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VOL. LXXXII No. 1

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Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-80 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1926, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1926, by Street & Smith Corporation, Grand Britain. All Rights Reserved. Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1909, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$4.75. Foreign, \$5.44.

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# THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXXII

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## Honey of Danger

By Frank Lillie Pollock

*Author of "Incantation," "Deep-sea Dust," Etc.*

A fugitive from mistaken justice, fearing discovery and capture, Delaine, chemist and artist, fled into the Canadian wilderness, the safest spot for him—or so he thought. Chance led him to a bee farm, isolated and seldom visited, a score of miles from the nearest town. Around this odd locale is woven a series of sinister events, by which not only Delaine's career and honor are menaced, but his very life. Mr. Pollock, who has written many stories for us, has put into this striking and unusual tale his very best craftsmanship.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE FIRELIGHT DANCER.

**F**IRELIGHT flashed red and high on the black background of pines, and glittered far out over the lake, mixing with the moonlight. A regular bonfire was burning on the beach, showing several large tents, another more distant tent for the guides, the dark shapes of a number of canoes on the shore. It was just the sort of elabor-

ate camp Delaine had expected, when he heard the music in the distance.

Skulking like a wolf through the spruces and cedars, Delaine peered through his field glasses, and then crept nearer. The chiming and chording of the ukuleles broke out again. By flashes of firelight he could see the forms of a number of people sitting on the ground, back from the blaze. There were men and women, a big camping party, probably from Montreal or Toronto, got up

regardless of expense, and carrying all the luxuries of a hotel.

He crawled up still nearer, crouching at last in a dense clump of stunted, bushy cedars at the very edge of the open shore. The guides began to sing now, grouped invisibly in the shadows. Guides for that sort of party are expected to entertain; they had good voices, and one of them accompanied on a guitar.

They sang in French, at first "Alouette," and then the jolly canoe chorus of "En Roulant ma Boule," and then a fine tenor voice began "A la Claire Fontaine," the sweetest of all the old Quebec chansons, and they all joined in the slow unison of the chorus.

"Long, long have I loved thee—never to forget thee——" they sang.

*"Longtemps, longtemps, je t'ai aimé,  
Jamais je ne t'oublierai."*

The voices rolled sweetly cadenced over the water. The song might have sounded intolerably sentimental if you did not remember that it had been made and sung by fierce *coureurs des bois*, with scalps in their belts, English scalps as likely as not. But from his ambush, Delaine drank it all in greedily, sentiment and all.

This was the first sight and sound of civilized life he had had since leaving Montreal—and that seemed ages ago. He had sighted this fleet of canoes coming up the lower end of the long lake as he entered the upper. Instantly he had landed and hidden himself; but the campers did not pass.

They had made camp a mile down the shore. Later in the twilight, he saw the glow of their fires. Drawn by the fascination of his own kind, he had not been able to resist dropping down in his canoe in the dark, looking at the camp through his glasses, listening to the singing. Growing still more reckless, he went ashore and scouted nearer.

The song ceased; there was a great clapping of hands. The guitar twanged aimlessly a little—silence. Then two girls darted out of the shadow and into the full firelight, dancing on the hard

sand, each of them swinging and tossing a great gauzy scarf that filled and swelled like a sail. They were not very skillful dancers. This shawl dance was evidently a mere impromptu of sheer youthful animal spirits.

One of the girls presently dropped out with a laugh; but the other, a tall, graceful girl in a gold-colored jersey and with fair, bobbed hair, kept on indefatigably, turning and weaving her taces, improvising, swinging and coiling the great veil, as if held in the fascination of her own rhythm, while the strings chorded and the guides kept time with clapping hands.

DELAINE watched, fascinated. He tried the glass to see the dancer more clearly, but could make out little in the tricky light. Suddenly it ended almost in disaster. The girl came too near the fire. The veil caught in a great flash. There was a shout, a rush of people. Delaine hardly restrained himself from springing forward. But the dancer let the scarf go with a little scream. It drifted away in a wisp of flame on the breeze.

This put an end to the entertainment. The campers melted away to their tents. The fire burned down. Still Delaine lingered, looking at the now deserted beach, softened and tortured with music and beauty and loneliness.

The crooning music of the old French song echoed in his ears, not that there was any one whom he had loved *longtemps, longtemps*, but it sounded to him like a farewell to all that had ever been dear. And then he saw the girl of the shawl dance strolling toward him. He leaned forward.

She was sauntering slowly along the margin of the water, her hands clasped behind her head, walking lightly, out for another breath of air before turning in. She came down to the edge of the woods, and stopped within a yard of Delaine's lair. He could have almost touched her dress by stretching his arm. Her profile was clear now in the dim light, delicate and clear-cut, her face thrown back as she looked absently and

happily over the water. Under her breath, just audibly, she was humming:

*"Longtemps, longtemps, je t'ai aimé—"*

Delaine drew breath slowly, slowly, holding every muscle still, afraid almost to wink. He had a wild impulse to speak to the girl. He suppressed it. All at once she turned toward him, staring straight through the cedars at his face. It was perfectly impossible that she could have seen him; he was crouching close to the ground in absolute darkness. But she backed away, still staring with scared eyes at the place where he lay, backed away till she was halfway to the fires, then turned and made for the tents.

Delaine hastily fled in silence. She had suspected something, somehow, and a search would surely be made by the guides. He regained his canoe, and paddled away as he had come. After waiting a couple of hours, he went down to the lower end of the lake, keeping near the shore opposite the silent, glowing camp, and made his own camp near the river outlet. Very early in the morning, he was afloat again, and going down the stream.

The memory of that dancing and music stayed in his mind as he paddled that day, not with pleasure, but with a dull anger and regret. But about the middle of the afternoon, he touched civilization again.

The river surged around a bluff of gray granite, cracked and shelving, crowned with jack pines, and a hundred yards ahead he espied a bridge. It startled him, and then above the rushing of the waters he heard a distant, increasing rumble and roar.

He raced down the swift current. He was almost at the high steel bridge when the train leaped out of the forest to the left, roared across the vibrating structure, streaming smoke and steam, all a-glitter with Pullmans, shot into the forest again, and its roar diminished to a humming, a murmur, and then silence.

Delaine looked after it, half scared, half delighted. This was his first glimpse of the railway for two weeks. It must be the Canadian transcontinental line;

this train must be the Limited from Montreal to Winnipeg and the coast. And this bridge gave him an opportunity to find out with certainty where he was.

He got out his map as he drifted past the bridge. This river was evidently the Rouille, as he had suspected. It seemed an unusually unsettled region, even for northern Ontario. East and west along the railway, there were no stations marked for forty miles or so. But if he followed this river southward, it would bring him to Ormond in twenty or thirty miles. This seemed a small village, but it was the terminus of a branch railway line coming up from the south.

He was torn two ways, as he put away the map. The sight of the train and of the campers had made solitude horrible. He hankered after men; and yet he shrank back—afraid. Anyhow, he told himself, he would have to go somewhere soon, for his supplies were running very low. The sugar, in fact, was entirely out.

HE knew well what Ormond would be—a straggling street of new planks and old logs, a dark, rich-smelling general store, men in shoe-packs and duffel, two trains a day. But certainly nobody there would ever have heard of Louis Lajoie or of Meteor Colors, Limited.

He might provision at Ormond, and drift on again—where? He did not know, nor care, so long as he kept outside the range of civilized, newspaper-reading men. He might have felt more certain of his course if he had known how he stood. But the law wanted him; in fact, the law almost had him; and he was perfectly ignorant whether he was guilty or not.

He continued to drift down the river, still undecided. If he were not going to Ormond, he should turn back at once. It was a dry summer; the water was unusually low, and rapids were bad. There would be a great deal of carrying if he tried to reascend the stream.

The railway was out of sight. Swampy flats followed, muskrats dived, wild ducks splashed up and whizzed away over the treetops. A great burned slash

succeeded it, a chaos of charred and blasted trunks and branches, jungly with wild raspberry canes; then a stretch of wild, rocky shore. Through the jagged wilderness, the river twisted and wound with an air of going somewhere. In a few miles the shores fell away. He found himself at the head of another long, narrow lake, curving so that he could not see the lower end.

Low, wild hills of stunted evergreen growth bordered the water. A peninsula of gray rock and vivid green pines jutted out. Delaine observed the scene, then hauled the canoe ashore, got out his folding easel and painting box, and began a sketch.

He worked for over an hour, absorbed in the one thing that he really loved. The river gurgled, and through his absorption he was conscious of a continual humming of insects in the spruces over his head.

Then the afternoon light changed; the colors shifted; the scene grew different. He had to leave the sketch unfinished, and what he had done did not please him much, after all.

He put away the wet canvas safe from smudging, and paddled down the water. Rounding the peninsula, the lower half of the lake opened in a mile stretch, edged with gravel and backed with dark spruces. Far down the shore, he thought he saw something move. He lost sight of it again, but after another ten minutes he checked his paddle, startled. A man was stooping over a canoe that lay capsized a little back from the shore.

The man caught sight of the paddler at the same moment. He straightened up quickly, stared, then vanished like a rabbit. A second later Delaine caught a glimpse of him running up the shore inland, through the scattered thickets.

## CHAPTER II.

### WILDERNESS BEES.

IF the man had hailed him Delaine might have sheered off, but he was astonished and intrigued. He turned inshore. There was a rude wharf of three large logs, and the upsidel canoe lay

just beyond. A screen of cedar and hemlock cut off the view inshore.

He landed on the wharf. After some hesitation, he started through the thickets, following a well-marked trail. A dozen steps took him through the water-side thickets. A gentle slope arose, partly cleared, stumpy, dotted with evergreen clumps, and at the top of it, fifty yards away, stood several buildings.

A farm, undoubtedly, a squatter's cabin, though he saw no sign of cultivated land. The main building was a well-built, log-and-plank house with a plank lean-to. At a distance stood two much smaller structures. Beyond them, the dark woods closed densely.

Some dubious instinct made him take the shotgun from his canoe and put it under his arm as he started up the slope. His eyes were fixed on the cabin. No one was in sight. He noted its neatness, the good glass in the windows, the unusual luxury of wire screens on its doors. As he came closer, he detected a human form peering through the screen mesh on the lean-to door. It opened; a man came out.

He was a roughly dressed fellow of perhaps thirty, unshaven, with a drooping, heavy mustache. He did not, somehow, look quite like a backwoods farmer, and as Delaine looked at him, he was astonished to see unmistakable fear in that dirty face. The man was afraid.

"Hello!" Delaine greeted him. "Bo' jour!" he added, thinking the settler might be a habitant.

"Hello!" the man answered, sidling up. He examined Delaine with uneasy, shifting blue eyes. "You from Montreal?" he asked nervously.

It was Delaine's turn to start uneasily. "Just canoeing down the river. There's a place called Ormond farther down, isn't there? I was going there for grub."

"Yes—it's near thirty miles," the man answered, studying his visitor with moderating suspicion. "Come on in. Come up to the house," he finally added. "You won't need go no farther to-day."

It occurred to Delaine that he might buy what supplies he needed from this



woodsman. He followed the man toward the building.

"Plenty of grub here," said the settler, over his shoulder. "Rough place, though. I live here alone. My name's Duggan."

"Farming?" Delaine inquired, mentioning his own name.

The man grinned.

"One kind of farming. Look over this way."

He steered Delaine around the corner of the cabin and pointed beyond. There was a row of stunted cedar clumps fifty feet away, and an open glade beyond this, backed by dense timber. The open space was entirely filled with small square and oblong boxes, some red, some white, some paintless, seen by glimpses through the cedar openings. The air was crisscrossed with the flight of innumerable insects, and now that he saw the cause of it he was aware of a constant dull roaring like a distant factory, which he had heard before without noticing it. "What! A bee farm? An apiary?" he exclaimed, staring.

"Sure thing. Ninety colonies of the best bees in the north country. Why, you don't know anything about bees, do you?"

"Rather. Let's have a look at 'em!" cried Delaine, making for the bee yard.

He really did know something of bee-keeping. It had been one of the too many side interests that had broken up his energies. As a boy, there had been bees on the Pennsylvania farm, and he had absorbed some knowledge of their management without knowing how. Much later, when he was employed as a chemist at the great phosphate works in Virginia, he had made acquaintance with a young man who had a commercial apiary.

Delaine had got the bee fever there. He had read books, had learned to handle the hives. With his friend he had planned to go to one of the great honey regions—Colorado or California—and start a great honey business. But capital was needed for that, and the scheme fell through. He had never owned a single bee himself, but he felt that he knew a great deal about them.

"They've got a lot of supers on," he remarked. "What are they getting now?"

"Well, not much of anything to-day. Too dry fer the raspberry. Raspberry bloom's our main crop here. Finest honey in the world. They're gettin' a little honeydew from the spruce trees."

Bees were certainly coming home with something. They were dropping heavily at every hive entrance, some laden with balls of brown or yellow pollen on their legs, some without visible cargo, but evidently with honey sacs full.

DUGGAN went to one of the buildings, and came back with a burning smoker. He lifted the cover of a particularly active colony close by. The bees boiled up angrily, and then surged down again from the blast of smoke. Duggan lifted out one of the combs, a great slab of honey, eight inches by eighteen, two inches thick, and sealed white as snow. The disconcerted bees crawling on it looked ink black.

"What do you think of that? Pure raspberry honey. I reckon I've got near two tons of it already, and part of the season still to come."

"Fine!" responded Delaine. He got a sting on the neck at that moment, but suppressed more than an exclamation.

Duggan deftly extracted the poisoned little dart. He was stung himself, but paid no attention. Warmed by Delaine's interest, he pointed out hive after hive, telling what each had done, the quality of its queen, its promise. One colony had three supers, or upper honey stories, on it, full to the top already. That colony had gathered two hundred pounds of honey last summer. It might make three hundred this year.

"Never had the outfit in better shape," he said. "If we'd just get some rain, I'd make mebbe four tons. There's miles and acres of wild raspberry; all the slashes and open spots are full of it. And then there's fireweed in the fall."

"The winters must be hard on them, though."

"Not a bit. There's snow enough to cover 'em up, and I pack 'em in big cases

with dry leaves. I hardly ever lose many. I don't generally stay here with 'em myself. Mostly I go out and get me a job in the lumber camps."

"Great life!" said Delaine, almost enviously.

"You bet! I'll go in and get us some supper now. You can come in or stay here, if you want to."

Delaine stayed a while to watch the bees, standing back in the shelter of the small log building that seemed a storehouse. It was growing late in the afternoon, and the activity of the apiary was waning fast. Fewer bees were going out, more coming home. Great groups of idlers collected, resting about the hive entrances. A massive, contented hum arose from the yard, and he could smell the sweet, mixed scent of bees and wax and honey.

Duggan was evidently an enthusiastic and successful apiarist. He seemed to have lost his first suspicion of his visitor, and continued to talk of bees when Delaine found his way to the lean-to kitchen where supper was in preparation.

THE room had the familiar frontier sort of furnishings—a plank floor, a bunk full of blankets, a cupboard. A gun and a pair of snowshoes decorated the rough wall, with several types of feminine beauty as exemplified on magazine covers. But there was a rough workbench with a vise and carpenter's tools, and a litter of parts of beehives undergoing repairs. The door and windows had wire screens, and Delaine realized now that these were to exclude not mosquitoes chiefly, but bees. A closed door seemed to communicate with the front, and larger, portion of the dwelling.

It was all clean, and pervaded with a faint smell of honey. The supper was better than Delaine had expected. There was not only bacon, but potatoes and small young radishes. It appeared that Duggan had a garden. There was honey, too, last year's honey, candied white and hard as tallow. Duggan cast Delaine a wink and rose from the table.

"I'll show you something else that the bees can do."

He pried up a trapdoor in the floor, and descended into a small, dark cellar, carrying a jug. He emerged with the jug foaming full of a brown liquid resembling ale, from which he filled a couple of tumblers. Delaine tasted it and was surprised.

"What do you call this?"

"I call it honey wine. I make a barrel of it every fall, and by next spring it's just right. It's nothing but honey fermented with water, and a little yeast."

Mead, evidently, thought Delaine—the drink of our viking forefathers. He had thought its manufacture was a lost art. It had a flavor halfway between beer and cider, and possessed a most pronounced kick. He could feel the draft tingle warmly all through him.

"And if you want something to beat that, I've got the goods, too!" said Duggan, after swallowing his tumblerful. He winked again, and went back to the cupboard, from which he took a brown bottle, and poured out about a wineglass full.

Delaine tasted it cautiously, and exclaimed. The liquor burned his mouth. It was dark brown, and must have been almost pure alcohol.

"You've got a still!" he said. It flashed upon him that Duggan might be making his living out of these by-products of the apiary.

"Not a bit of it. I don't need no still. It's an old Quebec trick with cider. I put a keg of this here honey wine out in the winter. Alcohol don't freeze, you know, but the water all freezes out of it. The keg gets to be a solid lump of ice, with the pure spirits in the middle. See? I don't make much. I'm no boozier. I ain't got but a few bottles."

From his scientific knowledge, Delaine saw that this ingenious process was quite practicable. The stuff was too strong a drink for him, however. He confined himself to the bubbling mead, while Duggan drank rather freely of both.

It grew dusk as they finished the meal, and they still sat by the table in the late summer twilight, smoking and sipping the honey wine, and Duggan, warmed by its influence, grew loquacious.

He told about his start. He had bought the bees six years ago from a French squatter. There had been only twenty colonies then, kept in old boxes. He had increased them, put them in modern hives, and had made a living out of them. In the fall and spring, he trapped, also. Food cost hardly anything; there were always ducks and partridges and trout, and he could get a deer when he wanted it, with no game warden to ask questions. It was a lonely sort of life, but he enjoyed it.

Delaine thought that he would enjoy it, too. After the dread, the disgrace, the anxiety of the past months, this forest apiary seemed an ideal haven. He could paint there, perhaps.

"You're lucky," he said. "I wish I had a bee outfit like this."

"I'll sell it to you," said Duggan promptly.

### CHAPTER III.

#### DODGING MEN.

DELAINE awakened the next morning astonished to find a roof over him, instead of a tent. It took him a minute to realize and remember. His awakenings had been painful, lately, before he could get his mind braced to resist the day. But this morning had a sort of peace in it, and memories of Montreal, of Louis Lajoie and Meteor Colors slid through his mind without spoiling its tranquillity.

He was in bed in the front, and larger, room of the cabin. From a small window, he could see the sky, already growing blue, and the dark crests of the spruces. The room was furnished more comfortably than the kitchen. There were two fine bearskins on the floor; there was a set of shelves, hooks for clothing, a small bureau with a good mirror.

The bed itself had greatly struck his attention the night before. It was homemade, with high posts of black birch, and three of these had been carved into a delicate taper with a spray of foliage in relief, topped with the head and shoulders of an owl, carved with great spirit. The fourth post was still unfinished.

Duggan had disclaimed it. He had got the bed along with the house.

Once more this spot seemed to Delaine an ideal retreat. He saw himself giving up industrial chemistry forever. He was sorry that he had ever taken up that profession. It had seemed a good prospect of a living when he was at college, and painting seemed to offer none at all.

Nor did it yet. But the bees would furnish all the modest living he needed, and he could paint between whiles. In the winters, he could go to some city, Toronto or New York.

An ideal life! But he knew something of the value of bees and this outfit was far beyond his means. Besides, he had not taken Duggan's proposal seriously.

All he owned in the world was nine hundred dollars in the bank in Montreal, and about two hundred dollars in a belt around his waist. It had been his own fault—but he grew hot again at remembering his first encounter with Lajoie in Cleveland, and how readily he had been taken in.

That enormously energetic and temperamental French Canadian was then developing his plans for Meteor Colors. He had secret processes and patents for varnishes and paints of the most marvelous brilliancy and durability. He needed a chemist for the factory he was starting in Montreal, but the chemist would have to invest a couple of thousand in the enterprise. In return, he would be one of the directors, though without any salary attached to the honor. But for the scientific work, he would draw two hundred and fifty dollars a month.

It happened that Delaine was mortally sick of the dye works where he was then engaged, and he had over two thousand dollars saved up. But he took the precaution of going to Montreal to look at the project. The factory was really being equipped. Lajoie was selling stock in quantities, especially among the French business men of the city. The enterprise was well spoken of. Delaine accepted the proposition, invested his two thousand dollars, and came to Montreal.

That was nearly a year ago. He soon found that Meteor Colors did not live up to Lajoie's enthusiastic accounts. There might be further secret processes not yet divulged to the chemist, but, so far as he could see, the paints and varnishes differed in no way from several other standard brands.

However, that did not seem to be his business. His job was to test materials and see to the correct mixing of ingredients. It did not keep him very busy. For the first three months, the factory produced little. All the machinery was not yet installed, and Lajoie was still selling stock in his concern. He was a short, fat, dark man, amazingly dynamic and persuasive. He won Delaine completely by praising his pictures; he even bought one for fifty dollars, and introduced the chemist to an art dealer who consented to hang four more of Delaine's works in his sale gallery.

SO far, none of them had sold, but it encouraged Delaine greatly. Again he wondered if art was not his forte, rather than science. He painted in all his spare time. Montreal was a brilliant and hectic city just then, swarming with American tourists and fired up with government-control liquor, gambling and a feverish night life, but Delaine took no interest in its dissipations. He made hardly any friends. Walters, the manager of Chemical Refiners, Limited, was almost his only intimate. He began to import art into the laboratory.

He had an immense, well-lighted laboratory to himself at the color factory—an excellent place to paint, and he ventured to install an easel there during his abundant leisure. Lajoie did not mind. He exploded into the laboratory every morning like a bomb, outlined Delaine's duties for the day, praised the latest sketch on the easel, and bounded out, always leaving two expensive cigars on the laboratory table.

At irregular intervals, board meetings were called, but they were not burdensome. There were four directors besides Delaine, and all they had to do was to sign an illegibly written statement which

Lajoie presented, and receive the ten dollars honorarium. Delaine didn't know whether any of his codirectors ever read the statement; he never did himself; and it did not occur to him that he was responsible for the money of the stockholders.

He was coming to think more of painting and less every day of chemistry when the explosion came. He might have been prepared if he had known how much stock Lajoie had sold, and how much of the proceeds had gone into his private gambling transactions.

He did have a suspicion that the business was shaky and that he might lose his job, not to speak of his two-thousand-dollar investment. He had so little to do that his week-ends frequently lasted from Friday to Tuesday, and he had been spending them at Portneuf, a tiny French village twenty miles up the river, where he found cheap board and good sketching. A small cottage was for sale there, and he had almost made up his mind to buy it. If his job vanished, it would be a cheap and attractive haven, and he could live for a long time on his savings, with nothing to do but work on his paintings.

He had actually transferred four hundred dollars to the village bank for this investment, and he was in Portneuf that Monday morning when the Montreal paper brought the news. Lajoie had been arrested the previous afternoon, as he was boarding a train for Boston. The other directors had all been apprehended and were charged with fraud, conspiracy to defraud, falsification of books and reports, and a number of other offenses. Delaine's own name was conspicuous; there was a warrant out for him, too; but by some inexplicable and miraculous luck it seemed that his whereabouts were not known.

But his freedom must be a matter of hours only. Delaine fell into a sort of nightmare of terror. From the newspaper story, he could have no doubt that Lajoie had gambled away the stockholders' money. The directors were legally accomplices. Some of them may have been really so; others, like Delaine,

guilty of no more than carelessness. But this was not an excuse that would pass, and Canadian justice was apt to be swift and stern. Only lately an influential bank manager had been sent down for six years.

In the brain storm of that crisis, Delaine saw himself facing at least a year of prison. He would be a marked man when he came out. His professional career, such as it was, would be ended.

There was no time to think. In a panic he drew out his money from the bank, thanking fortune that he had it, and took the first train northwest for a hundred miles. At a lumber village, he bought a canoe, supplies, a camp outfit, and plunged into the concealing wilderness.

He knew the woods. He had been on plenty of rough camping and canoeing trips before, but seldom alone, and never through these waters. But it did him good. The rough exercise, the fresh air braced his nerves. He had brought his sketching outfit and a good camera, but he seldom used either. Now and again he regretted having fled; he felt that he ought to go back and take his punishment, but the cold specter of the penitentiary terrified him again. His fellow criminals had been admitted to bail. Their trial must be imminent, was perhaps over; but he had no means of learning what had been the outcome of it all.

No doubt the police were looking for him, but he would never be caught while he stayed in the woods. North and west the wilderness ran almost unbroken for a thousand miles. He thought he could build a permanent camp, get in supplies, pass the winter. By spring, the affair would be blown over. He would not mind remaining a woodsman for the rest of his life, he thought, sickened with cities, and nauseated at the very thought of chemistry.

He doubted and hesitated, while he drifted and portaged through the wilderness. Twice he dodged camping parties; he was afraid to meet mankind, especially from Montreal. Only this once he had been drawn to approach in the

dark, and it had left a torturingly bitter-sweet impression of beauty and music.

*"Longtemps, longtemps, je t'ai aimé——"*

HE heard Duggan in the kitchen, heard the sizzling of frying bacon, and he dressed and went out. The bee man had been out early and had brought in two trout, two-pounders at least, and one of them was companioning the bacon in the frying pan. The morning was sunny; a hot, dry day seemed promised again, and Duggan again stated the lack of rain for the honey flow.

"Look here," Delaine proposed, as they ate breakfast. "Suppose I stay with you for a month. I'll go halves on the grub, or I'll pay you board, and I'd like to help with the bees—learn just how you manage 'em."

"Better do as I said, and buy 'em," Duggan interrupted. "I'll sell 'em dirt cheap."

"How much?" Delaine asked.

He knew very well that such an apiary with all its equipment and tools, in more civilized parts, would be worth all of two thousand dollars. Then there was at that moment five or six thousand pounds of honey already gathered, worth at the least five hundred dollars more. It was certainly far beyond his means.

"Well, if you'd come about a week later, I expect you could have had 'em for nothing," said Duggan, with a grin. "Fact is, I've got to leave. My only brother's dying in Colorado. They brought up a message from Ormond the other day. I was just patching up my canoe to start when you come. Like as not, I'll never be back. I was thinking of trying to get somebody to come up and manage the bees this summer, but there ain't nobody in Ormond fit for the job."

"I see," said Delaine. "Well, what'll you take, then?"

"It's worth close to three thousand dollars. I expect you know that, if you know anything about bees. But, seeing how I'm fixed, I'd be glad to take five hundred dollars, cash down."

"I don't say that isn't cheap," returned Delaine, surprised. "But I don't carry that much cash on me, and I don't know that I could afford to pay it, anyway. How much honey do you generally get in a season?"

"Eighty or a hundred pounds per colony. I've got as high as a hundred and fifty. It makes about twelve dollars a hive, generally."

"But where do you sell it? How do you get it to a market?"

"There's more market than you'd think, right here. Lots of camping parties come up the river. There was a big one less'n a week ago, and they took away fifty pounds. They always pay twenty-five cents a pound. Then there's a couple of big pulpwood camps within ten miles that take over five hundred pounds for their men. And Indians are always dropping in for a pail; great boys for sweets they are."

"And what's left I take down to Ormond, and the storekeeper there takes the lot, generally at twelve or fourteen cents. Fruit and sweet stuff is scarce up this way. There's an old logging road right to Ormond, and when the swamps freeze up and there's sleighing, you can send the whole crop down in two or three sleigh loads. It don't cost much over twenty dollars. Sometimes I've taken some down by canoe."

It sounded eminently practical, but Delaine shook his head. Duggan still scrutinized him.

"I'll show you how I pack the bees for winter," Duggan went on. "I don't often lose more'n five or six. I've got all the honey tins for this year's crop, too. All you'd have to do is to tin up the honey and sell it. You ought to clear a thousand dollars by September."

"I haven't got enough cash on me, anyway," said Delaine.

"Tell you what!" said Duggan, after a silence. "Fact is, I don't ever expect to come back here no more. My brother's well fixed, and I'm all the family there is, so I expect I'll come in for about twenty thousand dollars, and these bees'll be no use to me. But I'd like to know that they'll be looked after right,

and I need some cash bad for the journey. I'll take what I can get. It'll be all to the good. How much cash have you got?"

"About two hundred dollars."

"Well, look here! Give me a hundred. After you've sold the crop, you can send me the rest later. I'll leave you my address. What do you say?"

"I'll take you!" Delaine said.

## CHAPTER IV.

### HONEYDEW.

DUGGAN went down the river after an early dinner, and Delaine, left alone, again inspected his property with the intense satisfaction of fresh possession.

He had rather been rushed into the purchase, but he could not possibly lose. The sum he had paid down was trivial; the honey already on the hives would more than cover it. As he looked over the storehouses and the bee yard in the spruce clearing, the tools and outfit, he felt a warm glow of solidity, of security. It was the first real property he had ever owned.

This was better than the cottage at Portneuf. This was not only a refuge but a money-maker. The thought of Meteor Colors and of his own danger grew distant and dim. This place was safe. Perhaps, he thought vaguely, he might later surrender himself, if he should learn that his codirectors had only been fined. But prison—no, he could not bear that!

Forgetting both chemistry and commerce, he could begin a new life here. The bees would provide him with all the cash he would ever need. Food was a simple matter in the woods, and his other wants were few. He would have time now to paint as much as he wanted; and he had a vision of himself growing old in this cabin, half a hunter, half a hermit of art.

There were two shacks in the apiary clearing, built of small logs and lumber, bee tight, with screened windows. One of them was piled half full of supers, the upper hive stories to be added to hold a heavy honey crop. Some of them con-

tained eight fully built combs apiece, ready to be refilled by the bees; some of them were empty. There were a hundred zinc queen excluders, feeders, smokers, old and new bee veils, a wax boiler and press, and a shelf of dusty bee books and old beekeeper's magazines. All sorts of things had been stored in that cabin. There were piles of lumber, tools, a spade and hoe, a bundle of steel traps, a moth-eaten deer hide, a box of ancient potatoes.

There was also about a bushel of some partly dried roots in a corner, smallish roots with large leaves, which Delaine finally identified as the common bloodroot. It looked as if Duggan had been doing wholesale botanizing, for the plant is not edible, in fact, contains a highly poisonous principle. It is used somewhat in medicine, however, and he imagined that Duggan had been gathering these roots for sale.

The other shack was plainly the honey-extracting workshop, and it had a good, tight, board flooring. It contained the extractor, with a canvas corded over the top to keep it clean, several fifty-gallon honey tanks, two or three uncapping knives, huge, razor-edged blades, strainers and pails, and an uncapping box with a hot-water jacket. There was a good coal-oil stove, and a large tin of oil. One end of the room was piled high with crates of new, empty honey tins, hundreds of them—he could not tell how many—and on a table was a little pyramid of full ten-pound pails of honey, the last of the crop of the previous year.

Delaine looked it all over with intense enjoyment. It was certainly a bargain at five hundred dollars. And there must be several thousand pounds of raspberry honey on the hives. He would have liked to begin extracting it at once, but apparently the crop was still coming in.

The bees were flying actively, certainly carrying sweets. He felt that he should go through the apiary thoroughly, inspecting every colony to ascertain its condition. But he felt still too excited and unsettled to buckle down to hard, continuous work. He put on a veil, lighted the smoker, and opened one hive.

It must have had fifty pounds of honey in its first super; it was as heavy as he could well lift, with great, white, delicate combs of sealed honey. He "hefted" the super below, and it seemed equally heavy, though he did not take out any of the combs. Below this was the brood chamber, with a zinc excluder to keep the queen down. It was swarming and cramped with bees and they were cross, and he did not investigate the colony any farther.

AT the end of the yard, he discovered a hive on scales, which Duggan had forgotten to show him. It was a strong colony with two supers, standing on a platform scale, so that its daily gain in weight could be read, and an estimate made of the work of the apiary.

The scale was set hard up, and had evidently not been adjusted for several days. Setting it, he found that it had gained five pounds since its last adjustment, and the whole hive weighed one hundred and forty pounds. That must mean a crop surplus of at least eighty pounds.

He sat by the cabin watching the bees for much of the afternoon, then went to the house with some of the bee books. He read them, laid them down to gaze over the misty lake among the spruces, and then read again. But he was still too excited with his acquisition to make much headway with the complicated instructions that he perused.

At the end of the day, he lighted a fire in the stove, fried the rest of Duggan's trout, and made tea. There was a lamp in the cabin, and he thought of making candles of beeswax. But the summer twilight of the North lasted so late that it was hardly more than dusk when he went to bed between the carved owls, and lay wakeful for a long time.

The next morning he attacked the bee yard in earnest. There was no lack of work to be done.

Resolved to disregard stings, at least on his arms, he rolled up his sleeves, put on a wide-brimmed hat with a gauze veil, and lighted the smoker. Carrying a steel hive tool resembling a strong, thin

chisel, he approached the first hive, not without a sense of adventure and risk.

A blast of smoke at the entrance sent the guards crawling in with a loud, terrified buzzing. He took off the hive cover, and met the uprush of bees with a puff of smoke that sent them down again. Prying two or three frames of comb loose, he found that this colony did not have so much honey. Its single super was not quite full, and some of the honey appeared darkish in color, probably gathered from early willow blossoms.

Inserting his hive tool, he broke the sealing of bee glue, and pried off this upper story. Below it was a queen excluder of zinc, perforated with holes so exact in size that the workers passed through freely, but the larger-bodied queen was prevented from going up and depositing her eggs among the honey.

The lower story, or brood chamber, was now exposed, containing ten combs, mostly filled with brood—eggs, or young larvæ like white worms at the bottom of the cells, or sealed over brown and biscuit-colored in its later stages. This colony was not too strong; it had not built up well, and was not populous enough to gather a great amount of honey. Probably it was the fault of the queen, who had not provided eggs enough in the early spring; and Delaine mentally marked this colony for requeening.

The next colony he opened was better, and had two supers fairly well filled—perhaps a total amount of sixty pounds of honey. The third proved to be queenless. Some accident had caused the death of the queen, and the colony had failed to raise another. There was no brood, and the bees were cross, desperate and reckless, stinging viciously. Left to itself, it would perish within a few weeks, and Delaine, after trying to remember the approved procedure, set the whole colony, combs, bees and all, upon another colony, for the two lots of insects to unite themselves together under one queen.

The next two colonies had evidently died in the winter, and Delaine carried the empty hives and combs into the

storehouse. The next hive again was piled up with three supers, all full, and needing another—a tremendously prosperous and populous colony, having probably a hundred pounds of honey already and nearly a hundred thousand bees.

All the forenoon Delaine worked, progressing methodically from hive to hive, till his back ached from stooping. He had been stung less than he expected; better still, the stings did not swell and the pain passed quickly. Evidently he was physically adapted for a bee man.

HE was thinking of stopping for dinner and a rest, when he noticed an excitement about one of the hives where he had been working within an hour. A vast cloud of bees hung about it with a tempestuous roaring, and, on going to look, Delaine found the focus of the excitement to be a comb of honey which he had inadvertently left on the ground, forgetting to put it back into the hive when he had finished examining it.

It was so covered with bees now that nothing was visible of it but a dark, surging mass of insects, eager to lick out the last drop of honey. Delaine was surprised at their fury. When honey is being gathered from flowers, the bees will not usually care to plunder it from any other source, not even if a bowl of honey were set in front of a hive.

He committed the mistake of smoking the bees away and removing the comb. He should have left it till the bees had taken all the contents and lost interest in it. Five minutes later he found that the cloud of bees, failing to find the honey, had turned their attention to the hive beside the spot, determined to rob it. A fierce fight was already under way at the entrance. Bees were rolling over and over in struggling, stinging clusters, and at every crevice a group of robbers was nosing, mad to get in.

But the colony was strong enough to defend itself. The thieves did not make much headway. In fifteen minutes the fighting had almost ceased. Then the cloud of robbers suddenly concentrated around another colony three stands away.



This was a weak colony in one story, and the scouts must have discovered its feebleness. Delaine plugged the entrance nearly full of mud, leaving only a half-inch hole. Surely the defenders could hold that narrow way.

They did hold it for a time. Robbers rolled back dead into the grass by dozens. But the swarm of assailants grew every minute, coming probably from every colony in the yard. They were getting in now, and in half an hour the battle was evidently lost. The fighting stopped, and bees began to go and come, carrying the honey to their own homes. When Delaine ventured to peep into the hive a few hours later, there was nothing but the tattered combs from which every drop of honey had been taken, and about two quarts of dead bees on the bottom.

He was minus a colony, but he had his lesson, and never left honey carelessly exposed again. Still, he was amazed at this ferocious robbing spirit when there was honey in the blossoms. He walked a few hundred yards up the lake shore to look at the raspberry flowers. The canes grew in jungles and masses in every open space, and he was startled to find the bloom mostly gone. There was green fruit on many bushes. Still, there was enough bloom left to supply considerable honey, but he could not see a single bee on any of the blossoms.

Probably, he thought, the weather was too dry for the plants to yield. A certain degree of both heat and moisture is required for the blooms to secrete their sweet nectar. But what, then, were the bees working on? For he had certainly seen them coming home heavily laden by dozens.

Perplexed, he went back to the apiary, where the rioting had quieted. The bees were certainly bringing in something, and at that place and season there was nothing flowering but the wild raspberry.

Standing under the spruce trees beside the yard, he heard a murmuring in the branches. He had heard it before without paying any attention, but now he looked up carefully. Bees were certainly busy up there. He could see them,

crawling actively over the stiff twigs. Struck with a new suspicion, he reentered the yard and carefully opened one of the hives.

He lifted out a comb containing the darkish honey that he had attributed to the willow. He scraped off the wax capping of the cells. The contents were brown, dark, and hardening into sugary granules. He tasted it. It had a bitterish, resinous flavor. He shut the hive in the utmost disgust.

"Honeydew, by Jove!" he muttered.

## CHAPTER V.

### ASTONISHING NEWS.

**HONEYDEW** is one of the many annoyances of the commercial beekeeper. This substance with the poetical name is a dark, rank sirup secreted by the aphides, or plant lice, generally on the twigs of oak, spruce or pine trees during hot, dry weather. The bees do not much care for it, and pay no attention to it when real honey is to be had. But when the blossoms fail, they will work assiduously on anything they can find that is sweet, and a few pounds of this strong, dark stuff may be mixed with, and ruin, a whole super full of high-grade honey.

Duggan had said something about honeydew, Delaine now recollected. But it was not till this moment that Delaine realized that a great quantity—perhaps half—of his supposed honey crop was really this almost worthless product.

He had a feeling of having been swindled. But there must be, after all, over a thousand pounds of good clear honey at least on the hives, worth far more than he had paid. And a good rain would save him yet, washing the honeydew off the trees, and perhaps starting a honey flow from the last of the raspberry bloom.

It did turn a little cooler, clouded over, lowered, and then became hot and dry again, without a drop of moisture having fallen. Delaine finished his inspection of the bees, very careful now to allow no robbing to start. They were in good condition; there was really more than

half a ton of good honey there, besides perhaps a ton of mixed and doubtful stuff. With rain, he would get a crop yet.

He attempted to sketch, but could not settle his mind to it. He tried to fish, but the weather had made the trout extremely shy. He was coming to know the anguish of the beekeeper, whose crop depends on the slightest changes of the temperature, of the moisture in the air. The secretion of nectar in the blossoms is the most sensitive thing in the world. In coolness or drought, there is no honey, and a change in the wind or a light shower may make a difference of a thousand pounds of honey to the apiary in a single day.

Delaine's last thought at night was of the weather, and his first glance in the morning was at the sky. He was finding apiculture less peaceful than he imagined. In his nervousness and anxiety, he began once more to brood on his collision with the law. He grew intensely lonely, and yet he dreaded to see a human face.

Almost daily he half expected to see the return of that big party which he had spied upon. That night had left him with a strange impression of mixed bitterness and beauty. He could hear the singing of the guides still; he could see, clear as ever, the face of the girl who had danced—and who had shrunk away from him with a horrified instinct.

He dreaded to see that fleet of canoes coming down the lake. Yet he would have been glad of anybody, Indian or white, anybody with whom he could talk and relieve the strain of incessant thinking and hoping and scaring himself with ever darker and darker imaginings.

Two or three times, he paddled up to the railroad bridge to see the train go by. Sitting in his canoe, he could hear the murmur far away through the trees, rising to a roar, and then with a tremor of the earth the transcontinental limited streaked over the bridge—a blur of dust, smoke, windows, human faces—and vanished. There was no stop for over twenty miles either way. Delaine dropped back down the stream again

with a sense of having come partly into touch with human life once more.

DAYS went by. The bees continued to work on the spruces, collecting brown honeydew that seemed to granulate solidly almost as soon as brought in. The hive on scales registered a slow, steady gain of a pound or two a day.

Then Delaine, visiting the wild raspberry patches, found that the last of the bloom had disappeared. The sprays were covered with fruit, already turning red, ripening prematurely in the drought. There would be no more honey.

The next morning he paddled up to the railway bridge, in hopes of catching a trout in the river before the sun grew strong. It was already hot, and the night had been plagued with mosquitoes. No train was in hearing as he approached the bridge, and he was paddling mechanically, absorbed in his thoughts, when he was startled almost to the point of capsizing by a shout from above.

He stared up, letting the canoe drift. A man was sitting on the embankment at the end of the bridge, and he jumped up and started to make his way unsteadily down the steep slope to the water.

"Hello! Hello!" Delaine answered, confused with astonishment.

This was not a woodsman, nor a railway man, nor an Indian nor a timber cruiser. He was wearing a shapely soft hat and a white collar, and he carried an expensive-looking club bag. He looked as if he had just alighted from a Pullman. As he came to the shore, Delaine saw that it was a young fellow, a mere boy, hardly over twenty, with a handsome, pleasant face, dressed in very modish city style, and wearing tan Oxford shoes. An odder apparition in the midst of this wilderness could hardly be imagined.

Delaine guided the canoe up to the shore. The young man looked at his stupefied face, and laughed.

"You've turned up at the right time," he said. "When I got to this bridge, I thought it was the limit, and I stopped. Can you tell me where I am?"

"My dear fellow, you are not any-

where," returned Delaine, recovering himself, "and how you got here passes my comprehension."

"Simple enough. I got off the train last night," said the stranger.

"The train? The train doesn't stop within twenty miles!" Delaine cried. "Bruce Hill is the nearest stop."

"Well, it stopped last night, somewhere near here. I thought it was Bruce Hill. I grabbed my bag and jumped out, half asleep. It was all dark, and before I found out my mistake, the train had pulled out. I waited in a sort of shed till morning, and then I started to hike. I thought I'd get somewhere if I kept going."

"It's true there is a sort of shed about four miles west," said Delaine, thinking. "It used to be a freight-loading point for a pulp-wood camp. But it hasn't been used for a year. No train ever stops there."

"Well, I tell you it stopped last night," retorted the strayed youth, with some irritation. "I prove it by being here, don't I? Maybe it was in trouble—hot box or something. What are you doing here yourself? Camping?"

"Not exactly. You'd better come back to my place with me, for breakfast. I've got a bee ranch down this river."

The stranger looked oddly at Delaine and laughed with remarkable heartiness.

"Breakfast? Rather!" he ejaculated. "I'd begun to think there were no more breakfasts in the world. I knew you were a godsend as soon as I set eyes on you. My name's Maxwell. What's yours?"

"Burns," returned Delaine promptly, without any forethought. He was astonished himself at hearing the lie come out of his mouth, but he let it pass.

He assisted his guest into the canoe. Maxwell did not seem much used to canoes. He almost capsized it at the start, and then, following instructions, he crouched low in strained immobility, clutching his club bag. Fortunately it was not a great distance to the bee farm.

"Here we are. I can paddle you back to the railroad when you want to start for Bruce Hill," Delaine said, "but I

don't see how you'll make the rest of the journey unless you walk."

"Oh, that'll be all right. I'll manage," said Maxwell easily. He glanced around him with more confidence when he was ashore, and started up the slope toward the cabin. Once indoors he lighted a cigarette and looked all about him with an air of great interest, as if looking for something that he failed to find.

Delaine busied himself with lighting the fire and preparing coffee. He had already eaten breakfast himself. Behind his back, he was conscious that Maxwell was scrutinizing him with an air of suppressed amusement, and he found it irritating.

"Grub's ready," he said curtly.

"Thanks. How long have you been here, anyway, Burns?" Maxwell demanded, laughing outright. "And where's Duggan?"

"Duggan!" Delaine gasped. "What — You knew Duggan? Do you mean—you've been here before?"

"Well, rather!" said Maxwell. "You see, this camp belongs to me."

## CHAPTER VI.

### A BUYER APPEARS.

DELAINE glared at him in anger—consternation—then with a ghastly conviction of truth. Here was the explanation of his amazing bargain!

"I bought it from Duggan—j-just before he left," he stammered.

"You did? Well, Duggan hasn't owned a stick of it for three years. I bought it from him then and fixed it up, and kept Duggan on to take care of it. We divide the honey, and I use the place as a summer camp. It makes its own expenses. What did you pay him for it?"

Delaine angrily told the story of his purchase.

"Duggan was getting sore on the job and wanted to leave. He saw his chance and played you for a sucker," Maxwell commented. "We had a poor honey crop last year, and he didn't make much. He hasn't any brother in Colorado. He comes from Bruce Hill. I expect he's

gone back there. Why, you didn't think you could buy such an outfit as this for one hundred dollars, or for five hundred dollars, did you?"

Delaine smarted with wrath and humiliation. He had been a sucker, indeed!

"Well, if your man has cheated me, I'll look to you to make it good!" he exploded.

"Oh, hardly! You can't do that. You'll have to get after Duggan. Come on and let's eat. It'll make you feel better."

Delaine had not much appetite. He was too charged with anger against Duggan, Maxwell, himself, everybody. But Maxwell ate enormously, devouring all the bread, bacon and trout, and emptying the coffeepot.

"Where's that booze of Duggan's?" he inquired. "Haven't drunk it all, have you?"

The bottle of strong frozen spirit was still in the cupboard. Maxwell poured himself a stiff dose, swallowed it and poured another, which he sipped slowly. As he drank, it seemed to Delaine that his face changed. He looked uneasy, nervous, thoughtful.

"How's the honey crop this year?" he demanded abruptly.

"Poor. It's been too dry. The bees are gathering honeydew."

"Is there much of the honeydew?"

"Plenty. A ton or so."

"Um!" Maxwell looked at Delaine with sullen eyes. "Has anybody been through here lately—Indians or campers?"

"Not a soul."

Maxwell stared thoughtfully out through the wire screen of the kitchen door. In the steady light, Delaine noticed that his face, for all its youth, was lined and marked, perhaps with dissipation, perhaps with overwork. The fingers holding the cigarette quivered faintly. Maxwell's nerves were certainly in bad condition.

"Since this place belongs to you," Delaine said bitterly, "I think I'll be off—back to Montreal."

"Montreal!" Maxwell turned on him

sharply. "I thought you were a bee man."

"So I am. But what's that got to do with it?"

"Nothing. Say, don't be in such a hurry to leave," said Maxwell, laughing with sudden good humor again. "We'll find some way to fix you up. Sorry Duggan played you such a trick. But I've got to have a nap. I got no sleep last night. Keep a lookout for anybody passing."

HE leaned far back in his chair, yawning widely. His coat opened, and Delaine caught a glimpse of the handle of a small, black, automatic pistol. It was slung in a holster under his left armpit, as the city gunmen carry them.

The sight gave Delaine a violent shock, but Maxwell got up, closing his coat and yawning again. He went into the front room with his club bag and rolled himself in Delaine's blankets.

"Stay around till I wake up, anyway," he called, through the door. "Keep a lookout, won't you? I'm half dead for sleep."

Delaine walked out of the cabin, in deep disgust and depression. Another plan had gone wrong. The sun blazed down; the bees hummed busily among the spruces, piling honeydew into their hives. It did not matter now, but this wilderness apiary had never seemed so desirable to Delaine as now that he had lost it.

He thought of recommencing his rough, aimless wandering up and down the waterways. The prospect seemed intolerable; but it would be worse to go back to the city.

Maxwell slept heavily till noon, and then came out to dinner, looking touselled and drowsy still.

"I suppose nobody's been along?" he inquired.

"You seem to think this is a highway of traffic," said Delaine tartly. "Nobody's ever passed here in my time."

"You never can tell," said Maxwell. "I don't want to see anybody. I came here for a rest. I'm tired out—been overworking all summer. And rough

customers come this way sometimes. Duggan's had honey stolen time and again."

He really looked tired, and was plainly in a condition of overwrought nerves. He would talk with sunny good nature, and then snap savagely at the merest trifle. After dinner and a tumbler of honey liquor, he seemed to grow more tranquil.

"I've been thinking it over," he said. "You're not in a hurry to leave, are you? How'd you like to take over Duggan's job?"

"No, I can't stay here all summer," said Delaine, surprised.

"You could stay till you extract the honey and get it away. Two or three weeks. I'll pay you ten dollars a week and board."

Still Delaine shook his head. He wanted to get away from the place now.

"I can't be left here all alone!" Maxwell cried. "I don't know anything about the bees, or how to run this ranch in the woods. What wages do you want? I'll go anything in reason. Yes, and if things go well, I might refund you the hundred dollars that Duggan got out of you."

Delaine would have refused again, but the look on Maxwell's face astonished him. The boy was plainly on edge with anxiety. He licked his lips nervously; his eyes were imploring. He was desperately anxious for Delaine to stay with him. He looked scared; and Delaine remembered that Duggan also had looked scared and feared the approach of some one down the lake.

Like a cloud of evidence, all the queer facts of the affair poured through Delaine's mind. It flashed upon him that everything he had heard was false, perhaps. Maxwell did not own this apiary. Maybe Duggan had not owned it. Maybe Delaine owned it himself. His mind swung round a complete revolution while Maxwell waited.

"All right. I'll stay for a while, anyhow," he said.

"That's the stuff!" cried Maxwell exuberantly. "I'll make it right with you. Here, have a drink on it!"

Delaine took a sip, but Maxwell drank more than enough, finishing the bottle, and unearthing another from the square hole under the kitchen that served as a cellar. He grew light-hearted again, now that Delaine's cooperation was settled, talking and laughing with the abandonment of a schoolboy; but every now and again he cast a quick, anxious glance through the doorway and up the lake.

RAIN fell that afternoon, and at sunset it clouded again and rained nearly all night. If this belated downpour had come two weeks earlier it might have meant another five hundred dollars' worth of honey, Delaine thought regretfully. However, it would make no difference to him after all.

The rain even stopped the honeydew flow, washing the spruces clear of the aphides and their sweet juice. It was impossible to think of taking off and extracting honey, or even of looking into the hives. The bees buzzed angrily about the yard, disappointed in the cessation of harvest, trying to rob one another's hives. Scores of robber scouts nosed at every entrance and joint; hundreds of guards clustered at the entrances; and knots of fighting, stinging bees might be seen rolling in the grass anywhere.

There was nothing to do but wait, and Delaine and Maxwell waited, loafing, smoking, fishing a little, for the rain had improved the appetites of the trout. Maxwell had fewer spells of nervous irritation; his mind seemed more at rest. Delaine came to a liking for him; he was boyish, eager, impulsive, and he seemed to have had a strange and rather sinister experience of life.

He said vaguely that he was in the brokerage business, without going further into details; but he abounded in tales of the sporting life of Montreal. This was particularly vivid at that time, though Delaine personally knew little of it.

But he had heard much, even in the seclusion of his studio and laboratory.

Maxwell seemed to know all about it, though he did not claim to be a participant. Remembering the gun at his arm-

pit, Delaine wondered; but on the whole he was inclined to set most of it down to the boastfulness of a boy anxious to show his acquaintance with "life."

THE moisture was followed by several days of windy, sunny weather. No honeydew was gathered; the bees were growing accustomed to the dearth and were less anxious to steal, but still it was no weather for taking off honey. If a hive had been opened, it would have started an instant riot in the apiary.

"You might get a crop yet from fireweed," Delaine suggested, as they sat on the steps of the kitchen late in the afternoon.

"Fireweed? What's that? Does it amount to——" Maxwell began without interest, and then stopped as suddenly as if he had been choked.

A man had suddenly and silently come around the corner of the cabin from the rear, so silently that they had not heard a sound.

It was an Indian, clad characteristically in the worn garments of white men. He wore a khaki coat, duffel trousers, battered moccasins and a greasy and shapeless felt hat. He came up imperturbably and without speaking, and sat down on a flattened stump before the door. His beady, black eyes passed from one man to the other, and then seemed to settle on Maxwell's face.

"Hello!" Delaine greeted him. "Bonjour! What you want, eh? Parlez français?"

The aborigine shook his head.

"Miel. Honeys," he pronounced throatily.

"Oh, you want to buy honey? Got the price?"

He nodded, meeting Delaine's glance. It gave the white man a shock of surprise. The eyes were black, certainly, but instead of the slumbering, snaky gloom of an Indian, they were quick and alive with intelligence.

Delaine glanced instinctively at Maxwell. All the color had fled from the boy's face, and he was staring at the Indian in what appeared the fascination of terror.

Delaine looked again at the savage. He had seen plenty of Indians, and this man was certainly an Indian, he thought, or of part Indian descent. There was hardly any mistaking the shape of the strong, square face, the wide mouth, the coarse black hair. It was probably an Ojibwa; Duggan had said that these were "great boys for honey."

Delaine went into the house for one of the ten-pound pails of last season's honey. While he was indoors, he was almost certain that he heard the mutter of a voice, the exchange of a sentence or two. But when he came out, the two men had not stirred, and were no longer even looking at one another.

"Two dollars. *Deux*," he said, holding up two fingers.

The Indian produced a crumpled bill and four quarters, and took the honey, rising to go.

"Ojibwa?" Delaine inquired, again examining the man's grease-streaked face.

The Indian shook his head and started away.

"Chippewa? Where's your camp?"

The savage swung his arm vaguely toward the north, pronounced a few words harshly in an unknown dialect, and strode away carrying his honey pail.

He vanished into the evergreen thickets, but from the rear Delaine caught a clear sight of his head. The hair was cut short, trimmed closely and neatly on the neck, as a professional barber would trim it.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BLAZING LUCK!

DID you notice——" Delaine turned to say to Maxwell, but he found that the boy had retreated to the cabin.

Maxwell was sitting on a stool, mopping his face, in a half collapse.

"What's the matter with you?" Delaine demanded. "Not scared of that Indian? They're the most peaceable lot in the world. Duggan says they were always coming in to buy honey. You didn't know him, did you?"

"No—no. Damn you, how should I know an Indian?" Maxwell snarled.

Delaine looked at him in silence. The boy, with an evident effort to control himself, went to the cupboard and took a long drink of honey brandy.

"I think I'll beat it out of this, Burns," he said, quite calmly. "I'll get you to run me down to Ormond in your canoe. We could start right away, couldn't we? Inside an hour?"

"You must be crazy!" said Delaine. "It's getting near sundown, and the river's dangerous. I wouldn't try to run down any unknown water after dark. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing's the matter," said the boy, still with the same hard calm. "I'll just tell you that I've got to beat it out of here damn quick. I'll pay you for your canoe if it's smashed, and I'll pay you one hundred dollars to land me in Ormond before morning. If we did get wrecked, we could go ahead on foot."

"We'd never make Ormond at all. I won't take any money to attempt such a thing. If you're determined to go, I'll start with you as soon as it's light in the morning."

Maxwell argued in vain, and at last sullenly acquiesced. He filled his tumbler again with honey brandy and sat brooding and silent. Delaine did not question him further. All that he needed to know was plain. Maxwell certainly knew the Indian, and for some reason, feared him. There was a feud of some sort; in view of the young man's conversation, it might be a matter of rum running.

Delaine did not care what it was, but he felt that the turn of things might be not so bad. He had an intuition that Maxwell would never come back if he departed. The bee ranch might remain in his hands after all.

Maxwell ate little at supper, but drank a good deal. He hung about uneasily while Delaine packed supplies for the next morning's journey. He became flushed and more confident and talkative, but he did not make a single reference to the Indian or to the cause of his nervousness.

He was far from drunk, but he moved a little unsteadily, when he finally went

to the front room and brought out his club bag.

"Isn't there a safe corner to hide this thing overnight?" he inquired. "Down in the wine cellar, maybe?"

"Afraid of burglars?" asked Delaine ironically. "What's in it?"

"I'll show you what's in it!" Maxwell cried impulsively. He opened the valise, rummaged out a suit of silk pajamas, several shirts and collars, brushes and combs, and finally, from the bottom, a square package like a cigar box, done up in brown paper.

"Just to show you that I trust you!" he said, with a nervous laugh, and untied the wrapper.

Inside was really a book, a solid volume like a family Bible, bound in brown leather, and wrapped around and across with a fine steel chain secured with a small padlock. On the leather back, Delaine read the title, "The Book of Revelations."

"The sacred book of my church," Maxwell said. "It mustn't fall into the hands of the profane."

Delaine looked at him in amazement, concluding that he was either crazy or drunk.

"No, I want to put it in a safe place till we start," said Maxwell, quite soberly. "If anything should happen to me, don't let anybody get hold of it—unless it should be my Aunt Phil. Did you never hear of the Revelationists of Slovak River?"

"Never," said Delaine.

"You can't be a Canadian. All Canada knows about them. A big migration of them came over from Slovakia fifty years or so ago, and took up government land west of Ottawa. There isn't much good land there, but they found a few thousand acres, and cleared it and made the desert blossom like the rose. Now they have a big community, immensely prosperous, everything neat, stone houses and stone barns like a bit of Europe. I was brought up there. But I escaped young.

"Nothing eccentric about them except their religion, and that's queer only on one point. They think that revelation

is still going on through the true church; of course they're it. The chief elder is the medium. At the quarterly meetings, he goes into a trance and speaks with tongues, as they call it. Sometimes it's pure gibberish, and sometimes it's hard sense; but a stenographer takes it all down, and it's printed in a book. They've got about twenty volumes of these revelations. This is one of the latest."

"What are they about?" asked Delaine, interested.

"Everything on earth. Farming, morals, politics, business, beliefs. A few years ago the community almost wrecked on a rock. You'd never guess what it was. Playing the Winnipeg wheat market on the revealed tips! They're all grain growers, and some of the young fellows got the idea that there were indications of market future conditions in the elder's revelations. It got so bad that the church had to threaten to excommunicate them; but I expect some of the game's still going on."

Maxwell paused and laughed heartily. He drank again, and observed Delaine's face.

"Otherwise they're a good, solid community. They've got good schools. They've even got a college, mostly for training men for their ministry. But it has a scientific department—that's not bad. I suppose you've never heard of Bracka—Professor Paul Bracka?"

The name seemed dimly familiar to Delaine, but he could not place it for the life of him.

"Several years ago, one of the Revelationists went north into the mining country, and made a fortune out of copper claims. But he always said that he'd have made a great deal more if he'd known something of metals and chemistry; so he endowed a department of physics and chemistry in the college. The community didn't want any chemistry, but it wouldn't refuse the gift, so they had a laboratory established, and looked around for a chemist to head it. It wasn't so easy. All the professors had to be Revelationists. Revelationist chemists aren't so common.

SOMEBODY thought of my Uncle Paul. He'd left the community young, gone to Montreal, backslidden and studied chemistry. He had a lectureship for a while, and then drifted away to some small American college where he was teaching chemistry. He was a brilliant chemist, but erratic and lazy and he couldn't teach, and the job in the home college just suited him. There never were more than two or three students in the class, and he had all his time to potter around on researches of his own. As for being a Revelationist, that didn't faze him at all. He'd have been anything. All he cared about was chemistry. He was my father's brother, and——"

"Then your name can't be Maxwell," Delaine incautiously interrupted.

The young man looked at him angrily.

"It's Maxwell Bracka. What the hell difference does it make to you?" he snarled.

"Nothing. Sorry. Go on," Delaine apologized.

"Well—that's all!" Maxwell—or Bracka—growled. He had turned silent and sullen again. He sat lowering for five minutes.

"We'd better turn in if we're starting at daylight," he said sourly, at last. "Here, I've got to hide this book underground somewhere."

Humoring him, Delaine carried the chain-bound volume of revelations down into the cellar hollow that Duggan had made to hold his wine, and buried it lightly in the sandy earth of the floor. Maxwell watched the proceeding closely, seemed satisfied, and went to bed with hardly another word.

Delaine was left to ponder the grotesque story he had heard. It was not at all incredible; there were plenty of such queer communities of foreign origin. But what this one could have to do with the bee ranch, with the Indian, with young Bracka's panic, was more than he could begin to imagine. Perhaps it had nothing to do with it; perhaps the story was a mere product of honey brandy. Probably he would never find out.

He did not ponder over it long. He



had more urgent affairs of his own to occupy him. He would take Bracka down to Ormond, and he did not believe he would ever hear of him again. Probably the bees would be left in his possession.

The thought of even such civilization as Ormond represented rather intimidated Delaine, after weeks of the wilderness. He had been negligent about his appearance. His face was covered with an inch or two of dark beard, and he clipped and shaved it off carefully that night, and got out a clean flannel shirt. The changed face that he saw in the shaving glass rather surprised him.

He slept ill, perhaps infected by Bracka's panic. Once he awoke sharply, imagining he had heard a sharp, jarring noise. But all the house was quiet, and all was pitchy dark outdoors. Only as he looked from the window, he thought he saw a sudden, momentary, brilliant-white flash in the coves by the lake.

It did not reappear, though he watched for some time, and he believed it must have been imagination. It was late when he began to sleep soundly, and he awakened just in the first gray of dawn.

He jumped up, called Bracka through the door, and dressed quickly. He lighted the fire and put on the kettle, and then, remembering his vision of the night, ran down to the shore.

His canoe had been left there, bottom upward on the beach. It was still there, but there was a jagged hole in the bottom, six inches across, smashed with a sharp rock or a hatchet.

"Damnation!" he muttered, struck for the first time with a sense of mysterious fear. Then, on the sandy beach, he saw the clear print of moccasined feet.

He trailed them along the shore, but within twenty yards they turned inland, over hard ground, and became lost. He went back to the wrecked canoe, and found Bracka stooping over it.

"Can't go to Ormond to-day."

Bracka gave him a startled, questioning, perplexed glance.

"You've changed your face!" he ejaculated, and then: "Can't you repair the canoe?"

"I don't know. Perhaps, if there's any canvas or patching material here. But it'll take a day or two."

"We'll have to start on foot, then," said the boy, with decision.

"In those shoes?" retorted Delaine, pointing to Bracka's dainty Oxfords. "You'd be barefoot in ten miles. I'd be lost about the same time. There's no trail that I know. It can't be done."

Bracka threw up his hands with a gesture of absolute despair.

"I'll try to hurry it up. I might get the thing patched in a sort of way this forenoon," said Delaine. "Let's have breakfast, and we'll do what we can."

Bracka, seeming entirely unnerved, followed him in silence to the cabin. Delaine got out the coffee, the bacon and the frying pan. He had a dozen questions to ask, but he hesitated to ask them. He was infected with Bracka's fear now, and as anxious to get away as the boy himself.

Bracka sat watching him narrowly, still with that searching and perplexed stare. He jumped to his feet suddenly.

"Jim Delaine!" he shouted.

Delaine was so startled that he dropped the frying pan with a clatter. The hot grease spilled sizzling on the stove. Bracka leaped toward him, catching him by the shoulder with a grip that was almost an embrace.

"I knew I knew you!" he was crying wildly. "Oh, what a lucky streak! What blazing, blinding luck!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PINKISH POWDER.

I COULDN'T p-place you at first!"

Bracka cried incoherently. "I knew I'd seen you. I never forget a face. I knew your name wasn't Burns. I saw your initials 'J. L. D.' on that painting box of yours. It wasn't till you'd shaved that I spotted you. Your picture was in all the Montreal papers, and I'd seen you there besides. You were in the Meteor Colors fraud. You were old Lajoie's chemist."

Delaine was struck cold with terror. He opened his lips to deny, but it was

plain that Bracka was unshakable in his identification.

"Well—what about it?" he demanded coldly, on the defensive.

"Everything. Couldn't have turned out better if we'd planned it all. It's the greatest piece of luck for us both. Do you want to make a lot of money—a hell of a lot?"

"Nothing would suit me better," said Delaine suspiciously.

"You don't mind breaking the law again?"

"What sort of law?"

"Any old law. Never mind the law. You're up against it anyhow. I know all about your case. I knew old Lajoie—the oldest gambler in Quebec—pyramiding when he won and doubling when he lost. I could have told you there was a smash coming. You were the wise guy to beat it when you did."

"Have they been tried? How did it end?" Delaine asked eagerly.

"Sure they've been tried." Bracka halted for a moment and thought. "They got stiff sentences, I remember. Lajoie was sent down for five years, I think, and the directors for two or three years apiece."

Again Delaine had an icy shock. It was worse than he had feared. This was what he had escaped by a bit of luck and the skin of his teeth.

"But never mind that!" Bracka was crying excitedly. "You're all right. Nobody'd find you in these woods. And wait! Just listen to what I've got to tell you. It's both our fortunes, Delaine. Big money! You remember what I told you about the Revelationists?"

Delaine nodded, confused, scared and puzzled. Bracka burst into noisy laughter, and moved toward the jug of mead.

"Don't take that stuff on an empty stomach!" Delaine checked him. "Drink some coffee. Keep sober, and tell me what you mean. What's that Indian got to do with it?"

"The Indian? Oh, we'll manage him, if you stick by me. Then it'll be all in our own hands. You see—Fetch up that revelation book again and I'll show you."

Delaine descended into the cellar and brought up the book. Bracka unlocked it, and opened the pages. A ten-dollar bill fluttered out, then another.

"I'm going to give you back the hundred Duggan took off you. What's a hundred? It'll be hundreds of thousands—what I'm going to show you. Look here!"

He turned back about a quarter of the pages, revealing that the heart of the book had been cut out. A piece four inches square had been clipped from each of several hundred pages, leaving a boxlike cavity. Delaine had become so infected with the boy's excitement that he gaped with expectation of seeing—he knew not what treasures. But there was nothing but a rather crumpled roll of papers, scrawled with writing, apparently rolled around something solid.

They were irregular sheets of white paper, scraps of note paper, all written and scribbled over in a fine hand, sometimes with pen, sometimes with pencil. Delaine saw figures, letters, mathematical symbols, stray sentences, formulas, and he recognized the running notes that a laboratory worker keeps in his researches, usually in a sort of personal shorthand, and which he is frequently unable to decipher himself afterward.

Bracka unrolled the papers, revealing at their core a small bottle of blue glass.

"You're a chemist. What do you make of that?"

Delaine uncorked the bottle. It was nearly full of a flaky, slightly pinkish powder. He shook a little out in his hand.

"It might be any of a hundred things," he said. "I can't analyze it. You'll have to tell me."

"Taste it."

"What do you take me for? Taste it yourself."

WITHOUT hesitating, Bracka wetted his finger, put it to the pinkish stuff, and licked it off. Delaine then ventured to imitate him. He cast a sharp, surprised glance at the boy. The acid, bitterish flavor was familiar enough—and yet—

Delaine dropped a little in a saucer of water. It hardly melted. Pouring out a small quantity of Duggan's honey brandy, almost pure alcohol, he found the powder dissolved readily.

"I don't know," he said. "I'd guess it was pure morphia alkaloid, or some such opium product. But its color is wrong, and there's something about the taste that isn't just——"

"You're a chemist, all right," Bracka interrupted eagerly. "You're right, and you're not. It is morphine, and it isn't. It never came from any poppy. And yet it's the same thing as morphine, or so close that no dope fiend could ever tell any difference."

Delaine looked at him incredulously.

"What! You mean an artificial morphia—a synthetic product? There's no such thing."

"But you've got it in your hand. Strong stuff, too—much stronger than the regular morphine sulphate."

This was true. From the mere pinch he had absorbed, Delaine was conscious of a faint, tingling stimulus throughout his nerves.

"What is the stuff, really, then? What's it made of?" he demanded.

Bracka looked at him and hesitated, doubted, then decided.

"Bloodroot," he said.

Delaine had an instant memory of that heap of dried bloodroot in the storehouse. Bloodroot! What was its scientific name—Sanguinaria? He searched his memory for its chemical properties, and remembered. It was possible!

"Yes, I know," he said thoughtfully.

"The alkaloids of the Sanguinaria are very similar to those of the poppy. Practically the same thing, indeed. But there's one fatal difference. All the preparations of sanguarine are deadly poisonous. They couldn't be taken in any but the smallest doses."

"And that's just the point!" Bracka cried. "This powder here is morphine made from Sanguinaria, and yet it isn't poisonous. We've both been tasting it."

"Well, go on and tell me," said Delaine. "I give it up."

Bracka went to the stove and refilled

his coffee cup. Neither of them had eaten anything. He took a gulp of the black coffee, and spoke in an undertone, as if afraid of being overheard.

"Did you ever hear of 'Lockie' McKill?"

"Never."

"A chink?"

"A Chinaman? With a name like that?"

"They say it was his father's name. He's only half Chinese. His father was a Scotch drifter on the Pacific coast, and his mother was a Chinese woman in Seattle. That's the story. Lockie must have been a bright kid. He learned the drug-store business somehow and got a little knowledge of chemistry. He came to Montreal several years ago. He's got a shop there now—not a drug store—a little factory where they put up essences and fruit extracts, and such stuff. I've been working with him for two years."

"In the fruit-extract business?"

Bracka halted for some time again.

"Don't tell me any more than you like. I don't want to hear any criminal secrets," said Delaine hastily, oppressed already with what he felt coming.

"No—no—it's your secret, too. I'll tell you, all right."

His voice dropped lower still, and took a new and rougher accent, an echo from a different world.

"I'll give you the straight stuff, kid. I expect you know that Montreal is a center now for the dope trade. Lockie is in one of the biggest rings in America. Not that he's the top. There's big guys higher up that we don't know anything about. But I guess he's the chief in his own department. You see, he handles the stuff under cover of his factory. We get it in mostly from Europe, some of it by way of Havana, and some of it on the rum ships—all sorts of ways. We send it out from Montreal to Toronto and Detroit and Chicago, everywhere West."

"Are you talking about dope peddling!" cried Delaine, in disgust.

"Say, now, you don't think that a man like Lockie McKill would peddle dope, do you?" said Bracka compassionately.

"He's a way-up guy—goes in the best society in Montreal—passes everywhere for a white man. It's all wholesale trade, don't you see?"

"Well, somebody's peddling this new dope for you," Delaine returned.

"No, not yet. There hasn't been over eight ounces of it made. But the Canadian Mounted Police are getting far too damn sharp, and besides the European prices have gone way out of sight. What with seizures and the police grafters and commissions and losses every way you turn, there's getting to be hardly anything in the import business any more. Maybe a measly two or three hundred per cent—not near enough to cover the risks."

"But this artificial drug—what about that?"

"Lockie and Uncle Paul—Professor Bracka—worked it out between them. Uncle Paul did most of it, of course. Lockie didn't know enough chemistry. You see, Uncle Paul had done work for us before."

"At the Revelationist College?"

"Sure. It was just the place. Plenty of time, and nobody to bother what was going on in the laboratory. He was working at this job all winter. He found that the extract of bloodroot was the same thing as poppy juice, just as you say, but the stuff was deadly, a sure killer. You're right about that, too. Lockie croaked a chink with it, trying it out in Montreal."

"They tried every way to refine the poison out of it and leave the hop stuff, but it was only this spring that Uncle Paul hit on the process. And even then it was too expensive, cost nearly as much as to import the stuff. But just lately we've found out how to do it cheap. Yes, we can make that bloodroot dope, just as good as the genuine, for around fifty cents a pound, maybe less."

"Is this the process?" inquired Delaine, reaching for the roll of paper.

Bracka deftly pulled it out of reach.

"Wait a bit. Yes, that's the process, all right, if you can read it. I can't. Neither can Lockie. We can't make head nor tail of it."

"But why don't you leave it to your uncle, since he's making it?"

"Uncle Paul died this spring of quick pneumonia. These are all the notes of his work," returned Bracka.

Delaine realized the humor of the situation, and laughed in spite of himself.

"So you've got the directions for a million-dollar crime, and can't read them!" he exclaimed. "I take it that you want me to take your chemist's place. But," he added, "where does your partner the Scotch-Chinaman come into this? How do you come to have all the documents? Did you steal them? Oh, I see it now!" The explanation of the boy's fears had dawned upon him.

"Just about that," Bracka admitted. "Lockie didn't have any more right to the notes than I had. Professor Bracka was my uncle. Lockie couldn't read them, anyway. And besides," he went on eagerly, "I'll tell you this—even if Lockie knew the whole thing, he couldn't make the stuff, not without—without — Well, what I can give him."

"You think your partner won't get you first?" Delaine inquired.

"Not if you stick with me. I made a bad get-away. I was spotted taking the train. I had an idea that one of Lockie's gang had got aboard with me, too, and I was afraid to go on to Bruce Hill. It was another streak of luck that made the train stop that night beyond the bridge at the old pulpwood station. I guess she really did have a hot box. Anyway, I slipped out in the dark and beat it down the track. I figured that I could get down to Duggan's place somehow. I'd been here before, only this spring."

"I wish you'd never seen it!" said Delaine angrily.

He did not know what to think of Bracka's story. It was incredible on the face of it, though the young fellow had all the air of sincerity. But the idea of accepting this grotesquely criminal proposal never once occurred to Delaine. Dealing in opium had always seemed to him the lowest, most venomous, most contemptible of all iniquities, and the drug seller was worse than the addict.

Bracka cast a suddenly clouding

glance at him, and the joyful confidence of his face darkened. His hand went halfway up beneath his coat; then he smiled with a rather forced grimace.

"You wouldn't think of turning such a thing down, would you?" he asked. "You can't afford to do that. And you're up against the police now, you know."

Delaine said nothing. The boy got up and refilled his cup with hot coffee. Standing by the stove, he sipped it, looking out through the wire-screened door, casting quick, surreptitious glances at Delaine.

With a jerk, Bracka stiffened to sudden attention, looking through the door. The cup dropped from his hands upon the hot stove. A dense cloud of steam hissed up. Delaine heard nothing but the smash and the hissing, but Bracka spun round as if he had been struck, and tumbled over with a crash, crimson streaming from him.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SUSPENSE.

DELAINE stared one moment in paralysis of horror, hardly believing his eyes. Then he sprang to Bracka and leaned over him, seeing him streaming with crimson and apparently dead. The next instant something came through the screen door with a tingling "whist—whack!" into the wall beside him.

He knew what that was. Wheeling sharply, he thought he saw a sort of shadow flit from a clump of cedars fifty feet from the door. Too dazed with excitement to realize his risk, he seized the double-barreled shotgun from its corner and dived out into the open.

Nothing met him. He plunged into the cedars and found them undisturbed. But something sharp came under his foot, and, looking down, he saw a couple of brass cartridge cases.

Beyond him were scattered clumps of small cedar and pine, merging gradually into unbroken, scrubby evergreen jungle. It was a perfect ambush, impenetrable to the eye. He stood irresolute for a minute, then started forward. He had just reached the next thicket when, without

any audible report, something went past his head with the zip and tingle of a lightning crack.

He dropped flat on his face without meaning to. For several minutes he dared not raise his head and scarcely breathed. Then he ventured to look up, finally to creep forward a little into closer cover.

Here he lay still for five minutes. He was about to crawl forward again, when something stirred dimly behind a screen of hemlocks a hundred feet away, and a man stood up, holding a rifle and leaning forward to peer.

Delaine instantly let fly one of his barrels, loaded with buckshot, hurried and overexcited. He thought he recognized the Indian by his dress. The gun seemed to fly out of the man's hand. He staggered, and then bolted.

Delaine took another flying shot at the man as he disappeared, then rushed after him, forgetting that his gun was empty. He saw the rifle lying on the pine needles; he almost reached it, when another bullet zipped sharply through the twigs, coming from a different direction, and this time with an audible report.

Delaine dropped again. He remembered now that he had no more shells with him. Reaching cautiously forward, he secured the abandoned rifle. It was a high-power, small-caliber weapon, with a curious tube affixed to the muzzle. He knew now why he had heard no reports. The rifle was equipped with a silencer.

He pulled back the bolt uncertainly, hardly knowing how it worked. There seemed to be more cartridges in the magazine, and he lay still, listening, peering, hearing nothing.

Nothing stirred in the blue-gray, sunny hemlocks. All at once Delaine remembered Bracka, lying wounded in the cabin. He had entirely forgotten the boy for several minutes. And the book was open there on the table. Certainly that was what the assassins were after.

He crawled backward hurriedly. Behind a dense thicket, he ventured to rise. Nobody shot at him. Stooping low, and carrying both guns, he dived through the

copses, bolted across the open space and reached the cabin.

"The Book of Revelations" lay there undisturbed. Bracka also lay where he had fallen, his face a mask of crimson. Delaine thought him certainly dead, but he groaned faintly, and had a perceptible pulse.

He appeared to have been shot almost to pieces. Apparently he was hit in the head; there was a hole clear through his right shoulder, another in the upper arm, and still another in his thigh. It seemed impossible that he could live more than a few minutes.

Nevertheless, Delaine fetched a bucket of water. Sponging off the head, he found the wound was no more than a round hole through the upper part of his ear. Encouraged, Delaine got the boy's outer clothing off by cutting and unbuttoning, and managed to get him into the bunk. He had an emergency surgical kit in his dunnage, and he tore up Bracka's pajamas and all the shirts he could find for bandages.

The wounds were not so bad after all. They had been made by small, high-velocity steel bullets that had gone clear through, leaving small perforations. The wound in the thigh was a mere scratch. There had been a great shock, but the wounds did not look mortal.

Bracka half recovered consciousness at the sting of the iodine that Delaine poured in lavishly, and then lapsed back into a stupor. After applying sterilized cotton and bandaging him up, Delaine knew nothing else to do. The nearest doctor was thirty or forty miles away; Delaine could not leave the patient; besides, his canoe was wrecked.

HE drank some of the honey brandy, feeling that he needed it. It gave him strength to clean up the floor. Then he forced himself to swallow a little of the cold bacon and flapjacks of the neglected breakfast. He felt stunned and dizzy with the infernal suddenness and vehemence of the thing—Bracka's outbreak of criminal confidences, and then the swift, silent attack.

"The Book of Revelations" still lay on

the table—the root of the whole evil. He looked at it with horror; at that moment he had no curiosity to examine it; and he thrust it away on the shelf in the corner and covered it with a cloth.

He was certain now that this forest killer, who had a flash light, a silenced rifle and a city hair cut, was no Indian. It might be a Chinaman; many Chinese faces approximate the Indian type. It might be even the redoubtable Lockie McKill himself.

The probable drama reconstructed itself in Delaine's mind. Bracka had robbed his gang; he had received swift retribution. But had the ambushed rifleman shot with surprising clumsiness or amazing skill? Had he tried to kill, or only to wound, to punish?

Delaine glanced again toward "The Book of Revelations." This was what had drawn the danger. There would be no safety while this was in the cabin. There would be no safety for him, either, while Bracka lived, who had spotted him and knew his record.

Delaine had a horrible sense of being trapped, of being cornered. Bracka was tossing and moaning, half conscious; and he could have wished that the boy had been shot dead.

Delaine sat down to smoke, his shotgun handy, keeping an eye on the door and window. The sun grew high and hot; the bees hummed over the cabin. After a couple of hours, Bracka seemed to come to himself, and Delaine gave him a spoonful of honey brandy.

"Got me—didn't they?" the boy muttered. "Where's the—the book?"

"It's safe," Delaine reassured him. "Don't talk."

Bracka shut his eyes, seemed to doze fitfully, awoke, groaned and dozed, weakly tossing about in pain. Toward noon, he awakened again.

"Can't stand any more of this," he said, with some animation. "Too much pain. Can't you get me some of that dope stuff—out of the book?"

Delaine had not thought of this narcotic, but he got out the book and opened the blue vial. He doubted the contents. He did not know what the stuff was; he

had no idea what might be a sedative dose. However, he took out a little on a knife blade, dissolved it in honey spirit, and administered it.

With intense interest he watched for the effects. Within a few minutes, Bracka seemed easier. He grew drowsy, and Delaine noted that his eyes showed the contraction of the pupils characteristic of morphia. He murmured faintly.

"That's the stuff—the sure pain killer. Put it away safe. We'll do that gang yet, you and me. No chinks—no maiden aunts—just you an' me—D'laine—Heaps of money—hell of a lot—"

He went to sleep muttering, and seemed to sleep deeply. Delaine looked at the bottle; the stuff certainly acted like morphia. He looked again at the bundle of scribbled papers, and took them out.

It was immediately plain that they were a chemist's laboratory notes, and Delaine knew by experience how indecipherable these are apt to be, even by the maker himself. There were eighteen sheets, written rather neatly, in a sharp, small hand. The beginning was not hard to read. He noted the frequent occurrence of the formula  $C_{20}H_{16}N_2O_4$ —a complicated substance which he felt almost sure of being sanguarine, the chief alkaloid of bloodroot.

It bore out Bracka's story, and the resulting processes he could partly read and partly guess at. The alkaloid had been extracted from the vegetable by much the usual method, he thought, mixed with something that he could not identify, purified and distilled off.

GROWING interested, he tried to pursue it further, but the work grew more intricate, and the notes much less neatly written. Delaine conceived a high respect for Professor Bracka as a scientist, as he puzzled over these pages of intensely complicated symbols and equations. It was no wonder that an amateur like McKill could not make sense of them. Besides, Delaine doubted if the sheets were arranged in proper order. There was no paging; and different experiments seemed to have flowed to-

gether. Unsuccessful attempts were crossed off with impatient pencil strokes, and stains of chemicals and burns of cigarette stubs disfigured the sheets.

There was no use in trying to decipher those illegible, condensed, complicated records without plenty of time and a chemical library at hand. Yet Delaine had grown too interested in the mysterious process now to give it up. If Max Bracka's story had any truth in it, this was not a secret to be left with its present possessors; it was rather a secret for the police.

He thought of trying to copy the sheets, for future reference and study. But it would be too difficult, too uncertain. An error in a single one of those tiny figures might vitiate the whole result, and with the erasures and interpolations, added notes and crosscut lines, a clear copy was almost an impossibility.

He thought of his camera. He had hardly used it at all. It was an excellent instrument, taking four-by-five films, and he had plenty of rolls. He cast a glance at Bracka, who appeared to sleep soundly, got out his camera and carried the written sheets outdoors, to the north side of the cabin.

Here he pinned the pages on a bit of board in a steady light and photographed them one by one, using a small aperture and a rather long exposure. He numbered the films to correspond with what he thought the correct order of the sheets; he wrapped up the three rolls of exposures carefully, and hid them in the honey storehouse. Some day, he knew not when, he would have them developed.

He returned the sheets to the book, feeling rather like a thief. Bracka still slept deeply. Delaine looked again at the blue vial, poured out about an ounce of the flaky, pinkish contents, wrapped it up, and corked it up in an empty brass shotgun shell. If he ever had the proper facilities, he wanted to examine and analyze that sample.

He replaced the notes and bottle in their secret receptacle and closed the book. He noticed that there was still a considerable number of bank notes

among the leaves, but he did not disturb them; and he placed the book again under a litter of papers and burlap rags on the corner shelf.

Bracka remained quiet under the opiate, hardly stirring till sunset. Then he awakened, complained of thirst and seemed feverish. Delaine feared that the drug had done him no good. But he lapsed into semiconsciousness for two or three hours more, and then complained again of thirst and pain. His pulse was irregular. He asked for more of the drug, but Delaine refused.

"Guess I'm going to croak," the boy muttered.

"Not a bit of danger!" Delaine tried to encourage him. "You'll be better in the morning."

But he felt doubtful about it. He wondered if the boy had any family, any relatives. He had muttered something of a "maiden aunt."

"Have you got friends in Montreal, Max?" he asked, giving him more water. "Any relatives? I'd better know who they are."

"No—nobody," said Bracka dully. He moved his head feverishly from side to side. "No friends. Only just my aunt."

"Who is she? What's her name?"

"Aunt Phil. In Montreal. A school-teacher. No! no!" he added, with a little energy. "Don't let Aunt Phil hear about this. She's had trouble enough with me."

He shut his eyes resolutely and said no more. After half an hour, he appeared asleep, but Delaine had no intention of going to bed. He turned the lamp low, settled himself as comfortably as possible in a chair, with the shotgun and Bracka's automatic at his elbow, and prepared for a watchful and anxious night.

OUTSIDE, everything was still, except for the occasional wilderness voices to which he had grown accustomed. Bracka turned, moaned, and was still again. Delaine ceased to be conscious of the dim light, of the silent room; he roused to attention several

times, and then they blurred out again; until all at once he became aware that he was cramped and stiff in his seat, that the lamp had burned out, and that pale daylight was filling the cabin.

Bracka lay quietly breathing. Nothing had disturbed the camp. Greatly relieved, Delaine proceeded to make coffee and prepare breakfast. The hot food braced his overstrung nerves, but he was still so on edge that when Bracka called faintly to him, he jumped violently, upsetting his chair.

The boy seemed better and in less pain. His wounds looked healthy and not much inflamed. He even wanted food, and Delaine made a little oatmeal gruel—the only thing in the camp that resembled invalid diet.

Taking his shotgun, Delaine reconnoitered the ground all about the cabin and bee yard. He found no tracks; he could not see that anybody had approached. Relieved, but still far from being at ease, he returned to the cabin, dressed Bracka's wounds, administered more gruel and sat down to kill time by reading the encyclopedia of beekeeping.

That day seemed to drag unendingly, but without any disturbance. Bracka slept and wakened irregularly, would not talk, but seemed improving; and in the afternoon Delaine, growing tired out and reckless of danger, lay down on his own bed and fell into a heavy sleep that lasted till nearly sunset.

He passed another anxious, half-wakeful night, but morning came in peace. Bracka was distinctly better, and from that time he continued to mend without a setback. The clean, tiny bullet holes closed rapidly, and the boy began to develop a healthy appetite. He refused gruel, and Delaine spent hours in looking for wild ducks and partridges to make broths. It was illegal, but the necessity knew no game laws.

As one day after another passed, he began to lose his dread of another mysterious attack. Apparently the assailants had left the vicinity, though if they were really connected with the opium ring, he could hardly believe that the incident was closed.



Bracka gave him no information and asked no questions. He spent most of his time in sleep or in a lethargy, regaining his strength. As he grew better still, he retained a heavy, brooding silence. His former gayety and talkativeness were gone, and he looked sidelong at Delaine with anxious, brooding eyes.

Once Delaine questioned him openly about the bloodroot morphia.

"Cut that out!" the boy growled. "I was drunk, I guess—said too much. Unless," he added, with a quick glance, "you want to get into the game after all."

"No, I certainly don't!" Delaine assured him. "I suppose you're not afraid that I'll give you away?"

"Give away what? You've got nothing. Just go to the police and tell them that a couple of guys have a way of making moonshine morphine, and see what a laugh they'll give you. Besides, nobody's making it yet. Lockie McKill's too smooth ever to get caught with the goods. No, I ain't afraid. Besides, I reckon you're too wise to get your throat cut for nothing."

Delaine did, in fact, feel too wise for that; but he would have given much if he had never heard these dangerous secrets. He promised himself that he would take Bracka and the book, down to Ormond and put him on the Montreal train as soon as the young fellow could possibly stand the journey. But it would be some time before this could be thought of.

Bracka continued to improve in health, though not in spirits. He grew able to sit up a little, to walk a little, to recline outside the door in the sunshine. It had turned burning dry and hot again. The bees were working eagerly in the spruce trees once more, and Delaine began to take a revived interest in the apiary while he waited on his companion's convalescence.

It was likely to be his apiary, after all, he thought. The long flow of sweet from the spruces had produced some tendency to swarm. Two swarms had gone off and been lost; he had captured and hived a third. He undertook to look

through the colonies again, to detect and check swarming symptoms, and give more storage room where it was needed.

Several colonies, he found, had filled up astonishingly with the dark honeydew, crystallizing already in the cells into a substance like brown sugar. The hive on scales had gained eight pounds since he had set the balance last. He carried out empty combs from the storehouse and put them on the heaviest colonies, wondering how this solid honeydew would ever be removed, for the honey extractor would not throw it out.

The bees roared in the air and about his head. While working over an open beehive, a man can hear nothing, partly from the incessant roar in his ears, and partly from the extreme concentration of attention that the operation demands. Delaine had heard no human sound, but, as he held a comb of brood in his hands to look at the developing larvæ, a voice spoke close beside him.

"Hello!" it said. "Are the bees making any honey?"

## CHAPTER X.

### TEMPTATION'S VOICE.

DELAINE almost dropped the comb with his violent start. Right at his elbow a man was standing, a young man, a white man, smoking a pipe and skillfully keeping a cloud of smoke around his head to repel the bees.

"You don't seem afraid of them!" ejaculated Delaine, in amazement.

"Not a bit. They don't sting me," returned the stranger.

Through the haze of smoke, Delaine saw a handsome, olive face, a long, thin mouth, black eyes that looked alive with intelligence. The man was dressed in conventional camper's garb of flannel shirt, Norfolk jacket, knickerbockers, a green tie, and a gray cap crushed over his eyes. He looked almost like an Italian. A quick glance toward the lake showed a canoe stranded at the landing, and two men disembarking dunnage.

"I yelled at you, but you were too busy to hear me," said the visitor, smiling at the bee man. "So I came over.

Go ahead with your work. I like to watch you."

"I've finished," said Delaine shortly. He stared hard at his visitor. Certainly he could not have identified the young man, yet he felt a moral conviction that he had seen him before. Like a cold shadow, the sense of peril crept over Delaine. He went to the workshop, emptied the hot smoker, and took off his protecting veil.

"You'll get stung if you stay here. We'd better——" He checked himself. It would not do to take this man to the cabin.

"Better go up to your house? All right," said the stranger. "I've just been there. Max told me where you were. Getting on all right, isn't he? I had a long talk with him."

"The devil you have!" Delaine exclaimed, again startled off his balance. Concealment was useless now. Heavily he felt that it would have been impossible all along; and he wished angrily that the newcomer would take Bracka away with him, anywhere, out of sight, and trouble him no more.

He led the way in silence to the cabin. Max Bracka was sitting up, in a cushioned seat, and he looked even paler than usual. He fixed his eyes on the visitor's face with much the terrified fascination of a rabbit that gazes into the snake's open jaws.

"A visitor, Max," said Delaine.

"Y-yes—I know," Bracka stuttered. "Delaine, meet my—my friend—Mr. Lockie McKill."

Delaine felt that he had known it all along. McKill put out a chilly, soft hand, smiling. Quite at ease, he then produced a silver cigarette case, offered it courteously, and lighted one to replace his pipe. Smoking, he gazed cheerfully about the kitchen, appearing to study Delaine's sketches on the wall with peculiar interest.

"How's things in Montreal, Lockie?" inquired Bracka, as if with a nervous desire to make conversation.

"Slow. Very little doing, so I thought I might as well take a little canoe trip. We came up from Ormond since morn-

ing. Hard paddling—river very low—had to pole a good way."

He turned to look directly at Delaine, with an unexpectedly brilliant smile.

"You know, this isn't the first time we've been in contact, Delaine," he said. "Spiritually, as I might say. It was in Frechette's gallery in Montreal—the picture dealer's."

Delaine was so surprised at this that for a moment he could hardly remember he had four pictures on exhibition in that dealer's art gallery.

"I nearly bought one of them," McKill went on. "It struck me greatly. Probably I'll end by buying it, after all."

"Do you mean that you're interested in pictures?" Delaine asked ironically.

"He's got a whole house full of them," Max put in.

"I come of an artistic race," said the half-caste, with pride. "I don't usually care much for this new school of painting; still, I'm always interested in the young men of promise. You've got more than the promise, Delaine. You'll do something—probably great things—if you keep going."

Delaine looked at him skeptically, scenting the gross odor of soft soap. Still smiling, McKill rose and walked to the nearest sketch on the wall. Cigarette in the corner of his mouth, he put his finger on the exact merits and defects of the picture with an unerring accuracy that left Delaine with an astounded and unwilling respect.

"Now, here," McKill went on to the next sketch. "Here's a bit of real painting, if you like. Just these two inches—the rest isn't worth much. But you had the inspiration there. Cézanne couldn't have done that better. It's like his touch and feeling."

**D**ELAINE was struck dumb. This half-caste drug smuggler did really know something about pictures—had a quite unique critical ability, in fact. That particular patch of paint was really what Delaine himself considered the best he had ever done. And Cézanne! How did McKill guess that the Frenchman was his greatest admiration?

"You think so?" he said, immensely impressed, and forgetting everything else in the interest of the subject.

"I'm sure of it. With the right sort of chance, you could do something else. You haven't had much regular training, have you? Maybe you're none the worse, and you've got a strong originality in the way you see things, and a sort of harsh freshness in the way you paint them. I don't know that you'd be popular; you haven't got enough sweet prettiness. What you need is just to paint, paint hard all the time, and never think of popularity. When you're thirty-five, the public will be coming to you."

"In other words, what I need is a large private income. I could have told you that," remarked Delaine ironically.

"Yes, I never knew a man who needed it worse. You ought to be shut up in a studio, thinking of nothing but paint. What the devil ever made you go in for chemistry? How the devil did you ever get mixed up in Lajoie's swindle? I know all about it."

He lighted another cigarette, and cocked his sleek head shrewdly at the painter.

"You think you're clear of that," Mc-Kill went on, "but you're not. That affair made a bad impression. The French business men in particular wanted an example made of Lajoie and his associates for the sake of their race, and they all got stiff sentences. Your other directors went down for two and three years. You'd have got that. You'll get worse if they catch you now. And it's only a matter of time. You were traced to where you left the railroad. It's known you're somewhere in these woods. The fire rangers are looking for you. Of course we won't give you away—but suppose somebody did!

"A year in prison is death to any man of imagination, any sensitive man, any artist. He never can be the same again. Something gets killed in him. It would be the end of you as a painter, Delaine. And even as a chemist—what positions could you get with that record?"

"I don't suppose you came here to advise me about my life," said Delaine,

trying to keep up his face against this prospect. "Nor to talk art either."

"Not exactly, but I didn't expect to find a genius here. What Max has told me put a different face on it. Max talked to you a good deal—said more than he had any authority for. Max had got bad-tempered—thought he'd break away from us. But he's had his lesson—haven't you, Max? He knows now that there's no use trying to buck our organization—don't you, Max? So it's all over, and we're good friends again."

"What Max proposed was out of the question," said Delaine bluntly.

"Now, listen to me, Jim Delaine," said Lockie, smooth as silk. "You thought Max was proposing something dangerous, something to make you an outlaw, a criminal. Nothing of the sort. What I'm proposing is, first of all, to make you a great painter, backed up with all the influence and capital you need. We've an organization that can't be touched. I don't even know myself who the heads are, but there are big brains, big money at the back of us. Short of sheer blundering, the police can never get near us. It's as safe as banking and far more profitable."

"What's all that got to do with painting?" Delaine demanded.

"Wait. As Max has told you, we've got the formula for a synthetic drug, practically the same as morphia, extracted from the common bloodroot—Sanguinaria. But you know all about sanguarine, of course. The main difficulty was to refine it clear of its poisonous elements. We found a process, but it was so expensive that our drug cost more than imported opium. Only lately we've learned how to produce it cheaply. We can do it now for practically nothing.

"And the profits! Why, even with the terrific price we once paid for European and Japanese morphia, and graft and the commissions to the peddlers—still we were able to make a few hundred per cent. With our new dope, we can clear a thousand, ten thousand per cent, any profit we like! All we need now is a good chemist. I don't know enough.

The process is intricate and tricky, and the man who discovered it is dead."

Delaine listened in horrified fascination and repulsion at once.

"You want me to manufacture your dope for you? Here, in this place?" he asked.

"Oh, no! Not that at all!" cried McKill, jumping up with the enthusiasm of his idea. "I said that our first point is to make you a successful painter. My plan would be to establish you in Chicago or Detroit. You'd have a big studio there, a swell studio, in a fashionable location; and you'd paint there, and you'd have to paint damn well, too, let me tell you.

"You'd give teas and exhibitions and musicales in your studio, and we can manage your introductions so that the best people in town would come to you. We can work it so that no one would ever know where or how the influence originated, but between society and the press we'd make you the fashion in that town. All your expenses would be paid for you, but it would be up to you to keep up your standing by your painting and by your personality.

"You'd be a photographic enthusiast, too, and back of your studio you'd have your dark room and your laboratory, where you'd be trying new developers and all that sort of thing. The concentrated sanguarine extract would be sent in to you, and the other materials, and you'd complete the process there. It would be taken away again in small quantities. You'd sell nothing. No money would pass. Nobody could suspect. You could have the chief of police and all the local clergy invited to your studio. It would be as safe as a church."

SO it would! Delaine thought, as the infernal cleverness of it all penetrated his mind. A painter's studio would be the best cover possible, better even than the Revelationist college. With some vogue and reputation, he might carry on such an illicit manufacture for years without arousing suspicion.

Temptation on the one side, fear on the other hit him stunningly at once. McKill was right; sooner or later he was bound to be captured, and then prison was a certainty. He would never be the same man again, after two years of that—McKill was right again. And on the other side—independence, wealth, influence.

He knew he could paint. A chance was all he needed. No doubt McKill exaggerated the power of his organization, but Delaine knew well that there was enormous influence and wealth behind these opium rings.

"I'd be arrested all the same. That Montreal warrant would get me," he muttered.

"Oh, no, it wouldn't. You're known to have gone into the woods, paddling a canoe, somewhere in this direction. Well, your canoe will be found with a hole in her, upside down at the foot of the rapid and your hat and your—your sketch box with your name on them will be floating in a pool, and you'll be judged dead. Then in six months you'll be forgotten, and with a changed name and a little disguise, say a beard, you'll be absolutely a new man. You haven't an obstacle in your path.

"You wouldn't be such a fool as to walk right into prison," the smooth voice continued. "Better be dead. If it ever comes to that point with me, I'll choose the big dark rather than the stone wall, you may be sure. We'll arrange your career for you, Delaine. You'll never have to think of money again. Of course you'll have to paint hard and paint well; you'll have to make a reputation. A cheap faker would be of no use to us. But I can trust you for that. You'll have plenty of time. Our work wouldn't take you a dozen hours a week. Any time you wanted to take three months off to go and see what was doing in New York or Paris, it would be all right. You'd get expenses paid. You simply do what we want, and we'll give you all that you want—within reason, of course."

Delaine made him a hasty gesture to stop. He didn't want to hear any more.

The prospect was too alluring, too plausible, and so nearly within his grasp.

"Let me have a little while to think it over," he said, with a dry tongue.

"Sure! Take all the time you want," said the half-caste heartily. "Take till to-morrow morning. Max and I start back for Ormond the first thing after breakfast."

## CHAPTER XI.

### DESTRUCTION THREATENED.

DELAINE wandered out of the cabin, mechanically lighting his pipe, his mind in a hot swirl of emotion. He found himself at the edge of the apiary, and sat down on an empty winter case. The bees were getting nothing. Guards crowded the entrances against thieves. Prison—he thought—or a life of wealth, ease, great painting, success.

It was not a case of two courses which could be coolly compared. The situation was purely emotional and moral, and no one but a struggling young artist could estimate the force of the temptation. He did not so much reflect as allow two streams of thought to flow alternately through his mind.

Down by the lake he heard McKill's canoemen singing. French Canadians they must be, and undoubtedly members of the "organization." McKill would not have come here with outsiders. Such men would be hired to gather bloodroot, perhaps, for the mysterious new process.

Enormous profits! They could flood the country with narcotics, not cheap to the consumer. From the secret laboratory in his elaborate Chicago studio would go out packages, pounds of the drug, to be passed on to the retailers who would probably adulterate it for increased profit, and then again to the peddlers themselves, white men, yellow men, foreigners, selling the poison in little paper "decks" to the addicts, the slaves who had to have it at any price.

But he would not see any of that. The dirty work would be kept far away from his studio.

He sat there in a stupor of dizzy uncertainty, barely hearing the hum of the bees, the voices by the lake, and the

snatches of song. Time passed without his consciousness. Prison—success!

For a long time, he sat quite motionless, torn on conflicting whirlwinds of desires and fears. He was vaguely aware that the bees were ceasing to fly, that the sun was low.

Suddenly a vision tore through his abstraction with the force of a hallucination. For an instant he actually saw flaming firelight on the lake water, and heard the singing; he saw vividly the profile of the girl in the russet jersey, standing close to him, her face clear and pure in the moonlight. She had shrunk away from him in fright and horror, as if she knew—

He roused, startled to knowledge of the suggestion of all this. One of the canoemen was going back from the cabin to the shore, crooning light-heartedly:

*"Jamais je ne t'oublierai!"*

Delaine just caught the words that had pierced into his rapt mind without his knowing that he heard them.

She had not seen him. He would never see her again, no matter how powerfully her image had impressed itself upon his memory. But Delaine found that his mind had suddenly crystallized.

It couldn't be done! Apart entirely from the moral aspect of the case, he realized that he could never make himself an artist under the proposed arrangement—not in the most sumptuous of studios, with the most unlimited wealth, so long as he had that devil's kitchen behind his work. Art work needs a clean, clear, free mind, above all things. He would become merely a faker, a pretender, always conscious that, if they knew, people would shrink away from him in fright, in horror.

IT couldn't be done, and if it could, he wouldn't do it. He couldn't. He had a feeling of relief at having reached a solution; then the thought of the Montreal prison flashed back upon him. No matter! He would have to go through with it. He hardly knew what had solidified his resolution, but he wondered now that he could ever have hesitated.

A distant shout reached him.

"Delaine! Delaine! A-hoo! Coo-ey! Grub!"

He walked slowly back to the cabin. Supper was spread and waiting. Bracka, still in his invalid seat, gave him a long, strange look of anxiety and interrogation, but did not speak.

Delaine had had to brace his nerve to meet McKill again, but the half-caste asked him no questions, did not refer to their late conversation, and devoted himself to the meal, at which he played host. Well he might, for it was such a meal as Delaine had not seen for a long time, composed of stores from McKill's canoe, cooked by his two Canadians. There was fresh beef from Ormond, tinned asparagus, boiled potatoes, a ripe-tomato salad, even cheese and an apple pie, and honey wine and honey brandy—drinks which McKill declined to touch.

The cellar had been opened to get the liquor, and Delaine espied Bracka's club bag on the floor, gaping open and partly packed. Within it, he caught a distinct glimpse of "The Book of Revelations," bound with its chain.

Evidently Delaine's theft from it had passed unnoticed, and he blessed the prudence that had caused him to conceal the films and the drug sample in an empty honey tin in the bee workshop.

McKill did not ask Delaine for his decision, and Delaine shrunk back from that burning subject. The half-caste chatted pleasantly through the meal, talking of Montreal, of the liquor-control system, of art, and touched again upon Delaine's painting. But Delaine was no longer interested in that subject.

He found it hard to make appropriate responses, and Bracka remained almost silent through the evening, smoking cigarettes incessantly, too many cigarettes for a convalescent. Under other circumstances, Delaine might have found McKill charming. He was a clever talker; he knew books as well as pictures; and he had plainly had a wide experience of men and cities. But Delaine was in no mood for agreeable drawing-room conversation. A dozen times he was almost impelled to exclaim:

"Let's get it over! I've no use for your proposition. What are you going to do about it?"

What would be the answer—persuasion, threats, immediate violence? Would he be allowed to refuse? Or would McKill take Bracka's view, that Delaine knew nothing definite enough to be a source of danger?

No, he would put off the crisis to the last moment. But suspense hung heavy over all of them that evening. Even McKill at last succumbed to it. He grew more silent, yawned and proposed that they turn in. Max would need a good rest for the trip to Ormond.

The guides brought up a sumptuous cot, with an air mattress and pillow, and set it up in the kitchen near Bracka's bunk. Delaine retired to the owl bed in the front room, took off his boots and lay down without undressing.

For a long time, he heard a mutter of low conversation through the closed door. His shotgun and the silenced rifle were both in the kitchen; Bracka's automatic was probably there, too. Delaine could not remember where he had laid it.

But he was not much afraid of violence for that night. The light finally went out in the kitchen; the talking ceased. He tried to sleep, dozed a moment, then started awake, in a high nervous tension.

THE cabin was silent. Misty moonlight filled the outdoors. He heard the chattering cry of a loon far down the lake. The idea of escape came to him; but he would have to pass through the kitchen to get out of the cabin, and even if he managed this, his canoe lay right beside the camp of McKill's men.

He should have tried to break away before dark. He marveled that he had hesitated about the dope ring's offer. He had lost his chance. Now he would have to face it out.

He dozed fitfully and wakened again. Through those depressing hours between midnight and three o'clock, he lay feverishly awake, seeing nothing but unescapable dangers on every side, till at last it

came to seem to him that there was nothing to choose between the Montreal prison and a revolver shot from McKill, and he did not much care which he encountered. He felt exhausted to the pitch of total indifference, and he fell asleep at last and slept heavily.

A thundering at the door aroused him. He leaped up in a dazed panic. But it was only McKill, calling him to breakfast. It was late, and the sun was already coming through the window.

Hurrying on his boots, Delaine went out. Bracka and McKill were already sitting down to the table, where there was fried bacon and real eggs that scented the kitchen deliciously.

Delaine forced down a meal for which he had little appetite, the conventional bacon and eggs, he recollected, of a man about to be hanged. McKill's bed was already folded and packed, and Bracka was freshly dressed, partly in his old garments and partly in new ones that McKill must have furnished.

The half-caste finished eating, and took out his cigarette case.

"Well?" he asked. "You've had a night to think."

"Nothing doing," said Delaine, finding himself unexpectedly cool.

Bracka gave him a wild glance that seemed charged with appeal. The half-caste raised his eyebrows, in faint, well-bred surprise.

"I didn't think you could doubt," he said. "You wouldn't walk straight into the penitentiary, would you? Are there any changes in the arrangement that you'd prefer—anything we could do to improve it?"

"Nothing," returned Delaine. "It can't be done, that's all. I could never do any painting as you propose, on a foundation of all that dirty work. I'd be no good to you. I'd be nervous and anxious all the time. I'm not cut out for a criminal. Besides," he added, "your sort of crime seems to me particularly abominable and nasty."

McKill looked at him without any sort of expression, except that he seemed to Delaine to look more Chinese at that moment than ever before. Then he went

to the door to order his guides to pack quickly.

"Well, sorry you can't see your way to join us," he said, as indifferently as if it had been a question of a week-end invitation. "We must be off. Max'll have to have a long rest at noon."

"Is he—is he strong enough——" Delaine stammered, perfectly bewildered at the matter-of-fact way his decision had been received.

"He'll be better in Montreal than here. Of course you'll have to come with us."

"Me come with you? No!" Delaine cried.

"As far as Ormond. Yes, you must. We can't carry Max and all the dunnage and three other men in one canoe. You'll have to come. You can get back here to-morrow—if you're lucky. They've put your canoe in the water, and some of your stuff in her."

Delaine had put a rough canvas patch with balsam and tacks on his broken canoe bottom, and now he wished that he had not done it. He was afraid of that proposed trip to Ormond.

The two guides had come back to the cabin for the rest of the dunnage, and to help Bracka to the shore. The canoes were almost ready to go.

"Get your hat," said McKill. "Take along your painting box, too. You might see something to sketch. Be quick, now!" He put his arm through Delaine's. "Don't you see you've got to go?" he asked kindly. "My men will carry you, if necessary."

Protests were useless. Delaine found himself hustled down to the landing. The guides, with most of the outfit, took the first canoe and launched her. In Delaine's own canoe, they placed Bracka, reclining amidships, while McKill took the bow, and Delaine unwillingly took up the stern paddle.

Delaine had an impulse to overturn the canoe, or to creep forward and brain McKill from behind with a paddle. Either would have been insanity; he had to let himself be carried on the swift current of events. But he had to admit that McKill possessed nerve, for he sat dipping his paddle in the bow,

smoking his pipe, and never once glancing behind.

They dropped down to the foot of the lake, in the mild, early sunshine. This was easy paddling, but the river that they entered required more skill. The water was low, running fast, and a very heavily laden craft could hardly have got through. It was never necessary to portage, however, till they reached a point six or eight miles below the lake.

The leading canoe landed, and Delaine heard the roar of rushing water. Directly in front, the stream narrowed and ran like a mill race between huge rocks, then rushed foaming down a rock-staked rapid for a hundred yards. Below this, it broadened into a long, calm lagoon, bordered by a marsh of cat-tails and reeds and water lilies.

In high water, the rapid could have been navigated, and even now a light canoe could go through without too much risk. But the guides were already unloading the dunnage, and Delaine steered to shore beside them.

"We'll have to carry around here," said McKill, getting out. "Clear around that marsh, and Max'll have to be carried, too, I expect. But you can run the canoe through, and then come back for the carrying."

One of the guides got back into his now empty canoe, pushed off into the rapid, and shot through it with superb skill, skimming away into the placid lagoon at the bottom. McKill mounted one of the jutting rocks at the margin, looked after him, and then motioned Delaine to follow.

Delaine had run plenty of worse rapids, and he had no uneasiness. As he pushed off, the current caught him with a jerk. He shot past McKill at a distance of hardly six feet, and out of the corner of his eye he saw the half-caste heave forward, poising something heavy.

Delaine made a wild swerve as he saw the big lump of rock coming. It barely missed crashing through the bottom of the canoe, but hit the thwart hard. Between the swerve and the blow, the canoe

capsized like a flash, with hardly time for Delaine to catch breath.

## CHAPTER XII.

### UNDERWATER.

DELAINE made a grab at the canoe, but its slippery sides slid from him. Down and under he went, in the tearing current. He was shot half out of the water, caught breath, wrenched round and dashed against a rock, then whirled away from it.

He was blind with the spatter and spray. The strongest swimmer could not have steered any course; and how he went through that rock-strewn chute without having his brains dashed out, he never could comprehend.

It was like going through the wheels of a mill, and he knew nothing but the roaring and grinding, till, all at once, he found himself floating down on a slackening current.

He was half drowned, dizzy, bruised, incapable of making a stroke, but he caught a gasping breath or two, and then something brushed his head. He rolled sidewise into shadow, against something soft that halted him.

He caught at it instinctively. Green stalks were all about him, growing tall over his head. He thought he heard shouting above the noise of the rapid. In a panic, he crawled deeper into the green growth, squirming through a bed of soft mud.

As his brain cleared, he remembered and realized the attempted murder. Somehow, he knew not how, he had escaped alive—for the moment. The current had carried him into the reed-fringed lagoon, and he judged himself out of sight from the shore. But a canoe coming up the stream would sight him.

He pushed himself through a narrow channel made by muskrats, to get farther from the open water. All the marsh was crisscrossed with these water trails. He wormed through one and then another, squirming through mud and water like a rat, till he was a dozen yards from the stream proper.

Now he ventured to raise his head



for a look, and instantly ducked it again. The first canoe was coming slowly up the lagoon, with one of the guides aboard. Just below the rapid, it took on McKill, and came back, skirting the edge of the marsh. It turned again and came up the other side, and he could see McKill with a canoe pole, peering into the weeds and water, as if looking for a drifting body.

The canoe passed down out of sight, and then Delaine heard the rustle and crush of the craft being pushed through the reeds of the marsh. The growths would not hide him if they came this way. He snaked forward, looking for denser cover, and came into a little round pool so densely covered with water lilies that the whole surface was an unbroken sheet of green leaves.

Under the pads was a foot of water and soft mud. He slid forward and immersed himself, sinking into the cold, soft ooze, with his nose an inch above the surface under the stem of a big water lily.

He could see nothing, but he felt the vibration through the water as the canoe was forced through the flags and cattails, over the shallow bottom. McKill was probing the reeds with vicious jabs of the steel-shod pole. The waves rippled the lily leaves. It seemed to Delaine that the canoe slid almost over his legs, and certainly the pole missed his body by less than a foot.

THE wash of the canoe passed, growing fainter. It went almost up to the rapid, then came back, exploring the marsh thoroughly. Then for a long time there was silence. The ripples in the water smoothed out.

Raising his face just above the leaves, Delaine saw that they were portaging the dunnage around the marsh. The guides carried the loads, while McKill was assisting, supporting Bracka over the rough trail. Renewed hope came to Delaine. They must have given up searching. They planned to go on to Ormond.

But at the bottom of the lagoon, they lighted a fire and seemed to make camp.

Perhaps Bracka was exhausted and needed refreshment.

Some minutes later Delaine espied in a cautious peep that one of the guides had climbed into a tall, dead spruce, and was taking a wide bird's-eye view of the marsh.

He dived like a scared frog. A little later he heard a shout from the tree.

"Not a sign nowheres!"

This should have satisfied them, but they remained on the shore for nearly an hour, and then the canoe made another round of the lagoon. McKill was taking no chances. But this time it went back and took Bracka and the dunnage sacks aboard. It must have been a dangerously heavy load; as McKill had said, but it pushed off, diminished down the current between the dark, tangled evergreens, and vanished around the drooping cedars of a bend.

They were gone! Delaine mustered his last energies to wade through the mud and water to the shore. On the stony margin, he halted. He felt frozen and bruised all over, and he lay down flat in the sun, letting the delicious warmth penetrate his numbness, and went off into a dead sleep.

He lay there for an hour or two, and awakened wearily and slowly. The mud had caked all over him like armor. The sun had warmed him, but he still felt the chill of the deep ooze in his bones.

He got lamely to his feet. His right leg was very sore, and inspection showed a great, livid bruise on the thigh, where the rapid had banged him against a rock. Lesser bruises were everywhere. His chest, arms and shoulders were battered. One coat sleeve was torn nearly off. The back of his right hand was skinned. His head ached severely. All the same, he could not find that any bones were broken, and a few stiff experimental steps showed that he was capable of walking.

But where? His canoe was gone. Probably it had floated down the river, to be picked up later by McKill's party. He had only one possible destination. He thought of the bee cabin now with positive yearning, as a place of loneliness and peace and safety. It must be over ten

miles away; there was no trail; the rocky and tangled river bank was his only guide, yet he turned at once and began to limp up the shore.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### TREASURE-TROVE.

WITH a shock of horror, Delaine awoke, not knowing where he was. Pitch darkness was around him, broken only by a square of pale light. He rolled over, fell off the couch, and scrambled to his feet before he could recollect himself.

Then, still shaking with nervousness and fatigue, he groped for matches and made a light. It was the front room of the cabin. He had reached it just after sunset. It had taken him some eight hours to get back from the marsh, a frightful journey of floundering and scrambling through swamps and almost impenetrable undergrowths.

He found himself faint with hunger. When he arrived, he had been too exhausted to eat, too exhausted to think, and had tumbled upon the bed, boots, mud and all, and fallen instantly asleep.

His watch had stopped in the water, but he judged it past midnight. Aching in all his bones, he searched the kitchen for grub. He had no energy to light a fire, but he found some lumps of stale, hard bread and a tin of candied honey, and he devoured them ravenously, washing them down with honey wine. Then he took off his boots, lay down and slept heavily again.

When he awoke next, the sun was high and hot. He felt refreshed now and rested, but extremely stiff and sore. He lighted the stove and searched for food, uncertain what McKill had taken away with him. There was a small lump of bacon, plenty of flour, no coffee, but a little tea left, no tinned stuff, no sugar, but no end of honey. Out of these he extemporized a meal, and went out in the sun to smoke.

The weather had turned intensely hot again, and the heat was pleasant to him. He felt as if all the energy had been drained out of him by the emotional and

physical stresses of the last two days. All he desired was to lie in the sun, resting, dozing.

But the caked mud on his clothes and body irritated him so much that he presently mustered energy enough to go down to the lake, strip and bathe, and afterward wash his garments and spread them to dry. With some difficulty, he made up another suit out of odd clothing in his dunnage, thankful that his baggage had not started to Ormond.

Afterward he sat listlessly in the sun again, dry and warm now, but stiff and sore and enervated. What he would do next, he did not know, and had not the spirit to consider. All the firearms were gone. McKill had taken them. Delaine's canoe was gone. There was hardly food enough in the cabin for a week. But for that hour, the sunshine was enough.

In the heat, his clothes dried quickly. His coat and trousers were badly torn, and he got out needle and thread and mended them clumsily. Again he sat idly watching the flying bees. They were working on the spruce and pine trees again. That meant more honeydew; but honey or honeydew was indifferent to him.

He did not know how he would exist when his scanty grub supply was done. He still had fishing tackle, indeed. But it was not going to be safe to stay in this place, in any event. He would have to move on; his whereabouts were known now. But how could he move without a canoe?

Then he realized that he need not move, need not fear anything, for the present at any rate.

His canoe would be found capsized at the bottom of a rapid, just as the half-caste had said, and Delaine's hat and sketching box. McKill would undoubtedly report it in town. Delaine would be considered drowned. The search for him would be dropped, and that would be the legal end of the Meteor Colors chemist.

So McKill had schemed it as a piece of deception; and then he had tried to turn it into tragical earnest; and now

it had come back to a deception again, of which Delaine would get the benefit.

He spent nearly all that day in the sun, lost in a pleasant, dull languor. He wondered dimly if he could not keep the apiary; he was certain that Bracka was not its owner. He hated to leave the bees; but to remain there would probably be unsafe.

He grew very sleepy even before sunset. The next morning he felt greatly refreshed, more alert in mind, though his bruised leg was still so sore that he could only limp with pain.

He looked over the food supply more carefully. On the simplest possible scale, it might last him a week, with the addition of such fish as he could catch. He wondered if he could live on honey alone. It occurred to him that he might take off the honey crop and sell it, if he could get it out to a shipping point. There should be nearly one thousand dollars' worth of good honey in the bee yard, and he would need that money. All he had was the odd hundred dollars in his belt, and, being reckoned dead, he could never draw on his deposit in the Montreal bank.

THE morning was hot and dry, and the bees were working vigorously on the spruces, as they always seemed to do in such weather. The fireweed would soon be in bloom. He noticed several of the tall plants already showing their spikes of swelling buds. But he would not be there for the fireweed honey flow.

Putting on a bee veil, he lighted the smoker and pried into two or three colonies to estimate the crop. All the recent sweet that had been carried in seemed to be honeydew. Comb after comb was filled with the dark, worthless stuff.

There was perhaps a ton or so of pure white raspberry honey also, but most of it was so mixed with the honeydew that it would be hard to extract them separately.

Once more he thought how strange it was for this honeydew to solidify so quickly. It seemed to candy almost as soon as stored in the cells. He resolved

to look it up in the bee book, the "Beekeeper's Cyclopaedia," which provided information on every possible subject connected with apiculture.

He dug his hive tool into the honeydew and tasted it. It had a peculiar flavor, mixed with spruce resin, but not like any product of the beehive that he had ever tasted before. He had tasted honeydew in the States, but this Canadian stuff might be different.

The bees were humming in the spruce branches all around the apiary, and he went to the edge of the yard and watched them on a low bough. He had never examined any of the sweet-producing aphides, and he looked for them closely. He observed a bee as it nuzzled its head eagerly into the joints of the twigs, and he could plainly see its threadlike dark tongue licking something up. But he could not see any aphides, though they are large enough to be easily visible with the naked eye.

Instead of plant lice, he thought he perceived minute specks of shiny moisture. Growing more interested, he carried a broken twig to the cabin, where he had a pocket magnifier. The glass showed the shiny points to be thick, half-crystallized drops of a brownish, sirupy substance. There were no aphides on the twig at all.

It could not be ordinary honeydew. A faint recollection of old chemical experiences gave him a sudden start. He went back to the workshop and got down the "Beekeeper's Cyclopaedia."

There was a long article on "Honeydew," and he ran through it hastily. "A sweetish substance secreted by aphides upon the foliage and twigs—dark and of little value—" He knew all that.

But at the very end was an additional paragraph:

In hot, dry seasons, and under unusual conditions of the atmosphere, a sweet substance in very minute quantities is sometimes secreted by the twigs of spruces and other conifers. This is a trisaccharide, melezitose, one of the rare sugars, and is characterized by its extremely rapid crystallization, even hardening at once in the combs, and also by the fact that its solutions will not ferment. It is used

occasionally in chemical research, but is of no commercial importance, mainly, perhaps, on account of the extremely small quantities in which it is to be obtained.

Melezitose! Delaine's memory quickened, and flashed out a vivid fact. He had experimented with melezitose once, in an industrial laboratory in Washington. The chief of the laboratory had ordered some of this substance, and he remembered the complaint about the cost made by the management. Delaine recalled the price clearly enough. They had bought about one hundred grams, some two ounces, and the price paid was twenty-four dollars.

Twelve dollars an ounce! Nearly two hundred dollars a pound. Of no commercial importance on account of the extremely minute quantities available! And out there in the apiary, the hives were packed with it—a thousand pounds, probably a ton, perhaps more! His mind performed a lightning calculation. Nearly a quarter of a million dollars!

He sobered himself. It wasn't possible! But what else could this stuff be? He rushed back to the apiary, opened a hive, and got out a heavy comb of the sugary honeydew. Taking it indoors, he dug out some of it with the point of a knife, tasted it, looked at it through the magnifier. Its crystalline structure was unmistakable. He recalled having noticed that with curiosity in the laboratory at Washington; he remembered, too, the peculiar resinous, sweet taste.

**T**O make absolutely certain, he needed a polariscope. But it was almost impossible that he could be mistaken. The stuff was exuded by the spruces during this hot, dry weather, and not secreted by insects. No other honey or honeydew crystallized so rapidly. Of course, this would not be pure melezitose; it must contain a good deal of dextrose and levulose. They could be separated by filtration with alcohol. He searched his memory for the process. It was simple; and he remembered that he had the alcohol. Some of Duggan's strong honey spirit would certainly answer.

He dug out enough of the candied sugar from the combs to fill a teacup, and stirred it up with a cupful of the liquor. He had no filter; he was obliged to filter the mixture through a folded, not very clean handkerchief. The dextrose and levulose should pass through, dissolved in the alcohol.

Left in the filter, he had a handful of muddy, sugary stuff, mixed with scraps of beeswax. This he melted down very slowly in a tin cup, set it aside and waited impatiently for it to cool. The wax formed a yellow cake on the surface. He lifted this carefully off when it was hard. Underneath was certainly a gill of crude melezitose.

There was one more available test—its refusal to ferment. He mixed a weak solution of the stuff with water, and set it in a warm place by the window. As a check, he made a similar solution with pure honey. But this experiment would take time.

Still, he felt that this test was hardly needed. It was certainly the rare trisaccharide that he had. The worthless stuff that he had cursed the bees for gathering was worth at least its weight in silver.

His bewildered, incredulous sense of discovery began to harden into comprehension of the actual fact, with all its stunning implications. It was not a bee yard that he had bought from Duggan for a hundred dollars; it was a bank—it was a gold mine! There might be half a million dollars there. Certainly two hundred thousand. Freedom was there—security and luxury for the rest of his life. The intensifying consciousness of the treasure-trove grew so shattering that he dropped on a log by the bee yard, unnerved, dizzy. The bees hummed from the spruces past his head. They were bringing in more melezitose.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### UNWELCOME VISITORS.

**E**XCITED dreams flowed through Delaine's mind as he looked at the precious bee yard set in the spruces, dreams of life and art, of enjoyment and adventure. Unsteadily he went to the cabin

and got out a jug of the honey wine. He needed stimulant badly, and he drank to the treasure-finding bees. The melezitose was still coming in, but it could not last much longer.

No matter! He had enough already. The immediate thing was to get it off the hives, extract it, dispose of it. Some catastrophe might yet snatch it out of his hands.

He wondered suspiciously whether Bracka and McKill had any knowledge of what was in the apiary. It was most unlikely. Neither of them was chemist enough to know anything about melezitose, and neither of them had shown any curiosity about the bee yard. Their minds were on other, and still more valuable, drugs; and it was not at all probable that either of them would ever come this way again.

Delaine was desperately eager to get away with his crop. He could ship the stuff to Detroit. There he could hire an equipped workshop, separate the dextrose and levulose, and refine the melezitose, to purify and reconcentrate it. Part of the product he could sell in Detroit, the rest in Chicago, New York, Boston, not too much anywhere lest he break the market, for nobody probably ever had so much melezitose for sale at any one time.

But how to get the stuff to Detroit? He dreaded the idea of trying to reach Ormond on foot. His ten-mile tramp up the river remained in his memory like a nightmare. Besides, the melezitose could hardly be taken down the river in canoes while the water ran so low. Yet Ormond was the nearest railway point that he knew.

He was afraid to go to Ormond. They might not know there that he was supposed to be dead. But this was a game in which he would have to take chances. Most of all, he needed money, for it might take bribery to get his melezitose out secretly and safely. He had better ship it to Chicago, he thought, or perhaps even to Seattle.

But melezitose was worth almost its weight in silver. He could take what he could carry, thirty or forty pounds, go

up the railway line to the first station, and thence to some city where it could be sold. George Walters, of the Chemical Refineries, would buy it, if Delaine dared go to Montreal. Walters was a friend, and would keep his secret for him; and he could come back for the rest with sufficient working capital.

But the first thing of all was to get the melezitose harvested. He would have to melt down the combs to get it, he felt sure, for the honey extractor would not throw out that solidified sugar.

There was a capping melter in the workshop, which was what he needed most. It was a shallow, sheet-iron tank with a hot-water jacket, resting on a coal-oil stove, which melted up and separated honey and beeswax. There were two large, razor-edged uncapping knives, which he cleaned and sharpened. He would hardly need anything else.

He was too impatient to wait any longer. He put on his veil, lighted the smoker, and went out to bring in the melezitose. Smoking the bees down furiously when he opened the hive, he lifted out one comb after another, brushed off the remaining bees, and set it in an empty super on the ground. When he had them all, he carried the lot into the workshop to examine them.

SOME contained a large proportion of the raspberry honey, distinguished by its whiteness and liquidity. He would have to sort out the combs as he took them off, in future, so as to leave the comparatively valueless honey on the hives.

Returning to the yard, he went through the next colony, securing only two or three full combs of the dark honeydew; but the next colony yielded eight.

Entirely forgetting his lameness and bruises, he hurried from the hives to the shanty, collecting his treasure. It was hard, heavy work, for the supers weighed fifty pounds apiece, and slow, too, for every comb had to be inspected, brushed, cleared of bees. He went through twenty colonies, collecting over a hundred combs well filled with candied melezitose. They

should yield about five hundred pounds, which promised well for the whole apiary.

He was surprised to find the sun at meridian. He worked another hour, and then reluctantly went back to the cabin for a hurried dinner, grudging the time for boiling tea. There was hardly anything ready to eat. He had to make flapjacks hurriedly in the frying pan. It was an indigestible meal and he felt none the better for it—much worse, in fact, until he fortified himself with a stiff drink of the strong honey spirit.

This stimulated him to fresh effort. He went back to the bee yard and continued to bring out super after super, filled with combs of the precious sugar. The bees were uneasy and cross that afternoon, and he was tired, nervous, excited and shaky. He was stung continually. At frequent intervals, he resorted to the honey brandy again, and kept going on the stimulant until, late in the afternoon, he stumbled with a load of combs and fell heavily, spilling the honey.

He lay for a moment limp as a rag, unable to get up. Righting himself with difficulty, he felt the energy gone out of him.

"Been overdoing it," he muttered to himself. "Mustn't be sick now."

He couldn't continue any longer. He went back to the cabin and lay down, feeling really sick and shivering. Too much excitement had been piled upon too much fatigue. He wanted no supper; he dozed and then slept, waking to find it dark. Then he slept again with terrifying dreams; but finally deep sleep overcame him and he did not waken again till nearly sunrise.

A vague feeling struck his awakening mind of something momentous having happened, something appalling. For a dazed second he groped in his memory; then it flashed back upon him. The melezitose! The half million! Then it wasn't a dream.

He jumped up. He felt a new man after the long night. Looking out, he saw the dense evergreens glittering with dew, and the east brilliant. To Delaine,

there seemed something extraordinary in this sunrise, like none he had ever seen before. The world had changed since the last dawn. It was a new era.

The bees were hardly yet flying when he entered the apiary, merely crawling in chilly knots about the entrances. It was not a good hour to handle them, but he would not wait, and began at once to smoke and brush the bees off the combs, and carry the heavy supers into the building.

By the end of that forenoon, he had brought in about thirty supers, nearly three hundred combs, mostly well filled. They should yield at least a thousand pounds.

It was enough to start melting. He got out the capping melter, filled it with water and set it on the coal-oil stove. When it was steaming hot, he began work with the knife.

Taking one of the filled combs, he sliced off the cells and their contents, cutting right down to the midrib. It left a mere sheet of wax in the frame, sticky with honey, a foundation upon which the bees could rebuild their comb. The mass of wax and melezitose fell from the knife blade into the hot capping melter, where it slowly liquified, running in a thick current of molten honey and wax out the opening, and into a huge bucket set underneath.

Once under way, the work went on rapidly. At last the big bucket under the melter became full, and he emptied it into one of the forty-gallon honey tanks against the wall. It would take the wax some time to harden, and he began to refill the melter with fresh combs.

He labored all that afternoon, ceasing only when it grew dusk. By that time he had the combs of melezitose removed from all but a score of colonies in the apiary, three tanks filled with the dark, still intensely hot mixture, and the melter still full and streaming.

His excitement and exuberance over the treasure were gone. He had worked it off into fatigue. He was tired enough to drop. Those supers of filled combs weighed over fifty pounds apiece, and he

had handled and lifted them many times over.

Tired as he was, he still had to put the cut-down remnants of comb back on the hives, for they were coming to fill all the spare room in the workshop. This operation can only be done after dusk, otherwise serious robbing is likely to result.

He piled the emptied supers two and three high on the hives, and a tremendous excitement at once arose in the apiary. The bees found themselves suddenly presented with several sets of mutilated combs, sticky and dripping with sweet, without knowing where these had come from.

**T**HEY rushed out of the hives in clouds, the apiary roaring like a tornado. Robbers started tentative attacks in a dozen places, and by daylight there would have been severe fighting; but in the dusk the insects presently quieted themselves, and in half an hour there was no stir in the apiary but the deep, active humming of colonies cleaning off the broken combs, storing the dripping sweet, and planning how to rebuild.

Delaine slept the sleep of weariness that night, and did not awake in a shock of excitement the next morning. While it was still early, he walked down the shore for trout, and had the luck to catch two. Half of one of them, he prepared for breakfast; the rest he cleaned, salted, and put away in a cool place.

He found the honey tanks covered with thick yellow cakes of wax, still holding a little warmth. He lifted the cakes off, leaving the liquid melezitose below. On the edges of the tin, he observed that a smear of the stuff was already showing a tendency to recrystallize. It would need to be drawn off at once. If it should harden in the tanks, he would have trouble in handling it. He opened a crate of the empty ten-pound honey pails, and began to fill them from one of the tanks.

The honey pails filled up, one by one. When he had finished the undertaking, he had two hundred and twenty-eight pails of the valuable stuff, each pail holding ten pounds. There was a certain percentage of ordinary honey in it, as well

as the dextrose and levulose and other impurities, but he estimated that it should yield not much less than a ton of pure melezitose crystals. Even if he had to cut regular prices, it could hardly sell for less than two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

He had no doubt now that it was the rare trisaccharide. That morning his check solution of water showed a faint, but decided flavor of fermentation; while the melezitose solution was as sweet as when he had mixed it.

Transporting these stacked tins would take planning. Thinking it over, he decided that he would go out to Montreal, taking what melezitose he could carry, and sell it to strengthen himself with the sinews of war.

But it was at least twenty miles to the railway station at Bruce Hill, and he was in no condition for that tramp, carrying provisions and thirty pounds of melezitose besides. He would have to rest for it. He made up his mind to repose and relax for two days, then walk up to the bridge and thence along the track to Bruce Hill.

For that afternoon he did rest, lounging and smoking, and planning his golden future.

The next morning, to pass the time, he packed the tins of melezitose in their wooden shipping crates, sixty pounds to the case. The treasure would have to be left unguarded while he went to Montreal, but there was not much danger from thieves in that wilderness.

All the same, the thought of that defenseless quarter of a million weighed on him. His mind reverted to Bracka and McKill. It was a thousand to one that they would never come back, yet that one chance frightened him.

He got out the small shelter tent that he had used on his canoe voyage, and pitched it just at the entrance to the apiary. No one could reach the storehouse without passing close to him, and he slept there that night, an uneasy slumber, waking fitfully at the call of an owl or a raccoon, but finding all well in the morning.

His leg was still extremely painful, and

he decided to rest another day. It rained a little that forenoon. Another light shower fell in the afternoon, and evening came on cloudily and thunderous. Mosquitoes swarmed. The well-screened cabin was the only place of comfort. Delaine was debating whether to spend the night in his tent or in the building, when through the wire mesh of the door, he caught a glimpse of a shadowy canoe passing behind the cedars of the shore.

For a second, he sat absolutely frozen. He had not the slightest doubt that it was McKill, or some of his agents. He was about to make a bolt into the woods—anywhere!—when he saw that the canoe had drawn up to the landing, and a woman was getting out.

There were two canoes. A man disembarked, and drew the craft closer inshore. There was still another woman. It must be merely a canoeing party, after all.

The weight lifted off Delaine's chest. He went out and walked down to the shore.

There were two guides, white men, middle-aged, steady-looking, unloading dunnage sacks of gray canvas. A tall woman was directing the operation. She wore a long, loose coat and a broad hat with a voluminous veil, not unlike a bee veil, no doubt for protection from the flies. The other woman was short and plump and dark, and wore no veil, and was already untying the sacks.

"Hello!" said Delaine. "Going to camp?"

The tall woman turned on him sharply.

"Hello!" she exclaimed. "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Why——" Delaine faltered, taken aback, "this is a bee farm—the Duggan bee ranch—Duggan's gone——"

"Gone!" the woman exclaimed. "Gone where? Is there a young man here—a city man—dark and good looking——"

"Max Bracka?" exclaimed Delaine spontaneously. He gazed at the woman, dim in the twilight. Her face was invisible through the gauze veil; but she seemed tall and gaunt, and he caught

sight of a wisp of gray hair protruding through the gauze. An inspiration came to him.

"He spoke of an aunt. You're not the—his Aunt Phil?"

"Yes, I'm Aunt Phil—Phyllis Gordon. Where's Max?"

"He isn't h-here," Delaine stammered. "He was hurt—shot—accidentally. A friend from Montreal took him away last week."

Aunt Phil said nothing. She turned away, spreading her hands with a gesture of entire despair.

## CHAPTER XV.

### FROM THE PAST.

**Q**UICKLY Miss Gordon recovered herself and turned with a sharp gesture to her companions.

"We're stopping here, anyway. Get the tent up," she said to her guides. "*Allez donc!*" she dropped into French to the dark girl, "unpack the dunnage before it gets any darker. Quickly, *Suzette.*"

"You don't need the tent. You'll use the cabin. Everything's there," Delaine put in.

"I couldn't inconvenience you," said Miss Gordon shortly.

"Not at all! I'm sleeping in my own tent myself. I don't use the cabin. Have your people carry your dunnage up. I'll just see that things are all right."

He rushed up to the cabin, lighted the smoky lamp, and glanced about to see that nothing important lay about. Half a pail of melezitose sample, he carried out to the workshop. Who this party could be, what Aunt Phil wanted, he could not guess; but he was now deeply suspicious of everybody—especially when they came from Montreal.

From that twilight glimpse, Phyllis Gordon looked exactly the maiden aunt, the school-teacher aunt, that he would have expected—middle-aged, gray-haired, thin and tall. Surely she was not in league with the drug ring! But she might be. At any rate, Delaine had a quarter of a million dollars' worth of secret melezitose here, and the untimely



visit of this old maid was going to make it difficult for him to get away with it.

He groped into the storehouse and piled boards and old sacks over the pile of crates. The party was carrying stores and baggage up to the cabin now. Delaine might have helped them, but he did not. He stayed by his tent, watching them from the darkness. They seemed to have a great quantity of stores, as if for a long stay. Something always happened to spoil his plans at the very last moment, Delaine thought, raging with irritation; and he cast about for some means of getting rid of these visitors quickly.

But first he would have to find out what Aunt Phil was after.

The guides had put up the tent for themselves at the landing, and lighted a fire. The dim lamplight shone from the cabin, now from the front window, now from the kitchen. Delaine should have gone to ascertain if the women needed anything, but he stayed sulkily in his tent.

The light burned for a couple of hours, but finally went out. The visitors had gone to bed. Delaine, however, was too uneasy and angry to sleep well, and mosquitoes were troublesome as well. He had a bad night and when he awoke from an uneasy sleep, it was after sunrise.

Smoke was rising from the cabin chimney, and the camp fire on the shore was blazing up. He caught a glimpse of a canoe coming slowly up the shore; it had one of the guides in the stern, and a woman in the bow, with a fishing rod. Aunt Phil had been out early after trout.

The canoe went up the lake for a few hundred yards and then turned back. Delaine knew that the sun was getting too bright for fish. It was coming back to the landing, and Delaine slipped out of his tent and ran down toward the water, dodging from one clump of cedar to another, to catch a close look at his visitors without being seen himself.

The canoe was concealed now by the thick screen of cedars at the margin, but he heard voices. He recognized Aunt Phil's voice, remarkably sweet and youthful for an elderly school-teacher.

The canoe was close inshore. It surprised him by turning in sharply. Dimly through the thicket, he saw the woman step lightly upon a log and come ashore, while the canoe backed off again.

She turned to speak to the guide, then came up the bank. Delaine ducked behind a dense thicket, getting one clear glimpse of her that gave him a shock of amazement. This was not Aunt Phil.

Instead of the angular and gray schoolma'am, he saw a tall, graceful girl, surely not much over twenty, in a gold-brown jersey, a short brown skirt, golden-tan stockings. Her face was flushed with the morning air; her blue eyes sparkled. A blue cap was crushed on her bobbed hair—thick ashen-blond hair—that might have looked gray by twilight.

IN a daze, Delaine thought this must be a third woman. Still, he had not seen her clearly for more than a glimpse. She passed where he crouched, and paused, looking almost over his head, her face toward him.

Delaine's breath seemed to stop. A clashing of banjo strings, a chorus of French voices echoed in his ears. Even so he had seen that delicate, beautiful face once before from ambush. It was incredibly true—the girl of the shawl dance, the girl who had shrunk away from him in the moonlight.

The next instant she turned away and went up the bank with a free, athletic swing, disappearing between the scattered evergreen clumps. The golden-brown figure vanished into the door of the cabin.

Delaine stood up, dazed with amazement, incredulity and delight. He found his heart thumping; he had a sense of rapture and consternation at once, mixed up in a fog of bewilderment. The early sunshine looked strange, the trees unreal. He still heard that echo of singing—real or hallucination?

*"Longtemps, longtemps, je t'ai aimé,  
Jamais je ne t'oublierai—"*

His whirling bewilderment began to crystallize into reality. It was not a mis-

take; this really was the girl he had seen at that night camp. Not so improbable that she should have come this way again, after all, perhaps. But—Bracka's aunt? Impossible! She was no older than Bracka himself.

Delaine pushed through the branches to the water and bathed his face. He noticed suddenly how dirty he was. He was again wearing the clothes he had torn and mended, wrinkled with water and still stained with the mud of the lily marsh. He could feel nearly an inch of stiff hair on his chin. He must have looked like a border ruffian.

He was filled with horror of himself. He hastened up the lake for a quarter of a mile, stripped and plunged in, scouring himself thoroughly. Skulking back through the trees to his tent, he got out his razor and a small mirror, soap and a nail brush. He took off the mended clothes, put on instead a pair of knickerbockers, stockings and a white sweater, which was the utmost improvement at his disposal.

He dreaded the actual meeting, yet was impatient for it. Torn between fear and delight, he walked hesitatingly to the cabin, and tapped on the screen of the kitchen door.

Suzette opened it, a plump, freckled, short, French-Canadian girl, who beamed at him as if he were an old friend. The table was spread; bacon and coffee were steaming; evidently breakfast was just about to begin.

"Oh—come in!" said Miss Gordon. "I sent Suzette to your tent to invite you to breakfast, but you weren't there. Oh, yes, of course you must have breakfast with us, since we've taken your house," she added.

She was looking him over carefully, and her manner grew more cordial on the inspection. She must have thought him the roughest sort of interloper last night, Delaine thought.

"Don't trouble, please. A—a cup of coffee—" he stammered, losing his nerve.

"And some bacon and so forth," said Aunt Phil. "Suzette will fry a little more. 'You're letting the flies in. Do

come inside, Mr.— You didn't tell me your name, did you?"

Delaine gave his correct one. He couldn't have lied to that girl in the gold jersey, who looked at him so clearly and frankly. How could he possibly have imagined her an old woman, even under disguise of cloak and veil?

Youth and vitality were in every line of her. Her blond hair was not of the usual dead hue; every silken thread of it was alive, looking like cloudy sunlight. Her chin was clear-cut and firm; her face was full of energy and decision; it was the profile he had seen so sharply and memorably in the moonlight. Her skin was slightly browned and freckled with the sun. She looked at him with frank interest, then dropped her intensely dark-blue eyes, half frowning.

"I'm afraid you didn't find much grub in the place," said Delaine. "I was running very short. Have you got all you need? That stove is tricky in its action. Could you make it burn without smoking?"

"Well, rather!" said Phyllis Gordon. "I ought to understand it. I set it up, three years ago."

"You put it up! You've been here before?" Delaine ejaculated.

"Of course. Why, I built this place—part of it, anyway."

She paused and looked at him in surprise.

"Didn't Max tell you? This is my summer place. I've been here with Suzette every year. I own this bee farm. Duggan's been managing it for me part of the time, but it seems he's deserted."

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A REAL EXPERT.

DELAINE, drinking his coffee, suddenly choked. He set down the cup and gazed at the girl, who looked back calmly. He stifled an almost hysterical laugh.

He believed her. Delaine had doubted Bracka when he called himself the proprietor of the place, but he never doubted Bracka's aunt. Here was the authentic owner at last. His heart turned heavily

cold. Then here was also the real owner of the melezitose.

"I happened along on a canoe trip," he began to explain. "Your man Duggan was on the point of leaving when I came."

"I'm not altogether surprised," said Phyllis. "You see, Duggan was working the bees on half shares. He was a good bee man, but there was a poor crop last year. He didn't make much, and was getting discouraged. Then he used to make what he called honey wine, mostly out of refuse honey."

"That was all right, but last winter he took to selling it. I heard all about that in Ormond. I was up through here unexpectedly a few weeks ago, and I gave him a blowing-up. I told him a provincial officer was likely to be through here any day to run him in. I must have laid it on a little too thick, and with the poor crop and his discouragement, he just lighted out."

This was the secret of Duggan's alarm and haste to be off, Delaine thought.

"No, Max didn't tell me anything about your being interested in these bees. In fact, he hardly mentioned you at all. But surely you can't be Bracka's real aunt! He's no younger than you."

"Yes, two years younger. I am his aunt, though!" She laughed. "It's always been rather a joke. I'm the sister of the wife of his father's brother. Do you get that? My elder sister married an uncle of Max, who was considerably older than she was—"

"Was that Professor Bracka, of the Revelationist college?" Delaine inquired.

"Yes," she said, with a sharp glance at him. "I didn't suppose you had heard of him. Max's parents are both dead, and I've had a good deal to do with Max's up-bringing. Oh, yes, I've had to be an aunt to him. It wasn't always easy." She paused, and occupied herself with the breakfast equipment for a few minutes.

"Just tell me how Max came here, and what happened to him," she said, in a perfectly even tone, which, Delaine felt, concealed inward uncertainty.

He hesitated, uncertain how much to

tell. He was far from sure of his ground. Finally he described briefly how Bracka had reached the cabin, his stay for some days, until—somehow—a shot had been fired from the woods—he couldn't tell by whom—perhaps a stray bullet—that had wounded the boy, but not very seriously. When he was convalescent, a friend from Montreal named McKill had taken him away.

Delaine left out all the excitement. Phyllis was watching him closely.

"Do you know this man McKill?" she asked.

"I had never heard of him before. Do you?"

"I've heard Max speak of him," she returned, and Delaine felt a conviction from her tone that she knew much of the Scottish-Chinese outlaw.

SHE grew silent. A dozen fantastic theories floated into Delaine's head. This girl seemed to know too much, though he could not believe that she had any connection with the opium ring. But she did not know anything about the melezitose. What was he going to do about it? He could not give up that golden prospect of hope and freedom— No, not even for this girl who had somehow impressed his imagination so powerfully when he did not know her, that now he felt as if he had known her all his life.

He would have to keep her away from the honey storehouse, away from the bees. He hurriedly began to question her about her journey up the river. They had had very little trouble, she said, except for a long carry around the marsh—that almost-fatal marsh.

"I should have been here earlier," she went on. "I generally count on being here all through the main honey season. But now the raspberry bloom is all over. I suppose you didn't hear Duggan say how the bees had done?"

"I don't believe he was optimistic. I fancy it was too hot and dry," Delaine replied hesitatingly.

Miss Phyllis sighed.

"I was afraid so! I did hope the bees would make money this summer. They

did poorly last year, and the year before that I had only a small apiary. I wanted to increase them to about two hundred—enough to make a real income. Let's go out and look at them."

They had finished breakfast by this time. Delaine rose, in a sort of panic.

"I—I wouldn't! Too early in the morning—isn't it?"

"Oh, not to look at them." She glanced at him with an amused smile. "You needn't go into the yard, if you're afraid of them."

"It's not that I'm afraid— Oh, well, I'll go!" he said resignedly, and followed her out into the fresh morning sunshine.

The bees were beginning to fly already, and they were not working in the spruce branches. Delaine noticed bees dropping heavily laden at the entrances. Some of the fireweed must be out and yielding. Phyllis glanced over the apiary.

"Duggan seems to have piled on the supers," she remarked. "If they're all filled up, there must be a crop, after all. I'll just get the smoker——"

"They're not filled up," Delaine interposed. "In fact—in fact, there's not much in them. There was a great quantity of honeydew."

"What do you know about it?" demanded the girl, laughing at him.

"Well, you see, I've been sort of looking after the yard, since Duggan left," Delaine admitted.

"Surely you don't know anything about bees?"

"Just a little. It was really the bees that made me interested, and kept me staying here."

Phyllis looked at him, still smiling curiously, incredulously.

"Get a smoker," she said. "We'll just go through a few colonies, and I'll see what you know."

Delaine brought out the smoker and a couple of bee veils. Phyllis tucked up the sleeves of her jersey.

"Start here," she said, briefly indicating a strong colony on which he had piled three supers of his mutilated combs.

Delaine smoked the entrance a little,

removed the cover, smoked the bees down, and hesitated.

"These are just empties put back," he said. "There was so much honeydew honey that I had to take it off and extract it— Or rather, I had to cut it out of the combs. It had candied in the cells, and the extractor wouldn't handle it."

PHYLLIS lifted out one of the cut-down combs. The bees had licked off the comb base perfectly white and clean, and in places were beginning to erect cell walls again. Phyllis uttered a grieved exclamation. The stock of fully built, empty combs is the most precious part of an apiary equipment.

"My beautiful combs ruined!" she cried. "Why did you do it?"

"It was the only way," Delaine protested. "It was better than melting up the whole comb, and you couldn't get the honeydew out."

"Let's see all this honeydew," said Phyllis.

Reluctantly Delaine went into the workshop, and removed the boards and sacks from the pile of crates.

"Open it up," the girl ordered.

With still greater trepidation, Delaine got a hammer and removed one of the wooden box lids. Phyllis pried off the cover of a tin, looked at the brownish, crystallizing contents, tasted them.

"It was hardly worth putting up in tins," she said. "Why, you must have over a ton! Late last summer the bees gathered a little honeydew, but nothing like this. It won't bring five cents a pound, and it'll cost three cents to ship it."

"The bakers use it," said Delaine. "It's used somewhat also in—chemistry. I know you can get—well, ten or fifteen cents at least."

"I wish you'd take it all at that price," said Phyllis.

"I'll take it," he promptly agreed.

She glanced at him with a faint smile. He knew that the bargain was illusory. He might just as well steal the melezitose outright as buy it for ten cents a pound.

"You really do know something about bees," Phyllis remarked. "Where did you learn it? Have you ever run an apiary?"

"Not exactly. Over in the States, where I was working, I got interested in—"

"Working at what?" she asked crisply.

"Why," he hesitated, "a sort of job—in a chemical works."

"Not in a studio?"

She laughed at his startled glance.

"Of course I noticed those sketches pinned up in the cabin. I knew Duggan didn't do them, nor Max either. Curiously," she went on, "I saw some pictures that reminded me very much of them, in Frechette's gallery in Montreal. I didn't notice the artist's name, but they struck me immensely. Frechette said that the artist was a genius. One of them was sold, I remember."

Sold! Delaine had to use self-control to avoid betraying himself. Each of those pictures at Frechette's was priced at two hundred dollars. It was the most important sale he had ever made.

"Well, we can't all be artists," said Phyllis. "Some of us have to do real work, like keeping bees." She looked at him with a provocative smile again. "And now that you're here to help, I want to look through every colony in the yard. I must find what they've done, and what their condition is. Want to help?"

Phyllis went away to the cabin, and came back dressed in what she called her "bee suit"—light-gray, loose knickerbockers, loose gray leggings that the bees could not sting through, and a gray blouse, with sleeves tucked up to the elbows. She looked extremely alert and businesslike as she took the fuming smoker and hive tool and went to the far side of the yard, to start at the most distant point.

She was as capable and businesslike as she looked, Delaine discovered immediately. There was barely enough honey being gathered to keep the bees quiet. They were nervous, inclined to sting at any clumsy or jarring movements, but Phyllis handled them with extraordinary

skill, using just enough smoke to keep them subdued, fearless, gentle, deft. Once or twice she was stung on the hands, but paid no attention beyond scraping out the sting with her hive tool.

Delaine found himself strictly an assistant; he lifted supers, removed combs, fetched and carried, according to the brief orders spoken abstractedly as her blond head bent with entire concentration over the humming interior of the hive.

She knew far more about bees than he did. She was lightning quick to find the queen among the brown clusters of bees, and she could tell at once whether the queen were old and failing, or in good condition. Delaine felt himself a mere novice beside her, qualified only to heave heavy weights about.

JUST before noon they stopped. The guides were going back to Ormond, and dinner had to be early. They took one of the canoes with them, leaving one that belonged to Phyllis, and provisions enough for nearly a month.

Delaine and Phyllis went back to the bee yard after the men had disappeared down the lake, and worked hard for most of that afternoon. Both of them were absorbed in the job and there was little talk, except upon the business in hand. It came strongly upon Delaine how pleasant it would be to work thus, with this girl, day after day, with a common interest, in this work so fascinating, skilled, specialized. He could imagine nothing more delightful. The huge shadow of the melezitose rose between them. What he was going to do with that chemical treasure, he did not know.

The hours passed, and row after row was inspected, finished, closed up. Phyllis paused near the workshop, straightened up a little wearily, and glanced back over the apiary.

"I do believe we've been through every colony!" she said. "Not a bad day's work." She glanced at her assistant's heated face, and smiled through the black-silk gauze of the veil. "I've worked you pretty hard, I'm afraid. But I see you really are a bee man."

"Not as much as you," returned Delaine. "You must have had a good deal of experience."

"I've had this outfit four years. It was only thirty colonies when I bought it, and I improved the cabin and increased the bees. I want the business to be large enough to make my living; and meanwhile I've been keeping Duggan to attend to it until I can afford to give my whole summer to it myself."

"Bracka said you were a school-teacher in Montreal."

"A school-teacher? Not exactly. I'm in charge of the drawing and English departments of the Maisonneuve Correspondence School. A correspondence school has no regular vacations, but I can always arrange to have my work taken by somebody else when I want to come here to look after the bees.

"Suzette has come with me the last three years, as a sort of servant-companion, you know, and she helps extract the honey, too. This is the bright time of the whole year for me. I love the woods, and I love the bees, and I'm looking forward to the day when I can stay here and make a living out of it."

They went into the building and took off their veils. During all the work in the apiary they had scarcely exchanged a word that was not severely to the purpose, but the silent coöperation in labor had brought them into closer terms than speech. Phyllis sat down and talked of her plans without reserve. She was going to have the largest bee ranch in the North Woods.

"I want to have about two hundred and fifty colonies of bees in three apiaries, strung out along the river between here and Ormond," she said. "I might employ two men. It's a wonderful honey district—lots of willow for early pollen, and then a simply unlimited amount of wild raspberry that yields heavily when the weather is right, and then the fall honey flow from fireweed.

"I should average thirty thousand pounds of honey a year, and you've no idea what a market there is close by. You see, fruits and sweets are scarce up here, except for the wild berries and

maple sirup, and the demand for honey is enormous at all the backwoods settlements. The little store at Ormond sold over a ton for us last year. All the lumber and mining camps buy it, too, and at top prices. Yes, I'm sure I could sell thirty thousand pounds without any trouble, and all at twenty cents."

"Six thousand dollars a year. Good enough," said Delaine, who perceived some of his own former dreams expressed. "Even this year, you ought to clear close to a thousand."

"Not this year, unless the fireweed yields wonderfully," remarked Phyllis, shaking her head. "I doubt if there's more than a ton of white honey. So much of it was honeydew, you know. You've agreed to take it yourself at ten cents."

"You'll get all of ten cents for it, I'll guarantee!" Delaine laughed.

"Of course that was only a joke," Phyllis returned. "I'll be lucky to get six cents. It's used instead of molasses for baking. But I think the raspberry honey should be taken off at once, before it gets mixed in with the fireweed. I like to keep the grades separate. Did you look over the extracting equipment? Do you know if it's all right?"

"I think so," said Delaine. "But you and Suzette don't think of trying to extract all that honey alone, do you? It's much too heavy a job for two girls."

"Suzette is nearly as strong as a man. Of course we had Duggan before."

"Of course. You needed him. Look here! I'm in no hurry to move on. Why not let me have Duggan's job?"

Phyllis glanced at him, half startled, almost with a flash of suspicion. She frowned as she considered it.

"On the same terms? Well—why not?" she agreed coolly.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE WAITING GAME.

THE raspberry honey, however, was not to be extracted at that time. The hot, dry summer broke suddenly. Storms of cold wind and rain came down from the northwest, off the chilly reaches of

Lake Superior. The bees ceased to fly; the hives streamed water. Delaine's tent was intolerably cold, and he gladly sat by the fire in the stove of the cabin. The stunted and neglected vegetables of Duggan's little garden began to grow again, and Suzette went out in the rain and gathered bowls of wet red raspberries.

When the rains ceased, a cold wind still blew, and it was impossible to open the beehives. Even when this moderated, the bees were fiercely cross, anxious to rob, suspicious of robbers, and any attempt to take off honey would have stirred up the most deadly uproar in the apiary. But the cold weather had held the fireweed back; only early, scattered plants were blooming, and it would be a long time yet before its honey flow really started. Unless the weather turned warm again, it would never start at all.

Feeling the responsibility of Duggan's job, Delaine busied himself as much as he could. There was a great pile of new hives in the flat, frames, and hive covers in the storehouse, which he nailed together, adjusted and painted till the small supply of white paint ran out. He cleaned and set up the extracting outfit, looked over the remaining honey tins, and he gazed daily at the pile of full tins of melezitose.

The treasure no longer brought him any pleasure. Sometimes he almost wished that he had never discovered it. To think of abandoning it was intolerable, yet he knew more and more certainly that this would be the end. As he said to McKill, he had not the stuff in him for a criminal. Even now he ought to be on his way westward or northward, stealing the melezitose, buying it for ten cents a pound.

A fascination held him to this spot. It was the wildest folly, and he knew it. Phyllis did not care whether he stayed or went. But for him, a niche had been prepared in his mind into which the girl fitted so accurately that it seemed that she had always been there.

He had no business with philandering, in his perilous position. He knew the danger, but he was in a thrilling sort of intoxication. He felt like a drunken man

in a motor, knowing himself unfit to drive, holding straight in dizzy concentration, pressing more heavily on the gas, faster, waiting for the smash. For the smash was bound to come. Delaine trembled, but continued to accelerate recklessly.

The surface was calm enough. He talked for hours with Phyllis, of bees, of pictures, of the woods, of Montreal. Under her air of frank cordiality, he felt that she was watching him, sizing him up. He wondered if she suspected him to be a friend of Lockie McKill and her nephew.

She helped him nail up frames in the workshop, and proved surprisingly handy with tools. A day or two later he came into the cabin on a wet afternoon, and found her at the carpenter's bench which Duggan had rigged in the kitchen. In the vise she had the unfinished leg of the four-post bedstead, and was chipping at it with a tiny chisel. A litter of fine shavings lay on the floor and she was surrounded by an outfit of delicate rasps, chisels and gouges.

"What!" she exclaimed. "It wasn't you who did that—carved all those owls?"

"You didn't think Duggan did it, did you? I've been working on that bedstead for two summers in spare time, and I hope I'll get it finished at last. Wood carving is my great hobby; it always has been. I really believe I could make a living at it. I carved a walnut chair in town last winter and sold it for eighty dollars. I'm going to take this bed to Montreal—if I can bring myself to part with it."

"I should rather think you could make a living! You don't need bees, if you can do work like that," said Delaine, looking at the delicate tracery she was cutting in the hard wood.

She didn't need bees—or wood carving either. Out in the storehouse lay a quarter of a million dollars' worth of the rare trisaccharide.

"You ought to know," returned Phyllis. She leaned back against the bench and brushed the wood dust from her damp hands. "You're an artist—and a

woodsman—and a bee man—and a chemist. I wonder what you really are.”

“What I really am? A failure at all of them.”

“I don’t think so.”

“But it seems to me that you can do everything well.”

IT was perfectly true. She could use all sorts of tools; she could make a tracery of delicate incisions in the hard birch, or nail up beehives, or put a workmanlike patch on the splintered bottom of her canoe. She was an expert with bees, and she could cook. She had brought a light single-barreled shotgun, and once she went out and broke the game laws by bringing in a couple of partridges, shooting them both flying.

She could both catch trout and fry them. She was a much better fisherman than Delaine. With the rainy weather, the trout rose more freely, and Phyllis went out, either alone or with Suzette to paddle the canoe, and never came home without a big one.

Occasionally Delaine went out with her, paddling the canoe while Phyllis fished. One drizzling forenoon he paddled her up to the lake to the railway bridge, the first time he had been there for weeks. The sight of that embankment always reminded him vividly of Bracka’s arrival, and he pointed out the spot to Phyllis, and for the first time described the incident fully.

The girl looked up at the bridge.

“Tell me just what Max came for, and what he said to you, and why McKill came here,” she said quietly.

Delaine hesitated. He had wondered that she had not questioned him sooner, and had been relieved. Somehow, he shrunk from telling her the whole truth, of the bloodroot dope and his temptation.

“I think Max was just on the point of saying something important when he was shot from the woods, through the screen door,” he replied.

“Who fired the shot, do you think?”

“There were several shots. Apparently it was an Indian—or a man disguised as an Indian. Why Max was shot—why he came here— Maybe you

can make as good a guess as I can. Do you know anything of the business he was mixed up in in Montreal?”

“Yes,” said Phyllis. “Everything.”

“I take it there had been some quarrel between your nephew and his friend McKill. Max had some papers, chemical formulas, and a bottle of drug which, it seems, were important. He may have been trying to hide them here; but Lockie was too sharp for him. Anyhow, the quarrel seems to have been made up, and the two went back to town together.”

“Do you know what the papers were—and the drug?”

“I did take a look at the papers. They were chemical notes, made, I understand, by Professor Bracka.”

Phyllis gave him a startled glance.

“What were they?”

“I couldn’t read them, not without a great deal of time and some books of reference. McKill and your nephew took them away with them. But I’ve got photographic copies. As for the drug—I can’t say positively what it is, but I stole a sample, and I hope to get it analyzed.”

“I think you did well,” said Phyllis, after an abstracted silence. “I knew Paul Bracka was intimate with Max. He knew McKill, too. He used to be in Montreal often. I never liked him.

“Let’s go home,” she added, after another silence. “I don’t think it’s any use fishing now. But I believe it’s going to clear and get warmer. Perhaps we can get the honey off within a few days.”

The rain was slackening to a fine, misty drizzle. The clouds were breaking; watery rays of sunlight came and went. The fresh-washed green of the wet cedars and spruces glittered through the drifting, drizzling vapors of the atmosphere.

“If I only had my painting kit!” Delaine sighed, looking at this landscape. He had already explained the loss of his canoe and outfit by a wreck in the river.

“You might send down to Ormond for colors and brushes.”

“No, it’s hardly worth while. But painting’s the one thing I can do at all well, and it’s what I’ve never had time



for. I'd like nothing so much as to have a bee ranch like yours, somewhere away in the wilds. I wouldn't even mind staying there all winter. It would be great fun. I'd salt down a couple of deer and a lot of partridges, and go out to the settlements about once a month. I'd have all the time for painting, and with plenty of logs to burn and some books and maybe a radio set, I'd do well. It would be a great life."

"Why don't you do it?" asked Phyllis, looking at him curiously.

Delaine sighed, as the uncertain dangers of his position came back to him.

"Maybe I'll be able to, some day," he answered.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### HARVEST TIME.

DELAINE had a fright the next forenoon. A canoe with two men in it came down the lake, landed, and the men came up to the cabin. Delaine was working in the bee yard at the time, and he stayed there, continuing his work, reluctant to hide, reluctant to come out. At each moment he expected to be summoned; the men might be fire rangers, or mounted police. But it turned out that they were merely fishermen, and they stopped only an hour, buying two pails of honey and moving on. Both Phyllis and Suzette took the opportunity of sending letters by them to be posted at Ormond.

The episode reminded Delaine sharply that he ought not to be there, but he stayed; and, in fact, it was impossible to go without a canoe. The honey was still unharvested; the weather was cool and crisp; and the bees were getting nothing. The fireweed was slowly coming into flower, but was not yet secreting honey, and to attempt to remove the supers in the apiary would have started a riot of robbing.

During this interval Delaine wired frames in the workshop, and Phyllis, abandoning her wood carving, put in foundation every day.

It was a light, delicate, but endless business. There were nearly a thousand of the wooden brood frames, and each had to be strung with four fine steel

wires to support the future comb, and afterward filled with a sheet of wax foundation.

Delaine felt perfectly content, as he worked with the girl. An atmosphere of peace and calm flowed round him like a healing lotion. He ceased to think of Montreal, or of the police, or of the problematic and dangerous future, of the opium ring, even of the melezitose. He thought of nothing at all except this golden afternoon, with the bees humming outside, and Phyllis working beside him in the wax-scented room.

Phyllis glanced up once, saw him looking at her, and smiled happily.

"Nice work!" she said.

"Heavenly!" said Delaine, with enthusiasm.

She smiled again and returned to her beeswax, but he thought her face was a shade pinker.

Late that afternoon the bees seemed to be getting a little honey, and Phyllis thought they might be able to extract the next day. They stopped work and went to look at the fireweed, growing in masses all over the open spaces and burned slashes. There were acres and acres of it, tall spikes of pinky buds, bursting into fire-crimson bloom at the top. A few bees hovered about the flowers, but it was too late in the day for honey.

"There'll be a honey flow to-morrow," Delaine predicted.

But it rained lightly the next forenoon, remaining damp and overcast, but much warmer, all the rest of the day.

"I won't wait any longer," said Phyllis. "We'll take off that honey to-morrow morning, whether it's a robbing day or a honey day."

But Delaine heard the roar of the bee yard even before he was up the next morning, and knew what it meant. The fireweed was yielding. It was a hot, moist morning, ideal weather for honey. Early as it was, the apiary was all astir; bees were pouring out from the hives almost in streams. Delaine lifted a cover, and found the bees too busy with the fresh honey to be cross.

Hastening to the cabin, he found Phyl-

lis aware of the changed condition, and highly delighted.

"It's come with a rush, as it always does. If this weather would last, we might get a big crop yet!" she said. "Anyway, we can get our extracting done."

Suzette put on kettles of water to heat for the capping melter. After a hastily swallowed breakfast, Delaine went to the yard to bring in honey, leaving Phyllis to follow.

Veiled and armed with smoker, hive tool and bee brush, he began the harvest.

After a time, a stream of thick, amber gushed slowly out of the extractor. Phyllis came to look, thrust her finger into it and licked it off. Delaine imitated her. It was almost pure raspberry honey, ripened and thickened by the long stay on the hives through the hot, dry season.

"Nothing wrong with this honey!" Delaine exclaimed. "You'll get twenty-five cents a pound for this."

He brought enough honey in the building to keep the extractor busy all the rest of the forenoon. It made just under five hundred pounds, completely filling one of the tanks.

"I thought we could finish the yard in one day," said Phyllis, at noon, "but we hardly seem to have made a start."

All that afternoon the extractor whirred and rattled. By six o'clock they had handled only about fifteen hundred pounds.

Delaine got up early the next day and brought in all that was left on the hives, about two dozen supers, mostly heavy ones. They went through this lot in a long forenoon. The result yielded nearly a thousand pounds, with the drainings from the capping melter still to be counted.

"Not much over two thousand five hundred pounds," said Phyllis, rather ruefully. "I'd hoped there would be more. However, if this fireweed flow keeps up, we'll get another ton. Then there's about fifty dollars' worth of beeswax, and all that honeydew certainly ought to bring something."

"It certainly ought," Delaine agreed, with a rather wry smile.

It was odd to watch her counting her pitiful hundreds of dollars, almost within arm's length of the stack of melezitose that would bring hundreds of thousands. He knew that he would have to tell her; he almost told her at that moment; then he shrank back in a sort of panic.

After that, he could do nothing but go. Indeed, it was time to be gone—to Montreal or to the wilderness—he did not know which. But the honey time was over for him. Fall and winter were coming—no more sweetness! What could he say to her? There was hardly a chance, he thought, that love could have entered her heart during these few weeks of the honey flow. She hardly knew him. With him it was different. He felt as if he had known her always—*longtemps, longtemps*.

"Of course, half of all of it is yours," Phyllis was saying.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Aren't you on Duggan's job? Half the crop was what he got."

"Oh!" Delaine laughed. "That was only a joke, you know. I wanted to stay and help you for the fun of the thing. Besides, I didn't work the whole season, like Duggan. Besides, you haven't any idea yet what your crop is worth."

"Whatever it brings, I shall insist on your taking your share," said Phyllis firmly.

Delaine let it pass. It was a matter that would settle itself, only too soon.

## CHAPTER XIX.

TOLD, AT LAST.

THE next morning came up muggy and hotter than ever. Thunder was in the air, and electrical tension always stimulates the honey secretion. The apiary roared. Delaine, examining the hive on scales, found that it had gained fourteen pounds in the last two days.

Immediately after breakfast, he skimmed the tanks with a large spoon. He opened a case of five-pound tins, and with Phyllis seated at one tank and himself at another, they began the lengthy process of "drawing off."

"I do hope it doesn't rain!" said Phyl-

lis anxiously. "A thunderstorm at this time of year always brings a cool wave, and every day like this must be worth at least five hundred pounds of honey."

Once, toward noon, a faint rumble sounded below the horizon, but the weather stayed hot and close. The scale hive grew spectacular. Delaine took to visiting it hourly, and found that it was gaining almost at the rate of a pound every hour, so that at times the scale beam seemed to be rising visibly before his eyes.

Phyllis was jubilant; at that rate the day might bring half a ton of honey. The pile of filled pails grew tall. The stock of tins was growing short. It seemed doubtful if there were going to be enough.

The change came an hour after dinner. Delaine noticed a different sound in the apiary. There was a suddenly different feeling in the air, and the scale ceased to go up. A bank of dark cloud was rising in the southwest. It was still hot and dead calm, but all at once the whole sky seemed overcast and threatening.

"Look!" cried Phyllis, who had gone to the door.

The bees were coming home, the whole mass of field workers returning at once. Over the apiary, a solid stream of bees was pouring down, almost as dark and solid as a river, coming from fifty feet in the air, rushing down in a torrent, and separating into a hundred small currents to the individual hives.

This rush for shelter lasted only a few minutes. There was a shock of thunder; a few big drops of warm rain splashed down. Every bee had got out of sight.

A spatter of rain fell for a few minutes, with distant thunder, and then the cloud center moved around to the southeast. The sky brightened, but a cool breeze sprang up, and the bees did not attempt to fly again.

"The storm's going around us, after all. The honey flow'll pick up again tomorrow," said Delaine.

Phyllis was more dubious, but they went back to the honey tanks. The sup-

ply of empty containers was almost at an end. Phyllis went to the cabin, collected all the honey pails she could find, washed them, brought them to be refilled, then began to ransack both storehouses for odd pails. She gathered up nearly a dozen, and then came upon the pail upon a high shelf, in which Delaine had secreted his photographs and the sample of bloodroot morphine.

Busy at the honey gate, Delaine had not noticed that she had taken the tin, till he heard her exclamation. She seemed to guess instantly what it was.

"Yes, those are my pieces of evidence," said Delaine. "Better leave that tin."

She gazed into the pail as if fascinated and repelled at once.

"Evidence? Evidence of what?" she cried. "I know there's something you're not telling me. What did Paul Bracka have to do with Max and Lockie McKill? You're a chemist. You must surely have some idea of what those papers meant." Delaine paused in his answer, thinking hard.

"Dangerous stuff," he returned slowly. "You told me once that you knew all about your precious nephew-in-law and his doings in town. I wonder how much you really do know."

"Only too much!" Phyllis exclaimed, throwing out her hands with a gesture of despair. "If you knew the anxiety, the distress I've had. I've done what I could. You can't tell me now anything about Max Bracka that will startle me, so tell me everything. His parents died years ago. I've been an aunt to him indeed—yes, and a sister and a sort of mother. I'm very fond of Max. A lovable boy, generous, full of good, but foolish, weak, too easily influenced——"

SHE walked to the door, glanced out absently, came back, flushed and bright-eyed, and poured out the story. Max had been her anxiety, her weight, her care since his parents had died. She had tried to provide for his education, had spent much money that she could not spare. He had gone wrong young. She had paid fines for his minor offenses.

He had been mixed up in rum running across the American border. He had been in tight places, and she had got him out somehow. More lately, since he had fallen into association with Lockie McKill, it had grown worse. Once he had come, hard-pressed, to her apartment at midnight, and she had had to keep the police outside the door for ten minutes while he destroyed the packets of drugs he was carrying.

"I'm afraid I fell under police suspicion myself," she said. "If the correspondence school heard of it, I'd lose my job."

Max had sworn reformation after that, but it had not lasted. Phyllis had tried to interest him in beekeeping, had had him here at the apiary; but hard work was the last thing to his taste. If she could have taken him away from Montreal, away from all the cities, he might be reformed, but she had not the means. Almost her only hope was that McKill might be arrested and the gang broken up; but she knew too much of the power and resource of the drug ring, and the hope was a faint one.

"You know," she said, with a smile, "when I came and found you here, I made sure that you were one of them, when you admitted that you'd seen Max and McKill."

"I don't wonder. In fact, just at first I suspected you," returned Delaine. "As a matter of fact, I don't know but I nearly did become one of them. I was greatly tempted."

"You? I don't believe it!" Phyllis ejaculated, almost indignantly.

"It's true, though. I had a few hours of a sort of insanity. I'm only glad I recovered in time. You wanted to know what those chemical notes meant. I couldn't read them, but I know. Max let me into a deadly secret. They have a plan to make millions, and very likely they'll put it across. They have a process for making an artificial morphine, a morphine from the common bloodroot."

"From bloodroot? Impossible!"

"No, it's quite possible. It's well known that the essential principle of bloodroot is the same as that of the

poppy. Bloodroot, however, contains a deadly poison, difficult to separate. It seems your uncle worked out that part of it for them. McKill has the full formula and the process, but it needs a good chemist to work it. The process is intricate and tricky—I made out that much—and that was where I was expected to come in."

And he recapitulated the story of the events at the bee ranch—the silent shooting at Max Bracka, the arrival of McKill, the proposals, and finally the murderous attempt at the river rapid.

"I got out by the skin of my teeth," he finished. "It made for safety after all, for McKill thinks I'm dead, and he imagines that he has all your uncle's notes, and he'll give no more thought to me or this place."

"It's the most ghastly thing I ever heard of!" Phyllis murmured, gazing in fascinated horror. "What a miraculous escape! I never dreamed such a thing could be—and yet I might have suspected something," she added, after meditating a moment. "For I knew that Max was interested in some work that Uncle Paul was doing at the college. But I didn't know what it was, and Uncle Paul never talked to me of his experiments, though I was at Slovak River several times with my sister. And I knew that he knew Lockie McKill."

"What sort of man was the professor?" Delaine asked curiously.

"I couldn't bear him," Phyllis admitted. "He pretended to believe like the Revelationist people—good, simple, ignorant farmers—for the sake of his position. They say he was a wonderful chemist. But was he really going to use the college as a cover for making this drug?"

"So I understood it. But I know only what I've been told—by not very reliable people. Wait till I've read the notes and had the sample analyzed."

**M**AX came and told me that he was breaking away from McKill," said Phyllis. "He was going to leave Montreal, going West, he said, and he borrowed two hundred dollars from me. I

was so glad that I'd have lent him all I owned. Later, I heard that McKill was looking for him. McKill even telephoned me to try to find if I knew where he was. I heard that Max had been seen taking the train for Bruce Hill. I knew that he'd been at this place before, and it struck me that he might have gone here again."

"He was breaking away from his gang, all right," Delaine agreed. "But he wasn't clever enough to give them the slip. He got a sharp punishment, and now I imagine he's in as deep with McKill as ever."

"But this must be stopped!" Phyllis exclaimed. "I'm just beginning to understand. That gang mustn't be allowed to manufacture their morphine. They could flood the country with it, you said. I must persuade Max—use every possible means to get him out of it. You'll help me, won't you? We must go back to town at once."

"I want to help you," said Delaine, faltering miserably. "I'd do almost anything. But I can't go to Montreal. I'm in a bad sort of scrape myself. I've been thinking of leaving—going away—"

"Going away? Going where?" Phyllis asked, looking at him strangely.

"I don't know. West—I think," Delaine faltered.

She glanced up at him and then down, with a startled, hurt contempt.

"I never thought you were like that," she said stiffly. She got up and went to the door, came back again, and spoke in a choking voice as if the words were being wrung out of her.

"I thought you would be a friend. I don't know what to do now. I must save Max. If I had any one who would help— If I only had money enough to—"

"It looks as if I couldn't be a friend," Delaine interrupted, "but if you want money—here it is."

"What do you mean?"

"There!" said Delaine, in a mixture of wretchedness and triumph, pointing to the stacked melezitose tins.

Phyllis stared, mystified, angry.

"Melezitose!" he said. "It isn't

honeydew. I ought to have told you before, I know. I extracted it, when I thought I owned this apiary. It's worth maybe a quarter of a million dollars."

"Are you out of your mind!" Phyllis exclaimed. "What do you say? Melezitose? What is melezitose?"

"One of the very rare sugars—a valuable chemical—gathered from the spruce twigs. Wait, look here!"

He snatched down the "Beekeeper's Cyclopedia," and turned up the article for her to read.

"But this doesn't say that it's so valuable."

"It's of no importance to beekeepers, I suppose. They never get enough of it. I don't suppose there ever was so much melezitose in one spot before. It was the hot, dry weather, and the great number of coniferous trees close to the bee yard. Apiaries aren't generally located in spruce forests. I took the stuff for plain honeydew myself, at first. Then I couldn't believe until I had applied all the tests I could manage."

Phyllis gazed at him, still incredulous, mystified.

"You're sure you're right? Can it really be worth such a great deal?"

He laughed, his heart warming. He had no regret at parting with the precious trisaccharide. It was a noble gift that he was giving, pouring out fortune with both hands. Eagerly he detailed all he knew of melezitose. He opened a tin and showed the brownish, sugary mass of melezitose and honey, crystallizing already. The solution he had set to ferment was still perfectly sweet.

**TRUST** me for making no mistake,"

he said. "I'm an industrial chemist. I've seen about fifteen dollars an ounce paid for pure melezitose. Of course, this isn't pure. But I think that this lot should crystallize out about fifteen hundred pounds of pure melezitose, and I don't see how it can bring less than one hundred and fifty dollars a pound. I'm sure you can count on two hundred thousand dollars out of it, anyway."

"Two hundred thousand dollars! From my poor little bee yard!" She

drew a long, tremulous breath and laughed nervously. "But no! It's impossible—a dream. There must be some mistake."

"You'll have the money in your bank within three months."

"You thought it was yours. Why didn't you take it and go?"

"I was planning to, when you arrived," answered Delaine truthfully.

"And now you hand it all over to me!" She looked at him with surprised, softening blue eyes, then broke out with an exclamation. "But I'd forgotten! Half of this is yours—Duggan's share."

"That joke is worn out," Delaine muttered.

"No, it was the agreement—half the crop. Why, I'd never have suspected what it was, but for you. Even now I couldn't have the least idea how to sell it, unless you helped me."

"Any wholesale chemical establishment would buy it just as it is. You can't lose. I couldn't take any of it. I'm glad for you to have it. I'm glad I could help you to get it. That's one way of being a friend. I suppose I have to move on. I'm in a sort of tangle, as I said—worse than you've any idea of. But I wanted, I've wanted for a long time to——"

The old French chorus sounded in his brain. He hardly knew what he wanted to say, what he wanted to do, except that he wanted her to have the melezitose, all of it. He was wretched and confused and singularly happy, all at once.

"I wanted to be a friend, I did indeed," he went on. "Ever since I saw you. I didn't know you at first, the night you came. But—you remember the night when your big canoe party camped on the lake twenty miles up the river? You built a big fire and played ukuleles and banjos?"

"Yes. And the guides sang—oh, wonderfully! But how do you know of it?"

*"Longtemps, longtemps, je t'ai aimé,  
Jamais je ne t'oublierai——"*

he quoted, almost involuntarily. She colored suddenly crimson.

"I remember I danced with another

girl on the sand. We were all in wild spirits, that night."

"And your scarf thing caught fire. And afterward you went out alone, and almost walked over me in the dark."

"What?" she cried. "It isn't possible that that was *you*? Oh-h! I looked down, and saw suddenly two round, great, glaring eyes reflecting the light of the fire. I almost dropped with fright. Afterward our guides searched the place, but——"

"Eyes? Not mine," said Delaine, puzzled, then he laughed. "It must have been the lenses of my field glasses. I was holding them in my hand, I remember."

"But what were you doing there? Why didn't you come to the camp?"

"I was afraid to meet people. And I was so lonely that I couldn't keep away. I skulked around your camp like an Indian, listening to the singing, watching you dance. There was something magical about that night. It cut deep into my memory, Phyllis. A splendid tenor voice that guide had."

"Then when you came here, I hadn't the slightest idea who you were. You said you were Aunt Phil, and I thought of somebody about forty-six. When I recognized you the next morning, I was half stunned. I realized all at once that I'd been thinking of you for weeks. I didn't know who you were. I'd never expected to see you again—and here you were! So, you see, I was glad to take Duggan's job. Now my job's over. Oh, well!" he added vaguely, and turned away impulsively.

"What do you want to go away for?" asked Phyllis, who had sat down by the honey tank again, speaking in a calm, conversational tone.

"I don't want to go! I'd like to go on working the bees—with you. And I wouldn't care whether we got a crop or not. You know what I mean, don't you? I mean that I love you, of course. I couldn't help it. *Longtemps, longtemps*—it isn't so very long, after all, is it? But—never to forget thee! That's true enough, wherever I go. All I gave you that night was a scare. But it was dif-

ferent with me. Anyway, I'm glad you've got the melezitose."

He turned away again, too confused to know what he meant to do.

"Stop!" Phyllis called imperatively, and he looked back.

"You talk about going away," she exclaimed, in a not-quite-controlled voice, "and you don't seem to realize nor care that you'd be b-breaking my heart!"

## CHAPTER XX.

### DESERTED TREASURE.

THIS is far more wonderful than the melezitose, even if it brings a half million," said Delaine.

"It's all more wonderful—everything more wonderful than everything else!" said Phyllis, in an almost awed voice. "Don't you feel dazed? I do. Success—and wealth—and love—all in one minute. It's too much." She smiled deliciously. "The bees did it."

"Yes, they brought in the melezitose, and I wouldn't be here now, but for the bees. You'd have been only a picture of a girl dancing in the firelight with a blazing scarf."

"And you'd be only a pair of flaming eyes in the dark. You'll take Duggan's share now, I hope. We'll help Max with some of this money, help him to get far away from Montreal and into some clean business, and then you can tell the police all you know, and this ghastly scheme can be stopped. You will come to Montreal and help me, won't you?"

Delaine shivered.

"Yes—of course," he faltered. "And yet—if I go to Montreal—I'm a ruined man, Phyllis."

"What do you mean? Don't frighten me!" she cried, seizing his coat. "You said you were in some sort of scrape. Tell me instantly."

Delaine shrunk from confession.

"Did you ever hear of the Meteor Colors Company?" he asked.

"Meteor Colors? I should think I have heard of it! Is that what's the matter?" She laughed with sudden relief. "Is that how you're ruined? My dear boy, I put a thousand dollars into that company,

nearly all my savings. A man named Raymond persuaded me to do it; I think he was one of the directors. He told me it would pay ten per cent, and the stock would go up besides."

"This is worse than I thought!" Delaine groaned.

"No—listen! I thought I'd lost it all, and I was thinking what a fool I'd been. Then I got a letter from the receiver or something, saying that the company was being wound up, and that if I'd deposit my stock with him, I could get my money back. So I did, and I got a check for every dollar, and interest at six per cent, and eighty dollars besides, that they said was a bonus. Don't worry about Meteor Colors. If you had stock, you can get it all back, with interest. How much did you have?"

"It can't be!" exclaimed Delaine, stupefied. "Where did the money come from?"

"I'm sure I don't know. There must have been more money in it than they thought at first."

Delaine laughed shortly. He knew how highly improbable was any such supposition.

"But Lajoie—and the directors—weren't they tried and sent to prison? Max and McKill both told me that they got long terms."

"I never heard of any trial. In fact, all the directors weren't sent to prison anyway, because I saw Mr. Raymond, the man who sold me the stock, walking the streets only a few days before I left town."

Raymond was the nominal treasurer. If any director was to be imprisoned, it would surely be Raymond.

"Perhaps he was out on bail. He was arrested," Delaine muttered, confused. "But he couldn't be out on bail all this time. The trial must be over. If you're right, then McKill lied to me most damnably. You see, it's important to me. I'm one of the men who stole your money, Phyllis."

"You? I know you never stole anything. Besides, there's been nothing stolen. It's all paid back."

"Nevertheless, it was certainly stolen,

and I'm technically responsible in part. I'll have to tell you. I'm afraid I've been a fool. A coward, too. But I hadn't done anything, and the penitentiary scared me."

Summoning courage, he stumbled through the story of Meteor Colors and his flight. It was not a very long story, but he watched her face anxiously. The threat of prison is a strong dose for young love to swallow.

"Ah, you did wrong!" said Phyllis quietly. "You should have stayed and faced it out. Why didn't you tell me sooner? My dear boy, do you think I'd go back on you, even if you were sentenced to prison? When you've done nothing wrong? But there's no danger now. It's all cleared away."

"I wish I could think so. But there's certainly some mistake," returned Delaine. "Lajoie couldn't have refunded forty thousand dollars. He didn't have it."

"Well, I certainly got mine," Phyllis insisted. "But look now, you must go back to Montreal at once. You must find how you really stand. If there's anything to do to clear yourself, you must do it. Isn't that right?"

"That's right, I know," Delaine admitted. "But suppose it means the penitentiary, after all?"

Phyllis looked at him with softening eyes.

"Then I'll be waiting for you when you come out. But I know it won't be anything like that. Why," she cried, "I'd forgotten! With all this money from the melezitose, we could pay off the whole debts of your company. Only forty thousand dollars, you said. We'd never miss it, and that would surely settle the case."

Delaine burst out laughing.

"Only a trifle like forty or fifty thousand. I suppose the thing might really be squared somehow, if somebody made good the loss. I never thought of it either. But I couldn't use your money to buy myself off."

"It's all ours. Some of it must go to buy Max off, anyway. Can't we go back to town at once—to-morrow?"

HE, too, felt a sudden impatience. His mental attitude had turned over. He felt that he would give anything to have this uncertainty settled, to stand on solid ground. He wondered that he could have contemplated carrying this danger for the rest of his life. He could hardly believe that the affairs of his company had really been adjusted, but he was ready to go up to town and take the risk. Any change would be a relief.

"What about the melezitose and all this honey? What'll we do with it?" he asked.

"The honey is nothing. We can leave the melezitose safely for a little while, till we can arrange to move it. Nobody ever steals anything here. We've left several hundred pounds of honey stored here all winter, and it was never touched."

"Still, I don't like the idea," said Delaine. "I hate to leave that valuable stuff alone here, even for a day. Yet we certainly couldn't take much of it away in your one canoe."

"We can get canoes at Ormond," Phyllis suggested. "I know all the people there."

"We might do that. We might have it all freighted down the river before we go to Montreal, if the water isn't too low. Or it's possible that, if we paid enough, we could hire a truck or something to come out to the railway bridge and take it to the next station. But it would cost heavily, either way. I haven't got enough money on me, and I don't suppose you have."

"If we could only sell a hundred pounds of the melezitose!" said Phyllis.

"Just what I was thinking of. We'd better take twenty pounds or so to Ormond with us, and I'll go on to Montreal, while you're looking out for canoemen. One of the chemical wholesalers in town is a friend of mine—George Walters, of the Chemical Refineries—and he'll give us a square deal. Probably I can arrange to have the whole lot sold through him.

"Anyway, I know he'll buy what I have with me, and twenty pounds ought to be worth a long way over a thousand



dollars, at the worst. I'll come back with the cash, and we'll get the melezitose out to the railroad and shipped. And when I'm in town, I can find out how I stand with the police," he added. "But I'm determined to get the melezitose safe before I take any chances with my liberty."

"Let's get ready to start in the morning!" cried Phyllis.

But it was already late in the day. There were still a hundred things to do. The work overflowed into the next day, and the departure had to be postponed to the following morning. All available rubbish was heaped over the pile of melezitose tins. The dunnage had to be packed, and a little attention given to the apiary. The weather had turned clear and cool, with a north wind, and robber bees were flying about the honey house, smelling at every crevice.

They made the start at sunrise of the next morning, heavily laden with three passengers and all their dunnage. The river seemed even lower than when Delaine had last been on it. They had to make a long, fatiguing portage around that almost-fatal rapid and swamp, and three times again they had to carry, over difficult trails. It was going to be no joke to bring out those two thousand pounds of melezitose crates.

When Delaine saw Ormond, of which he had heard so often, it proved even smaller than he had imagined. There were barely a score of houses, a sawmill, a store, and a railroad station, where two trains came and went daily.

Phyllis knew where to find accommodation for them, however, and the next morning Delaine went out with her to try to engage freighters.

Almost immediately he found that it was going to be difficult. By noon, it began to seem impossible. At that season most of the men were away guiding, with their canoes. The few that were left refused to think of bringing heavy freight down the river until the water rose. Money might have done it; money was what they must have.

Delaine bought a small suit case, packed it with a few necessities, and left

for Montreal that evening, carrying two ten-pound pails of melezitose, his rolls of films, and the sample of Bracka's dope. He was going to what had seemed to him so long as the city of danger; but now, brown and shabby and with a stubbly beard, he did not believe that any one would recognize him on the streets. Besides, he took comfort in the thought that he was supposed to be dead.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### BURSTING BUBBLES.

DELAINE reached Montreal just before midnight. Fresh from the silence of the wilderness, the lights and hurry of the big railroad station confused him and excited him with a sense of danger. He held his breath as he walked past two policemen. They did not give him a glance, and then in a crowd near the street exit, he thought he caught sight of Max Bracka's face.

Instinctively Delaine wheeled to hide himself, and then wheeled back to look again. Bracka was gone—if it had been he. Delaine looked through the crowd without finding any one resembling him. He thought he must have been mistaken. Even if he had been right, Bracka's presence could only have been an accident.

He felt himself horribly shabby and woods worn among the city figures, but he valued the disguise. He intended going to a small hotel that he knew, not far from the station, frequented mostly by habitant farmers. He was encumbered with his luggage and could not afford a taxi, so he left his suit case at the check room, and started down the street, carrying the two precious pails of melezitose.

He walked several blocks, and then turned down what he believed the street for his hotel. Here all was quiet and asleep; the electric lights shone on empty asphalt and dead house fronts. He made another turn, then halted, confused, realizing that he had taken the wrong street.

As he paused, a taxicab slid up and halted. The driver leaned out.

"Taxi, sir?"

Delaine shook his head, and started to

retrace his steps. He knew the right way now. But the taxi driver jumped out to the sidewalk.

"Your money I want. Put 'em up!" he snapped, with a blunt, black pistol already out.

Delaine caught the deadly determination in the man's eye, sensed the danger by intuition. It was not his money, but his life. He flung up his hands, still holding the melezitose, and with the same movement he swung the ten-pound tin by its handle, even as the pistol exploded.

The hot blast scorched his face. But the heavy pail caught the bandit just above his ear, and he dashed sprawling upon the pavement against the wheel of his car. There he lay, and Delaine snatched up the fallen gun and ran, still clinging to his honey tins, dodged around a corner, and saw the lighted front of his hotel within fifty feet.

Up in the safety of his bedroom, the realization and the reaction of the thing came over him. Holdups were common enough in Montreal, but this was no ordinary holdup. The man had meant to kill, from the first. Bracka must have seen Delaine at the depot, after all. But what miraculous intelligence service could the dope ring have, to be thus aware of his being alive, of his coming by that train?

HE looked out his window over the lighted city, and thought that there was no safety for him in this jungle. Between the police and the gangsters, every man's hand seemed against him.

But he would be here only a day or two. The first thing in the morning, he intended to see Walters and finish his business. He might be able to start back to Ormond at night. Meanwhile, he would avoid taxicabs and dark streets. By daylight, there would be no danger.

He slept poorly and nervously, and awoke early. Even after breakfast, it was too early to find Walters at his office, but he remembered his films, and took them to a photograph supply house. They were to be developed and printed in enlargement, and they were promised

for noon of the following day. Afterward Delaine, choosing the most-frequented streets, went slowly to the offices of the Chemical Refineries Company.

George Walters, the general manager, had just come down. He was a huge, gross, puffy-faced man, who looked fat as a hog, and was in reality as strong as an ox. He was a sportsman, a moose hunter, canoeist, snowshoer, and was almost the only intimate friend Delaine had made in Montreal.

He uttered a shout of surprise and delight as Delaine entered his private office.

"Jim Delaine, by gad! Say, I never expected to see you again, after you made that get-away. Where've you been?"

"Up in the woods. I shouldn't have gone——"

"Gosh! you look it! Regular upriver mossback. What have you got in those pails—honey?"

"No, something in your line. But, Walters, what's doing—about that Meteor Colors business? Do you know how it stands?"

"Sure I do. They owed us about two hundred dollars for supplies. You don't mean to say you don't know?" He leaned back and eyed Delaine with a grin. "You shouldn't have skipped. Looked bad, my boy—it looked bad."

"I know it. I think I lost my head just then. But here I am now, anyway. For Heaven's sake, tell me where I stand!"

"You haven't known all this time? I expect you've taken it out in worrying. Well, that's no more than you deserved. But it's turned out all right. The concern's wound up; the shareholders and creditors have got their money; your directors have crawled out of sight; and Lajoie's warned out of business in future. I hear he's gone to Havana."

So Phyllis had been right! It was blissful and mysterious.

"But who paid, then?" he demanded.

"Why, your boss took the cash, all right," said Walters comfortably. "Used the money as if it was his own, only more so. He played everything—the stock market, the wheat market, the races.

Mostly he had rather poor luck; funny how these embezzlers always back losers. He'd run through pretty much the whole purse when they pinched him. But there was one asset that didn't come to light till later.

"Just before he was arrested, he'd put up a big play on Associated Steamships, on the short side, with instructions to sell on the scale down. He must have had a hot tip, for it was just before the court decision broke up the merger, you know. The bottom dropped right out of that stock. He cleaned up thirty or forty thousand on the coup.

"I expect he hoped to get away with it, but his broker gave him away. The courts attached the money for the benefit of the shareholders. Along with the factory building and other assets, it made enough to satisfy all claims, and even leave a little bonus.

"The shareholders had a meeting and decided not to press the prosecution, if the crown would withdraw. So that was how they fixed it. The case never came to trial. Lajoie was warned out of business in this province."

Like a healing balm, these words flowed through Delaine's brain. He had a feeling of inexpressible relief, like a release from physical pain.

"I'd heard a rumor of that, b-but I couldn't believe it!" he stammered. "I thought there was a warrant out for me—"

"So there was, but it won't be served now. In fact, you had stock in the thing, didn't you? Well, you get your money back like the others. You get out of it lucky. Let this be a lesson to you," he added paternally. "I'm just going into the woods myself for my vacation—start to-morrow night, if I can get off. Two weeks up the Coulonge River. Better come along with me."

"No, thanks. I've had enough of that for this summer."

He picked up a pail of the melezitose, excited and thrilling with anticipation as he said:

"Here's something I brought to show you."

Walters pried off the lid, looked in,

smelled the sugary contents, and turned an inquiring eye on his friend.

"What the deuce is the stuff?"

"Just melezitose," said Delaine, smiling.

"Melezitose? Are you sure? It's hardly likely. I never saw so much melezitose at once in my life. Where'd you get it?"

"I've an—an interest in a bee yard back in the spruce woods. The weather happened to be just right this summer, and the bees gathered several thousand— Well, quite a quantity of this."

"Of course, it may be. I suppose you've tested it. What do you intend doing with it?" Walters asked, without much interest.

"Why, sell it, naturally," returned Delaine. "I thought you'd want to buy it."

"All this—twenty pounds or so? I don't know what we'd do with so much. What price do you want?"

"Why, melezitose is worth around fifteen dollars an ounce, isn't it?" Delaine asked, with a vague chilliness of doubt invading him. "I've seen that much paid for it."

"Oh, so have I. I've sold a few grams at an even higher figure, for the pure sugar. How much have you really got?"

"A couple of thousand pounds, at least. I calculated it would crystallize nearly seventy-five per cent pure—say fifteen hundred pounds."

Walters began to laugh heartily.

"Did you really expect to sell all that for fifteen dollars an ounce? Nearly a quarter of a million dollars. No wonder you looked excited when you came in!"

"I certainly did. What's the matter? Don't you believe that it's the genuine article?"

"Of course it would have to be tested. But I'm not doubting it." He stopped laughing, recognizing the real anguish in Delaine's face.

"My dear fellow, I didn't know you were serious," he went on soberly and kindly. "I'm afraid you're in for a disappointment. I thought you'd have known more about the chemical market. Melezitose is rare stuff, of course. The wholesalers do stock a little, but it's used

only in laboratory research work, and only a few grams at a time. It's high-priced, but there's no demand for any quantity of it. It hasn't any real commercial value. There isn't enough of it sold in a year in all North America to keep an aged widow from the poorhouse. If you've really got two thousand pounds, you've got the world's supply assured for the rest of your lifetime."

Five minutes ago Walters had given Delaine liberation; now it was disaster. Gentle as they were, his words were like exploding shells, blowing to bits all the glittering edifice of Delaine's hopes. He did not doubt their truth. Walters was an expert, and he would not deceive. Delaine should have known the market better. The melezitose was worthless—Phyllis' melezitose; and how would he break the news to her?

"I'm—I'm sorry!" he faltered, trying to pull himself together. "It's a—a disappointment, as you say. I thought we had a fortune. Is it valueless?"

"Oh, not quite so bad as that. Not quite valueless. We do use a little. I might buy these two buckets here, if you care to make the price right. If it tests a fair percentage of pure melezitose, we might give you, say, sixty dollars for the lot. I expect it'll keep us stocked up for the next ten years."

"It isn't altogether mine, but I've no doubt you can have it," agreed Delaine miserably.

"Possibly I could help you to place a little more somewhere. But not at any fancy price. If you could furnish a lot of it at a reasonable figure there ought to be some sort of commercial use for it. It's rare, interesting stuff. But I can't think of anything at the moment, unless the borax people could use it instead of mannose, as a determinant. Let's see—what's melezitose?"

He leaned back to a revolving bookcase and took down a volume.

"Alekhine gives melezitose as  $C_{18}H_{22}O_{18}$  plus  $2H_2O$ , and the specific rotation for the anhydride as plus 95.12. It ought to make a useful substitute for— for something. I'll make inquiries. Drop in later, or ring me up."

## CHAPTER XXII.

## JUST A CLEW.

DELAINE went out the door so completely dazed with disappointment that he forgot the sample of drug he had brought, and he had to go back.

"I'd forgotten this," he said, producing the brass shell and opening the plug. "I wish you'd examine and test this, and see what you make of it."

"What is it? Another chemical curiosity?" asked Walters, shaking out a little of the pinkish, flaky stuff.

"That's what I want you to tell me. It's supposed to be a sort of morphia. Not from the poppy, though—a sort of synthetic drug."

"Thank Heaven, that's impossible!" said Walters. "There's no such thing."

"An artificial dope at any rate. It's supposed to be made from bloodroot—Sanguinaria, you know."

"What?" said Walters sharply. "Where did you get this? How was it made?"

"I don't know. It's too long a story for now. I didn't make it, of course. I may be able to find out the process." Delaine was thinking of his photographs.

"You'd better find out, if you can. But Sanguinaria is much too poisonous to yield any sort of practical imitation of morphia." Walters poked at the drug and smelled it suspiciously. "I expect this is some sort of bootleg morphia, mixed with an adulterant. I can't imagine how you got into touch with this sort of thing, Delaine. You'd better cut it out. Montreal is getting to be a sort of center for the dope business, and it's a horror to me. Murder is an innocent trade compared to morphine peddling, and I'd do almost anything to help wipe it out. The smugglers seem to be too quick and clever for the police. A synthetic morphine, that needn't be smuggled in, would be the very devil, but fortunately it's impossible. I don't take much stock in your Sanguinaria drug, but I'll certainly test it. And if you can find how it's been made, you'd better do so."

Delaine went out and proceeded slowly

toward his hotel. The Montreal streets were hot and crowded. Streams of glittering motors went by. The big hotels were crammed with tourists. Underneath the glitter and the spending, but breeding from it and feeding on it, ran the dark, silent current of that underworld, whose flow had touched Delaine, in fact had almost carried him away. But he was not thinking of that.

He was thinking of his lost fortune. The melezitose was a dream. He would have to tell Phyllis how he had blundered. Passing a telegraph office, he braced up his courage and dispatched a message to Ormond.

Dreadful mistake. Melezitose of no value. Will rejoin you, Ormond. Letter follows.

DELAINE.

Phyllis should get it that afternoon, unless, by chance, she had succeeded in getting canoemen to go up the river.

NOW that this was done, by degrees his mind began to react from its depression. His long terror of the law was gone, at any rate. He had got out by better luck than he had any right to have; and he was going to get his two thousand dollars back from Lajoie's company. Delaine had nearly another thousand in the bank. It made a not despicable capital. He thought that he might put some of it into increasing the apiary; they might have the two hundred and fifty colonies that Phyllis wanted. The idea of making a couple of thousand a year from the bees seemed alluring again, now that the melezitose had lost its lurid glare of half a million.

He would have given anything to see Phyllis, to explain his blunder, to talk of new plans. Instead, he sat in the hotel writing room and poured himself out in a long letter, which he posted at noon. He expected to reach Ormond himself not long after it, but he could not deny himself the pleasure of writing it to her.

When he had posted his letter, he had nothing to do. He knew nobody in Montreal he wished to see, and he preferred to go on the street no more than necessary. He read newspapers and old maga-

zines in the hotel, took a nap in his room, almost determined to start back to Ormond that evening. But he wanted to see Walters again, and he had some curiosity to see the prints of his surreptitious films.

With the help of a movie theater directly opposite the hotel, he got through that afternoon and evening, went to bed early, slept badly and got up late. It consumed part of the dull morning. He read all the papers, even trying the French ones, and looked up the railway time-tables, and regretted that the picture theater did not open till noon.

The films were promised for one o'clock, but it was an hour later before they were ready. By a blunder, the prints had not been enlarged, but were finished the same size as the films. Delaine glanced over them as he stood in the shop. The notes had photographed well for the most part, but were blurred here and there, and the fine characters would frequently need a magnifying glass. The least defect in one of those tiny coefficient figures might change the whole meaning of a page, and he felt less hope than ever of being able to make sense of them. The films would have to be reprinted and enlarged. He shuffled over the sheets of complicated notes, crisscrossed and interlined, conveying no meaning, until, near the end, his eye lighted on the formula  $C_{12}H_{22}O_{14}$ .

It was familiar, yet for a minute he could not think what it was. Then he remembered Walters' reference. It resembled his own melezitose. But this was more than improbable. Melezitose could not possibly have anything to do with either morphia or Sanguinaria.

He could not make out how the substance was being used. He looked farther. The familiar combination occurred again; and then the substance  $C_{12}H_{22}O_{14} \cdot 3CaO$ . This was levulose, he felt sure; it was one of the rare sugars, at any rate, and akin to melezitose. Whatever it was, the experiment had been canceled as a failure. But what could any of the sugars have to do with the bloodroot dope?

Possibly one of them was used as a

dissolvent, or refining agent. The crux of the process lay, not so much in extracting the narcotic, as in purifying it of the poisonous element. Bracka had said that they had found the process too costly at first; only lately they had found how to do it to advantage. Was it after they had discovered the huge crop of melezitose?

If melezitose was the key, much that was mysterious would be illuminated! The melezitose would be worth a quarter of a million after all, he thought—not to him, but to the morphia makers. And there it lay unguarded at the deserted bee ranch.

Delaine turned the sheets with shaky fingers. His mind was in a whirl, and the little symbols blurred before his eyes. It seemed impossible, and yet, if it were true, what a crisis of danger was imminent! He remembered suddenly that Phyllis had told him that her brother-in-law, the professor, had secured fifty pounds of honey from her apiary the previous autumn—for analysis, he said.

There must have been melezitose in it; perhaps that apiary in the spruces often yielded melezitose. Bracka had known where to look for it this summer, and the spruces had yielded to excess.

Yet it seemed incredible that melezitose could have entered into the morphine process. Delaine stuffed the prints into his pocket and thought of Walters. If only Walters had not started on his vacation!

DELAINE reached the Chemical Refineries out of breath. Walters was still there, and he uttered an ejaculation of satisfaction as Delaine came in.

"Did you get my message?" he demanded quickly. "I've been phoning your hotel, to have you come around at once."

"I was out. Did you examine it—the stuff I left with you?"

"I surely did. That's what I phoned you for. How did you come by that infernal stuff?"

"I'll tell you directly. It's morphia, then?"

"Practically. Not the sulphate of

morphia, but the pure alkaloid, and yet it's not quite identical. There's a difference. It has much the same action, but it's more potent, far more virulent. I fancy a heavy dose would kill even a hardened addict. No addict would live a year on a steady course of it.

"It has something else in it. There's a trace of sanguinarine, and that bears out the story you gave me; but I don't think it's the sanguinarine that does it. It's a peculiarity of the drug itself. If any of the dope rings are making and selling this stuff, there'll be hell to pay, Delaine!"

"They're not making it—not yet. I'll tell you all about it. Look here. I think I've got the process. I stole—borrowed the laboratory notes, and photographed them——"

"The devil you did!" Walters snatched the prints and stared at them, frowning.

Delaine cut the story short, leaving out all his personal adventures, while Walters shuffled over the prints.

"The queer thing is that melezitose seems to be used in it somehow," he finished.

"Nonsense! Melezitose couldn't possibly be in this process," returned Walters shortly.

"But look there!" said Delaine, putting his finger on the significant letters.

There was no denying the formula. Walters looked in silence, knitting his brows. Then he picked up a pencil and motioned Delaine to a seat by his desk.

"Come on, now!" he exclaimed. "We've got to work this out."

It was a hard business. Through a magnifier, Walters coned the fine symbols, dictated to Delaine, went on, swore as a section was blurred or crossed out. But the earlier portions of the notes yielded up their secret without too great labor.

The sanguinarine seemed to have been extracted from the bloodroot by the usual methods, apparently mixed with something, and evaporated off. This produced a complicated substance, for which Professor Bracka seemed to have found more than one formula, resembling mor-

phia, but highly impure and, as they knew, highly poisonous.

"Couldn't the melezitose have been used as a solvent or something, in refining it?" Delaine asked.

"I don't know. Who has these notes now—the ones you photographed?"

"A man who can't read them," replied Delaine.

Walters chuckled grimly. He threw out a whole sheet that was too blurred to be legible at all. The next sheet was crossed out—a failure.

"What's this? Galactose—lactose!" he murmured. "What the devil—"

He ceased to dictate, becoming absorbed in the sheets, making rapid pencil notes, copying equations by snatches on a scrap of paper. Delaine watched him in silence, the expert immersed in his work. Walters sat back and half shut his eyes, thinking, for two or three minutes, then consulted a big book at his elbow. He turned to the last page of the prints, turned back, stopped and swore under his breath. For fully ten minutes, he groped, copying one formula after another, filling odd sheets of paper with equations, then he looked up.

**I** CAN'T make it out entirely," he said, "but you can get the gist of the thing. You guessed right. It's the purifying process that takes up most of this. See here! He's been trying to clear out the poison by making glucosides of both substances so as to separate them by their physical properties. He tried galactose, levulose, lactose—he seems to have had a collection of the rare sugars. They wouldn't work. At last, he tried melezitose."

"And it worked?"

"It seems so. I can only get the general run of it. I could work it all out in time, now I've got the clew. He added something that's too blurred to read to his sanguinarine extract, heated it gently, and added the melezitose. It gave a precipitate. He filtered this off, tried adding sulphuric acid, and then used hydrochloric. Just what came next, I'm not certain, but he evaporated his solution down to crystallization, and got the pink

ish crystalline flakes. Of course the pink color comes from the sanguinarine. The melezitose is the key of the process. You're quite sure nobody is making it?"

"No, but, by heavens, they will be!" cried Delaine. "Unless I can get away with all that melezitose at once. I never should have gone away and left it like that."

"You mean to say that your melezitose is left alone at your bee farm?" said Walters, grasping this situation for the first time. "Where's the place? How do you get there?"

Delaine made a hurried, rough sketch map, showing the river and the railway.

"These places, Tedford and Bruce Hill, are really nearest," he explained, "but you have to go by Ormond, because that's the only water route that I know of. It's a whole day up the river from Ormond. I couldn't get canoes. I don't know whether Bracka or McKill can."

Ormond was going to be the danger point. It made Delaine's nerves cringe with alarm to think that Phyllis was there, unsuspecting what was coming.

"McKill?" Walters was saying. "Haven't I heard of him? There was a big round-up of dope gangs last night. Didn't you see the afternoon papers?"

"He's a half-breed Scotch Chinese," said Delaine. "I believe he runs a small factory. He ought to be in the telephone book—"

But Walters had fished up the crumpled sheets of the afternoon *Star*, from behind his desk, flipped over the sheets, and passed it to Delaine, indicating a paragraph.

The name stood out, startling to his eyes. He uttered an exclamation.

"Lachlan G. McKill! That's Lockie, beyond a doubt. He said his gang was police proof."

It was a rather brief, very circumspect item, stating that a raid had been made by mounted police, cooperating with Montreal police, and the following had been arrested, charged with being in possession of prohibited drugs. The dozen or so names were mostly of foreign sound. Max Bracka was not among them, unless under an alias.

"Thank Heaven! This gives me time!" Delaine exclaimed, with intense relief. "No danger for a few days, anyway, and it won't take me long to take that ton of melezitose and sink it in the lake."

"No—no. I wouldn't do that," said Walters. "I forgot to tell you, but I saw a couple of the local men for big American borax companies. They were interested right away. They're wiring their people, but I haven't a doubt that they'll take some of your melezitose, maybe several hundred pounds, if you'd take about three dollars a pound. It'd save them considerable on mannose, at that."

"I should think so!" Delaine exclaimed. "We'd take three dollars—Yes, between ourselves we'd take a good bit less. You've been awfully kind, Walters."

"That's all right. When do you want to start for your honey farm?" I don't see how I could get away to-night, but I think I can make the morning train."

"You? Will you come?" Delaine cried.

"I wouldn't be left out for anything. I was going into the woods anyway, and this looks a darn sight more fun than 'lunge fishing. Ring me up at my house about nine to-night, unless I let you hear sooner, and we'll arrange to start."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A GAS ATTACK.

THIS time, Delaine went away wonderfully cheered. The pendulum of luck was swinging his way again. There was going to be money in the melezitose, after all—some money—maybe a thousand dollars. Lockie McKill was pinched; his boasted organization had crumbled. No danger from him, nor from Bracka, who must be lying low. And Delaine was most grateful for the massive strength of Walters, who was going to the bee farm with him.

He resisted a strong temptation to wire Phyllis again. He would see her within a few hours. He returned to his hotel and looked up the trains for Ormond. His preparations for departure

did not take long, and when he had packed his suit case, he spent a long time in his room poring over the prints of the morphine process. McKill or Bracka had the originals. Delaine wondered if the police had captured them, and what they would make of them.

He half expected to hear from Walters again, but there was no message. Between seven and eight that evening, as he sat smoking in the hotel lobby, a bell boy came to tell him that a gentleman waited to see him on the street.

Expecting to see Walters, Delaine hurried out. But the boy indicated a small car standing by the curb a few yards away.

It was not Walters' car, Delaine was sure; it was a small, shabby coupé. Delaine was afraid of cars now. But this was not a taxi, and just beyond, at the corner, a policeman stood lounging under the electric light.

The sight of this officer gave Delaine courage. He approached cautiously. A man was leaning forward on the wheel, his cap drawn over his eyes, his face almost buried in his hands. As Delaine edged up, the driver glanced out sidewise and opened the door.

"Get in, quick!" he muttered.

It was Max Bracka, looking thinner, paler, haggardly anxious, but unmistakably Max.

"What!" exclaimed Delaine, recoiling. He approached cautiously again and looked into the car. Nobody else was in it. "What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you," said Max, half under his breath. "Can't stand here in this light. The bulls are after me. Damn it, man, do you think I'm trying to get you? I'm trying to save my own skin."

THE officer turned and was beginning to stroll toward them. On the impulse of it, Delaine got into the car, which Max instantly started.

"Go slow and keep in the lighted streets," Delaine ordered. "You did try to get me, you know, the night I got here."

"That was Lockie's idea—it wasn't



mine," said Max. "He thought you ought to be bumped off. I didn't want it. Murder's too strong stuff for me. Now Lockie's pinched. They raided his factory. There's a warrant out for me, too. I've got to beat it out of Montreal. Can you lend me fifty dollars? I'm broke."

"No," said Delaine. "How did you know that I was coming to Montreal?"

"We knew everything you've been doing. Suzette's been drawing twenty a week to send us tips whenever she got a chance. Oh, she didn't know she was doing any harm. Where's Aunt Phil now?"

"At Ormond. I'm going back myself."

"To look after the mel—what do you call it? Melzose? You're wise to it, I know. I was sure of it when I saw you carrying those pails off the train."

Delaine was rather taken aback. He was silent, while Max slowly steered the car around one block after another of quiet, well-lighted streets.

"Yes, I'm wise to the whole thing, Max," he said, at last, with emphasis.

Max cast a startled glance at him.

"The whole thing? What? Say, I'll bet you read those chemistry notes while I was at your shack!" he exclaimed, with lightning comprehension. "Copied 'em too, as like as not. You did? Well, you know I told you the truth, then. That was a great prospect. You ought to have come in with me."

"Forget it," said Delaine. "That prospect is all off; nobody will ever work it. Besides, it can't be worked. The stuff was too poisonous."

"No worse than lots of the dope they sell, I guess. But I'm out of the dope game for keeps," Max declared energetically. "Too risky a game for me. All I want now is to get out of here—out of Canada. I wish I could see Aunt Phil."

He sounded sincere, and Delaine did not want to see him arrested.

"I might do this much for you, Max," he said. "I'll buy you a ticket as far as Toronto. You can lie low there, till I see Miss Gordon, and we'll decide what

can be done. But you've got to run straight in future."

"You can bet I will!" said the boy earnestly. "You're a gentleman, Delaine. I'll make Aunt Phil less trouble than I have in the past. Can I get off to-night?"

"Why not, if there's a train?"

"I've got to get my grip at the house where I live, if I can. I don't know whether the cops have been there or not. I've been afraid to go near the place all day. It ain't far from here. We'll just scout a little."

He went ahead a few blocks, and then turned into a street of small houses and many vacant lots, quiet, apparently almost deserted. Along this he drove slowly, warily looking ahead.

"It's in the next block, but there's a cop on the corner," he whispered, slowing almost to a stop. "I'll bet he's watching my bunk house. We'll turn in here, anyway."

He went ahead twenty feet and then wheeled in across the sidewalk, into a wide entrance. The car's lights showed a small brick garage, low and windowless. Max turned off the lights, but left the engine running, and got out.

"I don't see him now," he whispered, gazing from the door. "This is where I keep my car, but I don't think they've spotted it. I'll scout ahead again and see if it's clear. Wait here for me. I won't be three minutes."

He shut the two big doors quickly and disappeared, leaving Delaine in the dark. Delaine got out also, went to the closed door and listened, but heard nothing but the smooth throb and pur of the engine running beside him.

Three minutes passed. He had no great faith in Bracka's repentance. The boy had had a bad scare; he would be good while the effect lasted. But for Phyllis' sake, Delaine was glad to help him out of danger of arrest—glad, too, because it left the melezitose absolutely free of danger, for a time, at least.

It was hot and close in the garage. It made his head ache. He was standing close by the rear of the car, and he got a sudden choking whiff from the spouting

exhaust. He tried to push open the big door. It would not move, for it was latched on the outside. All at once, his knees seemed to weaken; he had a feeling of general collapse, like impending death; a violent pain rent his chest.

It was the gas, he realized all at once, the deadly carbon-monoxide gas from the exhaust. He would have to get fresh air—stop the engine. In a crescendo of terror and weakness, he stumbled toward the front of the car, fumbled with the latch of the door, and collapsed on the running board. With a desperate effort for his life, he got the door open and fumbled for the switch in the dark. He could not find it, and his strength suddenly gave way, letting him fall downward, downward into dizzy blackness and annihilation.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### CRASHING THE BORDER.

WAKING, as it were, out of a painful sleep into a dreadful dream, Delaine still seemed to hear the roar and throb of that murderous engine. Everything swayed around him; he was sick and weak; he sank back again almost into unconsciousness. But still he felt the heave and swaying and roar. He tried to fix his eyes and wits, and he seemed to be in a close compartment full of tobacco smoke and gasoline fumes, and in front he saw a glare of lights on a moving white roadway.

Dimly he understood, without caring much, that he was in a fast-driven motor car. He was in the back seat; he could see the side of the driver's face. It was not Bracka; it was a stranger; and Delaine subsided on the cushions again, indifferent to everything but the swimming and sickness in his head and chest.

Time stood still for him, while the car rocked and swayed. He was roused by the sensation of stopping, of being half lifted out, of the fresh air, air smelling like the woods. He saw an open space, flashing lights, and he was dropped on a pile of something soft.

Here he lay inert, but by degrees the fresh air revived him. He was aware of

a continual movement, an intermittent roar of motor engines, of men passing and talking. Overhead, he saw the starry sky and around him he smelled the hemlock, mixing with gasoline.

He was in a good-sized clearing. Dimly a big barn stood up. Men were moving about, carrying small wooden cases from the barn to a large truck that stood close to him. Like pictures, the movement passed over Delaine's eyes, till somebody took him by the arm.

"Come along. Time to start."

It was a handsome young fellow, dark as an Italian, with a good-natured, reckless face, and he wore a large automatic pistol strapped openly over his stomach. He led Delaine almost unresistingly to the truck and assisted him to get into it. Two or three tiers of the wooden cases were piled on its floor, several bundles of hay on that, and on the hay were huddled five or six men, rough and shabby and foreign looking, mostly with small bundles.

The young man went to the driver's seat and started the engine. Another man, also wearing a pistol and carrying a rifle, mounted the rear and stood like a guard. The truck started, lumbering over the rough clearing, then out a roadway where its lights glared on hemlock thickets.

Delaine was seized with a sense of danger and mystery. He staggered up against the guard.

"Where's this going?"

"Why, you want to get across to the States, don't you?" returned the armed man.

"No, I don't!" Delaine ejaculated, in weak bewilderment. "How'd I get here? I want——"

"Well, your fare's paid across the line, and I've got orders to put you across. Sit down and keep still. Don't matter a hoot what you want," returned the guard curtly.

Delaine made a grab for the stake sides of the track, to jump over. He was instantly jerked loose. He went staggering down into the hay, among the other passengers, who laughed openly, thinking him drunk.

He was too shaken to get up, and he lay where he fell. But the reality of the situation penetrated his mind. He had come into one of the rendezvous of the international smugglers, the men who run cargoes of liquor, drugs and undesirable immigrants across the line, and bring back return loads of silk and lace and automobile parts into Canada. Bracka was at the bottom of this. He had rescued Delaine from that poisonous garage in time. Probably he had been waiting just outside the doors. Murder was not in his line, as he said, but he was sending Delaine where he would be out of action.

Laden with Quebec whisky and illegal aliens, the truck rolled heavily through the forest lane, bumped out at increasing speed on a wider roadway, and presently emerged upon a broad and well-built highway.

HERE it began to speed up. Heavy as it was and with a heavy load, it was tuned and adjusted so exquisitely that it ran with only the low, smooth purr of a passenger car. The dark-faced boy handled it with consummate skill, and at a smooth thirty miles the farms and belts of woodland and tiny, dark villages flashed past.

The fresh current of air relieved Delaine's aching head. His feeling of intense weakness passed off. He looked over the truck sides. Somebody would surely stop him if he tried to jump; besides, it would be suicidal—bone-breaking at the least. He would have to wait his chance.

He had no idea how far they were from the international boundary. There was no change in the landscape. The armed guard was sitting at the rear, rifle across his knees, smoking a cigarette, and watching the road astern. The speed must have been nearer forty than thirty now.

They roared over a small river on an echoing bridge, went up a hill, passed an intersection of four roads, and there the stillness broke.

There was a yell from the pale darkness beside the road. A brilliant light

was flashed out on the truck. The big car shot ahead with sudden acceleration, and a revolver fired from the roadside made a long streak of fire.

"Halt! Halt!" The shouts were already dying in distance, but there was a rapid-fire thundering of several motor cycles being started. At least four glaring headlights darted out from the side road, now a long way behind.

They were across the border—ambushed by State police and likely to be overhauled. Delaine realized it instantly, and for a moment saw himself rescued. Then the true position flashed upon him.

He would be arrested and held, if not as a bootlegger, then as an alien seeking unlawful entry. To be sure, he was an American citizen, but he couldn't prove it on the spot. It might take him a week, and meanwhile he would be held in custody.

With a brain suddenly stimulated by danger, he realized how Bracka must have counted on this, must have planned it. Bracka had passed him over to confederates of the underworld, to leave the field free for himself—for what, if not to get away with the melezitose?

Now Delaine prayed that the truck would not be overtaken. It was rushing along smoothly, but at a terrific speed for so heavy a vehicle. The motor cycles were not gaining, but were certainly not putting out their full speed.

The guard on the truck fired four shots from his rifle, without trying very hard to hit anything, Delaine imagined. Then, taking handfuls of short, sharp-pointed nails from his pocket, he began to scatter them over the rear of the truck.

One of the motor cycles fell out of the chase. The others held back, perhaps afraid of the rifleman, perhaps expecting reinforcement farther on.

The truck plunged down a slope, up a rise, down another hill, dropping the police from sight, and suddenly swerved into a crossroad, extinguishing its brilliant headlights.

Down that dim avenue, it rushed recklessly, the road only a pale streak in the faint moonlight. Delaine saw the

police lights rush past the turning, off the trail. The truck driver slowed suddenly.

"Get off! You're across the line. Jump! Beat it!" cried the guard, threatening his passengers with his pistol.

The immigrants were up, jabbering, hesitating. The guard snatched at them, beat them with his gun butt, threw them off. Delaine found himself sprawling in the road, and the truck went ahead with a rush again.

At that moment the police lights reappeared, swooping back. They came so fast that they were almost upon him before he could get out of the way. Horns blew shatteringly. Aliens scuttled all over the road. Delaine dived for the ditch, stumbled through high weeds, ran against a wire fence. Over this he went somehow, and burst into a field of tall corn.

**T**HE cycles had gone right on. He caught sight of the truck, with lights on again, rushing over the top of a hill with the police close behind, and they all vanished together in an outburst of firing, motor explosions and howling horns.

He never knew whether they caught the truck or not, and he never saw any more of any of his fellow passengers. He wanted to get as far away as possible from this too adventurous highway. He ran through the crashing corn, climbed a fence, crossed a stubble field and came into a patch of woodland.

He felt suddenly weak and shaken. He sat down, trembling, his heart fluttering wildly, incapable of walking farther, almost thinking for a moment that he was going to die. The weak fit passed off; he forced himself to walk on, but he was unable to go far, and he began to realize that he did not know which way he was going.

He was in the States, and he had to get back into Canada. He would have to keep out of sight of the State police, and also dodge the Canadian immigration guards. He sat down and groped in his pockets, without much hope. His money was gone, as he had expected. So

was his watch. So was the packet of prints of the professor's notes, and he knew well who had them now.

Max hoped to find another chemist to handle the process for him. Delaine boiled with outrage and indignation. He had saved Bracka's life, was trying to save him from arrest, and the boy had turned on him, treacherous as a snake. Max was criminal to the bone. Next time, Delaine thought vindictively, he would have no mercy, whatever Phyllis might say.

Meanwhile he was at least fifty miles from Montreal. In a vest pocket, he came upon a little loose change, about fifty cents. It was not enough for railway fare; and he dared not take a train, until he was well inside Canada again.

Boiling with futile wrath, he tried to compose himself to rest under a tree. Daylight would show his directions. He did not expect to sleep, but he dozed fitfully, uncomfortably awaking with the chill of night, and finally slept heavily as dawn was breaking.

Then he found the sun well up. He was damp with dew and stiff, but that feeling of poisoned collapse was gone. The effect of the gas was wearing off. He took his directions from the sun, and started across the woods, avoiding the highway.

The woods ceased; he crossed a quarter of a mile of farmlands and reached a road, a quiet, little-traveled road from its appearance, leading north. It was just what he wanted, and he followed it, wondering how he would get across the boundary.

He had miscalculated his strength, which was still vitiated by the poison gas. After a couple of miles, his legs flagged; he had to rest. He felt terribly empty, but money meant mileage and he could not waste it on food.

The orchards that he passed were full of red-and-yellow harvest apples, in ripe heaps in the grass, and he took to raiding them. But the fruit, though filling, was not sustaining. A few miles farther, he ventured to ask for milk at a farmhouse, paying ten cents.

For several hours, he plodded along

slowly, forced to rest at frequent intervals, hastily skulking behind the fence whenever he saw a motor car or cycle in the distance. He dreaded the border; he was mortally afraid of arrest, and he intended to evade it by a detour through woods or fields.

Suddenly as he toiled over a hot junction of four roads, he beheld a gray-cement monument, much like a graveyard memorial. He knew instantly what it was, without reading the lettering, and glanced up and down in wild alarm.

**N**OBODY was anywhere in sight. The ordeal he dreaded was nothing. He simply walked across the boundary.

He did not know that the Canadian government keeps no immigration guards on the highways, so he took to the fields and skulked like a hunted man till he was several miles from the border. Then he encountered a railway line, and followed the tracks to the first station.

It was a small branch line, and there would be no train connecting for Montreal till evening. The fare was ninety-five cents. It was double what Delaine possessed, and he was forced to increase the difference by buying a slice of cheese and some crackers at the village store.

Thus provisioned, he started down the tracks Montrealward. He intended to keep going as long as he could, and then take the train as far as his money would carry him.

He tramped on till he was faint, sat down and rested, and started again, driven by a fierce determination. His hotel in Montreal would take him in, and he had money in the bank there. He would draw some next day, buy a rifle and cartridges, and make for Ormond as fast as possible—Ormond, where Bracka might have arrived already, where Phyllis was waiting, in danger and unaware of her peril.

It was hot and close, splendid honey weather; it had been good honey weather for days, and Delaine wondered if the bees were doing anything with the fireweed flow.

He grew tired again and rested in the shade of a bridge, dropping asleep and

wasting a precious hour. The crackers and cheese were gone, and he was very hungry again. He became tired more quickly, had to rest longer, and he foresaw the time drawing near when he would have to give up altogether.

The sun went round the sky, went low, finally set, while he dragged himself along the ties in a mixed state of hunger and fatigue, black vindictiveness and uneasiness that was near despair. At the last station it was still sixty cents to Montreal, and it was an hour to train time. He managed painfully to reach another depot, and bought a ticket as far as his money would take him, having three cents left.

His ticket was to a point still a dozen miles short of the city, but when he reached that point, he stayed resolutely aboard. The train was crowded; the conductor did not notice him; and Delaine came right into the Montreal station a little before eight o'clock.

He made for a penny slot machine, put in his three coins and took out cakes of chocolate. He was stuffing these greedily into his mouth when some one seized him by the arm.

"What on earth have you been doing? I'd given you up. Where have you been?" Walters ejaculated in his ear.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### IN A HURRY.

**I** THOUGHT you'd come to grief somehow," continued Walters. "I've had the police searching for you. I couldn't wait for you any longer. Where've you been?"

"In the S-States. Crashing the border with the rum runners," Delaine stammered, his exhausted wits quite confused by the meeting.

Walters was wearing a corduroy jacket, flannel shirt and knickerbockers, and carrying a gun case.

"Well, you're just in time. The train goes in fifteen minutes. Never mind baggage, or anything. I've got all we'll need. Wake up, man! Don't you understand? To the Rouille River." He lowered his voice. "McKill was released

on bail yesterday morning, I hear, and he's left town. It's a safe bet where he's going."

"Oh, Lord!" Delaine groaned. "I've got no money, Walters. I'm half famished. I'm all in——"

"Come along with me!"

Walters hurried him to the lunch counter, supplied him with two cups of strong coffee, bought a great packet of sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs, and dragged him aboard the train a minute before it started. Still stupefied with fatigue and the shock of events, Delaine ate sandwiches and drank sherry from Walters' flask, giving out an incoherent and fragmentary account of what had been done to him.

"They put it all over you, didn't they?" Walters commented. "That's all right. We'll beat them to it now. You rest and leave it to me."

Delaine was only too glad to leave it to anybody. He was incapable of thinking or planning anything. He sank back on the cushions drowsily. Presently he found himself dropped against Walters' shoulder, while the big chemist sat bolt upright, frowning, thinking hard. That bulky, puffy figure seemed a tower of strength. Delaine let responsibility drift away from him, with deep relief.

He awoke several times and dozed again, and in the small hours Walters dragged him off the train, still stupid with sleep. There was a small station, a cold, crisp air, a smell of pines.

"This is Elgin. Got to change here for the local. Our train doesn't stop where we get off," Walters explained.

"Elgin?" Delaine's mind began sluggishly to work again. He had never heard of the place. "But—but this isn't the train for Ormond!" he cried, in sudden dismay.

"Of course it isn't!" Walters smiled. "Don't worry. I've got it all fixed up. The local takes us to Tedford—next station to the railway bridge. I know the district superintendent, and I got in touch with him and fixed it for the track workers to carry our canoe and ourselves down to the bridge. I shipped the canoe by express. From the bridge, it's only a

short run down to your bee camp. See? It saves nearly a whole day's travel."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Delaine, becoming alive to the strategy. His hopes rose suddenly. He felt rested, more himself.

"Besides," Walters went on, "I've arranged to meet a couple of government fire rangers at Tedford and have them go down the river with us. They've got the powers of deputy constables, so we'll have the law with us. Not that I think we'll need it. I think we'll be a long way ahead in this race.

"But I do hope," he continued, "that we connect with Mr. McKill and your young friend. We've got to get possession of those notes, those prints. That secret's got to be destroyed, Delaine. It's too dangerous to live. I'm more anxious about that than I am about the melezitose. Oh, that melezitose! You're in luck. Two of the American borax firms will take a thousand pounds between them, at two dollars and fifty cents a pound, delivered in Chicago, on the basis of seventy per cent purity. I think there won't be any difficulty about placing the rest of it at about the same rate. Not so bad, after all."

Delaine glowed with gratitude. It was a come-down after two hundred dollars a pound, but it seemed munificent to him now. It would be good news for Phyllis. He wished they could have gone by Ormond, and the uneasy feeling came again that Ormond was the danger point.

There was a long, chilly wait. In the paling dawn, the local came and picked them up. The train dragged on slowly, stopping everywhere, till it let them off at Tedford just after six o'clock.

Walters' canoe and two dunnage sacks were handed out. On the platform, the foreman of the section gang was waiting. He was ready with his men and gasoline lorry, but the expected fire rangers had not turned up. According to their schedule, they should have arrived in Tedford the preceding day, and now it was hardly likely that they would appear before noon or later.

The railway man took them to his own home for breakfast, and hot coffee,

potatoes and bacon restored Delaine's spirits to a normal level again. He felt desperately eager to push on. To wait for the rangers might mean to lose everything.

Walters assented, with just a shade of reluctance. Returning to the station, the canoe and dunnage were loaded on the gasoline car, and the machine started thuddingly up the track.

IT was twenty-five miles to the river and it took them nearly two hours, for twice they had to get off the track to let trains go by. But the bridge came in sight at last, the familiar bridge that Delaine had always before seen from below.

The railway gang helped them to carry the canoe down the embankment, and started back to work, already late. Walters opened his gun case and took a shiny light repeater, and carefully filled the magazine.

"You'd better put this in your pocket," he said, passing Delaine a small automatic pistol. "It's loaded. I hardly knew why I packed it, but now I'm glad I did."

The canoe went swiftly down the river current. It was a cool morning, with a brisk north wind, crisp and autumnal. In the burned slashes ashore, Delaine saw acres of crimson fireweed, still in full bloom, but he knew there would be no honey in it that day. The good honey weather had broken up.

From the foot of the river, the lake looked solitary as ever. They went cautiously around the crescent curve. The lower waters also had no sign of life. Keeping close inshore they came to the landing place, and Delaine began to feel exultantly confident that they had won the race.

"No other canoe in sight," said Walters. "What's that roaring?"

"It must be the bees. Yes, I think we're first at the post. Come along!" Delaine exclaimed.

Still with caution they went up through the waterside thickets. The cabin came in sight, undisturbed, the doors closed as he had left them. But Delaine was puzzled by the tremendous

roar from the bee yard, since there could be no honey flow in that cool weather.

Confident now that nobody had been there, they went around to the storehouse. It was surrounded by a roaring cloud of bees, and Delaine saw at the first glance that trouble had been here. The door that he had left carefully closed was wide open now, and bees drifted in and out like gusts of smoke.

He gazed in consternation for a moment and then ventured to the door. The interior was so clouded with flying bees that he could hardly see, but he was able to make out the stack of melezitose crates apparently undisturbed. He was stung two or three times, but, remembering where the bee veils hung, he secured them and came out.

"Great heavens! I'd as soon go into a den of rattlesnakes!" ejaculated Walters, who had kept at a safe distance. "What's the matter with 'em? Has anybody been there?"

"Put this veil over your hat and they can't get you," said Delaine anxiously. "I don't know quite what's happened. Don't be afraid. Come on!"

Walters followed him reluctantly, in spite of the veil. The melezitose was certainly there, but the lumber and litter masking it had been pulled off to the floor. The great pile of tins of raspberry honey was deranged. Several tins were upset, and two or three had spilled their contents in great pools of honey on the floor.

This was what had caused the uproar. Bees by thousands were licking up the spilled sweet, flying back to their hives, buzzing against the window, crawling over the walls, the bench, over everything in the room in the search for more honey. The whole room buzzed and crawled, but the bees were not really cross yet, and would not become so till they had taken all the honey and failed to find any more.

"I don't believe anybody's been here at all," Delaine cried, above the roar. "I think a bear has broken in, looking for honey. It must have been only last night."

He went out and examined the ground,

but the hard earth showed no marks. The hives in the apiary were undisturbed. With sudden curiosity, he went over to look at the hive on scales, to see what had been done in his absence. The scale beam was hard up; it needed another weight. The hive had gained twenty-eight pounds.

There had been a tremendous honey flow. He peeped under the covers of two or three colonies, and could see the combs bulging with new honey, sparkling fresh, not yet sealed over. There must be over a ton of fresh honey in the yard, he thought delightedly, then was attracted by Walters' excited calling.

WALTERS pointed to the workshop floor, where he had kicked aside an old sack. Where it had lain was a great, dark-red, wet spot, a pool that had soaked into the flooring, greasy and sticky.

Delaine knew instantly what it was. The whole situation changed its color as he looked at it. He gave one glance around. There was nothing there.

"The cabin!" he exclaimed, and rushed toward the building, drawing the pistol and tearing off the bee veil.

Walters was just behind him as he reached the door. Delaine listened a second, then threw it open.

A suffocating gust met him. The room was full of smoke, choking, so thick that he saw nothing at first except a red smolder on the wall opposite, where fire had almost gone out, brightening a little on the charred joists as the fresh air blew in. Then as the smoke swirled in the draft, they both saw the dark, huddled forms on the floor.

Delaine made a dash and dragged out the first he touched. Back in the open air, with watering eyes, he saw that it was a strange man, a yellow-faced man with black hair, unmistakably a Chinaman, though dressed in blue overalls like a mechanic. He was quite dead, wounded in the chest, but not yet rigid.

Walters staggered out with the other body, and Delaine beheld Max Bracka, blackened with smoke, with a bullet wound through his neck. He was not

dead, however. There was just a flicker in his pulse.

Delaine knelt beside him and tried to pour some drops from Walters' flask between his teeth. The liquor ran out again, but the boy's eyes half opened, and he looked up, without recognition, without concern.

"Max! Max! Who was it? Who did this?" Delaine spoke eagerly into his ear.

It was no use. Bracka's eyes closed slowly again. His mouth opened; his whole body shuddered and relaxed.

"He'll never tell you now," said Walters, looking down. "But who did it? Ah!"

Delaine was still gazing into the dead face. His vindictiveness evaporated. He had no quarrel with Bracka now, only a sense of futility and regret. He was so absorbed that it was some seconds before he became aware of a sort of tense silence surrounding him.

He glanced up and saw Walters with hands above his head. Facing him was a tall, rawboned Chinaman, also in blue overalls, who presented a heavy, nickel-plated revolver, grinning evilly. At the Chinaman's shoulder stood Lockie McKill, smooth and spruce as ever, apparently unarmed, but carrying his hands in his coat pockets.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### HIS OWN MEDICINE.

DELAINE jumped convulsively to his feet. In the flurry he couldn't think where he had put his pistol. Walters' rifle lay six feet away on the ground. The men must have come silently around the corner of the cabin.

"Don't trouble about who did it," said Lockie calmly. "Just keep perfectly still, both of you."

He walked forward and retrieved the rifle, also picking up the pistol that Delaine had laid down behind him. He glanced at Bracka, poked him with his foot, and indicated the body with a gesture to his confederate.

The Chinaman handed McKill the revolver, and promptly dragged the dead



men back into the cabin. There was a crackling sound, and the coolie came back, with a fresh burst of smoke and sparks from the cabin interior.

"It won't work," said Walters, without emotion. "There's always bones, buttons, bits of metal left—enough for identification."

"I'll take a chance on it. Will you?" returned McKill, with a smile.

"I suppose that's what you intend for us, anyway."

"Well, I don't know," said the half-breed thoughtfully. "It depends on how you two turn out. Max croaked one of my men before we got him, and it leaves us short-handed. You got here at just the right time. Right-about now—march!" he added, with a snap in his voice like a whip.

With the two muzzles trained on their backs, Delaine and Walters marched back to the storehouse.

"Inside, now, and each of you fetch out one of those crates," McKill ordered.

Even Walters did not think of bee stings at that moment. Each brought out one of the sixty-pound crates of melezitose on his shoulders, the Chinaman also shouldering one. Delaine began to have a glimmering of what was intended.

"Now march—straight on, as I tell you."

The coolie took the lead, heading straight out through the scattered cedar and spruce clumps and into the deeper woods. Delaine came behind him, then Walters, and McKill closed the file, the rifle poised warily in his hands.

In and out through the spruces, the Chinaman led them, seeming to know precisely where he was going. Only at moments could Delaine detect any semblance of a trail. The crate grew heavy and cutting on his shoulders, but the leader went on at a good pace without any appearance of fatigue.

Over fallen logs, through fireweed slashes, belts of tearing raspberry thickets, through shallow creeks he went steadily. Delaine had never explored this district before. He imagined that they were making for some cache, some

hiding place, a cave or a camp. He looked at the bent back of the Chinaman ten feet ahead and thought how he could smash the man's skull with a sudden plunge and a heave of the crate. But what would be the use? Quick death would certainly follow.

He began to stumble and falter with fatigue, and the crate of melezitose grew crushing. It must have been at least half an hour, and it seemed far longer, when he saw a glimmer of water ahead and they came down a slope and upon the wooded shore of a long, narrow lake. At the margin, he was amazed to see a string of boats, two heavy plank bateaux, fit for heavy freight, in tow of a motor launch, all lying half hidden and unguarded.

They deposited their loads aboard one of the boats, and the relief from the weight gave Delaine a feeling of expansionlike hope.

"You didn't know there was a clear waterway from here to within a mile of Bruce Hill railway station, did you?" McKill remarked. "Duggan could have told you. Come on now. We've got to get the rest of it."

Delaine had not known, and his map had not shown this waterway. But he made no answer. He understood now the slave task into which they were impressed. Only one ending, it seemed, was possible.

"I'm sorry I got you into this, Walters. My fault," he said, in a low voice, as they straggled back along the trail.

"Never mind. This game isn't played out yet," Walters returned, under his breath.

Flames were bursting through the roof of the cabin when they reached the apiary again. Delaine hoped that the fire might spread to the storehouse, but the strong wind was blowing in the opposite direction, and hardly a whiff of smoke came over the bee yard.

McKill paid no attention to the fire, but forced another load upon them. The bees in the storehouse were growing bad tempered now, and all of the carriers were stung several times, but Delaine, at least, hardly noticed it.

Halfway through this journey, he thought his strength was going to fail. He was still weakened by the gas poisoning, and his breath suddenly failed, his heart fluttered, and he almost dropped his load.

"Hold up! Here, I'll carry it!" said Walters behind him, putting out his free hand for the crate.

**B**UT Delaine summoned up some unsuspected reserves of energy. He staggered for a dozen yards, almost blind with weakness, but knowing that he would be shot dead if he gave up. Then the faintness departed a little. He stumbled on, and managed to reach the end of the journey.

Walters looked at him anxiously. Delaine drank deeply at the lake and felt a little refreshed. But he remembered that there were over two dozen crates to carry over that road. He would never be able to do it.

Nevertheless, he accomplished another round trip, stimulated by the fear of death. The fatigue was telling on them all. Walters' face streamed with sweat, puffer than ever with swelling bee stings, and mottled with livid spots, and even the tough coolie breathed hard and with distress.

Back again to the storehouse McKill drove his slave gang. The roof of the cabin had fallen in, and the log walls were collapsing. The bees in the storehouse were intensely vicious now, and even McKill, standing at a distance, was stung several times.

It could not go on. Delaine knew that he could do no more than one or two more trips. Even if they carried it all, the end would be the same. The work done, he and Walters certainly would be shot down and thrown into the fire. It might as well come to the crisis at once.

But he could see no chance of rebelling. He was at the rear of the file this time, with McKill's weapon poking him in the back whenever he lagged. The coolie steadied his crate with one hand and carried the revolver in the other.

That journey was a blur of distress. It would be the last, Delaine said to himself, reckless of any chance if he could make an end.

He drank again at the lake, and tramped back as slowly as possible, trying to recover strength. Again they went through the swarms of bees into the building and brought out their loads. Delaine staggered a hundred feet from the door. Then he stopped, wavered, let the crate fall from his shoulder, and dropped beside it in a heap.

"Pull up! Play it out!" Walters hissed at him savagely. "Here—I'll carry it for you then."

Delaine shook his head feebly, and tried to give Walters a meaning glance. He was not really exhausted, but he knew he would be done for with another journey, and he resolved to force the crisis while he still had strength to face it. Crouching as if utterly collapsed, he was in reality drawing his legs under him, breathing deeply, trying to concentrate his last ounce of force.

McKill came up and looked at him critically, then kicked him in the ribs. Delaine was set and tense for a wild spring, when, over his enemy's shoulder, he seemed to see the face of Phyllis thrust from among the thickets across the bee yard.

He relaxed, limp with amazement. He thought she made him an imploring gesture, and at her shoulder was the outline of a second figure behind the leaves. The sight was gone in an instant. He thought it had been a hallucination.

McKill turned and walked away, beckoning his Chinaman. The coolie dropped his load and cocked the revolver he carried. He stepped up close to Delaine with a yellow-fanged grimace, relishing the moment. The shiny muzzle came up slowly, and Delaine drove himself headfirst forward at the fellow's legs, gripping him by the knees.

The man shot back helplessly over Delaine's shoulder, kicking him in the head. For a second they writhed together, Delaine grabbing wildly for the dropped gun, then Walters smashed his honey crate down on the coolie's head.

A sudden wild flurry of firing, near and far, seemed to break out. Delaine got hold of the pistol and rolled free, cringing from an expected bullet. McKill seemed to be gone. Then Delaine saw him, nearer the storehouse, a crackling pistol in his hand, aiming at the woods. McKill had dropped the rifle, and his left hand was dripping red.

Delaine, lying flat, began to shoot, but his hand wavered unsteadily and the bullets went wild. McKill cast a wild, uncertain glance at him, and Delaine steadied his nerves with a powerful effort, holding the heavy revolver in both hands, and fired.

AT the shot, Lockie crumpled half down on one knee, a vivid scarlet blotch on his thigh. A bullet fired from the woods kicked up the earth beside him.

"Drop it! Surrender!" Walters was yelling.

But McKill raised himself on his hands and fired another shot. Then, with a violent effort, he got himself up on one leg, and with a succession of convulsive hops, he reached the open door of the honey house. Even at that crisis, he shrank back a moment from the raging interior, but the next instant he was inside and had slammed the door.

Walters swooped down to capture the rifle. Even as he picked it up, the window of the honey house burst with smoke and shattering glass, as two shots were fired right out through it. Walters ducked, bolted on past the door and went out of sight at the other side of the building.

Delaine also got hastily back out of range of the window, watching it with one eye while he searched the woods with the other. Had he really seen Phyllis, or was it a flash from overstrained nerves? But somebody had been firing from the spruces across the bee yard, and had fired in the nick of time. Then he heard a sound of crashing in the underbrush, and caught the outline of two figures circling widely around the bee yard toward him.

It was no hallucination. It was really

Phyllis, and beside her came a man in rough woodsman's dress, carrying a rifle. One of the Ormond men must have come with her. She ran up and seized Delaine by the shoulders, gazing intensely into his face.

"You're safe? You're not hurt?" she exclaimed. "We were almost too late. We'd been watching—we were going to make an ambush—when you went up through the woods next—" Breaking off, she flung both arms around his neck.

"But how did you get here? Oh, Phyllis! You know—Max is dead!" Delaine managed to say, through his bewilderment and delight.

"Yes, I know," said Phyllis, her face troubled. "My poor Max! He came through Ormond and went up the river alone. I didn't hear of it till later, or I might have stopped him."

Better as it was, Delaine thought, but did not say it. He put his left arm around her comfortingly. Walters suddenly emerged from behind the storehouse, flushed and exultant.

"Got him caged!" he exclaimed. "Why, who on earth is this?"

"The owner of the melezitose. My partner," Delaine told him.

"Well, I'm damned!" Walters exclaimed, in amazement. His attention went back to the storehouse. "I'll keep watch of that back window. You guard the door. He may make a break, if he isn't too badly hit. He can't stay in there, can he? Won't he be stung to death?"

"Not if he sits quiet and covers up his head," replied Delaine, and Walters rushed back to his post at the rear of the honey house.

Phyllis' companion had stopped a few yards away and had sat down behind a big cedar root, his eyes on the building and his rifle across his knees. Phyllis had nestled herself close to Delaine, and the bees swirled over their heads, flying from their hives to the honey house.

MINUTES passed in silence. It all seemed unreal to Delaine and dreamlike. The flurry of fighting had died to silence. Behind him, the ruined

cabin poured up volumes of hot blue smoke. The bees circled the honey house in whizzing clouds, and ten yards away lay the Chinaman with his skull crushed, beside the dropped crates of melezitose. Phyllis was close, alive and unharmed, and Delaine, still dazed and feverish, could not yet quite grasp how the situation had capsized so suddenly from imminent death into almost victory.

"There's no fortune in the melezitose after all, Phyllis," he said, the fact coming back into his mind.

"Dearest, I never thought there would be," she answered. "I always knew there must be some mistake. It was like a fairy tale."

"And your cabin's gone."

"We'll build a better one. There's two tons of fresh fireweed honey on the bees."

"And I got my money back for my stock, just as you said I would. Oh, I forgot the most important—Walters says he can sell the melezitose for you, for two or three dollars a pound—maybe five thousand."

"I expect there's some mistake even in that. But I knew it would be all right," said Phyllis. "Everything seems unreal, but this moment."

That moment seemed to Delaine the most unreal of all. He was still shaken and dazed with strain, as if in a dream. He looked at the door of the honey house, expecting any moment to see McKill leap out, pistol in hand, preferring quick death to that ordeal. A man is not easily stung to death, but Delaine knew how he would be covered with crawling bees, bewildered as much as vicious, how the bees would crawl through and under all his clothing, to every part of his body, stinging almost automatically whenever they touched flesh. Would any one have the hardihood, the endurance to bear that torture long?

Apparently Lockie had it. The minutes dragged past, slow as dying breaths. Delaine did not know how long it was since the shooting—ten minutes, twenty minutes, an hour? Walters came back to them, looking doubtful.

"I tried to peep through that back

window," he reported. "But the bees are so thick on the glass that I couldn't see anything. There wasn't a sound from inside. Do you think—"

The rifleman behind the stump left his lair and came up to join them. To Delaine, the man's face looked half familiar, but at that moment he could not make the identification.

"I don't believe that feller's alive in yonder," he said, with conviction. "He couldn't stand the stinging for this long. I couldn't myself, and I'm used to it. I'm going to see, anyway."

"Wait!" Walters advised, but the man edged himself along the wall of the building, and thrust up his hat on his rifle muzzle against the glass of the shattered window. It brought no response. He went on to the door, listened, opened a crack, peeped in, then opened it wide.

"All right. Come on!" he called back.

Delaine and Walters rushed after him, but Walters recoiled from the gust of bees anxious for escape that burst out the open door. The inside of the honey room was darkened with bees; they crawled in a moving layer all over floor and walls and windows and the stacks of honey tins, and filled the air. But at the first glance, Delaine saw McKill in a huddled mass on the floor just under the window.

His legs were drawn up and his face buried in his arms, as if he had tried to protect himself, and his clothing was alive with bees. His pistol lay at his elbow, and when they lifted him, a small empty blue bottle dropped from his hand.

They carried him out and laid him down in the shelter of the spruces. Walters, following them, bent over him intently.

"It's McKill, isn't it?" he asked. "Dead?"

"Yes. Not from his wound nor from bee stings, though. I think it was this," said Delaine, producing the blue vial.

Walters sniffed at it, poked in his finger and looked at the smear of the contents.

"Sanguinarine!" he said. "He took his own medicine. I expect weakness

and shock made it act quick. Now, I wonder——"

He looked down at the body again, brushed away a dozen bees and felt in the inner coat pockets. Nothing was there but a wallet bulky with bank notes. But something rustled softly under the vest. Walters pulled it open, and extracted from its inside pocket a sheaf of papers, written papers and photographic prints, that Delaine recognized instantly as the source of all the trouble.

Walters recognized them as quickly. He shuffled them in his hands a moment, then, with sudden passion, he ripped them into strips, tearing them again and again. Striking a match, he set fire to the sheaf in his hand, let it burn up, and scattered it in flaming patches.

"That's the end of that!" he exclaimed, with grim satisfaction.

It came upon Delaine that that moment really was the end—the end of the fear and the danger. Now came a beginning—everything would be new.

"Oh, what was that?" Phyllis asked, in a low, almost awed voice.

"It's the evil principle of the trisaccharide. It's what those men died for," said Delaine.

"If I'd only been a day earlier!" said Phyllis, not understanding. "It might all have been saved! But if I hadn't happened to meet Duggan yesterday in Ormond, I couldn't have come at all. I made him come with me, and——"

"Duggan?" Delaine exclaimed, staring at the woodsman, whose face had seemed known to him. Yes, it was indeed the man who had sold him the bee ranch.

"Duggan! I declare it's you!" Delaine said. "I didn't know you. Besides, I thought you were in Colorado. Have you come into your fortune yet? You know, you've got a hundred dollars of mine that you've no right to."

The bee man shuffled his feet, looking abashed, then he met Delaine's eyes with a defensive grin.

"Well, he said, "ain't you got your money's worth?"

*"Empress of the Sands," by Robert H. Rohde, is the complete book to be published in the next issue of THE POPULAR. It is a story of adventure in the mysterious depths of the Sahara Desert, an unusual, fascinating yarn of adventure and romance.*



## ANY SENSE WILL DO

**N**EITHER medical laws nor those rules which govern the conduct of well-behaved people stood the test of a certain World War veteran's return to sound hearing and glib speech. Because of a bullet wound in his cheek, received while he was serving with the Princess Pat regiment in France, this Lazarus of hearing became a deaf-mute. The best physicians in Europe and America could do nothing for the unfortunate man. Then one night when he was sleeping in an empty house, a suspicious policeman flashed his pocket light into the veteran's eyes. He awoke with a start and words leaped to his lips. "You fool!" the awakened sleeper cried out at the officer. More astonished than the bluecoat, the man was up and off down the street to a garage where he demanded that automobile motors be started to further test the grace of Providence. Providence was playing no tricks on the veteran; his hearing and speech were both restored by the shock received through the eyes.



# Duello

By Holman Day

*Author of "Go Hire an Outlaw," "The Hawk of Holeb," Etc.*

Pacifists to the contrary notwithstanding, there are perhaps some things in the lives of men which can only be settled man to man, outside of law courts. This was the code of Membec Gore, a little settlement in the mountains whose inhabitants still maintained the primitive way of deciding their troubles; and it was this code which young Candage followed. Something else, however, than the animal spirit of conflict guided his avenging steps toward his archenemy.

HAVING entered Membec Gore by way of the bottle neck, Bart Crawford and Weston Blake were just in time to be side-line observers of a singular spectacle. The two were merely come-by-chance visitors.

On the way north through the big woods, Timber Cruiser Crawford had been exuding information relative to the region, his flow of talk stimulated by the lively and naïve interest shown by young Blake. Blake, college man and fresh from an extension course in forestry, had been hired by the Grand Telos Corporation; he was now under Crawford's wing, to be guided over the trails and informed on certain practical matters.

The visit to Membec Gore involved a

detour, off the Telos lands. But old Bart had overreached in tickling the young chap's curiosity. The queer conditions in an isolated community had been dwelt on until Blake begged to be taken there.

"They're notional and stiff-necked critters, them Wraggs, Sopers, Candages and what else," demurred Crawford. "They don't hooray for strangers or hug and kiss 'em!" However, the veteran woodsman had been enjoying the effect he was producing on this "college cuss" and was now inclined to vaunt still more his special abilities as guide and mentor. "On tother hand, young sir, I stand pritty smuck and smooth with old Alasco Wragg, the reg'lar he-one of Membec, and I'm let to gad in and go away jest

about like one o' the fambly. So we'll visit!"

That was how two outsiders happened to be on hand to view the queer performance on a certain day.

Approaching the gore, Blake saw only craggy mountains ahead, bleak cliffs that seemed to bar the way, with lofty battlements of more distant peaks whose outlines were softened by the haze of late October.

Detected as an inlet only when they were close to the ledges, a wriggly path led through a chasm to the level spread of the gore, a circular basin, hill hemmed.

All the population of the hamlet of a score of log houses was out, grouped in various knots—men, women and children. They conveyed the air of persons waiting for something to happen in a short time.

SEATED apart from the others was an old man, posted on a tree trunk that had been sawed off ten feet above its roots and was provided with a splint back and sapling arms.

Crawford led his companion straight toward this rude throne.

"It's old Alasco I spoke to ye about. To judge by looks, guess a test tussle is on the docket."

"What's that?" demanded Blake, trotting along.

But Crawford was wholly concerned with greeting Alasco. The old chieftain of the class tossed a condescending gesture; he was an odd but rather imposing figure, wrapped in a faded, shabby dressing gown, the wrinkled parchment of his countenance framed by white beard and hair.

"Sit ye!" he invited. "It's about due to happen."

"Betwixt which and who, this time?" queried Bart, seeming to be fully in the know as to what this stage setting signified.

The young stranger found no opportunity to ask questions of his own; he shuttled eager glances between the parties to the colloquy, trying to understand.

Old Alasco pulled placidly on his pipe before replying.

"It's betwixt Luke Wragg and Art Soper this time."

"Must be a girl in it if it's Luke," suggested Bart.

"Don't happen to be 'bout a girl—not *this* time! Can't blame ye for thinking so, though, from what ev'rybody knows about him!"

Crawford, vaunting his liberties in Membec, gave his companion a side glance. Bluntly, shocking the city fellow by apparent tactlessness, the timber cruiser stated:

"Luke Wragg is this old fellow's grandnephew. But he's a reg'lar hellion, all the same."

"He's exactly that!" agreed Alasco. "Mebbe more so! Hope he gits his wracking this trip! He's in the wrong—so much so I'm expecting judgment to gaffe him."

"Well, that's being what ye might call fair, right in the fambly," commended Bart. "What's the special dispute?"

"The spring high water shifted the brook on Patchdam Heath. Cut Art's mink and muskrat-trapping section down to a sliver. Now Luke claims it all, going by the new brook, 'stead of by the old line marks. Says God changed the brook for him. And Luke don't know no more about God than a Canady goose does!" He raised his gaunt hand in warning. "'Nough talk! Here they come! No tongues allowed to wag when the test tussle is on!"

Two young men had emerged from behind log houses. They advanced slowly toward each other from opposite directions, a wide space separating them. Not a murmur greeted their appearance. All the spectators were motionless and hushed.

Blake found silence and scene both portentous and imposing. The high mountains banked the place like the walls of a rude coliseum. In this arena, two men were making their bodiful approach, stern demeanor revealing that they were about to meet in conflict. They were stripped to their waists in spite of the chill in the autumn air.

Bart's informative whisper to Blake was a mere flick of breath in his ear:

"Rooster with the black poll—that's Luke. Redheader is Art."

They were about of a size. Blake was glad to note that. He had had some experience of his own in college-sport affairs, man to man, odds even.

Though all his attention was on the gladiators, he was conscious of a movement on the stump throne and glanced sideways.

**A**LASCO was lifting a rifle from the bit of platform on which his feet rested. He laid the weapon across his knees.

All at once, Luke Wragg doubled forward and began to run toward the other man.

The rifle cracked above Blake's head; he saw dust "spatted" into the air just ahead of the runner.

"The next one bores your laig!" screamed Alasco, in the angry falsetto of old age. "Is it left for a Wragg, one o' my own name, to bash and smash the reg'lar law o' this thing? Make your 'peal, first! Make your 'peal!"

Luke had halted. The antagonists stood in silence.

"You first, Luke Wragg!" commanded the adjudicator. "Make your 'peal!"

The young man shook his head.

A man stepped forth from a family group. He was Lemuel Wragg, Luke's father, so Crawford confided to Blake in muted whisper.

"Queer stuff, hey, son?" he added.

Blake, eyes riveted, ears cocked, merely nodded.

"It's for the claimer to 'peal first," cried the father. "My boy is only 'fending what's been made his own, by act o' God."

"It's jest a case o' grab, and I have my doubts about God playing Art Soper any sech trick," declared the arbiter stoutly. "But howsomever it may stand, I say as how Luke Wragg must 'peal first!"

"The luck al'ways runs against the first 'pealer," insisted the father. "The records show it!"

"Hope it does in this case," confessed the implacable veteran on the stump. "Tany rate, it's his punishment for trying to bust in 'thout the 'peal. If it makes odds and luck agin' him, then on his own head let it rest. 'Peal, Luke Wragg! It's my last word to you!"

Young Wragg smashed his fists together over his head, raging under the mandate that was backed by the rifle. But it was in the hands of a marksman who could snip off partridge heads with a bullet, who would ruthlessly and unerringly bore thigh or calf with a chastening shot. Raucously the combatant yelled the prescribed appeal:

"To my grip and my grit, to muscle and to might, I leave the settlin' of my claim as the right one—and I 'peal for help from on high—and so may the judgment rest!"

"Your turn, Art!" prodded Alasco.

Soper bellowed his appeal, in the words used by his antagonist.

Then the two men bent forward, hunched their heads between upcocked shoulders, held their arms akimbo, fingers outspread, and advanced slowly and warily.

In the few moments of waiting for the coming together, Blake had time to give a thought to a matter of memory which flashed suddenly. In college, he had been a delver into ancient tomes. The methods of asserting human rights through the ages had interested him.

In a book titled "Superstition and Force," he had read:

In its origin, the judicial duel was an expedient resorted to in absence of direct or sufficient testimony.

He was having hard work to keep from crying out about his amazed discovery that here, in the North Woods, in this closely knit community, undoubtedly descendants from old English stock, the ancient Anglo-Saxon code was perpetuated. This was the antiquated adjudicature by force. He wondered whether these folks really understood—knew how closely they were following the old custom. He suppressed his hankering to ask questions, for he did not dare break on the general hush.



The contestants' hands, with fingers asprawl, immediately informed Blake that this was not to be a settlement by pugilism.

The two men, separated by strategic distance, circled in narrowing spirals, alert, resolute, stiffening for the impact.

THEN they flung themselves at each other, grappling. The struggle was unrelenting, savage and silent, except for the sibilant breathing and the grunts of mighty effort. Blake relished the sport of wrestling by rule; he did not especially enjoy this contest, however. There was little display of the finer points of the sport. These men were plainly motivated by hatred. Their contorted visages revealed the fiendish quality of their passions. They were doing their best to wreak harm and to deal ferocious hurt.

In the end, "Black Poll" prevailed. By a supple twist, he got the right arm of "Redhead" free and in his grasp. With both hands clutching Soper's wrist, Wragg flung the arm up and yanked that lever of flesh and bone down over the fulcrum of the black poll. There was the dull crack of fractured bone. For the first time in the conflict, the silence was broken. Soper yelped; he squealed like a tortured hog when Wragg swung him around by the twisting arm and flung him on the ground. Then the victor kicked his prostrate victim and turned and walked toward old Alasco, hands upflung.

"The judgment is mine!"

The arbiter's countenance betrayed his rancorous disgust at this outcome, but he delivered his verdict with uncompromising regard for the accepted code.

"The judgment is yours!"

"Hell, Alasco!" scoffed Bart. "This may be your style up here, but it sure ain't gitting to the rights of the thing in this case!"

"It's only running the same chances that you down-country folks take when you go to lawyers," stated the old man, relighting his pipe. "Tany rate, *we* don't fool away money, taking cases into them niddlering courts."

"Well, there's your expense saving for consolation, to be sure!" admitted the old woodsman sourly. He turned to shake hands with a young chap who sauntered within reaching distance and for whom Bart displayed the interest of friendship.

Blake seized an opportunity. He saluted Alasco.

"Let me ask you, sir—you're pretty much old English stock here, aren't you?"

"Our old sirs came over about two hundred years ago, so the story is. And we folks ain't mated none p'tickler with other breeds."

"And this custom I've just seen—it has been passed down——"

Alasco slapped a skinny hand on his breast.

"It's been passed down by *me*! I planned it up so we won't be running down country all the time, fooling with law courts and being tapped by cheating lawyers. It's all my own idee!"

Blake knew better! This pompous old nincompoop was not willing to detract from his own importance by admitting the influence of heredity and tradition! The young city man started to say something about his reading.

"Shet up!" commanded Alasco. "Everything in print is a lie, mostly. Who be *you*, anyway, butting in here to tell *me* what is or what ain't?"

"He's only a college feller—got a lot to learn from now on in the woods, so kindly overlook all his shortcomings," apologized Bart, grinning. Then he hastened to shift the embarrassing topic by introducing to Blake the young man who had been so cordially greeted. "Here's one o' your kind, son! Wants to go to college, though he's gittin' a late start. This is Theron Candage."

"The nice chap who'll git all my money some fine day," remarked Alasco.

Blake, following the gaze of the man he was greeting, glanced up. Alasco's withered features were now creased by a smile of benevolent affection. But a scowl suddenly supplanted the benignity. The victor had come swaggering up.

Wragg was flushed, ugly, in a mood to make the most of his recent triumph.

"Ain't it about time for you to stop promising all your money outside your own family?" He banged his fist on his breast. "I'm a Wragg. I've got rights as your heir."

"It don't make no diff'rance to me what you've got for a name tag! I ain't picking tags—I'm picking real goods." Alasco pointed his pipestem at Theron. "There's my heir, I tell ev'ry one and all!"

"I'm due for my rights!" blustered Luke. "I'm going to stand for 'em now! He's got to meet me in the test tussle to settle claims." He dragged off the jacket which he had put on after the conflict. His hairy torso was still dripping with sweat.

"I've settled it—myself!" declared Alasco stoutly.

"You can't back down on your own rules. You can't pick and choose in 'peal cases! Why, next thing we know you'll be trotting off down country to try out things with damnation lawyers!" sneered young Wragg.

The populace of the hamlet was flocking around the spot.

Luke's father spoke up:

"I ain't been complaining 'bout your shetting me out o' the propuppy, Alasco. I knowed I was too old to tackle Theron Candage in the test tussle. But my boy has his rights and his muscle—and now's the time for our own law to tell what's what."

Men were muttering their assent to this dictum, but old Alasco stood firm.

"I ain't letting nobody tell me what to do with what's mine."

"Aw, you don't dare to let your cosset lamb go up agin' me—that's what's ailing *you!*" bawled young Wragg. He whirled on Theron. "And *you* don't have the sprawl to come to honest grips. You're cheats, the two o' you!"

"If all the rules and the laws are kicked over up here, this way," persisted Luke's father, "there'll be hell to pay all round, from now on." His eyes glittered; his face was twisted with a scowl of hatred—the aggravated passion which

is so abominably ferocious in family feuds over property.

Old Alasco had set his rifle down on the foot rest. Young Wragg's father leaped high and snatched the weapon.

"To hell with rules, if it has finally come to that! Now make your bigness, Luke!"

**DURING** all this tense argument, Blake, so absorbed that he was unheeding of the persisting handclasp, continued to grip Theron's fist. Instantly the college man had found likable qualities in the other; their greeting had been mutually cordial; it was something like friendship at first contact.

Therefore, the shock of Luke's immediate and brutal breaking of the handclasp was hateful—an enormity in the matter of performance.

The young bully lunged forward and drove his shoulder against Blake, sending him toppling and staggering.

At the same moment, Luke swung his arm in a wide arc and drove his flattened hand against Theron's cheek with all the force of arm and revolving body. Young Candage's muscles were relaxed while he tolerantly permitted the continuing handclasp. The swift attack caught him off his guard. He fell, under the savage blow.

As he recently had kicked the other antagonist, Luke banged his foot against his victim. All the rabid hatred in an heir discredited was behind the kick.

"Now will ye git up and go to it like a man?"

Disdaining the help of the sawed-off limbs by which he had ascended the stump, Alasco seized the edge of his foot platform and dropped to the ground with the agility of an ape. He leaped at Lemuel Wragg, to recover the rifle, grim gavel of his arrogated judicial power. Wragg ran away a short distance, whirled the gun around and around over his head, grasping the end of the muzzle, and sent it flying high over the nearest log house, into the underbrush.

"Make him tussle, Luke!" yelled the father. "We're behind you and our law, the whole kit 'n' caboodle of us!"

When Theron struggled up, a madman in resolve to retaliate, old Alasco flung himself in the path, barring arms outspread.

"I'm standing agin' 'em, Theron! In this thing there shan't be no tussle to test! Don't let me stand alone! Back me up!"

But the young man was unmistakably flinging off the shackles of restraint long imposed.

"I'm going to fight him for this!"

"I won't allow ye to fight!"

"Your thumb shall not jam me down any longer! I don't want your damn money and I never asked for it. You have kept me here in the woods, away from an education. You have made me stand for all their slurs. But now that I've been kicked, I'll make that renegade pay for it!"

Old Alasco flung arms and legs about the striding youth and clung like a leech.

"Ye shan't! They'll make it out as a test tussle!"

"It'll be a killing—and no more bother for anybody about Luke Wragg," insisted Candage, trying to cut off this living clog of action.

"Never thought I'd be willing to teamwork with *you* in anything," gibed Luke. "But I'll help you git loose from that old hunk o' rope yarn!"

He started forward; Blake stepped in front of him.

Wragg looked this new volunteer up and down—surveying the new high boots, the spick-and-span corduroy knickerbockers, the fancifully woven pull-over. "How do you fit into this famby party, 'Mister Dude?'"

"You hit *me* first! Now settle with me!" It was dauntless challenge; Blake doubled his fists and squared off.

"Hey, there, Telos man!" bawled old Bart. "You don't belong! Mind your manners!"

"When other folks mind theirs! Now shove up your dukes, you mucker! That's fair warning! You don't give it to anybody else!"

Young Wragg contemptuously kicked at the city man's shins.

Blake leaped aside nimbly and struck

over Luke's awkward guard. It was a hook under the ear, and Wragg went stumbling backward and fell on his haunches.

"Now get up and fight, if you're any part of a man," Blake suggested crisply. "That's what you've been inviting others to do!"

WRAGG leaped up. His malice was centered on the amazing interloper. In his blind fury he was not making estimates in this form of combat—with fists. He rushed at Blake, arms outspread, remembering only how he had just dealt with Soper. Flailing wildly, he was no match for the other, who had been made fit in grueling gymnasium work, who knew pugilism in its fine points.

Blake found it easy enough to escape punishment by this crazy charging bull who rushed with lowered head. The expert, agile in footwork, ducked blows with a twist of the body or snap of the neck and did all the punishing. Inside of a few minutes, he had Wragg prone and half senseless, gurgling grunts as he slowly squirmed on the ground.

"And that's that!" said the city chap, confronting Theron, who had freed himself from the enveloping Alasco.

Candage's face was red with anger and shame.

"Yes, it's only more of making me out a dub!" he raged. He shook his fist at Blake and whirled to repeat the performance in the visage of the old man. "I've been teamed by you and tamed by you. I'm sick of it! I've let you keep me penned up in this sinkhole in the hills, pot-walloping in your kitchen for you. I could have got my education long before this so as to be something worth while in the world. I say, damn your money!"

"I was meaning it all for the best, Theron," quavered the old man. He had lost his pompousness. "I'd 'a' been all alone in my house, 'less I had you to tend and do for me."

"There was always your own relatives for ye to call on!" squealed Lemuel.

"Yes, to come standing around and

wheeling and watching to see how nigh dead I was—and mebbe putting p'isen in the tea they brewed for me," shouted Alasco angrily. "I've been well shtet of ye!" But the rage sloughed off his countenance when he turned again to young Candage.

"Oh, Theron, laddie, you don't still think I've kept you out of a whole lot, do you? It's only been a case o' waiting for the money. What's eddication 'thout a lot o' money to go with it? Fifty thousand—all hid away secret where nobody but you can find it—that's what you'll git." He advanced on Theron, his skinny old hands stretched forth imploringly.

The young man, muttering surly speech, backed away.

"But if I had giv' ye the money to go off and git college l'arning, I wouldn't have nobody to trust in—I wouldn't have you with me," insisted the old man plaintively. "I ain't sp'iled things too much for you! Jest think! Fifty thousand for you to swagger with after I'm gone!"

"I don't want to swagger—an ignorant boob! I've wanted to know something!"

"And what if I give you a slice o' money now?"

"If I did take it—spite of the way I'm feeling—I'd hurry away to get my education," declared Theron, surly, sourly resentful still.

Immediately it was evident that Alasco's proffer had been a trap set for an admission such as Theron had made. The old man flamed into rage.

"So that's it! All you want of me is money to coddle your own notions with. Would scoot off the minit you had your fistful, hey? Knowing it would break my heart to be left alone to do and tend for myself! I shan't give you money so as you can do that to me! No, sir! Mebbe I'll let it rot, anyway, where it's hid away! If it can't buy for me what I'm hankering to have from you, then I won't have it buy nothin' for nobody." He went straddling away toward his house, the ragged dressing gown floating on the wind behind him.

Blake put out his hand to Theron and the young man took it.

"Sorry, old scout! It's a tough deal for you! I'm going to be up in these woods for a time and we'll keep in touch. Count me in on anything where you may need help."

Candage's somberness was swept away by a smile of appreciative gratitude. He gripped Blake's fingers hard.

"I want to say a lot, but I don't know how. For Heaven's sake, do see me often. I need advice. I'm going to get out of here. I want to make something of myself."

Blake looked into the glowing eyes and took full account of the stalwart figure while he endured the clasp of the strong fingers.

"Old man, let this advice from me stick with you till we have another talk: Don't let that knave over there"—he ducked his head sidewise—"draw you into a fight. I know you're not afraid of him. Easy enough to see that! But fighting him will be like arguing with a fool—the fool likes it too much and gets you down on his level! I'm sorry now because I let my own temper run away with good judgment. But I had a special reason—I didn't want to see you mix with him right now. A better time will come!"

"I'll wait for your advice on that as well as on other matters," promised Theron. He bent closer. "Keep a sharp eye out from now on, Mr. Blake! Else Wragg will get you—and he doesn't care what kind of back-handed trick does it!"

Old Bart had come to the pair, and his hand was laid compellingly on Blake's shoulder.

"*There's* some good advice for you, young Telos man! Le's git out o' here before you're snarled up any more in the mess. Let cat claw cat—and mind your own bus'ness."

"It seems to me that I'm elected to stay in the snarl," retorted Blake. He had cast a side glance and was looking into the menacing stare of Luke Wragg. Luke had struggled to his feet with the aid of his father. "Look here, Wragg, why can't we call the thing quits, as it

stands? I'm up here in these woods for business, not bullyragging."

Wragg did not reply. He walked away, half supported by his father.

Crawford shifted his metaphor.

"Look out for a dog when he gits too mad to bark! After this, you'll have only one eye for your Telos calipers, son! That's the cuss o' butting in where you don't belong."

Under the thrust of the old woodsman's palm, Blake started away, twisting a wry grin for a parting salute to Theron.

The Telos men walked for a long way in silence. Outside the penning cliffs, Blake halted and looked back, narrowing his eyes as he estimated the place and pondered a matter which stirred his ready curiosity.

"Fifty thousand dollars, said the old man! How in blazes could he scrape that money together in a hole in the hills?"

"Got it off'm a place outside them hills, young sir! Grabbed timberland as a pioneer! Has sold stumpage rights to the Telos."

"And the cash is hid, as he says?"

"He don't believe in banks any more'n he believes in courts. And that money is going to give the old fool his everlasting come-uppance some day. He's setting on a bumb!"

"But if it's well hidden and anything happens to him, the Wraggs will never finger the cash."

"Young Blake, I've been thinking on the thing for a long time back," stated old Bart earnestly. "If anything ever does happen to Alasco, I'm afeared Theron Candage is going to git rasped hard. The gab the old man let out today—and he keeps letting that gab flow—that talk siggerfies that Theron, as chosen heir, is more or less posted on where the money is hid or else it has been pervided that he *will* know if old Alasco drops off, either slow or sudden! Folks is going to remember that gab. And only to-day Theron advertised that he's crazy to git a-holt of cash. Lord help him if the courts are ever called on to grab into the thing!"

"Candage is all square! You only need to look at him to know it," protested Blake warmly.

"Wa-a-all, how a judge and jury and the lawyers look at a man in court, after there's been enough lying testimony, is a dang sight diff'runt from how me and you size up a chap out here in the open country. Mebbe old Alasco ain't all wrong about leaving judgments to tussle testing! He claims he was born with a caul and can see into the future. Mebbe he was also born with a hunch about what can happen in a court. But standing here projicking on nonsense ain't earning the money the Telos is paying us, young sir! Git to moving one foot front o' t'other!"

ONE day Fire Patrol Jud Waze, peripatetic news bureau, brought assorted items of information to Oxbow Camp, one of the operating branches of the Grand Telos.

The outstanding bulletin stirred specially vivid interest in Bart Crawford and Weston Blake, now sojourners at Oxbow.

"Well, the hell they've been figgering on has broke loose at last in Membec," was Jud's report. "Case o' too much propuppy and too much gab about same! Old Alasco's house, where he was living alone, torched in the night, and his bones have been found in the ashes."

"Accident, o' course!" blurted old Bart, conscious of misgivings in regard to Theron Candage and starting a back fire promptly.

"Murder!" declared Jud Waze. "No question about it! No fire could be spry enough to ketch old Alasco 'less he was laid out stiff by somebody 'fore the blaze started."

"That's only your guess-sot" protested Bart.

"Well, I'm hooraying with the crowd, 'tany rate! That's what they all say—*murder!*" Waze rolled the last word around his tongue with a gossip's zest.

The time was after supper in the bunk house. Waze had a big audience, avid for thrills.

Bart's keen eyes detected rising emo-

tion in Blake. The woodsman, wary, afraid of being drawn into the affair, scared of courts, did his best to warn the young man. Catching Blake's gaze, Bart scowled, wagged his head admonishingly and said:

"Guessing is a mean gulch to tumble into. Best keep away from the edge of it, everybody."

"Why should there be any guessing if murder has been done?" exploded Blake. "If they haven't already grabbed Luke Wragg, they ought to do it!"

Bart muttered and rolled up his eyes, protesting this imprudence.

Mr. Waze, patently surprised, took his time in inspecting this cocksure stranger.

"Oh, city detectative?" he inquired pleasantly.

"I'm the new forester for the Telos," snapped Blake.

"New, hey? Well, most all new things squeak!" Waze swung around and put up his hand to silence babbling questioners. "I'm sluicing one log at a time, gents! Taking no chances on piling up a jam in your minds! Stand by! Here I sluice another big stick! The sheriffs have rushed up and 'rested Theron Candage for killing the old gent."

"Hell!" barked Bart, unable to restrain his own feelings now. "Young Candage wouldn't do it."

Blake leaped to his feet and smacked fist into palm.

"Candage isn't that kind of a chap."

"Have calipered him to git his measure, hey?" sneered Waze. "Well, this new-fangled forestry may know how to caliper the *outside* of a tree, but it takes a practical woodsman to sense whither the tree's rotten *inside*. Now, shet up, ev'rybody! I ain't guessing—I'm reporting the latest news."

He stuck up his left hand and began to bend down the fingers.

"Young Candage was to git the money when old Alasco died. Was announced enough times, wa'n't it? Also, it was jest the same as announced that Theron would know how to find it if he didn't

already know where it was hid." Another finger was doubled down. "Young Theron has been shouting about how he perposed to make his break for the outside—had been fooling away too much of his life in Membec. He'd already moved out of Alasco's house, leaving the old man by his lonesome.

MEMBEC witnesses have sworn as how Theron was seen sneaking around the old man's house the night of the fire. I ain't passing judgment ahead of the jury, but in a murder case it's a mighty good plan to arrest somebody as quick as ye can—and the most likely murderer is the right one to grab. Pleases the public, 'tany rate!"

"Yes, and takes all attention off the real murderer—kicks up a dust in which he hides," charged Blake angrily.

"Sho!" drawled Waze, inspired by grins and winks that urged him to rasp this city fellow who claimed to know so much. "Why don't ye mess into the murder thing, mister?" he asked tantalizingly. "Our hayseed sheriff could be showed something."

This incorrigible old railer was like a file on some very tender feelings in Blake. The young man was conscious of an understanding sympathy and instinctive friendliness for a chap beleaguered as was Candage.

The two had met several times in the woods since the affair at Membec Gore. Candage had opened his heart to the college man, lamenting a belated start toward ambitions which possessed him like a holy fervor. Above all, he had revealed to the stranger what had never been exposed to the skeptics of Membec—a real affection for old Alasco, a devotion that had made Theron a bond servant to the needs of senility.

Shocked by the tragic affair now reported, Blake was aware of a sense of guilt of his own. Influenced by Bart Crawford's lugubrious predictions of perils to spring from a touchy situation, the city man had warmly advised Theron to break away from Membec associations which might involve him, to leave while he was young enough to assimilate

an education, to use his savings from his trapping money.

"Alasco looks as if he could tough it out for some time to come," Blake had remarked. "He can hire a caretaker. It's mistaken devotion, boy, wrecking your prospects—and he'll think all the more of you if you make good."

Therefore, Blake now reflected, the suggested breaking of associations had been in progress by his counsel—it had seemed from the outside like a quarrel between patron and protégé; the liars had made the most of the situation!

While Blake struggled with the problem, that devilish old human file kept rasping.

Rage and spirit of responsibility were suddenly fused into one stout purpose in Blake. He shook his fist in Waze's face.

"Damn you! And all the rest of you, for that matter! I'm jumping in—all over—understand?" He stamped out of the bunk house.

Old Bart chased and caught the volunteer in the camp yard.

"Hev you gone plumb crazy—or what is it?"

"You heard what I said in there—that's enough!"

"Thunder mighty! You've only fell for Jud Waze's stringing of you! Go to bed and sleep it off! Else you'll be haw-hawed out o' this region."

"I simply must hop in and do what I can. I have my reasons!"

"Somebody else will have some other kind o' reasons! That's Field Manager Warren Denslow! The minute he knows you're in the Membec mess he'll fire you out o' your job with the Telos."

"Probably," admitted Blake. "But I feel I'm partly to blame for some of Theron Candage's present trouble. No matter how!" He put up his hand, protesting against questions, and walked away.

"Hist, son!" called Bart cautiously. When Blake turned and listened, the woodsman whispered hoarsely: "Dod-silver it, bub, we'll take our packs and march off all open into the woods in the morning, just as if we was going cruising. Warren Denslow won't be hurt by

what he don't find out about us. It'll have to be sly work, anyway, whatever we do for young Candage, hey?"

"Yes! Unless we have to knock in the side of the jail and pull Candage out!"

"Well," remarked Bart, after a sigh, "when I go into a thing I go in whole hoss. We're harnessed in one team from now on, son!"

HAVING footed it down through the woods, however, the team split at the edge of the shire town. Blake suggested this because the old woodsman could not hide his worry.

"I can get another job, Bart. That is, if Denslow hears about this and fires me for meddling in an outside thing. But you have been too long with the Telos to take chances."

Crawford halted, relieved, and began to search the landscape for a covert.

"An old man can stick along with his concern, bub; but let him go hunting for another job, after he's been kicked out, and it'll be a case of whiny and no oats. I ain't taking back what I said about going in whole hoss, but——" His voice trailed off dolorously.

"This part of the job is especially for me."

"What are you going to do for Theron?" Bart asked.

"Darned if I know! But I'm going into that jail to have my grit flag nailed to the mast." Then he answered promptly the old man's squint of query.

"I simply want to have Theron Candage look me in the eyes, as he has a way of doing, and tell me he's innocent," Blake explained. "Mostly that! Not for news, but for nerving me! Then if he can tell me anything to help in plastering the guilt where it belongs, I'll be glad to know *that*, too."

"Well," commented Bart dubiously, "seems to me like you'd got your two errunts wrong end to, so fur's rel'tive importance goes, but I don't try to keep up with young folks' ideas no more, 'specially if they've been to college." He mellowed the sarcasm by patting Blake's shoulder. "Go to it, bub, and good

luck! I ain't doing much in that line. I was feeling all a-whew and true blue as a hero last night, but somehow 'ruther I don't seem to be 'specially fast colors when the sun shines on me." He walked away toward a clump of trees, wagging his head and muttering.

"This is only some of my skirmish work," Blake called after Bart. "You'll be heavy artillery all right if you're needed in any fight." He tramped away sturdily.

But the skirmisher felt some trepidation when he stood at the head of a flight of stone steps and pushed a button 'under the legend, "Turnkey." In the city, he had heard much about the bumptious and brutal officiousness of a certain class of jail officers. However, he found the ways of the rural shrievalty comfordingly easy-going.

A bluff, cheery man opened the door and twirled his big key hoop with a merry jangling of metal and asked Blake what he wanted. The Telos for-ester tendered his card, bearing his name and occupation, and stated his errand—to call on Candage, as a friend.

"Sure you can see Candage, being a friend of his! And listen! Maybe you can help out matters. My young brother is in right now talking to the prisoner. Harry's a lawyer and wants to take over Candage's defense." The turnkey winked confidentially. "This is between you and I—but there's li'ble to be some big advertising come out o' the trial, and a lawyer that's just starting out needs some booming, hey? But the hell of it is, Candage says he don't believe in lawyers, won't have no lawyer, and he won't talk to my brother. Candage has asked me to keep all lawyers out—but he's a fool if he don't have one. A defender will be appointed by the court, anyway, when the trial comes off, and I figured my brother might's well have the inside track. Now step in as a friend and try to bring the critter round to reason!"

**B**LAKE had quickly lost the tenseness of that initial trepidation. Meeting geniality where he had expected rebuff, he warmly promised to bring Can-

dage around to reason; it did seem to be folly, this persisting against the statute method of defense in court. No longer was it a matter to be settled by the Membec code. The persisting instigation of heredity must not motivate young Candage!

The turnkey, flinging the door open for Blake to pass into the jail, left the iron portal ajar and sat down to listen.

The prisoner was at bay in the single corridor between the cell tiers. In front of the stool on which he sat was an arm-chair overflowing with a plump young man whose flushed face signaled hot emotions.

Candage leaped up and grasped the hand outstretched cordially by the new arrival. The mask of saturnine stubbornness melted into a smile of greeting.

The turnkey observed and called cordially from his post by the door:

"Now you're going to get along all right, Brother Harry. Candage will hear reason from this friend of his."

Evidently this coupling of friend with the lawyer held an ominous hint for Candage. He straightened and scowled and dropped Blake's hand.

"I see you've been posted on conditions, Mr. Blake. I hope you're not expecting to argue me out of the stand I've taken."

"I'm not here for any argument with you, old man! Only this—if you'll stand for a suggestion from me!" A nod encouraged Blake to go on. "You're up against a situation now where the Membec code can't serve. You understand all I mean!"

There was a mutual and complete mental exchange without speech. The matter of Luke Wragg's reckless animosity had been canvassed in their conferences. How to parry or to prevent had been anxiously dwelt upon in their talks.

The lawyer was mystified by the long engagement of the eyes of the two young men. He flashed glances from one to the other.

"Let's all three have an understanding," he pleaded. "You've got to leave this thing to law, as made and provided,



Candage, and I hope this friend of yours will be able to pull you into line."

The prisoner's jaw muscles again were ridged like bonds bulging under the tanned skin, jamming the teeth together to dam speech.

The lawyer frankly cursed this insane muteness.

Blake, better informed as to conditions, was not offended. When Theron sat once more on his stool, the friend laid palm on the bowed shoulder and put a question perfectly natural under the circumstances, but one which allowed Candage, out of their compact, to indicate whether he had knowledge or proofs that could be utilized by an outside helper in pinning anything definite on Luke Wragg.

"Theron, what can I do for you up-country?"

"Nothing, thank you!"

"I understand! And I'm sorry!"

"That code you spoke of! It must be a good one!" The baffled lawyer was peevish. "There seems to be a lot of understanding going on here, but it's too slippery for me to get a clinch on it!"

Blake smiled, but the grimace was wry and wan. He comprehended that, as the case stood, the matter was perforce settled into a duello, without Theron Candage having a choice in discarding the Membec man-to-man methods, even were he at large to make a fight for himself. To accuse Luke Wragg to the law at this time would seem merely like puerile dust throwing. It would dangerously whet an edge on the viciousness of Theron's enemies in the gore, the lying witnesses.

"If I were only out of this place!" mourned the prisoner, lifting his glowing eyes to meet Blake's.

THERE was no mistaking what was behind the lament. This was not to be solved by testimony, technicalities and lawyers' tricks. The true solution lay between two men. The tinder of the truth must be lighted by the harsh contact of those two.

Again the words of historical record flashed up in Blake's memory:

The judicial duel was an expedient resorted to in absence of direct or sufficient evidence.

He was far from adhering to that code, nor was he derogating the honor and abilities of the courts, but right now—in this affair—Blake shook his head and swore under his breath.

Whimsically, in a retort to Bart Crawford, he had mentioned knocking in the side of the jail. Now he doubled his fists and wanted to punch against the stones. He believed that Theron Candage, in this matter, if he were free, could do for himself what the law could not do. The thing belonged out in the open!

The door gong in the turnkey's office *pr-r-ringed* with prolonged summons.

Blake, pacing up and down the corridor, overwrought, rebellious against conditions, saw past the inner door, ajar, and noticed the fat turnkey waddling to open the outer portal. Two men were disclosed, chaps in greasy overalls; between them on the upper step was a new radiator to be added to the jail's heating system.

The turnkey was wholly occupied with this new business.

"Might's well go get your fittings, too, plumbers, and let me make one job of keeping this door open."

The men left the radiator where it stood and disappeared.

With the stool in his clutch, Candage went leaping past Blake. The woodsman's moccasin feet made no sound; with a wild-cat spring he bounded into the turnkey's office before the amazed lawyer could voice his yelp of alarm. Blake was silent.

When the turnkey swung about, galvanically moved by the brother's yell, the prisoner struck ruthlessly with the top of the stool and went out of sight, vaulting over the blocking radiator.

DESPITE the serious and shocking drama of it, Blake laughed when the lawyer went plunging down the corridor; the armchair was sticking to his fat flanks, so tightly was he wedged in. He carried the chair in that fashion into

the office, and Blake, on his heels, was obliged to use a bit of effort in yanking it off. Under the circumstances, the city man was still laughing when the turnkey rolled over onto the floor and opened his blinking eyes. He kicked at Blake, who offered to help him in rising; when he was tottering on his feet, he used up valuable minutes in cursing Blake out as an accomplice in the escape of a murderer.

"Yes, and rubbing it in with your damnation giggling!"

"Look here, sir, your brother will tell you a different story! It was all your own fault."

"I reckoned that killer was all safe with *two* men—one of 'em my own brother!" stormed the officer. "Why the hell didn't you—"

"Shut up!" commanded the lawyer, frantically busy at the office telephone. He got his number and rapped out speech: "Sheriff, that murderer is loose from the jail. Ring up all the constables who live in the outskirts! The man's desperate! Better have 'em shoot to kill."

"I'm going to lock you up, as aiding and abetting!" declared the turnkey, scruffling the slack of Blake's coat in an inexorable clutch.

"All right!" agreed Blake calmly. "But you'll have to jug your brother, also! He's responsible for having the prisoner out in the corridor."

The lawyer snapped an authoritative forefinger against the turnkey's clutching fist.

"Don't be a fool, Al! It's a bad mess and you'll get nowhere by locking this chap up." He turned on Blake; the latter was released and was smoothing out his rumped coat. "Well, Mister Candage's Friend, it gave you a good laugh, eh, his getting away like that?"

"I was merely laughing at that chair performance of yours," returned Blake gravely. "I couldn't help it. Guess I was sort of hysterical for a moment. As to Candage's get-away, I don't find it funny." He was more grave when he added: "Gentlemen, there's bad business brewing!" In his emotion, realiz-

ing what kind of an errand Candage was on, Blake had not guarded his tongue.

"There is, hey?" blazed the lawyer. "Now, young man, come out with all you know about that business. No more of the slippery stuff you and Candage were fooling with!"

Blake pointed to the telephone.

"I just heard you suggest killing a man on sight. Isn't that bad enough in the way of a prospect? That's all I meant."

He walked out, climbing over the radiator when he was on the steps. The brothers were left muttering, but allowed him to go about his affairs.

Blake had equivocated in explaining what he meant by bad business ahead. On the other hand, this gunfire business might break out at any moment in the shire village. He listened nervously for the barking of shots somewhere in the distance. As he walked along, several automobiles went whizzing past; unmistakably the occupants were officers.

Again he noted, as he had observed in entering the place, that the village was a straggling hamlet with the border of the big woods conveniently near for a fugitive's purposes. Among the houses, there were board fences for gardens and fowls, plenty of coverts and blinds to aid in escape. As a trailer of wild animals, Candage must know all the tricks of a quarry pursued. That reflection encouraged Blake's hope. He was fervently wishing for the fugitive's success in flight. He deserved to be free long enough to make his fight for something the law of the courts could not give.

Finally, when Blake had left the houses behind, Bart Crawford sauntered out from a grove of small pines.

"Well, son," he drawled, "I listened sharp, but I didn't hear the noise of it!"

"Of what?" demanded the young man, frowning into Bart's slow smile. Blake was in no mood for jest.

"Jail wall being busted in. You said it might be a good way to get Theron out."

"How do you know he's out?"

"Got a flash o' him scooting into the edge of the timber, way over yender."

"Then he's safe away?"

"Wa-a-all, I wouldn't reelly wonder if he is! Them officers who went jouncing past here later in flivvers is too lazy to get out and walk. Furthermore, with that wild woodsman ten lengths ahead among the trees, they couldn't no more ketch him than they could run the legs off'n a bobcat. How'd he get out?"

Blake told. And he added:

"He isn't running away because he is guilty."

"He's hotter'n hell after Luke Wragg!" declared Bart. "That's the Membec style—and you've already seen the critters at it! Going to leave these two alone fr'm now on, ain't ye?"

Blake gazed helplessly at the woods of the North Country.

"I can't see any sensible way of helping."

"There ain't none!"

"But the officers will ride to the jumping-off place and beat Candage into the gore."

"And you think, do you, that the young feller will sa'nter in there, sticking out his paws for the handcuffs? Say, bub, a college eddication may come in handy for him later, but right now, for the special line he's in, there ain't a fox betwixt here and the Ebeeme Range but what's in the A-B-C class compared with young Candage. Dang rammit, he's in the big woods, ain't he?" As if that were reply to all possible queries, Bart started away.

"And there's nothing—nothing we can do, eh?" faltered Blake, catching up.

"Yes, tromp most o' the night to get back to camp so we can partly make up the day's work we nigged out o' the Grand Telos! Save your breath for that!"

FOR the remaining hour of afternoon, through the twilight, then aided by the hunter's moon casting patches of radiance among the trees, Candage was the fleeing fox, using all the tactics of wile and maneuver.

But he was free! The uplift of that

glorious knowledge made his flight a buoyant rush through the forest aisles.

At dawn, he had ceased to be the fugitive fox. He had become the hawk! Still, he was free! His emotions were mingled joy and ferocity.

He beheld the red smear of the sunrise before any other eyes in the Membec region saw it. He was in a crevice high on the pinnacle of Pamona, the peak which dominated all the crags and cliffs that hemmed Membec Gore. The carmine skies fitted his flaming mood. Now his impulses were hawklike. He was quester, not quarry!

Just how or when or where he would give battle, he did not know. He had climbed to the perch on Pamona in order to maintain surveillance, to gather hints for action. There were no tremors in him any longer; he had no fear that the law trailers could track him to that dizzy height; only a few venture-some climbers had ever mastered the cliffs.

The glen of Membec was still in shadows. Little flecks of yellow in the gloom, he saw the kitchen lights of the early rising housewives. Then, as the glory of day spread, he beheld the smoke wisps from chimneys, ragged little banners promptly whipped away by the lash of the autumn wind.

There were strangers in the gore that morning. Seen from his height, the figures were scaled down to puny size, but the sunlight was strong and revealing. Long overcoats of men flapped; the gore woodsmen did not hamper their movements with flapping overcoats. The strangers walked around and around the black patch where Alasco's house had stood, displaying the curiosity of newcomers; the folks of the gore took no more interest in the grim embers of the pyre—they kept away from it—they did not like to look at it. Once in a while, in that brilliant sunlight, Candage caught the flash of the badges on the strangers' breasts. But he was free! He exulted! He scoffed, talking to himself.

Then the strangers went away. He watched them trail out of sight in the chasm between the cliffs. Pamona was

to the north; they were heading south. He was wishing the eyes of vengeance could possess telescopic power. Attire had distinguished the men from the outside of Membec. But he was not able to pick Luke Wragg out of the herd of nondescripts in their garb of Mackinaw and flannel shirts, unless, perhaps, Luke was the one who had marched with the strangers down into the chasm and had returned alone to the hamlet.

It would be the natural play for Luke Wragg to stick along and pour more lies into the ears of the seekers; it would fit the notions of a guilty man to go with the officers and make sure of their departure. The watcher on the crag made the most of that supposition.

Now that he had been left free to occupy himself with his own concerns, to what would Luke Wragg set himself?

The hawk on Pamona selected this especial moving figure in the arena of the glen and kept it marked and individual by an undeviating gaze at it. The person entered the Lemuel Wragg house. Therefore, vengeance had guessed well.

The man came out; he swung a pack upon his shoulders and started north. Trudging toward Pamona, he was lost to view under the outthrust cliffs; he was Luke Wragg. Candage made sure of it, crawling out on a spur, flattening himself on a ledge, clinging by his fingers to crevices in order to prevail against a wind that was swabbing moss and loose grit from the peak. The hawk had marked his quarry!

**H**OWEVER, Candage, looking out at a great bird that was slowly scaling in majestic arcs, impotently damned his own deficiencies. His spirit urged him to leap forth, to plunge like a bird of prey, to rip the truth out of his foe as an eagle tears the heart from a lamb. But the limitations of the human body permitted merely a snaillike crawl across the granite obliged him to cling, buffeted and breathless, until he could gather strength for another advance against the gale.

He was striving to win across the sad-

dleback to Pamona's sister mountain; he was advancing parallel with Wragg's route; the other mountain, a dome, had a north slope where descent could be easily made along a trail. Once on that trail, Candage knew, he could make up for this sluggish crawling—this devilish delay while he battled the tempest. He would run by leaps and bounds down the rugged slope; he could be ready for Wragg in the Patchdam Trail. Patchdam Heath was the intended destination of the enemy. Candage was not doubting that! This was the season when Wragg would be setting his traps for the muskrat catch.

After leaving Pamona's high peak, Candage was able to make a partial windbreak of the crest of the broad saddleback; dropping a little way down the side of the declivity, he wormed his way over the outthrust spurs of ledge. But at the Sabre Edge he was obliged to return to the crest to meet full face once more the roaring wind.

Some fanciful distributor of names had dubbed it the Sabre Edge, that segment of granite cocked up and planed narrow by glaciers, a narrow scimitar blade curving and connecting Pamona's side with the opposite mountain. Old woodsmen called it "Duck-foot Web;" the mountains were the gigantic toes, upflung.

Even in calmer weather, few men had the temerity to cross there on foot. The sheer descent on both sides was terrifying, and a stumble or a swirl of dizziness would snatch a victim. Therefore, they who went venturing in placid weather got respectfully down on their knees at the end of the Sabre Edge and crawled along the narrow crest, keeping their eyes fixed on the ledge in front of them, taking no risks by side glances into the brain-dizzying depths.

In like fashion Candage began to inch his way along the Sabre Edge. But he did not dare to elevate his body on hands and knees. He flung himself prone and crawled. Even that progress, every moment of it, was loaded with desperate peril. The edge was serrated with great nicks. Every few rods he was

obliged to work himself up over a Gar-gantuan tooth of ledge. The corresponding hollows gave him fresh strength and a short respite from the breath-taking buffeting by the wind. Several times he was fairly snapped out in the air, whiplash fashion, and his gashed hands were red spotted when the gale ebbed and he was able to relax his clutch on the jagged projections.

He was realizing now that only utter desperation had driven him to this terrible hazard.

But the noose was threatening him; his salvation must be wrought out by him alone. It was an urge which must needs drive a man to the extreme of temerity. Therefore, this man had a strong motive for any sort of jeopardy.

There is another compelling motive in human life—lust for treasure. Ocean depths and mountaintops do not deter. Another man was risking himself on the Sabre Edge that day, driven by fierce greed to venture again on a quest that had engaged all his waking hours for days past.

So two men, actuated by compelling, though different, desires—greed for gold, vehement craving for justification—crawled toward each other on the Sabre Edge, concealed each from each by the jagged spurs.

Candage took time to crouch and rest for a few moments in an indentation where the crest was flattened in a bit of a plateau. He was the first to be aware that another man was on the Sabre Edge that day.

**W**RAGG crawled around a jagged ledge tooth, having no eyes for aught except his handholds. Candage allowed his enemy to come on, repressing the yell of amazement and challenge that almost escaped him.

Wragg, ten feet away, above the level of the small plateau and partly in the lee of the spur, looked to measure the slide into the hollow. He beheld the other man. His quick yell was swept off his lips by a vicious blast of the gale. Then stupefaction made him mute.

Between him and the goal he had set

for himself that day, a dreadful obstacle to confront a guilty conscience, was the man whom lies had placed behind bars.

Wragg's first coherent thinking was concerned with a matter about which he was damning himself hotly: for his wrestle with the gale he had freed his body of all clogs, leaving his rifle with his pack at the end of the Sabre Edge. His only recourse in the way of a weapon was a heavy chisel strapped to his waist; he had believed that he needed a chisel to use on a certain box; only lunacy would have suggested bringing there the rifle he had carried on the chance of meeting his foe down in the open country.

Wragg would not have been greatly surprised to find Candage lurking near the settlement in the brush. But by what sort of damnable hunch or hocus-pocus did Theron Candage happen to be upon the Sabre Edge on a day like that? Setting an ambush in a spot where no other man would be expected to venture in a gale!

Out of his engrossment in his own errand, Wragg dug a core of suspicion. He yelled:

"You're after it, too, hey? Have had a line on it, just as everybody suspicioned you had!"

Candage bellowed against the wind: "You've got what I'm after—and I'm going to tear it out of you!"

Wragg, able merely to guess at the adversary's resources in this crisis, held to the ledge by one hand and slapped the other on the handle of the chisel, hand and weapon concealed by his Mackinaw. He was making a test of Candage's resources in his enemy's bravado; he felt fairly certain that the fugitive had not been able to secure a weapon overnight; however, he wanted to make sure.

"Pull, and shoot it out! I'm giving you a show!"

"Show!" jeered Candage. "You're only showing me you haven't any gun! Else you'd have nailed me on sight! So we start all even! Bare hands!" He began to creep toward Wragg.

The antagonist whipped out the big chisel. Luke gripped it by the middle. Sharp edge or steel-tipped handle—it was a double menace to a man unarmed.

There was no more talk between the two; the battlers who adopted the Membre code were wonted to bulldog silence in combat. Candage did not even speak out in protest when he saw the chisel. He rose, his body doubled forward, his arms outspread, his legs straddled wildly so that he could withstand the rushing wind.

This pose put all thoughts of any new kind of strategy out of Wragg's mind. This was the regular Membre style of going into conflict. Habit ruled Wragg in his manner of offensive. He exulted in the possession of the chisel, assured that the odds were with him.

He shifted his feet, made sure of his toe leverage, and launched himself down the declivity, purposing to bear Candage under with the weight of his catapulting body. Then the edge of the chisel between the shoulder blades or the haft against the skull—Wragg reserved choice until the clinch; he was not doubting his ability to prevail.

**W**HEN Wragg, helpless in the grip of gravity, was off his feet, Candage threw himself sidewise and stuck up his leg. Wragg, tripped, unable to swerve in his course, slammed face down on the plateau, raking off skin as he slid. Out of his relaxed hand, that was ground against the rough granite, the chisel slipped, clinking along in its course and hopping over the edge of the cliff into the silence of whirling, unbroken descent.

Instantly Candage whipped over onto his abdomen and gripped the ankles of Wragg, who was squirming, half stunned, a handbreadth from the fearsome rim. A twist to guide the lethargic struggles of the foe, and Wragg toppled over the edge, head down, his back against the wall of the cliff.

Candage clung to the fellow's ankles. But it could be only a momentary and precarious anchoring of the sagging weight.

His head projecting over the edge, Candage looked down into the countenance of Wragg, already red, contorted with insane terror.

"You've got only a few seconds!" gasped the man above. "Else I won't have strength to lift you back. Tell me the truth!"

In stress of fright Wragg tore at the very heart of exultation.

"Alasco ain't dead! He ain't dead!" "Where is he?"

But now rancor was strangling the confession. Wragg was fighting against full surrender to the one who would profit from the truth. He propped himself by trembling arms, shoving out from the cliff; he tried to raise his body from the hips.

The strain pulled Candage a few halting inches toward the cliff's edge.

"I'm not going smash down into hell with you!" he cried. "One more move and I let you go!"

The two faces were nearer; one empurpled, horrified, the other implacable.

Wragg choked out incoherent pleadings. He sagged slowly back, easing himself by weak arms, with the manner of one who feared to jar an impending death avalanche. A fragment of splintered ledge, dislodged by one of his hands, broke from under him. An awful silence followed and indicated the extent of the emptiness below. There was no more spirit of rebelliousness in him—only strangling abasement.

"Where is he?" demanded Candage, letting Wragg slip a few inches.

"In one o' the Bossum caves. Pull me up! You're needin' me! To guide you!"

"Use your arms! Help!" adjured Candage. "I'm losing strength!"

It was inch-worm business. When Wragg's knees were above the edge, Candage doubled the legs forward and sat on the feet. He was able then to extend his hands and grasp Wragg's clutching fingers. With a mighty heave, the man was lifted from the menace of the abyss.

The reaction was prostrating. Wragg sprawled in a stupor, gasping. When he

had strength enough to move, he obeyed Candage's compelling gesture and began to crawl back along the crest. The victor followed closely.

Though Candage made allowances for Wragg's shattered morale and the physical condition following the appalling ordeal above the chasm, he began to doubt the foe's increasing symptoms of collapse. Those symptoms were too extravagant. No man, Theron decided, could fight the wind on the exposed places after such displays of weakness in the hollows, if the debility were real. So, suspecting guile in one whom he knew to be a renegade in all his impulses, Candage was prepared in his resolution even though he was able to make poor shift in the way of a weapon.

The two men, Candage close behind the other, his eyes on the soles of the creeping man as he hitched his feet along, won over the length of the Sabre Edge to the place where it broadened into the flank of the opposite mountain.

Then, at the edge of the zone of safety, Wragg leaped up and ran; he was headed toward the rifle left propped against his pack.

CANDAGE made the best use of the weapon with which he had armed himself as he crawled along. It was a round stone. He was up as soon as Wragg. Running behind, aiming carefully, he hurled the stone and caught the fugitive in the back of the head, dropping him. Kneeling on the unconscious man, Theron yanked Wragg's belt from the Mackinaw and bound the limp wrists together behind the other's back. Then he scabbled up a handful of moss, rolled it in Wragg's handkerchief and made a gag of the contrivance, lashing the ends of the handkerchief behind the captive's head.

Rabid in fury that had been roused by Wragg's treachery, Candage kicked the foe back into consciousness. Once more the commandeered guide led the way, this time wholly at the mercy of a savage mentor who carried a rifle.

Circling the mountain, whiplashing into a region inaccessible except as one

knew the meaning of ax marks blazed on trees, they came to the mouth of the cave.

Candage had not gagged his man merely to shut off irritating speech. In his long hours for thought, he had been building something in the way of a theory. He had not been especially surprised by the news that Alasco was alive.

Alasco dead, with a sealed mouth, could not serve men who were seeking the old man's hidden treasure. Candage had guessed something even as early as the night of the fire; he had been the first on the scene, to his prejudice, giving liars their opportunity. Now he believed that Luke's father, Lemuel Wragg, aider and abettor, would be found at the end of the trail that day.

Therefore, outside the entrance of one of the Bossum caves, an inlet with a sharp twist that shut out the light of day, the captor drove in his captive ahead, at the end of the rifle, and Luke Wragg could not cry out to warn.

The light of a smoky lantern gave Lemuel Wragg a glimpse of his son without fully revealing Luke's plight.

"Didya git it, boy?"

A shadow darted from behind the son. Candage struck without speaking, selecting his spot, knocking down the elder Wragg as a butcher stuns an ox for slaughter.

Out of the gloom in the recesses of the cave came an old man's quavering cry:

"What's happening?"

"I am!" reported Theron.

After he had securely pinioned Lemuel Wragg, again using the belt from a captive's Mackinaw, he picked up the lantern, held it high to reveal his face and went to make sure of the vital, unanswerable proof that Theron Candage was not the murderer of Alasco Wragg.

TO Oxbow Camp came High Sheriff Caleb Hingston. He arrived there in the early morning of the day following Candage's escape. He had not accompanied his understrappers into the gore; the fugitive would not be caught nap-

ping by any such sortie, the sheriff was well aware.

Blake's card, turned over to the sheriff by the turnkey, suggested a possible clew. The head of the shrievalty made all speed in getting to this young chap who seemed to be so much on the inside of Candage's affairs. Deeply in the prisoner's confidence, too, so the discomfited lawyer had reported, exaggerating in order to remove as much stigma as possible from himself and the turnkey.

"You may as well talk to the two of us," declared Bart Crawford, when the sheriff asked Blake to step away from all listeners. "I'm in it just the same as he is—waited for him in the edge of the shire town while he went to the jail."

The sheriff's appeals got nothing from the pair. They assured him, speaking the truth when they explained their interest and their attitude, that they knew no more about the whereabouts of Theron Candage than the officer did.

Inwardly the sheriff was convinced by this frankness, but he tried threats as a final resource.

Old Bart narrowed the lids over his hard, gray marbles of eyes.

"Look-a-*here*, sheriff! What d'ye think this browbeating is going to get ye?"

"Nothing, I guess!" confessed Hingston promptly. "I was only hoping you two could help me."

"We've been showed mighty plain that we'd better tend to our Telos knitting from this time on. And we'll do it!"

But he was not reckoning on the pricking curiosity of youth.

Blake was ardently anxious to get in touch with affairs in the gore. He masked his personal interest with a shrewd appeal to Bart's vanity.

"No wonder the sheriff is coming to you for help, Friend Crawford! You have a big pull with the folks in Membec. They'll lie down and roll over for you!"

"Oh, I know how to handle 'em all right!" agreed Bart, with airy complacency.

"Why don't we go with Sheriff Hing-

ston into the gore, and see what can be dug up?"

"All right!" assented Bart, fired by his apparent importance. "First of all, the law has got to be helped out, of course. Second, young Candage has got to be helped. He's in a scrape where he don't belong." It was asserted stoutly.

"Maybe he is," admitted the sheriff, anxious to placate this new aid. "If you'll hop on my buckboard with me, I'll make it an easy jaunt for you gents—and be mighty grateful in the bargain."

Two stout nags, fairly passable tote roads—and they were in Membec before noon.

Bart did the hammering with bluff questions. The sheriff observed keenly for sparks of information. The quest was fruitless, though proper respect was displayed for the official gold badge and manifest candor was evoked from all by Crawford.

One of his first demands, after he had surveyed faces in the grouped populace, was:

"Where's Luke Wragg? And his ther, too! Where's Lem?"

"The Wraggs is off on their trap lines," reported a spokesman. "Lem was away, time o' the fire. Luke has been back and forth, toting supplies to their camp."

AT the end of a half hour the sheriff went with his two aids to the edge of the blackened patch where Alasco's house had stood. A man came and broke in on a conference which was producing no results.

The intruder was Art Soper. His arm was in a sling.

"I'm suspicioning something, Mister Sheriff. But I didn't want to say anything out in front o' the rest o' 'em."

"Let 'er go!" commanded Hingston.

"I ain't had nothing much to do but loaf and range since that hellion broke my arm. I've been looking over our graveyard, among other things. And if I'm any judge o' signs about where digging has been going on and sods set



back again, then there's been monkey-doodling round my father's grave."

"Die recent?"

"'Bout a couple months ago. I would 'a' dug in to see what had happened to the old gent, but I couldn't do it with only one arm. Furdermore, I want both arms to use for myself before I start a hoorah by any talk that Luke Wragg will hear of!"

"Well, you seem to be making something out of all this! What?"

"What if them bones found in these ashes wa'n't Alasco's?" asked Soper. "Furdermore, as I've said, I've been ranging. And the Wraggs hain't set a damn trap on Patchdam Heath—and Luke swings off'n the Patchdam Trail when he gits about so fur. I couldn't climb where he's been going!" He significantly patted the disabled arm.

"Looks like we're getting a-holt o' something, sheriff," blurted Bart.

"And we'll pull mighty sudden on what we've got hold of!" Hingston strode toward a group of men. "I call on you boys in the name of the county! Get shovels and dig into the grave of Art Soper's father. Find out what is there or what ain't there. Hustle to it!"

There was prompt obedience. The hurrying men disappeared over the swell of the foothill.

A few minutes later there was a real resurrection, so it seemed to the staring eyes of the throng. Alasco Wragg came in sight, emerging from the trail mouth to the north.

As soon as amazement ceased to be wholly concerned with this terrifying demonstration of the fabled phoenix in human form, goggling attention was centered on Theron Candage; he was teaming along the Wraggs, father and son, lashed wrist to wrist.

The sheriff rushed to meet the party, Crawford and Blake hurrying with him. But Alasco refused to be halted even by the wearer of the gold badge of authority.

The patriarch doggedly pushed past

the sheriff's barring arm and hobbled to the tree-trunk throne. Men were obliged to boost him to his seat; his hands would not serve him in clutching the limb props.

When he was in his seat, he held up those hands for all to see. The gaunt fingers were cut and torn and blackened by bruises. He accused stridently:

"Look at 'em! Then look at Luke and Lem Wragg. They gagged and tied me in my house in the night. They set it afire. They hauled me on a jumper to Bossum. They tried to make me tell where my money was. They jammed my fingers in the jaws of their traps. But they only got a word at a time out o' me! I couldn't help dripping a little! But what I dropped sent Luke Wragg to get his everlasting gash from old Sabre Edge! But I f'it against telling—yes, I did! You're the sheriff, be ye?" He glared down at Hingston and curled his lips from yellow teeth.

"What be ye going to do to 'em?"

"You don't need to give me any advice on that point," said the officer grimly. He tugged handcuffs from under the tail of his coat. While he was clicking gyves on the wrists of the prisoners, half a dozen men came whooping in chorus over the swell of the foothill.

One clarion voice announced:

"Jeff Soper has got away out o' his grave!"

Immediately the oncomers perceived that even this news was tame compared with what they beheld; old Alasco was again on his throne.

"Jeeemro susskatawhoop!" yelled one of the diggers, slamming down his shovel. "What the blazes has got into the old sirs? They can't no longer be buried or burned for keeps!"

"But some of the others in Membec can be put where they won't get out—not *this* time," declared the sheriff. He shifted his significant stare from Candage to Blake. "They won't be at home to callers!"





# The Flying Gun

By Fred MacIsaac

*Author of "Spirit of the Mist," "Tin Hats," Etc.*

When young Stuart Elbrow, rookie telegrapher, was assigned to the station at Joshua, Nevada, he wasn't aware that he had been given the job shunned by every one. Joshua, apparently, was lonelier than a desert oasis, for no trains ever stopped there and the nearest town was miles away. Nevertheless, Stuart found plenty of excitement.

**I**N his section in the transcontinental express of the Great Southwestern, Stuart Elbrow sat looking out upon the most drab and monotonous landscape in the world. Then he became aware that the train was slowing down. An ebony Pullman porter touched him on the shoulder.

"You get out here, sah," he declared.

The young man, in surprise, looked out of the window. Yes, they were still in the middle of the desert; not a building was visible as far as the eye could see.

"Must be some mistake," he protested. "I'm going to Joshua, Nevada."

"Yes, boss, this am it." The porter's gleaming white teeth were visible. "It am on the other side of the track."

Through the being of Stuart Elbrow there percolated a conviction that all was

not as it should be. He put on his straw hat, however, and followed the black man, who carried his bag, through the car. Elbrow was aware that other travelers gazed at him with interest because he was leaving the train at such a spot. The porter leaped to the ground, sat down his box step to aid the passenger, pocketed the quarter tip, then waited for a man who dashed out of the station.

The newcomer carried a big suit case and his face wore an expression of great joy.

"Are you Elbrow?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir. Why?"

"Welcome to our city. Here's the office key. Good-by!"

Abruptly he swung upon the car platform, followed by the porter, waved an arm in farewell and passed inside the car, leaving Elbrow beside the track,

gripping the brass key in his right hand. A host of unspoken questions whirled in his brain, while the long train of nine Pullmans, a diner and an observation car got slowly under way. The train flashed by, leaving an impression of the brass rails and awning of the observation platform where Elbrow had sat, the night before, looking out upon the desert of Utah in the moonlight, with several pretty girls, who thought it weirdly romantic.

As soon as the train had passed, Elbrow was able to see Joshua, Nevada. It consisted of a long, low box of a station, and a tree—a fantastic, twisted, gnarled deformed thing, a hideous caricature of a tree, which resembled nothing so much as one of those trees in Gustav Dore's illustration of Dante's "Inferno," part of the vegetation of hell, perhaps a damned soul turned into a plant. It made him shudder to look at it, yet, in time, his eyes would come to rest upon it gratefully as the only break in the awful flatness of the desert.

It was a Joshua tree. From it, the station had taken its name. Elbrow learned that it was the only beneficent thing in the arid regions, for it yields a sap which has often sustained life in prospectors lost in the vast barren country.

It was one thing to gaze from a car window at the unending expanses of the desert and another to be abandoned in the center of it. And it grew upon Elbrow, with dreadful assurance, that he was entirely alone, the only inhabitant of the town of Joshua, with its one building and its single tree.

The sun was already high overhead; the glare was unbearable. To the east and north and south was nothing save the gray-green and white of the American Sahara, gray-green because a fuzz of sagebrush covered the dry plains. To the west, far away, the young man did not know whether ten miles or fifty, rose jagged, saw-toothed mountains of red and yellow.

The poor befuddled youth laughed miserably. No wonder the retiring agent was waiting for the train, bag in hand,

anxious to board it before the new man had a chance to look about him. Tomorrow, Elbrow would be waiting also, for nothing in the world would persuade him to remain in this dreadful place alone.

He could not understand why there happened to be a station here; there was an old siding apparently disused, but there was no water tank, nor was there a village of any sort to be served by a railroad.

At least he could enter the station before he was sunstruck. He opened the door and looked inside. The building was about thirty feet long, by fifteen feet wide. Its interior had been cut in two by a partition, pierced by a ticket window and a door to the right of it. There was nothing whatever in the outer section of the station, save an old bench and a map of the Great Southwestern Railway, nailed upon the wall at the far end of the room.

THE door to the inner section was locked, but the brass key opened it, and he found himself in the office and living quarters of the agent.

At the opposite side of the room was an old iron safe; beside it was a cot bed. Against the outer wall of the station at the right was a long telegrapher's table, with an instrument upon it, and a typewriter of the period of 1895 beside the telegraph keyboard.

Elbrow sat down upon the cot and looked about him morosely; then he noticed, stuck in the roller of the typewriter, a freshly typed sheet of yellow paper, evidently a message from the dear departed.

DEAR MR. ELBROW: Pardon my hasty getaway, but I have served ten years here in the last month, and my sense of duty is so strong that had you beaten me aboard the train I should have remained until another sucker arrived.

In a lean-to behind the station, you will find a stove, some coal and wood, and a supply of canned goods. Also a cask of water. There is no water within ten miles of the station; you get your supply every three days when they drop a cask off a through freight train. They also leave a monthly case of canned goods,

bread, et cetera, which is charged against your salary.

Your duties are nominal. No trains are scheduled to stop here, but occasionally you receive messages to be delivered to trains which will stop on flag signal. If you had not taken the job, I think they would have abandoned the station. It's no earthly use, since they transferred the siding to Las Platas, fifteen miles west.

The nearest town is twenty-five miles south-east, and since prohibition it's worthless. There is no society hereabouts. I don't suppose you will stay long, but I am much obliged for getting off the train without looking out of the window.

P. GRESHAM.

Stuart Elbrow was a recent graduate of a school of telegraphy, who had made application for a position as operator to the Great Southwestern Railway, assuring the company in his letter that he was willing to go anywhere he was assigned and would convince them of his ability by intelligent and faithful service. Almost immediately he had been appointed to Joshua.

Because he was young and hopeful and without guile, he had not thought it strange that when he said "open sesame" to the business world, its door had been immediately flung wide, nor had any premonition that all was not well prevented him from accepting the appointment. His fellow graduates, equally unaware of the undesirability of Joshua, Nevada, saw him depart with envy.

Of course young Elbrow understood now why he had been instantly hired, for experienced telegraphers would no more accept a ticket for Joshua than they would put out their hands for a free pass to the infernal regions.

After a while he looked hopefully at the telegraph key. To him, it was not an inanimate object; rather, it was a friendly bit of brass which would make up for the absence of human companionship until train time to-morrow. Then he would say good-by to his career as a railroad man, go home and take a job as a clerk in a shoe store or as a waiter in a lunch room—any job where he could be sure of seeing people, lots of them. It was not an unprepossessing young man who sat gloomy-eyed in the dusty,

stuffy, hot, unfriendly room. Stuart Elbrow was honest and clear of eye; his brown hair, his pink cheeks which required the attention of a razor only three times a week, his straight nose, and strong chin were pleasing in appearance. He had youth and health, and his head was well-shaped. Altogether, he was a decent and not unintelligent boy, worthy of a better deal from Fate and the railway company.

Presently he opened the instrument and pounded out a greeting to Las Platas, the nearest station according to a time-table pinned to the wall in front of him. After five minutes of nervous tapping, he got an answer.

"Hello, Elbrow!" said the instrument pertly. "I'm eating breakfast and don't want to be bothered talking. Sent in your resignation yet?"

"I leave to-morrow," declared Elbrow.

"Try to get away! Conductors have orders not to take on board the Joshua operator unless there is a relief on the train."

WITH an expletive, Elbrow closed his key. This was a shock. He had not dreamed he could not depart if he wished, but the railway company had actually marooned him, and the brutal humor of the Las Platas operator hurt his feelings.

"I won't stay," he exclaimed.

Persons alone get into the habit of talking aloud to themselves, and Elbrow had the habit within ten minutes of his arrival. He contemplated stealing a ride on a slow-moving freight, tucking himself on the rods of a freight car as he had read was the custom of peripatetic hobos, but he dismissed the thought because, green as he was, he understood that the alkali dust of the desert would suffocate him.

With infuriating deliberation, the hours marched past while his instrument mocked him no more. He moved about, finally went out to inspect the shack which served as a storeroom, kitchen, and larder for the agent at Joshua.

He saw rows of shelves upon which were set stacks of canned goods. There

was a big box of stove coal, and some kindling, also a water cask and other kegs and boxes, the contents of which did not at that time interest him. Finally he returned to the office, kicked off his shoes, hung up his coat, threw himself upon the cot and by the middle of the afternoon, he was so sunk in bitterness and despondency that he did not hear a tap upon the door in the partition until the noise was repeated.

It is curious that the first emotion of one who knows himself entirely alone in a remote place, although he yearns for society of any sort, is fear. When he finds evidence that there is another human in the vicinity, he is frightened. Elbow experienced alarm, then relief. Rising and thrusting his feet into his shoes, he strode to the door and threw it open. Confronting him was a young woman.

She was a small girl. A saucy, pretty little face looked up at him from beneath a broad-rimmed felt hat, and a smile, part friendliness and part amusement, warmed his lonely heart. If he had passed this girl in the city, he might not have noticed her, but here, appearing as unexpectedly as *Crusoe's Man Friday*, she was well worth a long look. She wore riding clothes of brown, covered with a powdery-white dust which had even spread a coating on her tanned face.

"For Heaven's sake! Where did you come from and how did you get here?" he demanded.

"How long have you been here and how do you like it?" she countered. "No, don't answer the last question. I know!"

"You're wrong; I'm beginning to like it," he said, with a wide smile.

"Do you suppose you could spare a little water for my horse? And I could do with a sip myself. Whew, it's hot!" With this, she pulled off her hat and showed a mass of curly brown bobbed hair, and in need of being combed. If she seemed prepossessing under the big sombrero, she was positively beautiful with her lovely display. Elbow's enthusiasm was so obvious that she smiled again, rather shyly.

"I'm sorry I have no ice," he told her. "There seems to be plenty of water. Of course you are welcome to all you want."

He ran into the shed, returning with a pail into which he had poured a couple of quarts of water. She had brought around a sweating pony who plunged his nose eagerly into tepid fluid. Then Stuart offered the girl her drink in a tin dipper, the only receptacle he could discover in his haste.

"Gee, I'm glad to see you!" he said frankly. "I didn't know anybody lived within fifty miles of this awful place."

"I'm a neighbor." She smiled. "I only live fifteen miles away."

"On the desert?" he asked.

"No, there is a spring with quite a cultivated patch around it beyond your horizon, and half a dozen settlers. You must come to see us if you are allowed to leave the station. My name is Price. What's yours?"

"Stuart Elbow. This is my first job, and I hated it until you knocked on the door."

"It's a perfectly useless station," she said sympathetically. "We use *Las Platas* upon the rare occasions that we need a railroad train."

"I suppose that's a big town. The operator over there is very haughty."

The girl laughed. "It's a desert town, a station, a water tank, a siding, a general store, six or eight white residents, and a dozen huts inhabited by Mexicans who work on the railroad."

"Your settlement is nearly as big," he surmised.

"Oh, we're farmers, and the houses are widely scattered. The mine is as near you as we are."

"I didn't know there was a mine."

"It's in the foothills, about fifteen miles west, a silver mine and quite profitable. Though I have never been there, I believe they employ thirty or forty men."

"Then I shall have visitors from that direction," he said hopefully.

Miss Price rested herself upon an empty box, which stood outside the shack, and fanned herself with her hat.

He liked the friendliness of her, a sort of boyish directness, and it seemed to him that she grew prettier every minute. The station, too, took on an air of cheerfulness. Perhaps he had been hasty in determining to desert his post, and there were things about the desert which were not so bad. In Kansas City, he had never met a girl like Miss Price. She was a new type to him.

"People from the mine are not likely to drop in," she told him. "You may see their cars whiz by in the distance, but they ship direct to Las Platas. There is some talk of running a branch up there, but at present they use flivvers and trucks."

"I'd like to come to see you," he was bold enough to declare. "Only I haven't a horse."

"You must have a horse," she returned. "And they are dirt cheap. Could you spend twenty dollars?"

"Do you mean to say I can get a saddle horse for twenty dollars?"

"Or less. But I could pick you out a good pony from our stock for that, and bring it over some time."

"I'd certainly appreciate it if you would. You know, it's a mystery to me how you find your way in the desert."

"By the sun, of course. It's easy and you'll soon learn. I've got to be starting back."

"Please don't go," he pleaded. "It's terribly lonesome and I'm direct from a big city."

"Poor kid!" she observed, with a kind look in her brown eyes. "You must have been half out of your mind when you found where you had landed."

"You said it! Say, if you don't mind telling me, what's your first name?"

"Polly."

"Mine's Stuart."

"That's rather a nice name. Let's go inside, out of the sun."

Inside the station conversation languished. Polly's eyes were busy. Without a by your leave she rose, poked about, discovered fresh sheets on a high shelf and a fresh pillow case, then proceeded to remake the cot bed so that it looked inviting. To Stuart, this was like

magic, a few deft touches and the room was entirely different.

"Won't you have something to eat?" he suggested, hoping to detain her longer. "It's only canned goods, but there seem to be lots of stuff."

"But canned goods are wonderful if you know how to fix them," she declared. "Want me to build a fire and cook something?"

"Let me build the fire," Stuart requested.

THEY adjourned to the shed, where he quickly showed that he did not know how to start a coal fire, so Polly, with a laugh, pushed him aside and did it herself. She clattered about with pots and kettles, put him to work opening cans, then she set a table in the office and in half an hour exhibited to the astonished agent a dinner of corned-beef hash, nicely browned, tomatoes, string beans, hot coffee and, for dessert, sliced Hawaiian pineapple. Elbow regarded her with childlike admiration.

"If you would only come often, I would like this place," he declared.

Polly flushed with pleasure and regarded him with a side glance. Youth cries for youth. In the desert, she hungered for agreeable male companionship.

Had Elbow been less ingenuous of soul or more prepossessing of feature, it is likely he would not have pleased this delightful child of the sagebrush. Her only associations were her father, a sour, disappointed widower who worked frantically for a scanty living, and several other middle-aged, elderly, uncouth sons of the barren soil. She smiled, joyous at his compliment.

"Your name ought to be Dorothy," he observed, as he scooped up the last of the pineapple dessert.

"Why?"

"Dorothy comes from the Greek and means godsent, or godgiven."

"Thank you, kind sir! You have a good education, haven't you." Her tone was wistful.

"High school only."

"I never had a chance to go to school. My mother taught me quite a little and

father used to help some—sent for books for me—but I am afraid I'm very ignorant."

"Nonsense! Say, my mother has all my books. I could send for them. We might read them together."

"I'd like that," she declared eagerly. "I could ride over often. I'll come tomorrow with a pony for you."

"Would your father really sell it for twenty dollars?"

Polly laughed. "Cash is very scarce out here, and twenty dollars will sound like much money to dad. Certainly he'll sell, and glad of the chance!"

Two hours before sunset, Polly started homeward. She had to get supper for her father, and if the sky clouded and hid the sun, she might lose her way. After her departure Stuart settled down in comparative comfort. With such a girl in the offing, things were not so bad. In thinking about her, he forgot he was a hermit.

Never was stage set more effectively for romance, the actors, a good-looking boy, a handsome girl; no rivals, no distractions, nothing to do except regard each other and chatter. Soon they had exchanged the stories of their lives and each dated the beginning of the world from the day Polly wandered, thirsty, into the old station.

In a week they admitted their love and were planning their future together. It looked far from rosy, however. To marry and settle down in the small station was not to be considered. Polly naturally wanted to see the world. Stuart had no income save what his job paid him and that was a trifle. The girl's father needed her and expected, if she married, she would choose one of his neighbors, who could lend him a hand now and then.

As the railroad made small demands upon the agent, Stuart was able to gallop about the desert in company with his sweetheart. She managed to arrange her duties so that she spent two or three hours a day at the station. He found out that the child was getting up at four in the morning to set things in order at home so that she might ride to the sta-

tion daily. Only three times in two weeks did he flag a train to deliver orders. The telegraph instrument rarely sounded his call, though the agent at Las Platas kept inquiring why he had not resigned. Stuart didn't like that operator; to a telegrapher, a personality can be expressed by dots and dashes.

ON Polly's advice, he varied his orders for supplies and purchased a hundred pounds of ice, which was dropped off three times a week. This was delivered only because he declared he would resign if he didn't get it.

Polly had a lot of fun when Stuart was learning to ride a horse, but soon he was able to accompany her on mad gallops. She also taught him to hit a mark with the long, blue-barreled Colt revolver, provided by the railway company. This gun and a supply of cartridges were to be used to defend the empty safe. The girl insisted that he needed the gun, because occasionally a bad character turned up in the desert.

"Sometimes they find tramps hidden in box cars and the brakemen delight in throwing them off into the desert," she informed him.

"But that's practically murder!"

"The brakemen are a hard lot, and they don't consider a hobo's life of any consequence. I always carry a gun."

The romance continued for a month, during which they saw each other nearly every day. Stuart had never visited her home, however, because he dared not travel so far from his post. A box of books had come from his mother, and he was spending part of his salary for other volumes he thought Polly would enjoy reading. No longer did he hate or dread the desert. If the sun was hot, it was cool in the shade of the station, and the air was dry and pure. At night it got very cool, sometimes cold, and he slept soundly and heavily.

One day was very much like another, lazy, sweet, halcyon days. Even in the great American desert, however, such peace cannot continue indefinitely. Upon this particular day Polly had not appeared up to midday. Elbow lay upon

his cot reading a new book, frowning when he recalled that his little chum seemed to have failed him. And then, far off, he heard the familiar chug of an automobile engine, although this one did not seem to be running smoothly. He rose and saw a flivver staggering toward the station, smoking like a locomotive, evidently in dire difficulties.

A hundred feet away, the flivver balked, and the efforts of a black-whiskered chauffeur had no effect upon it. Finally the man climbed down and stood regarding the machine with disgust, while Elbow approached, wearing the amused smile with which bystanders always regard a flivver in straits.

"Hello, yerself!" growled the man, before the agent could speak. "Ain't this hell?"

"What's the trouble?"

"No water in the radiator. Burned up all the oil, I guess, and ruined the motor completely. You the station agent?"

"Would I be here if I wasn't?"

"Guess not," the man grinned. "I'm the superintendent of the Bonita Mine. The whole darn office force is down with ptomaine poisoning, and I had to make the trip to Las Platas myself. She began to fuss up about five miles from here, and I headed this way because I knew I'd never get to the town. Darn thing's done for."

"I don't know anything about automobiles."

"Neither do I, much. I can drive 'em, and that lets me out."

Stuart noticed that the tonneau of the car was heavily laden and covered with a strip of canvas, and the mine man saw that he was looking at the load.

"You got a horse," he said. "Will you ride over to the mine for me?"

"Sorry, I can't leave. Against regulations. I never ride more than a mile or two from the station."

"When does the next train come through?"

"East and westbound expresses have passed. There's a freight through at midnight."

The mine superintendent took off his hat and scratched his thatch of iron-

gray hair. Stuart saw that he wore a gun at each hip.

"This is a fix," said the man. "I might as well tell you the facts. I'm taking over the regular shipment of bullion. Usually two men go in the car, but they are all sick and I can't trust the work force. The desert is safe, for you can see a stick-up man far enough away to escape, since there are no roads. When the stuff is turned over to the express agent at Las Platas, they're responsible. Can you get them on the wire?"

"Yes," said Stuart. "That ought to be easy."

It wasn't, though. He tapped the call for ten minutes without an answer.

"Either the operator is asleep on the job or the wire is dead," he declared finally.

Again the superintendent considered.

"Will you do this?" he asked. "Take the bullion in your office and lock it up? Then loan me your horse. I can make the mine in a couple of hours, get another flivver and be back an hour later."

"How much is the silver worth?"

"It's in bars, worth about fifty thousand. Weighs twelve or fifteen hundred pounds. Of course I can't leave it in the car."

"Fifty thousand dollars!" exclaimed Stuart. "I couldn't take such a responsibility."

"You're not responsible. There's no risk. It's not as though it was in bank notes. Help me carry it in."

He tore off the canvas cover and began to lift small but heavy sacks. Reluctantly Stuart aided him. It took the pair half an hour to transport the silver to the office. There, they piled up the bags under the long telegrapher's table.

The job accomplished, Stuart led out his broncho. The superintendent swung into the saddle, waved his hand and cantered away.

When the boy who was left in charge of a fortune reentered his office, he left his peace of mind outside. Regarding the pile of sacks with wide eyes, he thought how wonderful it would be if he were the owner of so much money, how



smoothly it would make things for Polly and himself, how happy they could be with fifty thousand dollars in the bank.

Locking the door, he sat down on the cot, determined not to take his eyes off the silver until its owner returned to claim it. And because he felt it essential to keep awake, he nodded, then dozed, and finally slept soundly.

WHILE he slept, there plodded into view on the railroad track a dust-covered form, a man whose clothes were torn, whose face was covered with a scrub growth of grayish-black whisker and whose eyes were small, blearing and vicious. This individual arrived at the station ready to drop from exhaustion, but his weariness fell from him when he spied the abandoned flivver.

First, he looked through the station window and saw the agent fast asleep. He nodded in satisfaction, then passed through the open door of the lean-to, saw the water cask and filled himself a dipper, from which he drank, at first cautiously, then with gusto.

Next, he opened a can of tomatoes and consumed its entire contents. Afterward, he strolled over to the automobile and inspected it, grinned broadly, returned to the lean-to, filled a pail with water and poured it into the radiator. Then he examined the oil supply, looked under the seat, found a quart can of oil, opened it and poured it in.

At some time in his career, this hobo must have worked around a garage, because he knew that when a flivver engine gets too hot, it freezes up tight, but when it cools off, it will function as usual. He knew that there was nothing else the matter with this flivver. Making another trip to the lean-to, he carried out nearly all the agent's food supply and placed it in the car, then filled an empty keg with water and placed that likewise in the tonneau. Climbing into the auto, he was about to start when he realized that the noise of the starter would awaken the agent. And the agent might shoot holes in the tires.

So the tramp grunted, got out of the car, and entered the station. Stuart,

awakened by footsteps on the creaking wooden floor of the outer room, got upon his feet and peered through the ticket window. He saw the tramp at the moment the intruder saw him. Remembering the treasure in his charge, he reached for his gun, which was in the money drawer under the ticket window. Already, however, a short-barreled revolver glittered in the hand of the visitor.

"Drop that gun!" the tramp bellowed. "Let me hear it hit the floor."

Stuart was no movie hero. He dropped the gun and it hit the floor with a bang.

"Now, open the door, quick!"

The agent turned the key and swung the door open, and the tramp entered the room.

"Open the safe," he commanded.

Stuart regarded the big, evil, brutal intruder with natural apprehension, yet the order made him laugh in spite of himself.

"Open it yourself. It's unlocked," he chortled, "And empty."

Still keeping the agent covered, the tramp stepped across the room and swung open the safe door. There was nothing within.

"The cash drawer."

Stuart pulled it wide. It was empty likewise.

"No tickets ever sold here," he informed the visitor.

"Turn out your pockets."

Now luck was better, for the tramp became richer by thirty dollars in small bills.

"Sit down in that chair," instructed the hobo, pointing to a wooden chair of the kitchen type which stood beside the ticket window.

His keen little eyes had espied a coil of rope hanging on a nail. He took down the rope and prepared to bind his victim. He made Stuart place his hands behind the chair, fastened them to the rungs in the back of the chair, then turned the line about his body two or three times, tying it finally in a very efficient knot, but he did not trouble to confine the agent's legs.

"How did you get here, anyway?" de-

manded Stuart, curiosity bettering his discretion.

"A dirty dog of a brakeman threw me off a freight train ten miles from here. I walked the track. Say, what's in those bags?"

"Oh, nothing! Just some old truck," returned the agent, who had hoped the sacks of bullion would escape notice. The unexpected question made him turn pale.

Observing his change of color, the tramp stooped to investigate. At that instant, the door was pushed open and Polly stepped into the room.

SHE caught the situation like a flash and would have darted outside, but the tramp had heard her enter. He swung about and covered her with his revolver.

Stuart writhed and wriggled and looked at Polly hopelessly.

"Come over here," commanded the tramp.

The girl slowly and reluctantly moved toward him.

"If you got a gun, gimme it or I'll search you," he declared.

Polly did not hesitate to draw her little revolver from her holster and pass it, hilt first, to the master of the situation.

"That's a nice, smart girl," he said, with a leer. "Now you stand over in the far corner beside the table, while I see what's in these bags."

Desperately Elbow was moving his feet. He had removed his shoes when he entered the station after carrying in the bullion. What was going to happen to Polly? He knew that this desperate, brutal tramp was capable of injuring the girl. His right toe struck something hard; it was the big Colt he had dropped upon the floor at the tramp's first command.

Polly, white as snow, faced Stuart in the opposite corner of the room. The tramp was between them, a little to the right. He had placed his gun on the table, within reach of his hand, and was on his knees, pulling out one of the heavy bags. Drawing a jackknife, he

slit the sack and uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Silver!" he shouted.

"Lot of good it will do you," remarked Stuart. "You can't pack it away."

"Huh! What's the matter with the flivver outside?"

"It won't go—that's all!"

"You watch me make it go, kid." The tramp chuckled. "I know how to make flivvers lie down and roll over."

Excited by the precious metal, he started pulling out bag after bag. Stuart began cautiously to slip the toes of his right foot under the long, heavy revolver. At first, he did it from pure nervousness, then he thrilled with an idea. He had succeeded in balancing the gun on his foot, and Polly was watching him as if fascinated.

Could he toss the gun across the room into her hands, while the tramp was hypnotized by the hoard of silver? Polly was fifteen feet away; she might not catch it; he might not be able to throw it so far; it might slip off his foot—but it was their only chance.

He caught Polly's eye, then looked down at the gun which was balanced perfectly on his foot. He lifted his foot off the ground. She nodded eagerly. When he hesitated, she nodded again, which meant "Try it!"

The man's back was toward the agent, for Stuart was safely tied. The tramp could see Polly out of the corner of his eye.

Silently Elbow began to swing his right foot, slowly at first, making a longer swing each time. Then he threw his foot high and the gun flew across the room. Could she catch it? Would it swing wide? The weapon went away like a punted football, whirled in the air, and Polly, stretching out her right hand, caught it by the hilt, cocked it like the veteran she was, and threw it down upon the astonished ruffian.

The tramp had seen the girl put out her arm, but he knew she had no gun. He saw a revolver fall into her hand as though it had been created out of the air. Squatting on his haunches, he was so greatly surprised that he fell over

backward. He lifted his hands at once, however, for he knew the girl would not hesitate to fire.

Polly reached across the table and grasped the hobo's revolver in her left hand.

"Polly, you darling!" exclaimed Stuart, beside himself for joy.

"Get up, bo," commanded Polly. "Go over and untie the nice gentleman."

WITHOUT a word, the man complied and fumbled with the knot while Polly jammed one of the guns into his back. In a moment, Stuart was free and stretching his arms thankfully.

"Sit down, stranger," snapped Polly. "Now tie him, Stuart, and don't forget to fasten his legs."

While he bound the yeggman, that person made the air blue with expletives until Polly cut him off with the crisp command:

"Be polite to the lady, fellow."

As soon as the knotting process was completed, Stuart took the tramp's gun from the girl, broke it and sighed with relief when he saw the cartridges in the chambers.

"Fine," he said quietly. "Mine wasn't loaded, Polly."

"Why, damn you!" shouted the tramp.

"But yours is," remarked Stuart, smiling.

"Do you mean to say it was an empty pistol?" demanded the girl, whose sudden whiteness should have warned him.

"Sure! I emptied it yesterday at a target and forgot to reload."

"Oh!" sighed Polly, and slipped slowly upon the floor.

Stuart carried her to the cot, ran for water, muttered endearments, while the unfortunate prisoner swore as fluently as a mule driver who had been in France.

Presently Polly returned to consciousness, found herself safe and Stuart near by, and sobbed happily for a few moments. Then she demanded to know how the silver happened to be in the station. Stuart told her the whole story.

"What you going to do with me?" the tramp asked.

"I don't know. Lay you on the railroad track or turn you over to the mine people."

Then the man began to plead until Polly led Stuart out upon the desert lest he be foolish enough to turn the prisoner loose. Better than her young man, she knew the character of these Western wanderers, and she told him stories of such ruffians that filled him with horror.

They were sitting on boxes in front of the lean-to an hour later, when a flivver, driven at breakneck speed, came jumping over the plain and drew up with a rattle and roar in front of them.

"Is everything all right?" demanded the mine superintendent.

"Your silver is in there with a robber trussed up beside it," replied Stuart, and then he told what had happened.

"You mean to say my car would go? Let me see," said the mine man.

He climbed into the balky affair, started the engine, pushed in the clutch—and the machine started forward.

"What a prize fool I am!" he exclaimed.

"The tramp couldn't have got far if he did get away with your silver."

"Don't fool yourself," said the superintendent. He could have cached it somewhere. Everybody isn't honest on the desert, and that bullion would tempt a lot of people. Young fellow, what does the railway company pay you for being the agent here?"

"Thirty dollars a week."

"Give you fifty to come to work in the mine office. There's a house there you could have if you were married," he said significantly. "And I think the company will pay you a thousand or two for this afternoon's work."

"Wow!" exclaimed Stuart. "Polly, shall I take the job?"

"Grab it," she said laconically.

"And the house, dear?"

"You bet!"



By  
W. B. M. FERGUSON

Author of  
"Garrison's Finish,"  
"The Dumb-bell,"  
"Deep Water," Etc.



## Lightnin'

### CHAPTER I. HIS OWN PEOPLE.

PETER had no recollection of his parents, which is perhaps just as well, and he spent the first decade of his life with a squaw man and his Comanche bride. In those days, the "noble red man" was more deserving of the extravagant title, and Peter began to find life good. You can see him, a little pagan with the dusky hair and brilliant dark eyes of his mother, his lithe body tanned to supple bronze, straddling a bareback pony not long after he could walk. His tribal name meant "Flying Arrow," a tribute to his quickness, mental and physical, but he was destined to have many names throughout his life.

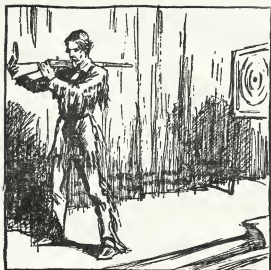
He learned more than how to cut sign, read signal smoke and shoot the heads off prairie chickens with his bow and arrow. His foster father's name and history are of no moment, but presumably he possessed some education and virtues, and, if held in contempt by the soldiers at the fort and such whites as the tribe chanced to meet in its nomadic existence,

he held an assured position with his adopted brothers. He possessed the ability to "make paper talk" and he imparted this to Peter, his only books being a tattered Bible and Shakespeare.

Thus the boy learned the tongue of his race at its fount, pure and undefiled. But while he heard all about the prophets and disciples, he was taught no dogma. God, the Great Spirit—apparently red and white worshiped the same deity by a different name. The ritual of the medicine man was only the mystic trappings cloaking the unknown.

"No worse nor better make-believe than the white man's," said Peter's foster father. "I'd rather listen to Red Cloud baying the spirits of the North Wind than to many a blue-nosed pulpit thumper back home. There's as much sense in it and more poetry, and the air's cleaner, too. It's not words that matter, son, nor laws either. The laws that *do* matter were written by man."

Peter learned them as he learned the social and moral code of the tribe. If not superior to that bequeathed us by the Romans, it was more universally obeyed.



Although his parentage was white, Peter was brought up by a squaw man in the Indian manner. He learned to ride like a centaur; he learned to shoot like a demon. Along with these he was taught the Bible and Shakespeare! When a tragic Fate gave him cause for a terrible quest, Peter set out for the land of the paleface,<sup>1</sup> at once aided and handicapped by his strangely assorted upbringing.

# Calvert

His foster father also taught him the use of the "thunder stick." Rifles were difficult to obtain, and the bow and arrow was still the tribal weapon. Nor did the Indian ever become the bullet's master. But Peter, though the old .45 Sharps, with its five-hundred-grain bullet and one hundred and twenty grains of black powder, kicked his bare shoulder purple and blue, became an expert with it and the Colt. He was ambidextrous by training, if not nature, his foster father saying that man had been given two hands to use.

From his foster mother, "Standing Cow," he learned the use of the herbs and many things not touched upon even by Shakespeare or the Bible.

He had a great affection for his adopted parents who, whatever their shortcomings, never treated him unjustly. He never learned what "back home" represented to the taciturn man, but he gathered little by little that it was an unlovely place where unlovely things were done. Occasionally his foster father spoke bitterly about it, talking as though Peter were a grown-up.

"You'll go back home some day maybe

and receive all the benefits of civilization," he said. "Or the tide will overtake you. It's bound to, sooner or later, wherever you go. The creeping pestilence will cover this fair land some day. You'll suffer from it. But never forget, son, the laws that matter. Don't let the vices of civilization destroy the virtues of so-called barbarism."

Peter did not understand it all, nor did he try to, but he gathered that his foster father had suffered some grievous injustice from his own people.

At the age of seven, Peter became conscious of a change in the affairs of the tribe; they could no longer follow the buffalo as they pleased, and he heard talk of gold and the "iron horse that flames." They were being hemmed in, pushed from one hunting ground to another by the steady thrust of the white man. The precursor of this influx was generally a black-coated gentleman who spoke feelingly of their iniquity.

"They march with a book called the Bible," said Chief Yellow Shirt. "They have the Bible, but no land. When their march is over, we shall have the Bible and they will have the land. If this

Bible they offer is such a good thing, why do they not keep it? Can it feed us like the buffalo? The Great White Father says we are his children also and that he will protect us. But does a true father work injustice between his children? We are to be given but a small part of our own possessions, all the rest is to go to the paleface children. Is this justice? Arise! Oh, my brothers, and sweep back this white tide before it destroys us utterly!"

Peter heard many such speeches from the young bucks whose eloquence, in time, was reinforced by the now easily procurable "fire water." His foster father and the old chiefs counseled peace, but conditions were changing with almost miraculous rapidity, nor were these changes purely physical. The white tide brought in its vanguard more than the Bible; it brought the riffraff that attends every pioneer movement, hoping to reap where others have sown, and these brought vice and disease unknown to the red man.

Let us try to do justice even at this late day to the original lords of the soil; he had shortcomings enough in all conscience without saddling him with those of his conquerors. His fate was inevitable, the fate of all minorities, of the obstacle that tries to stay the juggernaut of progress, but let us not pretend that the spoliation was conducted solely for his benefit or with conspicuous honesty or intelligence. There were those even in high places, who, paid to protect his interests, betrayed their trust shamefully. Let us admit also that all the crimes of violence were not confined by any means to the despised savage. Like begets like, and a savage is a savage whatever his color. There were men among that incoming tide who had done things at which even an Apache might blush.

Peter learned this, at the age of ten, from the fate of "Star Eyes." She was his foster sister and senior by four years, Standing Cow having been a widow. Peter and Star Eyes were constantly together, for she could ride and hunt like a young buck, and so it chanced that these two alone came upon the white

men where they thought no white foot had yet trod.

It was her cry, in the bed of a creek far from their camp, that brought Peter on the run, his only weapon the hunting knife in its beaded sheath. The rattlesnake, the cougar, the bear and wolf—these common dangers they were prepared to cope with, but not the human beast.

There were two of them, one pock-marked and swarthy, the other with a blond beard and full, shiny-red lips. He it was who had a hand over Star Eyes' mouth, who laughed at her futile struggles.

PETER sprang to the rescue and was sent down with a backhander that would have settled the ordinary child of ten; but he was ordinary neither in spirit nor physique. Knife in hand, he was upon "Blond Beard" in a flash, and it was only the other's upflung arm that saved his jugular.

The knife took him on the wrist, making a half-circular gash, and then the pock-marked man coolly brought down his pistol butt on Peter's head. Still that was not enough; courage, that was one of the laws that matter. Blond Beard, swearing at his wound, kicked the boy unconscious, then whipped out his Colt.

"The damn li'! poisonous varmint! Here's where I make one good Injun, anyway!"

Peter's life hung in the balance as the other man, now holding the still-struggling girl, pointed out the possible danger of a shot. He had more caution if no better morals.

"We'd better light a shuck outa here," he advised, looking about him uneasily. "The cub's done anyway, or near it. The coyotes and buzzards'll do the rest. Mebbe best to leave the girl, too."

"All in good time," growled the other, wetting his glazed red lips. "What I take, I hold. You know that. However ——" He eyed the still form of Peter, then gave it a parting kick, bathed his wrist in the stream, clamped a quid of tobacco from his cheek on it and, with the aid of his yellow fangs, bound it up.

Then he flung Star Eyes across his saddle like a sack of oats, while the other man led her pony.

It was characteristic that when Peter regained consciousness, he took up the pursuit, rather than back-tracking to the distant camp. There was his pony, hidden in the coulee where he had been when he heard his foster sister cry. The men had not thought to look for it, nor perhaps even considered its existence.

Peter had more than one broken bone and every movement was agony, but he rode on, unheeded of his hurts, picking up the trail in the darkness as few but he could. He had not only the Indian's training, but the mentality of the white.

He found her at length in a buffalo wallow, when the stars were dimming. Her long jet-black braids, always his admiration, were knotted tightly about her slender brown throat. Those braids had been the only weapon left her, and she had knotted them herself, as was testified by the cold hands still clenched about their ends. When one can no longer live with honor, one can die with honor. This code is not the peculiar privilege of the white race, and she was the daughter of a chief.

"You have done well, oh, Star Eyes," said the man of ten, and carried the lifeless form before him on his pony to the great painted tepee.

The immediate result of this tragedy was a second, quite as wanton in its way as the first. It is the irony of fate, amounting to a law of nature, that the innocent shall suffer for the guilty. The three years of spasmodic strife became open warfare, and an emigrant train was sought out, ambushed and butchered. That the original instigators of the trouble were not among the victims was of no particular moment. The young bucks had the reins and it was impossible for temperate counsel to prevail.

Peter himself lay mending his broken ribs, otherwise he, too, might have found a way to the warpath. For at this period, there had come no call of the blood and he hated his race. He was an Indian by upbringing and environment, if not birth, and the white man had

shown himself to be his natural enemy. Yet he had the intelligence to see the utter futility of indiscriminate violence and, moreover, the sense of equity to deplore it.

"Two wrongs do not make a right," he said to the mourning Standing Cow, and quoted the Mosaic law. "Do not grieve; I shall slay the despoilers of Star Eyes. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; thus it is written. I will camp on their trail until they have paid the price, then shall honor return to the house of the Bear. It is a promise, oh, Standing Cow."

Standing Cow continued her keening for the dead; this was child's talk. But Peter was calm and assured.

"I alone have seen them," he said, "and the Great Spirit has marked them for my eyes with a sign that time cannot efface." Thus his undefiled English, that came strangely from the lips of pagan youth.

"None but I," he continued, "have seen the dark one with the many little holes in his face, and also the fair one with bulging lips, scarlet as the cacti blossoms, who carries the burn of my hunting knife on his left wrist. Them I shall know always. It is fitting that I should be the one to wash out the evil they have done our house. I shall kill them with great gusto and give them to the beasts of the fields and the birds of the air. It is a promise, oh, Standing Cow. I have spoken."

Peter was not lavish in promises, for such as he made, he did his utmost to keep. This was another of the unwritten laws that matter. That some day he would rid the earth of Blond Beard and "Pockface," he had not the smallest doubt; but that day could not be yet unless God or the Great Spirit so willed it. He would wait.

Then he might meet them by what some misguided people call chance, but meanwhile he was a semiinvalid, whose fortunes were those of his adopted people. And the tribe was in full flight, trying to escape the wrath of the Great White Father called forth by the massacre of the emigrant train. His wrath

was only great, his vengeance terrible, when the paleface children suffered.

Thus again when the stars were dimming, Peter saw tragedy, saw it from the tepee he shared with his foster parents. Vengeance had overtaken the tribe, and the Great White Father struck mercilessly and without warning.

A sudden bugle call and the morning's gray gave out an avalanche of blue. They came, a troop of cavalry and a handful of buckskin scouts, with flying guerdon and thundering hoofs, emptying their revolvers right and left as they swept between the row of tepees. And though he looked on them as enemies, something stirred and thrilled in the bitter heart of Peter, and the hand he shot out instinctively for the old Sharps fell impotently at his side.

It was the call of the blood at last; *these* were his own people, these vikings of the plains; these grim-faced men with the light-blue trousers and yellow stripes, bell jackets and peaked forage caps; these men who rode like centaurs and who laughed as a young buck opened fire from the shelter of a tepee. If enemies, they were his own people and he must admire, even while he hated. Nor could his hatred raise a weapon against them; something held him, something stronger even than his love for Star Eyes' memory.

It was another massacre, though written "battle" in history. The Indian must learn his lesson, and there was but one way to teach it. Peter's foster father was killed by a stray bullet ere he was awake, and Standing Cow stopped another as she rushed to his aid. She grunted, opened her eyes very wide, shrugged and died.

Peter folded their hands, said a short prayer to all his deities, took the old Colt with powder, ball and caps, and crept out under the tepee on the side where death seemed least. He was going away from there, not in panic, but with calm decision. His family had been wiped out, and it could serve no useful purpose to remain and be killed or taken prisoner by his hated race.

Moreover, there was his promise to

his foster mother, rendered even more solemn by her death. There was nothing now to keep him from seeking out and slaying the ogres Blond Beard and Pockface, who had caused all the ruin. And so he went forth as another child of his years, armed with a toy sword and gun, might set out to slay the giants of fairyland.

As he crawled behind a clump of Spanish bayonet and wriggled like a snake into the curly mesquite, the smoke from the burning tepees stained the morning sky and the sustained rattle of carbine and revolver died slowly to an intermittent shot. Thus began the second decade of his life.

## CHAPTER II.

### LIGHTNING FAST.

ONE morning, Peter awoke to find a man looking down at him, the first human being he had seen for more days than he could count.

At first, Peter thought the man a figment of his fancy, one of the many strange pictures he had been seeing of late, because it seemed so grotesquely unreal. To begin with, he was a marvelously fat man, with a high stomach and little short legs, and he bestrode a calico pony several sizes too small for him. The stomach, topped by a vast mahogany face that was flanked by luxuriant, oily black whiskers, the mode of the day and obviously dyed, towered into the blue, while the little legs, in striped pantaloons tucked into three-quarter high-heeled boots, hardly came to his steed's belly.

He wore an elegantly frilled but very dirty shirt, and a rusty black stock in which glittered some variety of gem; a flowered waistcoat, over which was buckled belt and revolver, and a greenish frock coat of ancient vintage. There were rings on his grimy fingers, and the flowered waistcoat was liberally festooned with chains and seals, so that he jingled when he moved and sparkled like a cheap jewelry-store window artificially illuminated.

This attire, unconventional for that re-



gion, was offset by an entirely conventional broad-brimmed hat, precursor of the modern sombrero. Another conventional touch was a pack horse, the supplies loaded on a sawbuck saddle.

In those days a man could live off his gun; barring flour and salt, there was the best food to be had for the taking, both beef and game—buffalo and antelope, wild turkey, prairie chicken, pigeon. And it has been shown that in many ways, if not years, Peter was a man. Under ordinary circumstances and conditions, his quest would have presented small hardship, though indeed he had no idea where it might lead him in the end.

He had some recollection of Fort Griffin, but he had never seen a town, much less a city, and he had no conception of geography or the multiplicity of the white race. Curious blend of ignorant child and practical man, he expected to find the white man's land over the next range of hills, just as the ordinary child expects to find the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow. And the rainbow is so obviously reached!

Of course, it followed that where the white man's land was, there also would be Blond Beard and Pockface. They would be as easy to pick out as a medicine man in full regalia. His plans had not matured to the point where he knew what he should do after satisfactorily killing them. Nor did he care. One thing at a time.

So he had set out afoot, stout of heart and courage, having had no opportunity to secure his pony or supplies of any kind. Unmindful also of his half-healed hurts. Up and down the long rolling swells of the sunlit mesas he went, to the rim-rock country and back, traveling unconsciously and inevitably in a wide circle, until he became a victim of the great gray desert. He was hopelessly lost, almost delirious from thirst, when Colonel Moon happened upon him.

Such was the name of the gentleman with the dirty frilled shirt and many rings, and, though his adventurous life had hung by the proverbial thread on many occasions, he was never nearer

death than now, when about to play the rôle of good Samaritan.

The colonel had seen many men, good and bad, handle the national weapon, but he had never seen anything quicker, not even a striking diamond-back, than this boy. Moon sat, a fat knee across the saddle horn and astonished hands high in air, while Peter covered him from the hip with the miraculously materialized Colt. Here was a southpaw Injun who could shoot, handle a six-gun with the best.

MOON'S last doubt of that vanished when, on trying to lower his hands, his hat went sailing off into space. An Injun kid who could shoot even while he rocked unsteadily on his feet. An Injun kid, tongue blackened with thirst, eyes fever bright, whose first thought was not for the water, for which he must be nearly mad. But Moon's astonishment increased when Peter began to croak his Shakespearean-biblical language. There followed a curious colloquy.

"Moon, suh, Cun' Ambrose Moon, of the Moons of Tennessee." Clearly the colonel would have liked to accompany the introduction with a bow and flourish of the wide-brimmed hat which he now no longer possessed. "No, suh, not in the army since Appomattox Co'thouse, but a fo'mer membah of Price's unconquered Left Wing. The old guard dies, suh, but nevah surrenders. I am now a gentleman trader, suh, on my way from Dodge. I'm not aiming fo' to do yo' any ha'm, but only wishful to give yo' a sup of watah and any help needful in the circumstances."

Peter's eyes flamed at the mention of water, but the Colt remained cemented on his left hip, for he had used a hand that Moon never expected.

"I'm in search of the white man's land," he said, having studied the colonel at leisure. "Will you conduct me there?"

"Sholy!" said the colonel heartily. "With pleasure, suh!"

"And in that land, do you know a large man with a pink face on which is much hair like the rising sun? Also a

smaller man, whose countenance is yellow and covered with small holes?"

"Suttinly I do, fo' sure," replied the colonel promptly. "Friends of yo'-uns, may I ask?"

"It is of no consequence," said Peter austerely. "My name is Flying Arrow of the house of the Bear. I accept your assistance and—and some water."

Here outraged nature had its way and Peter ingloriously collapsed.

This was the beginning of a strange partnership between the man and boy, and of a friendship that endured. For if Moon had his faults—and there was no doubt of this—he also had his virtues, though they might be difficult at times to distinguish. But a love of children and animals ever ran true through his checkered life. Perhaps it was the one straight thing about him—this curious paradox.

The man was a born mountebank and liar and had no more right to his military title than many another person of that period and the present day. And it is quite probable that if he ever saw service with the Stars and Bars, it was in the rôle of sutler or camp follower. It is questionable even if Tennessee was his birthplace, though he knew it as he knew almost every State, but the honorable family of Moon, of which he was given to boast, was a figment of his lively imagination.

Speaking to a real Tennessean, he would identify himself with some noted family elsewhere. Gambler, corn doctor, showman, swindler—he was something of all these, but none of them really well. His like could be found in plenty during the carpet-bag era following the war, and indeed the type never dies.

He had omitted to mention to Peter that his exodus to Colorado, via the Panhandle, was enforced and that he had left several minutes ahead of a town marshal. At that time, before the coming of the rangers, there was no authority to carry law into the chapparal; it stopped on the borders of the frontier towns. And these, if by no means puritanical, had their own notions about brass watches, fake cures, and dealing off

the bottom of the deck. They objected to being exploited too obviously.

Mixed with Moon's wholly humanitarian impulse, the desire to befriend this curious waif of the desert, against whom he held no grudge, was the thought that such a quick, intelligent lad might be made very useful in various ways. His own hand was losing something of its cunning, as witness the last shooting affray, where his escape had been due more to luck than to skill. And this kid was no Injun either as, apart from his quaint speech, as a patch of light skin testified. Colonel Moon had pleasant thoughts of a handsome reward for a lost child, the survivor of some massacre or Indian raid.

OVER a fire of buffalo chips, while he cooked flapjacks and bacon, Moon began to diplomatically question the boy. He felt, and rightly, that here was one you might lead, but never drive. All his diplomacy failed, however, when it came to discovering the boy's real name or what he intended doing when he reached the white man's land.

Not that Peter was ignorant of his real name, but that he was not prepared as yet to give the other his confidence. Moon had undoubtedly saved his life, but gratitude and trust are not synonymous terms. He would endeavor to repay the debt as best he could, but there are things one tells only to proved friends. Nor was he a babbler by nature or training.

"It is of no consequence what my real name is," Peter said, after telling briefly and unemotionally of the death of his foster parents. "I have no people now of any kind and am free to go with you and find those of whom I spoke. They are the only white people I know. Are they friends of yours?"

Moon shook his head. "No, not exactly."

"What are their names?"

"Their names? Oh, John Doe and Richard Roe. How old are you?" he added quickly. "Ten? Go 'way! Really? Why, yo' suttinly look as if yo' was coming fifteen. Where did you

learn to shoot like that? I see yo're left-handed."

"I can use either hand," said Peter indifferently. "My foster father taught me, and I liked to learn. It was much easier than Shakespeare or the Bible. I can roll a gun, too."

"The devil you can!"

Peter shrugged and the Colt flashed into his right hand. Colonel Moon blinked and allowed the precious bacon to burn as he watched. The heavy, single-action revolver spun by the trigger on the boy's finger and his thumb snapped the hammer as the barrel completed the quick circle. A dangerous and difficult feat even for the grown expert, but Peter had been practicing it when other boys were shooting marbles, and every one of the five bullets threw up a spurt of dust at approximately the same spot some thirty yards distant. It was done so quickly as to resemble a circle of fire.

Peter was pleased and agreeably surprised at the obvious impression he made, yet he had all the expert's criticism for his work. "It's nothing," he remarked. "You should have seen what my foster father could do. He used to have two guns, and he could shoot the heads off prairie chickens with the double roll. I thought all white men could do that."

"Mebbe—if they had the birds tied to the muzzle," conceded Moon, highly doubtful of the story. "Yo' pa must have been to'able handy with a gun. The men who can shoot straight with the double roll are as scarce as whiskers on eggs. I've seen the best, and I know."

"I could learn it easily if I'd another gun," said Peter, eying covetously the colonel's weapon. "It really isn't hard."

"Mebbe not to yo', who've been raised to use both hands, son. They say there's something all of us can do best, even if it's only drinking, and I guess yo' was bo'n with a Colt in yo' hand. Yo' got a pair of lightnin'-quick hands, about the quickest I've ever seen. A man can't do much without them these days and my own ain't what they used to be."

The meal finished, Moon fished in the

tails of the venerable frock coat and brought out a greasy pack of cards. The fat, beringed fingers looked almost graceful as he riffled them with expert ease. Peter stared curiously; he had never seen a playing card.

"Yo've shown me your trick and now I'll show yo' one of mine," said the colonel jovially. "Every man to what he can do best. Know nothing about the game? Well, yo'll never learn younger. No, and yo'll never have a better teacher neither. Let's see if yo' eye is as quick as yo' hand."

MOON selected three cards, one the queen of spades, and held them up with their faces toward Peter. "Keep yo' eye on the cote ca'd, Rickety Ann," he said as he turned their backs. "Keep yo' eye peeled fo' the black lady in the center. Yo' got her? All right, let her go."

A quick pass and the three cards were flipped face down in the sand. The colonel drew a deep breath.

"Step up, gentlemen, and place yo' money on Rickety Ann. Cun'l Ambrose Moon, of the Moons of Tennessee, is wagering a solid-gold watch, fully warranted fo' five years, against yo' dollah that the hand is quicker than the eye. No trickery or gambling here, gentlemen, everything open and aboveboard!

"A scientific exhibition that has been performed befo' the crowned heads of Yurrope, including President Grant, Queen Victoria and King Umpsiloosea of Chund. Skill versus skill; my hand against yo' eye. A solid-gold watch against a dollah! If yo' don't trust yo' eye, keep yo' money. If you do, here's the chance of a lifetime."

"I haven't got a dollah," said Peter, rather awed by this unexpected verbal flood. "But that's the woman with the black heart." And he pointed an emphatic finger.

"It is not," said Moon.

"It is so!" said Peter. "I don't want anything, because I know I'm right and it wouldn't be fair. If I'm not, I'll give you my—my gun."

"I wouldn't take it, this being a

friendly game," said Moon, and turned up the ten of diamonds. "Yo' see?"

Thus was Peter, after being eager to wager his sacred gun three times on the wrong card, initiated into the fascination of the historic three-card game. Its mysteries he was only to learn later.

"How do you do to it?" he asked. "Could you teach me?"

"Sholy," Moon nodded. "And that's only one of the things I could teach yo'. There's as many games in this pack of ca'ds as stars in the sky, and just as bright and sparkling, too. A boy with yo'r hands would be no time learning and I could make yo' a far better player than I ever was—which is saying a great deal. I could make yo' fortune."

"How?" asked Peter, who knew nothing of betting. "And what is a fortune?"

"A nickel if yo' ain't got a penny," said Moon sententiously. "Call it a living. Every man has got to earn his living, and that's how I earn mine. Yo' was willing to stake yo' gun on the wrong ca'd; well, other folks stake their money, see? My hand against their eye—and my hand most generally wins."

"It must be great fun," said Peter.

"It sholy is. I tell yo' what we'll do. son. While we're lookin' fo' these friends of yo'rs, we'll fo'm a so't of pa'tnership, that meaning we'll help each other all we can. I'll look after yo' like I was yo' pa. And I'll teach yo' all about the ca'ds."

"But how could I help you?" asked Peter, suddenly shy.

"Lots of ways, son. Fo' one thing, it would be mighty handy to have a friend who could handle a gun like yo'. I got enemies, son; every good man has. Yo'll find plenty of bad men in the white man's land."

"I have heard so," Peter nodded, recalling two he knew.

"There are po' spo'ts," said Moon, shaking his head, "who, when I beat them fairly and squarely at the ca'ds, pull a gun and try to puncture my livah. I have a misery in mah shouldah and am not so quick on the draw as I used to be. If yo' are a boy in years, yo' are mo'

thap a man in skill, and it would be right handy to have yo' around.

"And apa't from all that, I should be most glad of yo' company. I'm a sociable man by nature, but it ain't every one that Cun'l Ambrose Moon, of the Moons of Tennessee, cares to call friend. There are suttin qualifications demanded and yo' appear to meet them. Is the proposal agreeable to yo'?"

"It is agreed," said Peter gravely. "Your enemies shall be my enemies, and your friends my friends. And you shall teach me how to manipulate the lady with the black heart, and many other beautiful things, known in the white man's land, that my foster father must have forgotten. And in return, I will be as a son to you. For these men I am seeking have no call upon my friendship, and I shall not forsake you for them. You have saved my life, and I am grateful. Moreover, I like you."

THE compact was made. There followed a colorful period and strange experiences that sharpened Peter's by-no-means-blunt wits. In time, he began to doubt his mentor's familiarity with the whereabouts of John Doe and Richard Roe, although Colonel Moon stoutly declared that they were always a town ahead.

"It sholy beats the old Ned how they just keep out of reach," remarked Moon, in evident perplexity. "I can't understand it nohow! When we make Sagebrush, they've gone to Tascosa, and when we land there, they're over the line to Timberly. Of co'se they always was roamers—a prospector will never stay put, you know—but yo'd think they knew we was camping on their trail and that they wanted to dodge us."

This was one of the many feelers he threw out in search of Peter's business with the two unknowns, but the boy was not yet ready to speak of Star Eyes and the tragedy that touched him so deeply.

There came a time when he even considered the possibility that John Doe and Richard Roe were not the names of those he sought, though they must have been known by such to Colonel Moon. In

any case, it did not matter greatly; he need not depend on names to identify them and this roving life suited him well. Sooner or later, he would meet them, in the open or in one of the settlements. His purpose only hardened with every failure.

Of his mentor's probity, Peter had no doubt, though he was somewhat startled when, during a practice three-card game, his sharp eyes discovered the queen of spades in the good colonel's left sleeve.

"Ah, yo're coming on and I'm going off," said Moon unblushingly, and with mixed emotions. "Mah misery's right bad to-day."

"B-but is that fair?" asked Peter, perplexed. "How can they pick out the queen when it's really not on the table?"

"They can't!" said Moon triumphantly.

"But is that fair?"

"Of co'se it's fair. Whut's the difference between mah sleeve and the table? It's a matter of skill, ain't it? The hand against the eye. I only sleeve it acco'ding to circumstances, if I'm playing against one or two. Fo', you see, it wouldn't do when the three ca'ds are bet on and they all have to be turned up. Some men don't like to be fooled, and it's better to let them think old Rickety Ann is the ca'd they didn't happen to pick. It saves a lot of explaining and it don't hu't their feelings."

Similarly when Peter detected the good colonel dealing off the bottom of the deck during an instructive game of poker.

"It's puffickly fair," declared Moon, "so long as yo' ain't caught at it. Everybody does it if he can. It's pa't of the game, a matter of skill; the hand versus the eye. I'll teach yo' how to stack the ca'ds, too."

So Peter learned this and many other things, among them that it was really he who had to look after the colonel. For Moon in some ways was more the child of the two. He had no thought of the morrow and his questionable gains went quicker than they came. Nor did he spend solely on himself, any specious tale of woe being sure of his last dollar.

He varied his gambling by hawking a cure-all called "Balm of Gilead," as bogus as the alleged diamond in his scarf.

We can see Peter attending him, faithful as a dog; ever at his elbow in gambling den or saloon, or by the kerosene flare in the old buckboard that Moon had acquired, silent and watchful as an Indian and looking twice his age. The West was in the making and it demanded first and foremost that a man should have grit and loyalty, loyalty even in a bad cause.

Boys became men without knowing youth, and Peter's eyes looked on things of which youth only knows imperfectly at secondhand. And yet, thanks to his upbringing, he was far less sophisticated in certain ways than the average boy of his years.

HE had so much to learn about this amazing white man's land, of which these ragged towns and "whistling posts" were only the remote fringe. Apart from Moon, no one had any idea of his age nor could the colonel really believe the boy to be so young as he claimed. He was called "The Injun Kid" or "Poor Dog Tray," according to the humor and attitude of the speaker, and he found favor with the dance-hall girls; but he was tongue-tied and they could make nothing of him nor he of them. Nobody took his existence seriously, in spite of Moon's incessant bragging that "mah protégé is a natural bo'n miracle with the gun, suh," until one night in the Golden Glory Saloon.

Hitherto, apart from one or two slight unpleasantnesses, no serious trouble had developed since the colonel's hasty exit from Dodge; but on this occasion his "misery" played him false, and in a game of stud, he was embarrassed by the sudden appearance from his sleeve of an ace that had just been turned up. That his opponent, the owner of the place, had been using similar methods with success, mattered nothing. As Moon had said, it was perfectly fair so long as you weren't caught at it. According to custom, the guns of both players had been placed on

the table, at their left hand as evidence of pacific intent, and, as Moon reached for his, the other whipped from his bosom a .45 derringer.

That would have been the good colonel's last flutter, but for Peter, who loosed off from the hip. None saw how it was done and all had laughed at the big weapon he wore so conspicuously. He did not shoot to kill, but others did; Moon was not a popular figure and "Sleeve" Jackson had friends.

An inoffensive spectator was killed by Jackson's hearty fusillade, and then the Golden Glory saw a gun "fanned" in the best style by a boy, as they thought, of sixteen. Including Jackson, he put down five men without mortal hurt, though he was credited also with the only fatality, and got Moon safely away with nothing worse than a flesh wound each.

Thus did Peter become known as a lightning gunfighter at the ripe age of some dozen years, which was a record even in that region of records. The subsequently notorious "Billy the Kid," who killed a man for every one of his twenty-one years, had nothing on Peter when it came to an early start. He went down on the black books of sheriffs and town marshals and his name was mentioned not unflatteringly with desperadoes of national prominence. They called him "The Pache Kid," because of the alleged murder without warning, and they predicted a lurid but brief career.

### CHAPTER III.

#### NEW PASTURES.

IT was partly owing to the affair in the Golden Glory that Moon decided to abandon, or at least postpone, his intention of making Peter a gambler superior even to himself, and partly to the fact that his own growing infirmities and bad luck was making the Southwest too hot for him. Nor had he abandoned the idea of restoring a long-lost son to his parents and thereby benefiting everybody concerned.

It was clear to him that the boy did not come of low origin; breed will show, whether in two-footed animals or four,

and, to Moon, wealth and aristocracy were synonymous terms. He had succeeded in tracing the boy back to his foster parents, but here the trail ended. Apart from this, the colonel had a real affection for Peter and, during his infrequent periods of introspection and self-censure, he realized his own unfitness as a model for youth.

The boy was growing weary of his fruitless search for Blond Beard and Pockface; much of the zest had gone out of the hunt, and thus when Moon suggested that they move East, he offered no serious objection. It was quite possible, as the colonel pointed out, that the men he sought had returned there long ago. At least, he stood probably as much chance of finding them there as here.

"I'm honin' for sight of a real town," said Moon, "and yo' ain't seen one yet. This country is getting played out and a man can't make a decent living no mo'. Yo' can't sit into a friendly game without stacking up against a professional ca'd sharper, like the owner of the Golden Glory. Of co'se, I didn't know he was the notorious Sleeve Jackson who was run out of Natchez; if I had, I'd nevah have drawn ca'ds with him, let alone a gun.

"My talents ain't whut they used to be, but they're mo' than good enough fo' the folks back East. Moreovah, I don't want to see you strung up on a wagon pole, and it will be years befo' you can take yo' proper place at the table. It's time you had some book learning, son, and we made an effort to find yo' real parents."

"I don't want any more book learning or parents," said Peter. "I know Shakespeare and the Bible, and I've got you. I couldn't have a better father than you."

Moon experienced one of his rare truthful moments. "I guess yo' couldn't have much wo'se!" He sighed. "I'm nothing but a po', mis'able sinner. A boy like yo' should have a proper pa and mammy. Ain't it come time to tell me about them and whut yo' real name is? I've waited two yeahs and mo'."

"I didn't think it of any conse-

quence," said Peter. "And it isn't. I don't know anything about my parents, but my white name is Peter Calvert. My foster father told me that. He said I ought to know it in case I ever wanted to use it."

"Calvert," mused the colonel. "That's a right good South'n name. Peter Calvert. Yes, I recollect knowing a gentleman of that name in Savannah. Yo' never heard any talk of Georgia?"

The boy shook his head. "It can't be the same, for my father came from a place called New York. He's dead long ago and so is my mother. My foster father told me. So you see there's no use trying to find them."

Moon was eying him fixedly. "Whut was yo' mother's first name? Might it have been Muriel?"

"I don't know. I don't know either of her names. She's dead and my father is, too. Something always happens to everybody that belongs to me." And in a sudden burst of confidence, he told the story of Star Eyes.

Moon's anger and sympathy were very real and they drew the boy still nearer to him.

"I'm anxious now to confess that I know nothing about these to'ds," said the colonel, at length. "I'm no angel, but I never herded with mavericks like that. I'd no idea whut lay behind yo' search and I was anxious only fo' to humor yo'.

"But put all such thoughts of vengeance out of yo' mind, son," he continued earnestly. "They only ha'm yo'self. Don't yo' brood ovah it no mo'. All the killing in the world can't bring yo' po' little playmate back. There's a rough so't of justice in the world that attends to these things if only we wait long enough. That's whut I tell mahself when I'm most inclined to go out and devastate some of mah enemies—and yo've seen that I've got mo' than a plenty. Put it out of yo' mind, but if yo' ever happen to run across these to'ds, let me know in time and I'll get up behind yo'.

"Now we'll pull our freight in the mo'nin'," he concluded. "We'll make

our way East, casual and pleasant, by the coast. Until yo've seen the South, dear old Dixie, mah dear old homeland, yo' ain't seen nothing wo'th talking about!"

Curiously enough, they stayed a week in Savannah, where the colonel said he had to see to the featuring of the Balm of Gilead in the principal shops, and then they boarded a steam packet for New York, Moon more than paying for their fares by playing "friendly" games with some of his fellow travelers. There was a conspicuous notice warning passengers against professional gamblers and the good colonel invariably pointed it out to the sheep before proceeding dexterously to shear them.

HE posed as a wealthy tobacco planter, drew largely on his mythical ancestry and service in the war, and spoke of Peter as a beloved nephew who had been "completely o'phaned and ruined, suh," by Sherman's victories. Peter heard the colonel referred to, by a beautiful and haughty young matron, as "that gorgeous mountebank," but on the whole Moon cut a popular and dashing figure. He seemed to be in his element and having the time of his life.

It was otherwise with the boy; everything was horribly unfamiliar, including his new suit, while inevitable seasickness was added to his misery. He longed for the freedom, stability and unconviction of his beloved plains. You can see him, his lithe grace ridiculed by the dress of the day, the provincial ready-mades that only fitted him at intervals. He had all the gaucherie, suffered all the misery, of the sensitive boy who is far beyond his age in physique and mentality, yet below it in knowledge of the social graces and polite society. A man in many ways, who yet must play the rôle of an inexperienced child.

It was inevitable that he should make many mistakes, and he sought to hide his ignorance and embarrassment by effrontery. Familiarity with places like the Golden Glory, which he had thought the acme of civilization, had not improved his vocabulary, and continual association

with Moon had imparted a hybrid Southern drawl. An unheroic figure whom assuredly none would have thought capable of the sanguinary reputation that was his, nor the lurid future predicted for him.

To homesickness and seasickness, there was added presently lovesickness. The attack was sudden and severe. It was the first time romance had touched him, the first time he had shared the same environment with a damsel approaching his years who breathed the rarefied atmosphere of wealth and fashion. Peter admired her from a distance, for a time.

When finally he found his sea legs, the boy and girl struck up an acquaintance, begun by her putting out her tongue at him and ending by her proffer of an apple. Thus was she true to the legend of her sex. It is possible she pitied him, but probable that his assumed indifference decided her in bringing him to heel. She had a fat governess who read French novels and permitted her charge to do much as she pleased. No doubt she would have done so in any case.

Peter had his own ideas about coming to heel; he might go to his bunk with a heart unsettled as hitherto his stomach had been and dream of her all night, but he showed nothing of this by day. Which perhaps piqued her the more. She made fun of his trousers and hat, mimicked his accent and gloried that the South had been soundly whipped. "Johnny Reb!" she called him, and added proudly: "My uncle was with Sherman when he marched to the sea."

"Marched to see what?" asked Peter curiously.

"Silly! And it served everybody in Georgia right. It was wicked to keep slaves."

The war had been a far-off, meaningless rumble to Peter, but his geography was no longer quite so hazy as his history. He looked at her with that mature dignity she found so disturbing and which she could never wholly ruffle. And behind the chronic wistfulness of his eyes, there seemed a mockery that exasperated.

"There isn't any sea where I come from," he said casually. "I'm not a Southerner."

"What a silly fib! You're a butter-nut; you know you are. And your uncle fought with Lee. I heard him say so."

In fact, everybody had.

"I'm speaking of myself," said Peter. "He came out to the Panhandle to fetch me."

"The Panhandle! Who ever heard of such a name? Where is it?"

"Up in Texas."

"You mean down. Texas isn't up, silly. Then you *are* a Southerner."

"I'm not. I'm a Westerner."

"Pooh! Texas is in the South, isn't it? Don't you know *any* jography? That's where they have Indians and buffaloes and things. Tell me about them. I want to know about the nasty wicked Indians and how they scalp people. Were you ever scalped?"

"They aren't nasty and wicked."

"They are so! Of course they are. Haven't I read all about them in hist'ry and Fenimore Cooper? I knew you'd never been out there!"—triumphantly. "What a silly fib. And you can't have read much either. Perhaps you can't read at all?"

"I don't have to get what I know out of books," said Peter. "And I've known worse white folks than Indians. My foster mother, Standing Cow, was an Indian and a good woman."

"Standing Cow!" His tormentor laughed. "What a silly name! Why couldn't she sit down? But I know you're only telling fibs. Everybody knows you're a Johnny Reb from Georgia. Anyway, Texas is a horrible nasty place."

"It is not. Men grow man-size out there."

"Pooh! You're only a little boy, for all your big airs. A silly little boy that tells silly fibs. Wait till you see New York. It's the greatest place in the world."

"You are an ignorant person," said Peter. "You don't know how much you don't know."



"You've no manners," said she. "I do believe you were brought up with Indians and buffaloes. I hate you, and I'll never speak to you again. So there!"

**B**UT she did; it was only one of the quarrels. They fought over everything and, at the end, she would bait a sweet hook which he inevitably swallowed with more or less grace. She told him her name was Elizabeth Lockwood and that she had reached the very ancient age of eleven.

There were elegant boys with varnished boots and manners that caused Peter acute envy and jealousy, and just when he thought she had forgotten him for these handsome wax dummies, she would seek him out while not appearing to do so. One of her constant cavaliers was a fair, blue-eyed boy of about fourteen whom Peter hated on sight. Miss Lockwood spoke of him as Freddy Gracie, the son of a prominent New Yorker.

"His father could have anybody arrested," she boasted, this appearing to be the acme of juvenile aspiration. "He's a friend of the man who owns all the policemen."

Peter failed to be suitably impressed, because he did not know what policemen were.

Disaster, sudden and complete, came toward the end of the trip, when Peter thought that matters were progressing most favorably. It developed that the haughty lady, who had called Colonel Moon a gorgeous mountebank, was Miss Lockwood's mother, who had been confined below with one of her imaginary illnesses. When next she appeared on deck, her daughter and Peter were playing euchre in a secluded nook. He had manfully produced a deck of cards, much to the girl's delight, when she intimated that they were among the many things she was supposed to know nothing about. Mrs. Lockwood happened within earshot, though not sight, as the game suddenly reached a crisis.

"You dealt the right bower to yourself off the bottom!" declared the outraged Miss Lockwood. "You did so! I saw you. *There it is!*"

Peter, anxious to make good his boast about being an expert card player, had been combating the well-known luck of the novice with a little necessary skill. But he had grown careless with success and underestimated his opponent's sharpness.

"Well," he said, "what of it?"

"What of it? Why—why, it isn't fair! It's cheating. Nobody deals cards that way."

"I never saw them dealt any other way," said Peter, with more or less truth. "It's perfectly fair if you can do it."

"It's not. You're a cheat!"

"I am not. It's purely a matter of skill, my hand against yo' eye."

"You're a cheat. And a person who cheats at cards is worse than—than *anything*. My uncle says so. You're nothing but a cheat and I'll never speak to you again!"

"You may be quite sure of that," said Mrs. Lockwood grimly, as she made her appearance. And her anger increased on recognizing Peter. "This impossible person, the nephew of that mountebank! Is this what you have been doing, Betty, while I was lying at death's door? Is this how you'd been looked after? No wonder I have to send you away to boarding school!"

Freddy Gracie appeared from the background, his supercilious smile functioning. "Oh, have you heard the latest? They say nobody will play with that fellow Moon any more because he cheats."

"You're a liar!" said Peter.

"I—I'll knock you down if you dare call me that!" declared Gracie, doubling his fists. "You—you overgrown oaf!"

Peter snorted and lapsed further into the vernacular. "Pull yo' gun. Where I come from if yo' call a man a cheat or a liar, you gotta come a-shootin'. I'm givin' yo' yo'r chance. I say yo're a liar, yo' swivel-eyed, slab-sided coyote."

"Come away, Freddy!" cried Mrs. Lockwood, and frisked her wide-eyed daughter behind her crinoline. "Don't attempt to bandy words with such a person. An impossible boy, a barbarian from the backwoods. I do believe he's

armed and would shoot. I shall report his conduct to the captain."

Freddy retired in good order. "You cheat at cards like your uncle," was his parting shot at Peter. "I'm not afraid of you. Of course you haven't got a pistol, and you wouldn't know how to use one, anyway. If you and your precious uncle try any of your cheating in New York, my father will fix you. You'll find this isn't the wild and woolly West. And I can whip you any time, too!"

There was no specific charge against Colonel Moon, but clearly his good luck had become suspect and he finished the trip under a decided cloud. People whispered and looked askance at him and Peter, and they were left severely alone.

Miss Lockwood at length found occasion to elude her guardians when the packet was nearing the dock. Peter was staring in awe at the sky line which, even in those days, stirred the imagination. Fifty-ninth Street was only a suburb, Castle Garden—the fort erected in 1812 which gave the Battery its name and which is now the Aquarium—had only been joined to the mainland some dozen years; the first "L" had just been begun, the Brooklyn Bridge existed merely on paper; the telephone was a distant dream, electric light and transport more distant still, and yet this queen city of the north far surpassed anything that Peter had seen or imagined. It so frightened and fascinated that, until she pulled at his sleeve, he was unaware of the girl who had stolen to his side.

"That's New York," she said, waving a prideful hand. "Where are you going to live?"

"Don't know."

"Our town house is in Stuyvesant Square," she added. "Maybe I'll see you some time."

"Maybe."

"I'm sorry mamma caught us playing euchre. You shouldn't have been blamed, for I made you play."

"You didn't. Nobody can make me do anything I don't want to."

"Oh, is that so? What a silly fib. Anyway, I know you didn't mean to cheat."

"I did. And it wasn't cheating."

"It was so! But I'll forgive you because I know your wicked old uncle taught you. He's a bad man."

"He is not."

"He is so."

"No!"

"Yes!"

The whistle blew and she looked round. "There's mamma coming to look for me. Good-by. You—you may kiss me. Hurry up!"

"I don't want to kiss you," said Peter.

"You beast! I hate you. Card cheat! Card cheat!"

He saw her later entering a gorgeous victoria and, from the shelter of the maternal crinoline, she turned and put out her tongue at him.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A VISIT.

PETER, nursing a shattered heart, was left much to himself during the following week, Moon saying he had pressing business which, if brought to a successful issue, would mean a permanent change for the better in their fortunes.

"Yo'rs, I mean," he added quickly, and refused to commit himself further.

They had quarters off the Bowery. It had retrograded socially since the days when Governor Stuyvesant lived there in retirement on his farm and it was spelled "Bouwerie." Indeed, it was well on its way to the fame gained for it in song and police court, to say nothing of that bestowed by the eminent "Chuck" Connors. Peter acquired two black eyes in as many days and a whole set of new ideas regarding warfare as conducted in the East. And amid the seething throng, he felt more utterly alone than ever in the great gray desert.

"They're a po' lot," he said, as Moon applied beefsteak to his eye. "They don't fight fair and they make rules to suit themselves. Yo' ain't allowed to pack a gun, but they carry a li'l pop-shooter where it can't be seen. I saw a man shot to-day."

Toward the end of the week, the colo-

nel electrified Peter with the announcement that "in the mo'ning, we're going to pay our respects to yo' mother."

The wool pictures, the antimacassars, the wax flowers, the horsehair sofa, the plush album—all the early Victorian furnishings of the cheap room suddenly blurred before Peter's eyes. "B-but she's dead!" he stammered.

"Of co'se," Moon nodded, and a wild hope died in Peter's heart. "Whut I mean is yo' stepmother. Yo' pa ain't dead."

"How do you know?"

The colonel took snuff. "I've been to'able sure of it fo' some time," he said, with complacency. "He married again after yo' mother's death. Yo' pa is Majah Frederick Gracie, a considerable figgah in the business and social life of this town."

Peter looked hard at his informant, well aware by this time of the other's flights of fancy. He asked why the colonel had said nothing of this before, and Moon replied that he wished to be sure of his facts before announcing the momentous discovery.

"I told yo' I'd look after yo'," he said virtuously, "and I shall always do my utmost in yo' behalf."

"Does my father know I'm alive? But he couldn't or I wouldn't have been brought up with Injuns."

"It's a strange world, my boy," said Moon, "and there's no accounting for the actions of folks. I needn't try to hide the truth from yo'. The long and short of it is that yo'r pa didn't want you. He don't want you now, fo' that matter, but yo're his son and I'm going to see that yo' come by yo'r rights. He has Cun'l Ambrose Moon, of the Moons of Tennessee, to reckon with."

"If he doesn't want me, I don't want him," said Peter, with finality. "And why should I call on this woman who isn't really my mother, or leave you for a man who has never been a father to me?"

Moon pulled his dyed whiskers. "I don't reckon yo'll have to live with him less you want to. But he owes you a certain duty, and I mean to see that he per-

fo'ms it. I've interviewed yo'r pa at his office, and he has refused to listen to the dictates of humanity and hono' in yo' behalf. Consequently we shall see whut his wife has to say about the mattah. From all rep'ots, she is a sweet and amiable lady of the highest rectitude."

"I don't want to go," said Peter, who had a very hazy idea of the whole matter. "I don't want to know these people."

"But yo' must!" said Moon. "It's yo'r duty and mine. Yo' are the son of Majah Gracie of Stuyvesant Square, a family of consid'able impo'tance in this town, and yo' must claim yo' rights."

Stuyvesant Square! His heart jumped.

"Is my father the father of that Freddy Gracie I met on the boat? The cousin of that little Lockwood girl? She said he was her cousin."

Moon nodded. "He is yo'r half brothah."

PETER felt exultant. Mrs. Lockwood could no longer turn up her nose nor Freddie sneer in that supercilious manner. What a surprise this would be for them! And perhaps his father, when they got to know each other, would like him.

"All right, I'll go," he said. "And if my father likes me and wants me to live there, you must come and live with us, too."

"Oh, suttinly!" Moon nodded. "But, of co'se, I can't put my own feelings befo' yo'r advancement."

Moon carefully oiled, curled and perfumed his whiskers for the occasion and Peter washed faithfully behind his ears. He was greatly excited; not only had he acquired a whole new set of immediate relatives, but Betty Lockwood could no longer put out her tongue at him. Like it or not, he was her cousin.

"That estimable female, Mrs. Lockwood, has a consid'able surprise in sto' fo' her," said the colonel, with lively satisfaction, as he twirled his elegant malacca cane with its bogus gold head, and Peter and he boarded an uptown horse car. "Yo' pa is her only brothah. And

yo' pa is a brothah to be proud of. He has a very fine military and social reco'd. Oh, very fine indeed!"

So his father was the uncle of whom Betty had spoken, the uncle who had marched with Sherman, the uncle who held that cheating at cards was the worst thing a man could do. It all seemed far too fantastic to be true, yet the colonel had assured him on his "hono'" that it was.

"It'll be awful if she tells him I cheated," thought Peter. "They play cards differently here, like they do everything else. But I won't stack the deck or deal seconds any more. I hope he'll like me. I reckon that I must have been a mighty bad kid that he didn't want me around. He must be a fine man."

"I hope I'll see Betty. I wish I could wear my gun. If she asks me to kiss her again, I'll come a-running. I wish my real mother was alive. The Injuns aren't the only folks who've a lot of wives. I wish my clothes looked like Freddy's. I'll manhandle him if he calls me a cheat again. I wonder how much she likes him? He's a rotten half brother, but I'll have to put up with him. I ought to kiss her anyway, if she's my cousin. No, I won't; it's silly. I never saw such big houses. They look as if all the folks were dead inside."

The butler who opened the door looked dead. He came to life and glared down his long nose when Peter, taking him for Major Gracie, offered to shake hands. Moon retrieved the error by treating this personage with great effrontery.

"My ca'd," he said, fishing with a yellow-gloved hand in his ample bosom and tossing the rather soiled pasteboard—it had done valiant service and the colonel had carefully cleaned it with bread crumbs that morning—on the salver with a regal gesture. "My compliments to Mrs. Gracie and info'm her that Cun'l Moon, of the Moons of Tennessee, awaits her convenience."

He waved aside all attempted parley, jingled his chains and seals, tossed his beaver and cane at the butler, puffed out his mahogany cheeks and swaggered into

the drawing-room without waiting for an invitation.

Peter's meeting with Mrs. Gracie was one that he had cause to remember long years afterward. He had lingered in the big hall, intent on a collection of weapons decorating the wall, and the colonel called to him.

"All right, I'm coming," Peter replied. "In a minute."

Immediately a sweet and gentle voice came from the head of the stairs. "What did you say, Freddy? What brought you home so soon, dear?"

THE owner of the voice slowly descended the stairs, a lady who was like a delicate picture painted on old ivory. She was older than Peter had expected, older than the flamboyant and assertive Mrs. Lockwood; she was a woman who showed all her forty-odd years. She was not beautiful, but there was something very attractive about her fair delicacy, something very appealing in her shrinking timidity and sweet graciousness. Peter's heart went out to her instantly and utterly. He had a feeling that he wanted to protect her. Somehow he thought of a doe caught in a wolf trap.

"Isn't that you, Freddy, dear?" she persisted, peering with pretty and faded eyes into the gloomy hall.

"No, ma'am," said Peter hastily, and ungrammatically, "it's me."

She came forward with an astonished and pleasing laugh, staring at him in her near-sighted fashion. "Well, I declare! No, of course you aren't Freddy. I see that now. You must pardon me. I have trouble with my eyes and sometimes I'm as blind as a bat. And then your voice, it's just like my son's. Astonishingly like his. Isn't it strange? I suppose you're a playmate? Though I'm afraid I don't remember your name."

"No, ma'am, I'm a visitor, a friend of Colonel Moon, who's in the drawing-room."

"Ah," said Mrs. Gracie. "I see. I'm sorry to have kept him waiting."

Evidently Moon had been expected,

arranged some sort of interview with Mrs. Gracie, though she was ignorant of his real mission. He made her an elegant bow, closed the door carefully, jingled his seals and warmed his coat tails at the wood fire.

"Yo'r very humble and obedient servant, ma'am. Tol'able fine weather we're having fo' this time of the yeah. But I find yo'r No'th'n climate very trying."

She agreed, as perhaps she agreed with every one, and asked timidly the nature of the urgent private business he wished to discuss with her.

"It is a delicate mattah, ma'am," said Moon, "which I am only fo'ced to bring to yo'r attention by the direst necessity, being sensible of yo'r many private benefactions. To come to the point, ma'am, yo' yo'self have just found a striking likeness between this young friend of mine and yo'r own son. And so——"

"Oh, no, sir," interrupted Mrs. Gracie. "He doesn't resemble him at all. And I fail to see——"

"In the voice, ma'am. He favo's yo'r son in the voice, and do' yo'r own eyes not tell yo' how greatly he favo's yo'r husband in the profile? The likeness is unmistakably there, ma'am, written by the hand of heredity and natu'e. In sho't, this young friend of mine, who has no other friend to urge his claim, is the son of Majah Gracie, yo'r husband's fust-bo'n. At least, ma'am, one of his fust. We do not expect fatted calf, ma'am, but merely that treatment dictated by our position and the promptings of hono' and humanity."

During this address, which the colonel delivered with a flourish and fluency as though extolling the merits of the Balm of Gilead or his genuine gold watches, Mrs. Gracie had grown paler and paler, until Peter thought she was about to faint. She seemed astounded, humiliated, overwhelmed. And yet the idea came to Peter that perhaps it was not her first experience of the kind.

She looked so distressed, pressing a hand to her heart, that Peter ran to her side.

"It's all right, ma'am!" he said. "I won't stay here, anyway. My father doesn't want me. We'll go away. You mustn't mind. I didn't know it would hurt you like this, or I wouldn't have come."

"A very wa'm-hearted and rema'kable boy, ma'am," said Moon, with a proprietary air, as though Peter were one of his patent medicines. "A singula'y innocent boy, ma'am, in many agreeable ways. The story I'm about to relate is not fo' his young ears. Natu'ally yo' will demand proof of my statements, which I am quite prepa'ed to supply."

"Of co'se my interest in this mattah is purely philanthropic. I have taken the friendless boy under mah wing, the wing of a Moon of Tennessee, and I am dete'mined to see his wrongs righted. If yo'r husband had received me in the proper spirit, ma'am, this painful mattah need not have come to yo'r ears. Of co'se there is no claim suppo'ted by law, but we base our case on the great unwritten law and put our trust in the dictates of humanity and hono', as exemplified so conspicuously by yo', ma'am."

"Be quiet!" said Peter, who had tried vainly to stem the fresh torrent of words. "It's all right, ma'am. We're going away from here, and you'll never be bothered by us again. It's all right."

She looked at him fixedly, pressing his hands, patting his cheeks. "Go into the other room like a good boy," she said, pointing to a pair of closed sliding doors. And then with dignity to Colonel Moon: "I shall hear all you have to say, sir."

But at this moment there was a dramatic interruption; the door giving on the hall was flung open and a man strode in. He tossed his beaver on a chair, unbuttoned his long coat and flourished a riding crop. He was tall, dark and handsome, with luxuriant side whiskers and dressed in the height of fashion. Obviously a gentleman, as the term was understood in those days, and Peter knew instinctively that this was his alleged father.

"Ha, you rascal!" cried the newcomer, advancing on the colonel. "I thought I might find you here. Foiled in your at-

tempt to extort blackmail from me, you now have the dashed effrontery to carry your scurrilous lies to my wife! By gad, sir, I'll teach your kind a lesson!"

THE gallant colonel lost much of his pompous demeanor; he backed toward the fire, looking like a pricked balloon. "Don't yo' dare hosswhip me, suh!" he blustered. "I wa'n yo', suh. Yo' strike a Moon of Tennessee at yo'r peril! At yo'r peril, suh!"

"Pah! You miserable mountebank!" cried Major Gracie, turning back his right cuff in a very sinister manner. "Moon or sun, you're about to suffer a total eclipse. I'll flog some caution, if not decency, into you. How dare you force your way into my house!"

"Frederick!" implored Mrs. Gracie timidly, a hand on her husband's arm. "No violence, please. This gentleman didn't force his way in here. I—I granted him an interview."

Instantly Major Gracie's attention was turned to his wife. He flung off her hand and devastated her with a look. She quailed, shrank away.

"Gentleman!" he sneered. "And you arranged an interview behind my back? By heavens, madam, this is too much! You're ready and willing to listen to the lies of any worthless scoundrel who cares to defame me!"

She shook her head like a dumb animal in pain. "I—I didn't know his business. I didn't know he had already been to you. And I really haven't heard anything."

"Because there's nothing that a sane person would listen to for a moment!" he exclaimed. "There's not an atom of proof, and I defy this blackguard to supply any. You should have known him for what he is, by the cut of his jib. It's nothing but the scheme of an unscrupulous mountebank to extort money from me, and, failing that, from you. But you are always the victim of such people."

"I repudiate yo'r statement, suh," said Moon, emboldened by the woman's continued presence. "Yo' traduce me, impugn my motives most wickedly, suh.

Mah interest in this mattah is purely philanthropic——"

"Get out of my house before I flay you alive!" roared the major, advancing on him anew. "Any further annoyance of this sort and I'll thrash you within an inch of your life and hand you over to the police. You've tried your blackmail game once too often, my man, and on the wrong person. Now get out and take this miserable brat with you!"

This was the first notice he had taken of the silent, wide-eyed Peter.

Colonel Moon made a wide detour round the threatening horsewhip and Peter followed him to the door. Major Gracie scowled at him, as he passed, and the boy gave back the look with interest. Father or not, he hated this arrogant, bullying man; and he knew instinctively Major Gracie had lied.

"Yo'r very humble obedient servant, ma'am," said the colonel, making a bow from the comparative safety of the hall. "I regret the scene which has been fo'ced on me. Everything I told you, ma'am can be easily proved, and this po' boy's parentage speaks fo' itself. I repeat that he is yo' husband's fust-bo'n. He has been treated most shamefully, like his po' mothah. All the vituperation and prevarication in the world can't alter that truth, Majah Gracie, suh. And yo' shall hear mo' of this mattah, suh. Yo' cannot insult a Moon of Tennessee with impunity! No, suh, yo' can't!"

Taking Peter by the hand, he made a hasty and undignified exit.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE PANHANDLE KID.

THREE years later there might have been seen in the bill of a flourishing Bowery theater the following headlines:

"Brazos Bill" and "The Panhandle Kid," the two Texans, in their Soul-shaking Shooting Act. A miracle with Rifle and Revolver. Out-telling Tell!

This was the colonel and Peter, Moon, while on the boards, laying aside his renowned connection with Tennessee. He forsook also the frock coat and flowered

vest, appearing in a buckskin costume subsequently made world famous by a gentleman called Cody, who shot beef on the hoof for the U. P.

Matters had not gone well with Moon, and he had been compelled to go to work, or such labor as this theatrical venture represented. Instead of Major Gracie hearing further from the colonel, it was Moon who heard from him, indirectly but unmistakably. The go-between was no less a person than a high police official, and he gave Moon to understand that any further philanthropic efforts on Peter's behalf would result in his, Moon's, arrest.

"You start spreading your yarn about this kid around," said the bull-necked visitor, "and we'll put you where the birds won't trouble you. We've got our eye on you, and you'd better walk soft."

That this was no empty boast was evidenced subsequently when it came to the marketing of the Balm of Gilead, the genuine gold watches and such talent as Moon possessed at the card table. He was arrested and fined heavily for peddling without a license, next charged with swindling and gaming, and only escaped a summary sentence by the efforts of a clever lawyer.

It was Mrs. Gracie's money that paid for the lawyer, though none knew that but Moon and herself. To do the gallant colonel justice, he had planned to blackmail the major and, failing that, to profit by Mrs. Gracie's well-known kindness and generosity. But also to do him justice, his version of Peter's parentage was true.

"Yo'r pa is a scoundrel, no mattah whut his position may be. That's the long and sho't of it!" the colonel explained. "Yo'r ma was a good but foolish woman, and she paid dea'ly fo' her folly. She was a lone, unprotected female, last membah of a po' but hono'able Georgia family, and yo'r pa cruelly betrayed her. She spu'ned the attentions of an hono'able man and ran off with yo'r pa, who was visiting in Savannah befo' the wah. I lived there at one time and knew the story."

"You mean he didn't marry her?"

"No, he didn't, though he had promised to. He dese'ted her, came back No'th and married fo' money the present Mrs. Gracie. Yo'r ma died in want, died of a broken heart. The man she had spu'ned found her befo' she died and he promised to look after yo'. That man was yo'r foster pa. Yo'r ma's conduct had broken his heart; he had abandoned a promising career, soured on life, gone out West and took up with the Injuns. And so yo'r pa ruined not one life, but two—and how many mo', God only knows!

"I gathered all this info'mation at the cost of consid'able trouble and expense, actuated by the most pu'ely philanthropic motives, and whut has been mah rewa'd? To be threatened with a hoss-whip and hounded like a common felon—a Moon of Tennessee! Fo', you see, the point is this: We have no redress at law. I can prove most of whut I say, but an unacknowledged child has no standing in the law as it is to-day. Yo'r pa simply denies the whole mattah, or traduces yo'r po' ma's memory by saying there was no promise of marriage. She had no relatives to bring him to book.

"The law is all fo' the man and against the woman and these mattahs are treated far too lightly. A man may be a hell rake and yet be received in the best society. Indeed, it's rega'ded as something to brag about. Yo'r pa and his kind would call a man a scoundrel who cheated at ca'ds, but he thinks nothing of cheating a po' woman out of her hono' and even life. He's a gentleman; that's whut he's called. But that's whut I call a scoundrel—and I've no pretensions to being a good man mahself."

"I shall kill him," said Peter simply. "Yo'll do nothing of the so't," said Moon. "That is po' talk. He isn't wo'th hanging fo'. And they hang yo' to'able quick up No'th. I have yo'r promise? Else I'll ship yo' back West pronto!"

Peter considered. "Well, I'll wait till I'm sixteen and a man. But why does Mrs. Gracie stay with a hound like that?"

"Women are women," said Moon sentimentously. "It's well fo' a lot of us that they're whut they are. She bartered her money fo' his name and looks, and she's making the best of the ba'gain. Besides, there's her son; she's all wrapped up in the boy and thinks the world of him."

PETER'S pride was cut to the quick by this narrative and his dream of renewing acquaintance with Betty Lockwood faded and vanished. Now he shrank at the thought of such a meeting. Instead of being an equal, he was an object of scorn and derision. As well as card cheat, Freddy could add another epithet. He wasn't even the legitimate son of a squaw man or Indian. He had no name, nothing.

He lay awake nights thinking about it and the fate of his mother.

"What was her name?" he asked the colonel one day.

"Muriel Calvert. That's why I asked if you'd ever heard her name. She called yo' for her pa."

"All right," said Peter, "from now on, I'm Peter Calvert. You say she had no folks, so nobody can mind if I use that name. I'm not entitled to my father's and I wouldn't take it anyway. I wouldn't take a sup of water from him if I was dying of thirst in the desert. I like Mrs. Gracie a lot, but I don't want anything from her, either. I don't want pity or charity from anybody. I'm done with that house in Stuyvesant Square and everybody in it. If I'd known the truth, I'd never have gone near the place. I know you meant all right, but it was a big mistake. Anyway, it's finished."

"That's right," agreed the colonel. "Whut yo' say goes."

But it was not finished where Moon was concerned nor did he hope it would be. From time to time, Mrs. Gracie, in great secrecy, sent him money for Peter's education and Moon said nothing about it to the boy. Part of it went for their living expenses, but most of it went for the gaming table. At length, it stopped; either she had learned how it was being spent or her husband had discovered the

matter. The latter seemed more likely, for it was here that Moon had cause to complain of being hounded.

"Yo'r pa," he said, "is a pussonel friend of 'Boss' Tweed and he's got it in fo' me. In this corrupt city, a man can't earn a decent living unless he's hand-in-glove with these rascals. I'm fo'ced to give up my hono'able profession and we'll have to go to wo'k."

"Shooting's the only thing I can do if they won't let us play cards or peddle the balm," said Peter. "There's a man up the street has a gallery and he's making a good-enough living. He offered me a job at good money, after I'd busted everything in sight. If he could afford to pay me what he offered, so could we. Let's open a gallery."

"Yo'r pa would find a way to close it," said Moon, though he was obviously taken with the idea. "If the boss is against yo' in this town, yo' ain't got a chance. They'll trump up some cha'ge."

"Well, this ain't the only town," said Peter, "and I'm not in love with it. Let's shift."

Such was the inception of the old original "Lone Star Shooting Range" that Moon opened in South Brooklyn and which flourished long after its first proprietors had sold out. It was successful from the start, Peter's amazing skill drawing a steady patronage and suggesting to Moon the further marketing of the boy's uncanny proficiency with firearms.

The idea appealed to his showman's instincts, and he brought to this genuine venture all the experience and talent he had utilized in so many bogus ones. He drilled and rehearsed Peter in a turn that has seen many imitators but no equals and the boy was the first to thrill an audience by shooting with the sole aid of a mirror. None but the expert knows the difficulty of this feat, but Peter blew various objects from Moon's skull with never a miss or accident.

By this time, Peter's education had increased in various ways, much of which he would have been better without, and he no longer had any delusions concerning the colonel. Moreover, as time passed and success continued, Moon re-



formed, nor could he ever quite overcome his astonishment at finding honesty pay better than trickery. He lectured Peter on the beauties of virtue and rectitude and claimed a background of irreproachable respectability.

AS his respectability increased, he began to frown on Peter's mode of life, seeking to undo the damage he had done. Heredity and environment were claiming their due and Peter had developed a wild, reckless streak, a passion for cards and questionable adventure. He associated with men twice his age and, in a town notorious for its corruption, was a well-known figure in certain haunts.

"I'm not living any differently than I always did since I quit living with Injuns," he said to Moon, when he was nearing his eighteenth year. "And you can't teach a young dog new tricks. What's the difference, anyway? I'm living according to my birth and training. I've no name or traditions to keep up. I'm what I am."

"Yo' have yo'r ma's memory," said Moon, resorting to his favorite weapons. "She was a good woman and yo' owe it to her to be a good man. Yo' mustn't let this mattah of yo'r birth wreck yo'r life."

Peter laughed. "You're afraid liquor'll get the best of me and that I'll plug you some night during our act? Don't worry, it never interferes with my hand or eye. I could shoot straight if I was paralyzed."

"I wasn't thinking of that at all," said Moon injudiciously. "Yo' have me worried with yo'r carryings on. I don't hold with the so't of company yo' keep. It ain't right fo' a boy of yo'r age. I'm responsible fo' yo' and I aim to bring yo' up respectable."

"Ha-ha!" laughed Peter, and clapped him on the back. "You moldy old fraud! You're becoming a hypocrite, like all the rest here. I don't want anything to do with this thing they call respectability. I'm bad enough without it. My father's respectable, isn't he? Sure, one of the most respectable men in town!

Yet it doesn't even stop him from sharing on the quiet the political graft that's the life and soul of this respectable town. My foster father used to talk a bit about the beauties of civilization, and he was right. Some day when I'm properly civilized, I'll go back to the Injuns and rattlesnakes for a breath of clean air. Meanwhile, on with the dance! Let joy be unrefined!"

"Yo're a damn young cynic. How do yo' know yo'r pa's in with the Tweed ring?" demanded Moon, pricking up his ears. "A man of his family and name and——"

"Awful, ain't it?" Peter grinned. "He shouts with Tilden about the corrupt government, while all the time he's getting his whack. And he's not the only one. Oh, you hear a lot of things when you aren't supposed to be respectable. and of course they don't know I'm his son. I don't brag about it. Yes, it's a fine place, this white man's city, when you can see behind the curtain of respectability. I tell you, old swindler, we're a couple of innocents when it comes to real classy sinning. We never even began to think of the things they pull off here."

"I ain't a sinner no mo'," protested Moon virtuously. "I don't have to be, nor yo' neither. We're earning a good living hono'able. Yo' leave the ca'ds and those low-down haunts alone. Yo'll get into real trouble. Yo'r pa ain't never forgiven yo' for being his son or me fo' bringing yo' here. He'll trump up some cha'ge on us if yo' give him half a chance. What are yo' doing, probing into his affairs?"

Peter smiled and swung his legs. "What do you think? I'll tell you something: Those who ought to know say that Boss Tweed'll wake up some fine morning in Ludlow Street jail."

"I've heard that talk befo'."

"Who hasn't? But I guess this time Tilden and the *Times* are out to smash him. I hear they've got a cartoonist, Nast, to help. They've been gathering evidence for a long time, but maybe there's some they haven't got. I've given up the idea of plugging my pa; folks

here mightn't understand it right. It wouldn't be respectable. But I see no reason why he shouldn't be sent to jail like any other grafter. They won't punish him for killing my mother, but they'll jail him for stealing public money. That's white man's law; it thinks more of property than people."

MOON looked perturbed. Respectability had bred fear. He had much to lose. He had dreams of developing their act, staging a great spectacular drama of the West. The East knew little about it and was anxious to know more. It was not Moon's fault that he did not become known to posterity like "Buffalo Bill" and P. T. Barnum.

He was saving money toward the enterprise and now Peter, the real drawing card, was about to jeopardize it. Moreover, the colonel had a sincere attachment for the youth, though that did not prevent him exploiting the other, and a profound respect for the powers that be.

"Yo're playing a right dangerous and foolish game," he said earnestly, "if I understand yo' right. Don't yo' fool yo'self about Tweed being smashed. The folks that have tried that have only smashed themselves. It's nothing to yo' whut goes on here. Yo' try to make trouble fo yo'r pa, mix into this business, and yo'r life won't be woth a cu'se. I mean it, son! Yo' don't know whut yo're stacking up against."

"Don't I? I guess I can look after myself."

"No, yo' can't. No man could. This ain't the West. It's one man against a whole army of hidden foes. Yo'll be playing against a cold deck. Yo' won't have a chance to defend yo'self."

"Oh, I know something about civilized warfare." Peter laughed. "They gun you from a dark alley or wait behind an 'L' pillar with a slung shot, to say nothing of doping your liquor. I know quite a few of the Ring's star performers—fellows like 'Gooseneck' Gurk and 'Sock' McGloin. I guess the 'Paches must have learned from them. But I go heeled, and the man who can bushwhack me ain't been bo'n yet. Besides, they've no

reason to suspect me. I ain't such a hell roarer as you seem to think, old bunky, even if I'm no tin saint on wheels. I'm still hanging on to the laws that matter, but you've got to get information where you can find it."

"Yo' leave it alone," fumed Moon. "When a man gets yo'r confidence, he's ripe fo' a coffin. We're living peaceable and comfo'table and I don't want no mo' of the Ring's attention. Live and let live. Yo' ain't no refo'rmer. It's nothing but vengeance against yo'r pa, and yo' can't hu't him without hu'ting others. Whut about Mrs. Gracie? The po' woman has trouble a plenty. That son of hers is wo'thless like his pa."

"Yes, I believe Freddy's turning out a right bad egg. He'd have been jailed long ago if it wasn't for the family pull. They give a starving beggar fourteen days for stealing a loaf of bread, while ——— But what's the use? It's white man's law, civilization."

"This vengeance idea is playing the old Ned with yo,' like I wa'ned yo' it would," said Moon, shaking his head. "Yo're losing yo' sense of pe'spective."

"But not my sense of humor," retorted Peter. "It'll be right funny to see the most respectable Major Gracie doing the lock step. I'm kind of sorry for Freddy in a way, having such an example as my pa, but he and Mrs. Gracie will be well rid of him. I'm really doing them a good turn! The Lord knows Major Gracie's given his wife legal cause for divorce and maybe, when she sees him in stripes, she'll get one. He won't look so handsome, either, with a shaved head."

Moon saw that further argument was useless, that he might as well try to dissuade Niagara Falls from functioning. Peter had been pondering his unhappy experiences, initiated by the fate of Star Eyes, until he was in a fair way of hating and despising the whole white race. The idea of avenging his mother's wrong had become an obsession, and perhaps the only wonder was that he had not shot Major Gracie long ago.

Moon sighed over the fact that even in himself the boy had found no admirable

example worthy of emulation, though Peter even now did not know the worst about him, and that, at seventeen, the youth was a cynical and disillusioned man of the world. However, this contemplated revenge was infinitely better than direct action in the form of violence, and Moon comforted himself with the truth that suspicion is not proof.

Securing legal evidence against a silent partner of Boss Tweed or any member of the powerful corrupt Ring was about the most difficult thing in the world to accomplish, as Peter would ultimately discover. By that time, he should have outgrown his obsession. At all events, the futile quest should keep him from more serious mischief.

"Whut evidence do yo' think yo' can get against yo'r pa?" Moon asked curiously.

"Never mind," said Peter. "You'll know when I get it—and so will he."

## CHAPTER VI.

### PETER PLAYS A HAND.

PETER was far more experienced than even Moon knew. The colonel would have been considerably less complacent had he been aware of the extent and quality of the young man's acquaintance. While the colonel trod the new-found path of respectability which even led him to the doors of the Walton House, ere it was demolished to make way for the wonderful Brooklyn Bridge, Peter sought his old stamping ground on the East Side, from the Bowery to Fourteenth Street.

He was a regular visitor in places like The Nest, a saloon and dance hall presided over by Gooseneck Gurk and patronized by the gentlemen whose duty it was to attend the polls and see that citizens voted right. There have been other political steam rollers since Tweed's day, but none that functioned with such blatant efficiency.

The Nest was merely one of the cogs in the machine, Gurk a minor henchman. Yet he was an important one, recruiting officer and sergeant major of the army of thugs that made voting such a danger-

ous duty to the upright citizen. And when a special and delicate act of blackguardism was needed, he attended to it in person.

He looked what he was, a brute of the lowest type. He had a long, stringy neck, from which he took his nickname, a little, round head, nose smashed flat, with high cheek bones, and beady, vicious eyes. This engaging gentleman was proficient with any weapon, from a bung starter to his angular knee or ape-like hands, but he was noted chiefly as a gunman. There had been more than one murder at The Nest, Gurk always pleading self-defense successfully.

It was Joe Slone who introduced Peter to The Nest, unvouched-for visitors being quickly shown their error. Slone was a gambler who paid tribute to the Ring and he made the mistake of thinking Peter one of the juicy young flies that were wont to walk into his ornate parlor. He took his subsequent discomfiture in good part.

"The joke's on me," he said. "Sink and skin me, kid, if I ever took you for one of us! You ain't got much to learn. Where do you come from?"

"Chicago," said Peter. "My name's Brown, and I moved East for a little change of air."

Slone nodded understandingly. "I could do with your hands if you're looking for a job."

"Thanks," said Peter, "but I'm working a line of my own."

Thus he acquired another name, that of "The Chicago Kid," and a host of new acquaintances, Slone vouching for his dishonesty and skill. In such circles it was not etiquette to inquire too closely into one's neighbor's past and, without his make-up, apparently none knew him for the youth who could do marvels with a pistol.

The evident fact that Chicago had become too hot to hold him was another certificate of character. And so Peter, a grown man in all but years, began a systematic double life. He was supposed to be a swell card sharp, working the haunts of the rich, while after hours he was a recognized figure in the

underworld. No other country or period could have produced a figure like him.

He had given Stuyvesant Square a wide berth and, though hearing occasionally of Freddy, had never chanced to see him again. Their orbits did not cross at any point. More than once, however, he met Major Gracie, who passed him seemingly without recognition. And once in a horse car, he happened to sit opposite Mrs. Lockwood and her daughter. He recognized them at once.

Betty was growing into a very beautiful girl, but, from the carriage of her head and set of her lips, her pride and vanity had not abated. She was attending a fashionable school, and he had seen her name in the papers among the younger set at Murray Hill entertainments.

She glanced across at Peter, who looked a very presentable young blood, and he returned the glance with interest. Mrs. Lockwood put up a lorgnette, said something in a horrified undertone, and whisked her daughter from the car.

"But, mamma, we weren't flirting!" protested Miss Lockwood. "I'd never dream of doing such a thing. Besides, I'm sure I know that gentleman, that I've met him somewhere at a dance."

"Gentleman!" snorted Mrs. Lockwood. "Do you know who he is? That's the young rascal who tried to blackmail your Uncle Frederick and Aunt Amy. I knew him at once. The impertinence of him, staring at you like that! I wish your uncle had done his duty and clapped him in jail. But he was always too soft hearted."

"Oh," said Miss Lockwood. "He—he pretended to be Uncle Frederick's son, didn't he? Freddy told me something about it."

"Hush!" said the scandalized matron. "It's not a subject for your ears. And you shouldn't even breathe such a monstrous falsehood. The son of a low mountebank daring to claim relationship with us!"

"The idea!" said Miss Lockwood, tossing her head. "And he had the audacity to try and flirt with me."

"An associate of thieves and vaga-

bonds, the lowest of the low," said Mrs. Lockwood. "He'll end by being hanged."

Which agreed with the West's forecast of Peter's future and showed perhaps remarkable intuition on the part of Mrs. Lockwood, or that Peter's father knew more about him than Peter thought.

Major Gracie was not a West Pointer, merely one of the many alleged soldiers created by the war. His part in that historic struggle was negligible, though family influence had gained him a commission with Sherman's command. His real business was contracting, an old and honorable one which, under his father's guidance, had played a worthy and prominent part in the development of New York.

The name of Gracie was connected with some of the most noteworthy municipal improvements. It still had the name, but, since the founder's death, not the character. The son had neither the father's integrity nor capacity for hard work. Moreover, Major Gracie had dissipated all of his wife's money that he could lay hands on.

The firm was secretly very near the rocks when he sought and found an understanding with the new political boss. The politician saw the advantages of such an understanding. Thus, while ostensibly the firm of Gracie & Son secured lucrative contracts in the open market against the bids of its rivals, the plums were all carefully reserved for it and the boss received his percentage.

It was but natural that such a true and tried firm should receive the best contracts, natural that its bids should be relatively higher. This agreeable procedure gagged the voice of criticism; the public was pleased when Gracie & Son got a big contract, while a McManus or Murphy would have provoked unpleasant comment. None could say that the boss was favoring his own against the public interest.

**I**T gave the lie to the reformers and cranks who were on the warpath and who saw nothing good in the present régime. Didn't everybody know that

Major Gracie was a political opponent, a silk-sock Republican? And so the city was scandalously overcharged by the old responsible firm and money was voted for improvements that never occurred, except in certain bank accounts. There was nothing original in the idea; so it has been, and so apparently it ever will be while human nature remains what it is. It is inevitable.

Peter came to suspect his father's iMicit gains by patient burrowing, picking up a word here, a look there, among those who had more or less knowledge of the working of the machine. It was principally less, minor cogs knowing little of what went on higher up. And, as Peter never made the mistake of asking direct questions or showing undue interest, progress was slow and suspicion did not become certainty until he met Alfred Holmes.

Competent psychologists assure us that we are really three people—there is the I that I think I am, the I that others think me, the I that I actually am. Peter was not given to thinking about himself, but by this time he was conscious of being at least two different people, one quite good and the other distinctly bad. So it may be said are we all, the good man being he whose virtues predominate even slightly over his failings. But with Peter the line of cleavage was sharply defined, the warring elements plain and distinct. It was heredity and environment versus the same.

His mother, in spite of her folly—or because of it—must have been a person of fine soul, as assuredly his father was not. He had the assets of the one, the liabilities of the other. He had also the teaching of his foster father, the diametrically opposite example of Colonel Moon. Added to this was an Indian patience and idea of justice, a cynical experience of life and mankind. Certainly in his dealings with Holmes, he acted a very unworthy part and laughed about it later to Moon.

"I promised," he said, "to tell you when I had the necessary evidence against my father, didn't I? Well, I'll have it to-morrow night. I'll have it

some time between ten and eleven. The instrument of justice is one Alfred Holmes. He's my father's head book-keeper and confidential secretary, the one person who can do it. Thus endeth a long and arduous campaign."

"W-whut do yo' mean?" stammered Moon. "How did yo' come to meet this pusson and why should he betray his employer?"

"Why not?" countered Peter. "Everybody does it, providing there's money and safety enough. It's a recognized asset of respectability. Only savages keep faith with one another. They don't know any better. The older and more trusted the person, the better they do it. Why, you'd do it yourself!"

"Who, me? No, sub, no. How dare yo' traduce me! It ain't hono'able of yo' to cast up a repented past befo' me. And a Moon of Tennessee would nevah betray nobody, sub."

Peter laughed and blew smoke. "Still fooling yourself, eh? Well, to proceed, I met Holmes over a poker table and he took a fancy to me. Said I reminded him of a young dead-and-gone brother. He's a mushy sort when he's in liquor. He had a small weakness for cards and liquor—of course we all have a weakness—and I developed it into a big one.

"We got very chummy, and he lost a good bit. He also said things, when he was feeling right, that he forgot, but I didn't. All this went on in his rooms and there was nobody but ourselves. The Ring doesn't know of our intimacy. I'm telling you in a few minutes what it took a long time to work."

**P**ETER played the hand as his father might have done, with charm and skill and utter lack of scruple or compunction. At the proper moment, he informed the unfortunate Holmes that he was not the moneyed young prodigal he seemed, but a reporter for a prominent daily that, acting in conjunction with a powerful citizens' committee, was secretly gathering evidence against the Ring. It is of some interest to note that Peter's imagination here pictured what actually happened subsequently.

"I had Holmes on the hip," he said shamelessly. "I knew enough to make trouble for him. He owed me a lot of money he couldn't pay. Now you needn't start one of your imitation sermons, old-timer. I wasn't corrupting any innocent young virtue. Holmes is nearly twice my age—he thinks I'm twenty-five—and he's a wrong un to start with, else he wouldn't be working for my old man. I simply played up to his weakness. And he'd have sold his employer long ago if he could have found a market and wasn't afraid of the consequences. When I convinced him that he'd never be suspected, that his name wouldn't figure in the matter, that my employers were powerful enough to smash the Ring and take care of him, he was only too willing to sell out."

"How? In what way?"

Peter rolled another cigarette. "There's a private ledger that nobody knows anything about, except Holmes and my old man. There always is, there has always got to be. That's one stage prop that has a foundation in fact. They've got to keep a true and private record somewhere. There's the books for auditing by the other clerks, and there's this one. Well, I'm going to get this Doomsday Book. Holmes won't be supposed to know anything about it. He'll be asleep in bed when I crack the safe in Greenwich Street."

"Eh, what's that?" cried the scandalized Moon, who, in his palmiest days, had never quite risen to the heights of burglary. "Whut do yo' know about safe breaking?"

"Most everything, old-timer. So would you if you knew some of my friends. One of them's 'Gumshoe Bill.' Never heard of him? That shows what you've missed by turning respectable. He's the leading light of his profession, a representative citizen. Bill showed me a lot, said I'd just the hands for a lock rumbler. But this won't be a real job, merely faked to look like one. Holmes

has given me the combination and the whole plan. Here it is. You see how easy it will be?"

Moon studied the paper that Peter produced, too interested and astonished to protest. He was like Frankenstein, overwhelmed by the being he had helped create. Peter had got beyond his control and influence.

"Well, and supposing yo' get this book?" said Moon, at least. "Whut do yo' do with it? It will take a good deal mo' than that to smash the Ring. Sholy yo' don't expect the police——"

"Surely I don't!" Peter laughed. "I know all about the police. I'm out to smash my father, not the Ring. I'll take that book to Samuel Tilden and nobody else. He's the man for me."

Moon looked up at the ceiling and took snuff. "A book like that, if it's whut yo' say, should be wo'th something. It should fetch a good price and a man like Tilden could affo'd to pay handsome."

"You damn old rascal!" said Peter. "Do yo' think I'd make a penny out of it, that I'd *sell* my old man? Why, I'm paying Holmes out of my own pocket, canceling his debt and turning over what I cleaned up from other mugs. The only thing I get from Mr. Tilden is a promise of immunity for Holmes. If I don't get that, he doesn't get the evidence. I play fair even with a crook; that's one of the laws that matter. You're a fine one to be talking of virtue!"

"Yo' misunderstand me," said Moon, with dignity. "It was me'ly a hypothetical rema'k on my pa't. I thought that so long as yo' was hell bent on doing this foolish thing—which I protest against with all mah vitals—that it would be a pity yo' vengeance didn't have a cash value. A great pity, especially as we need capital fo' my contemplated enterprise. It was me'ly my old commercial spirit rising up, so to speak. Let us say no mo'."

*To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, on the news stands  
November 7th.*



## “A Cathcart or a Riggs?”

By Roy Norton

*Author of “A Reformed Reformer,” “Swords Out for Spain,” Etc.*

Just who was that Pearl Brown woman, who was so darned snappy and defiant in that hard-boiled Western mining town? “Circumlocutory” Smith and his friend, Fosdike, were curious enough to make a bet on it, but their speculations had to be abandoned for a time in deference to the amazing developments when Horace Ring, fighting editor of the *Weekly Star*, carried his reforming campaign into the neighboring town of Placer City.

**S**HORTLY after that pleasant and profitable day on which Mrs. Pearl Brown knocked out Mr. Patrick Sheedy with a pair of brass knuckles, called Mr. Horace Ring, “The Reformer,” a chump, and satirically expressed her opinion of Mr. “Trigger” Smith’s celerity and prowess with a gun, she, too, caught the mania for reformation that had contagiously divided the mountain town of Murdock into numerous more or less violent factions.

Pearl Brown wasn’t in the habit of preannouncing her intentions. She was distinctly sudden. She never apologized for her acts, nor explained the reasons therefor. As John Fosdike, the blasé proprietor of the Miners’ Emporium once said: “That Pearl person just does

something and then turns the talking part over to other folks. All she does is do.”

When Pearl Brown bought the Alamo Amusement Hall from the sheriff, the purchase included a small row of flimsy, one-story buildings that had the distinction of being appreciably removed from any near-by neighbors. Pearl Brown did not buy the tenants, but she sniffed when they were mentioned in the columns of Mr. Ring’s *Weekly Star*. He considered the tenants undesirable. As long as the Reformer bestowed printing ink on the row of shacks, Pearl Brown appeared unconcerned; but when Mr. Ring turned his reformatory abilities in other directions, Pearl Brown, as usual, did the unexpected.

She sallied forth to the row shortly after dusk on one calm summer's evening, and notified her alarmed tenants that they had just one hour in which to pack their small belongings and vacate. Enlightened by previous experience, they bandied no words. They merely got industrious, some of them for the first time in their lives, and packed. Promptly with the turn of the hands of a clock, precisely on time, Pearl Brown set a match to a wad of cotton and kerosene in the first house, did the same to the next, and calmly burned out the whole flimsy row.

"They're mine and they're not insured," she said to the chief of the volunteer fire brigade, when he arrived with his trusty men, a chemical cart, a red helmet, and a blunt ax. "There's no law against my burning my own things, the same as I'd burn a mattress and a wooden bed in my back yard if I thought they were—well—not fit for further use. So that's that, and—you can go to hell!"

**I**N the face of such argument, it seemed a pity to waste the water. So none was wasted. Pearl Brown went back to the Alamo, which she owned and ran, climbed up to the top of a sort of lookout chair behind the bar, glared at a beer slinger, and said:

"Casey, you're not tending to business. There's a gent over there at No. 5 table that has slipped off his chair and thinks the floor is his boarding house. Chuck him out!"

The town marshal, arriving breathless and solicitous, approached her and began to condole her on her loss.

"Is there anything I can do, Misses Brown?" he asked, with due official courtesy.

"Not unless you wish to clear the ashes away to-morrow morning," replied Pearl Brown, unsmiling and unmoved. "I may want to build something else there. Maybe it'll be a nonsectarian church, or a Y. M. C. A. Perhaps the latter would be best. This camp needs one."

Murdock had not tired of discussing the idiosyncrasies of Pearl Brown before

she started another reformation. She had all the curtains and red-plush sofas removed from the boxes in the Alamo and a new sign put over the bar:

THIS IS A TEMPERANCE HOUSE. TEMPERANCE CONSISTS IN KNOWING WHEN YOU'VE HAD ENOUGH AND THE WISE MAN MIXES NO DRINKS!

Having succeeded in clearing out her only rivals in business worth consideration, by organizing a tar-feather-and-rail party for their benefit which she led in person, the financial losses of her reform movement didn't exactly hit her bank account, as John Fosdike remarked when he heard of the changes.

"Now with young Horace Ring and his *Weekly Star*," remarked his long-time friend "Circumlocutory" Smith, "it's different. Most every reform he undertakes costs him something. Sometimes most of his subscribers, and many times a beating; but does he count the cost? Not he. Just rolls up his sleeves and horns in with hoofs, tail, and mane all flying in different directions. The more I see of that boy, since he got grace and took to carrying a gun that he doesn't know how to use, the better I like him. By the way, what's he got to say about Pearl Brown's latest moves?"

Fosdike laughed through his red beard and his eyes twinkled humorously.

"Haven't you seen it in his paper? Oh, I forgot that you'd been away for a couple of weeks. Well, he came out with an editorial in which he praised her but wound up with the statement that while this was a step in the right direction, she could earn the higher approval of the better class of citizens by closing the Alamo entirely and taking up some more feminine occupation, like millinery. Pearl got riled when she read it and went to see him. Nobody knows whether she had her brass knuckles in her bag or not, but she met young Ring on the street and told him that when she wanted advice, she'd call on him personally.

"I like it," says she. 'It's so sound and so sweet; because if there's any town on the Big Divide where a good milliner



is needed, it's Murdock. And while I think of it,' says she, staring at him, 'I'm not certain you wouldn't make a better milliner yourself than you are editor or gunman.'

Circumlocutory Smith meditated over this for some minutes, and then said: "She's a Cathcart. That sounds just like Cathcart used to talk."

"Nope. She's a Riggs. Don't you remember what a sarcastic devil he was?"

"So was Cathcart, when drunk. I bet a hundred dollars she's a Cathcart."

"It's a bet. I'll take it. Shake! You seem to forget that Riggs was sarcastic when he was sober, and this Pearl's always dead-cold sober."

"She's a Cathcart. The bet's done made. I'll win your hundred."

THE discussion of the antecedents of the woman known as Pearl Brown was, for these two old frontiersmen, a continuous point of difference. She had let them know that once upon a time in Tucson, in the more reckless days of Trigger Smith, she had known both Smith and Fosdike, and had asserted that in those days there had been but four decent men in the town: Father Wyatt, a priest; Henry Bean, a mail carrier; a saloon keeper named Riggs; and a blacksmith called Cathcart, to one of which she "belonged." Inasmuch as neither the mail carrier nor the priest had ever married, and in those days she must have been very young, they reasoned that her father had been one of the latter two.

Furthermore, they were annoyed because the knowledge was one-sided, she apparently knowing all their past, while they were ignorant of hers. Also, with characteristic outspokenness she had told them not to ask her any questions.

"A shut mouth catches no flies," she told Fosdike. "Although, come to consider it, perhaps that's the reason you are compelled to wear that red fly trap of a beard. Must have been born with your mouth open. Wonder how your mother protected you when you were young?"

That ended all further personal inter-

rogations. The two old friends believed that she was not proud of her ownership of the Alamo, which she ran by sheer fighting strength—most successfully, from a financial viewpoint.

The miner repaired to his favorite loafing place in the saddlery shop with ulterior motives, for the gray-bearded old saddler was a gossip and a philosopher. Smith perched himself on the end of the workbench, dangling his long legs and inhaling the smell of freshly cut leather, and talked of many subjects before broaching the one in his mind—about hand-carved Spanish saddles; silver-mounted Mexican saddles, and cow-puncher "rocking-chairs." Then he edged closer to home topics until he brought the subject around to the Alamo.

"You know," he said, "I sort of like that Pearl Brown. Reminds me a lot of a man I used to know down in Tucson named Cathcart, a blacksmith. Dead image of him. And they do say she comes from down in that neck of the woods. Yes, sir, she certainly looks exactly like him, and talks like he used to!"

"Ever ask her if she was any kin?" the old saddler inquired, anything serving to rouse his bump of curiosity.

"No. I'd sort of like it, but you see me and her ain't very good friends. Just the same, I'd certainly like to know if she wasn't a Cathcart. Of course without her knowing that I sort of wanted to know."

And thus having planted a seed that he was confident would bear fruit, Smith diplomatically changed the subject.

On the following day, he entered the saddlery and was greeted with a scowl.

"You got me inter a hell of a mess," the saddler said, "askin' me to go and ask that Pearl Brown if her dad's name wa'n't Cathcart!"

"I didn't ask you to ask her. I just said——"

"Yes, I know; but you oughter heard what she said to me! She said that if people who stuck their bills inter other folks' business had long noses, I'd have a nose like a pelican. An' then all the

fellers that heard her laughed their fool heads off, when the Lord knows there ain't anybody that minds his own affairs more'n I do."

The miner soothed the saddler and left with a sense of bafflement. Smith was still endeavoring to think of other sources of information when he went to the Miners' Emporium and was hailed by its proprietor.

"I've thought of a way to settle that bet," said Fosdike. "My kid brother is a lawyer down in Phoenix, and she let out one day that she knew him. So I wrote him a description. You'll see. She's no Cathcart."

"We'll see!" The miner grinned, and made a jest of it when he departed for a two-week stay in the hills.

The next time he appeared in the Emporium, Fosdike met him with a grunt and tossed him a letter. The miner read:

If this woman is about thirty years old or younger, as you say, I'm afraid I can't help to identify her, although she would be near my own age. Cathcart and Riggs each had two daughters, all good looking, and all with what you call "snappy black eyes." Also, all were self-reliant. But none of them was named "Pearl," and I never knew a girl named "Pearl."

"Humph!" said Smith. "Only way I can think of to find out who she was is to get Ring after her. They're such good friends!"

Both laughed at this ironic jest, for the feud between The Reformer and the owner of the Alamo had become a classic throughout the entire district; and yet, in the end, it was the editor who first got the information.

For some tranquil weeks, The Reformer blithely went his way without giving any one sufficient cause to try to kill him. Perhaps the widely advertised fact that he had at last yielded to the protective use of firearms deterred the less courageous spirits from taking a chance, while others hoped that this was evidence that he was becoming tolerant to the exigencies of his environment.

Ring had come to Murdock from the highly moral and quiet surroundings of a mid-Western town and mid-Western

university, imbued with the idea that his mission in life rested in making a mining camp model itself on the same lines, and—the mining camp couldn't see it. His indomitable courage had saved him from ridicule, his increasing love for the town had gained him respect, and almost imperceptibly he had begun to wield considerable influence in all ordinary matters not too intimately associated with his ideas of reform.

Even Placer City, Murdock's rival, admitted this, and Placer City was farther away than it looked. The camps were visible to each other, and on a clear day the residents of one could be observed by those of the other with a pair of field glasses. Because of an enormous cañon, however, that separated them to make way for the river bed, necessitating a day's journey for one to visit the other, intercourse was of the most meager for all save the most energetic and determined, who could shorten the time to five or six hours by taking a perilous trail down one steep side and up the other.

**R**ING found the way to Placer City, and Mr. Ring was energetic. He also discovered that there was no adequate job-printing plant in Placer City, and that it offered a rich field for his efforts. Mr. Ring was not one to spare effort.

"That's one thing that maybe accounts for his sort of taming himself down lately," observed Fosdike to his friend Circumlocutory Smith. "He sort of works off a lot of surplus steam by making a trip once or twice a week to Placer, and every time he does twelve hours grueling work climbing down one side and up the other, to say nothing of a few miles extra walking drumming up printing jobs after he gets there, it makes him less combative and reformative here at home. Now if business would get good enough over there so he'd move his whole blamed outfit across the gulch and stay there, it'd be mighty big relief to Murdock."

"I ain't so sure about that," the miner objected. "I think he's doing a heap of good for this camp and——"

"Oh, I forgot you was chock-full of admiration for him," Fosdike interrupted. "Also that he'd been such an all-fired good friend and backer, and so on, of yours."

"Just because he's panned me a dozen times ain't got much to do with it," Smith insisted. "He's explained it all to me, and I see his side of it. It's not me personally he objects to, so much as what I represent. He can't get it out of his head that I'm a gunman and a danger to the community, instead of being the last man on earth to go looking for trouble."

Fosdike chuckled, threw up his hands, wagged his head and retired. If the man who had been the terror of some thousand miles of territory before he turned peaceful couldn't be made to view his past reputation as others viewed it, it wasn't a friend's duty to enlighten him. Even Pearl Brown couldn't be convinced that Smith wasn't dangerous and had once practically requested him to keep away from the Alamo, after the cold announcement that he was welcome only without his battery.

Pearl Brown again did the unexpected when she met Smith on the street that afternoon, halted him and put out her hand.

"See here," she said abruptly, when he stared down at her in astonishment, "I try to play a fair game. When I first came here and saw you, I thought—well—I thought you were probably the same as you were when I first knew you by sight, and of you by—by what I heard. I was mistaken. It seems you aren't the kind of a man you used to be, or that I took you to be."

His keen eyes, whimsical, curious, appraised her.

"That's all right," he said. "I like people who've got the stuff to come around and say so when they find out they've made a mistake; but— Wonder if you'd mind my asking you what made you change your mind about me?"

To his considerable surprise, she avoided his gaze, fixed her regard on the tip of a neat little shoe she thrust out, and seemed embarrassed by his question.

"You needn't tell unless you want to," he said.

As if spurred by this she retorted: "There's no reason why I shouldn't tell anything I want to. The last time I met that man Ring I took a little dig at him, and suggested that perhaps he'd better favor you in the *Weekly Star* for a while, because I was getting more than my share of his attention. Sort of turn about is fair play. And he told me that if I were half as good a woman as you are a man, I'd not need to be ashamed of myself. Said the difference between us was that you at least knew what decency was and are now trying to be decent and—well—the inference was obvious. So I smacked his face for him and went on about my business; but it started me to thinking, got me curious, caused me to ask questions about you, and that's the whole of it. I've said some mean things to your face, and it's to your face that I make my apology."

"That's the way to do it, I reckon," the miner agreed, with an unusual note of jubilation in his voice, as if at last he was really winning his way to public acceptance of his reformation. "And—you offered to shake hands a moment ago. I didn't, because I never shake hands with an enemy; but now— Do you mind? We're friends, aren't we?"

SHE took the hand that he suddenly held out to her, and something in its warmth of grasp seemed to soften the habitual defensive hardness of her eyes. It was quite like a reconciliation between two first-class fighters after a feud.

"Needless to say you are welcome in the Alamo whenever you care to come," she said, moving away.

"I don't drink," he answered.

As if this was a reflection on her business, she turned suddenly and left with him a parting shot. "Probably it's a good thing for the camp that you don't!"

He believed he caught the faint notes of mocking laughter as she walked away, and wondered what she meant by that. He stood watching her for a moment and thought:

"She walks like Cathcart used to, but

she does talk like Riggs. I wish I knew which she is. Humph!"

Almost absently, and pondering over many things, he made his way past the saddler's and down the somnolent street to the Miners' Emporium.

"Can't tell whether Pearl Brown's a Riggs or a Cathcart," he said, and, the hour being idle and the storekeeper lounging, retailed his recent encounter.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Fosdike. "That young woman and you become friends, and young Ring is out sticking up for you! That young man— What do you think of this? He ambled in here a while ago, calm as you please, just as if him and me hadn't been at cross ends ever since he came to this camp and says:

"Fosdike, I'm not a man to bear a grudge. Also you sell good stuff, straight and clean. I'm going to buy anything I need here after this. Here's an order."

"Then he throws down a little list and walks out. Can you beat it?"

"Does seem as if folks in this camp were sufferin' a change of heart," the miner agreed. "About time one of those revivalist chaps came along, I reckon. Seems too good to last. Ought to be clinched while the going is good, before anybody can backslide. Afraid something mighty bad's about to happen."

But nothing did. Save for its occasional brawls and squabbles, all in the natural course of events, Murdock went its peaceful way. From the Placer City side, it looked clean and calm, sprawled in the sunshine, on the afternoon when Circumlocutory Smith and his partner Jim Clarke visited Placer City to inspect some secondhand mining material that they felt they could, in their increasing prosperity, afford.

Their examination had been made and, from the seclusion of a tavern porch where they had dined, they were considering their homeward journey when they saw a group forming in the middle of the road but a short distance away. In the center of it, a tall man held a newspaper in his clenched fist and waved it aloft as if it were a banner of hate. Voices were becoming louder and some

one shouted: "Get a rope!" To this, came another shout: "No, no! Tar, feathers and a rail!"

"Looks interesting," Smith said, with a grin, as he stood by the veranda rail.

"Anyhow, we got a seat in the gallery to watch it," his partner remarked, as he caught a pillar, jumped upward, and stood on top of the rail, from which vantage point of height he could overlook the excited mob.

Suddenly the crowd began to mill wildly as if its center were a seat of disturbance and just as suddenly Jim yelled:

"Hey, pardner! I see a flaming red-head in the middle of that muss and— yes— It's that fellow Ring from Murdock and oh, boy! But isn't he putting up some fight!"

"Ring? Ring? Come on, Jim! We got to help him out. It's too one-sided. Come on! Into this bunch we go!" The miner vaulted the rail as he spoke, and charged.

CLOSE at his heels, with all the wild abandonment of fealty, youth, and the love of a good mix-up came his six-foot partner. They were side by side when they hit the outskirts of the crowd like a twin battering-ram, and men taken unawares from behind were hurled right and left as if they were but twigs in the path of a cyclone.

The younger man yelled as he charged, the elder went voicelessly and with shut teeth and jaw, a hard, veteran fighting man who wasted neither breath nor motion. The younger man struck with the quick, timed precision of a trained boxer, the elder with forethought to inflict the most damage.

They gained the center before they met any resistance, and there in the vortex they fought above the prone body of The Reformer, who was down and out. One man reached around and kicked at the fallen man with a heavy boot, despite Smith's endeavor to bring a truce, and not until then did the miner become angry. With cold malice, he knocked the man down, picked him up, battered his face again and then, exercising his

enormous strength, seized him and threw him at the heads and faces of his friends.

Two or three of the man's supporters started an angry charge when abruptly a loud voice shouted:

"Don't! Don't! Stop! Look out, or he'll shoot! Don't you see who it is, you fools! It's Smith, the killer!"

And such was the dread reputation of the miner and ex-gunman that the charge melted into a withdrawal. Smith and his partner, back to back, stood in a clear space above the fallen editor. They breathed heavily from their efforts, and the younger man, grinning as if not half satisfied, exposing his fine white teeth, wiped a cut on his temple, and called:

"Next!"

"You know who that red-headed stiff you're fightin' for is, don't you, Smith? That's the pup that abused you in his newspaper." The man who had shouted the warning restraint which had quelled the fight pointed at the fallen Ring.

"Yep. I know," the miner answered. "But I don't know what the fight's about and why it took twenty men to jump him."

"We didn't jump him. He jumped us," the man declared.

"About the time you were going to gang him, and tar and feather him, I reckon," Smith retorted dryly, and then, as if the matter were ended, he suddenly moved toward them waving his arms and shouted: "Clear out of this. Get! We'll take care of Ring. It looks like you've damaged him enough, even if it did take twenty of you to do it. Get!"

Some of the men, regaining their sober senses and perhaps a little shamed by the scorn in the rugged old gun fighter's tones, shrugged their shoulders and walked. Others moved somewhat sulkily, as if reluctant to end the matter, until they met Smith's stare, which decided them that it was well enough to drop the matter. Only one or two remained when the miner knelt down beside the unconscious reformer, tried to rouse him, failed, and then said:

"Here, Jim. Give us a hand. We'll get him to that drug store across the street."

No one dared interfere with them as they carried out their purpose. They laid Ring out on a prescription table and stripped him when a doctor arrived, and Smith scowled at the mass of bruises exposed while the doctor made an examination. He looked up through his spectacles and shook his head doubtfully.

"Lot of ribs broken in," said the physician. "Frightfully bruised. Looks to me as if a dozen men must have taken turns in trying to kick him to death. Don't know whether he has any internal injuries, but—he's in bad shape. Serious, I'm afraid. It's a hospital case, really, and—the nearest is down at Georgeville, as you probably know—a dozen miles."

"All right! Hospital it is. Out you go, somebody, and hire the best carriage or buggy there is in the town. Quick! Never mind the price. That goes for you too, doctor. You're coming along!" Smith snapped his orders impatiently and said to his partner: "Jim, you go with whoever knows where that rig can be hired, and see that it comes back on the run, too. Hurry up now!"

The doctor tried to protest that he could be of no assistance, but the miner silenced him with:

"Can't tell. However, you're going. Anything we can do to make him comfortable on the trip?"

"May have to use morphia on the road. I'll get my special case. There's a broken wrist here that we'll bandage first. You might get some blankets from the hotel."

It was a long time before Circumlocutory Smith forgot that ride in the only semicomfortable conveyance that could be obtained, a disused stagecoach that swayed and swung as if its springs and leathers had become limber through long neglect, and whose woodwork creaked dismally, like the bones of an aged man driven to painful effort. Smith sat and watched the crusader, who lay motionless on the floor of the vehicle, the young man who had once been his enemy, whom he had once before saved from a mob, and for whom he had a strange affection.

"Right or wrong—always brave!" Smith thought admiringly. "Too brave. Foolishly brave. Never cared about the odds or how they came, one or a hundred, with fists, clubs or guns. All the same to Ring! And—always ready to fight for what he thought was right! Be a pity if he's got his by being kicked to death by a mob of boneheads, not one of whom had the courage to go after him single-handed. Wonder what it was all about?"

THIS curiosity grew within him until, when they stopped the horses pulling the stage, he got out and changed places with Jim who had been sitting beside the driver.

"You got any idea what started all that fuss back there?" Smith asked the man, when they were once more on the road.

"Reckon I have," the driver returned. "I heard most of it, and seen most of it—out of my haymow winder."

"Well?" demanded the miner.

"Looky here. I ain't lookin' for no trouble with you, and somehow it seems you're a friend of his, although why the hell you should be, beats me! But— He got too damn fresh. He's taken to comin' over to Placer from Murdock lately, to try to drum up business. And he got a lot of it, too, folks say. Then he gets a nettle in his brain blankets that Placer City's a wicked place, and he comes out in his Murdock rag and has a whole column tellin' how rotten things are run over in our town, and among other things he hits 'undesirable tenants' in certain houses in Placer City. He hops the mayor for it and says the mayor owns the houses. That was the mayor you fixed up with a busted nose, a few front teeth knocked out, a pair of black eyes and a tin ear. Humph! And the way it started!"

He grunted and, when urged to proceed, said, half turning in his seat: "You see, it was this way. Ring stood for all the mayor had to say to him and what one or two others had to offer until the mayor says:

"'You got a hell of a right to talk, you

or any other Murdock man, when you've got a thing like that Pearl Brown runnin' your most decent dump—a place like that Alamo.'

"Then the mayor called this Pearl Brown person a name or two, but hadn't got through when this Ring—the red-headed, cantankerous cuss!—yells:

"'Whatever her business is, Pearl Brown's a straight, square, decent woman personally, and I'll teach you to keep your tongue off her!' And with that he hauls off and lams our mayor. Little fool! Why, the mayor could lick him with both hands tied behind him!

"Then it just seemed as if everybody that had it in for Ring, as well as them that tries to stand in with the mayor, all want a piece of Ring for a souvenir. And I reckon they'd have got it, too, if you and that big pardner of yours hadn't butted in. You sure did knock seven kinds of hell out of the mayor, and if it was anybody but you, you can bet you'd not have got away with it. Folks do say that you got a habit of fillin' up cemeteries when you get riled, and so—well—you got away with it."

Smith sat hunched forward in his seat, his stare fixed on the working haunches of the wheel horses, his mind rambling over what he had heard. There was no use in trying to avoid a past reputation as a killer, no sense in striving to be a man of peace who wished for nothing more than nonmolestation, quietude, comfort, security. He was and would be, so far as he could foresee, wherever he went, Trigger Smith who "fanned" his gun from the hollow of his side and who traveled in a cloak of security because men were afraid of him.

But this other matter was of more interest and puzzled him. This matter of that red-headed firebrand Ring, the Reformer, always striving to reform something that had neither inclination nor intent to be reformed, getting mauled and kicked and beaten, perhaps to death, defending that young woman, Pearl Brown, who had defied him and his efforts until it had become a feud. Why should Ring fight for her when he himself had always fought her?

Smith at last gave it up as a problem insolvable, inexplicable. His brain wasn't slow when it came to analysis of human motives, but it was bewildered by this situation. It was beyond his experience. And he was still pondering perplexedly, over this when the old vehicle pulled into Georgeville, rocked through its unpaved streets in a cloud of summer dust, and drew up at the two-story, veranda-fronted frame building, white-painted, with green blinds, that was then the only hospital within a wide radius.

THE miner stood by with hands thrust into his pockets when a nurse, assisted by his mining partner, carried The Reformer in on a stretcher, and, still with hands in pockets, walked to and fro outside while awaiting the verdict.

"We can tell you nothing about it, except that his injuries aren't fatal unless something internal shows up," the doctor from Placer told Smith, after an hour's wait. "There was no use in your making me come here with you, and I'm off for home again. Now about my fee——"

"Make it whatever it's worth and take it out of that," Smith said, thrusting a well-filled wallet toward the medical man.

The physician selected a twenty-dollar bill and handed the leather back. The miner extracted an additional ten-dollar bill and pushed it out.

"To have you with us has been worth that to me," he said. "Now I'll go in and powwow with these hospital folks. I want Ring to pull through. I don't agree with him on much of anything, but—well—he's too good to lose. Also he's from my own town—a Murdock man. Guess that's reason enough. Good-by. Thanks."

Ring was still unconscious when the partners, mounted in a mountain buckboard hired from the livery stable, turned toward the Big Divide and Murdock, and heard the driver's whip crack and his voice bawl: "Gid-dap!"

It was long after dark when the big miner trudged down the quiet street of Murdock and gained the front of the

flamboyantly lighted Alamo. He had never passed through its doors since that night when its proprietress had humiliated him by telling him that no gunman was welcomed or wanted in her place; but now he entered stolidly, and walked across to the bar with its high seat and cash till at the end, behind which sat Pearl Brown.

No one paid attention to his entrance. A so-called vaudeville act was in progress and, had Smith taken time to heed, he might have observed that the performer was a camp favorite. He was oblivious to the big floor, crowded with tables and chairs, the wreaths of smoke climbing upward toward the electric-light clusters, the sobbing sentimentality of the orchestra maundering an accompaniment to some sobbingly sentimental ballad about "A violet I plucked from dear old mother's grave."

The calm, defensive-eyed young woman in the high seat appeared equally oblivious and unmoved by it, but her interest seemed invoked when she discovered Smith standing at her elbow and heard him say:

"I come here to tell you something I think you ought to know. I don't know why I think you ought to know, only—there's something about it I can't understand. That boy Ring—you know—the crazy guy that runs the *Star*—was all beat up, hammered and kicked to a pulp, this afternoon in Placer City, because he stuck up for you and wouldn't let that bunch of hairy-heels headed by their mayor call you names that maybe you deserve, and maybe you don't.

"I gave the mayor what Ring wasn't strong enough to give him," the miner went on, "then took Ring to the hospital in Georgeville. What's left of him! He's there now. They don't know whether he's goin' to pull through or not. But I thought you ought to know that he got it for fighting for you and so, if you've got anything against him, any old grudge, any hurt, you'd better forget it and forgive it. Just as I've forgiven all he ever said about me after I learned that; right or wrong, he's a brave and honest boy.

"I been thinking over a lot of things this afternoon," he continued, "and I remembered that whenever Ring thought it was his duty to go and tell somebody something, he went and did it, regardless of what might come after. That's why I got to thinking it my duty to come and tell you, and it's all I could think of to make myself feel that I was as good as him in some ways. I think if he lives, he'd like me a little better for it, and if he dies, well—maybe he'll know and appreciate what I feel, anyhow. So that's that. I'm telling you this so that if you've got any grudge against him, you'll kind of square the books by giving him credit for making a good finish on your account. For he fought well!"

The proprietress of the Alamo sat apparently unmoved, emotionless, unblinking, and watching him with her direct, inscrutable stare while he talked. In that recital of his, there had been nothing of that circumlocution which he was wont to practice when he considered it wise, and which had earned him his new sobriquet. He had told her all of the episode, its results and his motives for telling, in one terse speech. There was no need to ask questions, or if so she seemed to neglect them.

"Much obliged for telling me," she said, and turned to give attention to the changing of a bill.

When she had made the change, he was walking out through the door, his broad, square shoulders swinging heavily as if wearied by long effort.

"Tom!" she called sharply to her head bartender. "Tom, you look after this thing here. I—I don't feel very good. I'm—I'm going out to-night and—I'm not coming back."

And the head barman, astounded by any sign of weakness in this employer of his, was still blinking when she walked into her little private office in front of the building, slowly entered and slowly closed the door behind her.

It was three weeks later when Circumlocutory Smith rode into Georgeville. He had taken a direct trail that had not necessitated a ride through his beloved camp of Murdock, and felt slightly

ashamed of his solicitude, a sentiment that he felt was rather womanish, not at all what a man should really feel about anybody; but—Ring had been pretty badly manhandled, and—also, he'd taken Ring to that hospital and said he'd be responsible for all bills, and—a man ought to pay his bills when they came due and maybe hospitals wanted their money every week and— Hang it all— How was that boy coming along, anyhow? Was he going to pull through? And if not—well—some of those murderers over there in Placer would have cause to remember him, Trigger Smith, if young Ring didn't pull through. They would! You could bet on that! Damn 'em!

THE miner saw some one sitting on the veranda of the second story, back in the shade, but paid no attention. He dismounted, tied his horse and, with a feeling of profound awkwardness, climbed the broad front steps and walked on tip-toe through the open doors into the clean, hard-wood corridor. Should a feller ring a bell, or yell, or—what did anybody do, anyhow, when they came to visit some one who was a patient in a hospital?

If you rang a bell, you might disturb some poor cuss, and if you yelled, maybe they'd come and throw you out. Further perplexities were spared by the opportune entrance of a cool young person in immaculately clean clothes and a funny cap and apron who had addressed him, heard and answered his question before he recovered presence of mind sufficient to drag off his weather-beaten and dust-covered hat.

"Oh, yes. Mr. Ring is all right now. No complications. Will be out in a week or two. He is sitting in the top veranda. You can go right up those stairs and out front to see him, if you wish."

He tiptoed up the smooth wooden stairs and down the hallway, feeling that, despite his efforts, he was making noise enough to wake the dead, blinked in the sunlight that seemed intent on invading the wide porch, and then stopped, gasping, with widely opened eyes and mouth.



Two were sitting there in chairs drawn as closely as they could be drawn, one a man whose flaring red head was half covered with bandages, the other a woman whose arm was thrust protectively about his neck and shoulders, as if to shield him from any or everything in an inimical world. The woman saw him first and, springing to her feet, came to meet him with both hands outstretched.

"Brown! Pearl Brown!" Trigger Smith exclaimed in a voice of amazement.

"Wrong, Smith. You're wrong," she said, catching his hand and looking up at him with a warmth that never before had he seen in her eyes, a warmth that told that she was still young, still had recesses in her heart that were unhardened, was still a woman well worth while.

He couldn't get it all. Surely she was Brown—Pearl Brown who owned the Alamo up there in Murdock and yet—Pearl Brown hadn't ever looked like this. His gaze swept over her head to that young fellow with the red head, that fellow Ring, and that fellow had a grin as wide as all outdoors and was trying to make signs with bandaged arms and, putting his feet on the floor in the first efforts to rise, come forward and greet him. Her voice came as a positive interruption.

"I am Mrs. Ring—Mrs. Horace Ring, now," she said. "We were married four days ago. And the name Brown was all right, too, because that fellow I married

after my uncle, Father Wyatt, who you knew, died, was named Brown. I've sold the Alamo. I'm through with it and everything like it. I've reformed. You see, I had to. It couldn't be helped. I had to take care of Ring. He needed somebody to put some sense in his head. It couldn't be pounded there. You know that, because you're really his friend.

"I had to take on the job and—we're happy. Very happy. He'll tell you so now, Trigger Smith, and if it rests with me, he'll still tell you so when you are dying. I don't know what you'll think about it. But I care. So does he—Ring. The trouble with a lot of us in this world is that we don't understand what makes others do certain things, the necessities that have driven, that have made us do this or that, that have kept us from doing perhaps better. But I think there's three of us who understand one another now—my husband, you, and I. Can we hope for that?"

"I lose a hundred because I bet old John Fosdike that you were a Cathcart," said Smith, "and I can't see why I never thought about Father Wyatt having a niece; but—as for a few understanding—yes—they can. We do."

And he had to disengage himself to take hold of Ring, The Reformer, who had succeeded in struggling from his chair and was coming toward them tottering, with hands that, though bandaged from battling were still clean and unafraid.

*Another "Circumlocutory" Smith story, by Roy Norton, will appear in the next issue of THE POPULAR.*



## FAR TOO MANY

There is a fire in an American home every four minutes, says the National Board of Fire Underwriters. In the five-year period, 1917-1921, fires in dwellings caused a loss of over three hundred and twenty-one million dollars. The average yearly loss of life by fire in the United States is fifteen thousand, and probably half of these fatalities occur in homes. Four fifths of these dwelling fires are classed as preventable. Be careful—it's worth while.



## In a Land Unmade

By L. E. Innes

IT'S a far, far call from the gay hotel  
With its gilt and its Peacock Alley  
To the Cup of Death on the burning sand  
In the alley men call Death Valley.

It's a distance greater than man may know  
Unless by a bare, bare breath  
He has flung the hand from his burning lips  
That held the Cup of Death.

I stand in a seething caldron of heat and look down brown vistas.  
I see the color and the mystery and sublimity of a naked land.  
I seem to sense the awfulness of creation as I stare, fascinated, across the back  
lots of the world:

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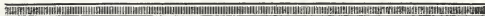
IN A LAND UNMADE

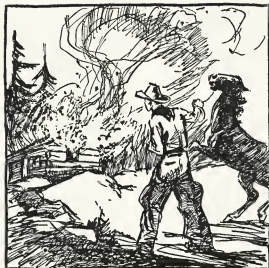
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The riven rocks split by some prehistoric cataclysm;  
The dry, burning rivers of sand which mark the path of monstrous torrents.  
These, with their crude and terrible charm, are painted forever on the white-hot  
film of the reeling mind.

Yes, from clinking ice in a cooling glass  
To a drink in the cactus shade,  
From an easy-chair in a big hotel  
To the lanes in a land unmade,

Is a greater distance than man may know  
Unless by a bare, bare breath  
He has flung the hand from his burning lips  
That held the Cup of Death.





# The Pendulum

By Irvin Mattick

To Bill Greb, the mountains around him seemed like a striped beast, holding the world in fear. One fourth of his life had been spent in this isolated cattle ranch. Then an insignificant thing—the pendulum of a clock—pointed the way to happiness and comfort, music, laughter and companionship. So Bill Greb became merciless.

WITH the whole world on his back, Bill Greb rode up Waldo Trail. At least the long western slope of Thunder Peak was on his back, and Thunder Peak had been Greb's world for seven years. He was sour on this world of his, too. Up every morning with the sun, out after the fool cattle in every kind of weather, barely enough to eat for a man to carry on with, when the herd needed attention day and night, and snow, higher than a horse, filled the road to Mosca.

And for it all, just a measly bag of pay at the year's end.

Carson, the owner, got the gravy. He sold the steers, bought a new batch of heifers and sent them up to Greb. Carson was away all of the time. San Francisco, or Honolulu, maybe Cuba for a month, eating all he wanted and drinking even more. Greb had all the scull drag-

ging. And worst of all, there wasn't a soul within miles but old "Spot" Tyler, and he might as well be in China for all the neighbor he was. Spot Tyler was a sour misanthrope, a man who had bred his own particular hatred for mankind in a jail down East, and, after he was let out, had come to Thunder Peak to get off by himself and nurse that hatred.

Tyler was trying to get gold out of the creek, but Greb had tried that a dozen times himself. He smiled whenever he caught sight of Spot standing in the cold water, shaking the pan dirt round and round and raking hungry fingers through the barren silt and gravel.

The ranch owner was due to come out in a day or two, on his regular trip West. Greb was going to quit. He'd tell Carson what he thought of the place now. He'd meant to do it for two years, but he had no place to go and little money

to find one. But any place would be better than Thunder Peak. Hell, peopled with a million warring souls doomed to everlasting strife, was better than Thunder Peak's terrible desolation. The very lowing of the cattle sounded like the wails of lost souls across the mesa.

Bill Greb was done with it! He'd carried his load long enough, and a man wasn't made to spend all his days alone with a bunch of brainless cows. Maybe Spot Tyler, a man with a big fuss in his heart for everything, maybe he liked it here, where nobody could recognize him, but Greb—

It was a fine September evening.

The air was still and very lonely, void even of all the pesky flying mites that filled it through midsummer days. Far away, the crinkled purple line of the Sangre de Cristo Range showed its streaks of snow, like a striped beast holding the world in fear. Beside Greb, as he rode, Thunder Creek bubbled and gurgled, a shallow stream played out from rushing along all summer, about ready to die and rest until born again from the melted mountain snows in spring.

Then it would be the same old thing all over again. The creek would rise; the bridges would be swept away and the cattle break half their legs getting across the water; and Greb would curse himself insane over it.

No, sir, he was tired of it!

**B**ILL'S horse was tired of it this evening. The beast had carried the cattle herder all day through the lower hills about Thunder Valley. His gait was getting draggy.

Stopping his horse to drink, Greb saw Spot Tyler's cabin back in a clump of trees, a black hut built of logs that had been cut from the hills long ere Greb was born. The sun, glancing from quiet patches of water, sent a lone shaft of reddish light up out of the creek, through the trees, upon the crooked windowpane in Spot Tyler's hut. The glass was a square of gold in the black log wall.

While his horse sucked water, Greb

recalled that he hadn't seen Tyler on the place for several days. He wondered where the bitter old gold panner was. Even when Spot went to Mosca for supplies, he never stayed overnight.

Spot Tyler could have made things a lot better, too. He was an old crab. Hardly answered you, hardly expected you to talk to him. Even the day that Greb met him the first time, suddenly here on the trail a year ago, and directed him to the untenanted cabin under the trees, Tyler had barely shown a sign of gratitude. Greb often felt like shooting it out with Tyler, but what could you expect of a jailbird?

Even Spot Tyler's name branded him. He brought that nickname, "Spot," back from prison. There was a blue spot, from gunshot, on his upper lip, where some hunter of men like Spot had nearly caught his game. After Tyler settled at Thunder Peak, he let a dark, somber mustache cover that gunshot, but Greb still hailed him "Spot," when they met on the trail. The dark, flowing mustache was conspicuous, but it hardly helped Tyler's looks. It covered the mark on his lip, but hardened his face to bitterness, underscored a surly countenance.

Greb started his horse up the trail again, and slipped a brassy cheap watch out of his shirt pocket. It was after five, and the light was getting dimmer. As he passed Tyler's closed-up cabin, the blot of sunlight on its window moved out of sight and was finally gone.

"The yellow sunlight on his window is about all the gold Spot will get hereabouts," Greb muttered, and gave his horse a heel in the ribs.

Then he reined the animal to a sudden stop.

On a flat rock that lined the bank of Thunder Creek, the white foam of a horse's sweating mouth clung like whipped cream. Even while Greb looked, the creamy mass quivered, its tiny bubbles bursting, leaving a film on the rock. Occasional leapings of water carried bits of the foam downstream.

Another horse had recently taken water there.

At first Greb thought of trouble. Whoever the horseman was, he had been at the creek but a few minutes ago. Greb had not heard him, so he must have carefully picked his way off. That wasn't a good indication. Cattle rustlers had never bothered Greb. Had the time come? But they wouldn't be out at this hour of the day.

Perhaps Spot Tyler had ridden back. But Tyler would have met Greb. The crabby old panner, for all his past, wasn't afraid to show himself.

Greb swung his horse around and rode back down the trail. He drove in under the trees about Spot's cabin.

First, he kicked against the rough door. Then he walked to the window, cupped his face in his hands, and peered inside the cabin.

No one was in the shanty, and by the little light that came in through the window, Greb could make out the various things in the hut.

The table with its smoked lamp had a large revolver on it. Back in a corner stood a stove, knocked down for the summer. Just under the window, Greb saw something vague, with a striped cover—Spot's bunk. It was hard to see clearly through the glass. At the end of the shack, above a crude cupboard of shelves, a big clock stared, its yellow face full of large black numbers. Its holes for the winding key looked like two black eyes over the hands that grinned at the untimely angle of ten minutes after nine.

Over a door that opened into a large cabinet, some old clothes hung on a peg.

Had that clock been going, Greb would have left the empty hut. The clock was one of the few things that Spot Tyler had brought down in Mosca during the year. Greb never stopped in to see the ex-convict but that he envied him for that big timepiece. It was large enough for a train shed, but Spot had hung it in this little room.

Now that big, spotted clock made Greb open the absent gold panner's door and step inside the cabin. Greb didn't like to see the big clock idle. He wanted to wind and set it, get it going.

Inside the little room, it was quieter and darker than without. It was warm with the unventilated atmosphere of a room that had been closed for days. The silence was even heavier.

Outside, Greb's horse stamped his hoofs. The sound brought back to Greb the sight of that foam on the creek bank. Unconsciously he picked up Spot Tyler's gun. After he realized he had it in his hand, he slipped it in his deep trouser pocket. Perhaps there was some stranger about the cañon with bad intentions.

THE stillness, the quiet clock brought Greb around to the reason he had entered Tyler's place. He set a chair under the timepiece and looked at his watch in the waning light. Then he stepped up and found the clock key on the cupboard, just below the clock. As his hand touched the knob on the frame of the glass door, a rusty male voice spoke from a corner of the shack, behind Greb.

"Lay off that stuff, you sneak thief," it said, "takin' stuff while the cat's gone, eh? Well, I've served time, but it was for what I done out in the open, not for mousing around while somebody was away from their stuff."

The ugly voice pitched down to Spot Tyler's usual speech. Greb's hand went to the gun he had picked from the table.

Before he drew, he turned and saw Spot crouched near the table, unarmed, the cabinet door ajar behind him.

"Double crossin' me while I was gone, eh?" Spot rasped out.

"Double crossin' you?"

Spot's face grew uglier in the dusk, his skin turning as dark as the mustache he wore.

"Yes, double crossin'! And get down off that chair and keep your sticky fingers off my clock. What the hell'd you come here for, anyway?"

"I didn't know you were back, Spot," Greb replied, perplexed by the man's rising temper. "I saw that somebody's horse had taken water at the creek, and thought you had returned."

"First you didn't know I was back,

and then you thought I was. You liar! All mixed up in your answers, ain't you?"

"I looked in your window, Spot, and saw it was empty in here. Then I spied your clock, saw it was stopped, and came in to set it going again."

"Takin' a helluva lotta int'rest in me lately, ain't you? 'Specially in the clock. Well, I got sight of you ridin' around my shack and got in without you catchin' me. Now get down off that chair, or I'll brain you!"

Spot Tyler produced a long, slender stick from somewhere down under the table. He raised it to strike. In the faint light reflected from the creek, a bit of wavering sunlight gleamed on the round brass disk at the end of Spot Tyler's weapon. It was the pendulum of the clock.

Greb got down off of the chair and faced Tyler.

"Get out of here, Greb, and don't show up again until after I pull out to-morrow," Spot ordered, wielding the long pendulum before Greb like an ax.

"Going away for good to-morrow?"

"Yes," Spot sang bäck, "where there ain't no sneakin' dogs around. I thought a feller'd be safe on a place like this."

Greb paused between two impulses—one, to rush Tyler and punch his face in; the other, to turn and leave with a wave of his hand.

Spot Tyler made Greb decide which impulse to follow, for the enraged miner charged Greb, raising the pendulum above him.

Greb's hand went up and caught the descending stick with the brass disk. A kick in Tyler's stomach made the raging man let go. With a deft swing, Greb pitched the pendulum, arrowlike, out through the closed window. There was a tinkle of glass on the floor, a delicate sound alongside the grunt and curse that Spot let out.

"Get out of my shack! You got no right in here, and if I catch you here again before I leave, I'll kill you!"

To belittle the maddened miner, Greb was about to hand back the pistol, but, seeing the animal fury in the man, he

slipped it back into his pocket and went out through the door. He'd return the gun in a few days when this blew over.

Keeping an eye on the cabin door, lest Spot should fight foul, Greb picked up the pendulum from the ground. He mounted his horse, smacked it with the broad disk of the pendulum, and rode up the trail toward his own hut.

WHEN Greb reached the top of the cañon, he looked down and saw that Spot Tyler had lit his lamp. Probably he was packing his stuff to leave to-morrow. It was dusk now, and the trees about the other man's shack made it darker down there.

Bending the slender pendulum back and forth, he pondered about Spot Tyler's unwarranted rage. The names he'd called Greb! Thief, liar, sticky-fingered, sneaking dog! Back and forth, from the lighted window in Tyler's hut to the pendulum, Greb's eyes roved.

As the darkness hovered lower and lower, sinking down into the cañon, the poison in Greb's mind sank from his head into his veins and finally found his heart.

Slowly the thing dawned on Greb, and with it something else.

There he stood in the dusk, a gaunt, weary man, Thunder Peak behind him. Some cattle lowed in the distance. He cursed them. Then he stroked the smooth pendulum with peculiar fondness. So still stood Greb on the brink of the cañon that he might have been part of the ledge carved by winds and rain.

So that was why the clock was stopped!

There wasn't room in it for the pendulum.

Spot Tyler used it for a storage place, a place to hide his wealth. And it must be worth something, whatever it was, or he wouldn't have made such a row about it. Greb cursed himself for not having looked in the clock to get a glimpse of what Tyler had there.

And Spot was leaving to-morrow, he'd said.

So the man who had kept his mouth shut like a clam for more than a year

had really found gold, after all! It must be gold. And he hadn't told Greb. Hadn't Greb led him to that shack the day Spot showed up suddenly from nowhere? From nowhere? From jail! The rancher's jealousy was as keen as a bested lover's.

Greb raised the pendulum in both hands and thrashed the air with the brass disk, making the darkness hiss with the stroke. Spot Tyler, a jailbird, not long out of an iron bull ring, a man who had to wear a mustache to hide his past—him getting gold in Thunder Creek when everybody else had failed!

Greb never found an ounce of the stuff. No wonder Tyler never spoke to a fellow. No wonder he went off on trips, presumably to Mosca for supplies, and came back quietly, sneaked back as he had to-day. He had a place in the creek, a pocket, a panner's mint that yielded pounds and pounds of gold!

Like all fools, Spot had stored it in his clock, as though nobody would find it there. That was a poor place to keep anything. Greb always knew there was something funny about having a clock that big in a little shanty. Spot wasn't so smart; the thing had leaked out.

Greb wanted to batter the pendulum to pieces on the rocks.

Then the light down in the trees went out. Tyler had packed the stuff, ready to go in the morning. He was afraid of Greb, then.

What right did Tyler have to the stuff, when Greb had only some rags and a grouch after seven years of cow-punching?

Greb was going to quit, anyway. This gold, Tyler's stuff, would be easy picking. It would set Greb pretty, too.

**B**BETTER not take the horse, though; that would make too much noise. Tyler was a bad one. Evenly matched, without a gun, Greb would have to scrap like a hyena to beat him. Catch him unawares, that was how. Better leave the horse out and walk down. There wasn't a moon to-night, either.

There must be some gold in that

clock; a man wouldn't raise a fuss like that about nothing.

Greb put the pendulum in a corner of his own shack. He made sure there were some matches in his shirt. Spot Tyler had a lamp, so he would also have some oil—enough to soak the wood cabin.

Spot Tyler's gun was nice and heavy in Greb's pocket when he started down Waldo Trail that night. It was odd, to be going after a man with his own gun.

Several times, Greb wished that the creek was higher, dashing by with more noise, to drown out any sound while he crossed the rocks to Spot Tyler's ground.

About the cabin, the grass was deep and dew-laden. In the inky blackness, Greb glimpsed the stars behind the trees. There was the broken cabin window, smashed by the pendulum that afternoon. Greb could reach right in. It was ten more steps distant. Spot's own gun was ready. One step every twenty seconds now. Care was the thing. Spot slept under the window, his head to the right. The sill grazed Greb's sleeve. The next moment Bill Greb was the only man living between Thunder Peak and Mosca, sixty-eight miles away.

When the sun came up next morning and sent its long shafts down the sides of Thunder Peak, it disclosed blue smoke rising in little straggling columns from the black mass under the trees where Spot Tyler's hut had stood.

That night Thunder Peak celebrated Bill Greb's success, and gathered the clouds for a terrific storm. Salvo after salvo boomed across the darkness, cracking down the cañon as if to rend it open wider. The rain came down in walls of water upon the ashes, and the winds about Thunder Peak next day bore no scent of smoldering fire.

While the thunder had boomed out Greb's victory over circumstances, he sat at his table pawing through the sacks of Tyler's gold. For the ninth or tenth time he had taken the loot from the clock, Spot Tyler's clock, now hanging in Greb's cabin, and counted the glittering disks of gold pieces.

There were sixty-two thousand dollars' worth of gold coin in the canvas sacks,



tightly strapped at the tops like bulging chicken craws, the coins crammed against the stretched bags.

Tyler must have sold nuggets and sand from the creek for the gold pieces, for in four other sacks there were more pebbles and pan dirt.

Where in the name of Thunder Peak had the dead man found all that gold?

Greb stacked it up carefully again in the big clock. There was nothing to do now but wait for Carson to show up—then to quit!

The world was a pretty good place, though. Thunder Peak had been a hellish mountain, but now at last it had given Greb the long end of a deal.

Tyler was dead and Greb had a pile of money.

The rancher loafed about the cabin, never straying far from the clock. He understood now how Tyler had felt about any one's getting near it. The cattle could do as they wished. They could croak. He was done with them.

It was strange, though, to look down on that black spot among the trees on the other side of Thunder Creek. It used to be a man's shack. His horse wasn't grazing there any more, either. The sleek mare was in Greb's barn, next to his own sorrel. And in the late afternoon, when the sun hit lazy pools in the shallow creek, its reflection found no window among the trees to gild.

Greb got impatient. All day he watched the road east that led to the Sangre de Cristo Range. Now he even began to see beauty in that long line of rugged peaks. The beast, lavender and gray in the distant haze, looked tamer. The mountainside, striped with snow, inspired Greb. He didn't have to stay there now and let the winds from their frozen summits gnarl his bones. He could leave them. Leave Thunder Peak! And they, the very mountains that had bullied him with blizzard and sun and flood for seven years—they'd have to stay there.

He laughed at them.

They weren't so high and mighty after all! Neither was Carson. Nobody was anything to Greb. He had enough of the

stuff that mountains kept hidden away from men to do as he pleased.

He laughed again. Men and women might get some of that gold away from him, for good or for bad, but those damn silent mountains with their forest beard, always sitting there and outliving man after man—they'd never get it back again!

The lowing of the cattle did not bother Greb. If Carson raised a rumpus about the herd when he showed up, well, that would be just the thing. That would give Greb a chip to knock off the owner's shoulder. He'd scrap it out with Carson. Let him just say something!

**N**EXT morning, Greb began to pack. After he started piling his things together, he suddenly threw them down with an oath.

He'd buy new things for himself.

"Let the puncher who takes my place use this stuff. If I take it, or burn it, Carson will buy a new outfit."

The round-faced clock, like a sphinx, stared down on it all. Greb had to look up at it often. He wasn't used to it in his shack and, like Spot Tyler, he found it couldn't go with the gold hidden away in it.

The pendulum stood in a corner of the hut, very useless in the scheme of things.

Watching through his window, Greb finally saw three men riding down the road from the Sangre de Cristo Range.

So Carson was coming!

The first thrill at seeing the men passed, and, realizing that his freedom was near, Greb got nervous about the clock. He looked up at it, but all was well. The glass door, painted up to where it covered the dial, hid the bags stored there.

Then Greb realized why Spot Tyler had raved so the day he caught Greb in his shack, about to wind the clock. Now that the three men were riding toward Thunder Peak, Greb got mad at them. But that wouldn't do. It was Tyler's uncontrolled rage that had undone him. Greb had to keep cool.

Greb watched the men approach the plateau. Triumph pervaded him. Here

was what he had waited for. Seven years he had cursed and lashed cows—for this.

The last stretch of the road was harder for the horses, and it took half an hour for the men to reach the wide, stony ledge on Thunder Peak where Greb had spent one fourth of his life.

It was Carson, with two men. The one was rather soft, tired from the ride and out of sorts with the whole trip. Carson was the happiest of the three. The third man was stocky and quick, and handled his horse like a cowman. There was a holster under his loose gray coat, and his eyes had the faculty of perceiving things without revealing his ideas about them.

"Meet Mr. George Tansey, Greb," Carson said. "He's my lawyer. He came up with me to take care of a little matter about the ranch."

Tansey, the soft man, shook hands.

The third man came up now, and Carson introduced him.

"This is Bill Shannon, sheriff of Mosca. Bill Greb—Shannon."

Greb's hand was colder when he took the sheriff's. This was probably necessary, bringing the sheriff along on a business matter, but Greb was not too ready with his welcome.

"Brought the sheriff along to witness some papers," Carson said.

Well, that was better.

"Perty nice land here, Carson," remarked Shannon, "and that slope up Thunder Peak—it's been years since I seen it. Not since I'm sheriff."

Shannon beheld the mountain with his little jet-black eyes. Those eyes seemed to see everything in sight. Greb even wondered if they could see beyond what was in sight.

Greb didn't like Shannon. There was something about him that reminded Greb of Spot Tyler. Not that they looked alike, but the glances and sour looks of Shannon made the rancher think of the man whose clock hung inside the cabin.

"Yep!" Carson smiled with pride. "It is a nice place."

"If you like it," Greb put in, with a sharp pretense at fun.

"Well, you've liked it seven years, and I think you'll like it better after I leave."

Carson winked an eye at Greb.

Greb wondered whether to spill it now, or wait.

Tansey hemmed about going inside the shack. Carson strolled off.

The sheriff let his little black eyes go round the whole horizon.

"Had a fire down yonder?"

Shannon had spied the remains of Tyler's hut.

"Some tourists made a camp fire and forgot to put it out. It burned down an old shelter."

"Let's settle up, Carson," the sheriff said. "You'll want to ride about, as you said, and I want to get back to Mosca to work. I'm busy, you know."

**G**REB," Carson said, his arm about his ranchman, "I'm giving you a half interest in the place. I'm going to Honolulu next month to be near my pineapple farms, and as you have been steady and stuck through the worst of it with me, I'm giving you half. In five years, when they irrigate the entire valley, we'll sell out for ten times what it's worth now."

Greb felt his insides cramp up smaller. He had rehearsed in his mind just what he would say to Carson. A tongueful he had ready, but it was choked in his throat.

Now he wanted to punch Carson.

Take half the ranch from Carson? As a gift? This man-eating place? Who was Carson, anyway?

"The hell with your old ranch! I'm through with it. Thunder Peak's ground the man out of me; it's made me sore at the world and made a jolly good fellow out of you, Carson. Not for a gift, half of it or all of it. I'm done!"

Carson raised his brows. Tansey stopped in the door of the cabin. The sheriff looked thoughtful.

Tansey spoke first.

"A fine, useless ride half across the State for nothing."

"Let's start back then," the sheriff said.

Carson looked at Greb.

"What's wrong, Bill? You must be crazy to refuse half of this, scot-free."

"I was crazy, until I quit," Greb shot back, red before his eyes. He hated the soft picture of Carson, his fat throat over the soft collar, the red-and-blue veins from too much living, the fingers pudgy from card shuffling. "But I'm back in my right mind again, and I don't want an inch of your place, even free!"

Carson laughed. Tansey smiled. The sheriff remained like stone.

Greb got madder. Laugh, would they?

"And I'm leaving to-morrow, too! Not another day on this place for me," Greb blurted.

"Who'll take care of the place until I get some one?"

"Whoever wants to, Carson. My contract expired three years ago. We never made a new one, so I'm free to go."

"Got something in sight?" the sheriff asked.

"Damn right! A year of loafing and fun. I've saved my pay. That's all you can do with money up here. And I'm going to throw it all into one grand year."

"Lucky kid!" The sheriff laughed, with little enough of good will.

The next minute a rabbit scampered out of the scrub and loped across the open sand.

The sheriff drew his gun and fired, but missed. To make a showing with the men, whom he had not yet, to his own satisfaction, outwitted, Greb pulled Spot Tyler's pistol from his belt and fired at the rabbit.

The ball of fur in the bushes thrashed about a moment and then lay still.

"Got him," the sheriff said, running to the bush. He came back holding the dead rabbit by the ears.

Greb grinned as he let the gun slip back into his pocket.

"It's good he showed up, men," Greb remarked, "or you'd just have the meal and beans I eat twenty days a month."

**A**N hour after they had eaten, Carson and Tansey rode off for a tour of the ranch. Shannon and Greb remained in the cabin, talking about the rabbit.

After a time, the two men sat silent and Greb wondered how he would get the gold down from the clock and start away from Thunder Peak. Probably it would be better to stay on until Carson got somebody. Then Greb could get the gold away without them knowing it. If he tried anything sneaky with them here, he might get into a mess.

"Haven't seen a man hereabouts with a large black mustache, have you?" the sheriff asked, rather easily.

Greb looked up. Behind the sheriff's booted feet, thrown up on the table, he saw the little black eyes watching him steadily. Greb looked back with the forced calm of the guilty. Then he did what he should never have done. He stroked the shaved expanse of his upper lip with the tips of nervous fingers.

Would Shannon think that queer?

Did Shannon know Spot Tyler?

Was he looking for Spot, knowing he lived here? Perhaps Spot hadn't served all his time and broke jail. But Spot had a mark on him. If they suspected Greb of being Spot, and took him in for it, that would be easy. The jail records would clear it up.

But Shannon had asked about a man with a black mustache. That must be Spot Tyler!

Greb let his hands slip down over his waist, onto the smooth, walnut stock of Tyler's pistol.

Why was Shannon asking about Tyler?

The three men had come up to Thunder Peak on the other side of Spot's shanty. They hadn't passed the charred remains of the place; furthermore, Spot Tyler couldn't start anything, for Spot was dead.

But the sheriff wore a poker face and asked silly things.

"So you haven't seen a fellow with a black mustache riding a fine black mare, eh?"

"A black mare?" Greb asked, and thought of Tyler's black horse out in the barn. The sheriff hadn't been to the barn, not yet. He couldn't know.

"Yea, a black mare," Shannon repeated. "A fellow like that rode out of

Mosca just a few days ago. Maybe he didn't get this far. I wondered whether you saw him from up here."

"Nope, nobody in these parts like that. Nobody but me."

To escape the sheriff's eyes, Greb took out his gun and placed it on the table.

"Nobody out here at all," Greb went on. "That's one of the worst things about the place. You're all alone."

Greb opened the gun to look at the cylinder. He extracted the empty cartridge left from the shot he took at the rabbit. Two other chambers of the cylinder also were empty. One of them had put Tyler out of business. The other—the extracted shell rolled toward Shannon.

The sheriff tossed it into the air and caught it playfully. Then he polished it on his thigh.

"Good gun, that," Shannon said, dropping his feet to the floor and reaching for the pistol.

Shannon turned the revolver over in his hand and drew his own pistol from his belt.

"No wonder you can hit rabbits at sixty yards. Your gun's got three inches more barrel than mine," the sheriff remarked, comparing the two revolvers.

Greb sat still and watched him. He wished that the other two men would get back. He didn't like this private session with the black-eyed sheriff who asked questions about a dead man—anyway, a dead man who ought to be alive. Spot Tyler was out of Greb's picture of things.

Shannon handled both guns with serious contemplation. He even admired the one Greb had placed on the table.

Then the sheriff's face changed.

**H**IS features grew sharp, forceful. It was a look different from any Greb had ever seen on a human face. It wasn't wicked and it wasn't good. It was a stone face, but, down under it, Greb saw something brewing. Flesh can assume the color of stone, but it cannot remain that motionless.

But the three men coming up to Greb's shack hadn't passed Spot Tyler's

ground! So how could they know? How could Shannon know?

It was quiet in Bill Greb's shack.

The two men faced each other. Into Shannon's black eyes a new light crept. They were now like coals with fire ready to leap from them.

"You're a good shot, Greb," the steel voice of Shannon said.

"I have to be. There's rustlers in my business, and if I want rabbits to eat, I have to shoot them."

"But you should use different guns for different jobs," Shannon advised.

Greb felt funny. What was this game Shannon was playing? The rancher wished Carson and Tansey would return. He began to fear the sheriff.

"A different gun?" Greb blurted.

The sheriff pinioned Greb with his look. Then he slipped Spot Tyler's big pistol into his holster and kept his own gun leveled at Greb.

"What's the deal, Shannon? Tryin' to stick me up while the others are away?"

The sheriff did not answer.

"You want the money I've saved and skip with it, eh?" Greb rose from his chair, but dropped back again at the circular motion of the other man's gun.

"You must have a bit of jack, to be able to retire," Shannon drawled.

Then it fell still again between them, so still that Greb felt the fear and turmoil and the rage within himself come up and beat about his ears. Surely the sheriff could see, could hear his agitation!

Was Shannon a hoax? Really an outlaw who had come up with the other men? He had much of Spot Tyler's unsociable sourness about him. Was Shannon an ex-convict? They never really got over bad acting, the real crooks didn't.

The sheriff hardly budged, but kept his gun trained on Greb. One minute, two minutes passed; a century compressed into minutes passed by. And still the dreadful silence hovered between them.

Finally Greb withered, but from the marrow outward. Shannon's scrutiniz-

ing, voiceless inquisition won, but the rancher kept up a solid front.

"What the hell is it?" Greb blurted, tired of the three eyes before him. Three eyes—the sheriff's black ones that gleamed but never moved, and the one at the end of the gun barrel, that moved but never gleamed, as it bored round in circles with a hypnotizing regularity.

Then Shannon scanned the room.

He kicked a box on the floor. It was empty. He tried everything that might conceal Greb's money.

"Where is it?" Shannon demanded, still screwing that gun around at Greb.

Greb stared back. He dared not look up at the clock.

"There's something damn funny about this shack, Greb, something too quiet and spooklike for a place up on a——" Then, as the sheriff stepped on a springy board in the floor, the long pendulum leaning in a corner fell over with a bang of its brass disk.

Shannon stopped short, looked at it, smiled, and then gazed up at the clock.

Greb rose and moved his hands awkwardly. He wanted to grab something, anything to keep the sheriff from getting the gold.

But Shannon smiled through his stony face.

"Oh, up there! Big clocks that don't run are good for something!"

Greb's throat was sandy. He had killed a man, and burned his body and his shack for that gold, and now a robber was taking it away as a bully snatches candy from a kid.

"I—I'll split with you, Shannon," Greb blubbered, finding nothing to crown Shannon with.

Still covering the rancher, the sheriff got up on a chair. He opened the clock case and found the bags.

He was closing the clock door when horses clattered up to the cabin. Greb felt glad enough to shout, but when Carson and Tansey came in, the sheriff still kept Greb covered.

Was he going to hold them all up and get away with it?

"I've got him, boys. The surprise is all mine. I was looking for a man with

a mustache, but this baby played safe and grew one, then shaved it off after his job. The gold from the Mosca National Bank, taken four days ago in the holdup, is in your rancher's clock here, Carson!"

Greb grabbed the table. His ears buzzed.

"He's a liar, Carson! He's taking my savings!"

Carson got up on the chair and looked in the clock. He lifted one of the bags, then another. He looked at some faint lettering stenciled on the heavy canvas of the bag.

"It is the Mosca stuff!" he declared.

The sheriff took an empty cartridge shell from his pocket.

**T**HIS shell, from the bullet Greb killed the rabbit with, is a mate to the one we found outside of Mosca, where the bandit rode away. There's not another shell in the State like it. And the bullets in the other chambers of Greb's gun are exactly like the one that smashed the bank window, and lodged in the plaster behind the teller who resisted the holdup man four days ago."

The sheriff suddenly became a jolly fellow, slapping every one on the back, even Greb.

"I'm sure glad I got him before the week was out. I've caught every law-breaker in my time within a week after his job, and I've kept my record. I was worried some on this trip, though."

Carson spoke up now.

"Shannon, I'll stay on the ranch until you send somebody up to take care of it." Then the ranch owner faced Greb. "The fifty-fifty ownership is off. You'll get plenty of time to loaf, in jail, after your trial."

Shannon began tying Greb's arms.

"And it's a damn good thing the shot you took at the bank teller didn't go as straight as the shot at the rabbit! Or you'd hang for killing a man."

Late that afternoon, three men rode back down Thunder Peak Trail toward the faint horizon of the Sangre de Cristo Range. They rode toward Mosca. On the sheriff's horse, that led, there was a

heavy pack of small bags bobbing from side to side. Every now and then the sheriff patted this stuff and repeated triumphantly:

"The Mosca National's gold. It'll be back in the vaults to-night."

In the center of the three, in front of Tansey, Bill Greb rode. His elbows were roped and his ankles cuffed to the stirrups. He held the reins of Spot Tyler's black mare.

Tansey held Tyler's gun for safety.

"A different ride to Mosca, on your black beauty, eh, Greb?" the lawyer asked.

The trio left Thunder Peak by the

same road that Carson had chosen to come there, so Greb did not again see the black clutter of ashes where Spot Tyler's cabin had stood.

All he saw was the small figure of Carson up on the ledge, waving to them, and, ahead, that pack of weighty bags on Shannon's horse.

All he heard was the rhythmic *clack* of the horses' hoofs on the road, beating like a great clock as they went slowly down the rocky trail. Closing his eyes, Greb saw a big pendulum, with a golden disk, swinging back and forth, back and forth, with each *clack* of the hoofs as they made their way toward Mosca.

*The complete book in the next issue of THE POPULAR will be "Empress of the Sands," by Robert H. Rohde. It's a gripping story of adventure in the mysterious depths of the Sahara Desert.*



## THE ECONOMICAL AGE

"This is an age," observed Litt Mallory, the Virginia philosopher, "when the girl makes her trousseau out of the same amount of cloth that made a high gown for her grandmother."



## FIRE WORSHIPERS BURNED AS GAS OFFERINGS

**B**ACK in ancient Persia, and, they say, in India and China, too, where fire was worshiped as the symbol of utmost purity and unlimited might, the devotees were hard put to it to maintain a continuous fire during their ceremonies, for sometimes these ceremonies lasted for days, often longer. It finally occurred to them to utilize the natural gas which was escaping from crevices and fissures in the rocks, and in this manner was started what might be called the first gas jets.

One may imagine the effect of a gas fire, around which had been constructed a temple—the sweet stupor into which the worshipers were probably lulled by the lack of oxygen—but there is, of course, really no proof that such an effect was intentionally sought for.

In Ohio, when workmen, who were digging in a salt well, struck a pocket of gas, they thought they had drilled through to the infernal regions. Gas had not as yet been placed upon a commercial basis. It was not, in fact, until 1872 that it was piped, here in the United States, on a great scale. Now gas has been displaced, as illumination, for the most part by electricity, but still holds its own in many other things, notably cooking.

## THE BEST-ADVERTISED INDIAN ON EARTH

HE is Geronimo, the browned and lithe Apache of our Southwestern deserts, he whose tribal name was to be later transferred and become renowned in so different a setting, to be borne by a wily ring of Parisian crooks who lived, drank, murdered, loved, danced and died in the rathskellars and cafés of the Montmartre.

The Apaches whom Geronimo so ably led in their so-notorious adventures were the most formidable Indian tribe that the United States troops were ever called upon to cope with; indeed their cunning, endurance and ferocity had no equal anywhere on this globe. The Apache warrior could lope up a mountainside for fifteen hundred feet without showing the slightest sign of fatigue, or in fact, even a slight increase in respiration or perspiration. He could ambush a party of white men on a plain which supported neither tree, bush nor solitary blade of grass; and he did this by burrowing in the sand, covering all of his body but his eyes and lying in this position, absolutely motionless, for hours; and what is more important, lying thus entirely unsuspected until his victims were within a hundred yards.

The outbreak which brought fame to Geronimo—his Indian name was Goyat-Thlay, The Yawner—and misery and death to many white settlers and their families in Arizona and New Mexico occurred in the spring of 1885. The immediate cause, as might be easily guessed, was intoxication of the Chiricahua Apaches on a native drink called "tizwin," whose potency puts "white mule" and apple-jack into a misty shade of oblivion. And then for eighteen months Geronimo led four divisions of United States troops back and forth across the deserts of the Southwest, across the border into Mexico—in all covering a distance equal to half the breadth of the continent. Many times Geronimo was almost caught in the net of General Crook, but each time he escaped, while the newspapers of the West reported time and again either the chief's capture or his death.

He was destined to die a man of peace. In September of 1886 the Geronimo War was brought to a close by General Nelson A. Miles, after the government had spent more than a million dollars upon its maintenance. The old chief finally surrendered with his fighting force—a formidable band consisting of but twenty-two warriors!

Geronimo, who was really not the chief of his tribe but only its medicine man, was sent to Fort Pickens, Florida, with sixteen of his braves. Here the remnant of that fighting tribe lived for many years—lived, when if they had remained prisoners in New Mexico, they would surely have been killed by the infuriated white men whose families the Apaches had butchered on their raids.

Geronimo was finally removed to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, from which point he made frequent sallies, peaceful now and in pursuit of the almighty dollar instead of the paleface. Indeed on one trip to Washington, which the government treated the chief to, he collected enough money, by selling his signatures for fifty cents apiece to members of the eager crowds which greeted him at every station along the way, to enable him to purchase a trunkful of expensive clothes and deposit the comfortable balance in a savings bank. The great war chief spent his last days exhibiting his wrinkled features to the throngs of white men who attended the many wild-West shows which were then the vogue in America. It can be said of Geronimo that he always had an audience, whether hostile or friendly.



# The Long Shot

By W. R. Hofer

*Author of "Gentlemen of Chance," "As Per Sample," Etc.*

In the colorful history of horse racing, there have been countless men of Polky's type, enough, as a matter of fact, to justify the admission of the word "tout" into all dictionaries. But surely there never lived one shrewder than Polky—Polky, who would rather bet than eat, who would stay up all night to clock a mysterious horse. For once in his life, however, he added to his efforts another motive than the thrill of betting, and Polky's enemy had not counted on that motive.

**T**ILTING his ancient straw hat over his nose against the morning sun glare, "Polky" Pepperill languidly stretched himself on the bench in front of the bare grand stand and yawned. He had been there since before dawn, when the dew was on the infield and the other clockers were in the hay. He had seen the first pink flush creep over the horizon beyond the clubhouse turn and slowly spread until the sky over the row of barns across the back stretch was tinted like pale rose leaves. And he had seen the sun peep over the nearby hills to greet what was undoubtedly going to be a dog-gone hot day.

But that, he reflected as he lazily fondled his stop watch, was about all he had seen to stir the emotions.

Time, with Polky, was money, when the time was fast enough and the stable was "shooting;" and of all the horses on the track since sunup—and the Latonia oval was now fairly alive with thoroughbreds getting their morning's work before the heat of the day—not one had shown fast enough time to excite the itching thumb on his split-second time-piece.

He lit a cigarette, shot a smoke ring aloft toward the scales, and yawned some more. A bay filly, in easy, rhythmic stride under the restraining double wraps of the exercise boy, galloped by, her flashing plates raising a wake of tiny dust clouds that hung like golden vapor in the July sun. A big chestnut five year old, fighting for his head, followed at an



easy pace. A flighty two year old pranced past with restive but unimpressive gait and even Mandarin, the eastern crack from the wealthy Budlong Stable, which was due for a stiff work before the stake race on Saturday, was only breezing after the boy unloosed a wrap at the stretch turn.

Polky sauntered over to the fence. A black mare with notoriously bad legs, all of them bandaged, approached on the outside rail and the freckle-faced rider rose in his stirrups, pulled the thoroughbred up and grinned impudently at the lanky clocker.

"Hi, you Polky!" he hailed. "Want to see me set this trick down for a track record?"

"I want to see you get right down off that poor old lady and lead her into her stall," the clocker drawled, gravely inspecting the pair. "And walk her in awful easy, Bud. If them bandages was ever to come loose, she'll fall apart like an old flivver."

"That's what all you wise railbirds think," said the boy. "But don't kid yourself, This mare's legs're real good now, since they was fired. And old Mary Hogan is gonna look the judge in the eye to-morrow about three lengths in front of that bunch o' goats in the third. And without openin' her mouth, either. Ain't you, Mary? If you got any sense a-tall, Polky, you'll have a coupla smackers ridin' right smack on Mary's nose when she starts, too. Guess she'll pay about eighteen dollars."

"Uh-huh!" Polky yawned. "At a glue factory."

"Shows what you know," retorted the boy. "Didn't she ramble a mile trip in one forty, held in?"

The clocker nodded.

"Held in the train, shippin' her here from Churchill Downs. But if she does three furlongs under her own power a second faster than a two-minute clip, she begins to come apart and yell for help." He shook his head gravely. "I got a good mind to tell the S. P. C. A. on your boss. Shame on you folks, Bud! The idea! Tryin' to race a nice old lady like Miss Hogan!"

The boy sniffed and abruptly pulled the mare around.

"Come on, Mary," he said indignantly. "We can't waste no more good time gassin' with a cracked egg like this Polky." He kicked the mare's ribs and the pair were off.

POLKY'S eyes followed them amusedly around the clubhouse turn to the back stretch, but there his glance lingered. Fireball, a plater that had run in the money his last two starts, was at the three-quarter-mile chute, an apprentice rider in the saddle and "Dude" Cromwell, the shifty owner who had been ruled off the track several years before, waiting near by.

The clocker raised his racing glasses interestedly.

"Now that pup Fireball," he mused, "ought to be about due for brackets. In his last finish, he's only a short head back. And he oughta be pretty sharp about now. I wonder is that crook Dude havin' that goat set down for the full six furlongs? He sure is—from a standin' start, too." Polky said aloud, a moment later as the boy got the horse off. "He must be just achin' to see exactly what old Fireball's got."

The horse, under stout restraint as the rider rated him carefully, moved along smoothly to the half-mile pole, picked up speed as he was given his head around the turn, swung into the stretch at the top of his stride and swept past the judges' stand with plenty of running left.

Polky looked at his watch and grinned. "One thirteen; right on the notch," he reflected. "And he ain't even kicked out at the finish."

A near-by spectator sauntered up.

"Did you catch that time on Fireball?" he asked. "What did he show, Polky?"

"Plenty—for the bunch of hounds he's tossed in with to-morrow," Pepperill replied.

"Think he can win, eh?"

Polky flipped his cigarette butt over on to the hoof-churned track.

"If he can't, brother," he drawled, "it's because he stops at the five-eighths

pole to take a nap—waitin' for the rest of the field—and forgets to wake up."

"A cinch, eh?"

Polky regarded the persistent questioner with good-humored tolerance.

"Always providin' Dude Cromwell ain't got any compunctions against it," he drawled. But that was a point on which the clocker desired real information, and he immediately sauntered across the infield to the Cromwell barn, over across the back stretch, to acquire it from the best source.

Cromwell, a small owner with not many horses, but with many ways of running them, had a pronounced aversion to a short price on any entry of his, as the trackwise addicts, if not the track stewards, were aware. In a word, when a betting price was too distressingly short, even though the horse was what is technically known as a "kick-in-the-slats," or a "stand-out," more than one animal from the Cromwell stable had been known to run for Mr. Sweeney instead of Mr. Cromwell.

But in this instance, Polky reflected as he ducked under the inside rail, this did not appear likely. Still, it was better to be certain.

"That hombre," Polky mused, "sure does love a short price about like I love the hives, and this Fireball is gonna be close to odds on by post time."

A coffee-colored stable hand was unsaddling the Cromwell horse as Polky sauntered up to the barn. The slightly corpulent but sartorially resplendent figure of the owner himself emerged aggressively from a stall a moment later. At sight of the visitor, however, the frown on his shrewd face evaporated into a semblance of bluff friendliness, for Polky, whose fund of track information, if not his judgment, was good, could be valuable at times; and he had occasionally been useful.

Polky winked solemnly at the colored swipec and lazily examined the restive thoroughbred as it was cooling out.

"You got this beagle awful sharp right now, ain't you, Mr. Cromwell?" he asked.

Dude Cromwell smiled wisely.

"He's ready, Polk. You caught his trial, I guess."

"That ain't any guess," said Polky. "Everybody—with eyesight and a clock—caught it. You ain't coverin' up form by settin' a hawse down at nine o'clock in the mawnin' with a real rider in the coop and the track full of railbirds. You gonna level with this trick, Mr. Cromwell?"

"After a work like that! Why, what else can I do?" asked the owner.

"Lots of things," returned the clocker dryly. "But if your jock is goin' out after brackets and a purse to-morrow, he can get 'em. You'll never have a softer spot. But I'd like to know is he goin' out after 'em? You know I never tout any stable chatter I get—if you aim to keep it quiet."

"Of course. I know you're discreet," Cromwell agreed in his grating voice. "But this isn't—ah—necessary here. I'll tell you this, and it's no secret, Polky: When Eddie Sturm is in the saddle to-morrow, the riding orders he carries from the paddock will be to get Fireball's nose home in front. And he'll do it, too! Unless one of 'em drops dead before the numbers go up."

"I reckon that's good enough for me. Much obliged."

Polky sauntered past the white arc of barns along the back stretch, entered the road back of the grounds, then strolled to the trolley loop across the railroad tracks near the entrance gates.

So Dude Cromwell was "shooting" in a cheap selling race when his entry might pay even less than even money! Well, Polky wondered as he swung aboard a car for Covington, what else could a poor guy do when even the judges sometimes get suspicious of horses so discriminating the animals have to read the prices before they decide if they'll run for Sweeney or Cromwell?

Coming from the paddock before the sixth race the next afternoon, Polky stopped in the thronged betting shed and edged into the sweltering crowd before the hundred-dollar machines.

Fireball, as expected, was getting the heaviest play, but its price was still bet-

ter than even money. He stepped out into the sun to examine the approximate-odds board. The last odds were out, and Fireball was quoted at eight to five.

Polky looked pleased. The bugle sounded. The dancing thoroughbreds, the riders' silks flashing brightly in the burning sun, came stringing out onto the blistering track for the parade. From a pocket of his baggy trousers, Polky's sunburned fist extracted his entire bank roll, consisting of a twenty-dollar yellow-back, a ten-dollar note, a soiled five, five very crumpled singles and eighty cents in change.

The change, being unbettable, immediately clinked back into his pocket as he loped to a twenty-dollar "straight" pari-mutuel-machine window.

"Deal me a pair on Fireball," he requested.

"You like that one, Polky?" the man at the window asked.

"Ain't a thing in that bunch'll be near him," Polky droned. "He's in now, except for hoistin' his number."

HE sauntered out in front of the crowded grand stand to a place by the scales, rolled a cigarette and idly watched the thoroughbreds stringing around the clubhouse turn in a prancing line to the three-quarter starting chute.

The race, a six-furlong selling affair for three year olds and upward, had a cumbersome field of thirteen, with Fireball holding the undesirable post position next to the outside. A fellow standee, with a two-dollar ticket on the Cromwell entry, mentioned the fact to Polky with some trepidation.

Pepperill's lazily keen eyes flickered faint amusement.

"This Fireball hawse is a slow starter, anyway. Crowdin' back won't hurt him any," he tolerantly explained to the man. "He'll just kid that bunch back of the pace around to the stretch turn. And then he just runs over 'em."

The fellow tightened his perspiring grip on his two-dollar ticket.

"Think so?" he commented anxiously. Polky stifled a yawn.

"If they spring the gate with that

beagle left, standin' backward, brother," he assured, in his soft drawing tones, "he's out in front all alone lookin' back at 'em at the five-eighths pole."

The race, when the starter finally got the difficult field away, was hardly as easy as that, but the favorite proved, indeed, quite the best of the lot.

Off among the last, little Eddie Sturm rated the horse easily behind the bunched field through the back stretch, came up on the outside at the turn and then made his move. Fireball, as Polky predicted, was catching and passing horses with almost every jump. At the stretch turn, the Cromwell entry had raced into a contending position, just a neck back, on the outside of the three front runners who were moving close together at the rail.

Here Polky's view was shut off by the roaring, gesticulating mob in front of him, but when his glass again had a clear focus, the maroon-and-white bars of the Cromwell silks were glistening through the dust clouds a good length in front, with Eddie Sturm just nursing the mount along by hand.

At the sixteenth pole, a little roan colt had moved up to flank the leader. The prosperous-looking stranger near Polky with the tightly clutched two-dollar ticket groaned aloud. Polky lowered his racing glasses and yawned. Eddie Sturm gave the horse a single cut with the whip. Fireball bounded forward like an electrified thing to race the roan into submission in a dozen jumps, and the Cromwell silks flashed past the judges' stand two lengths in front and going away.

Polky pocketed his glass.

"Gosh!" Polky's pudgy neighbor breathed fervently, mopping his dripping face. "He made it!"

"Made it! Why, brother," Polky droned, "that was just a cakewalk for him."

A few minutes passed, then a few more, without the numbers being placed. The riders were returning, tossing whips to valets, dismounting and unsaddling—and still no numbers. The pudgy man nervously twisted the diamond ring on his fat little finger. Polky absently

rolled a cigarette. The crowd wafted up a medley of inquiries and growls at the delay of the verdict.

Presently little Eddie Sturm appeared in the judges' stand, followed by two other jockeys, while the crowd stared and buzzed. And then the numbers, 6, 2 and 5 were hung out.

"Why—why!" gulped Polky's pudgy neighbor, as mingled boos and cheers rose from the throng. "That there Fireball's number ain't there a-tall. Why—why—he won, didn't he!"

"The judges don't seem to think so," Polky drawled, and stepped over to the clerk of the scales, who had just weighed in the last rider.

"Do you reckon them placin' judges must be all out of No. 12s, Mac?" he asked.

"Why, Polky!" The scales clerk noticed the two tickets in Polky's hand and grinned. "Didn't you see what happened at the stretch turn? First time I ever knew you to miss anything but working hours. Fireball's disqualified, and Sturm is set down for fouling. He pulled the horse over across those front runners so sharp he nearly caused a spill. Haley had to take back with Lady Dee so hard it threw her out of the running, and Goldwing got kicked and pulled up lame."

As Polky tore his two twenty-dollar tickets to bits, a look of understanding dawned in his shrewd eyes.

"That's one time," the clerk of the scales observed, with an air of triumph, "that Dude Cromwell didn't put anything over on the judges."

Polky slowly shook his head, a look of admiration, reluctant but unmistakable, stealing into his face.

"I wouldn't say just that," he drawled. "Dude Cromwell don't have to order a jock to pull his hawse—when he can get the judges to pull it for him."

"The judges!" exclaimed the clerk of the scales tartly.

The clocker nodded toward the price on the winner, just put up across the track.

"Dude's hawse is only an eight-to-five shot," he said, and grinned a little in

spite of himself. "But this here pup pays twenty-one dollars!"

**H**OT tears coursed down the sunburned cheeks of Polky Pepperill as he sadly gazed through the kitchen window. It was Saturday, two days after the Fireball debacle. His remaining eighty cents had vanished in the first three minutes of a crap game over at the Clover Valley stable that Thursday evening, and all attempts to borrow from his most likely friends had proven fruitless. All, it appeared, were suffering from the same wave of financial depression as himself.

"And when you get them onions all peeled nice," said Andy Dobbs, impresario of the race-track lunch room, who had joyously given Polky a job, "you can bathe these here pans."

"Listen, Andy, if you'll pay me off now, I'll give you a real hot thing on the stake race this afternoon. I'm goin' over to a barn to see a swipe that knows something——"

"You're goin' over to the sink to see some more work, or you don't get a thin dime," Andy threatened.

"But them pans're as clean as I am, right now!" Polky protested.

"Makes no difference," Andy Dobbs retorted. "I got you in mind, not the pans."

"And this swipe knows something!" persisted Polky.

"So do I!" chortled Andy. "I know I been waitin' five years to see a job catch up with you, and I ain't gonna lose this treat just through gettin' soft-hearted. And when you get them pans all nice and shiny, maybe I can locate some more onions for you."

"Onions!" Polky wiped his smarting eyes. "Why, I already peeled enough onions to smother all the steaks from Saratoga to New Awlins. More onions would——"

"Yes, onions!" Andy emphasized triumphantly. "They're the only things can bring sorrow to your wasted life and make you cry."

Polky subsided and busied himself with the towering stack of pans. Sam

Daggett, the patrol judge, passing by, stopped to enjoy the surprising spectacle. Artie Mehl, a fellow clocker, who shared the suspicion of the Fireball disqualification with Polky, also observed the phenomenon and gleefully dallied.

"One thing I got to say for Dude Cromwell," Artie mused aloud. "Dude's the only guy ever got you coupled in the bettin' with toil."

"I'll even up with Dude," Polky drawled pleasantly.

"I don't blame you," Artie sympathized. "Humiliatin' you like this—"

"Double crossin' me!" corrected Polky.

"Anyway," said Mehl, "I got to hand it to him. He's one guy that's smarter than you. Any guy that can get you cornered up against cooking pans and onions gets my money." He chuckled.

"Sure does," agreed Polky. "He got it Thursday."

Leeming, the track superintendent, happened by and grinned broadly at the toiler.

"An experiment, Polky?" he inquired.

A bookmaker from Cincinnati looked puzzled and then delighted, his fat frame quivering like a cone of jelly with silent mirth as he departed. Then the bent figure of old Cicero Clay, a track fixture for years, shuffled near, paused uncertainly at the doorway and finally entered. Cicero, whose son Henry was a stable hand at the Cromwell barn, had seen Polky in conference with the owner that morning after the Fireball trial.

"Lawd A-mighty!" he exclaimed, in his shrill, cracked voice, his faded old eyes peering in amazement. "What's dat yo'-all doin', Mistah Po'ky!"

"Workin'," answered Andy Dobbs, with deep satisfaction.

Old Cicero rubbed his eyes, peered again and his wrinkled mahogany face split with a toothless grin.

"Sho' 'nuff—sho' 'nuff! 'At's ezactly what you is doin'! Mah ole eyes ain't deceive' me," he cackled. He teetered to an upended melon crate and sat down, resting his chin on bony hands folded across the crook of his heavy cane as he continued to peer at the toiler.

"How come, Mistah Po'ky?" he finally inquired, when the stack of pans had diminished to the last one.

POLKY gave the water-soaked dish towel a final flip across the last pan and sat down with a grateful sigh.

"That old Fireball hawse leaves me flat as a rubber mat when them placin' judges misplace his number," he explained, in his agreeable drawl. "And everybody I try to tag for a stake is just on his way to the poorhouse, the way they act."

"Shucks! Ah knows ole Fiaball ain't gittin' no paht o' dat purse," Cicero remarked wisely. "Ah has me a ticket on de winner."

Polky was interested. So Dude Cromwell did put that one over, hey!

"Ah knows suthin' else, too," Cicero bragged. "Them odds Ah git ain't nuthin' to what Ah gits on Monday. Jes' nuthin'!"

Polky was more interested. Monday was the last day of the meeting, get-away day, the ideal time for a real killing. And old Cicero frequently had worth-while information, especially in regard to the contemplated doings of the temperamental Cromwell horses. The difficulty, however, would be to extract that information from the wily old man.

Polky rolled a cigarette and yawned. "Apt to be lotta good things get-away day," he observed, with crafty indifference.

"But nuthin' like dis. Nuthin' a-tall. Boy, dis price am gwine be close to a hundred to one. Yes, *suh*."

"Only hundred-to-one shot you get this meetin' any more is when you pick up a hundred and twenty-six pounds yourself, Cicero, and run with them cracks in the fifth on Monday," Polky derided. "Ain't a hawse runnin' Monday that ain't showed somethin' of what he's got."

"Ain't!" Cicero shrilled belligerently. "Huh! Dis hawse ain't nevah showed even herself what she got. But her stable gwine fin' out. An' nobody else—no, *suh*. An' ef she shows what dey 'spicion she got, dey's gwine put her ovah. An'

she shows it, too, what Ah means. Ah knows suthin', Ah does."

He got to his legs and shuffled off.

"That old bird does know somethin', for a fact," Polky mused, gazing thoughtfully after the bent figure. "He's wise as owls about some hot thing for Monday. I can tell it. No use tryin' to kid it out of him, though. Only make him suspicious."

He absently dropped his soaking dish towel into a pail of berries and puckered his brow in deep thought.

"Now what hawse can it be? Well," he reasoned, "Cicero lets it slip out that it's a 'she.' Can't be a mare, or there'd be plenty of trials on her. Must be a filly—and a maiden. A two year old, at that. Must be somethin' they had to throw out of trainin' all summer until just lately—not to have any trials on her."

This conclusion was not very helpful, however, as there were a dozen two-year-old fillies stabled at the track that had been out of training for some time.

"Anyway," he resumed to himself, "they got this trick on edge now. She's ripe. And they got a sweet idea she's awful good. Still, they been scared to let her out much in front of the rail-birds; so they don't know how good. Now they got to find that out before they unload the family plate on her. So they're gonna set her down for a secret trial to make sure."

But where?

Most likely right at the Latonia track, he concluded.

"Ain't no place close by to ship her, except the Coney Island track—and if anybody was to see her goin' out and comin' back by van, the whole place is wise to somethin' right off. Anyway, a coupla van trips ain't gonna do a flighty two year old any good before a race."

But when?

Probably, he shrewdly reasoned, that very night.

"If it was me," he argued, "I'd want a good two days before the race for that time trial. And the next day I'd just shoot her a fast three eighths to keep her sharp."

Andy Dobbs glanced at his watch and saw that it was nearly noon.

"All right, Polky!" he called. "You're through."

He tendered the erstwhile toiler three dollars for hardly that many hours of effort.

"The work you done wasn't worth this," Andy truly stated, "but the sight of your doing it sure was."

"Just so I get it," replied Polky, pocketing the money and picking up his coat.

He stopped in the lunch room for a sandwich and cup of coffee, still absorbed in the remarks of old Cicero Clay.

"Know anything hot for to-day, Polky?" the waitress who served him asked.

Polky snapped out of his reverie.

"Hottest thing I know to-day is onion. I bet I cried enough over them tear jerkers back in the kitchen to supply ten busted-heart movie films, sister," he replied.

Out under the grand stand, he idly watched the ever-increasing Saturday crowd flow through the turnstiles, deciding, as he lazily eyed the noisy inrush, to avoid speculation for once and keep the balance of this hard-won money in his pocket. A close scrutiny of the first-race entries in his program, however, found his fingers itching in his money pocket.

"Now this Mamie Hennessy trick is a stand-out on form," he mused. "Just her route—and she's in awful light. Oughta be a nice price, too. Be a shame to leave a cinch like this get away. Only thing is," he reflected, "is the pup 'meant' to-day? I just got to find out."

Back in the paddock, he edged through the spectators and sidled up to the colored stable hand who had just left the mare in.

"How about it, Zack?" Polky inquired. "The stable gonna turn Mamie loose this trip? Looks just like her spot."

The darky cautiously nodded.

"Stable fo'man is got twenty-five dollahs ridin' right on her nose, Polky." He gave the mare an affectionate slap. "And Ah's investin' two dollahs myself."

"Must be fixed, then!" Polky grinned. "But the boss oughta throw a different boy up on her. This apprentice Rooney oughta be ridin' trolley cars in place of hawses. He gets somewhere then."

BACK through the thick crowd to the betting machines, Polky threaded his way and the two dollars, still intact, went to purchase a straight ticket on Mamie Hennessy. That accommodating lady, winning easily by a length and a half, returned seven dollars and eighty cents to Polky for his two, and for the next three races the money remained safely in his trousers pocket.

"No use tryin' to beat the whole card," he philosophized, as he regretfully allowed the races to pass without a bet. But the favorite in the fifth race, the big feature of the day, tickled his fancy so strongly that the money was brought into action again.

"Four on Lord Eric," he announced, at one of the two-dollar-straight windows and laid down eight dollars.

"Shopping down here with the two-dollar boys, eh, Polky?" the ticket seller commented. "What's wrong with the twenty-dollar windows to-day?"

"I'll be back there buyin' 'long about the seventh race, I reckon," he drawled.

Lord Eric won by a scant nose after a tingling stretch duel that had the vast week-end crowd in a prolonged roar. Polky's bank roll was increased to exactly twenty dollars beyond its size when he left the lunch room.

He was back at a twenty-dollar window just before the final race, a three-year-old colt, that he had clocked in a good effort early in the week, tempting him beyond endurance in this condition event of a mile and seventy yards.

Andy Dobbs, hurrying by, stopped in his tracks at sight of the yellowback in his whilom employee's tanned fist.

"All I slipped you not long ago for some honest toil was just three clinkers," said Andy.

"And all I ever expect to get by honest toil is just about three clinkers," Polky returned.

Andy nodded toward the bank note.

"How come?"

"It come out of the machines."

"Ain't you ever heard that good, honest toil is a blessing in disguise and a boon forever?" Andy asked.

"Sure I have," Polky admitted. "But I also know that good, honest guessin'—when you got a little luck—gets you more than good, honest toil."

"But it don't keep it in your pants pocket," retorted Andy. "'Easy come, easy go' always was true." He shook his head confidently. "I'll have you back again in that kitchen yet."

Polky bought his twenty-dollar ticket, strolled back to a place near the end of the grand stand and silently watched his selection, Almadore, get left at the post and finish far out of the money.

"Oughta put that boy Rooney on a stationary engine," Polky observed to the clerk of the scales, as he tore up his ticket.

He rolled a cigarette, gazed with lazy interest at the jammed grand stand, and then ambled from the grounds with the exact amount of money in his trousers that had been there when he left the lunch room.

But that night he was back at the track. Slipping cautiously into the grounds after dusk, he stole across the racing strip and on to the infield like a thief in the night, cast a furtive glance all about, and then his lanky figure merged into the black shadows of a shrubby patch.

Weary hours dragged by. The sounds from the stables gradually faded to silence. The last light gleam, from the Lufkin barn over beyond the backstretch turn, faded into the gloom.

Midnight came—one o'clock—two. Polky sat up, glanced about again and grinned wryly. The thick furlong poles, looming white against the weird shadows under the stars, gave him an eerie feeling.

"Like ghosts in a dog-gone graveyard," he thought, and sank back on the wet grass and shivered in the cooling air.

When the faint toll from a distant church tower announced half past two, doubt entered his chilled being.

"Have to be soon now—or not a-tall," he told himself sleepily. "Be dawn before awful long. And then the rail-birds'll start to show."

He yawned, reclined again and fell into a half doze; but a sudden sound close by stirred him to complete wakefulness, with his senses acute and his heart drumming.

A figure, the aggressive, unmistakable one of Dude Cromwell, was striding by not three feet away, crossing the infield toward the judges' stand.

The watcher tingled with a sense of guilt and belated fear. With those footsteps a few feet farther off or his doze a bit sounder, Polky realized, his vigil would have been wasted. Two feet closer—and he must have been discovered!

He watched the faint figure for a moment, then turned his gaze along the back stretch. There, waiting at one of the sixteenth poles, were a horse, with rider already up, and another figure at the animal's head, who had stolen on to the track while the lurking clocker dozed. Again Polky tingled uncomfortably at thought of how narrowly he had missed the entire proceeding.

"So it's Dude Cromwell puttin' this one over, too!" he mused resentfully. "And that filly's Princess Lorna. They had to lay her up over at Churchill this spring, I remember. Bred to the skies, too, that little lady is. They're shooting her five and a half furlongs. Wonder what she'll show?"

He had not long to wait finding out. Stop watch ready, he watched Cromwell's faint figure stop near the wire at the inside fence and saw a light flash twice from there. The figure at the filly's head waved a flash light twice in response. There was a short wait, then a single flash from near the thoroughbred and the filly was off, Polky's watch catching the start perfectly.

**A**LONG the back stretch, horse and rider raced, wraithlike forms in the faint starlight. Around the first turn they glided swiftly, smoothly, a flitting, ghostly shadow against the white fence.

"Ratin' her too fast," hazarded Polky, as he lost them for a brief moment because of obstructing shrubbery.

But entering the stretch, the filly still carried her early speed and a furlong farther and up to the wire, she was at the top of her stride, not easing up until well past the clubhouse turn.

Polky's straining eyes caught the finishing signal from Cromwell's flash light and his thumb recorded it on his watch. He turned the timepiece to the starlight and gasped as he noted the figures.

"Holy smoke! One six, flat! The track record's only three fifths faster; and by a three year old, with only ninety-three pounds up, at that!"

On Monday morning he hung about the Budlong stables until that wealthy owner appeared. A feud of long standing, originating at a Pimlico fall meeting over a horse deal in which Cromwell had used sharp practice, existed between that sartorially resplendent owner and Hal Budlong, Polky knew.

And the late lamented race of the disqualified Fireball, he suspected, had only served to heighten the smoldering feeling, for it was a Budlong colt that had been injured by Eddie Sturm's rough riding that day.

"Mawnin', Mr. Budlong! Could I see you a minute, private?" Polky greeted, as the owner's car rolled up. "I got somethin' I reckon you'll like to hear."

"As many minutes as you like, Polk," the affable owner replied genially. "But I hope you're not going to tip me to one of my own horses."

"I'm gamblin' you play this tip even against your own hawse," Polky drawled.

"Indeed? Must be good, then."

"So good," was the assurance, "that you been waitin' about seven years for it." Polky then related what had happened long before dawn Sunday morning. He also tendered a suggestion and added a canny bit of advice in connection with it.

Hal Budlong heard him through, without a change of expression as his keen eyes studied the speaker's face, but there was the faintest hint of feeling in the owner's cultivated voice as he spoke.



"You're right. I have waited some time for a tip like this, Polk. You're certain about that time?" he added sharply.

"I never clock 'em wrong," was the easy assurance. "That little black trick's just dizzy with speed."

"H'm! Barring a bad ride or interference, it looks certain, what?"

"All the ride that little lady needs is keepin' her on the track. And unless they weight her saddle with an anvil, there ain't anything'll get close enough to her for interference."

"But what's your personal interest in giving me this?" the older man asked curiously. "You could have kept it quiet and had a good thing by just a modest bet."

"I'm evenin' up on that Fireball hawse," Polky explained. "Dude Cromwell accepts quite a few little favors from me, different times. And he pays me with a double cross on old Fireball. Not gettin' any return favors don't bother me any. On the track you got to look out for yourself. I know that. And I done those favors just 'cause I wanted to—not to get something. But," he added, in his melodious drawl, "a man that'll double cross you out of just plain cussedness must be about eight degrees lower than a deep-sea squid. And I don't ever leave that kind of fish get away, once I get my hook into him, I'll tell the world!"

THE race for two year olds, a five-and-a-half-furlong sprint, the second event on the program that afternoon, had a field of fourteen starters. And of all this number, the little black Cromwell filly appeared the most neglected by the excited patrons of the pari-mutuel machines.

The little Princess was quoted at thirty to one in the morning-line odds, appeared at forty to one when the first figures were posted on the big approximate-odds board down beyond the pay-off windows; and on the final quotation her price was fifty to one.

Polky Pepperill, sweltering in the crush before the hundred-dollar windows

in the simmering betting shed, grinned at that last price, for he knew that the last-minute flood of "big" money and "come-back" commissions from outside book-makers into the hundred-dollar windows would show odds of nearer a hundred to one on the Cromwell entry.

Not a bet was posted for Princess Lorna on the hundred-dollar board, he saw. Only a few were registered on the twenty-dollar boards. But as he edged down the line, he saw that every ten, five and two-dollar-straight machine carried support of the filly.

"Cagy Dude!" Polky mused. "Hiding his bettin' in the small machines. Easy for him to do it, too. Ain't bettin' much over four-five hundred, I reckon. Figures he's the only one supportin' the filly—outside of a few long-priced nuts with two-dollar bets just shootin' at the moon."

A little later, Polky came upon the owner, intently studying the figures posted at one of the machines. He sauntered near.

"Been plungin' on the Princess?" Polky inquired guilelessly.

"Not a dime," lied Dude. "Just got her in for a good work. She's a pretty green racer and this'll help her. Just running her for the work, Polky."

"Like you did Fireball?" Polky suggested.

Cromwell laughed.

"That was too bad, wasn't it?"

"Unless a guy knew somethin' besides form that day," the clocker replied innocently. "But I reckon I got the right thing this race. Pretty Polly—to place." He displayed the two-dollar ticket.

"Playing 'em safe now?" the older man derided.

"Not that. Just better shopping. I figure this Pretty Polly beagle pays more to place than the winner does straight."

Dude Cromwell's stocky frame shook with his silent chuckle.

"If you only knew," he thought, "what the winner is going to pay!"

The bugle sounded. The horses strung out from the paddock. The throng in the betting shed jostled about

excitedly in the rush to place final bets or to locate places of advantage out in front of the grand stand.

Dude Cromwell remained with a watchful eye upon the hundred-dollar board until the horses had paraded beyond the clubhouse. Then, with some of the mutual windows already closed and the entries for that race removed, and still no sign of a wager on Princess Lorna in the hundred-dollar machines, he sauntered contentedly out to the lawn at the end of the stand.

Polky followed and kept him in sight at a short distance, stopping at his favorite spot near the scales to get a good view of the race.

The baker's dozen of baby racers were at the post for what seemed an age to the restive crowd, prancing, wheeling, twisting and turning for several minutes before the starter had them aligned. Then the barrier sprang, the inevitable rumble, "They're off!" swept through the stands, and the big field of two year olds was on its swift way.

For a furlong, the field was a closely bunched lot of racers. Then a little black form showed on top, rounded the first turn a length in front, had increased it to two at the stretch bend, and, when the jockey let out a wrap on the tugging reins, came on alone to win by five lengths from Pretty Polly.

For a moment the great crowd was dumb with amazement as Princess Lorna flashed past the judges' stand. Then excited comments crackled thickly all about.

"Princess Lorna! Ouch!" "Why, the official handicapper's got her *last*, on the program." "Wait'll you see her price!" "Gee, what a killing! Why, nobody was bettin' that one!" "You said it. She'll be a hundred to one." "And I hadda kind of a hunch on that thing—gosh! If I'd only played it!" "Why, the wife told me only this noon to plaster a five on her beezzer. No, course she didn't have any tip. Only liked the name. Can you beat that? But I laughed it off. Now, ain't that plain hell?" "You'll hear some yell when that price goes up."

WHEN the price went up, there was silence more electric than when the little Princess won. Dude Cromwell, standing on the track in front of the scales after going out to greet the winning horse and jockey, merely stared at the white figures posted across the way with jaws agape.

Polky Pepperill sidled up near by on the other side of the fence and watched the owner's thick neck swell and redden with emotion. Turning, Dude saw Polky and finally found speech.

"Look at the price they got up there!" he exclaimed, in mingled fear and wrath. "The dumb-bells, making a mistake like that. Four dollars and forty cents! W-why," he sputtered, "it's nearer two hundred and four dollars for two! Well, why don't they hurry up and correct it? No excuse for a mistake like that, the poor fools."

Polky shook his head slowly, almost sadly, it seemed.

"I reckon that there price is about right, Mr. Cromwell," he remarked, bidding his time.

"Right!" the owner rasped. "Why, you're mad!"

"Not now," said Polky. "I was a little mad maybe the day you let old Fireball run for Mr. Sweeney instead of Mr. Cromwell. But I'm feelin' pretty good right now. Mainly on account of that price over there, I guess."

"What do you know about that price?" blustered Cromwell.

"I know that at the very last minute, when the hawses are almost at the post, ten thousand dollars is bet on your little Princess, over in the clubhouse. And five more grand is bet on her back here in the shed," Polky drawled. "And seein' that even a big holiday crowd like this wouldn't hardly bet much more than thirty thousand straight on the race, why, I guess that would make the little lady's price over there pretty near right."

Cromwell stared, unseeing, for a moment, then gulped. He had bet only six hundred dollars himself, all that seemed necessary at the time, and the thought of an expected clean-up of thousands

melting to mere hundreds brought pain to his face, for a couple of sizable gambling debts were even now staring him right in that face.

"Who bet that money?" demanded the raging man.

"Why, a friend of yours, who likes to know when a straight-shootin' owner has a good thing, put up the money. He likes to return favors—and he ain't never forgot the little favor you slipped him at Pimlico seven years ago," Polky answered. "He's comin' over here from the clubhouse now."

Cromwell stared at Hal Budlong coming along the track from the clubhouse lawn. Budlong stepped up to the fence and handed Polky a sheaf of bank notes.

"There was no agreement, Polky, but I think a thousand ought to be fair," he explained.

"Fair!" Polky ruffled the ten hundred-dollar notes and grinned. "Why, it's perfect, Mr. Budlong!"

A choking sort of noise issued from Dude Cromwell's swelling throat and then he again found speech.

"If I ever get hold of the dirty crook that gave you that tip——" he began.

"Nobody gave me any tip," said Polky.

"M-must have," Cromwell sputtered. "I tell you outside of the stable, there wasn't a bird knew about that filly!"

"Yes, there was," returned Polky. "A railbird knew about her. And the next time you run a hawse near three in the mawnin', remember that some railbirds get up with the other kind. Excuse me," he added politely, "I got to cash this two-dollar place ticket on Pretty Polly. I told you that was the right bet."



## INSECT CAMOUFLAGE

THE use of camouflage during the late war was not a new idea at all. Nature, as usual, had beaten us to it. Even the use of poison gas was not original, because the bombardier beetle has used that method of defense for ages. He has a little cannon on his tail, and when he is chased by some bigger insect he takes aim and *ping!* out comes a cloud of gas to confuse and annoy his enemy.

But to return to camouflage—best known in the insect world of the art of self-effacement are the "leaf imitators," those moths and butterflies whose wings and bodies so closely resemble the foliage about which they hover that only the keenest observer will detect them. The Indian leaf butterflies land upon a twig, fold their bright wings and remain stock-still, moving only with the breeze. And they choose their landing spots with uncanny judgment, so that their position on a twig will conform to the character of the tree.

The lappet moth conceals himself in much the same manner as the butterfly. The markings of his wings correspond perfectly with the veins in the leaves he imitates.

There is one insect which fools everybody, even his own family. This is the walking leaf insect, which looks something like a diminutive lobster—if one can get close enough to distinguish him from his hiding place.



## Ballad of the Herd Boy

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

SCANNING the meadow cool and still,  
    Beneath the morning haze,  
The herd boy whistled from the hill,  
    And watched the horses graze.

The stallion king, the colt, the mare,  
    Though well he knew them all,  
He counted thrice with questing care,  
    And shrilled again his call.

Yet no familiar answer came,  
    Quavering across the dawn:  
The herd boy breathed a cherished name—  
    His chosen one was gone!

Slow searching down each trodden way,  
    From field to barren mound,  
Far in a lone arroyo gray,  
    A fearsome thing he found.

The gaunted flank, the flaring eye,  
    The unresponsive ear:  
Could such an ardent creature die,  
    Nor any help be near?

Unbitted, wild, the mare had known  
    His playful, bold caress,  
Nor daring, had another shown  
    Her love and tenderness.

He saw the sunset lances fade,  
    And fall in slow retreat,  
Across the golden barricade  
    Where earth and heaven meet.

The meadow land in twilight lost,  
    The hills a soundless shore,  
With faltering step the herd boy crossed  
    The darkness to his door.

And there he told his story dire,  
The quest, the finding place.  
To one who cursed him from the fire,  
And smote him in the face.

With blood upon his ragged sleeve,  
He fled from hearth and food.  
And sought his hill, the where to grieve  
In kindly solitude.

Dreaming, the herd boy lightly trod  
Sequestered regions far,  
His cedar staff, a golden rod,  
His lantern light, a star.

Nor long he journeyed through the night,  
Beneath the argent moon,  
When all the world was filled with light,  
Became as cloudless noon.

The valley wide and emerald mist  
Of grasses bright with flowers,  
While coronals of amethyst  
Burned on the mountain towers.

Then thundering down the mountain wall,  
Clothed in a silver flame,  
With lunging hoof and trumpet call,  
Fleet, phantom horses came.

And one, slow turning from the flight,  
As bends an eagle's wing,  
Swept down the mystic valley bright,  
With shrill, sweet welcoming.

Her quivering shoulder warm and sleek,  
Beneath the herd boy's hand,  
She stood with muzzle to his cheek,  
As gentle horses stand.

Yet swift she raised her eager head,  
Untamed, his chosen one,  
Moving with quickening paces fled,  
A glory in the sun.

The herd boy, wakening on the hill,  
Smiled at the morning skies,  
Nor could dull pain or hunger still  
The rapture in his eyes,

That she, the beautiful, should go,  
Forever, wild and proud,  
Her gleaming coat, the mountain snow,  
Her mane, the foaming cloud.



# The Shooting on Bear Mountain

By Robert McBlair

*Author of "Natural Methods," "The Holdup at Elbow End," Etc.*

Ever, throughout both life and fiction, have fair ladies been dazzled and charmed by the audacious cavalier, the man of the world, and this evidently holds true upon every plane of human life. And when Adam Mock, deputy sheriff of that West Virginian mountain district, arrested Billy, owner of the commissary, for the murder of the dashing Danny Shoate, he wasn't aware, and neither was Billy, that sometimes even an accepted truth like this doesn't always hold good.

**I** KNEW he was coming for me when he rounded the turn into the commissary road. Two colored laborers who had been laughing and talking in the shade of the porch fell silent. The men, even the gang bosses and the superintendent, always adapted themselves to Adam Mock's mood; when he was boisterous, they laughed; when he was ugly, they grew quiet or edged away. Now his high leather boots were caked with clay up to the blue overalls thrust in at the knees.

He didn't like to walk, yet he stepped out briskly upon his long, leaping shadow; there was a set of satisfaction to the black Stetson on the sweaty red hair, a swing of decision to the heavy shoulders. Until then, I had thought I could go through with it in the sense of peace

that had come with having arrived at a decision. But with each step, the quirt in Mock's left hand lashed against his boot, and it seemed to me that each step, bringing the inevitable nearer, made a mark upon my heart like the dark stripe of the whip through the clay on the leather.

I continued to remind myself, however, that Nancy was safely away; and when the porch shook under his weight and he stood before me, so close that I could feel the heat from his tremendous body, I met the assault of his narrowed blue eyes with something of a smile.

"Gimme that gun!"

Without hesitation I passed him the automatic from my hip. He turned the end of a blunt forefinger into the muzzle, grunted with satisfaction at the smutty

ring of powder that adhered around the little mound of compressed flesh. He detached the magazine eagerly, holding the gun to his chest with the iron hook where it cupped over the stub of his right forearm, laid the magazine and the gun on the window sill, dug two empty shells out of the side pocket of the blue-overall coat and clumsily snapped them into the magazine. They fitted.

The large teeth shone whitely in his red face as he restored the magazine and dropped the gun in his coat. I still leaned, hands in pockets, in the office doorway; but when he drew out the nicked handcuffs, I started back.

"That isn't necessary, Mock." I objected sharply.

For answer, he slipped the iron hook behind and above my left elbow; the point bit into the flesh through the rolled sleeve of the gray-flannel shirt as he jerked me nearer, and I could not move as he clasped one bracelet around my wrist, dropped the other about his own wrist and forced it shut by pressing it between his body and the door jamb. The pain of the iron hook scraping free from my arm left me unprepared for his surge from the porch. I tripped as he swung down the steps, tried jumping to regain a balance, and landed heavily on my knees in the mud.

"Get up, you!"

He dragged me maliciously for several paces before I was able to lift against the handcuffs sufficiently to scramble up and fall in with his stride. He laughed. A few women and children had appeared in the doorways of the half dozen unpainted cabins that lined the road opposite the rail fence of the pasture. Through the red haze of that moment shot the white of the colored tenants' teeth against their ebony faces; and I sensed they were smiling only in a scared bid for his favor. I was nearly his height, if only half his great girth, but my impulse to fight was stopped by his narrowed eye and the lifted iron.

This, I began to realize, was an unavoidable part of what I had let myself in for. I tried to swallow it philosoph-

ically as I wiped my free hand against my khaki riding breeches and turned into the main road beside him. I braced for the ordeal of being led, muddy, coatless and hatless, past the men working at the tunnel, reminded myself that I could be glad, at any rate, for the fact that Nancy would not be there to see me pass, arrested.

"If you was going to hide behind a tree to kill Danny on the Bear Mountain Trail," he asked, "why didn't you cover your tracks? Seems to me you would have picked up your shells, and not dropped your knife. You might have cleaned your gun, too, and reloaded. I credited you with more gumption. But I reckon you was too plumb scared to think."

HE laughed jeeringly when I did not answer. I would be out of his custody after we tramped over the Bear Mountain Trail and arrived at Catlettsville. He was a deputy sheriff by reason of being the contractor driving the railroad tunnel, with a lot of men under him. He had weight in these West Virginia mountains; but nothing I might say would change the hostility he had shown ever since I had become, in a sense, his employee.

I looked around and tried to forget him. On the right, above the bottom land and the patches of silver river, the hills were sharply beautiful, trailing scarfs of morning mist as they rolled off into the purple distances. A cardinal flashed in an arc across the road and dropped, like a painted arrow, into a gulf of a shadow beyond the tender green of a birch. It hurt a bit, this fresh fragrance of out of doors, when you were walking manacled to Catlettsville.

"What the hell did you do it for, anyway?" Mock demanded.

I might have evaded by asking why Danny Shoate had come over the trail to our camp, carying as luggage a silk shirt wrapped in a newspaper, and offering, as his only recommendation for an office job, an ancient and grimy letter, couched in noncommittal terms, from some New York State legislator. But

Mock would want an apparent cause. of course, more immediate than that.

He would want the story from yesterday afternoon; it was then that the dormant seeds of the whole matter had sprouted; and as I kept step beside him in the soft yellow clay, I wondered if I should have been expected to foresee at least part of the outcome at that time?

I don't think so. I had come from the stable, on Firefly, and had drawn up near where Lafe Holman and Nancy were standing by the road, shooting at olive bottles on a stump out in the pasture. I remarked to Lafe that I was stopping to accustom the nervous black mare to gunfire—but really it was to see Nancy. I was going to visit Wade Damon and his daughter, Caroline, just to get away from being too near Nancy, yet I couldn't leave so long as there was a chance of having another word. That's the sort of fool a man is when he's in love.

"Here's the combination to the safe, Nancy," I said.

Lafe Holman, shooting his old .44 revolver from the hip, had just splintered a bottle. The mare had wheeled and backed, and stood trembling where Nancy was reloading her automatic by the commissary steps.

"I may not be back right on time Monday morning," I said.

"You stayin' overnight?" she asked. She put the gun down on the porch and stood on tiptoe to take the slip of paper. There was an edge to her soft, drawling voice, and I remember she balanced for a moment with her hand on my knee. "Why don't you marry that girl, and bring her over here? It would save you a pile of travelin', Billy."

"When I get ready to marry," I retorted, feeling my face go hot, "maybe I will!"

That is the way it had been between us ever since I had given that fellow Danny Shoate a job in the office with us; we could hardly speak without fighting. She stood there looking up at me, her brown eyes very dark beneath the heavy brows drawn together above her straight, lightly freckled nose. She had

been a hard person lately to understand; quick to flash into anger, equally quick to bubble over in sudden gayety.

I didn't want to fight with her. She looked very lovely to me with the sun winding coils of copper through her heavy chestnut hair, one narrow white hand holding the slip of paper, the fingers of the other tugging at her red lower lip. Her skin was always like milk, floating a few pale freckles across her high cheek bones, but she seemed paler than usual. I heard Danny Shoate laugh; looked up, and thought I understood.

**HIS** arm was around young Luella Hadfield. She was pulling toward the commissary door, her child's face pink, and shaking her yellow head at him in embarrassed entreaty, yet more delighted than angry. He pulled her back to him with an adroit sophistication which made my blood boil.

It was all open and innocent enough; I could say nothing, particularly as I saw from the veiled look of his long-lashed prominent eyes that he was performing for the effect upon Nancy. I was blocked, too, by feeling that he was covertly, and yet deliberately, trying to get a rise out of me. He would do things that way.

How is it possible that men like that have such a way with women? I had known Nancy's father before he had died in the landslide on the Guyandot Cut, had known some of her relatives back in Kentucky, but it had been months after she had come to work for Mock before I got to calling her by her first name. This fellow had dropped in from nowhere, had got a temporary job just because we were short of clerical help, and the second day he was calling her "Nancy" and she was calling him "Danny."

He had a good tenor voice, could sing all the popular songs as well as a professional, and knew a lot of off-color jokes, but none of the men liked him. When you first saw him, you thought he had a strong face, but the good nose and cleft chin were weakened somehow by the long upper lip and the smirk of an up-



curled mouth corner. I noticed that his pink silk shirt was dark at the edge of the collars and the cuffs. His ash-yellow hair, however, greased and gleaming, was brushed in a careful wave over his small ears.

"I don't see why Billy has to have all the fun!" He laughed, dragging Luella to the edge of the porch. "Ain't we got feelings, too?"

"Here's the combination to the safe!" cried Nancy, waving the slip of paper as she turned to pick up the automatic again. "How far will two thousand take us, Danny?"

"That'll carry a guy to little old New York, anyway. After that, leave it to Danny. On Broadway, he's hot!"

"When do we start, Danny?" Nancy asked.

"Oh, I got to take Luella first. Haven't I, baby?" He swept the young girl to him.

At the scuffle and her shriek, as she made a feint of evading the kiss, Firefly backed, and when I spurred and held him, reared and wheeled. I remember, as I turned the circle, noticing a curious expression, mixed of excitement and envy, on Lafe Holman's pock-marked face, and receiving a momentary realization that, despite Lafe's mountaineer blood, there was a certain affinity between him and Danny Shoate.

There was a veneer of low city high life about Lafe which I had never quite placed before. I mean, around his thick piglike neck was a celluloid collar, and in his white tie, a diamond horseshoe pin, while a lavender handkerchief garnished the breast of his black alpaca coat.

The fobbed gold chain dangling across his burly vest, the paste diamonds on his soiled hands, the cracked patent-leather shoes on his large feet—these things seemed to reveal another such mind as that which had manicured Danny Shoate's finger nails and greased his hair. There was something, too, of Danny in the look of Lafe's small black eyes as, oblivious of the mare's hoofs, he gloated over the scene on the porch.

I was busy with the bridle, but as Firefly completed the turn and scam-

bled backward, I caught a glimpse of Luella's yellow hair hanging straight down from Danny Shoate's arm as he leaned over her, his mouth pressed to hers. He released her with a gasping laugh, his prominent, long-lashed eyes excited, and catching sight of Nancy, reached out a pink-nailed hand, grimy at the knuckles, to touch her shining chestnut hair.

"What's matter, honey? Jealous?" he laughed.

I heard, from the other side of the road, the rasp of Lafe Holman's echoing laughter.

Firefly leaped forward over the slippery clay, but not too soon for me to notice the surge of red staining Nancy's ear and cheek and neck. As I gave the mare her head, I carried with me that picture—Nancy, slender and rigid; her small black-and-white sport shoes planted firmly on a spot of turf, the sand-colored dress wrinkling across the shoulders of her suddenly straightened back; and Danny Shoate, startled by something he had seen in her face, turning uneasy eyes to the blue automatic which weighted her freckled hand.

IT was the recollection of this picture which determined me to say nothing to Adam Mock as we kept step along the main road. And, indeed, he had seemed to forget he had asked me the question. Our knuckles brushed together with each step and the warm skin of our forearms touched above the handcuffs.

I suppose there is something of humanity in every one; even a man like Mock, after the first flush of dominance, must feel he is walking with a brother man when he is taking him, for such a cause, to such a destination. At any rate, he had fallen silent, and he did not hail the men, as I had expected, when we neared the jagged hole at the base of the low green spur of the mountain.

But we did not go unnoticed. My temple was freshly scarred; I was muddy and hatless; no doubt my lean and ordinarily ruddy face was pale; and the handcuffs gleamed in the morning sun-

shine. Mock was driving this tunnel for the N. & W. to compete for coal tonnage with the Virginian line already laid through Catlettsville. There was call for haste in construction, but although I kept eyes front, my ears heard the stopping of work. A gang of colored hammer men had been singing; away up the road, I had heard, over and over again:

"Hammerin' in de mountains (Uh!)  
 Hammerin' in de mou-un-tains (Uh!)  
 Ole blin' spider (Uh!)  
 Ole blin' spi-uh-der (Uh!)  
 Hammerin' in de mountains (Uh!)  
 Hammerin' in de mou-un-tains (Uh!)  
 Ole blin' spi-der-uh (Umm)  
 Don't bite me! (Uh!)"

At first, as we passed the tunnel, the song ceased, while the rhythmical grunt kept on, marking the whip of the flexible-handled sledge over a muscular black shoulder and its *clink* against the steel drill bar. Then, as we crossed the tracks, both the grunts and the *clinks* stopped.

There was a cessation of talk and of the sound of slate and shale being pitched into the dump cars. Not till we had passed the dummy engine on the spur track and were on our way up the Catlettsville road did I hear a resumption of the singing and laughter and oaths, and the impact of metal, which makes tunnel-construction work alive.

Marrowbone Creek, yellow and swollen from four days of rain, coursed sullenly between its rocky banks, a sheer fifty feet below the road, cut into the side of the cliff. Mock turned from the road to climb the Bear Mountain Trail, and as I scrambled beside him over the damp black mold and wet hemlock needles of the hillside, dodging the low tree branches, I began to understand why he was walking this morning instead of riding.

I recalled the old lightning-struck oak, still smoking when I had seen it last night, which had slid and fallen down the sopping hill and lay now on its shoulders, so to say, in the Catlettsville Road, so that a man could work his way through its branches, but a horse would

be blocked. It recalled things to me, and I tagged along beside Mock with my heart full of what had occurred the night before.

I HADN'T spent the night over at the Damrons' after all. The old man had developed one of his attacks of heart trouble. A woman cousin had come over to take the spare bedroom and help Caroline nurse him. So, after sticking around long enough to learn that I could be of no use, and was merely in the way, I had saddled Firefly and started back slowly.

There was something peaceful to the thrilling of the frogs, and the bur of the crickets, and the stars above the dark shoulders of the mountain. I needed this sense of peace—it was what I had gone to the Damrons to seek—yet some fever inside drove me to dig the spurs into Firefly, who was willing enough, and we kept at the gallop right up to the end of the commissary road.

It was nearly midnight and the commissary porch was deserted; there was no light in the rooms above, where Shoate and Mock and I slept; and on the right, where Luella and Nancy lived with "Mother" Casselvoy, who "boarded" the white men, the one-story unpainted cottage loomed entirely dark against a darker background of scrub hemlocks.

The acuteness of my disappointment told me that I had been hoping Nancy would still be up, although my common sense knew that every one would be in bed by this time on a Sunday night. I was too restless to think of sleep, so after stabling Firefly, I went into the office, telling myself that I would do a little work on the monthly pay roll, which was due to be in the envelopes the next day; but my real reason, I believe, was to light the lamp, so that Nancy might see it and, her curiosity aroused, possibly drop over to say: "Hello!"

I lit the glass oil lamp on my desk and, after lighting a pipe, dropped on my knees to open the safe. I remember noticing that the knob of the dial seemed sticky, but thought nothing of it. And at first, when I swung the door open, I

simply couldn't believe that the black tin box, which contained the pay roll, was gone.

I had put it there myself; it was too large to go in one of the little lock boxes, so I had pushed it cater-cornered into the bottom middle part of the safe, on top of the two private ledgers. But now it wasn't there.

I had given Nancy the combination so that she might get to work on the pay roll the first thing in the morning, as they had late breakfasts at Wade Damron's. For some reason, it is a comfort for me to recall that then I didn't think there was anything wrong. But the money was gone, over two thousand dollars, and it was up to me to find out where it was. I mean, it would really be my loss if it was gone for good.

I ran the commissary on my own hook, paying Mock a lump sum for the concession, so in that sense I was independent. But the laborers and the men had accounts with the commissary which had to come out of their pay at the end of the month, so the pay roll came naturally to be handled by me. Mock paid me for doing it, but had stipulated that as I had entire charge of the pay-roll books and money, I must be responsible for the cash. I couldn't afford to lose two thousand dollars.

I looked to see if Nancy might have taken the money out of the tin box and put it in one of the locked compartments in the safe, but it wasn't there. Shoate didn't know the combination, so he of course could tell me nothing. So I went out of the office and up the road to Mother Casselvoy's.

Nancy had the room on the north side, with a separate door. I knocked gently for some little while, but she did not answer, so I tried the knob. The door opened easily. I lit a match. No one was in the room, and the bed had not been slept in.

I went out and closed the door quietly, not wanting to wake Mother Casselvoy, who had a hard day's work ahead of her. I felt a trifle worried as I walked back to the commissary and went upstairs to Shoate's room, where I lit an-

other match. The crazy quilt on his bed was smooth, so was the pillow.

I got the electric flash light from the top of the dresser in my room and went downstairs again. It was out of the question to go to bed with the idea that everything would be explained in the morning, so I walked along the commissary road, occasionally flashing the light.

**T**HERE had been so much coming and going that it was hard to tell about the footprints on the road or in the path beside it. But just as the path turned into the main road toward the tunnel I found one of Nancy's footprints. I knew its shape and size, and the print of her rubber heel, as well as I knew the palm of my hand.

There was nothing unusual about Nancy and Shoate going for a walk; in fact, it was their frequent companionship which had driven me into going so often over to see Damron and Caroline; and I didn't want to seem to be following them. But the pay-roll matter was too important to delay for any such consideration as this, so I set out briskly down the road.

The rain of the preceding four days had left the woods too wet for them to be strolling in there. It was mighty late for them to be out, anyway. The silence was broken only by the shrilling of the frogs and, now and again, by the sucking of my heel from the clay. Once I thought I heard a shot from way up on Bear Mountain, but I couldn't be sure. I remember having a cold, creepy feeling as the footsteps continued on and on into the darkness—past the mouth of the tunnel and up the Catlettsville Road.

It was a hundred yards up this road that I came upon the lightning-struck oak, which must have fallen during the storm of the previous night. The ground was comparatively untrampled at the upper side of the road. No one else wore such pointed shoes, and Shoate's footsteps were unmistakable where he had made his way through the broken branches. But Nancy's were nowhere to be found.

I retraced my steps, casting the light on both sides of the rocky platform, and about a hundred yards back discovered where she apparently had turned off to go up the Bear Mountain Trail, a shorter route, which went over the hill, through Twisted Gun Gap, and came back to the road a mile or so farther on.

I must say that I was puzzled to see their trails separating like that. Of course I can't deny that certain wild ideas had been floating through my mind. In the darkness, with the money gone, and Nancy and Shoate's footsteps keeping on and on—beyond any conceivable distance for a friendly walk at that hour of the night—I had had fancies of their running off together with the pay-roll money, catching the early-morning train at Catlettsville.

The more I thought of it, and the longer their trail had kept going, the more I had come to believe in the possibility that Nancy's red-headed fire and impulsiveness might have been touched off by Shoate's happy-go-lucky persuasion. Anyhow, no one but Nancy could have opened the safe, and certainly the money was gone.

I don't say that these thoughts of mine would have stood the test of daylight scrutiny. It would be easy to think of Nancy as doing some violent thing, on an impulse of love or jealousy. But it wouldn't be easy to think of her as going off with some one else's money. She was honest to the point of brutality, almost.

That's why another conclusion leaped immediately to my mind when I followed her solitary footsteps up the Bear Mountain Trail and found that she, in turn, was following in the footsteps of little Luella Hadfield. I suppose Luella's tracks would have been visible to me along the tunnel road, except that I had been looking only for Nancy's and Shoate's. There were lots of tracks in the road and you don't see the things you're not after.

The Bear Mountain Trail, a sort of deer trail which had widened to a beaten path, was springy with hemlock needles, but now and again, in a muddy level spot, the tracks came out with the dis-

tinctness of a blue print. I recognized easily the shape of the worn place in the sole of Luella's right shoe; she had told me the day before that she needed a half sole, and had lifted her foot to illustrate.

And I could see that Nancy and she weren't together. A rabbit's track had crossed one of Luella's footprints, and after this Nancy's footprint had come down on a part of the rabbit's track. I knew this wouldn't have happened if Nancy hadn't been coming along quite some while later than Luella.

I MEAN, it came in my mind that Shoate in some way must have gotten hold of the combination to the safe, and have taken the money and persuaded Luella to go over to Catlettsville and wait for him to meet her at the early train. Nancy, going late into Luella's room, probably had figured she was staying out too long with Shoate and had taken a flash light and started out to find her and make her come home. When the footprints had kept on past the tunnel, Nancy must have guessed that Luella and Shoate were running off together, and have taken the short cut over the mountain to try to cut Shoate off.

I don't know why the thought of Nancy interceding with Shoate should have so enraged me. Perhaps I was uncertain how much she would be pleading for Luella, and how much for herself. At any rate, I began to run. A twig knocked my hat off and I let it go. The end of a broken branch ripped the flesh across my temple, and I did not know it until the next day.

The thought of Nancy running through the woods at midnight after a creature like Danny Shoate caused the leaping circle of the flash light to seem to fill the darkness with a hazy glow of red. I was wet from sweat and the slap of dewy leaves; the lining of my lungs felt scraped as I gasped over the crest and raced down the twisting, slippery path on the opposite side of the slope.

As the path dropped abruptly to rejoin the road, the edge of the jumping light revealed a curious mound of shadow. I tried to stop, tripped, re-

gained my balance and slid, to end with the light playing on the white-flannel trousers and the dark coat of Danny Shoate. He was lying with his face in a puddle, his arms outstretched on the road as if reaching toward Catlettsville.

The coat was pulled back over his shoulder. I almost could see a freckled hand holding to it, hear a soft drawing voice pleading as he jerked away. And where the untrimmed and greasy yellow hair curled at the base of the skull, there was a small hole, matted with red.

Human beings are peculiar. I wasn't bothered so much by the thought that Shoate was dead. There had been plenty of men killed in the last three years by falling slate, or in quarrels among the blacks over craps or women, or in barroom brawls between the mountaineers and the other white men on the works.

I suppose I should be ashamed to admit it, but first I wanted to know, more than anything else, whether Nancy had come after Shoate to keep him from leaving her for Luella, or whether she had been trying to get back my money for me. The coat was pulled off his shoulder so that it was easy to discover that his inside pocket was empty. My heart went light, thinking that as he had no key for it, he had broken open the money box and taken out the bills, leaving the heavy silver behind, and that Nancy, for my sake, had rescued the bills from him.

But I noticed a bulge over the small of his back, lifted the coat, and there, tied to his waist with rusty baling wire, was the tin money box. It unfastened with some difficulty; it was uninjured and still securely locked.

I was kind of numb after that. I mean, it stunned me to realize that Nancy felt badly enough about Shoate's leaving her for Luella to go off her head. My shoulders and body grew so heavy that I could hardly move. It was in a sort of daze that I aimed the light to observe her footprints, turning from Catlettsville, back along the road—not walking now, but running. I followed after her slowly, the money box under

my arm, in my breast a weight heavier than any money box could ever be.

It wasn't till I was nearing the commissary, and thought of Nancy huddling in her bed, that I began to consider the consequences. Murder, after all, is murder, and the law grinds the same in Mingo County as in Washington. I knew that I couldn't let Nancy stay in any such trouble as that. As I plodded along the road, wondering what could be done, I heard the sudden beat of a horse's hoofs.

THEN, horse and rider whirled out of the commissary road and came galloping headlong into the darkness. I was barely able to jump aside as they thundered by, spattering me with mud. I just discerned a sand-colored dress and the blur of a white face over the black horse's straightened neck. I sighed with relief as I lit a match to look at my watch. Firefly could scramble over the Bear Mountain Trail to the Catlettsville Road beyond, and they would be able to make the early eastbound train.

I turned up the road to the commissary, lighted the lamp in the office and dropped the tin money box on my desk. Nancy was safely away; I already had decided how to forestall pursuit; but I was still worried for her. She had mighty little money and wasn't equipped by experience to get along in any strange city. I guess it was this association of ideas that caused me to take the keys out of my pocket and unlock the box.

Instead of neat sheafs of crisp green bills, held together by strips of manila paper, I saw a pad of printed blue-and-white calico, such as we sell at the commissary, folded at the top of the box when I lifted the lid. Packed tight beneath it, and wrapped in calico so they would not rattle, lay a dozen or so of the small spikes used for pinning the light dump-car rails to the cross ties.

Nancy must have learned that Shoate had secured the slip of paper giving the combination to the safe, and she must have taken the money out of the box to fool him if he tried to get it. Apparently it was only afterward that she had

discovered he was planning to run off with Luella.

But none of that made any difference. Nancy would catch the train for the East, and she would have about two thousand dollars, enough to last her a year. It was Mock's money, but he would look to me for it, so that would be all right. I don't guess I had prayed since I was a kid, but, right then and there, I knelt down and laid my forehead against a rung of the high stool, and thanked Heaven and asked that she be looked after and kept safe always.

When I got up, it hit me that the plan for Nancy would have to be worked before Mock came riding back from his weekly spree at Catlettsville. I threw the calico and the spikes out of the window, chucked the empty money box into the safe, extinguished the lamp and then hurried back down the road. Once more I climbed over the Bear Mountain Trail, taking care this time to obliterate Nancy's footprints with my own. Where the trail hit the road, I kicked things up a bit, as from a struggle, fired my automatic twice and placed the ejected shells where they would be seen, dropped an initialed pocketknife, and next returned by the way of the road, stepping on Nancy's running footprints. It might have seemed that the prospect of the morrow would have kept me awake when at last I got back home and undressed and climbed into bed. But I was so tired, and so relieved over Nancy, that I drifted into a dreamless slumber and even overslept in the morning.

SO I had been in a pretty good frame of mind, all things considered, when Mock had come for me shortly after breakfast. And as I kept pace beside him on the downward slope of the Bear Mountain Trail, I began to feel the same way again. We only live once, the whole business of life is a gamble, and a man can stand most anything—if he is sure the person he loves is safe and that he is doing what he knows is the right thing to do. I mean he can feel sort of in a position where nothing else in life can touch him.

The river ran and sang in its bouldery bed far below us. The slanting sun of morning filtered through the fresh green of the hemlocks and powdered the brown needles of the path with gold. Even Mock seemed possibly to have grown more agreeable, for as we reached the Catlettsville Road, he stopped, directed me to take the small key out of his side coat pocket and unlock the bracelet from his wrist.

Evidently he had sent men from the tunnel to remove the body of Shoate, for his roan gelding, which likely he had not wanted to ride over the steep and slippery trail, was tied to a protruding root and stamped its feet and switched its tail at the very spot where Shoate had lain.

I judge Mock was considering whether to manacle me to his stirrup, or let me walk alone, when the *plop* and *clink* of a horse's hoof came to our ears. The next moment, topping a rise in the road from Catlettsville, I saw the bobbing yellow head of Luella. And then my heart stood still. Because Luella, her left arm bandaged in a yellow bandanna sling, was on the back of Firefly. And walking ahead of them, leading the tired horse, came Nancy. Her dark eyes saw us. But there was no change in the drawn mask of her pale face as she dragged her little muddy sport shoes toward us.

Adam Mock lifted my manacled wrist. "I got him, Miss Nancy!" he announced. "He shot Danny Shoate from behind a tree. Danny's dead."

"What?" asked Nancy, as if his voice had come to her from far off. "What!" she exclaimed, and stepped forward, pushing her small freckled hand against Mock's huge chest. "No!" she cried sharply. "No! He didn't! He *didn't!*"

"Don't listen to her, Mock!" I shouted so loud and so rapidly that she couldn't interrupt. "She's going to try and say that *she* did it. Go home, Nancy! She is going to try and tell you that she did it, Mock, when as a matter of fact she knows I did it!"

Comprehension began to dawn in Nancy's expression. I stopped talking.

because I saw the crisis was over. Her face softened as if in relief; her eyes, as she moved near to me, were luminous with something which, a day or so ago, I would have given anything to see. But, somehow, coming at this moment, it made me bitter. I suppose it was because I hadn't asked pay for what I was doing, and didn't want any. She could see that I was ready to interrupt her if she spoke to Mock, so she stood on tip-toe to whisper in my ear.

"I didn't do it, Billy," she told me. "I wish I had done it, just so I could have you willing to take the blame. Lafe Holman shot him, Billy."

Her tone was so convinced, and I was so surprised, that I did not interrupt as she turned to Mock, a slow flush suffusing the milk-white of her skin.

"Billy didn't do it, Mr. Mock; and neither did I. Lafe Holman did it. Yesterday afternoon, I lost the slip of paper with the combination of the safe on it, and I guess Danny Shoate found it. When I missed it, I took the money out of the tin box. Then I put the silver in a bag and hid it in the filing cabinet.

"But the bills were so valuable," she went on, "I was scared to leave them out of the safe, and I stuck them way back in one of the little lock cupboards and put envelopes in front of them. You see, I figured if anybody *should* get in the safe, they'd just take the money box and run. And I had put spikes in that to make it heavy. But Danny took the box, and found the bills, too."

"I didn't know he had stole anything," Luella's shrill voice fell eagerly from the air above our heads. "If I had of, I wouldn't of gone with him."

"No, of course she didn't," Nancy confirmed. "But Lafe Holman must have seen Danny pick up the slip. I was coming over the trail up there, looking for Luella, when I heard Lafe and Danny talking loud to each other, and then I saw the flash."

"Lafe didn't mean at first to kill him!" Luella cried, in explanation. "He meant to make Danny go halves with him. But Danny pulled away and started to run, and Lafe let him have it. Then Lafe

took the bills out of Danny's pocket and come on to Catlettsville. He told me everything while we waited for the train. And he said if I raised a fuss or wouldn't go with him, he'd do me just like he done Danny."

"I was so scared when I saw Danny," Nancy added, "I ran all the way back to the commissary. I heard Firefly in the stable, so then I looked for Billy. But I couldn't find him. I knew Lafe would catch that early train and likely try to take Luella with him. There wasn't any time to be lost if I was going to keep him from going off with Billy's money. So I saddled Firefly, and took a chance on the trail, and got the Catlettsville policeman up just in time."

"Yes," put in Luella, "the train was just in sight when Lafe saw Mr. Jones coming toward the station, and began shooting at him. It was so dark, Lafe missed. And Mr. Jones' first shot hit me in the arm, and I laid down, and so did Lafe. But the locomotive's headlight turned the curve and played right on us. So it was easy for Mr. Jones to let him have it."

Adam Mock broke the silence.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said. His jaws were set tight, and he was staring at me with a curious bright expression. He turned abruptly away, untied the gelding, mounted, and galloped off down the road toward the tunnel.

"I heard a crash back there a while ago," I said, handing Luella Firefly's reins, "and I guess a gang has cleared the road of that tree. You and Nancy go ahead while I try to get this handcuff off."

But Nancy waited, and took my hand, and we walked along after Firefly in silence. As we were nearing the tunnel, Luella turned in her saddle.

"Why don't you kiss her, Mr. Billy?" she asked. "She loves you. She said she could understand why I run off with Danny if I loved him. She said if you asked her, she'd run off with you tomorrow, to the ends of the earth. Those were her very words, Mr. Billy."

My heart leaped. But just then we turned a bend and found that all the

tunnel workers, whites and blacks, had quit work and were out standing by the road as if waiting for us. Mock, on the roan gelding in front of them, lifted his hand, and the men burst all at once into a tremendous roar.

"They are cheering you, Billy!" Nancy cried.

It certainly got next to me. I kept my burning face lowered. Everything was a blur. All I remember is that somehow we managed to stumble past them,

and presently things were quiet again. Nancy, still holding my hand, was walking beside me on the road beyond the tunnel.

Luella, ahead of us on Firefly, looked around.

"I'm going to ride on," she called, "so you-all can talk."

I stopped. But Nancy and I couldn't talk. We could only stand there, our arms suddenly around each other, and look into each other's faces.

*Another story by Mr. McBlair will be published in the next issue of  
THE POPULAR.*



### A BETTER COUNTRY WHEN—

THIS will be a better country when the average church congregation does not include so many men, each of whom pays about as much for his automobile as all the members, put together, pay to the preacher for his annual salary.



### THE LOW AGAINST THE HIGH

"ONE reason why there are so many crazy dances," observed Litt Mallory, the Virginia philosopher, "is that in pretty much all our social circles a nimble foot is a greater attraction than a nimble wit."



### DISCOUNTING THE COMPLIMENT

WHEN Henry W. Savage, the theatrical producer, was the principal speaker at one of the big entertainments given by the National Press Club in Washington, he got off to a flying and fluent start by describing with polysyllabic fervor how pleased he was by the fact that he was the first representative of his business who had ever been invited to address that organization.

When he had concluded and bowed low to the thunderous applause accorded him, the master of ceremonies stepped forward and, with a twinkle in his eye, said:

"Far be it from me to lessen, diminish or otherwise discount the greatness of the compliment that Mr. Savage thinks was paid him through his being the first theatrical producer to address this club. But, as a matter of fact, when we decided to invite one of his profession to make the feature address, we discovered that he was about the only one of the lot in New York who could speak English."



## A Chat With You

**D**ID you go to college? Or perhaps high school? And did you study there what they used to call English Literature, but what they now designate English A, English B, and so forth? How much did you get out of it? What do you remember of it? A few shining names, perhaps. A line or two of verse, the titles of one or two of the great works of the past. If you have not been to the movies lately—or indeed if you have—can you put together in your mind the plot of Hawthorne's masterpiece, "The Scarlet Letter?" Do you know what actually happened to *Romeo and Juliet*, beyond the fact that they died tragically? What is the actual story of "Hamlet?" Who was Pendennis? And Becky Sharp? Who wrote the books in which they figure? Sydney Carton—who was he and what did he do? And what happened to Martin Chuzzlewit? Who were the Cheeryble Brothers and how did they conduct their business, if they had any? Why did *Mercutio* meet with such an untimely death?

\* \* \* \*

**T**HE above constitutes what they call an intelligence test. You learned all this stuff at school—and unless you have a distinctly literary bent and make a hobby of reading the classics, you will pass one hundred per cent for intelligence if you cannot answer a single question.

As a matter of fact, the trouble with English courses in all the schools is that they are still worshipping the past. They are still studying the authors of a century ago instead of the successful authors of to-day. Robert Louis Steven-

son? We have sayings from his essays printed in fancy type on calendars. He comes a bit nearer our time. His books are given in sets as wedding presents—but we would like to know if ever any one read a whole set of books through.

Speaking of Stevenson makes us remember that sometimes a man seems quite a failure at one time and a classic later on. Stevenson's "New Arabian Nights," a whimsical adventure story, in which, half the time, the author seems to be making fun of his own characters and own story, ran serially in an English magazine. At its completion, the magazine suspended publication indefinitely. It is said that the publishers of the magazine attributed its failure to Stevenson's contribution. Anyway, the editor who accepted it and was enthusiastic about it found, after the public were given a chance of reading it, that he was an editor no longer.

\* \* \* \*

**T**HE trouble with the college courses in English is, first, that it is hard to communicate within the four walls of a lecture room so delightful and stimulating a thing as the zest for reading; secondly, that they concern themselves too much with the past and not enough with the present. We may speak freely about the past. It is complete and perfect. Nothing that any one could say would ruffle or disturb those great immortals who were so sensitive and mortal while they still had their being on the earth. If one likes them, it is well to read them. But it is no more use reading the thing that bores you than it is eating when one is not hungry. There

are plenty of good authors writing now—we think we know one or two. So far as learning the use of English and acquiring a general culture and acquaintance with things in general, the stories written to-day are just as valuable as any written at any time. After all, you are living to-day and not in the past—and there are so many stories in the world that no one can read all of them. So why not specialize on your own generation?

THIS magazine, if you read it regularly, may send you to some of the books that are set down for college reading. If it gives you the taste for reading good sound narrative, it is enough. Your own taste, your own capacity, your own instinct will do the rest. You may start reading THE POPULAR and wind up with Dante or you may not go so far—but we think that we can promise you an interesting and pleasant journey the first part of the way at least.

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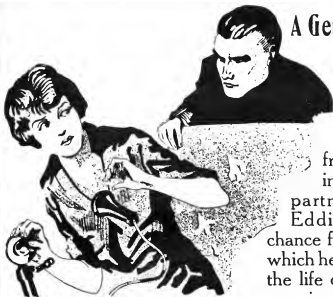
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