaped her. The relief was so sudden she felt hysterical. "I suppose if I had ever run away before," she thought as she hurried from the room, "I wouldn't be so panicky."

Going to the news-stand, she picked out three magazines and several newspapers. With these she retired to a remote corner of

the waiting-room. Settling herself behind one of the morning papers, she tried to make herself believe that there is no place like a station in which to have the time pass quickly. She had read that somewhere.

At the end of ten minutes she was surprised to find the train-time still vaguely remote. Another ten minutes and it seemed half a lifetime.

She wondered when she was due in Boston. She had forgotten to ask. She hoped it would be before dark, for Constance was not expecting her, and she had never visited her before.

She hadn't dared to write, for fear Constance might not approve of what she was doing. Anyway, she would have felt it her bounden duty to remonstrate. And Jacqueline's mind was fully made up. Once in Boston she could talk things over, win Constance's sympathy, and convince her that she was receiving very unfair treatment from her family.

Any one could see with half an eye that after a girl had been away to boarding-school for four years and had been led to expect that she could stay at home and enjoy life after those same strenuous four years, it was beastly unfair to tack on an extra, for " finishing off " purposes.

" It's all on account of the money," Jacqueline addressed the newspaper she held as a shield in front of her. " If Grandfather Bolter hadn't died and left mother all that extra money, they never would have thought of finishing me off. After moving into that big new barn of a place she still had so much left over she didn't know what to do with it. So she and the others happened to think of me. That's the worst of being the youngest of a large family.

" I'm perfectly well finished by four long years at the Misses Luggs. And the family made one huge mistake when they thought they could sidetrack me to Mme. Girards for one whole year more.

" Now there's Constance already married to Robert, and settled in her own cozy home. I suppose it's cozy. I don't really know, for I never visited it. But anyway that one year at school she had the knack of making our room as attractive as any there.

" Not Constance any more, but Mrs. Robert Livingston. I only knew her that one year at school, and its three years ago now. But, keeping up such a vigorous correspondence, I feel as if I knew her as well as if I had seen her just yesterday. It's a good thing I thought of her when I decided to run away, for my respected family will never think of looking for me there.

" I want a home. I want to be able to do things when the spirt moves, and not an old cling-clang bell. Four years of living according to schedule is enough for any one, and it's time my family realized it. Perhaps they have by this time."

Jacqueline grinned cheerfully as she pictured the confusion of the household when they discovered that she was missing. " I think I'll let them know as soon as I get to Constance's. They really deserve to worry for a while. Then perhaps next time they'll listen to my side of the question. After giving them a good old scare and letting an uneasy conscience work, I think I can return home and do just about as I please."

Again Jacqueline grinned. " The thing to do now is to get safely to Constance's. I suppose no expense will be spared to locate me as soon as possible." Jacqeuline lowered the paper and glanced anxiously about. " Wonder how long it takes to get things in motion in a case of this kind? I wish I was safely in Boston—or even on the train—or at least that it was train-time."

She glanced at her watch and found that she had half an hour yet to wait. " We're getting on." She again retired behind the newspaper. " The train will be called now before I know it. Then a quick run—Boston—a taxi to Constance's—and all my troubles will be over.

" The only danger is waiting around here. Any minute some one I know may come in and see me. I don't suppose they would recognize my feet, though, so long as I can hold this paper in front of my face, I'm all right. Wonder how near train-time it is now?"

Again glancing at her watch, she found

it was fifteen minutes nearer. Opening her handbag she searched among her visiting-cards till she came across one engraved:

MRS. ROBERT LIVINGSTON

123 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, Mass.

She took it out and put it in her coat pocket. "Now I'll know where to find you when I get to Boston." Just then her train was called.

Summoning a porter, she followed him, keeping a careful watch against a chance encounter with any friends or acquaintances. She tipped him gratefully on reaching her place in the car. She felt that he had led her safely past possible dangers lying in wait for her on her progress through the station.

The train seemed loath to pull out from the big comfortable station. Even after the conductor's final call it waited as long as it dared before moving reluctantly forward.

"One minute more, and you would have been late in starting." Jacqueline's eyes ceased to travel from the watch on her wrist to the station platform. She settled back with a sigh of relief. The engine decided that it was useless to object, and was soon humming along.

"The chances were ten to one against their discovering my escape in time to locate me," mused Jacqueline; "but if the one had overcome the nine it would have been good-by to me. It would have been humiliating to have been dragged out from the station to the waiting car. Then nothing, nothing, nothing could have saved me from that detestable Mme. Girards." At the thought Jacqueline shivered.

After running out of the tunnel she watched the flying landscape for a while. Then she turned to inspect her fellow passengers.

A man sat in the chair next to hers. He was turned so she could see only the back of his head. Across the car were two women. One was already knitting, while the other read. On her other side an elderly man was reading.

"Not anything very exciting in sight," Jacqueline decided, and looked about for her magazines. "I had three—there must be one somewhere." She moved her bag, looked under it, opened it and looked inside. She got up and looked on her chair. "Anyway, I know what I did with one of them." She sank down in her chair again. "I probably left the others with the newspapers in the station. But I put one, I know, on that chair, when I got up to wrestle with the window before we started."

She regarded contemplatively the back of the head visible over the chair top next. "I'm positively sure I put it there." The more hopeless it seemed to get, the more she wanted it.

"There he sits, selfishly enjoying his old book while I haven't a thing to read." Jacqueline tried to amuse herself by looking out of the window; but she found it dull and uninteresting. Never before had she wanted so much to read.

"I just can't sit and do nothing all the way to Boston." She fidgeted; then she turned resolutely to the man in front. "But what if I ask him to move, and it is not there? He'll think I'm flirting." She swung back to indecision again.

"Shall I, or shall I not?" It became an obsession and timed itself with the hum of the wheels. "If a freight passes first, I'll ask; and if a passenger goes by, I won't. No, the other way round."

III.

A SHORT time passed and a passenger train whizzed by. Jacqueline swallowed hard, as if she were about to take a cold plunge.

"Pardon me," she began pleasantly. "I think I laid my magazine on your chair before you—came—"

It trailed off into silence. She sat staring round-eyed and speechless at the man who had turned toward her as she spoke. It was the same man who had sat opposite her at the table in the restaurant.

The next few minutes were a blank to

Jacqueline. She never knew just how the magazine was retrieved. She was only conscious that the young man had located it somewhere and was handing it to her with a friendly smile.

After murmuring some sort of thanks she opened it and pretended to be lost among its pages.

The young man did not turn his back again, but sat facing her. Jacqueline was fully conscious of a swift glance from time to time.

" My beloved family found I was gone and phoned in post haste after a detective," she came to the grim conclusion, " but why didn't he grab me in New York instead of letting me go merrily on my way to Boston?

" Perhaps, according to the laws of the Medes and the Persians, or whatever they go by, one can't be arrested till after one has actually started. If he had taken me firmly by the arm in New York I might have shaken myself free with the information that I was merely doing a day's shopping in New York, expecting to return home that same day. Probably I had to be actually on my way before he had just cause for a regular arrest.

" He really looks too nice to be a detective." She glanced up and their eyes met. " I don't know, though, just how they ought to look—never having met one—at least not to know him. I wonder if they don't wear badges or buttons or something?"

She studied the front of his coat minutely, but was unable to discover anything unusual about it.

" How do you like it?" The young man nodded toward the page at which Jacqueline's magazine was open.

" Haven't finished it yet," Jacqueline replied. She didn't feel it necessary to admit that she hadn't even read the opening sentence.

" Not much of an ending," he explained; " but good stuff all the way through. Why is it you're so often disappointed in the last page of a story?"

Jacqueline hadn't thought of it before, but she was perfectly willing to pass the time by discussing it now.

The conversation progressed. Jacqueline forgot her suspicions—forgot she was running away—forgot she was engaged in conversation with a perfect stranger. She was entirely unself-conscious in a friendly impersonal way.

Then suddenly, without any warning, the talk turned, took on a personal tone, and before Jacqueline could stop herself she had run bang up against a stone wall.

She had been holding forth on the stuffiness, the dirt, the noise, the conventions of city life in general.

" But you don't live in the city—"

Just there Jacqueline hit the wall and was so stunned she missed the rest, which, after a moment's hesitation, was added in a low voice:

" One can see that from your wonderful sun color, so different from the usual paint and stick make-up."

" He knows where I live and has let it slip." Jacqueline turned to the window to collect her thoughts. " I don't see how he lit on me out of that whole big restaurant. My devoted family never had time to come in with my photo. They must have wired a minute description. My new friend probably isn't sure, but is leading me on to find out. All right, Mr. Detective, I'll see what I can do to fool you."

Jacqueline picked up her magazine. She pretended to read while busy trying to think out some plan by which she could match her wits against those of the young man. She would keep wide awake and fool him if possible.

After watching her questioningly for a few minutes the young man took the hint—and his book, and was soon busily turning over the pages.

Suddenly he stopped and frowned. He searched his pockets, apparently without success. The frown deepened as he looked helplessly around.

At last he took two of the uncut pages, one in each hand, and began tearing them apart.

" Don't," commanded Jacqueline.

He glanced at her quickly.

She thrust her hand into her pocket and brought out a card.

" This will cut straighter than those

awful humps and gouges—my visiting card."

She smiled triumphantly as she handed over Constance's visiting card.

The young man murmured his thanks as he took it—glad to be received back into favor again. He had been regretting his inadvertent remark about a mere acquaintance's radiant complexion.

Carelessly he turned the card over and read what was engraved upon it:

MRS. ROBERT LIVINGSTON

123 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, Mass.

His smile disappeared. He glanced sharply at Jacqueline, then back at the card.

"He's sidetracked all right," decided Jacqueline, "and some surprised to find I'm Mrs. Livingston instead of Jacqueline Garfield."

Instead of using the card to cut the pages of his book, the young man sat gazing silently and thoughtfully at it.

But Jacqueline, feeling safe as Mrs. Livingston, and suddenly secure in the possession of a husband, became her naturally sunny self. She chatted gayly as the train sped on its way.

Then as the train slowed down for the first stop Jacqueline began to grow nervous again.

"If he still suspects me this will be the time for him to say so and invite me to return to the bosom of my family. He certainly would never go all the way to Boston—" She sat breathing rapidly while the brakes creaked ominously and the long train ran slower and slower till it came to a final stop.

No passengers got off. One or two got on. With a final "all aboard," the train jerked into motion again and—nothing serious had happened.

"I believe I'm just fidgety about this run-away business," Jacqueline scolded herself. "I don't believe he's any more a detective than-I am. Now I can go on being friendly without a worry at the back of my mind. I'll just keep Robert on as a husband, though. It would be really awkward giving him up."

IV

At New Haven the train made a ten-minute stop. Murmuring something about some business to attend to, the young man hurried from the train, across the platform and into the station.

Getting a telegram blank he paused a few minutes, straightening out his message, then wrote rapidly:

Mr Edward Herne,
Care Ford's Detective Agency,
Boston, Mass.:
Meet four ten train. Be near, but don't speak.
Rodney Lanier.

After sending the telegram he walked slowly and thoughtfully back to the waiting train.

As the train pulled away from the New Haven station he was again in his place, turned so he faced Jacqueline. His book lay unheeded on the floor while Jacqueline's magazine was unopened on her lap.

Jacqueline attributed the comfortable feeling of comradeship to the protection of her adopted husband.

"Hereafter I shall always have a husband when I travel," she communed with herself. "I shall dismiss Jane, for a husband is certainly more convenient than a maid, especially when he's left at home."

During the afternoon it started to rain, and darkness settled down early. Jacqueline's new friend returned from a brief interval in the smoker.

He reported some sort of an accident—nothing serious, but enough to cause a delay in the usual running time.

Jacqueline smiled a carefree smile.

"Your husband won't worry?" he asked solicitously.

Jacqueline looked sober.

"Would you care to send him a telegram?" he suggested.

"No—yes—no, I don't believe so," replied Jacqueline.

"You expect him, of course, to meet you at the station?" He peered into the gloom outside.

"Yes — no — certainly," stumbled Jacqueline in sudden confusion. "You see," she hurried on, "I haven't had anything to eat since that early breakfast and I'm almost starved."

"I wanted to suggest luncheon, but—" The young man paused, embarrassed.

"Being a married woman it ought to be perfectly proper," thought Jacqueline to herself. Aloud she said: "I'm too far gone to bother about who suggests it. I've just got to eat or there won't be anything left of me to reach Boston."

During the meal Jacqueline's thoughts ran comfortably along the line of her present adventure.

"I never, never would have dreamed it possible to have such a cozy, friendly meal with a perfect stranger. It is of course the chaperonage of Robert."

As they returned to their seats she exclaimed: "Now I feel able to cope with anything."

But she soon realized that a problem was waiting for her that took more than a hearty meal to solve.

"It's all very nice to have a nice, convenient husband like Robert—in theory," she mused as the train neared Boston; "but when it comes to the fact of his meeting me—"

The train was slowing down as it neared the station.

"Here we are," said her companion.

"I want to thank you for your kindness in looking out for me and—good-by," Jacqueline held out a friendly hand.

"Naturally I will see you safely with your husband." He ignored her outstretched hand.

Jacqueline offered a few feeble protests, though she knew she was wasting time.

Together they walked along the platform to the station.

They neared the crowd of eager watchers searching out friends among the incoming passengers. Jacqueline failed to notice the quick glance of recognition between her escort and a man in the crowd. She never suspected that he followed them so closely he missed hardly a word of what they said.

For a moment she forgot about the husband supposed to be eagerly waiting for her. She was brought back to the difficulties of her situation by the man at her side inquiring:

"Do you see Mr. Livingston anywhere?"

Jacqueline jumped. Then glanced hurriedly around.

"I—he—doesn't seem to be anywhere," she replied nervously.

"Now don't worry. Don't worry for a minute," assuringly. "A train arriving late always causes mix-ups."

"There may have been some mistake," mused Jacqueline.

"We'll just sit down and wait calmly till Mr. Livingston arrives."

"Oh," gasped Jacqueline, "suppose he shouldn't come?"

"You're just nervous. One always thinks up ninety-nine things that might happen, and it's always the hundredth that doesn't amount to anything."

Jacqueline went over to the nearest bench and sank down limply. The man followed with her bag and his suit case.

She felt the despair of one who might be obliged to end her days in a railway station.

For some time she listened with nervous inattention to the man's light conversation. Then she broke in suddenly, determinedly:

"It's ridiculous—my wasting your time here. Your friends will wonder what has become of you."

"There's no one sitting on the doorstep for me. Don't worry on my account."

"But I can wait just as well alone; it really isn't late, you know. I must insist." Jacqueline was becoming desperate.

He did not bother to contradict, but talked pleasantly and impersonally on.

Ten minutes passed.

"We—we—can't sit here indefinitely," said Jacqueline.

"I don't mind," replied the man cheerfully.

Five minutes later Jacqueline jumped to her feet in great excitement.

"How stupid I have been. If you will take me to a taxi and see me safely inside, I won't need to bother you further."

"I will gladly see you to a taxi and to your home. I am going to see you safely in the hands of your husband." The man seemed equally determined.

Jacqueline sat down again.

For five minutes she communed with herself severely.

"It all comes of fibbing that first little fib, for Robert is really Constance's husband and not mine. I am in so deep I may never be able to get out again: But if I ever do I will stick to the truth closer than —than—" She smiled as she glanced at the man at her side.

Suddenly she jumped to her feet again. Her eyes sparkled and she spoke eagerly.

"Of course there's the phone. If Robert is still at the house I can hurry him down. He may not have heard that the train is in."

"All right," agreed the man, "I'll keep the junk together while you see what you can find out over the wire."

Jacqueline hurried off.

The stranger, who had followed and taken the seat next, watched keenly till she was out of sight. Then he shook hands quickly with her former companion.

"Got your telegram, Rodney, old man, and here I am. What's up?"

"It's a darned queer thing, Herne," Rodney frowned. "She"—with a nod in the direction Jacqueline had taken—"gave me this as her visiting card."

He handed over the card Jacqueline had given him to cut the pages of his book.

Herne took the card, glanced at it, and gave a low whistle.

"I might think there was another Mrs. Robert Livingston, but not with Connie's address, 123 Commonwealth Avenue."

"You've never seen this—er—Mrs. Livingston before?"

"Never."

"She's phoning now?"

"Pretends she's phoning Robert to come down after her."

"What do you make of it?"

Rodney shook his head. "What can be her object?"

"Looks to me like a case of blackmail."

"She doesn't seem that sort," protested Rodney quickly.

"They usually don't," dryly.

"Well, Herne, you'll just stick around?"

"Sure thing. Here she comes."

In the mean time Jacqueline had been busily phoning. After getting information and giving the name she soon had the number.

"Is Mrs. Livingston at home?" she asked anxiously as soon as it had been given her.

"Constance," she exclaimed a few minutes later, "this is what is left of your once flourishing friend Jacqueline. Yes, I'm here in Boston. I got in hours, or days, or years ago. I'm not quite sure when. And I'm in an awful mess, and you'll have to help me out.

"A man sat next me, Connie, on the train. For various reasons, Jane was not with me. Anyway, by way of a chaperon, I adopted a husband. There was more to it than just that, but I haven't time to explain.

"The train was late in arriving, so the man bamboozled me into having my husband meet me at the station. You needn't laugh. It ceased being funny hours ago. Such a determined man in a perfectly friendly way you never saw. He insists on taking my hand and putting it in that of my husband with the manner of one who has returned a valuable package safely to its owner.

"So, Connie, if you will lend me Robert for just five minutes—five minutes as a husband, I mean. I wish you'd stop laughing. Nonsense, I am old enough to travel alone. These were unusual circumstances.

"Yes, please tell Robert as much as you have to and hurry him down. Ask him to greet me once—once will do—as a long lost wife. I'll return him, Connie, just as quickly as I can.

"Oh, yes, the man is a gentleman—I can't help being friendly with people. Remember—I'm Mrs. Robert Livingston."

Jacqueline hung up the receiver with a sigh of relief. She returned with a load off her shoulders.

If she had thought to notice she would have found the two men in exactly the same positions on her return as when she left—her former companion watching her curiously—the man next to him diligently reading his paper.

"Good news?" the man asked quickly.

"Mr. Livingston will be down immediately," beamed Jacqueline.

" Great to have some one feel that way about one. I suppose Mr. Livingston has been waiting to hear from you?"

" Why, yes." Then for fear some more embarrassing questions might be asked, Jacqueline began talking rapidly. For twenty minutes she rambled on about any subject that came into her head. Then she began, " I wonder—" and hesitated.

" Yes?" encouragingly.

" Just how are you and Mr. Livingston to become acquainted?"

" There is the chance of your introducing us."

" The only obstacle to that," Jacqueline frowned, " is — that — I don't know your name."

" I wish all obstacles were as easily removed," he said; " I'm Rodney Lanier."

" Oh," gasped Jacqueline, " how can you be Rodney Lanier?"

" My mother and father decided on it before I had time to protest."

" You are Constance's brother! You knew when I gave you Constance's card—"

" Here you are," a deep voice boomed out behind them making Jacqueline jump to her feet.

" Robert!" she exclaimed.

" My darling wife—" began Robert.

" D-d-don't, please," begged Jacqueline.

" Dearest," began Robert again, " you are all unstrung."

" Hello, Rob!" Rodney rose with a broad grin on his face.

" How in time?" stammered Robert.

" It's all an awful mess, and I suppose it's my fault," groaned Jacqueline.

" In the mean time let me introduce to you my friend Edward Herne. As a high-up detective he will enjoy the unraveling of the mystery."

With a rush all Jacqueline's past troubles came back to her. She held out a trembling hand.

After Herne had shaken it heartily he turned to Robert, slapping him vigorously on the back.

" Too bad you lost out, old man."

" It was a mean trick getting me down here under false pretenses," grinned Robert sheepishly.

Then they all looked inquiringly at Jacqueline.

" I can't tell you." She cast a frightened glance at Detective Herne.

" Don't you be afraid." Rodney caught hold of her hand reassuringly. " I'll take care of you."

" I ran away," Jacqueline plunged in heedlessly. " My family thought I could spend a year finishing off after I'd spent four endless years being finished by the Misses Luggs. That was where I met Constance.

" After meeting you," with a nod toward Rodney, " at the restaurant, and again in the train, I decided you must be a detective sent after me hot foot by my devoted family. As I had one of Constance's cards in my pocket, it seemed easy to pretend I was Mrs. Robert Livingston.

Rodney chuckled.

" I suppose it's your own affair that you happen to be Constance's brother." Then glancing defiantly at Herne, she asked— " Now what are you going to do about it?"

" Constance is Robert's wife. It's up to him," he replied with a smile.

" After being thrown down so promptly I leave it to Rodney," grinned Robert.

" Please, please, don't send me home," Jacqueline gripped the hand that still held hers.

" I think to-morrow I'll—go back with you," replied Rodney slowly.

" By way of a chaperon?" groaned Jacqueline.

" By way of a husband," grinned Rodney.

WE ARE SO WELL CONTENTED

WE are so well contented here below
To go our daily ways, and not to know
The meaning of the riddle we call Life—
How came we here, and whither shall we go?

The splendid panorama of the skies
Is spread, each night, for our unwondering eyes;
We gaze, unmoved, upon a million suns—
Is each a world? Ah, we can but surmise!

And of the earth below, what do we know?
Of men that lived ten thousand years ago,
Of cities buried underneath the sands,
Ah, we know nothing—yet are happy so!

We talk of "I" and "me," yet who can say
He knows himself—the soul within the clay?
How came it here, and whither is it bound,
If it goes on? Where was it yesterday?

We earn our bread, play out our little plays;
Absorbed, intent, we fill up all our days
With small events! We breed our kind and die
Content, if we are fed, to go our ways!

We build our towers upward to the skies,
And praise ourselves and them, as up they rise—
Over, or up to, what we do not know.
Yet oh, we count ourselves so passing wise!

We fling a bridge across a rushing stream,
Or build a ship to carry out a dream
Of trade or conquest—we are supermen!
We who are atoms in creation's scheme!

We have brought down the lightning from the sky,
And wingless man at last has learned to fly,
Man speaks to man across a continent—
But still we know not what it is to die!

We build great guns to kill our fellow men,
And pride ourselves on our expertness when
We make one greater than the enemy's—
But who has learned to bring life back again?

Is this life all? Ah, who can ever say?
Some question, and some scoff—while others pray!
But should one come to tell us, he would find
Us chattering of the things of every day!

So well we are contented here below
To go our daily ways—and not to know
The meaning of the riddle we call Life!—
How came we here and whither shall we go?

Roselle Mercier Montgomery

Doubles and Quits.

Part V

by Elizabeth York Miller

Author of "Folly's Harvest," "Diana the Hunted," "The Greatest Gamble," etc.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE WILL.

LORAINE really made a determined effort to pull herself together, as advised by her husband. She had little or no will-power left, and the ordinary task of making herself look neat and changing her clothes was nearly beyond her.

It was better when finally she was dressed and out in the air, which revived her considerably.

Peter walked with her to Mrs. Dundas's gate, where he waited while she went in. He, alone, knew how important was the outcome of this business. It was a forlorn hope at best, but better than nothing.

Loraine had long since forgotten that according to Amy, Elspeth McQueen was supposed to have been her one friend during that time of desperate trouble. Having securely established herself as Amy, there was no need to worry about small details. She had treated Elspeth with indifference upon the few occasions when they happened to meet, and instinct told her that Elspeth did not like her, but it had not told her quite enough. Never once did it occur to her that Elspeth was convinced she was not the former Amy Marshall.

Elspeth came to the door herself in response to Loraine's ring.

Yes, she said, Mrs. Dundas was very ill, but not suffering any pain. She was just growing steadily weaker.

"It's not likely she'll last much longer," Elspeth added. For her, she was quite cordial to Mrs. Tremlett, and bade the latter to enter while she went up to inquire if Mrs. Dundas felt equal to seeing anybody. In a moment she was back again.

"Yes, madam, she would like to see you. She doesn't know she's dying, you understand."

"Heavens, you don't imagine I'd tell her, do you?" said Loraine.

"Certainly not—only I thought I'd mention it," the servant replied stiffly.

"Hateful creature!" thought Loraine as she dragged herself up-stairs in Elspeth's wake. "Giving herself airs already. I shouldn't wonder if she's not poisoning the old woman."

Anna Dundas was not in bed. She sat in one of her big chairs close to a window, which despite the lateness of the season, was open. They had banked her around with pillows and wrapped her in shawls. To Loraine she did not look in the least as though she was dying.

A table was at her right hand, and on

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 7.

it stood a tin despatch box filled with papers, and a litter of torn letters overflowed a small waste-paper basket beside her. Evidently Aunt Anna was destroying things which she did not care to leave behind her, and it might be that she did know she was going to die. Her silver-bound spectacles bestrode her nose, and she looked over them at Loraine as the latter crossed the room to her side. Yin and Nanky Poo rose simultaneously from their satin cushions at her feet, and made a noisy and inhospitable rush at Loraine.

"Take the little darlings away, Elspeth," said Mrs. Dundas. "Mrs. Tremlett doesn't like them."

Loraine certainly did not like them. They frightened her with their snappy little jaws and goggly eyes, but on this occasion she tried to nerve herself to pat their heads. They slithered away from her and took whining refuge in Elspeth's arms.

"It isn't really that I don't like them," Loraine said apologetically, "only they come at me with such a rush. It terrifies me."

"Humph!" ejaculated Aunt Anna. "Dogs know when they're liked and when they're not. You used to make a great fuss over them at one time—but in that you've changed as in other things. Why have you taken the trouble to come and see me? Heard I was on my death-bed, perhaps?"

"Dear Aunt Anna, I heard that you were ill," Loraine protested. "You make it very hard for me to show my natural feelings. Can't we be friends? I'm not very well, myself—"

"You're a wreck," Mrs. Dundas said critically. "I would never have believed that money could change a woman so much. Well, you know you're not going to get any of mine, don't you?"

"Oh, how can you speak of such things!"

Loraine was on the verge of tears between nervousness and vexation. Elspeth had said that Mrs. Dundas was very weak, but there seemed to be no sign of such a sad state of affairs. She was certainly strong enough to make herself disagreeable. Loraine wondered how the real Amy had managed to endure her.

"I hear that Peter Tremlett's been trying to borrow," she went on relentlessly, "and I'm not surprised, the way the two of you've been spending. I may be chair-ridden, but I get to hear things."

"No doubt Elspeth keeps you well informed," Loraine said angrily. "It is quite true that Peter has made some unlucky investments, and for the moment we're rather hard up. A few thousands would tide him over, and it seems rather hard that he can't ask a bank to lend him something without the news spreading all over Witcham."

"Are you thinking of asking me?" demanded Aunt Anna.

"Certainly not," Loraine replied, with a catch in her voice. "Only—it *is* hard." She began to weep, but tried to restrain herself.

Mrs. Dundas reached out a shaking hand and took a legal looking document from the despatch box. It had a slightly faded look and unfolded stiffly. Dabbing her dripping eyes, Loraine caught a glimpse of the heading in big engraved capitals: "Will and Testament." It could not be a recently made will.

The old woman attempted to tear the document across, but her hands were feeble and the stout parchment resisted destruction by this method.

"Ring for Elspeth," she panted. "I need my drops. There's something gone queer with me all of a sudden."

Loraine hesitated. From the direction of the woman's glance she felt sure that Mrs. Dundas wanted that old document put into the fire, but would not trust her with the task of doing it. A wild notion came ino her head that it would be to her own disadvantage if that document were destroyed; but obviously not to Elspeth's.

"I can give you your medicine," she said, deadly calm. The situation seemed to be in her hands, although she had not the least idea what it was, and she was keyed to the highest pitch of determination to control it. "Where are the drops, Aunt Anna? In this little bottle? How much do I give you?"

"Ring for Elspeth," Mrs. Dundas repeated, her voice trailing off faintly.

Again she made that feeble effort to destroy the document, and again she failed.

Loraine still hesitated.

"Do you want to murder me?" The voice was faint, but the faded eyes behind the glasses seemed to hold terrific power.

"Of course, if you won't let me give you the medicine—"

Loraine pushed the bell, and Elspeth was in the room before it had ceased ringing. She must have been waiting just outside the door.

"Yes, ma'am," she began hurriedly, throwing a suspicious glance at Loraine.

Mrs. Dundas made no mention of her drops. She held out the document with a wavering gesture.

"I want—this burned, Elspeth," she gasped. "At once."

Loraine started forward slightly, but after all, how could she interfere? Mrs. Dundas had a right to burn her own papers if she liked.

The supposed niece felt herself go white to the lips as Elspeth took the folded parchment and approached the fireplace with it. Mrs. Dundas's chair was sidewise to the fire, and she made a futile effort to twist herself in order to see clearly.

Elspeth bent down and raked over the glowing coals.

Then something hapepned; it was like the flash of a conjurer's trick. Even Loraine, who was watching tensely, did not see exactly how it was done; but she knew that Elspeth had whipped the docnment she had been ordered to destroy into a pocket, or otherwise out of sight, and the flame which burst up from the fire came from a twist of newspaper whisked from the kindling basket on the hearth. Neither did Elspeth want that document to be destroyed, and that was ominous, for Elspeth undoubtedly knew its contents, which were probably to her own disadvantage.

"It's burning, Elspeth?" the old woman quavered.

Loraine was on the point of denouncing the faithless servant when Mrs. Dundas gave a quick cry, threw out her arms and then fell back limply.

"She's dead," said Elspeth, grimly matter-of-fact. "I'm not surprised. The doctor said it would come like that."

As the husband of Mrs. Dundas's next of kin, Peter Tremlett, assumed that he should take possession of her affairs, but Will Agnew — Witcham's youngest and most officious solicitor — stepped in and proved that the power lay in his hands.

Loraine had told Peter about the document which Elspeth had not destroyed, and they were both in a high state of excitement as to what would develop when the will was read. Between them they could not come to an agreement as to why Elspeth had not destroyed the document which obviously her mistress did not wish to survive. The existing will, as every one knew, was in Elspeth's favor to such an extent as was almost unheard of. The house would be hers, and something like fifteen hundred pounds a year. She could scarcely hope for more. But there was no knowing. There might have been an earlier will leaving everything to her and cutting out the charities. It was possible that Elspeth was in a position to suppress the last will.

Peter and Loraine believed her capable of anything, and after the funeral, when they all foregathered around the big table in the dining-room, they were prepared to accuse Elspeth of criminal treachery.

There were present, besides the highly interested couple, Will Agnew and the head of one of the banks, named as trustee; the minister, and the guardians of the several charities named. Also, there was Elspeth. She sat in a corner dressed in deep mourning; her expression a little sad, but very, very grim.

And then Will Agnew threw his bombshell into this black-clad, long-faced group. No situation could be too dramatic for the young solicitor.

He deeply regretted, he said, having to disappoint the majority of those present, particularly the clergyman and guardians, not to mention Miss McQueen.

Peter and Loraine leaned forward, shaking with excitement.

"Miss McQueen found quite by accident

a will of the late Thomas Dundas, drawn up some six months befor his death. Evidently Mrs. Dundas did not know of its existence—"

So Mr. Agnew went on. He explained with slow relish that Mrs. Dundas had really no reason or legal right to make a will at all. Her late husband had arranged everything for her. In fact, she had for years been enjoying an income only half of which was really hers. The late Mr. Dundas had left his money to be divided equally between his widow and his niece, Amy; but his widow's share was only for life. At her death the whole of the estate would become the property of his niece, the said Amy Dundas.

Peter and Loraine could scarcely believe the evidence of their ears.

This was the document which Elspeth had preserved from the flames. Under it, she would not benefit to the extent of one farthing.

"May I congratulate you, Mrs. Tremlett?" said Will Agnew. "There will be formalities, of course, but the situation is perfectly clear. There can be no doubt as to the legality of this—"

Elspeth stood up in her corner and addressed the young solicitor.

"Excuse me, sir. The money was left to Amy Dundas, afterward Amy Marshall."

"That is so, Miss McQueen, as I assumed you understood. But I've no doubt but what Mr. and Mrs. Tremlett will suitably reward your honesty—"

"I don't want any reward for doing what was only my duty. All I ask is, where is my dear Miss Amy—her that was Mrs. Marshall?"

This question puzzled even Will Agnew, who was not easily set at naught.

"Because," Elspeth continued, leveling a bony forefinger at Loraine; "because that woman is not, and never was, Amy Dundas. I don't know who she is, or what has happened to Miss Amy. That woman may be Mrs. Tremlett—I won't dispute it—but she's not my poor Miss Amy who ran away to London because she hated Mr. Tremlett and was deadly afraid of him. He went after her and he brought back a wife. But it wasn't Miss Amy he brought back, although she fooled the whole town of Witcham into thinking so."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MISSING MOLE.

LORAINE'S first thought was that the game was up. She felt quite sure that Amy had been communicating secretly with Elspeth McQueen, very likely with a view to getting all this money. An unjust hatred of Amy flamed in Loraine's heart, and she was so enraged with Elspeth that she could scarcely restrain herself from flying at the grim old serving-woman.

But almost immediately she realized with triumph that not one person in the little company had the faintest idea that Elspeth was speaking the truth.

"Come now, Miss McQueen," the solicitor said soothingly, "this is a rare tale of yours, but I'm afraid you've misspoken yourself." He glanced at the minster and touched his forehead significantly, indicating none too subtly that Elspeth must have been stricken with sudden madness.

Indeed, in Will Agnew's opinion when he had his long talk with her about the will, she had been a little mad not to have obeyed the dead woman and put that old document on the flames. Elspeth told the solicitor the whole story which had its beginning some fifteen years ago at the time of Mr. Thomas Dundas's death. All this time Elspeth had known her mistress for a thief, for she herself had witnessed Mr. Dundas's will, and knew the terms of it. That was why her mistress had dealt by her with such amazing generosity. Mrs. Dundas had hoped to bribe Elspeth into holding her tongue.

It may be that during those long years Aunt Anna had fought battles with her own conscience, and that was why she had preserved her husband's true will. But in the end her conscience lost because she had taken a violent dislike to Mrs. Peter Tremlett.

The minister laid a soothing hand on Elspeth's shoulder.

"You have made an astounding charge, my good woman," he said. "A shocking

charge, if I may say so. I daresay you're excited and a little upset. We all are, in fact."

The disappointed guardians took up their tall hats and conferred with one another in whispers. They were not in the least satisfied with the way things had turned out, but with Mrs. Tremlett looking like a fury, and Elspeth hysterical—as it seemed to them she must be—their questioning of Agnew would have to wait.

"I am not in the least upset," Elspeth replied with cold passion. She moved her shoulder to dislodge the young minister's hand. He needn't try to calm her down. She was sure of her ground and would stick to it, even if it came to the point of discussing a birth-mark which would be on Mrs. Tremlett's back were she really the Amy referred to in Mr. Dundas's will.

"I think you're a fool," Loraine said coarsely. She turned to Peter and laughed, saying something in an undertone.

Will Agnew was speeding the guardians. "Yes, gentlemen, I will see you in my office to-morrow at ten o'clock. Extraordinary, I grant you, but I fear there is no mistake. A great pity, since poor Mrs. Dundas really wanted the charities to benefit."

The solicitor was thoroughly enjoying himself. The greater the scandal, the more advertisement for him. He had not as yet made up his mind whether he would go to the length of blackening Anna Dundas's memory. Whichever course he took depended upon the Tremletts. If they were furious at her having kept Mrs. Tremlett out of her rightful dues all these years, then there was no reason why Witcham shouldn't know of Anna Dundas's dishonesty.

Mr. Powell, the minister, lingered distressfully. He was young and rather poor, and the few hundred pounds his late benefactress had put him down for would have made all the difference in the world to his personal happiness—he could have married on the strength of it—but he was not concerned with his own loss at this moment. Indeed, he scarcely thought of it. He had the highest respect for Elspeth McQueen; he knew her good qualities so well that it distressed him to feel she had got this strange and altogether mad notion into her head. At the very beginning she was alienating the Tremletts, who might otherwise have considered it a pleasure as well as a duty to befriend her.

"It's easy to call a body a fool," Elspeth retorted to Loraine's sneering remark. "Any fool can do that. But it's not that you'll be calling me when I challenge you in a court of law to show the jury the mole on your back which you haven't got, and which anybody could see you haven't got when wearing what you might be calling an 'evening dress,' though, God knows no decent woman would do the same. Not my Miss Amy, her whose name you've vilified and dishonored by your goings-on from the first day you set foot in Witcham."

Loraine was white to the lips with anger and her voice shook as she faced the intrepid Elspeth.

"How dare you speak to me like that!"

"Because you're a fraud and an impostor," Elspeth said coldly.

"My good Elspeth—" Mr. Powell protested.

Will Agnew took a quill toothpick from his waistcoat pocket and chewed it reflectively. He saw the anger in Loraine's face, and he saw something else besides. Was it fear?

"Peter, we will go," Loraine said. She tried to speak contemptuously, but that strange quiver of alarm ran through her voice and told something to the astute solicitor. Will Agnew believed in frauds and impostors. He made his living by them.

"Just one moment," he said, switching the toothpick to the other side of his mouth. "Let me get this straight before we part. What do you propose to do, Miss McQueen?"

Do? Poor Elspeth thought she had done all that was sufficient.

"There should be a mole on her back, just below the left shoulder-blade, and there isn't," she said.

Mr. Powell turned a little red, coughed modestly, and strolled to the window; but the solicitor was a practical man-of-the-world.

"Have you—er—any such mark?" he asked Mrs. Tremlett.

"Certainly not," she snapped.

Peter was looking at her with narrowed eyes. She wondered what was passing through his suspicious mind.

"There! She admits it," Elspeth exclaimed.

Will Agnew was being very patient. "But, Miss McQueen, what proof have you that—er—that such an identification ever existed?"

Elspeth's flat breast heaved dramatically.

"I think I ought to know. Miss Amy was as my own bairn, a wee thing when first she came to live here. I had the care of her. I mind giving her the hand-glass to see for herself when she might be seven or eight. But it wasn't only *that*. I knew long before I hung over the banisters that night at the dinner party—just, as it were, to satisfy myself completely. I knew she wasn't Miss Amy, although I'll admit it's a rare puzzle and not one I can solve."

"The woman is wholly and completely mad," Loraine said, speaking with more assurance than before.

All this time Peter Tremlett had been silent. If any one were mad, he thought it must be himself. How often he had dwelt upon that same idea, in a slightly different way. Never had he doubted that the woman he had married was Amy, but he had felt times without number that some uncanny soul transference had taken place. Had he believed in such things he would have said that the soul of another woman had entered Amy's body, pushing out the rightful owner. He knew that Dorcas had felt the same way, and to some extent had Mrs. Dundas. He remembered so many things now, some of them trifles, which tended to uphold Elspeth McQueen's startling assertion. But one or two incidents were not trifles. For instance, although he himself had recognized Dick Marshall that night, his own wife hadn't the ghost of an idea who the man was. And there was also the episode of the supposed old lady who had called upon her one Sunday evening. That little mystery had never been cleared up.

There was some further disputing in which Tremlett lifted a voice. In any case a hitch must be expected for the necessary legal readjustment. Meanwhile, it was not quite clear who had a right to take charge of the house and personal affairs of the deceased. Under Thomas Dundas's will, his widow and a man since dead were named as trustees. A new trustee would have to be appointed, and Peter Tremlett determined to get that job for himself.

He firmly ordered Elspeth McQueen to pack up her things and go, and she as firmly declined.

"I'm here, and here I'll stay until Miss Amy comes to claim her own," said Elspeth.

It was at this point Loraine weakened. Elspeth was making too much of an impression to suit her.

"Oh, leave the woman alone, Peter," she said. "Somebody's got to look after the place or it will go to rack and ruin. She may be utterly daft, but she'll make a dependable caretaker"

"Thank you, Mrs. Tremlett," said Elspeth with a sour smile.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THREADS OF DESTINY.

WILL AGNEW and the minister left the Tremletts at the gate and walked on together, their ways being the same.

Agnew was silent, for him, and he still chewed industriously at his toothpick. Everybody in Witcham said that Will Agnew had common manners and was a bit flashy, but he was a smart young man and they had no doubt he would get on in the world.

Mr. Powell was deeply troubled. He had scarcely known the Marshalls, for he was a newcomer to Witcham about the time Dick was sent to prison. He retained a vivid impression, however, of calling one windy March day upon Mrs. Dundas, and of being kept waiting a moment until a rather shabby-looking young woman had been dismissed from the august presence of Aunt Anna. He was standing in the dining-room, and as the door was opened he witnessed a little scene not meant for his eyes.

Elspeth, speeding the shabby-looking young woman, had spoken tenderly, if hastily, and endeavored to give her some money

which was refused with a grateful smile and the explanation that it was not needed.

This was impressed upon the minister's memory particularly because of what happened immediately afterward. Mrs. Dundas, always frank with the clergy concerning her personal affairs, had retailed with relish the story of her niece's unsuitable marriage and the curious object of Amy's call, namely to thank her for the supposed gift of a hundred pounds. That same night Dick Marshall was arrested.

Mr. Powell remembered the girl's sweet brave smile as she parted from Elspeth. There had been love as well as gratitude in that smile.

And although the minister had only seen the real Amy once, he could never reconcile his first impression of the woman he knew as Mrs. Tremlett with the Mrs. Tremlett of the present.

Will Agnew removed his silk hat with its mourning band, and mopped his brow, which was apt to become heated and moist under the stimulus of excitement.

"Well, sir, what did you make of the McQueen woman's little startler?" he asked, speaking for the first time when they reached the bridge.

"It was very embarrassing and — and strange," said Mr. Powell. "I don't suppose there's the slightest possibility of its being—er—true?"

The solicitor replaced his hat and drew Mr. Powell's attention to a string of barges going up the river. He said he thought they looked nice against the winter sunset.

"Possibility of its being true? Well—of course not. Mrs. Tremlett's changed a good deal. She got the spending of money and it went to her head. It's plain that money doesn't mean very much to Elspeth McQueen, and I dare say she doesn't understand how it could change a body."

The minister thought of the three hundred pounds he had lost under this strange turnabout of fortune. There was a little maid in Edinburgh waiting very patiently for the time when they could afford to get married. He sighed. Yes, money—even a small sum could make a difference, he admitted, while he deplored the fact.

"As for that birthmark story—" Will Agnew laughed, and Mr. Powell stared at the rosy sunset which reflected some of the pink glory of his own face. "Miss McQueen is evidently a reader of novels."

The minister cleared his throat and ventured a timid protest.

"Not necessarily. When applying for a passport last summer, I was asked the question, 'Any distinguishing marks?' and had with truth to confess that I carry a slight blemish at the nape of my neck."

The solicitor nearly choked. He possessed a rather crude sense of humor.

"And did they—did they ask you to remove your collar?" he wheezed.

Mr. Powell saw nothing to laugh at. "Certainly not," he replied indignantly. "They took my word for it."

Will Agnew recovered himself. Perhaps he had offended the minister by his levity, but that was not disturbing him. He was going to make a lot of money out of the readjustment of this will business. The matter might easily drag out a year or more. He felt that he must revise some of his ideas of human nature, particularly of woman-nature. It was beyond his comprehension that wicked old Mrs. Dundas, having coolly produced a former will in her own favor, should not have immediately destroyed the one which had not come to light. Nor could he understand an honesty like Elspeth McQueen's. Elspeth had preserved the true will when ordered by her dying mistress to burn it, and thereby had lost a most comfortable inheritance; lost it, moreover, to a woman she frankly detested.

The whole thing, the psychology which had produced this situation, was beyond Will Agnew. However, the situation, itself, was clear, but not even he could guess as to what its developments might be.

It was growing dark as the two men crossed the park and turned into the High Street. Then the minister spoke again, apparently bearing no malice for Agnew's recent mirth at his expense.

"There's something that's been on my mind for some time," he said. "It's just occurred to me that I might consult you about it."

Agnew brightened. "Right-o!" he said cheerfully. "We're close to my office—"

"Not a professional consultation, you understand," the minister replied with quick caution.

"Oh!" Will Agnew's voice dropped. "Well, you see, we lawyers have to live just the same as the parsons. However, as a personal favor, I'll waive the question of a fee this time."

"You misunderstand me," Mr. Powell murmured confusedly. "What I wished to consult you about has nothing whatever to do with me. It has, in fact, to do with your clients, Mr. and Mrs. Tremlett. I've been wondering for a long time what my clear duty is."

"Indeed! Well, no time like the present. I am at your service, Mr. Powell. Here we are. Wait until I turn on the light. These stairs are rather tricky."

The solicitor's offices, reached by a side entrance, were over an iron-monger's shop, and deserted at this hour. The two men went up-stairs; Agnew first, turning on lights; the minister treading cautiously behind him, rather excited and troubled as to the propriety of making the confidence he himself had proposed.

The green-shaded lamp in Will's "sanctum," as he called it, having been switched on, Mr. Powell was invited to take a chair, hastily cleared of a stack of law reports. It was an untidy little room, dusty and rather sparsely furnished, but one got the impression that quite a lot of work was done here. The host produced cigars, glasses, and a bottle of sherry, but Mr. Powell shyly refused to partake of any refreshment.

Will coughed apologetically and then winked.

"Well, of course if you won't, it's not for me to press you. However, between friends—I can assure you the news would not leak out. I'm the one man in Witcham who can be trusted like a bank."

Mr. Powell smiled wanly. "I'm glad to hear that, because it might be important that what I wish to speak to you about should go no further. No, thank you, Mr. Agnew, I don't smoke, and while I was once persuaded to have a glass of sherry wine at a christening party, it disagreed with me. But don't let my abstinence deter you—"

Will Agnew had no intention of letting it deter him.

"Lowering to the spirits, funerals are," he said cheerfully, lighting his fat cigar and pouring himself a generous measure from the brown bottle. "I've been looking forward to this peaceful hour all the afternoon. Well, here's lowering spirits to raise 'em. Ha! Ha!" He drained off the glass and laughed at his own pretty wit. "And now, Mr. Powell, although time is money, I am a born spendthrift and at your service indefinitely."

The minister thanked him gravely.

"When you've heard what I have to say, Mr. Agnew, I'm sure you'll agree that there could be no question of your accepting a fee. Have I your word, sir, that you will not speak about this except to those concerned, and only to them if it seems—er—feasible?"

Will Agnew nodded.

"Ab-so-lutely," he said with emphasis.

"Very well. Mr. Agnew, some time ago there came to my attention a rather curious coincidence. Were you acquainted with Mrs. Tremlett's first husband?"

Agnew nodded again. "I represented Tremlett when Marshall was prosecuted for theft," he said. "Dick was a decent enough fellow, but down on his luck. He must have been desperate to take that money."

"Unfortunately, I never met him. At least I don't remember him. It's rather a delicate question to ask—I've often wondered, since Mrs. Dundas was so set against Mrs. Tremlett and the marriage having taken place in London—I've wondered if Mrs. Tremlett was divorced from her first husband."

"Good Lor', no! Dick Marshall died in Quentin. She was a widow when she married Tremlett—only just a widow, too. They rushed it."

"Well, I don't think Marshall is dead," Mr. Powell said in his hesitating fashion.

The solicitor leaned forward and took the cigar out of his mouth.

"Bless my soul, sir!" he exclaimed. "Now however could you get an idea like that?"

"In several ways. You see, Mr. Agnew,

I get about amongst the people and they confide in me. Witcham's a prosperous little place and all that, but there's still a great deal of ignorance and superstition. Particularly superstition. There's been a rumor that Marshall's ghost was seen in the town one night. It seems 'it' went to his old home and inquired for his wife. It was tall and emaciated looking, and wore a beard."

"Dick Marshall never had a beard, but perhaps his ghost grew one," scoffed Agnew.

"That's as it may be. But there are unpleasant murmurings against the new mayor and his wife. It's just an undercurrent as yet. Marshall's ghost is supposed to have gone from Mount Street to a public house—"

"A good place for spirits," interrupted Agnew, who was apt to wear a certain form of joke rather thin.

"And then some one saw him or 'it,' as the people say, in Witcham Mere, haunting Pinehurst that same night. And later the ghost was seen striding bareheaded over the downs in the direction of Loughly. In each case the description tallies — a tall, bearded man, with wild eyes and a small satchel. I'll tell you what night it was—the night of the Tremletts' famous dinner-party, early in October, just after Mr. Tremlett had been elected mayor."

"Well," Agnew said easily, "there's just about as much in this ghost story as in Elspeth McQueen's fairy tale. A small town is the limit for comic rumors. I wonder you listen to them—"

"And"—Mr. Powell went on, frowning at the interruption—"last Sunday, a substitute being found for our church here, I was able to accept an invitation to take the morning service at Quentin Prison. Afterward I lunched with the Governor and asked him a few discreet questions. He remembered Marshall very well; said the poor chap had been a regular hero all through the epidemic, and that he had, as a matter of fact, been reported as dead. He was discharged on the tenth of October. Since then the Governor said there had been several inquiries for him. Mr. Peter Tremlett himself had motored to Quentin the very next day. The Governor hadn't the vaguest idea that our new mayor was married to the former Mrs. Marshall. Another inquiry came from a doctor in London. He telephoned to Quentin. He was one of those two brave students who volunteered to help during the epidemic, and recently he's taken his full degree. Well, this doctor had got very friendly with Marshall. They'd worked together all through the worst of the siege and incidentally saved each other's lives, according to the Governor. I hope I'm not boring you, Mr. Agnew?"

"For the love of Heaven, man—go on! Do I look bored?"

"No, no—only myself, I feel there must be some mistake——"

"Go on—what else?" Agnew said impatiently.

"Only that this doctor—I've forgotten his name—said he particularly wanted to get into touch with Marshall, because *Marshall's wife was in London.* She was wildly anxious to see her husband. And that's all, I'm afraid. The Governor couldn't help him, because Marshall had left. Gone back to Witcham, the Governor supposed."

If this tale were true—and who could doubt that ingenuous parson—then there might be even more in it than actually met the eye.

On the tenth of October, or certainly a day or so later, *Marshall's wife was in London.*

In the old days Will Agnew had known Amy fairly well. He had been one of her many admirers, but when she—as he supposed—became Mrs. Peter Tremlett, she had actually cut him dead one day when they passed in the street. He supposed that her newly attained greatness had gone to her head, but he bore Mrs. Tremlett no particular malice for the slight, particularly since he had both Tremlett's and Mrs. Dundas's business affairs in his care. But now he began to wonder.

The thing that tripped them all up, even Elspeth, was the absolute impossibility of accounting for another woman, the double of Amy, being here in Amy's place. Such a thing could not be.

"Well, sir, what do you make of it?"

asked the confiding and puzzled Mr. Powell.

Will Agnew rubbed the back of his head and then critically studied his cigar, which had got frayed at the end and gone out. An unattractive smoke. He pitched it at the fireplace.

"Frankly, I don't know," he confessed.

"Do you think it means that Mrs. Tremlett has—er—unwittingly committed bigamy?"

"Most likely it was another 'Marshall.'"

"Ah, yes, yes! I had thought of that." Mr. Powell was immensely relieved. He had been waiting for a confirmation of his own private theory. "I'm rather glad I told you. Of course it was another man."

"And the ghost story?" Agnew asked.

"That is nothing, if there's no truth in the other."

"You don't believe in ghosts, Mr. Powell?"

"Well, no—not exactly. I mean to say, in these days, we have perhaps lost the spiritual vision."

"I don't believe in 'em, either—but I believe in live ones," Agnew said cryptically.

Long after Mr. Powell had bowed himself out with the heartened feeling that possibly all was well in this world, even in the spot known as Witcham, Will Agnew sat on at his untidy desk. He lit another cigar and dropped into heavy thought. Could he possibly spare two or three days away from Witcham at this precise period of his career?

The Dundas will case would require all of his activities from now onward. But suppose—as an instance of immediate necessity—his delicate and widowed mother was very ill in London, reported to be at death's door? Actually his mother was neither delicate nor widowed, and her home was in Witcham, not a stone's throw from Will's office. The point that he wished to make with himself, however, was that there are occasions so important that they must overshadow everything else. A matter of life or death, let us say—or the possible furthering of a career to which ambition sets no limits.

He rummaged about and found a timetable and then painfully figured out his bank balance. Office expenses were heavy, and he was a light-hearted spender, but still there was a comfortable margin to take him first to Quentin Prison and then to London. Fortunately he had nothing coming up in the courts for a week. The Tremletts and the disappointed guardians must await his return. It would enhance his importance to be called away so suddenly on business which simply could not wait.

His plan of action was quite simple. The Governor of Quentin once more would be questioned regarding the prisoner Marshall, who had been falsely reported dead, and if there were reason to believe that this Marshall was one and the same with Mrs. Tremlett's first husband, then Will Agnew meant to go straight as the crow flies—or as railway runs—to London, and look up this young doctor who had taken such an interest in the discharged prisoner and his domestic affairs.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SIMON PROPOSES.

AMY MARSHALL returned to London from her hurried trip to Witcham, with the dazed feeling of one treading the mazes of a difficult dream. She had reached a point now where nothing seemed real to her.

It was unreal that people should know her as Loraine Drew; unreal that she was a chorus-girl earning her living on the London stage; that Dick had come to life again and presumably was wandering the world as lonely and forlorn as she knew herself to be.

But startling realities would occasionally emerge from the mists. Simon Punter, the hooked-nose little man who, quite unknown to himself, had taught her everything she knew in a professional sense, was suddenly made a widower. He had been a more faithful spouse than most people would have believed; but love for that weird creature, Loraine Drew, had lured his heart away, and now—if anything—he was more deeply in love with the woman he supposed

to be Loraine. His wife buried and his children packed off to their maternal grandmother, Mr. Punter drew in a long breath and began to look toward the future.

Loraine—that is to say, Amy—had developed talents hitherto unsuspected by Simon. He supposed her improvement due to the fact that she had given up drugs. Her ankle was all right now. She worked furiously at her dancing and singing. Indeed, the only fault the clever little stage manager found in her was she never had much time to devote to him apart from work.

One Sunday he succeeded in getting her to go to Hampton Court with him for the day, and over a delightful lunch at the famous Mitre he unfolded a glorious plan that had been simmering in his mind for some time. There were men who believed that Punter had a big future. Everything he staged was a success. His reputation was growing. With a little effort he could get a syndicate to back him in an enterprise over which he would have full control. If that came off, he assured Amy, there would be a big part for her—perhaps a lead, if she was a good girl. It would mean fifty or sixty pounds a week.

She laughed uncertainly. "I know it isn't true," she said.

Simon Punter closed one eye significantly. "You wait and see," he replied.

He did not tell her that he had other plans to go with this—domestic plans, in which she had a part also. It was just a little too soon to discuss anything of that sort.

"What's become of the 'Babe'?" he asked with seeming unconcern, when they had finished their coffee and he had suggested a tour of the palace. "Haven't seen him risking pneumonia at the stage door lately."

Amy knew that he meant Teddie Butcher. She flushed a little and replied carelessly:

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps he's got something better to do."

"Did you send him about his business?" Teddie's rival asked eagerly.

"Not exactly. He—he just went."

"You know, I had an idea you were a bit gone on him in the old days," Simon ventured as he trotted along beside her. He was rather an absurd creature, shorter than Amy, and when he looked up at her big brown eyes rolled appealingly. Only in his shirt-sleeves, dominating a rehearsal or performance, was Simon Punter impressive. There he was, indeed, the master.

"Teddie is a nice boy," Amy said. "One couldn't help liking him."

"Oh, like him as much as you please, but for Heaven's sake don't marry him," Simon said gruffly. "Any girl with the chances I can give you would be a fool to spoil her career by getting married."

Amy sighed. She knew exactly what was in Simon's mind. It was a great pity that Mrs. Punter had died. They went in and had a penny look at the famous grape-vine. It seemed to Amy like some rather sinister live creature in a zoological garden, with its keepers and the carefully raked hothouse. Hundreds of years old and still reaching out sinuous new growth. She felt a shuddering sense of relief as they emerged from the close dripping atmosphere into the clear cold of the late November day.

"I suppose when it's covered with leaves and grapes it doesn't look so—so—"

"Snaky," supplemented Simon.

The galleries and wonderful old rooms of the palace with their interesting historical associations charmed her, but Simon was not very interested, and hurried her along. Already he was thinking of his tea. Amy had said he might come home with her, and he was looking forward to a cozy chat and buttered muffins by her fireside.

They took a taxi back to Chelsea, although it seemed a hideous extravagance to Amy. Why not the top of an omnibus?

Simon was genuinely puzzled. "I can't make you out at all," he said. "In the old days I used to thank my stars I was married, and so couldn't get you if I wanted you. It seemed to me that no one short of a millionaire could stand the pace you'd set if once you really got started. And now you talk of extravagance, and want to take a bus. It beats me hollow."

"I know," she murmured. "Lots of things about me must bewilder you, Simon. I—I've changed."

"But I like you all the better," he said quickly, trying to possess himself of her hand. "Not that I'm so particular myself. Only—when a fellow cares for a girl he'd just as soon she didn't smoke and drink and—well, you know how it is. You've got great talent—yet often and often lately I've thought you really didn't belong on the stage. Now, ain't that funny?"

Amy let him hold her hand for a few seconds, then she slipped it gently away on the pretext of straightening her hat. For some time she had meditated making a confession to Simon Punter that might perhaps save them both a little pain and misunderstanding in the future.

"Simon, there's something I think it's only fair to tell you," she said in her shy, hesitating way. "I know you're rather fond of me—" He interrupted with a convulsive sigh, and she went on hurriedly: "Simon, I'm a married woman— Oh, wait, please! Don't stare at me like that. I've been married for nearly two years."

"Well, where in hell is your husband?" Simon exclaimed darkly.

A little differently expressed, Amy herself might have given vent to the same question. "I don't know," she said with a forlorn quiver of the lips.

"Who is he?"

"Nobody you ever heard of."

"How's that? You've been working under me for five years now. I knew every blessed fellow that ever looked at you, and that speaks well for my powers of observation."

"You wouldn't know this one; you never saw him."

"What's his name?"

"Please, Simon—don't ask me to tell you. There are reasons why I'd rather not."

Simon was angry and disappointed. "Deserted you, did he?"

"Not exactly. He couldn't help himself."

"In jail!" The astute little man had jumped to a quick conclusion.

Amy flushed deeply. How on earth had she conveyed that impression?

"The fact remains that I'm married. Perhaps you won't be so anxious to star me now. But I couldn't go on letting you think—"

"Oh, cut that out! Of course I'm upset. Can't help it. But it's up to you to say whether it's going to make any difference between us or not. We've always been good friends. My wife never had any reason to be jealous of you, although she was. Women are like that. I expect your husband would be jealous of me—that is, if he's fond of you."

Amy brushed her eyes with the back of her gloved hand.

"Oh, if only I knew where he was!" she cried softly. "Or if he knew where to find me. I wish I could tell you everything, Simon, but I can't. It isn't only my own secret, and besides you'd think I was completely mad. But my husband and I have lost each other. I'm always looking for him—everywhere. In the streets—everywhere. When the curtain goes up and I smile out at the audience, it's always with the hope that he may be there and recognize me. Only, perhaps he wouldn't, because of the make-up and wigs. And I don't even know whether he's in London or not. Indeed, it's scarcely probable."

"He's out of 'quod,' then," Simon observed. "Well, why doesn't he look you up? Ashamed?"

"He had nothing to be ashamed of," she replied hotly. "But he doesn't know where I am."

"I say, you must be clean dotty. You've lived in Lawrence Street for five years to my certain knowledge. It wouldn't be much trouble for this mysterious gent you say you're married to, to give you a call there, would it? Or drop you a card. Look here, Loraine, do you know what I think this is? It's a neat little 'frame-up' to make me keep my distance. All right. If you think it's necessary. I thought we were friends—I hoped we'd be something more one of these days—but you've spoiled everything for me now. I wouldn't of believed it, Loraine, that you'd go and make up a story like that—"

"Oh, Simon, on my word of honor, I haven't made it up!"

"Huh! Tell that to somebody else and maybe they'll believe you. I don't. I sup-

pose that accounts for the ' Babe's ' taking himself off. I suppose he began to get fresh and you spun the same yarn to him and found it worked."

" Mr. Butcher happened to be present when I had some roundabout news of my husband," Loraine explained with pale lips, her eyes heavy with tears. " Please don't jeer at me any more, Simon. I can't bear it. I've more to be grateful to you for than you know, and—and I am grateful. If you stop being friends with me I don't suppose I'll have a friend in the world."

" Oh, cut that out, too," he said wearily. " Who's going to stop being friends? I didn't say anything, except that you've spoiled things for me. I can't all of a sudden get over it, but give me time. No, I won't come in, after all. I ought to go out to Hampstead and see the kids. They miss their mother something fierce."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BLIND.

DICK MARSHALL entered London at nightfall to be welcomed by an old-fashioned November fog. It seemed natural enough, for although London was a strange city to him, he had somehow received an impression that during the winter months its inhabitants groped perpetually in a choking, yellow mist.

To the man who had tramped pretty well all the way from Witcham, mostly through open country, this first glimpse of the great metropolis was not pleasing. He stood with his much-traveled satchel in the Marylebone Road and marveled with a deep disgust upon the tendency of humanity to herd together in such unwieldly masses.

A muffled roar pervaded the dense atmosphere, breaking now and again into startling individual clangs and hoots as the traffic swung cautiously past. People bumped into Dick. Sometimes they apologized and made a friendly comment on the pea-soup consistency of the fog; others, less polite, asked him pointedly ' where he was a goin' to!' Naptha flares set up at the corners dazzled more than they helped when one floundered into the circle of their radiance. There did not seem to be a solitary policeman in the whole city.

Dick joined a conductor, who was leading his omnibus on foot. It seemed an interesting way to travel. Dick wanted to get to a certain square in Bloomsbury which was the address Hugh Sanders had given him, and the conductor told him that he was headed roughly in the right direction. At St. Pancras Church they parted, since the conductor was unfortunately tied to a route and might not lead his mammoth charge astray.

" You keep strite ahead, mate, until you come to a big 'otel on yer left. That 'll be Russell Square. You cawn't miss it."

It was reassuring to be told that he couldn't miss it, but surprising how often he nearly did. And when Dick finally located the square it took him nearly an hour more to make the round of it in search of the number he wanted. Dozens of times he mounted door-steps and struck matches to find out, if possible, where he was. It was eight o'clock now, so the church bell told him, and he was getting hungry. Well, if Dr. Sanders wasn't at home, or there were reasons why he could not receive this unexpected visitor, Dick could grope his way back to the hotel which had been his starting-point, and get dinner and a bed there. Perhaps it would have been better if he'd made sure of the dinner before trying to find Dr. Sanders.

Another match. Surely this must be the house. Dick was reminded of something Amy and he had always joked about in the early days of their marriage, before his mother was taken ill and the cottage piano had to be sold. They used to sing together in the evenings, and always the particular piece of music they wanted seemed to be at the bottom of the pile. A choking feeling came into his throat that was not caused by the fog. Why should he think of those days? They were dead, just as his mother was dead. He thought of his mother, a little ailing, but hiding it bravely, sitting near the fire with her knitting, her wrinkled face wreathed in a smile of pure contentment as she nodded in time to their singing. His mother had loved Amy, had been so happy because he was happy, so proud of

them both because they had been brave and taken life into their courageous young hands. Thank God, she was dead; pray God she did not know what an immensity of woe had fallen upon her son.

Yes, at the very bottom of the pile, so to speak, Dick Marshall found the number he wanted.

He rang the bell, which was answered by an oldish man distinguished by the alpaca coat and the white dickey of a fast-disappearing class of servitor. The caretaker, in fact, or the husband of the caretaker. There would, no doubt, be a pair of them.

Dr. Sanders was in, dining alone in his rooms. At dinner this very moment. Perhaps—the neat old man in the alpaca coat and white dickey was only mildly dubious—perhaps, such being the case, the gentleman might like to send up his name before being announced in person.

There is something mysteriously against nature in disturbing a man at his meal. Dick nodded and agreed that it would be better. His name, he said, was Marshall. In case Dr. Sanders might not recall, please say they'd known each other at Quentin Prison.

Dick, rather weary, waited upon an oak settle in the hall. It was a pleasant, very clean house, with its distempered walls, linoleum-covered floors and red carpet running up the stairs. Just the sort of neat, comfortable place in which one would expect to find Hugh Sanders. Dick felt shabby and grimy, like the tramp he was. He shouldn't have presented himself so unceremoniously; Sanders might not be pleased at being taken literally at his word.

But as these fears crowded into Dick's mind there was a brisk step on the landing and down rushed the young doctor, flourishing his table-napkin like a flag.

"Well, well! I *am* glad, old chap! This is splendid of you. Come straight up to my digs. Henry, ask the missus if she'll be kind enough to send up another chop and some hot potatoes for my friend. You haven't dined, have you, Marshall?"

Overwhelmed with the heartiness of his reception, Dick replied that he hadn't and that he was very hungry, while Sanders pumped his arm off, and the old servant hurried on stiff, rheumatic legs to the basement to see about the chop and potatoes.

"I'm afraid I'm not very smart," Dick said ruefully. "Somehow, I haven't thought much about my clothes lately. I didn't realize until I was actually here that it might be an embarrassment for you to—"

"Not a bit of it. And, anyway, I'm quite alone. This isn't the sort of night to wander about in, and I can tell you, I'm very glad indeed to see you. You've been terrifically in my mind lately."

Secretly, Hugh Sanders was wondering if Dick had communicated with that gentle, sad-eyed little wife of his who had hurried off at once to Witcham in the hope of getting some trace of him. Later on the young doctor meant to lead up to the subject—tactfully, of course, for he had to remember that Marshall had never discussed his personal affairs.

When they reached the warm, red-carpeted sitting-room with its comfortable leather chairs and thick curtains drawn against the fog, and Dick was partaking of the plain, wholesome meal laid on a bridge-table close to the blazing fire, his host addressed him with simple sincerity.

"I can't tell you, Marshall, how proud and pleased I am that you took me at my word and came here."

"I knew you meant it," Dick said gravely.

"Indeed I did mean it. And I want you to stop here and make your home with me until you have time to look around—unless, of course, you have plans I don't know about, or some one else you'd prefer to go to."

"As yet I have no plans," Dick said, "and there is no one in London I care about looking up. It's frightfully kind of you. You don't know anything about me, and considering the circumstances under which we met—"

"Never mind all that. We saved each other's lives, and I for my part am grateful for that little favor. Try some of this cheddar. It's pretty good."

"Thanks. I don't know when I've had such an appetite. I'll tell you what it is, doctor—ever since we had those talks about

hospital work and missions, you remember? —I've been thinking about asking your advice. I've been on the tramp since I left Quentin, picking up odd jobs here and there; but that unsettled sort of life is no earthly good to any man. I'm younger than I look, and I want to do something useful with my life. I don't care whether there's any money in it or not, so long as I can earn enough to house and clothe myself. I learned a lot at Quentin, and I might be useful in one of the East End missions, particularly with the men. If they knew I'd been in prison, myself, all the better. Sort of give them a homely feeling."

He broke off with a short, rueful laugh, gazed into space a moment and then began diligently to fill his pipe.

Hugh Sanders nodded. "It's a good idea, and I can put you exactly in the right place. I'd like you to have a few months' hospital work, first. But—forgive my mentioning it—a man needs to be quite free if he's to give his best in that sort of work. That's why most of our priests down there are celebates."

"I'm absolutely free," Dick said grimly. "I haven't a single earthly tie now, nor am I likely to acquire any."

The doctor's lips pursed in a silent whistle. Here he was, as at Quentin, up against Dick Marshall's icy reticence. The man would discuss any topic except his past. It wasn't quite fair. That poor, distressed little wife! Sanders had kept a sort of eye on her. He had been several times to see "The Rajah," and fallen a little in love with "Loraine Drew" across the footlights. Once he had very nearly sent a card around to ask if she'd let him take her out to supper. But no, that would not do. Second thought prevailed, and he fought down the impulse to see her again, except from the stalls of the theater. She was the wife of a man he thoroughly respected in spite of the questionable surroundings in which they had met. She was a brave girl. Those gray eyes of hers were full of courage.

The young doctor would have been more than human, had he not been filled with a vast curiosity. Yet there was that wall of reticence. How could it be scaled? Above all, a doctor, if he is to be successful, must possess the gift of tact. This man, however, had not come to him for physical nor even for mental healing. Marshall merely wanted a job, and remembered that Hugh Sanders had offered to help him get one. There it began, and there it ended.

The doctor made a fresh start to reach the difficult topic.

"I very much wanted to get into touch with you some time ago," he said, when Henry had cleared the table and departed. "In fact, I rang up Quentin, but unfortunately for me you'd been discharged two days before. The Governor said you'd gone to your old home, which was Witcham."

Dick Marshall started, and his tired face was very pale.

"I used to live at Witcham, but I have no home there now. My mother died last winter and—my home was broken up."

Almost a confidence at last! Dr. Sanders took heart of grace.

"But you went back there?"

What was the doctor driving at? Dick replied briefly to that question and then switched the subject. "Yes, I did. But I didn't stay long. I started off almost immediately on the tramp. My longest job was in Reading. I rather liked it—loading crates of biscuit tins onto a motor trolley—"

"My dear chap, I wonder if you'll forgive me if I ask you something? You've never talked to me about yourself, and God knows I've no wish to meddle with your personal affairs—only I simply must speak." Poor Sanders was desperate.

"What is it you want to ask me?"

There was a scowl in Dick's eyes. Did he anticipate what was coming?

"It's only that I — that I happen to know you're married. I met your wife quite accidentally. She thought you were dead, and it was my privilege to assure her that the rumor was false. I've never seen a woman so moved—so sublimely shaken in my life. I can't help speaking to you about it, old chap. I know she was in Witcham, and I thought—just possibly—you'd seen her." The doctor faltered, hesitated and finally stopped speaking.

Marshall's face frightened him. It was a veritable mask of fury.

"I don't know why you should—should mention my wife to me, even if you have met her," he said in a choking voice.

"I'm awfully sorry. I only thought—"

"Well, you thought wrong."

"Will you accept my apology? I meant no harm."

Dick's head went down on the cleared table, now, encircled by his arms, the hands clasped tightly together.

"Forgive me, doctor," he said in muffled tones. "I'm sure you don't know everything. If you did you'd understand why I can't bear even the thought of her. Yes, I saw her in Witcham. I saw her and I came away. If I'm not allowed to forget I shall go mad. I thought with you I'd be safe from certain memories. The plague? That pit of death from which you dragged me? My soul would be easier if you'd left my wretched body there. The hell we went through is nothing to this—nothing!"

"How he loves that woman!" the puzzled doctor muttered to himself.

Had there been a quarrel? If so it could have been no ordinary one. Perhaps—and this seemed to be the only solution—perhaps that little gray-eyed girl who had defended his innocence so splendidly had been in some way responsible for Dick Marshall's disgrace. Perhaps it was through some fault of hers that he had been sent to prison, and—although he loved her—he could not forgive her. There are men like that, devoid of the power of forgiveness, but Hugh Sanders would never have suspected Marshall of being one of them.

Dick was heartily ashamed of himself. He had been betrayed into a gust of emotion against which the bitterness of his heart should have protected him. He loved Amy. He loved her in spite of what he believed she had done to him. While ever since that horrible night when he had seen her, the woman he had no reason to suspect was not Amy, coquetting with Peter Tremlett, a cigarette in one hand and a glass of champagne in the other—Tremlett's "wife"—he had told himself that she was the one woman in the whole world that he hated. Yet here was plain proof that he could never forget her.

"I'm rather tired," he said, raising his head. His face was quite composed now. "There's a hotel on the other side of this square. Perhaps I'd better—"

But Hugh Sanders would not hear of such a thing.

"Old Henry has made up the spare bed," he said. "I've got a nice little room for chance guests, and it's yours, Marshall, as long as you care to stay. I wouldn't have said a word, old chap—"

Dick clasped the hand held out to him.

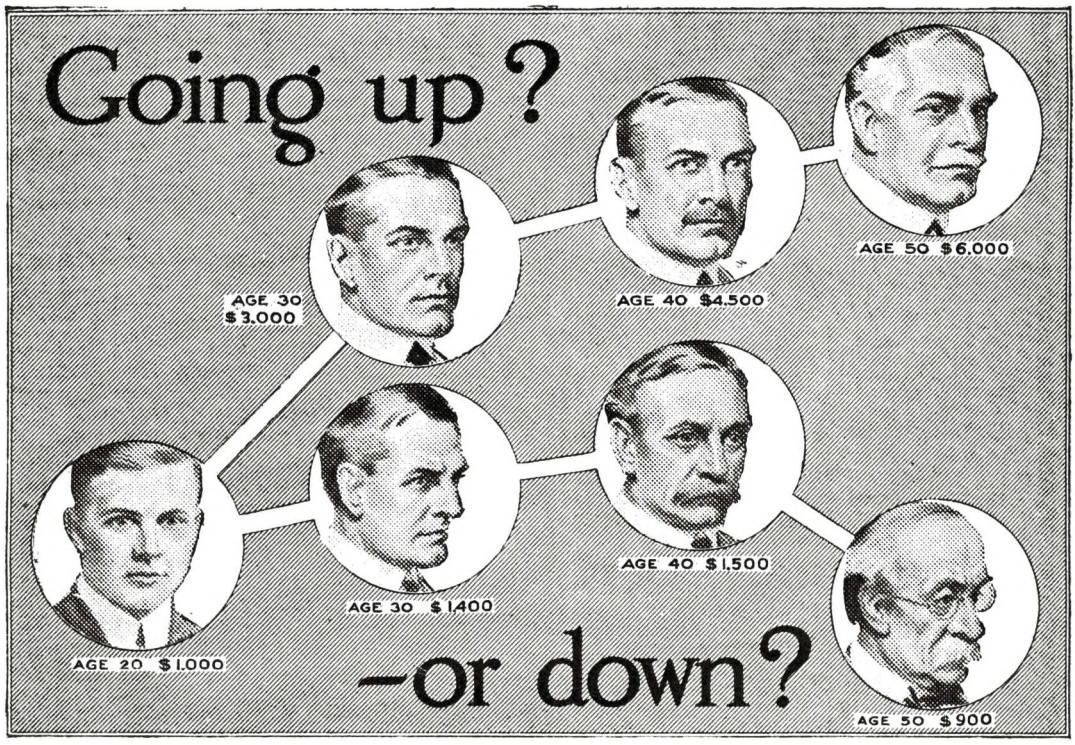
"I know you wouldn't—if you knew. There's just one thing—if ever you see her again, will you be kind enough not to mention—not to say anything about me?"

"Of course I'll promise," Hugh agreed heartily.

He felt sorry for the little gray-eyed wife—troubled by her conscience, no doubt—but his first allegiance was to Dick Marshall.

So closely had the lives of those lovers touched as they winged past; a breath might have blown them together!

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



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- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
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- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
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- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING & HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
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- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
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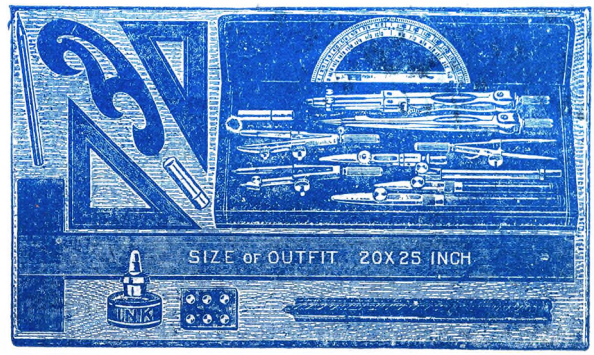

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