

THE GOLDEN LEAF BY FRED MAC ISAAC
THE RECKONING BY W.B.M. FERGUSON

WEEKLY

MAR. 3, 1928

The Popular★

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ROBERT M^CBLAIR

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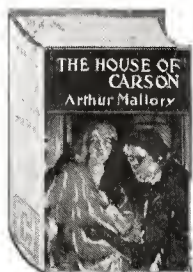
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Here is a man fighting his way back to an honorable position in society. Most men's hands are against him; he has a few loyal friends. His heroic struggle against odds will win you over to him, heart and soul—all set against a real Western background.



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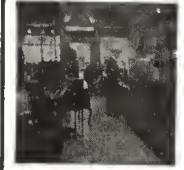
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Today even the ordinary Electrician—the “screw driver” kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the Electrical Expert—who is picked out to “boss” the ordinary Electricians—to boss the big jobs—the jobs that pay \$3,000 to \$5,000 a year. Get in line for one of these “Big Jobs.” Start by enrolling now for my easily learned, quickly grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home-Study Course in Practical Electricity.



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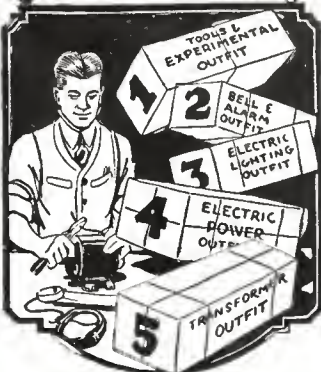
“The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging \$500 a month from my own business now. I need to make \$15 a week.”
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Address.....
Occupation.....

The Cooke Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

Next week's issue of **THE POPULAR** will be opened by Bertrand W. Sinclair, with his novel, "Forked Trails." This is a story of the Far Western frontiers of to-day, a story of a young man who, riding out on a peaceful mission, is greeted by shots, and is forced to decide whether to turn back or go forward. Well, he goes forward, and meets with high adventure.

Volume LXXXIX

Number 4

The Popular

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

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Weekly publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 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, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, December 22, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$7.50. Foreign, \$8.50.

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All manuscripts must be addressed to the Editors.

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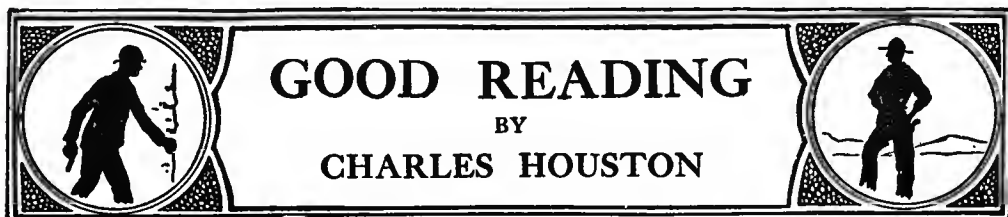
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Stop!
have you had
your **WRIGLEY'S**
today ?
"After every meal"



I-14



Rudyard Kipling, the poet, singing:
 "The white moth to the closing vine,
 The bee to the open clover,
 And the gypsy blood to the gypsy blood
 Ever the wide world over."

THERE is a clear call to the gypsy blood that is in all of us when a master of modern fiction sits down to tell us his stories of romance, mystery, and the Great West.

They come to Chelsea House, at 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, these writers who know how to bind the magic spell upon their readers, and there are printed the books of fiction which entertain, enthrall, and entice thousands of readers from coast to coast.

Whether these stories have to do with mystery, romance, the great West, or stories of old swashbuckling days upon the Spanish Main, every one of them carries the lure that draws the reader out of himself into the world beyond four walls, where anything might happen. Down the highroads of imagination one who reads may run. The worries and perplexities that beset us all have a way of vanishing when once a good book of fiction is at hand.

Any book which bears on its jacket the famous C-H brand of Chelsea House is your guarantee of hours of adventure on land or sea, far away from the monotonies of the every day.

My advice to those who love the

swing of a fast-moving story that is clean from start to finish, and at the same time stirs the emotions, is to stop at the nearest dealer and ask him for any one of these Chelsea House titles:



YOUNG LIGHTNING: a Western Story, by Charles Wesley Sanders. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

It begins with a man and a girl and a proposal. But not the sort of proposal that you expect. For over this man hung the shadow of a crime which was imputed to his father, and which darkened all his days. There were those who said that this upstanding "Young Lightning" could never escape from that shadow. But there were others who believed in him, and because of that belief he was able to win his way against heavy odds.

Right off the reel as the story begins, Young Lightning bumps into a man who is to lead him into all sorts of adventures. Though he had no particular love for this man Ferguson, for the sake of the woman whom both he and Ferguson loved, "Young Lightning" fought the good fight against Ferguson's slayer, and eventually won.

Here is a revealing study of a character who will linger long in your memory, and whose story is a thrilling epic of the West.



THE GLORIOUS PIRATE: an Adventure Story, by James Graham. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

What an anomaly! Glorious and a pirate, or so they called the mad, glad, brave Terence

Continued on 2nd page following

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Name

Address

Town State

Goodwin, deep-sea rover, who "singed the beard of the King of Spain." He went laughing through the world with a song on his lips and a cutlass in his strong right hand. The story of that going is told in a style so masterly as to transport you to the very Spanish Main itself and find again the new delights of old romances.

There is a description in this book of a battle between Spanish and English ships which is the equal of any stirring sea romance penned by modern man. And there is Lady Betty, and a most memorable astrologer, and a wealth of good writing to boot. Duels galore, and sea fights a score, make the rapt reader hungry for more.



SCHEMED AT SANDY BAR: a Western Story, by George Gilbert. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

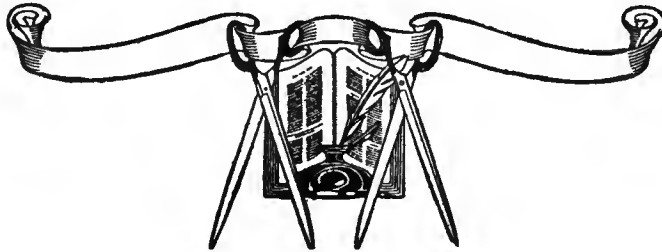
The daughter of old Sim Marlewe was named Rita, and when her father was forced to fight a foul scheme to rob him of his hard-won fortune, it was Rita and other courageous admirers of Sim who came to his rescue.

No doubt you have read other Western stories by George Gilbert; "Cowgirls—Plus" and "Good Haters," perhaps. You know that when this man sits down to the spinning of a Western yarn, he has few equals. In "Schemed at Sandy Bar," Mr. Gilbert has given his great host of readers a story of the desert places of the West which will long be memorable.



THE HOUSE OF DISAPPEARANCES: a Detective Story, by Chester K. Steele. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Nothing for weak hearts, this story of strange disappearances which made the Beacon Knoll House the most talked-of place in the entire length of the Rainbolt Colony. In vain did Houston Poolc attempt to rent this dwelling place around which hovered so many stories of the sudden and unexplained disappearances of those who had come to it. Your pulse will beat faster as you follow Mr. Steele's rapid-fire mystery story, one of the best which this talented author has yet turned out.



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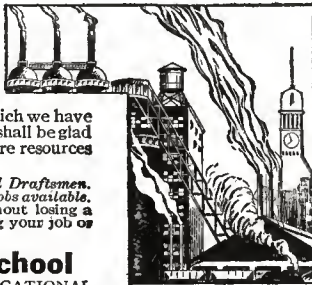
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Help Wanted—Male—Continued

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OH, HELLO! WHY DIDN'T I SEE This Before. Christy's Iron Rust and Stain Remover sells like blazes. Write for free sample. Christy, Inc., 5080 B'way, Newark, New York.

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\$6-\$18 A DOZEN decorating pillow tops at home, experience unnecessary; particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 110 LaGrange, Ind.

Male Help Instructions

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EARN \$120 to \$250 monthly, expenses paid as railway traffic inspector; we assist you to a position after completion of three months' spare time home study course or refund your money. Write for free booklet CM-25, Standard Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

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\$1000.00 Extra for Promptness—or \$500.00 and a New Model Ford Sedan. Send no money, just find twin hats, mark them, answer today.

G. A. Culver, Advertising Mgr., Room 458
600 N. Dearborn St., Chicago

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BUICK
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Bat writes: "Most of the public know no well enough to know that I never bunked them in my life. And when I say your vaporizer is all you say it is, I mean it."

Who Else Wants to Save Gasoline?

FORD
"I have used one on my Ford for over five years and have traveled over 35,000 miles. Never had any spark plug trouble. Have averaged 28 to 30 miles on gal."
J. H. Alruth, Iowa.

CHEVROLET
"You people claim a saving of 25% to 50%. I found I was obtaining 43.8 miles to a gal. on a Chevrolet, whereas formerly I had been getting only 19.5. Actual test surpasses your claim."
M. E. Miller, Kansas City.

BUICK
G. M. Rathburn, Charleston, W. Va., has a Buick Six. Having an old engine, it was getting only 8 or 9 miles to a gal. On a 287-mile trip he got 19 miles to a gal. He says it has saved him \$40.00 on one trip.

NASH
"I had a large Nash Six. I drove from Los Angeles to San Francisco on 20 gals. of gas, whereas I have usually taken from 50 to 55."
H. T. McCallon, California.

A SOUTH DAKOTA man has discovered an amazing gas-saving invention now installed on over two million cars of every make. Already over ten thousand car owners say it increases gas mileage 25% to 50% . . . cleans out carbon without touching the engine . . . adds more speed and power . . . and saves an astonishing amount of money in gasoline and repair expense. There is a model for every car, truck, tractor or gasoline engine. Anybody can install it in a few minutes.

This invention is based on newly-discovered facts about potential gasoline power that few car owners know about. For example, it is now found that the average man wastes at least 20% to 30% of his gasoline through improper combustion. And many more interesting discoveries, too detailed to mention here.

Read on the left what other car owners say about it. Then accept the inventor's special introductory offer. He will send you samples to test without obligation to buy. If you find it doesn't

do for you what it has done for other car owners, he will pay a cash forfeit for the few minutes you've spent in testing it.

Don't send a penny now. Simply send your name in coupon below. J. A. Stransky Mfg. Co., C-220, Stransky Block, Pukwana, S. D.

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J. A. STRANSKY MFG. CO.,
C-220 Stransky Block, Pukwana, S. D.

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Check here if you want agent's proposition.

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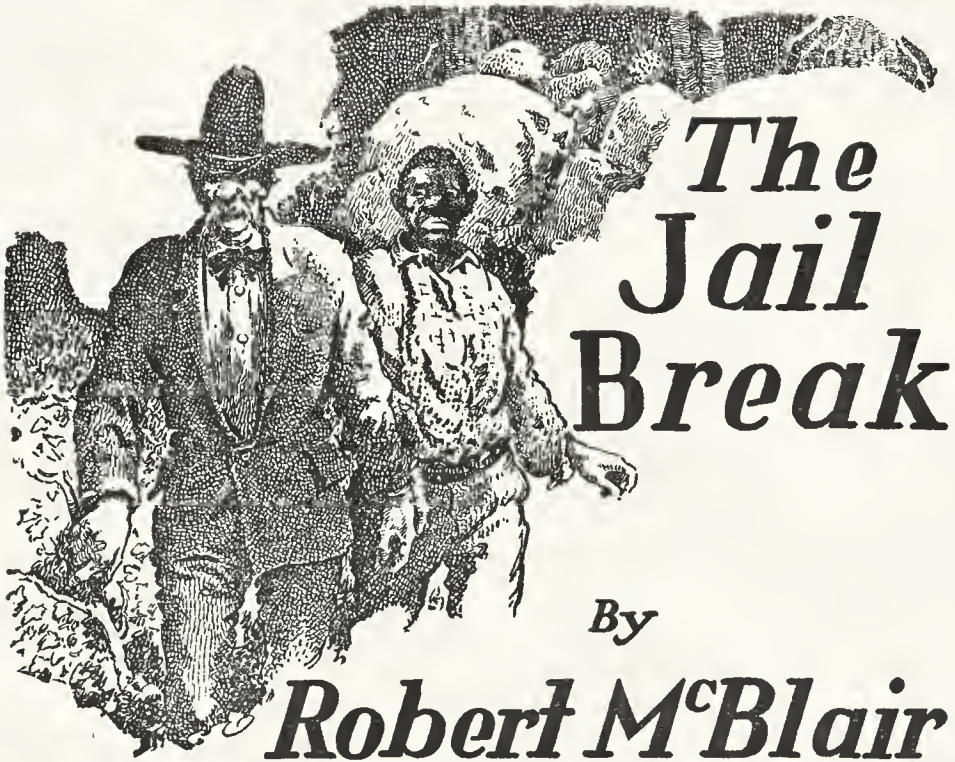
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THE POPULAR

VOL. LXXXIX

MARCH 3, 1928

No. 4



The Jail Break

By

Robert McBlair

Author of "The Immortal Ingredient," "Among Friends," Etc.

Who shot Reggy Smith? It was to learn this for his paper that Harrison returned to Damron. He was surprised when the sheriff started to arrest him; more surprised at the identity of the real murderer; most surprised when he found out about Nancy.

CHAPTER I.

BLUE MONDAY.

HERE pape'—all 'bout de big murder!" The words, winning their way faintly through the din of Main Street traffic, filtered unpleasantly into Gregory Harrison's ears. The train, bringing him back to his job after a week's vacation in the pine-scented mountains, had dumped him

into Huntington at five thirty in the morning. He had snatched a little sleep at the house where he roomed and boarded, had overslept, and now, after a hurried cup of coffee, he was walking rapidly toward the office.

The past year had been a hard one. His vacation had been too short. The blare of automobile horns on the busy street compared disagreeably with the shrill song of the crickets which had

accompanied him the night before in his midnight walk across the mountain to his train. The odor of carbon monoxide gas reminded him that he had left behind the aroma of sun-warmed grass, of hemlock needles, and the aromatic smell of balsam. He was back on the job.

"Murder!" he exclaimed, as he leaped a crossing before a stampede of traffic-released automobiles succeeded in overwhelming him. "I'd like to murder the man who invented work!"

He stopped, however, at the next corner and purchased a copy of his own paper, the *Mountain Record*. It said nothing about a murder. He bought at the next corner a copy of the opposition paper, the *Daily Express*. It, too, was silent on the subject of murder. There was half a column, it was true, about the number of bees which had been slaughtered by the packing house; but that wasn't murder, that was necessity. There was a column, with a carry over to the second page, about the killing by allied forces of two hundred and sixty Chinese near Hankow; but that wasn't murder, that was diplomacy.

"Here pape'—all about de big murder!"

This call, fainter now than ever, had emerged from the building, far down the busy main street of the river town, which housed the *Daily Express*. Evidently the news had justified an extra. As he listened he could hear the extra boys, as they got their papers, add their excited cries to the din of the street. But the square, squat, red-brick building which glowed across the street in the summer sunlight showed no signs of such activity. There was no line of newsboys, like a plague of singing locusts, emerging from the lane with fresh ink-smelling copies of the *Mountain Record*. His own paper, apparently, once more had been beaten out by the wide-awake opposition.

"Old B. J.," grinned Gregory Harri-

son, thinking of the editor-owner, "will be sore as a boil again!"

This reminded him of his own need for diplomacy in view of the fact that he was late. He sent his hundred and seventy pounds of bone and muscle across the street in four jumps, and ran up the dark, squeaking stairs to the *Mountain Record* offices.

The first thing that impressed him as he entered through the swinging doors was a strangeness in the attitude of the switchboard girl, who was also the reception clerk. He had expected to be rather bored with the formalities of greeting with which the office force would of course belabor him.

"Didja have a good time? Got sunburned, didn't ya? Well, how's it feel to get back to work?"

The switchboard girl didn't greet him at all. She just stared up at him with a pencil in her mouth, her eyes rather wide open. He was rather irritated at the lack of effusive boresomeness which he had anticipated. He said, "How do you do," crisply, and made his way to his desk, feeling a creepy sensation grow over him.

The other people in the office were regarding him silently in this same curious, staring way. None of them got up and shook hands with him; if they spoke at all it was with a brief, sideways, but very intent glance. Even the society reporter, a maiden no longer young who was wont to smile upon him coquettishly, was all mouth and eyes, and rather little voice.

He paused, when he hung up his hat, to glance at himself in the mirror which stood beside the water cooler. It occurred to him that he perhaps had forgotten to put on his shirt, or that there was a smudge of soot on his face. There was nothing, however, out of the ordinary about his appearance, so far as he could make out. His crisp, ash-yellow hair was properly parted, and brushed down so far as its natural stiff-

ness would permit. There was no smudge upon the clear surface of his ruddy, healthy skin. His blue eyes stared back at him intently from either side of his straight, narrow nose; his sunburned brows were drawn together in a frown, and his clearly defined lips were pressed together grimly—although he had nothing, really, to be grim about.

He felt of his striped tie as he turned from the mirror and made his way to his desk. And then an idea struck him.

"Old B. J. is in a rotten humor this morning, in view of this latest scoop. He's probably been raising hell. I shouldn't be surprised if I've been fired. That's probably it. They're all looking at me as if I were just about to be executed."

He was pulling out the typewriter chair at his desk, when the office boy shot out of old B. J.'s inner sanctum, skated across the floor, and landed breathless at Gregory Harrison's side.

"The boss's been lookin' for you all over!" he said.

Gregory Harrison turned without a moment's hesitation and walked toward Mr. B. J. Asbury's office. It is true that the job, a few moments before so unattractive, had suddenly begun to take on desirable aspects. It is true that this was a time of slump in the newspaper business, when advertisers were drawing in their horns instead of blowing on them, when subscribers were allowing their subscriptions to lapse, and even the news-stand circulation was dropping fast.

It is true, in other words, that this was a time, the country over, when newspaper reporters were a drug on the market, and not a drug which newspaper proprietors considered necessary for the good of their systems. It is true, too, that Gregory Harrison—like many another attractive young man—was cherishing in his breast a romantic dream, a dream which was rather hopeless at best, and which would vanish utterly

with the vanishing of the wherewithal for shoe leather and groceries. But he had found out at college, and in the army—if, indeed, he hadn't been born with this conviction—that the way to discourage trouble is to smile at it, and never turn away. Accordingly he entered the sanctum of his employer with a smile.

"Well, Mr. Asbury," he smiled, "I'm back at last!"

Mr. Asbury merely stared at him—"Good night! He's got it, too!" thought Gregory Harrison.

Aloud Harrison said: "You wanted to see me, Mr. Asbury?"

The publisher, a large man in shirt sleeves and suspenders, seemed to be trying to pull himself together. He parted his tobacco-stained mustache delicately with thumb and forefinger, and spat under his palm into the brass spittoon, all the while keeping his jaundiced brown eyes fastened upon his employee. Having freed his oral cavity for the purposes of speech, he made use of it.

"See you!" he cried huskily. "I'll say I wanted to see you! Why the hell did you let the *Express* get ahead of us on this here murder?"

"Why, Mr. Asbury!" replied Gregory, staring in his turn, "I was on my vacation. I am only now reporting for work."

"Hah! And I suppose just because you were on a vacation you wouldn't send in no news, huh?" Mr. Asbury, whose editorials were the last word in purity of English and stylistic delicacy, lapsed by choice and habit into the speech of the people, when he was vehement. His expression of ferocity changed now abruptly into one of thought. "But maybe you didn't go up into the mountains like you said you was. Maybe you haven't been with Reggy Smith and Heath Dixon. But, yes, you was, because the dispatches said—— Set down!"

Gregory Harrison sat down opposite his employer, whom he could now scarcely see above the pile of yellowed correspondence, old newspapers, agricultural journals and other miscellany which cluttered the flat-topped, golden-oak desk.

"You went to Damron, where those boys have a shack up in the mountains about two miles from town, didn't you? About a week ago? When did you leave there?"

"At one o'clock this morning."

"Did you have any quarrel with Reggy Smith?"

"No, of course not. I was up there as his guest, mainly."

"No law against a man quarrelin' with his host. When did you see Reggy Smith last?"

"Around midnight last night. Perhaps a little earlier."

"Was everything serene? Anybody drinkin'?"

"All of us had been drinking a bit. Reggy was somewhat ugly; no worse than he always is when he's drinking. Why?"

"Why!" Mr. Asbury worried his bulk to a standing posture, waddled over to examine a railroad schedule tacked to the wall under a life-size photograph of Abraham Lincoln, waddled back, pushed aside about ten pounds of neglected correspondence and sat on the desk, fixing Gregory astutely with a jaundiced glare.

"Reggy Smith," replied Mr. Asbury, in his husky rumble, "was murdered last night."

"What!" cried Gregory, jumping to his feet, sending his chair over backward. "Dead?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Asbury, "dead. And furthermore——" Mr. Asbury hesitated. "By the way," he continued, "how'd you like to go up there on the case?"

"Why," Gregory stammered, "this is such a—a surprise!"

"You don't have to go if you don't want to," said Mr. Asbury, looking shrewdly at Gregory's countenance, which had lost its ruddy color somewhat. "I got plenty other things for you to do." His manner was strangely hesitant. "You might be better off here. You're the best judge of that."

"Go!" cried Gregory. "Of course I'm going. I'm going, whether I go for you or go alone."

Mr. Asbury breathed a deep breath. His expression lightened.

"Well, that's different," he said. "I didn't know. To some people it would look strange your leaving there just about the time of the killing and not saying anything. Not to me, you understand. But there was only the three of you up there—you and Reggy Smith and Heath Dixon. You left, and didn't say nothing. Dixon, on the other hand, telephoned the story in to the *Express*. They say he's engaged to that there girl who's been gettin' ahead of us so often lately. You know who I mean, I reckon. I've heard things about you there, too.

"Anyway, the deceased is the governor's cousin, and the situation is that the governor has offered a five-thousand-dollar reward for the arrest and conviction. The *Express* telephoned him early this mornin'. That's how I happened to get it all; I've got a fellow in the governor's crowd, you know. Well, there was something about a pistol, with one chamber exploded, which you left behind. Nothin' in that, I suppose?"

"Well, hardly. There was a pistol, yes. I fired it once on the way from the camp to the train, fired it at a wild hog that was in my way, and I left it with the tunnel watchman when I got on the train, because it belonged to Reggy."

Gregory paused. His face tautened.

"That wild-hog business doesn't sound so convincing, does it?" he said.

"Tell me just what is supposed to have happened?"

"Reggy Smith is dead—he was shot. That's all we know. Heath Dixon telephoned the story to Nancy Kingsley early this morning. But I've already told you that. If they knew who done it, there wouldn't be a reward offered, that's sure; but the fellow who telephoned me from the capital said your name had been mixed up in it. I suppose that was just because you happened to leave there about the time it happened."

"When does the train leave?" asked Gregory.

"You've got just about time to pack and make it," Mr. Asbury responded. "I want to say again that if you'd feel better about it, there's no need of your going up there at all. If you are going, though, I want to impress the general situation on you. I believe I hinted at something like this before you went on your vacation. Remember I said you'd better take it while you could. Well, you——"

Mr. Asbury parted his mustaches and spat meditatively into the spittoon.

"The newspaper business had got pretty bad in this town. Reckon it's bad all over; but here it's poisonous. Well, I'm not betraying any confidence when I say that within a few weeks there aren't going to be two newspapers here any more. The *Record* and the *Express* are going to be consolidated."

He cleared his throat.

"There's going to be one staff, instead of two; and the new owners have got the idea of making the staff members partners in the business. They figure it would pay to give 'em an interest. Well, anyhow, lately the other gang have been putting it over on us in beats. We've got it on 'em in editorial quality and in general thoroughness, maybe.

"But what I'm driving at is, it's pretty well understood down at the

Bankers' Club that, so far as you are concerned, they're wavering between taking you on and taking on Nancy Kingsley. Some are agin' her because she's female, but the rest point out that it's through her most of the beats have been secured. What I'm driving at is, I reckon she'll be on this story. See? It's up to you."

"So long," said Gregory Harrison, who had been edging impatiently toward the door. "I'll send you a flash as soon as I get there. I've got to run."

And run he did. He snatched up his hat so fast that he left the society reporter and the switchboard girl staring after him more open-mouthed than ever. So great was his velocity, indeed, that he nearly knocked over a burly gentleman with a blue and heavy jaw whom he passed on the stairs.

Gregory didn't wait to apologize; and the man, after murmuring a few epithets which were remarkable more for obscenity than for originality, and after considering for a moment whether he should pursue the fleeing figure, brushed off his largely checked suit, continued up the stairs and into the *Mountain Record* offices. Here, to the indignation of the reception clerk, he strode noiselessly across the outer room and, without being announced, opened the door to Mr. B. J. Asbury's sacred sanctum, thrust in his head, and then went in by himself.

"Hello, Riggs," said Mr. Asbury. "First time you've been in to see me since—lemme see—it was the Reggy Smith affair, wasn't it? Two years ago. Well, what do you want to keep out of the paper this time?"

"Nothing at all, Mr. Asbury," answered the gentleman called Riggs. "You got a man here named Gregory Harrison, haven't you?" Mr. Riggs lowered his voice in asking this.

"Yep."

"Well, I want him. Telegram just come from the Sheriff of Wayne

County to hold him till the papers get here charging him with killing this young sport, Reggy Smith."

Mr. B. J. Asbury parted his mustaches, spat carefully, then emitted a lugubrious whistle.

"Hell!" said Mr. Asbury mournfully. "I like that boy, too."

Mr. Asbury took out a large nicked watch.

"You're too late, Riggs," he informed that worthy. "Your man is just pulling out of town. He's on his way up to Damron to report the Reggy Smith murder for the *Mountain Record*. If the sheriff wants him, all he's got to do is be a little patient, 'cause Gergory Harrison is going to be right up there with him in about four hours and eighteen minutes."

CHAPTER II.

A RIDE WITH NANCY KINGSLEY.

HARRISON made the distance from the newspaper offices to his boarding house in record time, flung some clothes into a suit case, and on the way out of the front door hailed a taxicab which dumped him at the railroad station with six minutes to spare. He bought a copy of the extra which had been issued by the *Express*, and while he stood in line at the ticket window glanced over the account which Heath Dixon had telephoned in from the mountains.

He could see that the office of the *Daily Express* had considerably expanded and decorated what no doubt had been a very meager communication. Across the page was flung a seven-column lead:

R. SMITH MURDERED.

The headings beneath it spoke of "mysterious circumstances," but of these circumstances no details were given except that Reggy Smith had been discovered sitting at a table in the shack

used as a home by him and Dixon; that he was dead when found, a single bullet having entered his head behind the right ear and come out just below the left cheek bone; and that the bullet causing his death had not as yet been found.

Following these definitely stated facts came a few paragraphs, in which, hedged about by an army of "alleges" and "it-is-reported-thats," was a suggestion that the companions of Reggy Smith immediately prior to his death had been Heath Dixon, "well known as a spectacular real-estate operator in Huntington, and who was in the mountains recuperating from an alleged impairment of health;" a negro cook, by the name of Joe, whom they had brought up from Huntington; and "Gregory Harrison, a newspaper man on a local paper."

This was followed by a write up, in brief, of the past history of the dead young man, who had been well known in Huntington and connected with some of the most wealthy and prominent families; and in another column, on the first page, was given the news of the governor's offer of five thousand dollars as a reward for the arrest and conviction of the killer, or for proof of his guilt if he were captured dead. The governor, as was well known, had made the good name of the State one of his campaigning features; he had engaged himself to stamp out the feud and other killings which took place so freely among the isolated mountaineers. And he was making the most of this conspicuous incident, no doubt, as the primaries in which he was entered for reelection were not so far away.

Gregory Harrison thrust the paper in his pocket, for further examination on the train, snatched up his Pullman and railroad tickets and dashed out to the platform just in time to catch the train.

The colored porter, with teeth as white as his coat, welcomed him with characteristic courtesy, took his bag

and led him through the narrow corridor to the chairs of the single Pullman car, which held only four passengers beside himself.

So preoccupied had Gregory Harrison been with haste and with the details of this almost unbelievable murder, that he was startled when he saw Nancy Kingsley seated midway along the row of chairs. He was startled in part by surprise; but in another way he was always startled when he saw her. The reason was that he kept his thoughts of her, as a rule, in a cloistered niche of his brain; he was with her a great deal of the time in this airless world of the imagination, and saw her very little in the flesh.

This no doubt explained his confusion when he sat down in the chair next to hers—for she had greeted him, and had expected him to join her. And his confusion increased when he saw that she had observed it. The truth is, she was observing it very seriously and pointedly, as if it were a significant phenomenon.

"You are going to Damron, I suppose," he stammered, wiping his flushed face with a handkerchief. "So am I. Poor Reggy!"

She looked out of the window without answering him. The fine line of her brows, upcurved as if traced with the downy tip of a black moth's wing, was straightened into the crease of a frown above the faint freckles on her piquant little nose. Her soft red lips, usually curving in mischief above the level rim of her sharp white teeth, were compressed now until a small dimple had been formed in the end of her chin.

"Yes, I am going to Damron," she finally replied, and turned her deep, brown eyes upon him.

The train had begun to move. The sunlight, filtering through the screen of passing trees, made her auburn hair first coppery red, then a chestnut brown, beneath the rim of small blue hat,

touched the oval of her peach-bloom cheek and the white pillar of her slender throat with little golden caresses. It was quite a moment before Gregory Harrison, rousing himself from the spell which her loveliness had always laid upon him, noticed the quality of her scrutiny.

She was looking at him with much the same expression with which his fellow workers in the office had greeted him when he had returned from his vacation and the scene of the murder. Like them, no doubt, she had heard that he had been mentioned in connection with the killing.

"Another scoop, I trust!" he said acidly. His clear skin flushed again, but this time it was in anger.

He was used to a feeling of anger against her. Even as youth and maid in the days of the local high school he had preserved toward her a ready antagonism, and she, recognizing it, had sought in revenge to give him a reason for it. Later, after both of their absences at colleges, the civilizing effect of added years, and the strangeness of association upon a new plane at the local dances and dinners, had glazed the surface of their relationship with a friendly courtesy. Even here, however, occasion had come up for the flaring out of his anger, and for her delicate retaliation. Her present affront, however, he felt was beyond the pale.

"Don't quarrel with me, Gregory," she was saying now. "Please don't!"

He was surprised at the glister of moisture upon her lower lid.

"I'm not quarreling with you," he responded, even more angrily, perhaps because he was somewhat ashamed of his heat.

She looked out of the window. He drew forth the copy of the *Daily Express*, opened it at the account of the Smith affair, and pretended that he was reading. As a matter of fact, however, he was watching out of the corner of

his eye as her slim white hands twisted a tiny linen handkerchief till it was about to tear. He had never encountered her before in this melting mood. It put him at a disadvantage, and made him, therefore, all the angrier. For justification, he recalled to his mind all of the things he had against her, and in particular the look with which she had greeted him.

"Gregory!" she exclaimed, and put her hand on his, forcing the newspaper down. "Don't! Please! I—I took this train, thinking you would be on it. Won't you stop quarreling with me? Won't you tell me everything about—about—up there?"

Her hand was still on his, but he knew if he thought about that he would be putty. He thought, instead, therefore, of her lack of gallantry. After all, they were rivals, not only for their position in the newspaper world, but for the five-thousand-dollar reward as well. Two men in such a case would work each upon his own; this woman was using the wiles of sex to take advantage of him.

"Yes," said Gregory grimly, and removed his hand. "I'll tell you everything about up there." It gave him a certain definite pleasure to do it. Here, unquestionably, she was in the wrong. He would tell her everything he knew, everything he could suspect. The more he told her, the more indubitably ignoble she would appear to him. The mere matter of their competitive status was small as compared with this. "What do you want to know first?"

"When did you leave there? When did you see Reggy last? Who was with him?"

The cynical pleasure with which he gave her of his knowledge should have warned him of what was going on within himself; but men do not stop to analyze their emotions until after they have been the victims of them. He was old enough to have known that a

man does not feel a ready passion of anger against a beautiful girl if he is entirely indifferent to her. Literature, if not life, should have informed him ere this that a man may perhaps escape from love by fleeing from it, but becomes only the more enmeshed by trying to strike it violently down. And this was what he was doing. Like the fox and the tar baby, every time he struck he became more deeply held.

"I caught the train back to Huntington at one o'clock in the morning," he told her. "I had left Reggy at the barroom in Damron. I had to go up to the shack to get my bag, and then had to walk for nearly an hour across the mountain to get to where the train would stop for me."

"You left him in the barroom by himself?"

"No. A fellow named Gay was with him, and Heath Dixon was there, too. Gay was the chap who had come down from New York to buy the land that the shack is on from Heath and Reggy. But I guess you know about that."

She nodded, and Gregory felt an accession to his store of bitterness.

Reggy Smith, an attractive young chap, but with a passion for drink, had left Huntington at the request of his family, who had agreed to support him in the simple outdoor life which he had chosen to live upon the mountain near Damron. He could enjoy there the shooting that he liked. There were wild turkeys in abundance; pheasants flew up with a tremendous noise from beside the dim mountain paths; and there were squirrels, possums, skunk, foxes, quail, deer—and even bear and mountain lion in the farther fastnesses—to be sought with rifle, shotgun, or trap; as the sportsman might prefer. There were trout in the streams; pike, eel and catfish in the river.

The family allowance was not much more than he needed for food and clothing, but when he had a surplus, a

there was the barroom at Damron—run openly by a native for the natives.

These things Nancy Kingsley already knew. In Huntington, in fact, she had tried to straighten Reggy up, but the only result had been to change his friendship into a stronger affection. Instead of reciprocating, however, Nancy, as a final effort to help him, had told him that unless he stopped drinking entirely he was never to see her again. For several months, as a result of this warning, he had behaved himself, and his family had been hopeful and happy. But it could not last, and the violent and outrageous incidents which accompanied the resultant spree had made the mountain retreat not only socially but legally advisable.

The thing that aroused Harrison's bitterness was of more recent occurrence. Heath Dixon, dark, vital and dashing, had come a spectacular cropper in ambitious real-estate promotions in Huntington the year before. His ego, as well as his inherited small fortune, had been tied up in his grandiloquent plan; and when the plan smashed, his nerves went too. At Reggy Smith's invitation—they had known each other since childhood—he had come up to Damron to recuperate. Recuperating, he had seen a great real-estate opportunity in the adjacent mountain land, which was being sold by the State, under a law intended to raise money for the schools, for as little as two dollars an acre.

A gambler's luck had been with him. After he had bought the land, a section adjoining had been drilled by wealthy New York interests and had shown traces of oil. In the boom which followed—and which was doomed to collapse—Heath Dixon had disposed of his holdings at a sum more than sufficient to recoup his fallen fortunes.

"I suppose," said Gregory, voicing his thoughts, "that you and Heath will be marrying now."

She had been staring broodingly out of the window. She turned to him and—at his impertinence, he concluded cheerfully—her face flushed in a duplication of the anger which he had experienced previously. Her dark eyes looked at him fixedly; but instead of rebuking him, she said:

"So you left him with Heath and with the buyer, Gay. You have no clues, then; no ideas? Was there no one else there with whom Reggy had quarreled?"

"You know Reggy Smith," retorted Gregory. "He quarreled with everybody when he was drunk. He quarreled with me: or at least, he told me he was sick of seeing me around, and he wished I'd go home. He and Heath had been playing cards earlier in the day. I heard him tell Heath that he was never going to play cards with him again because Heath was fundamentally the kind of fellow who would cheat. You know how Reggy Smith does when he's that way—lolls sidewise in his chair and shouts out at anybody the first thing that comes in his mind. That's the way he was. His red hair was all askew; he had a three-day growth of red beard; his clothes——"

"Did Heath resent his calling him a cheat?"

"Not a bit. All of us understand—understood him."

"And he didn't quarrel seriously with Gay, the buyer?"

"No."

"Then you have no idea as to who the——"

"Heath told me that Reggy had whipped the negro cook, Joe; and that he, Heath, didn't like the idea, because Joe, as he put it, was a bad one."

"That's absurd. I've known Joe all my life."

"Yes," Gregory reminded her, "but Joe came up to the mountains because of a cutting scrape."

"With another darky. An entirely

different thing. Wasn't there anything else that might give a clew?"

"To tell you the truth," replied Gregory frankly, "I have been having the sheriff in mind."

"The sheriff!"

"Yep. Those natives hang together, and never forget a grudge. Do you remember, a year ago, that Reggy was a witness in a criminal case in the Damron courthouse?"

"Yes. A man had beaten his wife so badly that she died. Reggy had seen something of it, and he gave the fellow a licking, and then testified against him."

"Exactly," agreed Gregory, running his fingers through his yellow hair while his clear skin grew pink with excitement. "And the fellow was the sheriff's first cousin. He got ten years. These people believe in blood ties—you know about their feuds—and they never forget."

"But that's been a year ago," Nancy countered.

"Yes, but the fellow escaped from prison and somehow made his way back to the hills. He has been seen in the woods. Reggy Smith saw him, and telegraphed the governor. And yesterday, when he was drinking, he cursed out the sheriff for not having apprehended him."

"And did the sheriff resent——"

"He started to knock Reggy down; but Reggy was drunk and couldn't defend himself, so I got in the way. It didn't amount to much; but I didn't like the look I got."

Nancy fell silent. Gregory became so occupied with his thoughts that it was with a start of surprise that he heard the brakeman calling:

"Damron! Damron! All off for Damron!"

"Look," said Gregory to Nancy. "There's the sheriff now!"

They leaned and peered together out of the window.

Just beyond the cindery platform, on the yellow clay of the dry-rutted road, stood a tall, lean, rawboned mountaineer. His faded corduroy trousers were thrust into the tops of laced boots that came up to his thin calf. He wore a black cloth coat, which was beginning to turn green with age; his crossed arms caused the lapels to bulge, and disclosed the butt of a revolver in a leather shoulder holster. He was chewing tobacco, with curious movements of his mournful mustaches, as he watched for passengers to descend from the train.

CHAPTER III.

BEFORE THE ARREST.

GREGORY followed the porter down to the cindery platform, helped Nancy Kingsley down from the step, and then turned to survey the scene which, since the tragedy, had begun to take on a different aspect.

As he turned, his eye met the sheriff's, and to Gregory's surprise the impassive mountaineer actually started, as if stirred at seeing him. Gregory nodded a greeting, but without returning it the sheriff strode toward him.

Behind the lanky approaching figure the hemlock, one-story building, which represented the post office and the crossroads store, stood bright in the sunshine at the foot of the green mountainside which sloped upward on the left. At the right the red clay road ran steeply down to follow the near edge of the yellow river which, full now from a recent rain up the mountain, ran dirty and turbulent between its high, rocky banks. Across the trestle which bridged the river at this point, but invisible behind a spur of the opposite hill, stood the two-story "hotel," which, in fact, was the saloon patronized by a twenty-mile radius of the mountain neighborhood.

"You come back to give up, eh?" demanded the sheriff. "Well, that's accommodatin' of you."

"Give up!" exclaimed Gregory. He had never understood these silent mountain people, with their undercurrents of strong emotion. For a moment he imagined that the sheriff had gone insane. Those two blue eyes in a network of crow's-feet were staring at him sanely enough. Shrewdly, in fact. There was nothing but homely strength in the tanned, aquiline nose, the blue, spade chin, and the mournful mustaches.

"I sent a warrant to Huntington for your arrest," the sheriff explained. "Didn't they serve it on you?"

"For me? Why, that's ridiculous!" said Gregory, his thin skin flushing. "Do you think I would be coming back here to report the case if I had committed the crime?"

"You mout," replied the sheriff, after chewing meditatively for a moment. "Shore you mout! Didn't you leave a gun with the tunnel watchman when you left on the train last night?"

"Yes, I did. But do you think I would have done that if I had shot anybody?"

"They was one cartridge had been fired out of it."

"I know it," replied Gregory Harrison. "I met a big wild hog on the way over to the train. He wouldn't let me pass on the trail. I fired once."

"So I reckon the hog is dead up there to prove it?"

"No, sheriff. I didn't try to kill him. Just to scare him."

"You think a jury would believe that?" asked the sheriff.

"But I had no reason for killing Reggy Smith!"

"Ain't a man on the mountain without a reason for killing Reggy Smith," replied the sheriff. "The bartender heard Smith callin' you some hard names, too."

"Listen, sheriff!" broke in Nancy.

The mountaineer tipped his heavy black felt hat, as an acknowledgment of Nancy's existence. His blue eyes ad-

mitted that so trim an apparition as this, in short skirt of dark blue, flesh-colored stockings, alligator-skin, high-heeled pumps, and tiny dark hat, was not encountered among the maidens of the mountainside.

"Mr. Harrison," Nancy went on, "has been sent up here by a big Huntington newspaper to hunt down the person who committed this crime. The governor of the State, as you know, is behind such an effort, and has offered a reward. For your own sake, I hope you are not going to make it seem that you are trying to arrest newspaper men and block an investigation."

The sheriff spat reflectively and wiped his spade chin.

"Tain't that, ma'am," he replied seriously. "I jes' don't want nobody to run away before this here thing is worked out. I been sheriff for nigh twenty years, and they ain't no killin' ever took place in my county without they bein' somebody tried for it. I don't aim to let this be no different."

"He isn't running away," said Nancy. "He's running back! Won't you leave him in my charge, sheriff—if I'll guarantee to keep him safe?"

"Well," agreed the sheriff, "I ain't got no fit jail for him, nohow, ma'am. I reckon I kin leave him loose till we git this here thing worked out a bit further."

"You got any idees 'bout what happened up thar on the hillside?" he asked of Gregory.

Gregory's strong jaw came together with a snap. His blue eyes stared fixedly at the sheriff from either side of his straight, narrow nose; his eyebrows were drawn together in a frown.

"I've got a very good idea," he replied.

"Who?" said the sheriff, meeting his gaze.

"I'd rather wait till I have more evidence," said Gregory, continuing his meaning stare.

It was the sheriff who first looked away.

"Well," he remarked, "I'm countin' on your bein' nigh, should I want you."

He stood a moment as if in thought and then turned and directed his long stride toward the path that ran up the mountain toward Reggy Smith's invisible shack.

"There's Heath Dixon," Nancy Kingsley exclaimed. She called to him: "Oh, Heath! Heath!"

The slender, dark man who just was coming out of the unpainted corner store started at seeing Nancy, much as the sheriff had been startled at recognizing Gregory Harrison. He hurried toward them, looking almost dapper in the neat black suit, black shoes, and a felt hat of oyster gray, the turn-down brim of which obscured all of his handsome face except his brown but softly molded chin and the twin peaks of the small, upcurled mustache of an intense black.

"Why, Nancy!" he cried in a vibrant emotional voice. "What are you doing in this place! You shouldn't be here; and you promised me that you would drop this newspaper reporting at once!"

"You know Gregory Harrison, of course," said Nancy, while Heath held her hand.

Heath Dixon turned his habitual wide, fixed look intently upon the tall blond newspaper man.

"Yes, indeed," he said. "Of course. Oh, I see, Gregory," he added with sudden warmth. "You have come up for your newspaper. I'd forgotten you were reporting. Well, I suppose you would like to see the shack and hear everything right away, so you can wire it back. I'll take you right up there now, both of you."

"I thought we might find out if there's a decent place for Nancy to stay, first," said Harrison. Then he added apologetically: "But I suppose you have arranged all that."

"No," said Heath Dixon, showing his brilliant, somewhat protruding teeth in a smile upon the girl. "She told me she was out of the game. I didn't expect her up here. Well, yes; we've got to find her a place, haven't we? Well, rather!"

"I'd rather go up to the shack first, and hear everything," said Nancy positively, nodding her little auburn head.

"All right. Follow me. I can tell you as we go along."

Gregory took up Nancy's bag, and his own, and followed Nancy and Dixon across the rutted clay of the road in front of the store, and up the narrow path worn between the weeds and boulders. As they mounted they could see below them the hurried waters of the stream debouching below the trestle into the wide and quiet flow of the yellow, willow-lined river. The path, up which they wended single file, became brown with pine needles as it reached the scattered evergreens which bordered the thicker woods above: a virgin forest, of hemlock, spruce and pine, with copses of birch and poplar in the more watery deep ravines.

The sheriff, who had gone up ahead of them, was lost to sight in the dense undergrowth, shadowed and gilded by the leveling rays of the sun, which now was near the silhouetted edge of the mountains beyond the slow river. Gregory's thoughts drifted to the escaped convict. A man could hide very easily in these mountains, and in the summer live upon fruits and roots and berries; but this man, a member of the sheriff's clan, no doubt received plenty of food—probably ammunition, too, with which to kill game.

He was startled out of his thoughts by a remark from Dixon.

"There's Joe. Hey, Joe! Come here!"

Joe, the colored cook and handy man for the shack, rose from where he had been sitting in a small clearing up the

hill and began climbing down toward them. Even at this distance of a hundred feet or so, Gregory could detect something strange about the fellow's demeanor. He was a short darky, perhaps thirty years of age; very black, with a low forehead and a black, nappy head which ran lumpily back to a sort of egglike peak above the back of his powerful neck. His shoulders were tremendously wide, extending into muscular arms and wide hands with pale palms which hung below his knees. He wore a gray flannel shirt, torn off at the arms below the elbows; dark trousers, ragged at the bottom; and no shoes.

There was a lack of the negro's usual physical ease and alacrity as he came sidewise down the steep hillside slippery with hemlock needles and thin dry grass. And when he came nearer, and turned his face toward them, Gregory was surprised to see the great change which had come over him since yesterday—which now seemed so far away—when he had cooked breakfast and mid-day dinner for himself, Dixon and Reggy. Yesterday the boy had been the picture of happiness and cheerfully affectionate servitude. To-day his face was actually a mottled gray, instead of black; it was thinner, and his eyes peered secretively in oblique, uneasy glances.

"Joe is scared about something," remarked Nancy to Gregory, in a low voice. "He's scared to death!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE ARREST.

GREGORY had to admit to himself that the negro's obvious fear transmitted some of itself to him. The shadows were long in the forest. Just beyond the rocky summit of the path, and down a grassy incline to a level terrace, stood the wooden shack of two rooms where the red-headed, carefree Reggy Smith had been shot in the head from

behind. Joe, the negro, after his salutation to Nancy and Harrison—a grin essayed with frozen lips and a roving of the white eyeballs in his black face—took the two bags and, keeping close beside Harrison, accompanied the cavalcade as they continued once more on their way to the scene of the murder.

"Leave the bags outside," said Heath Dixon, turning his stare on Joe. Dixon was nervously twirling his mustache, using both hands in the process; and it seemed to Gregory that the hands were a bit unsteady, as if Dixon, too, had become possessed by the prevailing air of foreboding. Only Nancy was calm. Her piquant countenance was somewhat pale, as was natural under the circumstances; but her expression, Gregory noticed, showed nothing but alert resolution.

"Of course," Gregory was thinking as they crossed the burned grass of the clearing about the shack, and Heath Dixon threw open the door, "it is natural that Dixon and I should be nervous, if the sheriff, or his cousin, have done this thing. The sheriff will find it necessary to make somebody the goat. Dixon and myself were hereabouts at the time; it can be proved that we quarreled with Smith, or at least that he said things to us which we should have been justified in resenting. These mountaineer juries have little mercy on 'furriners.'

"But I don't understand Joe's terror. He would hardly figure out what I have just been figuring out. He would naturally have some superstitious fear about the fact that in this place his employer was recently lying dead. But there is more to his terror than that. He has something real to be afraid of. I must get him alone as soon as possible and pump him dry."

Unconsciously walking close together for comfort, the three whites entered the unpainted hemlock shack, while Joe minded the bags by the door, outside.

"He was sitting at that table," said Dixon in a low voice, indicating the deal table, which held an oil lamp with a white shade, an inkwell with pens and pencils, a row of books held upright by brass book ends, and an untidy assortment of sporting magazines and newspapers, with a scattering of shotgun shells, "he was sitting at that table with his back to the door. The shot came from the door, here, behind him. He never had a chance."

They stood and looked about them, Gregory seeing the interior of the place, where he had been a guest, with new eyes. In the middle of the wall opposite the entrance rose a large fireplace and chimney of field stone, above which, on a rack of deer antlers, hung a polished repeating rifle. Two windows, filtering the rosy sunlight through their panes of dirty glass, stood on either side of the chimney, and in three corners of the room, covered with deerskin and pillows, the three beds, or cots, were just as they had been made up the morning before. The splintery, unplanned boards of the wall had been covered, two thirds round the room, with newspaper, over which, vertically along the cracks, had been nailed splintery, wooden lath. A sideboard of cheap manufacture, loaded with decanters and glasses, a few comfortable chairs, and a talking machine in the corner, with a stand for records, completed the furniture of the living room.

Through the open door they could see a section of the kitchen—a shelf of dishes, a table supporting a bag of flour, a wooden mixing bowl and a round box of salt; and an edge of the cast-iron wood-burning cookstove, greasy and black.

"Tell me, Heath," said Gregory, "exactly what happened. You will remember that I left you and Reggy and that buyer, Gay, at the barroom across the creek."

"Yes," agreed Heath, in a subdued

tone, "and you will recall that I was saying something about going up to bait that trap on the ridge. Well, I went, shortly after you left; and I told Joe to keep an eye on Reggy. Gay was going to take the eastbound train; and Reggy was to come home alone, except for Joe. Joe says that when they got halfway to the shack, Reggy sent him back to get two quarts of a special kind of whisky. He went back, found the barroom locked up, he says, and when he came on over and up to the shack he found Reggy sitting in that chair."

"What was your experience?" asked Nancy in a whisper.

"I left the barroom and went up to the trap. It was a beautiful moonlight night."

"Yes," agreed Gregory, "the moon came up just as I was getting on the train."

"I put some meat in the trap—we were after that old brown fox, you know, Gregory—and after enjoying the beauty of the view for a while, I came down the mountain."

"Have you told the sheriff all this?" asked Harrison.

"Yes," said Dixon, "exactly what I am telling you."

"Well, when did you get down to the shack?" whispered Nancy, who was standing with her alligator-skin hand bag hugged close to her breast, as if she were cold.

Heath Dixon twirled the mustaches, which looked blacker than ever beside the lightened color of his handsome dark face. The wide, fixed stare of his brown eyes, with its plenitude of white around the iris, was like the look of a nervous race horse.

From without the room came the sound of a movement in the grasses. Heath Dixon moistened his lips, and swallowed.

"When I came down to the shack," he said in a voice scarcely audible, "Joe was just running out of the door. He

seemed frightened. Couldn't talk at first. I brought him back here. There was—Reggy."

"Joe had come in and found him," murmured Nancy. "Did you hear the shot, Heath?"

"I heard two shots," said Heath Dixon. "One, however, was along the trail toward the railroad."

"That was me," stated Harrison.

"The other was—down here."

"Heath, do you think it could have been——" Gregory hesitated.

Heath Dixon lifted his black brows; his mouth formed the whispered, inaudible question:

"Joe?"

"No," murmured Gregory. "I mean"—and he whispered—"the sheriff, or his cousin?"

Dixon shrugged thoughtfully.

"Let's talk to Joe," said Nancy.

"Joe! Joe!"

There was no answer.

"Joe!" the three of them called in unison.

Still there was no answer. The little house resounded still from their shouts, while from without rose only the shrilling of crickets and katydids, the tiny *cheep-cheep* of some small bird, and the *chirring* of locusts.

Gregory hurried to the door. The others followed. The trail in either direction was empty. The two suit cases stood beside the path. There was no Joe.

Their attention was attracted by the cracking of a twig above them. Down the steep slope of the sun-warmed mountain, their figures gilded by the last beams of the sun, came two men. One seemed to be leading the other, and they saw that this man was the gaunt and saturnine sheriff. The light glinted on a bracelet of steel which affixed his wrist to that of the man behind. They emerged clear of the intervening trees, and it could be seen that the captive man was Joe, the cook, whose ebony

face was now a mottled gray and whose eyes were whiter and more protruding than ever.

CHAPTER V.

THE MISSING KEYS.

HEATH went up the hill a few feet to meet them.

"I'm sorry about this, Joe," he said. "Sheriff, if you want to, you can put him in the tool house for the new engineering camp. I remember you told me you didn't have any proper jail. You can sleep with us at the camp, if you want to. The engineer, a friend of Reggy Smith's, left me the keys while they are all away."

The sheriff nodded and led the way down the hillside along an almost invisible path that found its winding way around hillock and weather-worn gray boulder. Gregory, bringing the bags, followed Nancy and Dixon. They came, in the afterglow, to the freshly built camp of the engineers who were to superintend the building of the railroad tunnel. It was a one-story, tarpaper-covered, hemlock shack; divided into four fairly large rooms, in three of which were cots; while the fourth had a desk and chairs, and was used as a living room and office.

Heath Dixon got the keys from behind the front door, which stood open upon the living room, unlocked the new tool house, brought blankets and a pillow from the shack. The sheriff, removing the handcuffs, put the gray-mottled darky inside. He then said that he was going up to the corner store to telephone, and probably would sleep with Jim Damron, the storekeeper.

"You got the keys there," he said to Dixon. "You can git in to give him some supper, and some breakfast in the mornin'. Reckon I'll be round after that. If you go away, reckon I can git the keys from behind the door thar, cain't I?"

Nancy, Gregory and Dixon went to-

gether shortly up to the corner store, where Dixon bought provisions; while Nancy and Gregory, in turn, crossed the tracks to the little shack of the railroad telegrapher beyond the trestle and sent off telegrams. Then they returned, bearing eggs, coffee, bread, some faintly rancid butter, canned tomatoes, and canned peaches.

Nancy cooked supper, a generous portion of which they took out to the prisoner in the tool house—a windowless, sturdy shack of newly sawn hemlock, taller than a man and about eight feet square. The door, fifty feet from the living room, faced toward the dark shoulders of the silent mountain.

“Poor Joe!” said Nancy, when they were gathered round the fire of cedar twigs they had lighted in the living room’s tin stove.

“Well, I’m not kicking,” retorted Heath, showing his teeth and fixing the wide stare of his dark eyes first upon one and then the other. “I tell you frankly, I’ve been nervous. Gregory had a right to be nervous, too.”

“Why should you have been nervous?” asked Nancy, brushing back a coppery lock of the bobbed hair which curled over her shapely head. “I don’t see that.”

“My Lord!” cried Dixon. “Didn’t they even have a warrant out for Gregory? And everybody knew Reggy and I were sort of on the outs that day. We’d been gambling, you know; and you know how nasty Reggy is—was when he was drinking. For a couple of days—you heard him, Gregory!—he’d been drinking and blaming me because I had bought out his interest in this land around here just before the boom came. Hang it! he didn’t have to sell, did he? Of course the money would have meant a lot to him, broke as he was. But how about me? I didn’t have any parents to support me, and I was broke, too.”

“But Joe had no motive for killing him,” Nancy said.

“Oh, yes!” Dixon objected. “Didn’t I tell you? Gregory knew about it. Joe went out Sunday—good Lord! it was only yesterday!—to see if he could get some quail for supper, and he let a couple of shot hit Reggy’s Irish setter. Killed the poor dog. Reggy, of course, was raving. He beat Joe with a ramrod, and made him “come to heel” when we went over to the barroom. Over there, he would make Joe catch things in his mouth, “give a paw,” and all that—said Joe had to take the setter’s place. Joe was scared to object—*then*. There were too many of us, and Reggy carried a gun.”

“Good heavens!” Nancy moaned, covering her face with her hands. “If I hear any more of this to-night, I’ll go crazy. I think the best thing is for us all to go to bed.”

“I’m willing,” agreed Gregory. “I slept mighty little last night. To-morrow, we’ll be able to see this thing clearer.”

But after the lights were out and Gregory was in bed he could not sleep. The frightened, mottled face of Joe, the negro cook, as he had first seen him, before the arrest, kept rising before his eyes. Joe knew something. Or Joe was guilty. Either way, an interview with him would be important. He would hesitate to interview him privately if the sheriff knew it; the sheriff would be scenting a conspiracy to defeat justice, and might even arrest the three of them. But now was different. If Joe had anything important to say, it would be a big scoop, too, for the *Mountain Record*.

Gregory fell asleep while waiting for the others in the house to sleep. He awoke with a start, dressed hurriedly in the dark, and carrying his shoes in his hand, crept into the living room where the moon made bright the hook behind the door.

The bunch of keys was gone. The door to Nancy’s room, which she had

said she was going to leave open because she was afraid to sleep with it closing her away from the rest of them, was shut. Gregory tiptoed back into his own room and peered through the door that stood open into the room that Heath Dixon occupied. Heath lay on his back, his mouth open, and snored lightly.

Nancy, apparently, had beaten him to it. She never missed a trick, he thought—half in irritation, half in admiration—as he lay drowsily upon his bed again, without undressing.

He had slept less than four hours the night before, on the train to Huntington. Scarcely, now, had he lain down again than he was slumbering; and when he woke, as before, with a start, the milky light of dawn was diluting the shadows in the room's dim corners.

Harrison observed sleepily, as he crept out of his bedroom, that the door into Dixon's room, which had been open, now was closed; and the door to Nancy Kingsley's room, when he went softly through the living room, was open now, whereas before it had been shut. He wasn't sure whether he had been dreaming the first time he got up, it all seemed so peculiar to his drowsy senses in the unreal light of morning.

He stopped outside the door and put on his shoes, as the grass leaning over the path was drenched with dew. When he rose, he was surprised to find a ray of sunlight softly turning the dew-drops to diamonds; the seeming sense of dawn had come from the clouds around the mountain, and the sun, up half an hour, was breaking through.

It was later than he had thought. With the keys held tight, so they would not jingle, he hurried through the fresh morning air toward the tool house, shining bright and new in the diffused rays. He cut across the wet grass, to save time, and fairly ran around the corner of the little building. Then he stopped short,

The tool-house door hung open. The tool house was empty. Gregory turned and stared up the mountain. He could see nothing except, across the silvery dew on the grass, a darker trail mounting from the doorstep of the tool house steadily upward. Some one had gone up that way, and was bearing off toward the ravine.

He wheeled back to examine the lock. It was intact. But the hasp, which ran from the locked padlock, had been pulled free of the soft wood; the staple which had held it had been bent straight, either by Joe inside the tool house or by the force which had pulled it through the board.

Anyhow, Joe was free, which didn't help solve the murder.

After standing a moment, trying to puzzle out what had happened—for it seemed improbable that Joe could have forced this heavy staple from the inside—Gregory turned to go back to the house; but he felt, of a sudden, a heavy hand clapped on his shoulder.

"Looks to me," remarked the sheriff, his small blue eyes glinting angrily in the sun against the crow's-feet in his leathery cheek bones, "that I got here in time to git one of 'em, anyway!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHERIFF'S COUSIN.

TAKE your hand off my shoulder!" demanded Gregory angrily.

They stood there facing each other. The sheriff had removed his hand from Harrison's broad shoulder to the gun inside his own coat. Both were angry now. Harrison's straight nose and thin-skinned cheeks had flushed red. The early sun, in contrast, brightened the gold of his eyebrows, the stiff sprays of his hair. The sheriff's aquiline, leathery face, however, showed no change, except that the mournful black mustaches, usually moving with his chewing, now were still, and the crow's-

feet about his blue eyes were not deep and crinkly.

"I'm sick of this damned persecution by you!" snapped Harrison. "I came out here to see if I could interview Joe. I found that he was gone. You can see that the lock is still locked. Why should I let him out? It is more likely that you let him out yourself and are trying to put it on me. You had plenty of reason for disliking Reggy Smith. Not only that—there is a cousin of yours, an enemy of Reggy's, loose in these mountains. For all I know, you may be trying to lay this business onto one of us fellows from Huntington just to keep it from falling on somebody who belongs around here."

"I reckon you've said 'bout enough!" said the sheriff.

"I haven't said half enough!" shouted Gregory, who had talked himself into a state of righteous indignation. "How do I know you didn't let Joe loose? You may be wanting him to escape, so it will seem he committed this murder; while you will be saved the job of trying to convict him in court when he is innocent."

"I told you you've said enough!"

The sheriff's blue-steel gun appeared as if by magic, leveled at Gregory's stomach. His leathery skin had turned a dull red and his small blue eyes were two points of light.

"I'm a Hadfield," said the sheriff in an icy voice. "No man can talk to me like that and still draw breath. You say I'm crooked. You take that back, or I'll kill you *now*."

From toward the house a voice broke the moment of tense stillness.

"Wait a minute, sheriff! Hold on!"

The sheriff stepped back till his gun was out of range of Gregory's grasp, and glanced toward the house. Gregory, too, looked around. The person who had shouted was Heath Dixon; he was hurrying toward them, pulling on his shirt as he came. Evidently the

angry voices had roused the sleepers in the camp, for ahead of Dixon, running toward the two angry men, flew Nancy Kingsley. Her coppery bobbed curls were like a train of sparks in the sun. Her face was a lovely oval spot of pallor above the dark blue of her dress—and she was fully dressed. From the high-heeled black slippers, light stockings and dark skirt, to the chased silver necklace round her throat and the sheen of her copper hair, she was ready to meet the world—though it wasn't till later that Gregory remembered this.

"You heard me," said Sheriff Hadfield, making a menacing movement of his elbow and ignoring the attempted interruption. "I'll give you three. One. Two. Th——"

Something struck Gregory Harrison in the breast, staggering him backward—something soft and fragrant. He recovered, and tried to push her aside, for it was Nancy.

"No, damn him!" said Gregory. "Let him shoot. I haven't got a gun. Let him commit murder, if he wants to. This time we'll have the goods on him. There is such a thing as law. Move aside, Nancy!"

But she clung to him, a shield.

"No, Gregory!" she panted. And he felt, even in his excitement, that it would be sweet to die if it brought her thus close to him. "Don't be silly!" she cried. "Listen to me!"

It was Heath Dixon, however, who really furnished the diversion.

"Wait, sheriff," he said placatingly. "I've heard all of this. Harrison is all right; he's just upset because he's been threatened with arrest for something he didn't do. And I don't blame him; I feel the same way about it. He hasn't got anything against you.

"Now, you look here. Here is a sporting proposition; and as you are bent on bringing the criminal to justice, you will take us up on it. You must think Joe did the killing, or you

wouldn't have arrested him. Now, we'll show you that we are on the right side of the fence. Harrison and I will go and get Joe for you. Won't we, Harrison? We'll bring him back, dead or alive. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

The sheriff stood there with eyes narrowed beneath the brim of his black felt hat, looking from one to the other, his square, thin shoulders rising and falling in the black coat.

"I'll do that," said Gregory, speaking over Nancy's coppery head. "That's what I came up here for. Justice!"

The sheriff's teeth clicked together behind the black down-turned mustaches. He put up the gun, nodded his head, and turned without a word, to climb rapidly up the mountain.

Heath ran back to the camp, returned with two revolvers, handing one to Gregory, who, shaken more by the interest Nancy had shown in him than by the sheriff's threats, was standing staring at the ground.

"Come on!" cried Dixon, starting up the slope. "We can't lose any time if we're going to catch him!"

"Send a flash to my paper, will you?" asked Gregory of Nancy Kingsley. "Hate to bother you, but you're going up to the telegraph place, anyhow. Just say Joe escaped and is being pursued, and sign my name. Don't do it if you think it's unfair of me to ask you."

"Don't be silly!" Her brown eyes were looking at him curiously, her cheeks were flushed from the running. "And, Gregory, *do* be careful! Don't get in the way of any shooting."

"I'll try not to!" Gregory said, and was off up the hill.

He began to wonder who had released Joe. If Nancy had done it, it might have been because she would figure that the men, including Gregory, would naturally chase him, and this would leave her free to pursue the trail of any other clues that might develop. She was the best newspaper woman he had ever

heard of; she never missed a trick. Ordinarily he would have resented this success of hers. This morning, climbing upward through the dewy grass, slapped at refreshingly by dewy branches, he didn't mind at all. He wanted her to be successful, even at his expense.

"I'm a fool, all right," he thought. "Going off man hunting with her fiancé, while she takes my job away. Well, it isn't a bad feeling—to be a fool."

Heath was leading the way so fast that Gregory, even though longer of leg, had a hard time keeping up with him. Heath seemed suddenly to have been possessed with the energy of ten men. He leaped from rock to rock up the damp course of the ravine until, surprisingly soon, they had left the cleared foot of the mountain and had risen to where the rocks in the gully were mossy, the way bestrewn with rotting, mossy tree trunks which crunched squeakingly under the mounting foot, and the sides of the gully a mass of greenery. There were ferns as tall as a child; silver birches with their ragged bark and slender bodies; stately elms, sturdy water oaks along the edges of the bank; while the course ahead of them was like an enormous green V, along the bottom of which they crawled like ants.

They had caught up easily with the sheriff. Heath thereafter took the lead, seeming tireless in a sort of frenzy. They had been walking for some little while silently along the moss-covered rocks beside a clearer space in the ravine, when Heath, now twenty feet ahead, stopped suddenly, staring with mouth open up a drain that departed from the main ravine to rise along a course of its own toward the right. As Harrison and Sheriff Hadfield approached, Heath motioned for silence and pointed.

At a point of rock, in a bend of the leafy drain, a creature sat. His bare foot was crossed over his knee and he

was endeavoring to pick something out of its heel. In some ways he was like a man. The sharp bones of his shoulders stuck through the tattered, dirty rags of what once had been a pale blue shirt. The tattered trousers, caked with drying mire, sheltered legs no thicker than a bone, while the matted, rat-colored hair hung down around his neck.

The sheriff cursed beneath his breath, as his foot slipped and his crash made a panic of sound in the silence.

For a fleeting second the watchers caught sight of the white cheek bones, the sunken eyes staring startled at them over a thicket of scrawny, rat-colored beard. Then, faster than a deer, as fast as a humming bird, it seemed, and as noiselessly, the creature darted into the leaves and vanished. Nor was there a sound by which could be traced the course of his flight.

"There's another one!" remarked the sheriff as he climbed to his feet. "I'll go up this drain, boys. The big gully makes a bend to the right just above here, and this here drain'll let me cut 'em off. You-all wait right here, and keep still, for ten minutes or more, give me a chance to git ahead and turn 'em back into you."

The sheriff crept rapidly up the drain and vanished round the corner which had concealed the fleeing travesty of a man.

"That was his cousin," Heath whispered.

"I wonder," Gregory whispered in answer, "if the sheriff fell just now on purpose, to give him warning!"

CHAPTER VII.

A CAPTURE.

THE more Gregory Harrison thought of it, the more it seemed to him that Sheriff Hadfield—either because he himself was involved in Reggy Smith's death, or because he knew or suspected

his cousin to be guilty—was interested in letting the cousin escape, and in using Joe, the colored cook, as a scapegoat. Failing Joe, he seemed willing to use Dixon or Harrison: any victim except his blood relation.

The sighting of the cousin seemed to have had a profound effect upon Heath Dixon. His naturally dark complexion grew sallow, making his pointed mustache and his eyebrows seem intensely black. He gnawed on a thumb nail as he stood waiting, his dark eyes, wide and fixed, staring at nothing.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "You're right. He did fall on purpose. I tell you, we've got to catch Joe!"

He started up the gully at a furious pace, then stopped and retraced his steps to Harrison.

"Joe," he said, "is armed!"

"Armed!" Harrison ejaculated in a low voice.

"When I went back to get the guns, I found one of them missing, and I noticed a bare footprint wet on the doorstep. We've got to be careful. I tell you, we've got to shoot first."

"Joe wouldn't shoot us," said Gregory.

"Hah! Would you shoot me if it meant your life to be caught? You bet your life you would. Come on! Come on!"

Once more he started off, and Gregory was hard put to it to keep close behind him. The going got worse as they proceeded; the boulders larger, the moss deeper and hence more treacherous, the water deeper between the rocks, and more dead logs across the way. But it was better going than on either side; for in this sheltered ravine the laurel, or rhododendron, grew so thick on the hillside that a man could make no progress at all through its dense interlacing of wiry branches. To look up at it one could see nothing except the plain of waxy, deep-green leaves supported by the veined, grayish bush branches.

They sighted Joe the first time in this jungle of leaves and rocks which made up the gully. It was only a glimpse: the nap of a black head, the faint gleam of the upper curve of his ear above the lush crocodile-green of a mildewed and rotting log.

Whether he had seen them; they could not tell. But, despite the terrific pace which Heath immediately put into effect, they did not come up close enough to sight the darky until the underbrush had begun to clear. A slip in the mountainside, happening generations ago, had disturbed the V-like chute of the watercourse. Gregory and Heath, moving cautiously now on account of the increased visibility, came into the patches of sunlight which lit up a small plateau.

It was drier here. Scraggy cedars gripped the rocks with unyielding claws. Dwarf pines obscured, on the right, all except glimpses of the river, which seemed now so far beneath them in the valley. Straight ahead the watercourse continued over a fairly level space dotted with smooth-worn boulders.

It was from behind one of these boulders, as if he might have been stooping to drink, that they saw appear the black face and the white eyeballs of the hunted man.

He saw them. For a split second he was motionless. Then, without a sound, he leaped forward, toward the gully's bend. Before he had gone twenty feet, Dixon's gun thundered.

The darky dropped out of sight behind a stone. The next moment, ten feet nearer the curve, his head appeared, the white teeth gleaming against his blackness in the effort of breathing. At the same instant his gun spoke—once—twice.

Dixon and Gregory dropped behind a sheltering shelf of slate. As they went down they saw the negro's gray flannel shirt disappearing around the bend in the ravine.

"I told you!" Dixon gasped. His

countenance was a mottled yellow; but apparently not with fear, for he rose to the pursuit. "You follow him straight up the ravine," Dixon whispered. "Don't expose yourself; there are plenty of rocks; but we want to keep him from turning back—the country is more open up above. I'll scale up this cliff here on the left. Then I can see him and shoot down on him. And I'd better beat him to it!"

He darted up the side of the precipitous bank, sending down a shower of dirt and little rocks. Harrison waited to see if he was safely up to the crest. He reached it, and after turning, with staring dark eyes, to wave his hand, began creeping through the stunted pines toward the upland.

As Harrison emerged from behind his shelter and began cautiously working his way up the rocky gully, his active mind for a fleeting instant contemplated the tremendous power of habit. For Heath, as he crept nervously forward on the man hunt—a matter of life and death—had been instinctively twisting the end of his small mustache!

The gully bent again, this time to the right, after Harrison reached the curve which had hidden Joe; and the colored man was nowhere to be seen. It was possible, of course, that he had crouched down in the middle of the watercourse, making an ambush out of one of the many boulders which dotted the ground. Harrison therefore had to move with caution, keeping his own body hidden, or ready to be hidden; and his progress was slow.

It would be stupid, he reasoned with himself, to rush forward and get himself killed. He was willing, if necessary, to give his life in some good cause. But it was possible that Joe was an innocent man, yet so frightened by the fate which seemed about to overtake him, that he would shoot to kill.

So slow was Gregory's progress that he began to think of some other way

of advance. The downhill side of the ravine, opposite the cliff, whose rising here had turned the slope of the mountain sidewise, seemed to be fairly free of laurel. As the ravine was curving to the right, it seemed reasonable to suppose that he would save time by making a short cut across the spur of land.

He crossed the bed of the stream, stepping from smooth rock to rock above the shallow trickle of rapid water, and climbed up the crumbling bank. So friable was the earth that the first footstep loosened the dirt for the second one; and although he clung to the roots of a birch as he was climbing, and got finally up till he could mount upon the roots themselves, his endeavors sent a dry rock falling upon the rocky bed of the ravine. The clatter, to Harrison, was so loud, so penetrating, that he imagined it could have been heard down in the river bottom, where Nancy, it was to be presumed, was rooting out the real history of the causes leading to the recent murder.

Harrison cursed himself for having quarreled with the sheriff, or for having come at all on this man hunt. Birds flitted with rustling noises as he made his way into the shrubbery, and each rustle sounded like a threat on his life. A squirrel took the trouble to run head foremost down the trunk of a tulip poplar and stand ten feet from his cautious advance to upbraid him severely. A pheasant rose out of the bush with a noise like an express train, and left Harrison's nerves in a state of collapse.

After all, he reminded himself, he was supported by no moral idea. A man can fight for his home, his loved ones, his country, his personal possessions, or for his rights, and be happy in the battle. It is something else to invite a bullet to plow itself through your vitals when you are pursuing a man whom you half believe should be free.

Harrison wasn't a coward; but he

was out of breath, leg-weary, and disgusted. His nerves were on edge. His advance through the shrubbery, he discovered, was necessarily far from silent. The leaves rustled; and unless he took the time to ease the branches back into place, they would fly back with a noisy swish. He saw that he would have to make his way back to the ravine again; and he turned his course in that direction with fresh unwillingness, for he was sure that—unless Joe had raced far ahead up the rocky channel—the noises he himself had been making would certainly have given away to the fugitive exactly where he was.

There was nothing else to be done, however; so he made his way as quietly as he could back toward the gully. Reaching the edge of the bank at last, he peered cautiously up and down the stream, but could see no traces of Joe; nor could he see any signs of Heath on top of the cliff edge, which for quite a distance hung over the watercourse.

So he started to climb down. This was not easy. The bank was perhaps ten feet high, and the freshets—rising above the bank's edge and leaving, as proof of their prowess, a line of dead leaves hung adroitly in the tree branches—had eaten away the earth beneath the bank edge so that a descent was precipitous. There was no way of getting down except by means of the roots of an old birch; and, with a gun in one hand, this was not easy, either, while you kept your attention fixed intensely everywhere except upon the birch roots.

Gregory's preoccupation with looking for Joe, no doubt, caused his slip. The foot which he had lowered to the second incurving birch root had seemed to be supported; but when he rested his weight upon it, the root gave way.

He caught himself by his hands; but in doing so he knocked the slippery rubber grip of the revolver from his grasp. It took a moment or so to find a new purchase for his foot; and when he did,

and turned to look down, he could see the gun easily enough, under a couple of inches of clear mountain water between the purplish points of two immersed rocks.

Harrison was lowering himself down to the river bed when a slight sound, on his side of the bank and upstream, attracted his attention. He turned his head. And then, without moving, he hung there with his arms grasping the birch trunk and his feet feeling for a purchase below.

Joe, the colored cook, was coming out of the leafy covert of the bank. Tiny lines of red were traced across his black, perspiring skin, where thorns had scratched him. His eyeballs seemed to have grown in size, and his black face to have shrunken, while lines of fatigue and desperation made shadows about his thick-lipped mouth and flattened nostrils. In his right hand he held a revolver, and his left arm held the leaves back while he watched the tall blond newspaper man hanging there, helpless, his gun in the water.

Joe did not shoot. Instead, to Gregory Harrison's surprise, he made a motion for silence, at the same time indicating to the white man that he should descend to the river bed and come silently over to join him in the covert.

There was nothing else to do. So Gregory let himself down, then crept across the rocks and climbed up the lower bank. Joe let the bushes fall around them as Harrison climbed into the hiding place. Then, his white eyeballs turned toward the cliff edge opposite, he gasped:

"I got to tell you! I got to tell you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT JOE HAD SEEN.

"TELL me what?" demanded Gregory.

The whole business of this mysterious murder had been so without reason, his own nerves had been so both-

ered, that for a moment, seeing the negro change so abruptly from a hunted, fighting man into a whispering confidant made him tempted to doubt the colored man's reason. Particularly as Joe's appearance had changed so. He was no longer a mottled gray. Meeting with real, instead of indefinite fears, had sobered his panic. He was in fear of his life now—that could be seen from the way in which he kept an alert eye and ear upon the opposite cliff. But he was not terrified any longer.

"What do you want to tell me?" Gregory whispered again.

"Watch him!" said the darky. "Watch him close. He'll want us both now, Mr. Gregory, sho's you're a foot high!"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Gregory in irritation. "Who will want us? You mean the sheriff's cousin? Or the sheriff?"

Without answer, Joe turned and scanned carefully the opposite bank, crawling forward on his hands and knees to the edge of the leaves, so as to be able to see up and down the river bed. Then he crawled back and turned to face the newspaper man. The sun, now well up in the sky, laid a pattern of gold upon the colored man's black skin, brightened the tip of his tongue as he moistened his thick, dry lips.

"Mr. Gregory," Joe whispered huskily, "you 'member, when you was leavin' de barroom, dat Mr. Dixon he 'lowed as how he was goin' up de hill to bait dat fox trap of hisn?"

Gregory nodded.

"Yas, suh!" Joe continued. "Dat's what he 'lowed as how he was goin' to do, didn't he? Well, Mr. Gregory, dat trap ain't never been baited yet!"

"Well, what of it?" snapped Gregory.

The darky swallowed, so dryly that he made a sound. He was counting for much from what he had to say; that was obvious. His difficulty with saying it clearly, his fear that he might not be

believed. apparently weighed heavily on him.

"Mr. Gregory," he burst out, "you an' Miss Nancy been knowin' me all my life. You ain't never heerd of me doin' nobody no wrong. I done got in a cuttin' scrape down in Huntin'ton; but dat's 'cause a yaller-skin took my gal. Ain't I always cook good for Mr. Reggy, since I been in de mountains? Ain't I always done what he say, never mind how much dis here white lightnin' he been drinkin'? You ever heerd him say Joe ever stole nothin' off of him?"

"No," said Gregory. "You were all right."

"Dar now! You see! Well, Mr. Gregory, you lissen to what I goin' tell you now."

Once more, with irritating slowness and care, he crawled off to look up and down the ravine and to examine the opposite cliff. Once more he crawled slowly back and licked his lips.

"After you left de barroom to go back to camp an' git your things, Mr. Gregory, an' make your way over to de train—yas, suh! jes' a short time after dat, Mr. Heath Dixon, de man what's up on dat cliff dar, tryin' to kill me wid a gun—yas, suh! dat gen'leman, he said as how he was gwine up to bait de fox trap, an' he walk out into de night. 'Twan't no moonlight, like he say, neither; dat didn't come up till later, Mr. Gregory. But he didn't go to no trap, 'cause I went up an' looked, an' dat trap ain't never been baited."

"Well, where did he go?"

"Lissen while I tell you. I don't know where he go, but I knows dat pretty soon de buyer gen'leman—dat Yankee gen'leman name Mr. Gay—he got up and tuck his bag an' made off for de train. He had a automobile, or a Ford car or somethin', which he was goin' to drive to de station in. An' Mr. Reggy, him not havin' nobody to drink drinks wid him, nobody he could fuss at—'cause Mr. Reggy who loved to fuss

at somebody when he was drinkin' white lightnin', Mr. Harrison. I mind de time when——"

"Never mind about that," Gregory interrupted. "Gó on."

"Yas, suh, Mr. Gregory. I was sayin' Mr. Reggy, he figgered as how he would git up to go home. He says to me: 'Rover, you come to heel, damn you! I goin' take you home.' De bartender, he laugh; but I don't care what Mr. Reggy do, Mr. Gregory. I knowed I didn't have no business lettin' dat good setter pup run right plumb in front of my gun. Yas, suh. He sho was a fine dog, too."

"Did Mr. Reggy go straight home then, Joe?"

"I went along behin' him, like he tell me to, Mr. Gregory; an' I kept right up wid my arm roun' him when we cross de trestle, 'cause I always was scared Mr. Reggy goin' to fall over dat trestle some night when he been drinkin' dat pizen lick. Well, we gits past dat, and done got started up de path to de shack, when he turn roun' to me, an he say: 'Rover, damn yo' black soul! you minds me of de black dog, what was de debbil in disguise, what run aroun' de house of that Doctor Faust.'

"I says: 'Yas, suh, Mr. Reggy,' like I always did.

"He say: 'Rover, when Doctor Faust let dat black dog in he house, de doctor done wrong to de gal he love, and den he die!'

"I say: 'Yas, suh, Mr. Reggie.' But I sho was scared; he talk jes' like de sperrits had a grip on him, Mr. Gregory."

"And then what happened?" asked Gregory, feeling his flesh creep.

"Den Mr. Reggy say: 'Rover, you go back to de barroom an' git me two bottles of dat three-war whisky. An' when you come to my house wid it, don't you come inside. You stay out. 'Cause sho as you come inside dat house, I gwine to die!'"

"Then what?" Harrison demanded.

"I went back to de barroom, like he told me to, Mr. Gregory. But dis here was Sunday night, an' de bartender he done close up an' gone home. So I turn roun' and started back for de shack. Yas, suh. 'Twas mighty dark, too. I was makin' my way mighty careful—I didn't want to make no noise, 'cause Mr. Reggy he was liable to step out an' take a shot at a noise, if he'd been drinkin'. He'd git dem spooky thoughts, like dis here one about de black dog what was de debbil. I was creepin' long, mighty quiet 'cause I was drawin' nigh de shack. An' den what happen but a gun go off!"

"Where?" Gregory Harrison whispered.

"Soun' like it was up by de do' of de shack, Mr. Gregory. I hadn't seen no flash, but I thought it mout 'a' been Mr. Reggy a-takin' a shot at de darkness; so I left de path an' crept up de mountain so I could git roun' an' see what he was doin'. Yas, suh, I lef' de path an' clumb up de mountain, an' when I got higher, I set still, 'cause de moon was jes' gittin' ready to h'ist itse'f over de mountain, an' I didn't want Mr. Reggy to lay his eye on me."

"Then what did you see, Joe?"

"I seen a man comin' up de mountain in my direction, an' I sho was scared. I thought Mr. Reggy had done seen me an' was comin' for me wid a gun. But it wa'n't Mr. Reggy. 'Twas Mr. Heath Dixon. Yas, suh, Mr. Gregory; dat who it was. Back behin' him was de shack wid de do' shut and a crack of light shinin' out under it. An' he was comin' right up de hill. Well, suh, I set still as a chick partridge, Mr. Gregory; an' pretty soon I seen he never seen me. He was lookin' all de time back down de path, like he was spectin' me or somebody to come up dat way."

"Did he have a gun in his hand?"

"Naw, suh, Mr. Gregory. He didn't

have no gun in his hand. But I seen a gun stickin' out of his back pocket when he kneel down an' begun to dig."

"He began to dig?" asked the newspaper man.

"Yas, suh. Turn he back on me, so he can dig an' watch de trail. He dug a little hole under de roots of a old hemlock, Mr. Gregory. Den he got up, an' felt in his pockets, an' took out somethin' white. He kneel down ag'in an' put somethin' in de hole. Den he git up and go climbin' up de mountain like he was going up to dat dar trap he been talkin' 'bout. But he wa'n't goin' up to no trap."

"Go on, quick! What's the rest of it?" said Harrison.

"I's tellin' you jes' like it happen, Mr. Gregory. Come I hear Mr. Heath's foots git high up, I slips down to de trail an' makes to go right up to de shack like I hadn't seen nothin'. 'Tain't no business of mine to mind de white folks' business. I done learn dat at my mammy's knee. I start up to de do' jes' to tell Mr. Reggy dat I cain't git him none of dat three-war whisky. So I opens de do' right cautious, ready to run, 'cause I knowed he was goin' be mighty mad when I tell him I cain't git him none of dat good kind of whisky."

"The door was shut, and you opened it?"

"Yas, suh. An' dar was Mr. Reggy sittin' by de table wid his back to de do'. I calls to him, an' say: 'Mr. Reggy! Mr. Reggy!' But he didn't pay me no mind a-tall; jes' set dar wid his haid a-layin' on de table like he was asleep. He had done train me, Mr. Gregory, not to let him go to sleep like dat, 'cause it give him a crick in his neck. But I had my mind full of what he done tole me 'bout de black dog, so I stayed where I was."

"You didn't go inside then, Joe?"

"Yas, suh, I went in. De lamp on de table had got to gutterin' an' smokin'. I knowed I'd ketch it if I let de lamp

soot ruin everythin' in de shack; so I crept in an' took de shade off de lamp an' put it down right careful on de table. Jes' den—when I was a-puttin' de lamp shade down, Mr. Gregory—my eye, it caught sight of dat hole in Mr. Reggy's haid."

"You mean Mr. Dixon—had shot him!"

"I didn't know what had happened, Mr. Gregory. I recollected what Mr. Reggy had told me 'bout him dyin' if I come in de shack, an' dis scairt me so I turn an' run. Jes' as I got out of de do' I run plumb into Mr. Dixon. He say: 'Here! Where you goin'?' An' he drug me back into de shack. 'So,' he say, 'you is 'sponsible for dis, is you?' An' I was so scairt, thinkin' 'bout what Mr. Reggy done say 'bout de black dog, I jes' couldn't say nothin'. But presently Mr. Dixon took me outside an' he say he ain't goin' tell on me, an' he 'vised me not to say nothin' to nobody. An' dat's de way things was until I heerd him tellin' you-all 'bout findin' me at de shack when Mr. Reggy been kilt."

"Then you ran, and the sheriff caught you."

"Naw, suh. Den I snuck off up de hill an' look under dat root whar I seen him hidin' somethin' de night befo'."

"What did you find, Joe?" asked Harrison tensely.

"You know what I foun'? I foun' de bullet, Mr. Gregory. He done pick up de bullet when it gallop about de shack off of de stone fireplace. Yas, suh! An' he done wrop it up in dat piece of promise paper an' hide it under de tree root."

"What do you mean—'promise paper?'"

"Dat's what he wanted, Mr. Gregory. It was de paper what make him promise to pay Mr. Reggy all dat money he los' to him playin' cyards Sunday afternoon. Don't you 'member Mr. Reggy say he ain't goin' play no more

with him, 'cause he cheat? No wonder he cheat, Mr. Gregory. He done los' to Mr. Reggy all de money he was goin' to make by sellin' dis here lan' roun' de shack for a profit. Yas, suh! Mr. Reggy he was goin' come heir to all dat money hisse'f. Yas, suh! Dat's why Mr. Heath he want so bad to git back dat promise paper he give to Mr. Reggy. Yas, suh."

"Well, he got it back, all right," remarked Harrison grimly. But even the circumstantial report of Joe's experiences made it hard for him to believe this of Heath Dixon. Everything around him seemed to belie such a possibility. The sun was bright and warm in the clear blue heavens. In its light and shade, under the overhanging trees, several song sparrows flitted near by, cheerily unafraid, emitting their steady *cheep-cheep*. Crickets chirred from a thousand safe vantage points. The very face of nature seemed hostile to a belief in such a crime.

"Yas, suh! He got it," said Joe, turning to crawl to the bank for another reconnaissance; "an' if he see you here 'arnin' all dis from me, he goin' to — *Look out!*"

His cry of warning was loud, and he crashed past Harrison with no thought of concealment, apparently, but only in thought of hasty protection from across the ravine's bed, which here was very narrow.

Gregory stood up. Joe was invisible, safe behind the trunk of a large hemlock whose roots grappled about a grassy rock. Harrison looked across the ravine. At first he saw nothing. Then he descried the hatless head of Heath Dixon. The dark eyes were fixed upon him; the face behind the small black mustache was a cloudy yellow. His revolver muzzle glinted in the sun. Before Gregory knew what to expect, or had thought what to say or do, the muzzle flashed; and with the sound of the gun he felt a blow, and a

searing as of hot iron, pass through his shoulder and carry him staggering backward.

CHAPTER IX.

THE KILLER.

GREGORY'S backward fall carried him through a thicket of broad-leaved poplar sprigs and dumped him on his shoulders into a pocket the drainage had sucked between the roots of Joe's sheltering hemlock. He figured afterward that the thick shrubbery, closing together after his fall through it, probably saved his life. Dixon, with only four cartridges remaining in the chamber of his six-shooter, would want to wait till he had a fair shot. As it was, Harrison lay stunned upon his side, only conscious enough to be aware of a gnawing agony in his shoulder.

He was roused by feeling—as he thought—the whole world begin to slide away from under him. Instead, as he found when he opened his eyes, Joe was dragging him over the ground with rough haste, and in a minute had him propped up against the corrugated bark of the old hemlock and was taking off his coat and tearing the sleeve free from his shirt.

"Uh-umm!" murmured Joe. "Right fru de under-arm muscles. Missed de bone, though. Wait till I ties dis here sleeve round it tight. Dar now. Dat'll hold de blood in some till it begin to clot. Sho is bleedin' fast! It's a wonder he didn't git you through de heart. Mr. Heath's a dead shot with a pistol. But I reckon dis time he was excited. Yas, suh! 'Nough to make a man's han' trimble when he tryin' to kill two of his friends in two days—an' de cook, too! Yas, suh! You lean still where you is, Mr. Gregory. I got to keep my eye peeled on dat gen'leman. I sho' never thought, de way I used to crisp his bacon an' turn de aigs over for him, he'd be tryin' to shoot me wid a gun. Naw, suh!"

Gregory's head had cleared; but the shock had made him momentarily weak. And he could feel, besides, his strength draining out with the stream which was trickling its warm, irregular way down his ribs. He leaned his head back against the tree trunk and watched, as Joe lay prone and peered cautiously through parted leaves toward the opposite side of the gully.

Joe hastily took out his gun, rested it upon the hemlock root, and pulled the trigger. The only sound was a *click*.

"How come dat!" Joe exclaimed in a low voice as he withdrew behind the hemlock and began opening the pistol to examine the chamber. "He comin' over dis way after us, Mr. Gregory. I seen him jes' as he was a-climbin' down de bank from dat big rock. I could 'a' got him easy if dis gun—— Heaben he'p me to git right! Look-a here, Mr. Gregory. Dis gun ain't got no more shells in it!"

"You only fired twice," murmured Gregory.

"Yas, suh. You see what dat gen'leman had in his min', don't you, Mr. Gregory? He give me dis here gun dis mornin', an' he put two blank cartridges in it—I jes' bet dey was blank—so I could shoot at him, an' he could say he had to kill me to save hisse'f. Yas, suh! Dat's why he let me loose."

"He let you out of the tool house?"

"Sho he let me out! An' he give me dis gun. He tol' me if I didn't git away to-day, de sheriff was goin' to hang me. Said de sheriff's cousin would be blamed for dis here business if de sheriff didn't hang somebody else for it."

"But you had the bullet and the promissory note," said Gregory, carrying on the conversation so as to keep his mind from drifting off into the black cloud of sleep which hung over him.

"Naw, suh. I didn't have it. I lef' it where I found it, Mr. Gregory. I didn't want to be carryin' dat bullet

roun' wid me. Naw, suh. For all I know it's up dar yet, 'less Mr. Heath, he went an' got it."

"You say he was coming down the other bank when you tried to shoot just now?"

"Yas, suh. Dat's him. I bet he seen you drap dat gun in de creek. An' he know my gun ain't no good. Dat's why he comin' over here to see us. Yas, suh. He gwine git rid of all de witnesses. Dat's his idee, Mr. Gregory; but you wait. You wait till he git over on dis side, so I has a chance to slip down where dat gun of yourn is layin'!"

Joe, meanwhile, was peering through the leaves; and of a sudden he jumped to his feet.

"Don't you move, Mr. Gregory. I ain't goin' to let him kill you. Naw, suh!"

The darky had become a different person. Apparently, no longer was he haunted by the fear of being thought guilty of murder with no way of proving his innocence—terrified by the knowledge that if he accused Heath Dixon of the crime he would, in the first place, be disbelieved, and in the second, turn against himself the anger of all his white friends. Probably, too, his superstitious nature had felt that all the revenge of Fate was being worked upon him, because, he felt, by entering the shack after Reggy Smith's prophetic warning, he had caused his employer's death. It had done him good, no doubt, to share these fears with some one else.

"Now's my chance!" Joe whispered.

"Bring the gun back here and put some of its cartridges into the pistol," Gregory suggested.

But Joe, motioning for silence, had slipped through the leaves toward the bank beneath which lay Harrison's revolver.

Silence fell upon the mountain, disturbed only by those sounds which were a part of its silence—the whistling of a robin far down the hill, the chirring

of crickets, the chattering of a squirrel, the occasional fall of a pine cone or the drifting down of a single leaf, the ripple of an eddy in the water running down the gully.

The silence continued so long that Gregory's languor became lost in anxiety. Dixon had been seen by Joe climbing down the opposite cliff while on his way over to his victims huddled behind the hemlock. Ample time had passed, not only for him to have crossed the gully, but to have worked his way along the near bank until his sharpshooter's eye would have come close enough not to miss a vital spot in his target.

Yet there was no sound from Joe. It was possible, though not likely, that the darky, having found the gun, might have been overcome by fear and have made his own escape. Gregory's recollection of Joe's sincerity and sudden courage, however, made him reject this thought. It was true, however, that Joe had had time enough to have got the gun and returned with it two or three times. Gregory's imagination played cruelly upon his weakened nerves. He saw, in imagination, Heath Dixon's pistol butt strike Joe down silently with a blow to the temple; and after this Dixon, with his murderous gun held ready, had begun to creep upon Harrison's hiding place.

Gregory felt that he could no longer lie still and await the slow approach of death. Despite the danger of starting his wound to bleed more freely, he rolled over on his side and peered beneath the leaves toward the bank along which Heath Dixon supposedly would come.

And by chance he saw Dixon. A tunnel, perhaps no larger than a man's head, happened to be open through the multitude of leaves and branches that grew along the surface of the ground. For an instant only, through this tunnel, Harrison glimpsed first the knee,

next the hand holding a revolver, of Heath Dixon, who was creeping toward him behind the screen of undergrowth.

Apparently discarding secrecy for haste, Dixon, who presumably was aware of the unarmed condition of his victims, was pushing rapidly toward the hemlock. Now Harrison could hear the sounds of his progress, the crunch of the dead, damp leaves, and once the cracking of a twig. Ignoring the warm trickle which had begun freshly to wet his side, the newspaper man dislodged a rock from beneath the hemlock root and held it in his hand. It would be a poor weapon against a crack shot armed with a pistol, but no man will die without an effort to save himself.

Once more he caught a glimpse of the dark suit which Dixon wore. This time it was much nearer. If the pain of the wound in his side were not so indubitable, Harrison still would have doubted his senses almost, in view of the necessity to believe that Heath Dixon, whom he had known all his life, was really intending to kill him. But in a few flashes he was beginning to catch sight of the whole picture.

The emotional, impetuous Dixon, raised to great heights of quick financial glory by the apt investment, in Huntington real estate, of the money which he had inherited from his father. The vision which this had opened to Dixon of power and of a happy marriage—for even then he was attentive to Nancy Kingsley. The crash, bringing Dixon's splintered ego to the ground with it. Nancy's pity, held off by Dixon's pride. The months of bitter musings in the mountain—musings suddenly lifted into dreams of grandeur by the successful coup in the land speculation.

Then the drinking in celebration; the card game with Reggy Smith; the loss of everything he had suddenly gained. His desperate efforts to retrieve his fortune, going even so far as cheating at cards. Reggy Smith's discovery of the

sleight of hand; the consequent loss of any chance to recoup by means of gambling with him——

Gregory's musings were interrupted by a shot. It had come from Heath Dixon's pistol, for now he could see Heath's hand, see even the little curl of smoke which was rising above the muzzle of the gun. He had not been shooting at the newspaper man, however. He had been aiming toward the gully. Joe must have crept up the ravine, after retrieving the gun, and Heath Dixon must have seen him.

Dixon's hand, and the spots of black suit which had been visible through the leaves, now had disappeared, as if he probably had lain down after shooting. The nerve-cracking silence descended again upon the forest. No answer had come from Joe; and Harrison began to feel sure that the expert Dixon had killed his ally.

Apparently Dixon, too, came to this conclusion. After lying very still, following his shot, he could be heard moving cautiously and slowly toward the gully bed, and Harrison, his blond head and pale face stretched now across the hemlock root, glimpsed once a view of Dixon's dark head as it moved forward. These sounds ceased, though; and once again there was silence.

Then, startling the echoes far and wide, there came a sudden fusillade of shots, so fast that Harrison could not count them—shots from the gully, and shots from where Heath Dixon was lying. Smoke rose in a faint, pale stain against the green leaves above Dixon, and drifted into invisibility upon the gentle warm breeze that stirred the gold sun patches on the ground. From above the gully bank, too, Harrison espied for a moment a tinge of smoke.

Once again the terrible, threatening silence came down.

Gregory Harrison waited until he could wait no longer. Waited until he felt that unless he could find out some-

thing he would lose his mind. To keep himself silent he sank his teeth into the skin on the back of his hand. He lay there, his chin on the hemlock root, his eyes burning upon the spot where Dixon last had appeared to him, his ears at the pitch of acuteness. The birds had flown. Even the streamlet in the gully seemed to stand still. There was no sound on all the mountain except the shrilling of the crickets and the sound of his own breathing which, as he became weaker from loss of blood, was growing labored.

Gregory raised himself painfully to his knees. His idea had been to walk forward, to find out something—anything to break this suspense. But on an impulse he suddenly shouted, instead.

"Joe!" he cried. "Joe! Are you hurt? Answer me, won't you!"

His voice echoed from the mountainside and ran off down the valley in tiny mocking repetitions. Once again the terrible silence settled down upon the forest.

CHAPTER X.

A BEATEN REPORTER.

GREGORY climbed to his feet, then caught hold of the hemlock's rugged trunk. A black shadow had seemed to come down over the bright morning sunlight, the ground beneath his feet had seemed to sway to the right and to the left. The giddiness passed, however, and he began to make his way, slowly and carefully, with his right arm pressed to his side, toward the spot where he had last seen Dixon. Once on the way, nerve ridden in his weakened condition by the hateful silence, he had stopped and shouted:

"Joe!" And after that he even called angrily: "Dixon, you dirty dog, where are you?"

But there was no answer, although for a moment he was sure that he had heard a sound from where Dixon last had appeared.

"Ambush me, damn you!" cried Harrison, and with the rock held ready in his hand he staggered rapidly upon the spots of black suit which he could see now between the leaves.

It was Dixon. He was lying with his right arm extended toward the gully, the pistol lying in his nerveless hand. The intensely black hair, the curled small mustaches, seemed blacker than was natural against his pallor. His handsome face was more handsome than ever and had a look, even approaching that of ascetic distinction, which it had never worn in life.

For a moment Gregory experienced a great feeling of pity, not only for this man who had effected his own destruction in his blind and selfish search for happiness, but for Nancy, whom his good looks and spontaneity, and his need of help and guidance, had drawn into the circle of his pain.

"Dixon!" cried Gregory.

For the lids in the face of the man whom he had thought dead now had fluttered open. The dark eyes, with their wide stare, looked at Gregory in recognition. The lip lifted above the brilliant, somewhat protruding teeth in what was bravely meant for a smile. The mouth moved in speech, and the newspaper man dropped to his knees to hear.

"You win!" The dying man's whisper could barely be heard. "I was a fool—I didn't have a chance, anyway. Tell Nancy that I always——"

The flicker of life was too small to let him finish. His handsome head relaxed upon his extended arm, and on his face was an expression of happiness; as if, in the end, when all was lost, he had come into a knowledge reserved for the dead—a way of transcending the errors of our mortal existence.

Gregory got to his feet then, remembering Joe, and made his way through the waist-high underbrush until this

gave way to the rocky and pebbly approach to the bank of the gully. On the way he observed no less than four sprigs of underbrush which had been clipped off by the flying bullets.

There was no sign of Joe between Dixon and the gully, nor was there any sign of him in the gully itself, as Gregory approached.

"It would be in keeping with the way things have gone," thought the wounded reporter, "if Joe has made his escape, and I should be charged with the murder of Dixon as well as Reggy." He was becoming a victim of the unreasoning depression which accompanied his weakness. "Joe!" he shouted as loud as he could. "Joe!"

Only the echo answered.

Gregory worked his way carefully to the edge of the bank, and there, holding onto a birch sapling with his left hand, he leaned out as far as he dared.

He saw then.

Joe's body was lying face down in a hollow between two boulders, as if he had fallen backward, struck one of the boulders, and slid, turning down between. The water waved in slow movements the tattered gray shirt, and rippled with a faint sound above the submerged shoulders. The hole in the rear of the nappy black head left no doubt as to whether there was any hope for Joe.

Feeling suddenly very sick, his way blinded by a moisture in his eyes, Gregory turned aside from the gully bank and stumbled as fast as his strength would permit down the irregular slope of the mountain.

For a while, along the plateau caused by the landslide, the way led through leafy underbrush with tender stems; but as his slow stumblings brought him nearer to the old channel of the ravine, the shaded slopes began to be covered with the laurel, or rhododendron, called by the natives "mountain ivy," and it became necessary for him to seek

the slippery rocks and the mossy logs of the water bed.

The gunshot wound now had sent a hot fire through all the right side of his body, and its fever seemed to swell his eyes and make his brain numb. He worked his way along slowly and painfully. Stretches which he and Dixon had covered in a few minutes now took him a half hour, for he had to rest to keep his giddiness from overcoming him. Presently, however, the coolness of the shaded ravine made his head clearer. And as he forced his leaden limbs to drag him along he began to become aware of the significance of his situation.

If Nancy had not been involved, his course would be simple. Her paper and his paper, and the general public, believed of course that Joe was the culprit. No one but himself knew that Heath Dixon had released Joe, had furnished him with a revolver containing two blank cartridges, and had pursued him into the mountains until, catching him at last, he had shot the negro to death in order to make him—dead and unable to defend himself—seem unquestionably to have been the murderer of Reggy Smith.

Here, then, was a newspaper man's dream of happiness—an astounding surprise, sprung upon an unsuspecting world by his newspaper exclusively. Such a thing, of course, would establish him solidly as a necessary and important factor for incorporation into the proposed newspaper merger. More than this, it would bring to him the five-thousand-dollar reward the governor had offered for the detection of the criminal, alive or dead, and would bring him the prestige of having worked out the solution of this mystery.

Unfortunately, however, Nancy Kingsley was involved. To expose Heath Dixon would be to expose her fiancé. And nothing would be gained by it, if he left out of consideration

his own selfish ambitions. No harm would be done by allowing the world to consider Joe the criminal. Joe was a free lance, alone in the mountains, and he was dead. He could well afford to bear the burden of another man's crime.

Another argument in favor of silence was the fact that Dixon, too, was dead. It was too late for society to punish him for what he had done. To expose his crime would do no one any good, and would certainly hurt Nancy.

"And I can't bring myself to hurt that girl," said Gregory to himself as he began climbing up out of the rocky gully and into the drier, more sunny slope near the bottom of the mountain. "I am a fool, I know. My only consolation is, that I am not as big a fool as Dixon was, and that my foolishness will be of some good to Nancy, whereas his only brought her harm. Poor kid, how am I ever going to tell her that Heath is dead?"

As if in answer to his question, he heard his name called in Nancy's voice.

For a moment he thought that he was dreaming, because in his giddy weakness the real and the unreal oftentimes had merged as he climbed down the ravine; and now, in the full glare of the hot sun on the hillside, the black curtain was beginning to fall over his eyes. The gray rocks shimmered and wavered and seemed to sway forward and backward over the grass and weeds. He stopped, and shading his eyes, looked down into the bottom land. At first he could see nothing except a swaying mass of green, threaded by a quicksilver ribbon which he knew to be the creek. Then, suddenly, coming up out of the ravine on his left and below him, his uncertain vision distinguished Nancy, accompanied by a man.

The man he recognized, with a faint feeling of surprise, as being a newspaper reporter, a chap who worked for Nancy's paper. In this important case, no doubt, the paper had sent up all the

men they could spare. Nancy and he, no doubt, had made a good thing out of the colorful surroundings, Joe's escape, even the sheriff's argument with himself at the door of the tool house.

Gregory Harrison had even a flash of self-pity. Weak and wounded, with the real story of the murder in his possession, he was obligated by his better feelings to let these two fall heir to the gain and the glory, while he would be blamed for falling down on the job.

His feeling of weak self-pity vanished, however, when he saw Nancy clearly. She was running toward him up the steep, uneven slope. Her red lips were parted for breath; her dark little coat flapped out behind her; the sun made a skein of ruddy gold out of the mass of her uncovered hair. He knew then how much he wanted her to be happy, regardless of what might be the cost to him. And he felt that he had already his reward when she came up to him.

Her dark eyes had seen the bandage over his shoulder, the blood upon his shirt; and her lovely face, despite the exertion she had been making, was gone very white. He remembered the solicitude that she had expressed when he had started out after Joe: "Gregory, do be careful. And don't get in the way of any shooting." It had amused him, the thought that he would get in the way of any shooting if he could possibly avoid it. Now he was touched by the solicitude in her expression.

"I haven't her love," he thought, "and never will. But I have her sympathy. That's something."

He felt suddenly so grateful to her that he could hardly bring himself to say the thing that he had to say. Yet he knew that if he said it at all, he must say it soon. The black veil, which had lifted upon his sight of her, was falling once more over the sun. The hillside was beginning to sideslip and rock like a ship at sea. He saw her reaching out a

hand to steady him, and his own voice came to his ears like the voice of a stranger.

"Nancy," he said, "Heath is dead. But don't you worry!" He put out his hand to touch her head, but instead it fell upon the edge of her shoulder and slipped off, causing him so nearly to lose his balance that Nancy put her arms around him. "Don't you worry. Heath died like a brave man. He was hunting Joe, you know; and Joe shot him. Heath told me to tell you that he always—always——"

The hillside dropped in a terrific swoop. The black veil fell with a rush down over the world. Smiling, Gregory Harrison, a man first and a newspaper reporter second, sank into darkness and peace.

CHAPTER XI.

MORNING.

WHEN Gregory came to himself, the level beams of an early-morning sun were driving through the window above his bed and laying a pattern of pale gold upon the unplanned hemlock boards of the wall. For an instant he thought that he was at the shack, on his vacation with Reggy Smith and Heath Dixon. Then the memory of the murder hit him with a shock. He recalled his train ride with Nancy, their visit to the scene of the crime. Now it was morning, and Nancy and Heath Dixon and himself must get up and stir themselves, for Joe was locked up in the tool house. With his free left arm, Gregory threw back the red-and-green crazy quilt which covered him. But when he started to rise he found that his right arm was bound to his side, and that his whole side was sore.

Only then did it all come back to him. Heath Dixon was not in the next room, his handsome head pillowed on his arm, snoring faintly. Poor Joe was no longer huddled in the tool house, his

eyes protruding, his black skin faded to a mottled gray.

To make sure, Gregory got up and walked on weak legs to the door of Heath's room. The bed was empty, the covers thrown back just as Heath had left them the morning before. With a shudder, for he still was weak, Harrison turned away and leaned upon the sill of the window.

Across the valley the sun peered with a face of glowing red through a rent in the mists which swathed the horizon. The farthest hills were invisible save for a faint smudge of gray; the next nearest were faintly darker, and so in increasing ridges of blots growing into trees, and trees showing their branches, until, beyond the noisy yellow creek below the road, scrubby cedar and dwarf pine hung over the low rocky cliff of the opposite bank.

Gregory followed with his eye the line of rutted red-clay road on this side of the bank. It carried him to where he could see, beyond the bulge of hillside and a spray of sycamore, the edge of the corner store. The road turned to the left here and wandered to the trestle which crossed the creek.

On the other end of the trestle stood the tiny hemlock shack which housed the telegrapher. The sun was just beginning to gild its tar-paper roof. To a newspaper man the telegraph office is symbolic: it is the ear of the editor, the eye of the public. To Gregory Harrison it symbolized of a sudden the failure of his trip to Damron, and, in a way, the loss of all his hopes. And as if to add emphasis to his disappointment, a girl came out of the door of the tiny shack and ran, or rather skipped, toward the trestle. In her hand fluttered a yellow sheet of paper, and as she ran and skipped exuberantly along, she would now and then look down upon it, and skip then the faster, as if it said something to her which added wings to her feet.

Turning away from the window to put on his clothes, Gregory permitted himself an ironic smile. It was a wire of congratulation from her editor, no doubt. Once more the *Daily Express* had scooped the *Mountain Record*. Once more old B. J. would be furious, with the difference that this time the ax would fall. And the newspaper business, as B. J. himself had said, was terrible all over the country. As Harrison painfully pulled on his trousers, got on his socks and slipped into his shoes without lacing them, he felt grim but not unhappy. He was willing to be out of a job, and wear his arm strapped to his side, if it meant that Nancy skipped for happiness. The only fly in the ointment was that the real benefit came not to Nancy but to her employers. He felt a surge of anger against the whole race of beings connected in any way with newspapers.

Unfortunately, the reporter for the *Daily Express* climbed out of his bed in the next room at this moment and appeared at the doorway. He was incomparably dainty in flowered purple pajamas, and his long mouse-colored hair, by reason of the aid of some patented product, retained its part and gloss after a night's sleep. He showed a red slipper beyond the door and said:

"Oh, Mr. Harrison. You shouldn't be up! Really, you shouldn't! Miss Kingsley made me promise to keep you in bed!"

"Try and do it, damn you!" replied Harrison simply. But the bloodshot glare of his eyes was so deadly that the gentleman quivered, murmured "Sorry!" and closed the door very softly.

Gregory Harrison felt better after this. His shirt was still on him, although cut away round the bandaged shoulder. He put his arm through the left sleeve of his coat, swung the coat over his shoulders, and went again to the window, where another surprise awaited him.

Two men swung with long strides down from the mountain's foot and came out upon the red clay road, this side of the corner store. One of them unmistakably was the sheriff, despite the fact that one side of him was caked with mud and he looked generally as if he had spent the night in the woods. His companion was a scarecrow, yet somehow resembling himself. The sharp bones of the shoulders thrust through the tattered rags of what once had been a blue shirt. The tattered trousers, caked with drying mire, sheltered legs no thicker than a bone, while the matted rat-colored hair hung down around a skinny neck.

It was the sheriff and his cousin, the escaped convict!

Nancy Kingsley came around the edge of the corner store and met them. The sheriff touched his black felt hat, the cousin scraped a bare foot against a bony ankle. There was a minute of talk, and Nancy turned and ran, her coppery hair flying, back to the telegraph. The sheriff and his cousin continued at their same steady stride up the road toward the railway.

Gregory turned away and sat down wearily upon the bed. He still was very weak. A great depression swept over him. This, then, was the end of the story. The sheriff, now that Joe was bearing the onus of Reggy Smith's death, had brought in his cousin, possibly with the idea of advising him to return to prison. Nancy had dashed off to get this final bit of news on its way to the *Daily Express*. His own paper would appear again, as it had appeared since his arrival in Damron, bare of all news of this important crime, except such as they might crib from the rival paper.

He sat there so long, and so deeply occupied with the thoughts weighing him down, that he did not hear the footsteps on the path. He did not know Nancy was in the room until she had

crossed the board floor and knelt down beside him.

"Gregory! You shouldn't be up. Please lie down—for me!"

Her soft brown eyes were tender. Happiness gave a tinge of added color to her cheeks, made the lips redder above the even line of snowy teeth, seemed even to add a livelier luster to the hatless hair of fine-spun copper and red gold. She was on the up grade, and he was on the down. And she was happy.

"What's the use?" he asked dismally. "What does anything matter, anyway?"

"Love matters!" she said surprisingly. She was staring, lips parted, through the hemlock walls; thinking of Dixon's last words to her, Harrison concluded.

"Yes," agreed Harrison bitterly, "to those who get it."

"Open your mouth and shut your eyes," she commanded, turning to him. Her expression was full of guile, and it was half smiling, half tearful. "I'll give you something to make you wise."

Wondering, he shut his eyes. There was a rustle of paper, and paper was thrust between his hands. He opened his eyes and looked as she commanded. On his lap lay a copy of her paper, the *Daily Express*. Its first page had no big headlines about the Reggy Smith murder, only a one-column lead, and the article started out:

According to a copyrighted dispatch to the *Mountain Record*, the colored man, Joe, who had been arrested on suspicion of being the murderer of Reginald Smith, escaped this morning and is being pursued in the mountains—

"Well?" asked Harrison, staring at her. "You didn't make much of a story out of this."

"Close your eyes again," she ordered.

He did; opened them to find a copy of his own paper, the *Mountain Record*, on his knees. Across its front pages, in two-inch letters which fairly

screamed their startling message to the world, ran the caption:

SMITH SLAIN BY DIXON

He read on, bewildered and amazed. The whole story unfolded. "Dixon, Smith's close friend and fellow camper, shot his friend in order to secure from him the promissory note . . . Fatal bullet, too, found beneath the root of the hemlock . . . Tried to throw suspicion on colored cook . . . Slain in pistol duel with the negro in the mountains after trying to kill the *Mountain Record's* correspondent, Gregory Harrison—"

Gregory Harrison glanced back to the beginning of the article. It was headed, "By Gregory Harrison." His dream had come true. His own scoop, under his own name—an astounding surprise—had smashed its way into the honored achievements of journalism. Yet he had sent in not a word to his paper. He put his hand to his head, closed his eyes. He was dreaming again. He opened his eyes.

"Nancy," he asked, for she was there at his knee, "am I crazy?"

"No, Gregory!" Her dark eyes brimmed with happiness. Her soft red lips trembled.

"Then you did it!" he murmured aghast. "But how? Why?"

"I got up in the night and interviewed Joe in the tool house, Gregory. He told me about the bullet and the promissory note. I went up and found them while you were after Joe. With them, too, was a letter Reggy had been writing to me at the time Heath shot him. Heath hadn't time to burn it, I suppose."

"Yes, I know. Joe told me. But it is in *my* paper, not in *yours*! Why is that?"

"I had resigned from the *Daily Express* the day before I came up here. Their reporter missed the train we came up on, but came up on the next one.

He spent the night up over the corner store and of course missed the story."

"But I saw you skipping out of the telegraph office!" he exclaimed, still bewildered.

"Oh, yes!" She drew a yellow paper from her hand bag and handed it to him. It was a telegram, for himself, from old B. J.:

Governor has announced you will get the five thousand reward. Congratulations,

B. J. ASBURY.

Gregory caught Nancy's chin and turned her to look into her eyes.

"Nancy," he said uncertainly, "you did all this for me. You've got to tell me why."

Her flushing cheek was warm to his fingers, but her dark eyes returned his look steadily.

"I'll tell you, Gregory," she answered. "All our lives we've been on different sides of the fence, fighting about one thing or another. I always felt that we should be friends—that you—you would really like me if we could ever get past that. When I learned of Reggy's death it shocked me so that I saw the thing to do in life is to get down to fundamentals. I resigned my job because I didn't want to come up here and be against you once more."

"But why did you come at all?" he asked.

"Because you were going to be here, Gregory. I thought that if we worked this thing out together—— And then, on the train, I didn't have——"

"But Nancy," he interrupted, and his voice was quiet with awe, "I thought that you and Heath Dixon were engaged!"

"There was never anything to that, Gregory. Heath told several people that we were—I imagine he told you in particular. That was Heath's way of doing things." By the way, the sheriff suspected him. Heath, the sheriff just told me, had never baited that fox trap up on the ridge as he said he had."

"But, Nancy," demanded Gregory, and his throat was tight, "do you mean—is it possible that you did all this for me because——" His voice failed him. He hardly trusted his fate enough to put it into words. But Nancy did.

"Yes, Gregory," she answered, and moved closer till her forehead was against his unshaven cheek. "Yes, dear. I did it because—— It's hard to say it, Gregory! Tell me—do you love me, too?"

"Oh, Nancy! Nancy!" he cried.

The reporter for the *Daily Express*, his hair freshly anointed, his cane held with elegance and ease despite the unpressed condition of his light-blue suit, chose this moment to emerge from captivity in his room and to slip over to the open front door, where he paused for speech.

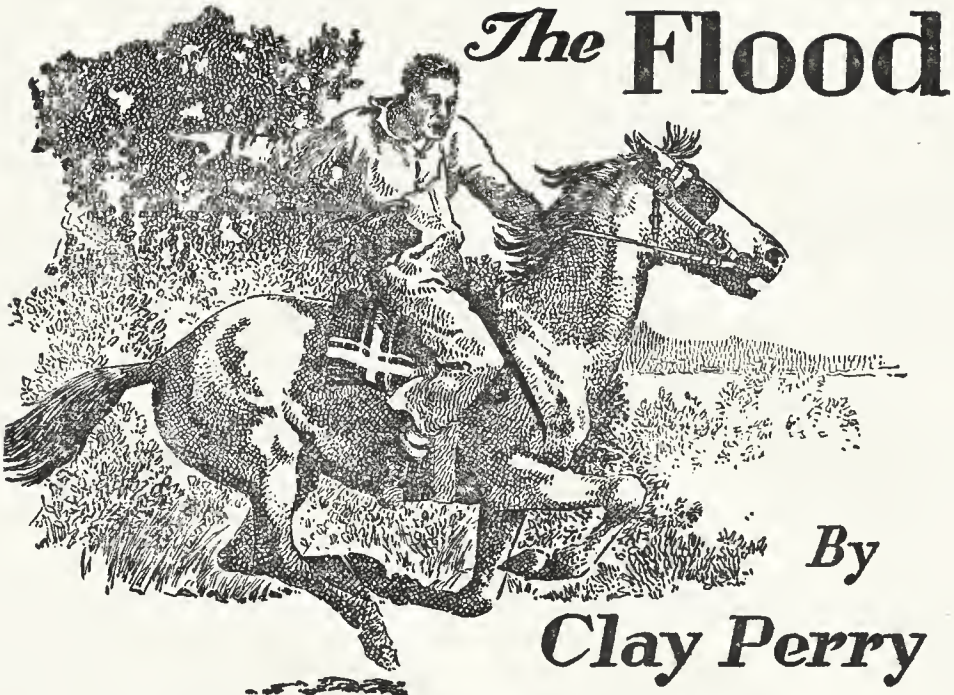
"I am sorry to have intruded," he remarked, blushing hotly. He wiped his embarrassed countenance with a lavender handkerchief, and fled outdoors, where, to his momentary confusion, he found two wild doves billing and cooing upon a locust branch and, at a turn in the path, the nest of a catbird in the thicket.

But he needed not have minded his intrusion upon Gregory and Nancy.

They had not even seen him.

They were otherwise engaged.

How would you feel if you were riding peacefully along the border of a Western plain, and suddenly gunshots ripped out in the stillness, dangerously close to you? What a young Scotchman did, and the wild events that then happened, are told in "Forked Trails," by Bertrand W. Sinclair, the opening novel in THE POPULAR next week, March 10th.



Author of "The Triumph of the Trees," "Panax," Etc.

Racing madly against time, a modern Paul Revere, galloping to warn the New England farmers against the roaring, devastating flood! A story that electrifies.

RONNY DEAN stood in the door of the barn, perched halfway up the steep slope of Pine Mountain, his striking, strong face darkened by a scowl. It had been raining, steadily, for twenty-four hours and it was still coming down, at noon of the second day, warm, windless, unseasonable rain. It was November 3d. Sawmill Creek was boiling up, a brownish torrent, almost to the floor of the old bridge, at the foot of the mountain. Ronny could not remember the water ever being so high, particularly not at this season.

It was too wet to do anything, even to go fishing or to hunt grouse. But it was not this which brought the shadow to Ronny's face. Ronny was the fifth Dean to try to wrest a living from the old mountainside farm, and it could not

be done. Ronny's father used to say that the old place was stripped to the bone and the bone wasn't worth gnawing. A rain like this robbed it of just a little more of its thin soil, washing it down off the rock underlay.

Pine Mountain farm was richer in tradition than in fertility. By tradition Ronny should become a hero. All Ronny's ancestors had been of heroic strain; they had died with their boots on, even his father, Jim Dean, who had been crushed by a huge log at Hardwick's sawmill. By the snap judgment of civilization Ronny was a backwoods hill-billy, scion of a decadent race and family. In fact, Ronny was just growing into manhood, and it was a question what sort of man he was going to be. In his scowling face was suggested a sense of injustice, of hatred.

"I suppose old Hardwick's glad of the rain," he muttered. "It will fill his rese'voy for his man-killin' mill. I wish the crick would rise enough to wipe the mill out."

Ronny hated Samuel Hardwick, and all his emotions were powerful, consuming; this was part of his inheritance, which included the heavily mortgaged old farm, this and the knowledge that the Hardwicks, of old, had worked for the Deans. Now the Deans worked for Hardwick. They had to if they wished to continue to live here on their barren acres. The sawmill, down the narrow valley toward Hilldale, represented the chief industry in the region.

Samuel Hardwick had made his farm the base of operations in timber, utilizing the waters of the creek and building a rude dam up around the shoulder of Pine Mountain to impound the headwaters of the creek and control them. And whereas the Dean's scrub cows and solitary nag fraternized over decrepit snake fences with the Hardwick Herefords and Percherons, the short-cut path across Hardwick's pasture to the State road at the mill was used no longer by Dean feet. Ronny had been forbidden to set foot on Hardwick's land.

He had been forbidden the house, too, because of Phronia Hardwick, one of the two beautiful creatures of Samuel Hardwick's ménage whom Ronny loved. The other was White Star, the blooded Morgan mare with a pure white splash on her forehead. One day Hardwick had found Ronny riding on White Star through the pines which closed the line fence. In anger that was half jealousy of the lad's easy capture of the horse, he had ordered him off his horse, his land and away from his house, calling him "next door to a horse thief."

"And you're next neighbor of mine," Ronny had retorted shrewdly, "I might call you a man-killer."

He had been glad to see Hardwick turn white. He did not realize how

Hardwick suffered when he was reminded of the fatal injury to Jim Dean, in his mill.

Ronny's mother remonstrated with him for his implacable hatred of Hardwick.

"He gives you work when he's layin' other men off," she said. "He doesn't foreclose the mortgage on the farm. And I hear tell Sam Hardwick's hard pressed, sometimes, to keep the mill goin'."

"Huh! He wants me to work so's I can have money to pay the interest on the mortgage," Ronny responded bitterly.

Ronny misunderstood. On the other hand, Sam Hardwick considered Ronny a rather lazy lad who would rather fish or hunt than work. He did not know that Ronny had quit high school to prevent his mother taking a job as cook at the Hilldale House. Ronny had pretended he was sick of school. Nor did he know that Ronny had bettered the disposition of White Star by gentling her, and could whistle her from any part of the pasture to the line fence; and that, with his dog, Rip, Ronny had fought off a maddened draft horse in the same pasture that had attacked the mare.

But Hardwick did know that Phronia rode White Star across the moonlit meadows to the pines one evening when Ronny's whistle rose shrill and clear, and that she seemed most interested in helping keep time at the mill when Ronny rode the saw carriage his father used to ride.

"I never saw it rain so!" Mrs. Dean exclaimed that evening, when it had been pouring down for almost thirty-six hours. "I'm right glad we live high up here on the hill 'stead of down the crick, beside the mill, or even in the village. Why, if that dam up to the rese'voy should break——"

She let her voice trail off, a habit she had.

In Ronny's mind the suggestion she had hinted at grew into a vivid image.

"I wish——" he began, then let his voice die. "I—I wish it would let up so's I could hunt pa'tridge."

Ronny went to bed and dreamed, oddly, that the sawmill burned down and Hardwick's home with it. He saw Phronia, in the blue dress, the one she had worn when she rode White Star to meet him. She was crying out: "We have lost everything!"

"I'm glad of it!" Ronny shouted in his dream. "Now I can take care of you."

The sound of his own voice woke him—or else it was a more furious burst of rain on the roof. He looked out his window into a drizzling, sodden dawn and saw the leaping waters of the creek, higher by a foot or more than they had been the day before. It seemed incredible that all that water could come from a three-foot penstock, the only outlet the reservoir had. In fact, Ronny couldn't believe but what there was a farther source of supply for the creek, from somewhere. He could not believe that the natural drainage of rain into the deep ravine which carried the creek in its bottom, a distance of a mile from reservoir to Pine Mountain bridge, could swell the stream so high. He was excited. He dressed and went quietly downstairs so as not to waken his mother, for he had in mind a matter of trespassing on Sam Hardwick's property.

He slipped out, after snatching a bite, with an ancient leather coat, an old slouch hat and his calked drive shoes, and trudged down the slippery, rutted lane that led to the bridge.

His eyes widened as he neared the bridge and saw that the torrent had already piled brush against the bridge, where other drift was gathering with it. He got his pike pole from where he had hidden it under one end of the bridge, and cleared the débris away. If that old

bridge went out it might choke up the arch of the concrete highway span that bore the State road loftily across the creek ravine, to continue along the narrow shelf between the creek and the steep bank that overhung it on the other side.

This was an ancient highway, once a coach line between Boston and Albany, built in the days when all roads in the mountains followed the run of the streams. If the arch were choked it would cause the creek to flood all the lower acres of the Dean farm. Likewise, if the old bridge went, the pasture path would be the only exit to town.

Ronny turned his face upstream. The water leaped toward him like a live thing, avid, eager, angry. Already the creek meadows were lakes. Ronny began to be angry. What right did Hardwick have to leave that penstock wide open and flood his farm?

"I'll just go up and see about that," he told himself, to justify his intended trespassing on Hardwick's holdings at and about the reservoir.

At the top of a rise which commanded a view of the sawmill and a part of Hardwick's house, he halted involuntarily and looked back. His eye caught a movement in Hardwick's pasture. It was the flash of White Star's blazed forehead, and he saw the mare curvetting and prancing about in the rain—and Hardwick, a grain bucket extended in one hand, a halter dangling behind him, vainly trying to coax the horse back to the barn.

"The fool!" Ronny exclaimed. "He let her out and now she won't go back for him. I could get her easy."

The mare tossed her head, raised her tail and scudded for the pines.

"He'll never get her out of there," Ronny chuckled, as Hardwick started after her.

He turned his back and went on. As he glimpsed more of the growing fury of the swollen creek, his excitement

grew. The hard wish that was within him challenged him. Something in the threat of the torrent began to drain from his heart the careless desire to have the elements wreak rude vengeance upon Hardwick. He had been wishing that the dam would break—but with no idea it would. It had always held; probably always would. It was fifteen feet thick at the top, twice as thick at the bottom.

And now the penstock was wide open, water gushing out of it, at the foot of the dam, as if flung from a huge hose. It boiled into a maelstrom and fumbled at a tangle of loose timber lodged on the ravine bank. Ronny experimented with his pike pole to see if it was being loosened. If it went it would ram the old bridge. Already a big pine log lay half in water, one end in mud, on the bank.

It would be fun to ride that log down to the bridge—and he could do it, too. He had once run spring headwater clear down to the mill, standing on a log, without even wetting his feet, a trick no other man who worked in Hardwick's woods camps or on the drive could do.

But first he intended to take a look at the reservoir. He climbed to the top of the dike near the west end of the dam. He gasped at the vast sprawl of a lake that had grown from a mere pond in a day and two nights. The works at the water gate which controlled the penstock were covered. The water had crept within five feet of the sloping top of the dam.

More than ever Ronny realized the menace of rising waters. He knew something of water and its ways. It was a fine friend to man when he knew how to control it, treacherous and terrible if out of control. Like fire. He recalled his dream. Dreams went by opposites, they said. Could that have been a premonitive warning? If this rain kept up much longer the water would be up to the top of the dam.

It would flow over, wearing away, little by little, the soft earth. And the rain was pouring down as if the heavens had opened their sluice gates.

When Ronny had left the house he had noticed a tin pail standing out in the yard, half full of water. It had rained that much in two days; six inches or more. Nothing like it had ever happened in these hills in so short a time, so far as Ronny knew.

From his knowledge of the normal level of the reservoir, he estimated it had risen almost six feet in two days. The mountain streams had gathered up the rain as it ran off the slopes and poured it in here, with increasing volumes.

He turned his head and looked across the dam. On the opposite side he saw the jerking head and excitedly waving tail of Rip, his collie. Rip was barking furiously, although his voice could not be heard above the water's roar. Ronny gave a shrill whistle. Usually this was sufficient to bring Rip to him on the run, or swimming if he had to. But Rip only vibrated more violently, ran back and forth on the dike, refusing to come along the dam.

Ronny flung a stick into the water, far out. The dog, trained to retrieve anything his master flung, only backed away, tucked his tail between his legs and gave a reproachful, half-shamed look at Ronny. Ronny clapped his knee and beckoned. Rip sat down, raised his pointed nose to the sky and howled. Ronny heard him, now. His hair prickled on his scalp.

"By jinks, there's something wrong!" he exclaimed. "Rip never acted like this. He has crossed the dam a dozen times."

He slipped off the rounded bulwark and started to cross the dam. The dog challenged him, harshly. Ronny halted and the dog ceased his paroxysm.

"By jinks, he don't want me to cross over!" Ronny muttered. "It can't be

anything up to the house. Something wrong. He must—it must be about the dam!”

A new chill of apprehension seized him. Rip’s wisdom, at times, was almost uncanny. Ronny had a vast respect for it. Rip was trying to tell him something, warning him.

Ronny took a long look down the ravine that yawned thirty feet deep below him, with its rush of water emptying out of the deep-laid flume pipe of wood. There was no spillway to the dam. Only that three-foot pipe gave egress to the water—and, although it was wide open, the level of the reservoir was higher than it ever had been and seemed to be creeping steadily up.

In his mind’s eye Ronny followed the flow of the creek down to the sawmill two miles below, where Hardwick had built another, smaller dam of concrete, to form a small pond out of which he sluiced logs and water for his turbines. On beyond, two miles farther along the curving State road, lay the village of Hilldale. The road was its main street. Houses and stores stood close to it and to the creek, cramped for room by the crowding hills that towered above. Some of the buildings were set upon the very rocks of what, ages ago, may have been the bed of a roaring river.

If the dam should break, Sawmill Creek would become a roaring river again. The water behind the dam ranged from ten to thirty feet in depth. If water ate through and burst through the thirty-foot bulwark of the dam, it would pour into a ravine which was nowhere more than three hundred yards wide, even in the village. The wall of water would be crowded deeper and deeper; it would gather speed as it ran, for the slope of the ravine was steeper, close to town.

The torrent would strike the sawmill first of all and there was little doubt what would happen to it. That concrete dam would be only a step for the tor-

rent to leap from. It would roar on and on; it would crush Hardwick’s house. Phronia—

Rip’s continued agitation helped to bring Ronny back to his immediate surroundings. There was something wrong. He sensed it. But where? He descended from the high dike and clambered down beside the dam toward the gushing penstock. The water fascinated him, but he tore his eyes from it and keenly scanned the broad, sloping face of the earthen dam. It was dripping everywhere from the rain; but Ronny’s attention was riveted at last upon a tiny spurt which jetted out at a point fifteen feet from the east side and ten feet below the top of the dam.

Even as he watched it, the little jet grew larger and shot out farther.

“Old Hardwick better come up and fix that or—”

Ronny choked himself off as the spurt shot still farther out and fell into spray a dozen feet from the dam. He gaped at it, poised on the pitch of the bank, pike pole thrust deep in the soil before him, his leather coat gleaming wet, his slouch hat drooping.

He made a picture of a bedraggled hill-billy—or of a grim and watchful scout of those fighting days when men wore battered, tricornered hats that drooped in the rain, who fought on and on even when hope seemed gone and were repaid, sometimes, with the gift of a tract of wild land in the mountains, as their bounty for patriotic service. That was how the first of the Hilldale Deans had come by the Pine Mountain farm. And back of him was that swashbuckling Sir Ronald, who had fought with a pikestaff before he got his title, a pikestaff that looked not a little like the pike pole Ronny had.

Ronny Dean was poised on the brink of manhood; there was a question what sort of man he was going to be.

He took the leap. He landed close beside the pine log he had spotted on

the way up. With an expert roll and twist he freed it and got it into the muddy moil of the flume's outburst. He shoved the log along close to shore, beyond the dashing sweep of the cylindrical outspurt, looked back and saw that the tinier spurt had grown as large as the handle of his pike.

Ronny leaped on the log. It dipped and rolled. He splashed his pike in the water to steady himself. The steel-tipped end was snatched by the current with swift and astonishing strength. It almost unbalanced Ronny. The log was pulled toward midstream. He danced and rolled, balancing himself like a dancer on a rope, and was carried along the raging torrent faster than he could have run, on land. Rip raced, barking, to keep up with him.

The old bridge rushed to meet Ronny, it seemed, its floor covered with water. Ronny got the log around it; the water was a foot above the road. Below the bridge he got into midstream again and was borne so fast that he outdistanced the racing dog.

Ronny felt the thrill of a race with the elements. The very rush of water that endangered life and property below bore him as a herald of disaster; he was conscious of no danger, did not even think of it, but kept reminding himself he must stick to that log and keep going fast, fast.

Under the concrete arch of the highway bridge he flew, stooping to escape being grazed, down around the curve where the creek swept against a rocky bank on his right, away from the alder-grown flats, now submerged, on the left.

The roof of the mill hove into view, the new building on the hillside above the road, where sawed timber was finished. The old mill stood below the road, in the ravine, almost hidden from sight by the top of the low dam. The waters hid it entirely just now. The timbers of the sluice gate rose higher than the mill roof and Ronny steered

for them. He was plunged to his knees in water as the stream roared down a rocky gorge and he kept his footing only by herculean effort. He enjoyed every minute of it.

The roar of the rapids drowned out all other sounds, but Ronny knew that if the dam went out he would hear it. It would be a sound that could not be mistaken. It had not come—yet.

A sheet of water four feet thick poured over the mill dam and thundered to the rocks below. On a level with the dam and at the left, the current surged against the sluice gate, which was closed down, as if Hardwick had been afraid to let the growing stream through, beneath the mill. "What a fool," Ronny thought. Hardwick was only increasing resistance to that tawny young river which grew more powerful and irresistible every moment. Better far to have the gate wide open. And how like life it was, for an old man to underestimate the strength of growing youth.

Ronny's eyes, his mind, were as clear as if he were clairvoyant; suddenly he saw with a mature vision, visible and invisible things. He saw a flash of blue darting out on the housed top of the sluiceway and knew it was Phronia and that she was running to try to raise the water gate. It was of two-inch planks, water-soaked, that weighed half a ton. White hands gripped the rough iron wheel and tugged at it. Ronny shot out his pike and stabbed a gate timber to haul himself to it, for the water was too deep to touch bottom with the twelve-foot pole. He felt the gate structure shaking as if from continuous earthquake shocks. It was time to open the gate.

Where was Sam Hardwick? Ronny's imagination quickly answered him with a picture of Hardwick trying to coax White Star out of the rain. Somehow Ronny could not hate him, with that picture in mind. White Star was

worth saving from the danger of the rain, which was growing colder. Ronny told himself he might have been doing the same thing—but for the ban.

His log was swung broadside, sucked against the gate with a slam that dislodged his feet, and he just managed to grasp the timbers with his hands, leaving his pike hanging and quivering like a long arrow in the wood. He drew himself up.

Phronia had managed to raise the gate a few inches and the water was sucking through with a rumbling roar. When Ronny rose dripping beside her, she staggered away from the wheel and looked up at him with a gesture of weary defeat. He caught the color of blood on her palms.

"Ronny!" she panted, as he caught her swaying form. "Father is hurt. We've got to open the gate. The mill will go—the house. Help me."

For answer he lifted her and carried her off the dangerously swaying structure to the roadway and set her feet on the ground.

"Let the mill go!" he cried. "It's going anyway."

She stared at him as if he were mad. He picked her up again, as she started to return to the gate wheel, and ran down the road to the house. He burst in the door and faced Samuel Hardwick, sitting on a chair, his shoe and sock off one foot, which was propped in another chair. Mrs. Hardwick knelt beside him, bathing a puffy ankle. Ronny set Phronia down, slammed the door behind him to cut off the roar of the river, and spoke.

"There's a hole in the rese'voy dam. I just come from there. It's too late to plug it. Where's White Star?"

Hardwick went white, rose to his feet and cried out.

"The dam? White Star? What do you want to do?"

"Warn the village. I rode a log down from the dam but I can't ride

it down to town. I've got to get there. The dam is going out pretty soon. I can get White Star, if she's in the pasture yet."

"I don't believe it! I don't believe it!" Hardwick shouted, meaning the dam. "It can't go out. It's as solid as——"

"There's a hole in it. It's as big as my arm by now—or worse. Ten feet down. It may go any minute. The creek's rose inches since I left."

"You mean—you want to ride White Star down that macadam road?" demanded Hardwick, gulping. "It will kill her."

Ronny's face twitched.

"No, it may hurt her a little; it won't kill her. But it's that or——"

"I'll telephone," cried Hardwick, limping a step. Then, calling out to Phronia: "You do it."

Phronia shook her head.

"The phone's out of order," she said. "Has been since late yesterday. Ronny, you better go whistle for White Star. Quick!"

She ran with him to the barn and through it to the pasture. Ronny gave a shrill whistle. The blazed forehead of the mare poked inquiringly about a corner of the barn, where she had returned, after Hardwick had dragged himself away on a twisted ankle. Ronny led the mare in the barn by her forelock, slipped a bridle on her head and led her out the front door, where he vaulted onto her gleaming wet back.

Phronia looked up at him through the rain, her lips parted to speak—but instead she screamed, for there came just then a booming roar, as from a gigantic explosion, and then a continuous rumble from up the ravine.

"It's the dam!" cried Ronny. "Run and get them out of the house and up here, on high ground. Good-by, Phronia."

He slapped White Star on her flank.

"Oh, Ronny!"

There was something in her voice and face that made Ronny conscious for the first time of danger to himself. He smiled. The sensitive mare leaped ahead, snorting, and he bent against the rain and guided her onto the sleek, hard, black roadway. He shrank as her sharp-shod hoofs clattered down on the road. He loved the mare and it hurt him to race her on this terrible road, but he dared not spare her in speed.

Two miles to town. Two miles away the raging wall of water had begun the race down the ravine. It would travel fully as fast as he could race White Star. He had a scant ten minutes start. Ten minutes to warn those who lived in the path of the coming flood.

White Star stretched out and ran, her legs working like pistons, never wincing from the pounding of her hoofs on rock-filled, metaled roadway. In places Ronny guided her onto the softer gravel shoulder of the road, but these places were scanty for the highway was close clipped between cliff and ravine.

On one of the sharp curves she slipped and slid against the heavy wire cable stretched on posts to guard the brink of the ravine, thirty feet deep below, but she did not fall and Ronny clung like a leech.

Within a mile he came to the first house, shouting his warning. The distant sound as of battle raging had roused the inhabitants and they stood out in the rain as racing hoofs brought them further warning.

"Run for the hills! The dam has burst!"

They caught his meaning more from the hand he waved than from his words. They ran back into the house and out again, bearing odd, pitiful burdens.

Many of the residents along the creek had watched the swelling stream and had been made uneasy, though it lay many feet below the level of their houses. Its menace spoke emphatically

of the fact that behind the shoulder of Pine Mountain lay a lake with only an earthen dam to hold it back.

There had been telephone messages exchanged about town, concerning the unusual torrential rain. In a day and a half nearly seven inches of rainfall! No one dreamed of danger, up here in the hills, such danger as had been pictured to them of the ravages of the mighty Mississippi. Still they were uneasy. No such rain had fallen in the memory of man. The steep slopes of the mountains had emptied it into the brooks, the rivulets; and these in turn into larger brooks and into the gut that cut the hills in two, where Hilldale lay.

Into the outskirts of town Ronny came, past the little cemetery, high on a knoll—and he saw, with his clairvoyant vision, that the city of the dead would be safe—but there might be a city of the dead, newborn, below. The gleam of neat, white houses, most of them of Colonial design, sturdy but old, built on stone foundations, loomed ahead of him, down the road that was Main Street.

"The dam! The dam! Run for the hills!"

Already telephones were buzzing. The central operator caught up the cry and broadcast it. But to many who had no phones Ronny's brazen-throated cry came just in time. The village began emptying itself, like an anthill disgorging its brood. Most of them ran for the height beyond the railroad, where a street ran up toward sky line. Ronny, on White Star, panting from a two-mile run such as she had never made in her life, was first to halt midway up the hill and look back.

The creek, when it reached the high embankment of the railroad which cut through town, curved and flowed, sprawling, out into flatter land, where the valley opened. Already it had eaten into the embankment, caved down cinders and gravel, baring the stones.

Ronny slid from the mare's back and felt of her trembling legs. They seemed burning hot to his touch. He winced and rubbed her legs with a soggy kerchief and with his felt hat.

The thunder of the flood came closer, ominous, terrible. Men shouted, women screamed, children cried and whimpered. The fugitive mob swarmed up the hill toward Ronny and huddled about him, asking questions he could not answer; seeking to know how high the water was going to be, whether it would engulf their homes, their stores. Selfish questions. Ronny was patient with them. He lived in a house on a hill.

The flood came. There were some who could not bear to look at it. A crashing, smashing, hissing wall of water, thirty feet high, flung itself upon the village and lifted houses bodily and bore them along as if they were toys.

On the crest of the flood came a mass of *débris*, gathered in the ravine. Ronny, running to rouse out a family that huddled in the upper windows of their home, close to the railroad, saw a section of white clapboarding, with a bit of green shutter dangling from it, flung high in air as the wave struck a concrete highway bridge in the center of town and went over it like a tidal wave engulfing a pier. It was a piece of the Hardwick house, that bit of wood, and it told the tale of what had happened to it—and the mill. The glass-studded top of a telegraph pole shot up out of the moving wall like a cross raised by invisible, fumbling hands, and shot over the bridge.

Logs thudded against sturdy railings and were spewed out like matches spilled from a box.

Boards and roots, whole trees mingled in a mass of whirling, tossing *débris*.

In mid-village, where the stores and houses clustered close together and close to the street, the wave came rushing down the road, treetop high, and en-

gulfed them like a fluid avalanche. Some of them seemed to leap from their foundations; others resisted and trembled and shook, then slowly, slowly, reeled and whirled and were hurtled on.

The first mass of wreckage, whole buildings a part of it, was flung violently against the railroad embankment. It stood twenty feet high, and the water went clear over it, spewing wood and even rocks high in air.

Even the sturdiest buildings, wrenched loose by the initial blow of the moving liquid wall, were crushed and flattened and became kindling wood. Others floated loose later, turned on their sides, whirled and struck trees; their roofs were ripped off, chimneys crumpled, porches torn off.

In the lowest place where buildings stood, a smooth, grassy slope on the right bank of the creek, were a small basket mill, a silk mill, a grist mill—Hilldale's minor industries. The grist mill, decrepit and weak, was first to go, its huge wooden wheel spinning merrily along, as if loath to leave its accustomed duty. It was whirled horizontally, now.

A child came up to Ronny where he knelt massaging White Star's trembling legs, and handed him a flannel garment, a baby's garment.

"You told us the big river was comin'," lisped the tiny lad. "You can have this. I growin' up; I don't wear dresses any more."

This was the beginning of the wave of gratitude that threatened to engulf Ronny as the flood had buried Hilldale.

"The mare did most of it," he protested. "And my dog, Rip. He gave me the first warning."

To escape them he ran back to the railroad, leaving White Star in care of admiring men, and watched, helplessly, as the flood fumed and tossed and tore. There was little he could do.

The flood began defeating its own ends, after a time. In the sweep it made of sawmill, houses and trees, it gathered

débris which began to pile up against the sturdy highway bridge, logs, poles, pieces of houses, rocks, earth and brush. It formed a sort of dam.

To be sure, the flood swerved around it, carved a new channel fifteen feet deep in solid earth, wormed beneath a tall white house which stood high upon a bank—but spared the house by another vagary. The water dug a trench along the upstream side of the house, then piled logs and boards into it and formed a bulwark that defeated it. It rushed through the woodshed at the back of the house, floated off all the winter's fuel supply—but in front of the house the roaring giant of the hills built up a stack of wood sufficient to keep the home in fuel for years. It rose as high as the ridgepole of the house.

But one person was drowned, and, by the irony of fate, this was an aged woman who had barely escaped with her life from a dam burst years before, not thirty miles from Hilledale, in a lower valley. Her body was found days later, three miles away from her home from which she had been swept, though the house clung to its foundations.

A man, threescore and ten years old, rushed back into his home as the wave struck it, to rescue a cherished bauble. He was floated upstairs, into a bedroom, as his house was borne away, and grasped a branch of a tree, drew himself out and perched in safety until the flood had subsided, when he had to be taken down with ladders.

It was all over in an hour. The ruin was more terrible than the actual destruction had been, beneath men's eyes.

Main Street was gone. In place of the winding, macadamized roadway, shaded by tall elms, bordered by quaint houses and stores, there yawned a raw gorge of dirt and stones, many feet deep. It seemed as if Hilledale had been but a dream. That a double row of twenty-two buildings, facing each other

on either side of the stream, including three small factories, had been where that ruin of rubble now lay, seemed an idle tale.

No more vicious fury could have been visited upon a town by an avalanche. An avalanche would have buried its dead. The flood had torn the town to its bones and let them lie bare and unburied. Loss of life is terrible, but the death of a town, stricken by the elements, is somehow more terrible still.

Men crept back into town as the rush of water went roaring on down the valley to rip the railroad up, vanishing as if it were a huge ball rolling downhill. They were unable even to find the sites of their homes. They found unrecognizable holes in the ground, deep, rocky pits, gouged down to the bed rock.

Where there had been houses, lawns, fences, flowers, nothing remained but rock, sand, stones, mud and débris.

Ronny led White Star—limping a little, but with her legs bandaged tightly now—back across the railroad and into the skeleton of Hilledale. His eyes took on a look of staring bewilderment as he saw, little by little, all that the bursting dam had done. He was shocked more by the ruin than he had been by the actual blow of the demon in its destructive march. That had been spectacular, somehow grand, terrible yet fascinating. This was sickening.

And he had once wished the dam would break!

In the middle of town—that is, on a narrow shelf of roadway which remained before some houses which had stood—he halted and stood looking dazedly about him. He heard his name called, anxiously. He turned and saw Phronia, her father leaning on her arm, a crutch under his other arm. Hardwick wore a dazed look, too, but the harsh lines of his face had softened.

Ronny went toward him eagerly, as if Hardwick, the man he had hated, were an old, beloved friend.

A sharp bark greeted Ronny and Rip came dashing toward him, wriggling all over. White Star pawed and bent her head to meet the dog's curling tongue. They were old friends of long standing.

"Ronny," Hardwick mumbled, fumbling for his hand, "Ronny, you're a hero. You saved them! You saved them! If it hadn't been for you I'd have been worse than a man-killer. *It was my dam.*"

Tears burst into Ronny's eyes as he gripped the calloused palm of the richest man in town—and he the poorest, just about.

That is, they had been. But the flood had come.

"My mill, my house—everything is gone," Hardwick said. "We're poor people now. Most of my lumber was swept away and it's kindling wood. I expect some of it is five miles below. A lot of it is piled up there in that stack of stuff at the bridge. I haven't got five hundred dollars to my name. No mill, no home, no money. Only the farmland—and it's bone poor, that land. Funny thing, Ronny; your farm is the only place that profited by the flood."

Ronny stared at him, wondering if his mind had been affected by the horror.

"That's a fact," Hardwick chuckled, a gleam breaking through his dulled eyes. "It washed all the silt and mold out of the rese'voy and left it lyin' on your bottom land, down by the creek. You got fifty acres of the richest fertilized land in this country now."

"I—I——"

The flood came to Ronny then. It came in tears that would not be checked, flowed out as he leaned against White Star's neck and sobbed.

Phronia gripped his hand in hers and it made him cry more. He was not the only strong man who cried, in Hill-

dale. No one thought less of him for that.

"Your ma came down and took my mother home with her," Phronia whispered. "She knows about you, already—and she is so proud."

Ronny's tears dried up suddenly. He turned to Samuel Hardwick.

"I'd be glad if you'd come and stay with us," he said. "Until you can build again. Will you?"

"I'd appreciate it," said Hardwick. "I'll want you to help me build a new mill. I can use some of the pine along the line fence—both sides."

Build! Rebuild!

Those two words sprang to men's lips. It seemed as if they had burst from their hearts. The flood had come—but it had gone.

A group of the more prominent men of the town closed about Samuel Hardwick and Ronny. Already they had formed a committee for relief and rehabilitation of the ruined community.

"We want you," they said to Hardwick, "to be chairman of the committee. We've got to decide whether we'll rebuild Hilldale."

"Decide!" Hardwick shouted, brushing his eyes with one hand. "What is there to decide? We'll rebuild, of course. Sure, I'll be chairman. But I want Ronny Dean on the committee. Ronny is going to help me rebuild my mill."

Ronny's head came up. He turned to Phronia.

"Will you take White Star up home?" he asked her, and his fingers got tangled with hers, in White Star's mane. "Up to my house—our house. I want you to—stay there—Phronia—always."

She nodded.

Ronny Dean was growing up to manhood. There was no longer any doubt what sort of man he was going to be.

Watch for more of Clay Perry's stories in THE POPULAR.



Sullivan, Donovan and Fury

By William Hemmingway

Author of "The Amateur Who Slammed John L.," Etc.

The author of this article on John L. Sullivan is a real authority on his subject. His true name, of course, cannot be told, but you may be assured that his facts and opinions are founded on experience and exact information. You will like his work.

MIKE DONOVAN, middleweight champion of America, was the first real pugilist to give battle to John L. Sullivan. The Highlands Strong Boy had knocked out several big bruisers in local halls and back rooms, but they were mere roughnecks, with little knowledge of the difficult art of fists. Donovan was different. When he took on young John L. for four rounds he was at the height of his powers and enthusiasm, full of wisdom gained by years of hard experience in the ring, wise to the shifts and strategies of the trade and master of all of them; with a stout fighting heart, moreover, and the assurance that he could flax any man, no matter how big and speedy he might be.

Although Mike stood only five feet nine and weighed but one hundred and fifty-four, he had held his own with six-foot Paddy Ryan, soon to become champion of America, a bigger man than Sullivan. Dazzling speed was his greatest asset—he struck like a hawk and dashed in and out as fast as a featherweight; also he had solved every tech-

nical problem in the risky business of making a living with the fists. He had, too, an excellent working knowledge of psychology as applied to that business, as the following will show.

"I fought Mike in San Francisco for the middleweight title," Bill McClellan said to me one day as we were breathing ourselves after a brisk mix-up. "It was in a hall, on a hard floor, small gloves, to a finish, under London Rules—that is, we could wrestle, and a round ended only when a man was downed. Mike was faster, but I was the stronger.

"For more than one hour I finished every round by throwing Mike to the floor and falling on him. I did it fifty-three times. In the fifty-fourth round he locked his arm round the top rope, and I couldn't budge him. Just as I was changing my grip, Mike jumped off and downed me. As he threw his weight on me he laughed in my ear and said: 'Bill, you beggar, I've got you now!'"

Sullivan, not yet twenty-one nor quite full grown, but of extraordinary strength and ferocity, was quite con-

vinced that he was going to be champion of the world. He made no secret of his belief, and when he met Billy Madden, a first-class lightweight, he frankly confided it to him.

"What makes you feel that way?" Madden asked, with a cynical smile. "Is it because you've licked a few dubs?"

But when he saw the ease with which Sullivan knocked out Dan Dwyer and Tom Shandler, good second-raters, and especially when he saw the fury with which the Highlands Strong Boy pounced on them and battered them unconscious in a few seconds, Madden began to sit up and take notice. The lad might be a comer, and managing a coming champion would be pleasanter and more profitable for Madden than waiting for Arthur Chambers to give him a shot at the lightweight crown. He sparred with Sullivan several times and tried to teach him something about defensive tactics in the ring—parrying, side-stepping, et cetera—but the big boy laughed at him, refused to try any shiftily dodges, and said: "I've got all that fancy stuff beat a mile—just jump in and knock 'em cold!"

Donovan came to Boston to "take a benefit" at the Howard Athenæum. Prize fighting was a crime in the eyes of the law; glove contests under the Queensbury rules were not permitted, and boxing matches were not recognized as a proper public entertainment. Exhibitions of the art given for money were called benefits so as to give them an air of respectability and keep off the police. After a series of mediocre bouts between boobs who went on for glory, the beneficiary would set to with some local able man, whose fame and following drew money to the box office. Madden thought he could test the quality of his comer at this benefit by sending him in against the king of the middleweights. Win or lose, it would be a pretty go.

"Will you box four rounds with Donovan?" he asked the Strong Boy.

"He's so clever that you can't hurt him, but you can make a little money by betting that he can't put you out."

"I bet you I'll put *him* out," said the lad.

Now, Donovan had heard of the youngster when he visited Boston a few months earlier. An aged Irish admirer came over from Roxbury to see him box in public and afterward told him of the bold young gossoon, Johnny Sullivan, the son of an old neighbor, who could "bate" all the lads for miles around. Would champion Mike be pleased some time to take a good look at him and say whether he was any good or not? So, when the boy called on him, modest but unawed by his title, the alert Mike studied him as keenly and carefully as an expert scrutinizing the latest big gem brought out of Kimberley, meanwhile telling him stories about some of the heroes of the ring.

"I wish you'd give me some pointers on boxing," the youth said to Mike. "We could work somewhere on the quiet. 'Twould have to be on the quiet; for, of course, if I was to box you before a crowd, I'd knock your head off." This he said not in a boasting way but as placidly as if he were stating that two and two are four. Mike beamed on him in recognition of his true fighting spirit, and he said nothing to dampen the boy's ardor.

"Well," he counseled, "you are a rugged, strong young fellow, and if you'll take care of yourself you may get to the top. Paddy Ryan will beat old Joe Goss for the championship, but Paddy isn't the best man I ever saw."

"I'll fix Ryan," the boy growled. "I was in the theater when Ryan hit Goss after he was down; so Goss stopped. I offered to go on in his place, but Ryan sneered at me and said: 'You go get a reputation.' Well, I'll get a reputation, and I'll get him, too, the big stiff! I can hit as hard as any of 'em, and I know I'm game."

Donovan could not spar with the Strong Boy just then because he had a felon on his elbow, and he knew he would have to be at his best against him; but he was so much impressed by the lad's looks and his serene confidence in himself that he asked Jimmy Elliott, his heavyweight partner, to take him on.

"Ah-h-h, you're always gettin' stuck on some new phenom!" Elliott snarled—but he wisely avoided taking any chances with the unknown.

"Never mind," said Sullivan, when Donovan broke the news to him. "Some day they'll all be glad to have me on their program."

Pugilists suffer as much as kings from the whisperings of little men who try to win favor by tattling. When Sullivan told his friends that Donovan had put off sparring with him, some of these meddlers said: "You see, he's taking extra time to train for you, so that when you face him he'll make a holy show of you." This embittered the Strong Boy. It is a curious fact that every man who has championship stuff in him is as jealous as a prima donna. Even to-day the placid philosopher-champion, Tunney, is vexed because Showman Rickard praises Dempsey too much. Imagine, then, how eager the primitive young Sullivan was to get at Donovan when Mike returned to Boston a few weeks later to take a benefit before defending his championship against George Rooke.

The lad said nothing about the tales the tattlers had told him, and Donovan, who was the most ingenuous and unsuspecting of men, never dreamed of the jealousy that smoldered behind those thick black brows. That jealousy was the seed of an enmity which was to last for many years, with consequences that affected Sullivan's fortunes again and again. What a pity it was that the boy did not speak out! A few words of explanation would have scattered the mists and averted the feud. But the words

were not uttered, and thirty years passed before the two honest men understood each other. Mike meantime often spoke of it with regret, but each was too proud to say the first word.

On the appointed evening Sullivan came to the theater. Donovan, who occupied the star's spacious dressing room, pointed to a smaller room and commanded:

"Here, young fellow! You go in there and dress."

"All right," Sullivan rumbled, nourishing his secret grudge and not at all overcome by the peremptory tone.

Dick Fitzgerald, manager of the Athenæum, meeting the Strong Boy on his way, asked him:

"What are you going to do?"

"Why, the best man wins," he growled in his deep bass that made the scenery quiver.

Fitzgerald made haste to warn Donovan.

"Oh, that's all right, Dick," said Mike gayly. "He'll get what lots of other big fellows got—a good lacing."

Nevertheless, Mike bethought him of his applied psychology, and just before the lad was called to the ring he strolled up to him and looked him over with a great show of casualness.

"You're a likely looking young fellow," said he patronizingly, "and I'll not take advantage of you. You needn't worry."

"You want to look out that I don't knock your block off," young Sullivan responded calmly. He spoke quite without heat, much as one would warn a friend to watch his step on slippery places.

As the two stood in their corners awaiting the call, Donovan studied the youth with the eye of the expert. "John looked twice as big stripped as he did in his clothes," Mike often told his pupils afterward. "When I looked him up and down I realized that he was one of the best men I had ever seen. His

shoulders were wide, sloping and flexible, the kind that can shoot out a blow like a bullet. His arms were thick and smooth—no knots in the muscles. His body was deep through, the chest well arched. His legs were considerably lighter in proportion than the rest of him; so he was light-footed enough to jump at his man with surprising speed for such a big fellow. He weighed one hundred and eighty-five pounds. We wore five-ounce gloves.

"When we were called to the center to shake hands, Sullivan grasped my right and tried to crunch my fingers, to intimidate me; but I had heard about his Strong Boy tricks and I was ready for him. I thrust my hand far forward, so that we gripped thumb to thumb. When he found that I prevented his crunching, he looked surprised."

In the last moments before the clash, the zero moments that try men's souls, whether in ring or court or trench, Donovan tried a psychological attack that had often helped him to victory: he fixed upon the youngster a glare calculated to chill his young blood. But the cold fire that streamed from Donovan's blue eyes crossed a fiercer current of defiance and rage from Sullivan's hazel eyes, which now seemed burning black. His eager, consuming glance, the rippling play of muscles along his mighty arms as he clenched his fists, the forward thrust of his arrogant head, combined in a picture of irresistible force.

Dick Fitzgerald clapped his hands and shouted: "Time!" The boxers sprang forward as if propelled by one impulse. Hoping that the Strong Boy would be somewhat disconcerted by the presence of the crowd, Donovan leaped at him, led with his left for the chin, followed with his right to the ribs—and barely got away with his life! Sullivan's chopping left missed, but he instantly followed it with a swing of his beamlike right arm, which flew fast as

a ray of light. Donovan ducked his head just in time to escape a crash that would have outed him, stepped past Sullivan and whirled around to face him. The Strong Boy, far from suffering stage fright, utterly ignored the crowd and bent his mind on only one thing—the quick destruction of his antagonist.

It was Donovan who was disconcerted—he admitted it many a time in after years to his friends. He was in the position of the Parisian who confessed that to hunt the tiger is one grand sport; "but when ze tigare he hunt you—ah then, m'sieu'!" Before Mike could charge on the enemy and rattle him with a hot fire of feints and real blows well mingled, young Sullivan was upon him with a fresh attack that made all Mike's other ring experiences seem like child's play. He plunged in, chopping down with his left that broke through the lighter man's guard and raised a lump on his ribs; again launched the right swing, and the impact of it on his guard slammed Donovan hard against the stage wings. He flew as a battle-dore flies.

Mike skipped nimbly out toward the center, just in time to avoid another deadly swing. Fast as he was, Sullivan was hot on his heels every moment, except when the middleweight champion was side-stepping out of his path. Every time Sullivan landed a blow, even on the parrying arms, the impact tossed the lighter man to and fro like a cork on the waves and made him gasp for breath.

"In those days," Mike often told us in the Athletic Club, "I was called the cleverest man in the ring. By golly! I'd have had my head knocked off if I hadn't been. I proved my cleverness by avoiding a knock-out in the first round. He nearly had me when he batted me up against the wings. John slowed up a little toward the end of the three minutes; for he was so anxious to finish me that he tired himself. And I was

tired, too. Sullivan was the strongest man I ever met, and he smashed me so hard that every blow took a lot of my vitality, no matter how well I blocked. It was like being struck by a runaway horse."

At the end of the round the men went back to their corners, to rest one minute. Sullivan sprawled back for a few seconds, but he soon sat up on the edge of his chair and leaned forward to glare hungrily at his victim. When time was called, he leaped up, and in a flash was tearing headlong into Donovan's corner. The agile middleweight slipped aside and evaded his rush, then wheeled toward him and feinted at his head with quick, teasing jabs of the left fist. Curious thing about feinting—the man who is master of this art can almost force his enemy to do as he wishes and take advantage of him as he does it.

As Donovan darted his left in threatening blows which did not carry all the way through, young Sullivan responded with a plunge like that of the bull at the fluttering cape of the toreador. This was just what the veteran wanted; for as the youth leaped forward on a straight line the old master slipped obliquely to the right and kept himself out of harm's way. Mike instantly flew in front of the young giant, and again feinted him into a rush, fierce but unavailing. Four or five of these futile assaults, striking nothing but the empty air, made the Strong Boy breathe hard.

"Come on!" he growled, slapping his open left palm on his thigh as he advanced. "Come on and fight!"

"Like that?" cried Mike mockingly, as he jabbed his left fist on John L.'s mouth. Again the bull-like rush, with Donovan skipping nimbly to the left this time for a change. The big boy had bellows to mend at the end of the round. But he was a temperate, clean-living fellow in those early days, and the rest after the round brought him out for the third as fresh as at the beginning.

Donovan changed his program now. He dodged John L.'s first rush, then stepped close to him, very close indeed, bent his head down near the youngster's chest, and began stabbing left-right, left-right jolts into the ribs and middle as fast and hard as he could. Sullivan had never heard of infighting, and these blows not only surprised him but stung him to the quick. (Oh, how those short jolts of Mike's did sting!) In the midst of Donovan's rapid-fire drumming, Sullivan threw him aside a little and brought his right fist down like a trip hammer on Donovan's bent back, knocking him down so hard that he broke his nose when it hit the floor. There he lay, inert, both arms spread wide.

"He's out! The professor's out!" yelled voices in all parts of the Athenæum. But he wasn't out. For two or three seconds he lay, stunned; then his head cleared, and he began to push himself up, and came to rest on his right knee as Manager Fitzgerald was counting "Five!" of the ten seconds in which under Queensbury rules a fallen man must get up and go on fighting. Sullivan, unfamiliar with the rules, stood close to his victim, with the knock-out blow in either hand. The manager waved him back and continued to count. Donovan nodded, to show that he was counting, too.

As Fitzgerald chanted "Nine!" Donovan rose to full height, grinned his defiance, and started toward Sullivan, while the crowd cheered wildly for both of its heroes. The big fellow rushed him again, but Mike, warned by his latest experience, kept well out of his reach for the rest of the round. Sullivan charged as fast as ever, but the skill of the veteran prevented his getting to close quarters. He was puffing hard at the end of the round.

Donovan, as he sank in his chair, felt a pain in his right wrist. Hiding the right fist under the left as he crossed his arms before him, he rotated the fist

—or, rather, tried to rotate it, and found that he couldn't. Then it flashed in his memory that he had felt a burning pain in that wrist as he was infighting. His right had struck Sullivan's left elbow, and he had broken a bone in the wrist and thrown his thumb out of joint.

"By golly, boys! that was a tough fix to be in," Mike used to tell us in the boxing room of the old Athletic Club. "There I was, one more round to go with the fastest and fiercest man I had ever faced—and my right hand crippled! My reputation, my whole future, was at stake. There was only one thing to do: make him think I was feeling fine. So, when Fitzgerald called, 'Time, and wind-up!' I stepped out as gallus as a fellow going to a fair."

Lovely old word—"gallus;" a colloquialism in those times for gallant, but signifying conduct even gayer than gallant. One line in the old song "Shoo-Fly" stated: "I had a gallus fellow; he wore a gallus hat."

At the call of "Time and wind-up!" then, out pranced Donovan to meet the rush of the Strong Boy, feinting briskly with both fists, but taking special care to keep his right from hitting anything. John L. was as full as ever of the spirit of destruction, but the professor bewildered him with the speed and unexpectedness of his movements. Having slipped back from Sullivan's left chop, Donovan ducked low to avoid the lightning swing of the right that followed. He got away in safety the first time, but when he tried it again a full half minute later, Sullivan chopped down his left fist on the top of his head and made him see a shower of falling stars. He clinched and saved himself, but only for a moment; for the youth flung him off and dashed after him, still intent on a knock-out.

But the knock-out was not to be. John L. kept trying for it, Donovan twisting and fleeing from it in an exhibition of skillful defense never sur-

passed. In his mind meantime, as he used to tell us, one thought was constant: "Here I am, with my reputation at stake against a mere unknown—and my best hand gone!" Thanks to a clean life, his stamina was practically unlimited; so he kept young Sullivan dashing and guessing up to the last minute. Indeed, when the two shook hands at the finish, he was still patronizing, and laughed and said: "You did mighty well for a young fellow!"

Mike never lost sight of strategy. His battle with George Rooke was still to come, and if the news of his injured wrist should get out it might interfere with the prospects of the match; so he said nothing, did not even bandage it, but took the Strong Boy around to Keenan's place to supper. At table he hid his pain under a running fire of jokes, not forgetting to praise the youth and tell him he would be champion some day. At last he said, with a laugh:

"John, I believe you tried to stop me!"

"Sure I did," John L. replied seriously. He never spoke lightly of his prowess. "You were trying to put it all over me. If you had downed me, see where you'd stand! Of course no one can down me. You got away from me to-night because you were so scientific that I couldn't get a square shot at you. But I've got your measure now. Next time, I'll break you in two."

But when the next time came, a year later, and they met at the Music Hall, Boston, John L. did not break Mike in two, although the grudge was bitter as ever. One reason was that he had picked up some fifteen pounds of extra weight and was not quite so fast on his feet, yet Donovan had to step his best to keep Sullivan from knocking him over the unguarded edge of the stage, and out among the spectators. With his superior speed and skill, Mike managed to keep the battle in the middle of the stage.

"I'm better now than I was a year ago," John L. growled in a clinch.

"No; you're not as good," Mike jauntily replied. "You might as well have your left paw cut off, for all the good it does you. There's the joker I'm looking out for"—tapping John's deadly right. And whenever that instrument of destruction whizzed in his direction, the middleweight dived under it to safety.

In the third round Donovan saw that Sullivan was tired, thought he had a chance to down him when he was off balance for a moment, and swung the right with all his strength at the heavy blue jaw. The glove barely grazed the Strong Boy's chin, and the impetus of the blow sent Donovan sprawling on the floor, where he nearly broke his leg as he rolled. He was breathing deep and getting slowly to his feet, when Sullivan stepped close and let go a right uppercut. Donovan ducked, so that the fist hardly touched him; then quickly stood erect and closed in a hurricane mix-up. The police pulled them apart and stopped the bout.

This unhappy incident caused more ill feeling between the men, and the whispering tattlers who peddled gossip to them made it much worse as time went on. Yet Donovan from the time of their first encounter proclaimed that Sullivan was the coming champion of the world. And when that prophecy was realized, Mike still praised him, although they were more than ever on the outs.

"Boys, Sullivan knows he is the best

man in the world," Mike would tell us in the boxing room of the old club. "I don't hold it against him that he uppercut me before I was quite up; for he is a fiery fellow and he was so sore at me that he lost his head.

"He's different from any other man we've ever seen in the ring; has more speed than any other big man, and he's out to finish you in a punch. When he jumps at you, he smashes down your guard with a left chop, then shoots the right at you like a cannon ball or swings the right arm on your neck like a club. Most of the men he has beaten were licked before they put up their hands. His glare paralyzed them, took all the fight out of them. The only way to beat that is to feel that you're better than he is, and outglare him. And, by golly! that's no easy job. If it isn't impossible, it's almost impossible. But some one will do it some day."

How jealousy and gossip kept these great fighting men apart; how Donovan seconded Kilrain in his desperate effort to take Sullivan's title; how Donovan aided Corbett with his keen analysis of Sullivan's style, thus contributing much to John L.'s downfall, and how Mike befriended John when friends were few, and at last helped the big man to find himself and regain his self-respect—all these incidents are among the most interesting things in the history of the ring. Mike Donovan was as kind a Christian gentleman as ever lived. Sullivan, at heart, was much the same. It is pleasant to know that in their later years all was well between them.

Other contributions by Mr. Hemmingway will appear in succeeding issues of
THE POPULAR.

WILL SOMEBODY ANSWER THIS?


What football enthusiasts, harassed by critics of the sport, want to know is: How can they manage a game which the public pays in one season \$50,000,000 to see, without making it a commercial proposition?

The Reckoning

In Six Parts
Part II

By
W. B. M.
Ferguson

Author of "The Dollar God," "Lightnin' Calvert," Etc.



Peter (Lightnin') Calvert, whom Fate had made into the most colorful gun fighter of the old West, finally abandoned his tempestuous career and settled down in the town of Sagebrush. But he was forced to return to his guns and defend the town against the vicious Bargendy gang. When that was done he felt at liberty, at last, to marry Julie Vickers. She was the niece of Pop Vickers, who ran a general store; they had cared for Peter when he was wounded. When the story opens, Peter has been away on a trip, to see a lawyer about the Gracie estate. Peter is Major Gracie's natural son, but he has a long score of grievances against his rascally father. There was a second reason for Peter's trip; he has not been well. On his return he is examined by Doctor Day, who finds that Peter has tuberculosis. Peter now knows that he cannot marry Julie, and that he must go away. But new clouds have been coming up from the horizon. During his trip, Julie went to visit Lucy Long, an old schoolmate, and, on the way to that ranch, she and her escort came upon two members of the Bargendy crowd. Their proximity to Sagebrush augurs no good.

CHAPTER VII.

DUSTED BOTH SIDES.

YES, a problem for Solomon himself; certainly the most difficult that Peter, in a lifetime of problems, had been called upon to solve. Perhaps the most difficult any man ever had. Here assuredly was a situation to test the quality of his love for Julie, his

fortitude, his capacity for self-sacrifice. "I'm good maybe for a month, maybe a year," he thought, recalling Day's words, as he walked the floor of his room. "Maybe I'll last long enough to do this job. I've got to go; I've got to—but I can't tell her anything. I can't tell anybody. Not a word. And I may never see her again. To go like this——"

He sat down on the cot, stared at the wool mat whose tangled threads now more than ever resembled the warp and woof of his own life. Even when there was no one to see, he did not give way outwardly to emotion. His eyes alone now mirrored the agony of his soul. Might never see her again? What was the use of trying to fool himself? Why, it was ten, a hundred to one that he never would! One lung nearly gone, "not worth a curse."

What would the town say? What would she think? The answer was obvious. They would say he had jilted her. And she might think he no longer cared. What a position to place her in! What suffering to cause her! Yet what else was he to do? He must go, and he must go at once. It all came back to that.

He arose with decision, the last flickering of self conquered. A fit of coughing shook him.

His eyes strayed to the six-shooter at his side. What was it Doodah had said? Yes, a bullet would be just as sure and more merciful. Why not, if he must go anyway? He was not afraid of death; he had looked into its eyes too often, while its shadow was almost as familiar as his own. A debt everybody must pay sooner or later. Fear alone kept the majority from paying in advance. The hand was played out and he had lost, lost when he thought he had won. How typical of the ironic sinister fate that had pursued him from the cradle! The dead Bargendy was striking him from the grave. Bargendy had won. Why not then pay up? He was much of a fatalist anyway, like all his type. A man cashed out when his hour struck, no sooner and no later. Well, his hour was striking. One lung gone.

His hand slipped toward the butt of the Colt, jerked away. No, not the coward's way out! Strange, the power of suggestion, though Doodah had

meant it as a warning. His hour was striking, but it had not struck; nor was the hand played out. The game was never finished until every card lay on the table. And he had work to do. Yes, a man with one lung was a whole lot better than a man with none.

He sat down and wrote several letters, the last and longest to Julie. For once the pen was able to say what his tongue refused. It was the sort of letter than even the shyest and most inarticulate of us can write when we know we shall be no longer in this world when the recipient reads it. The shadows deepened as he wrote, and a single star in a primrose bed hung in the window as he finished.

The rest of his preparations were made automatically. He slipped on the shoulder holsters, placed the bowie in the leather sheath under the collar of one of his business coats, flung the other and the Winchester under his arm, and went downstairs.

"Land's sakes!" exclaimed Pop Vickers. "Where be you off to now?"

"Oh, I'm ridin' again," said Peter casually. "Reckon you and Joe can make out a while longer alone?"

"Reckon wē can," replied Pop, trying not to appear too jubilant at the prospect of his period of undisputed authority being unexpectedly extended. "You going over to bring Julie back? That's right, boy. And, when you're at it, stay a while. Don't go hurryin' her home. She needs a change, and so do you. Don't mind me; I'm fitten and can make out fine.

"Sam Long'll be glad to see you, too. Reckon the least he can do is give you an invite, after riddin' the county of Bargendy. And there's Miss Lucy, back from her long schoolin'. She's be'n wantin' to meet you. Julie'll be tickled to death, too. Sharp set on seein' her ag'in, ain't you? Yes, I know how you feel. Used to be young myself. Well, have a good time, boy.

Don't mind me; I'm fitten. And you're lookin' pretty fitten yourself. That trip to Dodge done you good."

Pop was neither a close nor accurate observer. His kindly faded-blue eyes saw little but what he wished them to see. They had observed nothing amiss in the relations between his niece and Peter, just as they had observed nothing lacking in the character of his friends and patrons, nor in his own mercantile abilities. He lived in a little world of his own.

Peter let him run on unchecked, let him assume that he was going to the Long home ranch. So long as he dare not tell the truth, one lie was as good as another. He was fond of this unworldly old man, appreciated his many virtues, the fine courage he had shown when trying to save Julie from Bargendy. It was practically a foregone conclusion that he should never see him again, that they were parting forever.

"Well, take care of yourself, Pop," he said gayly and, clapping the old man on the back, went out whistling.

He glanced through the window of the Come Inn next door. The oil lamps were being lighted, the usual crowd gathering at the bar and stables. Uncle Joe Sidebottom, in his favorite corner, playing checkers with Jase Webb; Tushman, Bob Farrell and two others at the perpetual game of draw. Charlie Stein, dispensing refreshment, looked so much like his dead brother, everything looked so much the same, that Peter found it easy to imagine that time had slipped back and he was the supposed Freddie Gracie about to enter for his soft drink after the day's work. Everything seemingly the same, yet how tragically everything had changed!

He went up and across the street to Day's house where he knew the other would be waiting. Day had a servant now, an ornate sign and a fine home that would not shame any small town. It had been entirely refurbished and re-

furnished regardless of expense, to the wonder and admiration of Sagebrush. Articles that some of the inhabitants had never seen, except in pictures, and that Vickers' store was unable to supply, were ordered from the East and freighted in from the railhead. Hardly possible to realize that a few months ago this house was an eyesore; that this man so elegantly dressed, and who now sat smoking on the veranda, had been little better than a bar fly. Assuredly things had changed for Doctor Day, and not tragically.

"I'm passing up the bunch," remarked Peter, thumbing at the Come Inn. "There's nothing to say. Best if I slip out unheralded, unsung." He spoke lightly, fumbled in his shirt and brought out two letters.

"These are for Julie. This one—the one with no name on it—is for her when she comes back. The other is for her if I don't come back. Savvy?"

Day nodded, cleared his throat.

"I'm giving them to you, Doodah, because I know there'll be no mistake. Pop might forget, or get muddled. Remember, you don't know anything. You don't know where I've gone, when, how or why. I just left this letter for you to give her. That's all you know."

"And—how long am I to wait before giving her the other one?"

"If I come back at all she'll hear from me, in one way or another, in a month. I mean, Doodah, at the end of a month I'll have a doctor look me over, maybe in Denver."

"I see."

"If I should be getting better instead of worse—miracles *do* happen sometimes—if there's a chance for me, then I'll let her know all about it. But I won't come back, of course, until I'm absolutely fit and there's no chance of her catching it."

"I see," said Day again. "Yes, that's the best plan, under the circumstances. Naturally you don't want to keep her in

suspense longer than is absolutely necessary. And I'd see another doctor in any case. What? Yes, of course, there's no possibility of my being mistaken, but it would help me to feel that some one else was sharing the responsibility. Are you quite decided that you're doing the best thing in going like this?"

"Yes, and you are, too. And it's the only thing, best or not. I've no choice."

"Life is like that," said Day heavily. "We've no choice. We must do as circumstance dictates. We think we're free agents, but we're not."

"Yes, that's about the size of it."

"Then, if she doesn't hear from you in a month, I give her this other letter?"

"That's the idea. It'll mean the jig's up and she must know the truth. I've fixed everything else, all cinched with the lawyer in Austin. I reckon my old man's dead, all right, so she'll have the whole business. No need to ask you to be good to her, Doedah."

"No, I'll do my best."

"Thanks. Good-by, old-timer."

"Wait a minute," said Day in a muffled voice, and went into the house.

When at length he returned he said, "Take this," and handed Peter a bottle. "It's the new Kalmetz treatment that perhaps you've heard of. No? Well, he's the great Vienna specialist, the big man on tuberculosis. It's something entirely revolutionary. What they call a serum, sort of a piece of the dog-that-bit-you idea. They say it's going to do wonders. I don't know. But we may cure a lot of disease some day by that method. I sent for some. It's hard to get, and it's been a long time coming."

He seemed to be talking rather at random, as though to cloak a powerful emotion. He lacked Peter's iron self-control.

"Anyhow," he went on, "it can do no harm and may do good. Try it. Only one teaspoonful a day, taken before breakfast. Remember that. I'm no be-

liever in nostrums, but Kalmetz's reputation is high, and the reports *may* not be exaggerated. Anyway, try it. One bottle is enough, supposed to do the trick, if it can be done. It kills the germ, and the rest is only a matter of feeding. You'll try it to-morrow morning?"

"You bet," said Peter, and reached a hand into his pocket. "What do I owe you? I mean in money. Come now, I mayn't have another chance to square up. You've never billed me——"

"Shut up," said Day roughly. "Next to the ground; don't forget that. And Kalmetz's stuff. First dose to-morrow morning before breakfast. Stay in the open, away from everybody. And don't give up hope. Don't worry about Julie. Good-by, Peter."

They shook hands in silence, and then Day watched the other as he slipped across the road and swung lightly to the saddle of the horse he had left at the hitching rail in front of the store. A full moon cast a silvery radiance over the drab, unlovely little town. Peter turned and waved a hand to the man watching in the shadows, the man whom he had come to love like a brother. Then he cantered down the long, dusty street and so to the desert, riding alone to meet his destiny.

Day continued to watch long after Peter had gone. A dead cigar was in his mouth, a knot between his blue eyes. At length he went in slowly and closed the door. There was a finality about the action, as though he were closing the door on something irrevocably over and done with, on a person whom he never expected to see again in the land of the living.

The solitary horseman, once more alone. Fated, no doubt, to spend his last moments among strangers, surrounded, it might be, by hostile faces. Well, so be it. We come into the world alone and we go out of it alone. And, despite all personal contacts, each of us

goes through life alone. The inner self none can reach, none but Heaven. If life is made for futurity—Peter's faith in this was invincible, though he was without dogma or any religious training—then such isolation is essential. Each soul must stand or fall by itself. We go on and on, progressing or declining, promoted or demoted, but we go on.

The night was immaculate, the sage sea a mystic wonder. A night for thoughts such as these. Out into the desert whence he came. But it is not to be supposed that he bore himself as one doomed to death, a martyred victim of fate. Self-pity was something unknown to him and his thoughts were wholly of Julie. He wished now that his tongue had spoken a tithe of what his pen had contrived to say in that last letter. What was this force that had palsied his tongue? Was it pride?

He was heading for no man's land. On just such a night as this he had set out for Bargendy's stronghold, followed the same route, and again came the convincing feeling that time had turned back and he had dreamed succeeding events. His mind also was in the same turmoil, while the effect of the vast moonlit spaces, the rhythmic motion of the horse, lulled his senses into a sort of narcotic sleep.

Fifteen miles out and he came to Picket Rock or Sentinel Butte, Dead Man's Rock, as it was now coming to be called. Yes, there it was towering like the bastion of a fortress, sentinel of the mesa and guardian of the rim-rock county. Here he had been ambushed on that other night, and then, in turn, ambushed Royce and the gold thieves.

Another ten miles and he caught the glimmer of a camp fire, the first sign since leaving Sagebrush that this wilderness contained any other human than himself. No doubt a trader in honey and pecans or a party of buffalo hunters. Peter felt that he could do with

a steak, some venison or game instead of the frugal fare he carried. One could live off the land in those days, and all he had was a little flour, salt, and some jerked beef. But, though the hospitality of the plains was proverbial, it demanded a certain etiquette; nor was he the one to step carelessly even at the dictates of appetite.

There was only one man at the fire and he stepped quickly out of the light, keeping the blaze between Peter and himself, when he heard the horse. The moon was now obscured by cloud and neither man could see the other distinctly, no more than a vague blur in the starlight. There was no advantage on either side; if Peter was against the sky line, the horse half hid him. He knew that in all likelihood he was facing a six-shooter or Winchester, precisely as his own hand was on the butt of a shoulder gun. It was eloquent of the times.

"*Bueno*, stranger," he greeted.

"Howdy," came a deep bass voice.

"That's a right good smell yuh're brewin', an' I'm powerful sharp set. I'm from the Canadian, takin' a *poco pasear* up to Denver."

"Set in an' eat hearty, stranger," invited the other. "Ain't nothin' to beat a young, sweet, mast-fed turkey cooked this yere way over a hackberry fire."

"That's whatever," agreed Peter, his mouth beginning to water. "Buffalo huntin'?"

"I were, but I cut loose from my pardners. It ain't what it used to be. 'Tain't so long back that tongues fetched three cents apiece, an' yuh could get a thousand a month. I'm aimin' to hit the Texas road into Mexico—get me a job punchin' longhorns, mebber. This country's gettin' played out. Yuh ridin' for anybody?"

"Myself," said Peter; and, the amenities being performed, he dismounted.

An old-timer from his voice and talk, an old-timer who knew his little book

and who wasn't taking any chances, for he remained beyond the circle of fire-light. He meant to have a good look at this guest, in spite of all the fair words. It was up to Peter to advance and he did so, left hand—that seemingly harmless left hand—tucked negligently in the breast of his coat.

No one could have followed what happened next. Peter had hardly entered the circle of light when a stab of flame came from across the fire, and almost at the same moment Peter's breast seemed to spout lightning. Another second and something whistled through the darkness at his back, crashed through his steeple hat and sent him headlong to the ground. Two more goutts of flame came from beyond the fire and Peter jerked, lay still.

"That's enough, Flash. Yuh've dusted him both sides, an' Ole Betsy stove in his head like an egg. Ain't no use wastin' good ca'tridges. Reckon he left that *payé* of hisn to home this trip."

Beef White, holding the long buffalo gun by the barrel, stepped into the circle of light from one side of the fire, while his partner joined him from the other.

Ullman's face was streaming blood, and an arm hung queerly.

"Why didn't you plug him?" he demanded. "He danged near got me. Yuh knowed his voice as well as me."

"Ain't no sense wastin' good powder," retorted White, using his favorite phrase. "I knowed I could belly up an' give him a wipe with Ole Betsy as a finisher. Say, Flash, yuh'd oughter be on the boards with Booth, changin' yuhr voice like that. Never knowed yuh was such a great actor. He never suspicioned nothin'."

"Danged well he didn't." growled Ullman. "I've lost most of an ear, an' my left wing's bust, too. I'll call that shootin', under the circumstances. I sure will."

"Never seen nothin' like it," agreed

White. "Certainly was pretty. They told no lies about him."

They gazed with admiration on Peter's huddled form, then drove their boots into his ribs. They kicked him thoroughly, scientifically, dispassionately.

"Stiffened, all right," said Ullman.

"Ain't a doubt of it," agreed White. "Never seen nothin' deader."

"He couldn't have his *payé* with him this trip. He was a great gun fighter, Beef. I'll say I never seen nothin' prettier than that last drawer of hisn. He sure could crack down like greased lightnin'."

"That's whatever," agreed White, chewing meditatively. "If it hadn't be'n for Ole Betsy, he'd have stiffened yuh—"

"Like hell he would! What yuh-all talkin' about? I got him before yuh horned in, an' I got him good. He's carryin' my brand to hell with him."

"Well, I reckon he's carryin' Ole Betsy's, too. Say, what was he doin' up here? I'll bet that gal of hisn sicked him onto us."

"Or them high-heeled galoots of Long's. Well, the Lightnin' Bug's cashed in his chips, an' I reckon I got him the only way he could be got. His hand's played out. Luck was agin' him this time, an' his *payé* went back on him. But he sure was a great gun fighter, Beef." Ullman gave the still form a valedictory kick. "Better dry-gulch him, huh?"

"Aw," said White, "what's the odds? The buzzards'll pick him clean. I'm dog tired an' empty, so let's eat."

CHAPTER VIII.

PETER'S PAYE.

THUS through human vanity, laziness and the appetites of the flesh, aided and abetted by fortuitous circumstances, was Peter's life miraculously spared. His hour had not struck.

Vanity played its part in Ullman's belief that he could not possibly have failed to kill his man, if not at the first shot then at the second or third. With such an expert as Ullman no other victim could have escaped instant death, but when he recognized the voice of the Lightnin' Bug coming out of the darkness, Ullman had been perilously near panic. He was a physically brave man, and so also was White; whatever their failings they had abundant animal courage, and this was what helped to make them so dangerous. They disproved the popular theory that a bully is always a coward. Those who thought them cravens because of White's discretion, or some wanton killing, made a fatal mistake.

But this man riding up out of the night was their admitted master, the only man in the whole West whom they feared. They had deserted Bargendy in his extremity, cleared out of the State in order to avoid meeting Calvert. He had a bone to pick with them; they had heckled and bullied him when he was forced to pose as the harmless Freddie Gracie, and he would never believe that they had been against the proposed abduction of Julie, no more than he would forgive them for what happened that night in Sagebrush. They had no reason to doubt that, if he ever cut their trail again, he would shoot it out with them on the spot.

Neither had they any reason to think that he was on their trail. When they heard him coming, before he could see whether there was one man or two, they divided forces simply as a matter of routine, White lying in ambush near the place where the unknown visitor must ultimately appear. Their horses he could not see, but even if he did, he would take one for a pack animal.

Those few moments, when he waited for Peter to enter the firelight, were probably the longest Ullman had ever known, and he had known many. He

must make absolutely sure; he dare not risk a shot in the dark. Given half a chance, this man would kill both him and White. His skill was superhuman, and he would go on shooting even though shot to pieces. That was his record. Added to this was the legend of his luck, the story that he possessed a charm that rendered him invulnerable to lead and steel. It was his life or theirs. Ullman must get him with a center shot, dust him both sides through the heart. He must not fail.

But Ullman failed, victim of his own anxiety and fear. His hand lacked something of its customary cunning, a trifle that made the difference between life and death. Moreover he forgot the fact, heard often enough, that the Lightnin' Bug always carried a brace of shoulder guns.

The bullet that knocked a little puff of dust from Peter's coat was several inches wide of the intended mark; it struck the butt of the concealed Colt, plowed off at an angle and inflicted no more than a superficial wound before its exit at the back. "Ole Betsy," as White justly claimed, was the one, up to this point, that did all the damage. It knocked Peter flat, rendered him as completely unconscious as though Comanche Peak itself had fallen on him. There was no question that, as he lay prone, Ullman's next shots hit him. His body "jumped" twice, even as will a corpse. But these bullets were not necessarily fatal, not to a superman like Peter. Nor was the "wipe" from Old Betsy.

Ullman and his partner, however, were fully justified in believing the contrary, especially after the industrious application of boot leather. White was proud of his strength and believed that nobody could have survived that blow, not even a buffalo calf. Moreover, at Ullman's first shot had he not seen plainly in the firelight the little puff of dust that leaped out under Peter's left

shoulder blade? A center shot, through the lungs, if not heart. Oh, yes, he was stiffened, all right.

"But it is quite possible that fortuitous circumstances was the prime factor in saving Peter's life. Ullman and White might have decided finally that the wisest course was to attend to their victim's burial in person. Somebody might happen to come along and recognize him while identification was still possible, not that such a contingency was fraught with any great peril. But it might be just as well if none knew what had become of him.

They were in no particular hurry to leave, and the proximity of the supposed corpse did not disturb them in the least; rather it was a source of pride, satisfaction and relief. They gazed at it with increasing approval as they ate, continued to voice their admiration for his exploits and thus indirectly praise their own. They had accounted for Lightnin' Calvert. The man who could say that with truth could say anything.

"Pass over that tarantula juice yuh-all have be'n hoardin' up like a moldy miser," said Ullman at length. "Reckon it's time for celebratin'. Let's drink to the corp' an' the occasion.

His discreet partner demurred.

"It's got to last us, Flash."

"Last hell! Why, 'tain't thirty miles to a drink now! Who's to stop us makin' Sagebrush if we've a mind to?"

Apparently this agreeable corollary had not as yet dawned on the mentally more sluggish White. He brightened instantly and, going to his horse, returned with the treasured bottle of whisky.

"Here's to the corp'!" he said. "Long may she wave!"

It was a full quart bottle and they finished it between them, forgetting to eat. The result, if comparatively slow, was sure. White's customary discretion functioned only in seeing that he got his fair share of the liquor, and

more if possible. They drank to the "corp'," to each other, to things in general.

"We're a great team, me an' yuh," asserted White.

"Yuh-all mean *me* an' yuh."

"That's what I said, Flash—me an' yuh."

"No, yuh-all didn't. Yuh said me an' — No, yuh didn't neither. I don't rightly remember what yuh said, but don't yuh never say it again, Beef. I come first. I'm the face card of this combination, an' don't yuh forget it. I'm the man that got the Lightnin' Bug."

"Me, too, Flash. Don't yuh go forgettin' Ole Betsy."

"To hell with Ole Betsy. Didn't I dust him both sides?"

Thus they quarreled, finally embraced, eulogized the corpse anew, almost shed tears over the sudden demise of such a celebrity, while the neglected fire, and the contents of the bottle, got lower and lower.

"Cut off in the flower of his youth," said White, gesturing at the night. "A cryin' scandal, a scaldin' shame."

"One of the greatest men th' country has ever seen," asserted Ullman. "We got to plant him decent, Beef. It ain't respectable to leave a man like that layin' for the buzzards an' prairie howlers. I was reared proper."

"We'll plant him, pardner. Don't take on so. We'll bury him decent, an' give him a monumental, too. We'll do it handsome."

White staggered to his feet, groped about him. The fire was very low.

"Say, durned if I can find him, Flash. Where is he? Yuh had him last. Where'd yuh put him? No, he ain't not here. Hey, corp'!"

Ullman was now assisting in the ludicrous search, stumbling and falling.

"'Tain't right to go hidin' out on us like this, just when we was aimin' to plant him decent," he complained. "Yuh

keep outen my way, Beef. I can find him all right if yuh quit trippin' me up, yuh big pork bar'l yuh."

"Let's have another drink an' get our bearin's," suggested White. "Ain't nothin' like liquor to put sense into a man. He's got to be around here somewheres. Hey, corp'!"

"Shut up," said Ullman. "If yuh-all wasn't blind drunk yuh'd know he's just ornery enough not to let on where he is. Gimme that bottle before yuh swaller it."

"There's nothin' to swaller. Nary a drop, Flash. Must have a hole in the bottom. That barkeep sure skinned us."

"Let's go to Sagebrush an' get a bottle that don't leak," suggested Ullman. "We can come back an' do the plantin' proper by daylight. We'll get *two* bottles—many as we've a mind to. An' we won't pay for them neither."

"Now yuh're shoutin', pardner! Just for his ornery carryin's on, we'll leave the corp' out all night. That'll learn him. Yes, we'll get two bottles—an' Julie Vickers."

"No, yuh don't, Beef. Womern an' liquor don't mix, an' I don't holt with womern. All I aims to get me is a bottle that don't leak. Surge up, yuh pork bar'l yuh."

They staggered away to their horses, never too drunk to ride or even shoot, and vanished in the direction of what they believed to be Sagebrush.

All this time Peter had lain little more than half a dozen yards from the spot where he first had fallen. He was concealed by nothing but the buffalo grass, and had the fire not been neglected, or had the searchers been sober, his discovery would have been inevitable. Total unconsciousness alone had saved him ere Ullman and White absorbed a pint each of potent liquor on empty stomachs, and when at length he did move, they were too drunk, and the light too poor, for them to note the fact.

Thus did fortuitous circumstances save him, for Peter, when he regained consciousness, remembered nothing of what had happened.

How had he come here? What had happened? Where was he? But, far more than that, *who* was he? Peter did not know. He had forgotten his identity. He was like one born into a new world with no recollection of the one he had left. It hurt him when he tried to think; there was an excruciating pain in his head, while red-hot irons seemed to be stabbing his vitals.

From where he lay when he opened his eyes he could see, without moving more than his head, the two men at the fire. He could see them distinctly, for both sat facing him. Yet he knew neither. Instinct, however, warned him that they were enemies, responsible for the pain that ravaged him. Their words, such as he overheard, supported this. They thought him dead, and the instinct of self-preservation commanded him not to let them suspect the contrary. These men had tried to kill him, would kill him. Why? He must escape before they discovered their mistake.

Obeying instinct alone, his movements mechanical, he began to edge away with the silence and stealth that were his heritage. Inch by inch and foot by foot he went, gritting his teeth against the pain and supported only by his indomitable spirit. Unconsciousness overtook him again before he had gone very far.

When next he opened his eyes on the stars all that remained of the fire was a dull red ember or so. And now even his new memory had vanished with the old. His mind was an appalling blank, and he had no recollection of the two men whom he had seen. What was this in his left hand, this blue steel on which the moonlight ran cold? A six-shooter. Yes, he knew that, and the colloquial name, that and no more. What was he doing out in the dark with a gun? He

felt like a somnambulist who, suddenly awakened, finds himself in an unknown locality with some absurd article in his hand.

He staggered to his feet, and presently something came out of the night and he felt a cold touch on his hand. A horse! It must be his own horse. The remains of a fire, and now a horse. Of course; he had been out camping and something had happened to him. He was wounded, badly hurt in head and body. He must get home. But where did he live, and what was his name? No matter; he'd remember pretty soon. He couldn't be far from home, and the horse, if given its head, should take him there. The first thing to do was to stanch this blood that his movements had caused to flow like a warm tide.

He proceeded to do so expertly, instinct his only guide. He had no recollection of ever having bandaged a wound before, but his nimble and dexterous fingers worked automatically with the impromptu materials he found to his hand.

Seconimo and his merry men had seen many strange sights, not a few of their own devising, but seldom so strange a one as this. They crept down from rock to rock, wary, suspicious, fearful of a trap, yet impelled inexorably by the curiosity of the wild.

Unlovely specimens of humanity these, Jicarilla Apaches and a handful of Muache Utes. Cruel, cunning, incredibly ignorant. There was little of the noble red man about them, nor had there ever been. Undersized, wizened, poisonous as the Gila monster or diamond back. Lank hair hanging from under a dirty head band in which was stuck a feather or two. Stark naked but for moccasins that reached half up the leg and were held in place by strings fastened to a loin cloth.

This roving band, of whom the

Apache, Seconimo, was the leader, belonged to the Cimmaron Agency upon what was known as "Maxwell's grant." At least that is where they should have been. There were about eight hundred and fifty Jicarilla Apaches and six hundred and fifty Muache Utes at the agency; they had no treaty rights with the government, nor had any reservation been apportioned them as yet. The Utes had resisted efforts to transfer them to the big Ute Reservation in Colorado, while it was planned to remove the Apaches to the Mescalero Agency at Fort Stanton, if it could be done without bloodshed.

They objected to being moved, and it served as an excuse, whatever their rights in the matter, for some of the young bucks to go on a raiding expedition, have what they called a good time, until rounded up and sent back by the troops. This good time embraced torturing to death any white man unfortunate enough to be taken alive, and stealing anything on which they could lay hands. With this agreeable project in mind, and the ambition to put as much territory as possible between themselves and the agency, they had reached the Mexican line when they fell in with Peter.

Peter had expected too much of his horse when he thought it would take him home, wherever that home might be. This was not the intelligent animal he had owned before settling in Sagebrush, the famous Mustard Plaster that he had been forced to sell. It was the first time this animal had been over the route, and, given its head, it went where fancy dictated. That fancy led it more or less directly due west.

Peter knew nothing about that long ride; he was unconscious half the time, delirious the rest. Back in his mind was the indomitable purpose to get home, to keep on the move in spite of pain, hunger and thirst. He fell from the saddle more than once, lost the

horse more than once. Finally he tied himself to the saddle. He rode as one in a nightmare, lying on his mount's neck, or what he took to be the neck. But it was the rump.

Thus Seconimo and his merry men were afforded the spectacle of a paleface who, for some occult reason, preferred to ride in a strange and undignified manner, for assuredly there was none to compel him. They had satisfied themselves of that ere showing a single dirty head band. Apparently he was asleep, legs hanging free from the useless stirrups. They could not see that what held him up was a rawhide lashing him to the saddle horn, nor would they know it was a miracle that he had managed to get astride the horse at all.

They could have riddled him with arrow and bullet as the horse walked wearily, its rider heedlessly, into the ambush; but curiosity, and other emotions, stayed their hand. If this hated child of the White Father happened to be touched by the Great Spirit, as his manner of riding would suggest, then unfortunately they must let him go in peace—after robbing him, of course. Insanity; it was the one thing they respected. But if he happened not to be afflicted by the Great Spirit, then he could be made to furnish much sport ere death came to him. A bullet would finish him too quickly, and at the worst they could steal his horse and weapons.

When at length they rushed him and discovered the truth, Seconimo spoke with satisfaction.

"Behold," he said in substance; "he is not afflicted by the Great Spirit but by man. He has been sorely hurt by enemies and placed in this ignoble attitude. We shall help him to live so that he shall know when death comes."

There was criticism of this laudable intention among the older heads. Of course, nothing could be more gratifying than a paleface to torture, but there are occasions when one must exercise

self-denial and restraint. Could they afford to be burdened with this sorely wounded paleface? A man in good health, or even slightly wounded, was a different matter. This paleface might never recover sufficiently to repay them for their hospitality and care. Why not scalp and mutilate him now? With any luck they were sure to have many able-bodied victims before the pleasant game was ended by the Long Knives.

Some of the impatient young bucks advocated this course, and it is quite likely that Peter would have been killed then and there, had he not suddenly opened his eyes and astonished them all by addressing Seconimo in the latter's own tongue.

CHAPTER IX.

A MAKER OF MIGHTY MEDICINE.

PETER had no recollection of having saved his life, or postponed his death, by his linguistic ability. It had been purely unconscious, automatic. By some strange functioning of his injured brain he reverted to the days of his childhood when he saw the dark savage faces about him and recognized them for the tribes they were.

Seconimo was interested enough to postpone the proposed slaughter and mutilation. His interest deepened during the succeeding days when Peter lay up in the mountain fastness to which they had taken him. This was not a case of a paleface acquiring a smattering of the tongue; Peter, in his delirium, spoke like a Cheyenne chief. Either the Great Spirit had seen fit to give him intimate knowledge of these matters, or he was an adopted child, blood brother of the red man.

Peter, when he regained consciousness and a measure of strength, could enlighten his curious host very little. Strangely enough, the only names that came to him out of the past were those of his foster mother and sister, though he now thought them blood relatives.

It is to be remembered, however, that he had never known his foster father's name. But of the fate of these people he remembered nothing.

"My mother," he said to Seconimo, "was Standing Cow, widow of a Cheyenne chief, and my father was a squaw man. I had also a sister called Star Eyes. We hunted the buffalo and fished the rivers. Life was good. Then the white man came——" Peter knit his brows, gestured helplessly. "That is all. More I do not know."

And more he did not know. Obviously there was a hiatus between those joyous days and these, but how great a one? Obviously something must have happened, but what? The whole past was a blank but for those two names and the blurred but exhilarating memory that he had ridden bareback over the plains and shot arrows into buffaloes. There was also the dim recollection of a great painted tepee, and of certain religious rites.

He tried desperately to beat his brains into some train of consecutive thought, but the only results were strange head noises and an increasing pain at the base of his skull. They brought him the Bible and the old Shakespeare, without which he never traveled, but they evoked no memory. He could read them, yes, even quote them by the yard, but when, how or where he had learned—no, nothing but head noises. He could not remember, no more than he could remember his own name, how he had been wounded, where he had first learned the Indian dialects.

"He has been a great warrior in his day," said Seconimo, mightily impressed by Peter's collection of scars which far surpassed his own. "His mother was a daughter of our race, his father an adopted son."

Peter's appearance, apart from his innocent misstatement of the facts, supported this belief. His earliest nickname among his own race had been that

of "Injun Kid." But Peter himself had no recollection of being a great warrior, no memory of his superhuman skill with firearms. Of course, he must be able to use them in a measure, else he would not have possessed them, but his only feeling at sight of six-shooter or Winchester was that of repugnance and even fear. On the other hand, he viewed with interest and pleasure the bows and arrows possessed by most of his hosts.

He thought that this surely betokened more familiarity, a greater affinity with the primitive weapon and that he must have spent by far the greater part of his life with his mother's people; that he was in fact an Indian. He was unaware of the true explanation, and the deep psychological truth behind it. If he had no recollection of his half brother, the remorse and horror inspired by Freddie Gracie's death had left its ineradicable mark on his soul. This repugnance toward firearms went deeper than memory.

"He has overcome the paleface blood," said Seconimo. "The bad strain has been washed out in the good blood of his mother. He has suffered at the hands of the children of the White Father even as we have. Our hatred of the paleface is his hatred."

This was true in a measure. Reversion to the days of his childhood brought its inevitable concomitant. If Peter had no memory of the fate of Star Eyes, the death of his putative parents, there remained the blurred feeling of a poignant tragedy for which the white man was responsible. Nor was this to be wondered at; apart from those incidents, Peter's contacts with members of his own race, with few exceptions, had produced contempt or hatred. This feeling of hostility that was his heritage now operated instinctively. He was like a creature of the wild that has gone back to its kind and forgotten the hand of the tamer, or remembers it vaguely with aversion.

"Also," said Seconimo, "the hand of the Great Spirit is heavy upon him. But ere many moons have gone it may pass from him, and he shall join in this war against the palefaces. He has been a great warrior and undoubtedly knoweth many things we know not. With his counsel and help we may do what our fathers, and fathers' fathers, failed to do; we may drive the palefaces into the big water, which none of us has seen, so that the land shall be ours again and we may follow the buffalo without hindrance. He has been sent to us by the Great Spirit. Let him be taken care of. Seconimo has spoken."

In order that nothing should retard Peter's recovery, Seconimo gave orders to postpone the great game of harrying the palefaces. Thus far they had lacked both time and opportunity, and consequently no organized hunt was after them. But, though news traveled slowly, their first outrage would be the signal for them to keep on the move, forsake this pleasant mountain fastness where there was an abundance of food. The Long Knives would keep after them until at last they must go back to the hated agency, like naughty children returning to school.

Let it not be supposed that Seconimo was swayed by anything but the dictates of expediency and superstition; the sooner Peter recovered, the sooner would he prove an invaluable ally, while the Indian religion imposed the severest supernatural punishment on any who harmed or failed to succor the insane. Though he had no scientific knowledge of medicine, nor, indeed, connected the head wound with Peter's mental condition—White's foul blow, thanks to the steeple hat, had left surprisingly little visual evidence of the damage it had wrought—Seconimo believed that as the other's body mended, so might the affliction of the Great Spirit be removed from him.

This came to pass in a measure; the

head noises ceased gradually as Peter gained slowly in strength, and in no sense was his reason impaired. He was able to think with all his old clarity and quickness, but the blank wall which shut out the past remained intact. Yet, if he was conscious of no chink through which he might glimpse the past, it has been seen that certain knowledge from the other side reached him in mysterious fashion.

As another example, when Seconimo told him where they were, Peter knew instantly and with certitude that he had never been in New Mexico before, though where he had been he did not know. Texas, the Panhandle, when mentioned, were as so many names to him.

There were those in the band with whom he found no favor, those who resented the fact that, owing to him, they must postpone the pleasure of murder and theft. Others resented Seconimo's growing intimacy with him; they were jealous, suspicious. Some went so far to say that he was a liar, like all white men, and that he had imposed on Seconimo merely to work the band's destruction through some base treachery. He had no Indian blood, he was not touched by the Great Spirit, he would never make war on the paleface.

But that Peter was under the protection of the Great Spirit, and possessed of supernatural powers they never suspected, the maker of bigger medicine than they had ever seen, was demonstrated one day in most astounding and dramatic fashion. A crafty buck, known as Eagle Feather, who perhaps feared being ousted by this interloper from his position as Seconimo's chief lieutenant, had become Peter's deadly enemy and the leader of the faction opposed to him.

Failing to convince his chief of Peter's falsity and the danger they thus ran in harboring him, Eagle Feather finally decided that the only way to cope with the situation was to make an end

of the interloper. Covetousness added its spur to jealousy and blood lust. There were many things which Peter possessed that Eagle Feather felt he could do with. A guest, an ally, must not be despoiled, but if he should die his goods could be decently inherited. And Eagle Feather, being second in command, would get second choice.

Peter was able to do little more than crawl about in a blanket, shifting himself from sun to shade, and Seconimo had taken personal charge of all his worldly goods. Perhaps he knew the virtues of his graves, or his belief in Peter did not go to the extent of allowing him weapons.

Eagle Feather was particularly enamored of the coats, heavy and light, which Peter had worn as climate dictated. He had never seen anything like them for they were made to Peter's special order and requirements. Eagle Feather, unmindful of the effect of moccasins and unclad legs, considered that he would look uncommonly well in such a garment. There being two, he might confidently expect to inherit one. His fingers itched to try them on, but he dare not display his desire before Seconimo.

There was a naïve simplicity about Eagle Feather's murder plot, suggested by the terrain of the mountain fastness. What more feasible and pleasant than to drop the hated interloper down one of the many handy gorges? Had they not been put there for that precise purpose? A little duplicity, a gentle push, and the thing was done. Quite as reasonable for this victim of the Great Spirit to step over into space as for him to ride a horse hindside foremost. One could not expect logic in such a man. Or, say, a sudden dizzy spell consequent upon his convalescence—Eagle Feather explained it all proudly to his fellow conspirators.

"He is learning to walk again, like a babe, and are we to know whither his

feeble footsteps lead? We shall await the day when Seconimo has gone to hunt, and only those whom we can trust remain. Then one of us—it shall be thou, Broken Knife—will lead this cheating paleface dog by the hand——"

"No," said the selected instrument; "it shall not be Broken Knife."

The rest similarly declined the honor. They had no fear of the accomplished crime being discovered, nor were they hampered by any humanitarian scruples, but they did fear the Great Spirit. It might possibly happen that Peter was under its protection, with very awkward results to themselves. Their simple minds saw a vast and vital difference between being accomplices before or after the fact, and doing the deed in person. One and all were quite willing to perjure themselves wholesale, agree that Peter had wandered off alone and met with the fatal accident before he was missed; but the other—no, thank you. Eagle Feather would profit most by this matter, and undoubtedly he was the one to do it. Was he not their leader?

Eagle Feather saw, that if it was to be done at all, he must attend to it in person.

"Eagle Feather knows not fear. He is not a lizard," he said disdainfully, "He looks the sun in the eye. He will show that this paleface dog is a liar and cheat. Man-with-his Face-to-the-Tail shall call vainly on the Great Spirit to save him."

Thus it was arranged, and all they waited for was opportunity. When it length it arrived, Peter was able to hobble a little with the aid of a stick, thus making matters all the pleasanter. Quite physically able to walk to the jumping off place, and no questions asked.

Now that his coveted chance had finally come, Eagle Feather could not resist the craving to handle the goods he was about to inherit. Peter was lying in the sun, rolled in a blanket for,

despite the season, the morning air nipped hard at this altitude. He was unarmed, as usual.

In the cave, under a ledge of rock, where Seconimo had his quarters, Eagle Feather fingered covetously and cautiously the three Colts. He knew they were not as other weapons. The triggers of these were filed. He had overheard Peter telling Seconimo to be careful. The latter had "borrowed" the Winchester, a '73 model much superior to his own, and no doubt he would keep it. But Eagle Feather could count on securing one of these revolvers, perhaps the long one in the curious scabbard, a scabbard that revolved even as the chambers of the weapon it held. Also he would acquire a coat. Yes, and perhaps other articles.

"Arise, O my brother," said Eagle Feather, at length approaching Peter, while the other conspirators remained diplomatically in the background and pretended to be looking elsewhere. "Let us go for a little walk. It is time your legs were strengthening, and, with my aid, progress will be greater. We can go far. Lean on me."

But Peter would have none of the little walk; he wished to be left alone. Nor had he ever fancied this gentleman.

Well, if he would not go one way, he should go another. It was all the same. Indeed, Eagle Feather was glad to discard diplomacy and tell this hated paleface, helpless as a babe, what he thought of him ere he dragged him by the hair to his doom.

But Eagle Feather, his oration finished, had taken no more than a step toward Peter when a sudden and terrible change came over him. His expression became one of pain and terror, his eyes turned in, and, giving a howl like a wounded dog, he dropped to the ground, rolled over, kicked, lay still.

When at length Seconimo and the others returned they found the rest of the band in the grip of supernatural ter-

ror, unable to move. They squatted at a distance, staring at Peter and the evident corpse, afraid to approach either. Peter was smoking a cigarette.

"How, Seconimo!" he greeted, raising a hand. "This dog tried to kill me when your back was turned, but I called on the Great Spirit and It answered."

The trembling conspirators corroborated this and took Peter to witness that they had no hand in the proceedings, no knowledge of what Eagle Feather intended until it was too late. No one had touched him, that they could swear, yet he had fallen and died like a sick buffalo. Undoubtedly there had been much evil in his heart. They did not mind testifying now that he had spoken of killing Man-with-his-Face-to-the-Tail, and had even misjudged them to the extent of trying to enlist their support. They thought they had talked all such evil out of his heart, threatening, as they had, to inform Seconimo.

Doubtless Seconimo knew how much of this alleged innocence to believe, and, approaching the form of his erstwhile chief lieutenant, he proceeded to examine it closely. There was no question that Eagle Feather was dead, nor was there any evidence of how that death had occurred. Clearly it was the work of the Great Spirit—perhaps.

"Let the fate of this unbeliever be a warning and a lesson," said Seconimo in substance, fixing an eye on the conspirators. "Man-with-his-Face-to-the-Tail is a maker of mighty medicine and he will use it against the palefaces, his enemies. All shall be stricken, as this secret enemy was stricken. It is good."

CHAPTER X.

THE CALL OF THE BLOOD.

THOUGH Peter knew no more about the sudden death of Eagle Feather than any one else, he was never one to overlook the chance of gaining an advantage that might come in handy some

day. He had had a very narrow escape as, unarmed and helplessly weak, he could have offered no serious defense. Moreover, the plot had burst on him without warning.

Truly a man did not die until his hour had struck. That phrase came to him suddenly out of the past like a familiar thought. Under what previous circumstances had he voiced it mentally? Or had he read it somewhere? No matter; it was useless to try and conjure up the past.

Doubtless Eagle Feather had died of an apoplexy, or something of that nature. Peter's medical knowledge was scanty, no more than the average layman's of that period, even though he had much practical experience in curing and giving wounds. But he knew that the only other explanation was untenable; Indians did not die of poison, except perhaps alcoholic. They knew what to eat and what to let alone.

Nor could Eagle Feather have partaken of anything unshared by the rest of the band. No; providential heart failure, a seizure—something of that kind. Some of the strongest-looking men have a fatally weak link in their life chain, and it snaps suddenly during great physical stress or emotion. Eagle Feather had got all worked up over this murder he wanted to commit, and he had not been too young a man.

Well, he was dead, a secret and bitter enemy gone, and there would be no more attempts at tricks of that sort. Peter's prestige had increased vastly, though by the rank and file he was regarded with more awe than liking. Seconimo shared this awe, but he wished also to share the secret whence it was derived.

Peter must possess a charm, an incantation which placed him in such good standing with the Great Spirit. Or perhaps it was some trick he had learned from the palefaces, like the wire that talks, or the new box with a voice in

it of which Seconimo had heard at the agency? Surely Peter could impart the secret—not, of course, to the vulgar herd, but to a great chief like Seconimo.

Seconimo's importunities became embarrassing. Peter considered tendering him a trouser button and a set of nursery rhymes, but then Seconimo would invoke them in vain and discover the fraud. He thought a measure of truth the best answer.

"I possess no charm, O Seconimo," he said, "nor have I any magic words; else I should share them with you gladly. But the Great Spirit does as It wills. When I saw death in the evil eyes of Eagle Feather, and words of death came from his lips, I called in my heart, 'Guard me, O Great Spirit!' and It answered as the thunder answers the lightning. More I do not know. It is a mystery, even as life itself."

Seconimo had all the suspicion of his race and he coveted this occult power, or paleface magic, which would make him mighty in the land. He coveted it more even than Eagle Feather had coveted Peter's coat. He was far from satisfied that he had heard the whole truth.

Nor was Peter himself satisfied that, even if possessed of such power, he would use it to the detriment of the palefaces as Seconimo so confidently expected. It was one thing to have a vague feeling of hostility, another to have a definite desire for murder. But of this he said nothing to Seconimo, though he viewed with some misgiving the day when he should be strong enough to take arms against the palefaces.

He did not wish to take arms against any one, did not wish even to think. It was pleasant to lie in the sun and smoke, eat, drink, sleep. He felt as though he had entered a backwater, unlovely but placid, after years of storm and stress. He did not care whether he was Indian or white or both; they were only names to him, and he felt little real kinship

with either. He had no race, just as he had no name nor identity.

Neither had he any delusions concerning his hosts; at best they were a soiled lot of savages. But were the palefaces any better? He was being treated well simply because his mother was supposed to be a Comanche who had married a Cheyenne chief before she had married a squaw man. And they thought him crazy. Perhaps he was crazy.

He was content in a physical sense but not happy. Always there was the feeling of some vast irreparable loss, an unnamable and insonsolable grief. He should weep, if only he knew definitely what to weep about. He sat for hours brooding, chin on knees, his eyes tragic, vainly trying to pierce the past, while his body continued to mend slowly.

He was jerked rudely out of this somnolence of soul, this lethargy of mind and body, when some of the more enterprising spirits among the band returned one day with a paleface scalp. They excused themselves to Seconimo; it was a very small killing, done merely for no other reason than that of keeping their hands in.

They had not gone out of their way to do it, and clearly the gods had sent this lonely wayfarer to them. Unfortunately he had blown his brains out before they could take him alive, but they had brought Seconimo his pack horse and, what was more, a large bottle of the much-admired fire water. The Long Knives would not be after them for this trivial matter, for they had taken good care to destroy all the evidence. Who was to say what became of a lonely wayfarer?

Something stirred in the soul of Peter as he listened to the tale and saw the trophy, the least grisly exhibit, for the corpse had been mutilated thoroughly. The victim had been an old man, for the scanty hairs were gray. One of the old rim-rock breed, solitary

pioneers of civilization, as the pick, shovel and burro testified.

He had left his mark on the savages—one dead and three wounded. Then, all hope gone, he had cut the throat of his hipped horse and reserve a bullet for himself. Evidently a humane man who knew that the stricken animal would be tortured. A trifling affair, a little tragedy, played out to the finish amid the rock and sand and under a smiling sky. Peter could visualize it as though he had been there himself. He was incensed, sickened.

"There is no justice in this, Seconimo," he said. "This man was no enemy."

"All the palefaces are our enemies," replied the other. "A snake is a snake, whether it strikes you or not."

Peter choked back a violent retort. He saw suspicion, and something more in the Apache's beady and cruel little eyes.

"It is well for Man-with-his-Face-to-the-Tail to remember that he is the son of his mother," said Seconimo, with the same look.

Peter realized in one and the same instant that, not only could he never take part in such atrocities, nor even passively countenance them, but that if this were known his life would not be worth much. He sensed that Seconimo more than half believed that this alleged protection of the Great Spirit was no more than a new and wonderful method of slaying invented by the white man, a secret which he hoped yet to learn.

"I guess the blood of my father, even if he was a squaw man, is stronger than my mother's," he thought vaguely, trying to account for this anger and disgust that had suddenly leaped from the void into his heart. "These fellows are devils, dirty devils. If they thought I was faking—I've got to get away from here."

Easier said than done, of course. He might make shift to sit a horse, but he

had neither arms, supplies nor geography. Where was he to go? Even if he could steal a horse and escape they would be after him at once, and then—at best another trivial tragedy among the rocks and sand.

But now, for the first time, his thoughts turned toward escape. He must use his brains, pretend to be less physically fit than he was, prolong his recovery until he found or made his chance. And he must regain possession of his weapons. That was the first requisite. He could do nothing without them.

Here, however, he met with a check. Seconimo pointed out that, armed with such power from the Great Spirit, Peter obviously had no need of man's weapons. Nor had he any reason to fear another experience of the Eagle Feather type.

"I only wanted to clean them," explained Peter, with an indifference he was far from feeling.

Seconimo smiled his crafty smile and said that he had attended to that. They were in good hands. Plenty of time for Peter to have his weapons when he took the warpath against the palefaces. They would only encumber him now. Of what use could they possibly be? He could not even hunt.

He was in a cleft stick, a virtual prisoner. Peter realized that. He was watched now, night and day, apparently for his own good. They were very solicitous about his welfare. The whisky made Seconimo ugly, whetted his appetite for more. Also his blood lust. Peter believed that, once possessed of his supposed secret, Seconimo would kill him.

The inevitable happened before Peter expected, a party returning one day with four white prisoners. This was a more ambitious haul, apparently at Seconimo's orders. The long-delayed game of harrying the palefaces had begun in earnest, and Peter realized that

with it his own game had reached a sudden crisis. His hand was to be forced.

He was squatting under his blanket when the joyous band, with many gestures and whoops, came trooping up the rocks. The blanket was over his black head and there was nothing in his attitude nor appearance to differentiate him from an Indian. He had never affected the facial adornment of the period, partly through a violent dislike for Major Gracie's luxuriant whiskers, and now as the son of a Comanche squaw he must have no hair on his face. Thus he lacked the immature beard of convalescence while, being continually in the open, he also lacked its pallor.

"Ugh," said Seconimo, and gave him an oblique glance with his unwonted use of the paleface tongue. "Seconimo's braves have been hunting. Heap good bag."

Yes, a good bag; evidently a party of emigrants, or what remained of it. The first prisoner, hands pinioned behind back and the rawhide fastened to his captor's pony, was an old-timer, a mule skinner, in a dirty checked shirt and cowhide boots. Peter classified him accurately and automatically.

This man, a veritable giant, had been forced to walk all the way in those atrocious boots, no doubt over miles and miles of rock and sand, keeping pace with the horse while prodded at intervals with a scalping knife which his ingenious tormentor had tied like a bayonet to the end of an old Sharp's carbine.

This man was weary, wounded, defiled, but not conquered. He had blue eyes and a long flaming red beard liberally stained with tobacco juice. He was still chewing his quid while at intervals he made dispassionate remarks about his captors in words that only a mule skinner knows. Peter's heart rejoiced at them.

The second prisoner was of an entirely different type, a large, handsome

man perhaps in the middle forties. An Easterner, a tenderfoot, or, if familiar with the West, one who knew only its civilized centers. Very well dressed; quite the fop and dandy. What is known as a fine figure of a man, though there was little fine about him now.

Although younger than the mule skinner, this man had neither the physical nor moral stamina of the other, however superior his social position. Evidently he had collapsed at an early stage under the novel treatment and had been loaded on a pony where he sat, with sagging body and bowed head, apparently in the last stages of exhaustion and funk. Peter dismissed him with a glance.

The third prisoner, while also presumably a tenderfoot, was of different mettle. Though utterly exhausted he was still afoot. A man of perhaps thirty, round-faced, good nose and chin; freckled and sandy-haired. Boyish, yet conveying the impression that he had seen and done things beyond his years, if not this sort of thing.

But it was the fourth prisoner that caused his heart to skip a beat, capped the tide of surging emotion of which his wooden countenance gave no hint. His worst fears were realized for it was a woman. Worse than this, a young and pretty woman. A brave had her on his pony in front of him, a stringy arm about her, his vulpine nose sniffing the copper-colored curls on her white neck. She was deathly pale but held herself rigidly erect, her violent eyes wide open, her mouth trembling but defiant.

"Ugh, heap good," repeated Seconimo at sight of her.

Yes, undoubtedly cause for congratulation. They might, after a long and arduous campaign, have had to return to the agency without experiencing such a haul as this. Four prisoners, one of them a young and beautiful female! Nor was this all; among the spoils was a fresh scalp and a wagon wheel. Ap-

parently this last was an idiotic fancy; but Peter, with a grim tightening of the lips, knew its uses. Nothing could approach a wagon wheel when it came to crucifying a man and putting him to roast over a slow fire. To Apaches that was what wheels were really made for. This one was worth all the trouble involved in its freighting.

Of the whole, a glorious day's work. The raiding party, sent out by Seconimo at random, had acquitted itself nobly. Assuredly the Great Spirit was with them. Man-with-his-Face-to-the-Tail had brought them good luck.

Peter nodded assent to this observation and saw that the chance for which he had been long watching and waiting had come—at least a better chance than he might ever have again. Now was the time to try and get those weapons, now when Seconimo and the rest were in the first transports of joy and triumph, engrossed with the prisoners. He *must* get them. There could be no such thing as failure. Not merely his own fate, but that of these four, depended on it.

These Indians had no advantage of him when it came to moving like a shadow. He vanished, slipped round to Seconimo's quarters, the cave under the shelf of rock. Everything should be here but the Winchester which Seconimo carried proudly as a sort of scepter and of which he was greatly enamored. Rifles were about the only firearms that he and his followers really understood, not that their marksmanship was ever reliable.

Peter found them, as he knew he should, under the skins that represented the royal couch. He worked swiftly, surely, dropped the all-covering blanket and slipped on the shoulder holsters, the full thimble belt—the '73 Winchester took the same cartridge as the Colt—and the long hip gun in the open scabbard.

Apart from the blanket and a pair of moccasins, the loss of hat and coat, his

dress had not been altered since leaving Sagebrush.

Next he slipped on a coat, the one with the bowie knife in the collar. Assuredly a foolish place for a knife, Seconimo had thought, knowing nothing of the paths its owner had trod nor all the methods of paleface violence. Merely another proof that Peter was crazy. The coat also had disappointed him when tried on. It was foolishly loose in the breast, though it did not look so, and too high in the collar. Seconimo had not looked well in it nor found it comfortable. Moreover it had strange inside pockets, one of which held a small pistol and mirror. Seconimo, who had never seen a derringer, was afraid to examine it too closely. As for the little glass, it was a useless woman's article. On the whole, the foolish garment of a foolish man. Such was Seconimo's opinion of the Lightnin' Bug's famous business coat.

On second thought Peter now decided to buckle the hip gun outside his coat, and this he had no sooner done when the gloom suddenly deepened. His acute ear had heard no sound yet an Apache had entered, obscuring the light.

He gave a guttural exclamation and stepped toward Peter, whipping out his scalping knife from the beaded sheath at his loin cloth. Then he paused, considering perhaps if it were not wiser to give the alarm instead of dealing single-handed with the slayer of Eagle Feather.

The next moment something took him in the throat, and the only sound he could utter was a wheezing gurgle ere he died.

CHAPTER XI. THE TRAP.

PETER stepped over and pulled the knife, buried to the buckhorn handle, from his victim's throat, wiped it mechanically and slipped it back in the leather sheath under his high collar. He

had used it instinctively as a cat uses its claws. There was no memory of former affairs, such as the killing of Lon Bargendy. Mind and muscle, hand and eye, had functioned automatically. This Indian must be killed silently and instantly. With the thought, his hand had flashed up to his collar and, almost with the same movement, in the same instant, there had come the whirl of hurtling steel.

Peter had never regarded himself as a knife thrower, nor thought much of his ability in this direction. It was merely a trick to be used in a pinch, and few knew or suspected his skill. He claimed that there were a dozen or more men, men who relied solely on the knife, who could beat him at the game, which may or may not have been true. At all events this little-advertised accomplishment had its share in making him the unparalleled lethal machine that he was.

He recognized his victim as Wounded Knee, an Apache who had stepped into the position vacated by Eagle Feather, a man high in Seconimo's confidence who, no doubt, had been detailed specially to watch him. Peter took him by the heels and dragged him into the darkest corner, covering him with an old saddle blanket.

By this time Peter felt his knees quivering, his body drenched in perspiration; he was still very weak and the unaccustomed exertion, excitement, had told. He wondered vaguely now whence he had derived the force and accuracy of hand and eye to accomplish this deed. Yet it was but the first; he must go on, hold himself together even beyond the breaking point. He had no definite plan; circumstances must dictate his future actions. There were thirty braves at least with whom he must deal.

He wrapped the blanket about him, dropped on hands and knees and crawled to the entrance. A brave was approaching, and Peter's hand crept to

his collar. But the Indian passed, unaware of his proximity to death, and Peter slipped the knife into his belt. It should be handier thus in his present garb.

If he had no definite plan he knew that whatever he was to attempt must be done as soon as possible. No troop of cavalry would come bursting out of the blue to rescue these victims at the eleventh hour; it was quite the thing in song and story, but all too rare in real life. Something assured him that it might be days, weeks, before the fate of these four was ever known.

Moreover, there was to be no postponement of that fate, no prolonged, fortuitous delay; it was to take place here and now. These savages knew they would have plenty of time. They meant to dispose of the three men, make a night of it, and strike camp in the morning.

From where he crouched in the shadow of the cave Peter could see preparations being made for the entertainment. Figures were moving about joyously, rolling up the wheel, bringing material for the fire. Then he saw a buck, who had been on a special errand, bearing a cleft stick and something that wriggled. The snake torture! Yes, they meant to enjoy themselves thoroughly.

He was about to slink out, when the crowd parted and he saw the woman. Her hands were still bound behind her, and an elderly Ute had her by the arm. He began to push her unceremoniously toward Seconimo's quarters. If she was to be spared the sight of her companions' agony it could be through no feeling of humanity. It was merely policy.

Peter slipped back into the darkness which had deepened. Another killing was not to be undertaken lightly. But for the excitement and bustle going on, his own absence, and that of Wounded Knee, would have been remarked be-

fore this. Another man missing—no, not if it could be helped.

He crouched down behind the old saddle blanket that covered his victim, the knife poised at his right ear. There was no light to betray the glint of it nor his eyes.

As he had expected, there was little danger of discovery, not if his luck continued to hold. This brave had no thought but to get back to the coming festivities as quickly as possible. He flung the girl on the heap of skins, then bound her ankles securely. If he took a few chance steps toward the back of the cave—but he did not. There was no occasion, and his task was done. The paleface maiden was secure.

Peter arose silently as the Ute disappeared, pounced beside the girl like a great cat, and clapped a hand over her mouth. For a long moment his dark eyes stared down into the violet ones that had widened with sudden fright. If he had a silly, hysterical woman with whom to deal—but that must be risked, and he had approved her bearing. She had shown better mettle than one of the men, and now her eyes looked more startled than terrorized.

"I'm a friend," he said laconically in a whisper. "You've nothing to be afraid of. Do you understand?"

She nodded, her eyes now widening with astonishment and curiosity as she stared up at him through the gloom. This, rather than thankfulness or relief, seemed to be her dominant emotion. She conveyed no suggestion of swooning, and, as he slashed swiftly through her bonds, he gave her his approbation.

"You'll do," he said. "We've got to get out of this mess the best way we can. Plenty of time for fainting afterward."

"I'm not given to fainting," she said shortly. "Tell me what to do, and I'll do it."

"That's the talk," said Peter. "Put on these." And he handed her

Wounded Knee's moccasins and blanket. "That's it, right over your head and held like this. Can you shoot?"

"If I have to."

"Good again," said Peter, and handed her one of the short Colts. "Under the blanket—so. Let 'em have it through it, if you have to. Mind, it's a hair trigger. And walk like this."

He gave an illustration, then dragged Wounded Knee from the dark corner, laid the body on the royal couch and covered it with some of the skins.

"That'll do if anybody happens to look in," he said. "A nice present for the chief."

The girl gave further proof of her good sense by not asking how the accommodating corpse happened to be there, or showing fright at its sudden appearance.

"Now, look here," he said, in the same calm, unhurried voice, as he led her to the entrance. "The horses are down there beyond that point of rock. They won't be guarded. Rub some dirt on your face; that's it, good and plenty. Now watch your chance to sneak off and down to the horses——"

"I couldn't think of leaving without the others."

"I'm not asking you to. We're all coming—some way—but we can't be hampered with you. Is that clear?"

"Quite."

"Very well, then. If we don't have to look after you, the better we can look after ourselves. Get away and ride like hell. You know the stars? Well, straight south. We'll overtake you. Now, don't hurry; it's beginning to get dark. Give it a chance. Nobody will come here, and I won't start anything until I think you're safe. Now, I've got to go before they come hunting me. You've got the general idea?"

She nodded, lips compressed.

"All right," said Peter. "Remember, no bungling hurry. Watch your chance, and use your head. Fit yourself to cir-

cumstances. Here's a knife." He handed her Wounded Knee's weapon. "You've got half an hour, anyway. The darker, the better; but take your chance sooner if you see it. I'm off. Good luck. Adios."

With a wave of the hand, a smile, he was gone.

He felt he could depend on her, that she would not ruin everything by some ill-judged or panicky action. A girl of few words, fine courage, sound balance. Somehow it seemed that in the impenetrable past he had known just such another girl. Where? When? Whom? No matter; the present and future alone concerned him now. He had his hands full.

He circled round, mingled dexterously with the crowd. Some braves were engrossed with a huge diamond back, preparing to cut a slit in its neck. Peter knew the horrible game. A victim should be spread-eagled, face up, and the rattler staked near him. The distance would be judged to a nicety, the infuriated reptile striking vainly at the man's face. Then, drop by drop, water would be poured on the rawhide that was passed through the slit in the snake's neck. It would begin to stretch, little by little. Nearer and nearer would come the fangs—yes, a fiendish game. Perhaps the victim would go insane, die under the fangs, or be spared for some other form of sport.

Meanwhile the three prisoners, their hands alone bound, and compulsory spectators of these preparations, were being reviled. There was little satisfaction to be derived from the flaming-bearded teamster or the younger of his companions; they bore the insults stoically, each in his own manner. But the foppish man was providing a fund of amusement, and presently he drew all attention. He screamed curses, suplications, as one indignity after another was put upon him, his tormentors howling and capering about with delight.

Peter, seeing his chance, went up to the mule skinner, pulled the flaming beard and began to curse him. But a whispered message was interlarded between the loud words of abuse.

"I'll cut you loose. The girl's free, away. Be ready to bolt for the horses. Don't move until I shoot."

The man gave no sign that he understood, but amid a picturesque flow of invective he said:

"Count on me, pardner. Don't trust the dood gent. He's skeered stiff. We'll have to yank him some ways. The other feller's prime beef."

Peter stepped behind him, and the keen blade of the knife, working under cover of the blanket, cut the other's bonds in a few swift strokes.

He gave the teamster a final blow and curse, and passed on to his companion. Here he was joined by two Apaches and a Ute. But the ground had been prepared; this round-faced young man was highly intelligent and had caught the drift of the whispered colloquy. A single glance passed between Peter and him, but that was enough. While the three Indians in front were pointing out in pantomime the horrors awaiting their victim, Peter's knife was busy. The work done, he slipped the knife deftly up the other's right sleeve.

These two men, like the girl, were thoroughly reliable—cool, brave, quick-witted. He felt that they could be depended on to do the right thing at the right moment. The teamster, with his great strength and experience, should prove particularly valuable. It was the other man that worried Peter, panic being the most difficult thing in the world with which to deal. The teamster was right; this terrorized man would only destroy them all if forewarned, as the drowning man strangles his would-be rescuer. Yet Peter had no thought of leaving him to his terrible fate. It must be all or none.

"Ha-ha! Man-with-his-Face-to-the-

Tail," said a voice; and Peter turned to meet Seconimo. "Does not the blood of your father speak some word at sight of these men of his race?"

"They are dogs," said Peter, and glared upon the round-faced man. "They are dogs to me, even as they were to my father."

Seconimo, as Peter well knew, had been watching him some time from a distance. Yet suspicion still lurked in the Apache's little eyes, that and the something more.

"Your heart has changed," remarked Seconimo sardonically. "You said that the scalp we took was that of no enemy."

"The hair is not the face," retorted Peter. "It is different when I look upon the faces of these white dogs, see them in the flesh. My heart swells and runs blood. They killed my sister, and she calls aloud for vengeance."

"It is well," said Seconimo, his eyes twinkling maliciously. "Vengeance you shall have. The Great Spirit will aid you if you call upon It. Is it not so?"

"It has never failed me yet, O Seconimo. Whenever I have called, It has answered."

"Then, Man-with-his-Face-to-the-Tail, you shall call on the Great Spirit to slay one of these paleface dogs, even as Eagle Feather was slain."

Peter had seen the trap coming, but he also saw something else that Seconimo did not. He had walked deliberately into the trap because it brought with it his plan. His quick brain saw it in a flash.

"These dogs are past harming me, O Seconimo," he replied with contempt. "Their power for evil has been stripped from them. The Great Spirit, as I have told, protects me only from those enemies who are capable of working me harm. Such is not the case here. I should call in vain. It does not answer unnecessary prayers, nor spend Its force foolishly."

The Apache smiled sardonically.

"Does Seconimo doubt my power?" challenged Peter, drawing himself up.

No, not exactly. The Apache, suspicion and superstition at war within him, did not care to commit himself to any flat denial. At the same time, he would like to see that power demonstrated here and now, see the thing with his own eyes. And he hinted delicately that if such proof were not forthcoming, Peter might have occasion to call upon the Great Spirit to save him from the wheel of fire.

"I shall give proof," said Peter austere. "If Seconimo doubts, and is my enemy, let him take the place of Eagle Feather. He, having power to work me harm, the Great Spirit will answer."

Oh, no, not that. Had Seconimo acted like an enemy? Assuredly not.

"Then," said Peter, "if Seconimo declines this test, let it be so arranged that these paleface dogs have power to work me harm. In no other way will the Great Spirit manifest Its power. I will set these palefaces free and give each a rifle, but ere they can use it against me I shall call upon the Great Spirit, and It will smite them dead even as Eagle Feather was smitten. I have spoken."

Seconimo trumped this trick, smiling craftily. There was no necessity to take such a risk as that. If Peter wanted a demonstrating model there were plenty among the band who were his enemies, plenty who had power to work him harm if given the chance. What about those who had tacitly abetted Eagle Feather? Let him choose from among them.

Nothing dismayed by this counter, Peter was ready with the second barrel of his scheme.

"The choice is yours," he said indifferently. "But I warn you, O Seconimo, that much danger may attend this matter. Can the voice control the lightning? The Great Spirit may not look

into *one* heart but *many* and see the evil therein. Think well before you command me to unleash that which I cannot control. Think well, O Seconimo."

Seconimo had thought well, but he was still thinking. He was rather frightened but intensely curious and determined not to be bluffed. Moreover, if there should happen to be a victim it would not be himself. He would think well of Peter in his heart, for the time being, so that the Great Spirit would make no mistake.

"Very well," said Peter somberly. "Does Seconimo see yonder rock?" And, holding the blanket close with one hand, he pointed to a distant spur which dominated the little plateau.

This prominent rock was in the opposite direction from where the three prisoners stood and the direct route to the horses. If Peter could get the Indians concentrated near the rock, where most of them were already busy with the fire and the rattlesnake, the avenue of escape should be clear. He himself could stem the first rush of the enemy, cover the bolt for liberty. It was a desperate risk, a slender chance at best, but the only one. And it was infinitely better to die fighting, if die they must. He knew that the other two men thought the same. He was far more concerned for them and the girl than himself.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MIRACLE ON THE ROCK.

THE Apache chief, greatly wondering, intimated that he observed the designated rock. What then?

"Choose the victim, O Seconimo," said Peter, "for I wish to have no blame in this matter, even though he be my enemy. Place a rifle in his hands and bid him stand on yonder rock. I shall stand here in the middle of this space. The paleface dogs remain where they are. You, and the rest of my brothers, take your place at that side over there."

"What reason is there for this?" demanded Seconimo, with instant suspicion.

"So that the sheep may be separated from the goats," replied Peter, in the same somber voice. "It is necessary for your own safety. I wish no blame in this matter. I cannot control the lightning. The paleface dogs have evil in their hearts, even though they cannot harm me, and it may happen that the Great Spirit will strike them also. I cannot tell. But if you wish to take your place near them——"

"No," said Seconimo, with decision. "It shall be as you say. What then?"

"Then," said Peter, drawing himself up, "I shall turn my back on this enemy to show my contempt for his power. I shall trust everything to the Great Spirit. Mine enemy shall take careful aim at me with the rifle. I shall not see him, but you will see. When he raises the rifle you shall call out to me, and at that moment I shall call on the Great Spirit, not one second before. And ere the bullet has sped, the fate of Eagle Feather shall be the fate of this enemy. He shall die before your eyes. Can Seconimo ask greater proof?"

He had spoken loudly, loud enough for all to hear, and there followed a great stir. Even those at the fire dropped their work and came forward, curiosity and superstition, those savage traits on which Peter knew how to play, their mainspring. They had never heard of anything like this and, for the time being, it was a far greater matter than the coming festival. Those who had not witnessed Eagle Feather's death, and they were the majority, welcomed eagerly the chance of standing on an equal footing with their more fortunate and boastful brethren, more especially as the brave chosen to make the test should not be from among their number.

As Peter had foreseen, there was no competition for this office, and a great

controversy ensued. He noted with satisfaction that the teamster and the round-faced man had taken instant and well-judged advantage of this temporary diversion; apparently they had not stirred, but now their foppish companion stood between them. Moreover, all three had moved a little toward the rudimentary path that led down to the horses.

Seconimo at length selected a member of his own tribe, a close friend of the late Eagle Feather and a buck noted for his marksmanship among that assembly of mediocre shots. He by no means relished the distinction forced upon him, but he was fortified by, not only vanity, but a lusty hatred of Peter and some considerable doubt of the other's partnership with the Great Spirit.

Seconimo knew what he was about when choosing this brave, and so that he might be fortified further, he gave him the treasured Winchester and a piece of secret information. They would play a good joke on Man-with-his-Face-to-the-Tail who would not be able to see what was going on. Seconimo would delay giving the signal and, before Peter could call on the Great Spirit, before he knew his enemy was in position, a bullet would take him between the shoulders.

This characteristic piece of treachery arranged, the buck swaggered off and the Indians gathered at one side of the little plateau. The three prisoners were at one end, the designated rock at the other, Peter in the center.

The sun was dipping behind the high range of hills to the west and the short twilight would soon be on them. But nobody thought of that, none but Peter. The big fire was blazing merrily, the prisoners perfectly safe. What could they do with their hands tied? Where go if they tried to run away? Of course, Seconimo meant to keep an eye on them all the same.

But this he found impossible as Peter

slowly turned his back to the rock. No one had eyes for anything but him and that distant point. The excitement became intense, the silence absolute but for the crackling fire. None knew what to believe or expect.

Peter's utter confidence, his whole bearing throughout, had succeeded in shaking Seconimo badly, yet the Apache tried to cling to the belief that, if anything, this was some white man's magic like the talking box at the agency—something understood in a sense if once explained; at least something material, not supernatural. And, thanks to the planned treachery, this magic would come to naught. Peter would be riddled with bullets before he knew the game had begun.

Seconimo was trying hard to believe this but not quite succeeding. No, not quite. If it should happen that the Great Spirit should look into his heart and see the evil therein, if it saw him as the enemy of this man who, after all, might be under Its protection, Seconimo did not care to think of what might happen. He must fool the Great Spirit, pretend very hard that he was the friend of Man-with-his-Face-to-the-Tail.

Peter, groping under the blanket in an inside pocket, found the little mirror that Seconimo thought a useless woman's article. He knew that he had used it before, as he purposed using it now, though he had no recollection of shooting objects from the head of the late Colonel Moon, performing all those marvelous feats on the stage which had been the first of their kind. No, nor of killing Freddie Gracie with the mirror shot. But he knew that he could use it in conjunction with revolver or rifle, precisely as he knew he could use his hands and feet. Natural aptitude and the incessant practice of years went beyond conscious memory; it was second nature, instinct.

He brought out this glass and held it

in his hand so that it mirrored the distant rock. It was held in his cupped palm so that none but himself could see it. Seconimo and his braves were on the left, distant; behind them the dying sun which could strike no telltale flash from the glass. It looked as though Peter had half raised his hand, ready to call upon the Great Spirit.

With his right hand Peter began to depress the butt of the hip gun under his blanket. This, being on the blind side of his audience, they could not see; they could see no bulge in the blanket—and there was very little—as the holster swung up. This holster, it has been said, was open at the end and capable of practically any elevation. It was virtually a swivel gun and used solely for that purpose, fired without being removed from the holster. For a lightning draw, he used the shoulder guns. The long Colt was useless for that unless the holster was tied down.

He was now ready for the most difficult and nerve-trying feat of his whole career—shooting through a blanket by the aid of a small mirror in a fading light, the gun not only at the hip but *upside down and reversed*, a rifle at his back ready to beat him to the first shot. Yet Peter, as he stood there, looked the personification of calm confidence. He might fail, yet in failing, succeed. The blanket would hide the flash, muffle the explosion to some extent. He could count at least on creating enough wonderment and diversion to facilitate escape. The Indians did not even know that he was armed.

He noted that the three prisoners had edged still farther away. They could not know what he intended, but they knew he must be secretly armed and that a shot was the signal for them to act. They trusted him, did not act prematurely, and had seen to it that their frightened companion should not do so either.

Presently in the small mirror Peter

saw a spot of white appear above the black of the rock. This was the head band of the Apache. His yellow-brown face and torso quickly followed. His movements were deliberate and he stood up boldly, confident of Peter's ignorance and that the signal would never be given. He even paused to brandish the rifle triumphantly, posture theatrically to his distant fellows, the last rays of the sun striking fire from the barrel.

"Has my enemy appeared, O Seconimo?" asked Peter, never shifting his gaze.

"Not yet," lied Seconimo, his guttural voice dry, the beady eyes burning with excitement.

Peter had expected this treachery. Well, it was none of his doing. He had given all the odds possible, done what he could to avoid this display in which he took no pride.

The slight bulge under the blanket moved a little, the muzzle of the gun centered on the target by uncanny sense of direction alone. Peter's middle finger, now forced to take the place of his thumb on the inverted and reversed weapon, raised the hammer slowly. His thumb was on the hair trigger.

The figure on the rock took careful and deliberate aim, Seconimo and all his braves staring at it, mouths slightly agape. They heard suddenly a muffled explosion close at hand, and they jumped as though shot. They did not see the flash, the smoke that now spurted through the hole in the blanket at Peter's off side. They had eyes only for the figure on the rock.

For, almost synchronous with the explosion, there came a sudden scream. The figure on the rock dropped the leveled rifle, crumpled to its knees, pitched headfirst from its pedestal. It was found afterward that the heavy bullet had taken him in the stomach, ranged up and shattered the spine. A mercifully quick end. A center shot.

There followed a numb panic, Se-

conimo himself unable, afraid to move. None knew rightly what had happened other than that there stood Man-with-his-Face-to-the-Tail safe and sound, and still with his back to the rock, while his enemy lay undoubtedly dead. Even had they known that Peter was armed and could use a revolver in such miraculous fashion, the feat would have staggered them. It would have staggered the most sophisticated of audiences who knew beforehand what was about to be attempted.

It was no wonder then, that for the time being, these savages believed it something supernatural. Many were quite ready to vow that they had actually seen the heavens open and the lightning god send forth his avenging spear. Sound is very difficult to localize, if one is ignorant of the cause, and all were ready to believe that the muffled roar of the Colt was a thunderclap.

Peter had caused a sensation that exceeded his highest hopes, but he knew its temporary character. Presently they would begin to recover from the spell, begin to think rationally, discover the bullet in his victim's body, the fact that the prisoners had gone, had vanished in the deepening shadows. He must act at once, drive home the lesson, increase their awe. Meanwhile, his blanket had caught fire from the powder flash and he smothered it with his bare hand.

He turned and faced his audience, taking a few slow backward steps and thus blocking their view of the space that the prisoners had occupied. Night was coming fast, the plateau a thing of shifting, delusive shadow as the fire gained ascendancy.

"Behold, I have given proof," he said, raising a solemn hand. "It is given me, O Seconimo, to know of matters whereof I see nothing. It is a gift of the Great Spirit. I knew of the base treachery planned and I called upon the Great Spirit to strike. You have witnessed the answer."

He took another backward step, while none of his audience moved or spoke.

"You have doubted my power, O Seconimo, and planned treachery against me. Your heart was black with evil while your lips spoke fair words. I have spared you because you are a chief, but do not provoke me further. There is a limit to all things. Where is Wounded Knee? Let him stand forth."

There was a scanning of faces, a stir, mutterings.

"No," continued Peter; "he is not among you. You shall not find him for the Great Spirit has taken him, called him to account. He was high in your counsels, O Seconimo, and therefore strong and eager to work me evil. The Great Spirit has dealt with him as it dealt with Eagle Feather and this other. If you doubt, go to your quarters and see what there awaits you. Let the fate of these three be your warning and lesson.

"I go now from among you, back to my mother's people. I came as a friend, but you treated me as an enemy. I go as I came—alone. If any one attempts to follow me, he shall do so at his peril. I have spoken. Hail and farewell, O Seconimo."

He turned and without haste, with head erect and proud disdainful mien, walked into the gathering gloom, vanished as though the shadows had swallowed him.

He had not gone far in his descent when a figure pounced on him from behind a rock. It was the flaming-bearded teamster, revolver in hand.

"I couldn't leave ye to them varmints, kid. The gal give me a weepo—"

"Softer," warned Peter. "Don't break the spell. We've got to ride for it. The show isn't over yet."

They completed the descent, the irrepressible giant still jerking out words in a hoarse whisper:

"The gal's a brick. She stood by, an' everythin's ready. Them p'izen snakes'll have a hard time ketchin' their horses, too, yuh betcha. Foller me, kid. Here we be. Outen the jaws of death, thanks all to yuh, like Samson in the lions' den."

A chorus of yells suddenly broke out above them.

"The spell's broken," said Peter. His tired eyes twinkled. "I reckon the Philistines are anxious to cut Daniel's hair."

In the gloom he saw the girl and the two men, each astride a horse, while two others were being held, and in another moment the teamster and he were up beside them. More yells from above and then the bloodcurdling war whoop, made by rapidly pressing the palm of the hand against the lips and removing it as quickly. There came a random gunshot or two, and then an arrow sang past into the night. The Indians were piling down over the rock, slipping and falling, shooting as they came but regardless of everything but haste.

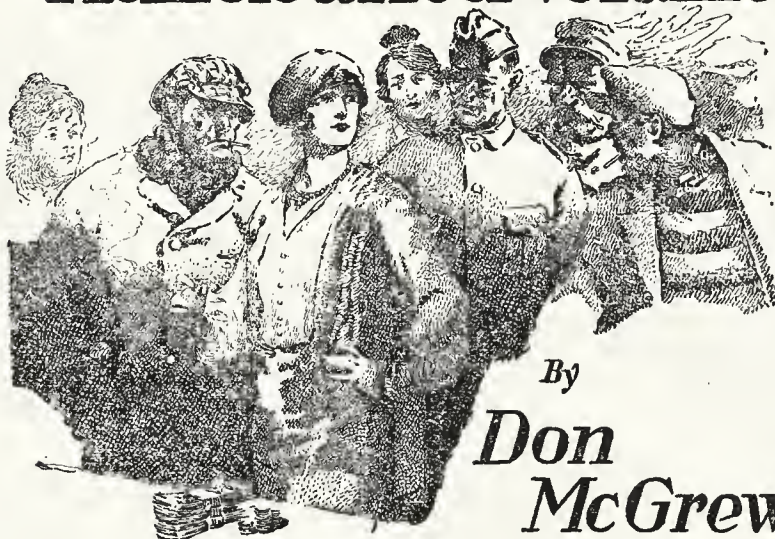
Peter rode knee to knee with the girl under the light of the stars, the teamster between the two men. Apart from the knowledge that he was in New Mexico, he had no idea where he was or where they might be going. Nor did he care. It felt good to be on a horse again, to feel the wind of speed in his face, to breathe the night scents; good to have civilized human companionship, those of his father's race. The great weariness he had felt, which had threatened to overwhelm him, disappeared and a certain exhilaration took its place.

He had got his second wind.

The girl rode well, astride like a man, and it was evident she knew horseflesh. Clearly she had picked out five of the best ponies from among the lot. Not a little of the credit for this remarkable escape was her just due.

To be continued next week.

The Handcuffed Volunteers



By
**Don
McGrew**

Author of "Trey Beans in a Mess Kit," Etc.

An American ex-soldier, in France years after the Great War, meets a girl he once knew.

ALWAYS, "Beef" Blanchard would insist on shooting craps with dice that retained all their original spots. In consequence, he and "Zoop" Kennedy, veterans of the A. E. F., were now in grave danger of losing the big tourists' bus which they had acquired since returning to France. The winner, not wanting the bus, had nevertheless stipulated that they produce its cash value within the week, or turn over the machine for sale.

Zoop therefore entered the Café of the Blue Horse with malice aforethought. But he saw right away that neither cards nor dice would intrigue the boys this night. They were crowding round a roulette wheel, and in their midst was a lone American girl. She was intent on the whirling wheel, her slender hand toying with an ivory cigarette holder, inlaid with silver, and her blond head shining in that smoke-filled room like the sun showing through a fog.

"It's that Travis Dawson dame I saw in the trenches in '18, or I'm a liar!" he ejaculated inwardly.

In June of '18 he had caught this girl trying to sneak into the trenches. She had fought like a wild cat, because he would not let her go up to cook doughnuts for the boys. She was then only seventeen. Attending school in France till America entered the war, she had then disappeared; and, though her father was making huge profits in war munitions, and had pulled countless wires to have her apprehended, she had been doing war work under an alias until Zoop's intervention led to her identification and return home.

The spectacle of this A. E. F. doughnut girl being gypped and leered at in this apache hang-out went against his grain. Ascertaining that Travis had entered unaccompanied, he moved quietly to her side.

"Miss," he said, in a low tone, "I'm a secret-service agent, and you're under

arrest. Will you come along without any fuss?"

At his first word she turned her head sharply. He saw that she recognized him. For a second he wasn't at all sure that she wouldn't reach out and twist his battered nose.

"Better come without the fuss," he suggested.

She looked quickly at the frowning croupier. She saw at once what resistance would mean. These rats would come to her rescue in a flash. But if she went out with Zoop quietly as though he were an escort she had been expecting, they would only frown.

"By all means let's not have a scene," she whispered icily, picking up her remaining bank notes.

Frigidly silent until they reached the outer walk, she then turned on him.

"Since when have you become a member of the secret service?" she snapped.

"Well, now, Miss Dawson," he amiably responded, "I made my own appointment about five minutes ago, and approved of it myself."

"And what, pray tell me, moved you to spoil a perfectly unique thrill for me? Am I so innocent in appearance that you believe I went into a place like that without realizing some of the risks?"

"No," he returned slowly, appraisingly.

"Then why did you do it?"

He shrugged.

"For a girl who has turned out to be as hard boiled as you look when you give that twist to your mouth—well, I wonder whether it was worth it!"

Fire flashed from the blue eyes of Travis Dawson, while her toe beat a rapid tattoo on the worn flags.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Then you don't approve of my—er—air of sophistication?"

"An A. E. F. vet disapproving of a loughnut girl turning out to be hard boiled? Fie upon thee. You see, when

us boys used to think of the risks those girls were taking just to give us a hot cup o' coffee on a rainy night, why it kind of gave us a lump in the throat, an' made us feel silly and uncomfortable—see? That's why we always give three cheers when we see one of these dames get wise to herself—we don't like to be made uncomfortable."

Rendered momentarily breathless by this drawing, ironical broadside, delivered with an engaging grin, she seemed to come to a sudden decision.

"I wonder," she icily inquired, "if you could demean yourself by riding downtown with a 'goil' who has been left overlong in hot water?"

She was imperiously summoning a taxi, even as she spoke; and Zoop, feeling that she was only sparring for time till she could hit on a means of avenging herself, allowed himself to be fairly swept into the machine.

After looking askance at his worldly profile for some time, Travis finally spoke again.

"It's unique," said she, "to be preached to by a young man with a nose so artistically battered. Yes, it's quite an experience." But, after another perplexed frown, and a searching look into his gray eyes, she suddenly turned on him the full battery of her smile. "After all, I must confess that you probably did save my life by keeping me out of that bombardment, though I hated you for it then. You probably saved me from a mess to-night, too."

Zoop smiled, and then looked at her through speculative eyes.

"I take it," he drawled, "that you haven't had a thing to do since the war but take in washing, and make over last year's dresses, and scrub floors. Why is it that you ain't got that 'glory, hallelujah' expression, when all the time you know that Heaven don't do nothin' else but protect the 'woiking goil'?"

She grimaced.

"What fools we were to think that any sort of sacrifice would make it a better world!" she cried. But, before he could answer, she regained herself and shrugged. "Enough of that rot," she said. "Tell me something of yourself."

Under her prompting, it wasn't long before she had the story of the bus. She sat silent for a while, her brows knitted; but finally she placed a hand on his sleeve.

"Grandfather—our only soldier—came over this week," she said. "Mother and my two brothers—whom mother *didn't* raise to be soldiers!—are here, too. Well, grandfather wants to see a bit of the battlefields, and I can arrange a trip. What's more, there's an Englishman with our party—a Sir Cunliffe Upton, formerly of the Coldstream Guards. The cleverest man! And he's discovered a croupier—a very clever croupier." She winked knowingly.

"And then what?"

"Why, silly, this croupier will signal Sir Cunliffe before the wheel starts spinning. Then——"

"Sir Cunliffe plays his stack, and we all follow suit, and slip the croupier his percentage afterward!"

She laughed.

"Bright boy! Really, though, there's a chance for you to recuperate!"

He saw her play now, but he didn't let her know that he saw it. She had been stung by his assumption of superior ethics, and she was perversely set on proving him equally culpable.

"Where is this wheel?" he asked.

"On the Chemin des Dames. Roulette being out of bounds in France, we are going out as guests to a little party in an old château."

"H'm! Know this Englishman well?"

"Oh, soso. Brother picked him up at one of the clubs. But say—are you afraid we poor innocents from the provinces may be crossed up by a clever con-

tinental shark? Please use your intelligence. We don't have to plunge until we see that he's won a bet or two, do we?"

"No," Zoop admitted slowly. "There's something in that. Well, all right. You fix it up, and I'll take a whirl with the rest of you."

He pretended not to notice the sudden flash of victory in her eyes, and the twitch which momentarily distorted the corners of her mouth.

Early the next afternoon, when Zoop reported at Travis' hotel with the big bus, and saw the tall Sir Cunliffe coming down the steps with the Dawson party, he knew that he was going to enjoy a large afternoon. Sir Cunliffe? It was to laugh! Why, Helene, the barmaid, had pointed out to him this clever international crook, seated in a distant alcove, in the Café of the Blue Horse, less than three weeks ago! The man was an American whose mastery of the blank, impersonal stare and clever impersonations of knighted Britishers had made dupes of countless expatriated Yankees, giving the half world cause for much ribald laughter.

Keeping his face composed with difficulty, Zoop took in the others. He felt certain that all but one of them had already apologized to the correct Sir Cunliffe for everything American, from blatancy to Tennessee trials. The exception was old Colonel Dawson, the grandfather. You could see right away that grandfather was a trial to his pudgy daughter-in-law, Mrs. Dawson.

In acknowledging Travis' introduction, it was obvious that Mrs. Dawson and her sons, H. Beverly and J. Ogden, meant to be quite democratic and cordial. They murmured words conveying this impression. But when Zoop was in the driver's seat, and the car was rolling along, he began to catch things which, he was quite sure, they didn't know he could hear.

"Of course," said H. Beverly, "*we* know that the A. E. F., in comparison to the fighting done by the British, never saw anything much worse than a skirmish."

"Called the Toul Sector an Old Ladies' Home, didn't they, Sir Cunliffe?" J. Ogden inquired.

"Yes, they called it that."

"What about Seicheprey, and Apremont, and Xivray?" grandfather unexpectedly cut in.

"Mere raids," said Sir Cunliffe—just like that.

"Well," said the old man, "I reckon a bullet stings about as much in any kind of a shindig, whether you call it a raid or a push or a drive. And maybe you'll try to claim them marines and our Ninth and Twenty-third Infantry didn't do a darned good job between Bois Belleau and Château Thierry."

"Why, grandfather," cried J. Ogden, "everybody over here knows that the enemy drive had simply spent itself when the marines went in!"

"And in the St. Mehiel," said Mrs. Dawson, "those poor Austrians and landwehr troops were only too glad to surrender."

"Huh!" said grandfather. "Maybe you'll try to tell me that the Argonne was some sort of a pink tea."

"Sir Cunliffe," H. Beverly informed his grandparent, "made it clear only last night, as I've contended right along, that the enemy were only fighting a rear-guard action in the Argonne. It was the British who drove them back along the really important part of the line."

"Oh!" said grandfather. Zoop could see him, in the mirror, getting up from his seat. "I kind of had the idea that when our boys got over here they found plenty enough war left to go round. But I reckon I'll find out at firsthand."

Moving briskly forward, grandfather climbed over the back of the driver's seat, which extended across the width

of the car, and slammed shut the glass partition above the seat back. His lean jaw muscles were knotted and working.

"Son," said he, "red ear tips tell tales. Well, you see how it is. I set out to raise Americans, but it appears I only raised hell—for myself. And say—you needn't call me colonel. I wasn't only a captain, and I never got to Cuba—I only got as far as Chattanooga. The family likes to throw that up to me—in private. It's when I open up because neither my boy nor my grandson went to the front in '17."

Zoop looked at the old veteran, and glanced quickly away. There were tears in the faded gray eyes now bent upon the road ahead.

"You were in that Château Thierry drive?" the old man asked now. And when Zoop nodded, the grandfather went on: "I'll never forget the first day o' that Château Thierry drive. There was hundreds of the old boys out on High Street, before them bulletin boards—hundreds of 'em. Old boys between forty and fifty, and more. You never heard such yellin'. No, sir, you never did. I ain't ashamed to tell you that the tears was a-runnin' down *my* cheeks, and about every one else's that was there. Mostly tears o' just downright joy and pride. There they was in their shirt sleeves, poundin' one another on the back, each time an advance was announced. And every now and then you'd hear, in the proudest kind of a tone, some wild-eyed dad a-yellin': 'Why, my *boy's* in that! Yes, sir, my *boy* is in that!'"

"I wish," Zoop began huskily, "I wish that——"

The colonel cleared his throat.

"Heck! I kind of felt you would. Say, is it true you boys found beer kegs in them machine-gun nests?"

"Beer kegs?" said Zoop. "Colonel, you should've been there!"

And they were still engrossed in discussion of beer kegs and loaves of

French bread that were baled into trucks with shovels when the car rolled into the grounds of the château.

Zoop did not make any effort to join the group which alighted and hastened indoors. Instead, he reached under the seat and pulled out two jointed fishing rods. A stream lay not far away. He looked up at the old man.

"Colonel," said he, "I'll bet you learned how to make a mean cast, back there on the Scioto. I had an idea that maybe you'd rather fish a bit than join that party."

"You had the right idea, son. I don't seem to get no kick out of gypping when it's so bald as this."

Seeing them joining the rods, Travis came back and halted before Zoop, in amazement.

"Do you mean to tell me you're not coming in?" she cried.

"There are fish," said Zoop, "going into that château, but you couldn't catch them with this kind of a rig."

"I thought," she cried, with poorly suppressed fury, "that you needed the money?"

"I do, but count me out."

She bit her lip; her brows rose in high scorn.

"I suppose," she exploded witheringly, "that your precious morals are above taking a tip on a fixed race!"

The blood thickened a bit in Zoop's cheeks, but he continued to grin affably.

"No, and they ain't above palming a phony diamond, in a pinch, if you want to know it. But the other fellow usually thinks he's gypping me, in that case—and if he can't locate which shell the little pea is under, that's his lookout. There's something phony about this deal, though. Yes, there's something phony, and if your Sir Cunliffe doesn't take all of you for a parachute jump, I'll be surprised."

Travis glared.

"Well, go ahead, you and grandfather, with your silly old fish," she

gritted. "Go ahead. We'll just see who laughs last!" She whirled abruptly after this, and hurried into the château.

The colonel was cackling.

"Egad, son!" he cried. "You got that Englishman sized up about the way I have. Sir Cunliffe this and Sir Cunliffe that, with all his sneers at Uncle Sam! Well, the deeper he breaks it off into 'em, the better I'll be satisfied."

But later, when it grew too dark to fish, and they were returning to the château grounds, Travis greeted them triumphantly. She fairly rubbed a huge roll of franc notes under their chagrined noses.

"We won just oodles!" she gloated. "Just as Sir Cunliffe said we would. Now who's so smart?"

There wasn't much for Zoop to say. No, there wasn't much for Zoop to say, and he said it, chewing savagely on a cigar, while the bus rolled back toward Paris in the moonlight. There wasn't any justice in this world, at all. He and the colonel sat glum and silent on the front seat, while behind them, in the body of the car, the rest of the party gloated hilariously. Sir Cunliffe was smiling fatuously, the hero of the hour.

Yeah, Zoop conceded, it appeared that he had guessed wrong. He was still willing to concede that he had guessed wrong, even after they asked him to detour off the main road. It was a beautiful, moonlit night, and Sir Cunliffe, Travis sweetly assured him, wanted to show them a spot where a mere handful of British regulars had made a lone stand against hordes of shock troops in the early part of the war. He didn't get an inkling of what was impending till they reached a deserted spot on the winding road, and the Englishman suddenly rose from his seat at the back of the car, and produced from his pocket an ugly automatic.

Zoop didn't have to be told that he

must stop the car. The mirror was before him, and he could see the whole interior of the machine quite plainly. The Englishman had shed his blasé, nonchalant air as an actor sheds a disguise. He stood revealed as a forceful, alert and grimly determined man, bent on carrying out a coup which would net him a small fortune in francs. Zoop knew better than to make any false moves just then; he knew a killer when he saw one.

"Leave that engine running slowly!" the crook curtly commanded; and Zoop complied. It was as good as a play, sitting there and watching it all in the mirror. The astounded, sheepish expressions on the faces of that party were as so much meat and drink to him. He made not a move while the pseudo knight ordered the frightened Americans to leave their money on the seats and file out past him, their hands in the air.

Zoop didn't make a move; and what is more, he didn't intend to make any moves. He knew that this crook didn't guess that he, Zoop, had an automatic under his left armpit. The glass partition behind him was not closed now, and he had chances to turn quickly. Yes, he could have turned quickly, more than once, while this stick-up guy was feeling the men over, with one hand, for possible weapons. That was when they were filing out to take their places on the ground at the back of the car.

And why should he take a chance for these ungrateful expatriates who so richly deserved their trimming? They could afford it. He had not more than five hundred francs of his own to lose; he wouldn't risk being shot for that. He happened to have learned that the colonel had not more than a hundred francs on his person, too. Moreover, the old man was actually enjoying the situation. He had turned his head, and was grinning sardonically.

"Egad!" he was saying. "I couldn't

have thought up nothing no better than this. Egad! They was lookin' for thrills, and they're gettin' it!"

Why, then, Zoop asked himself, should he risk his hide to stop this little comedy? He couldn't do it. No, he wouldn't do it; but, even as he vowed this, and the last of the party had stepped down to the ground, he acted. Sir Cunliffe had ordered him to turn and climb back over the driver's seat into the body of the car. This he did; but when Zoop was told to drop his money on a seat, and he thrust his hand in under his coat lapel, as though he intended to produce a wallet, it came whipping out with an American .38 automatic instead.

There seemed to be but a split second between the two shots. But Zoop's landed first. It struck Upton in the forearm, breaking it. The consequent spasm of pain sent the wounded man's bullet into the roof of the car body. The ugly pistol dropped with a clatter from his hand.

Everybody began to yell then; or so it seemed to Zoop. H. Beverly and J. Ogden were bent on scrambling back into the car and kicking the life out of the writhing, pallid Upton, now sagging in agony upon a seat. The women were also chattering excitedly. They were calling Zoop a hero, and were apparently bent on securing once more that pile of franc notes there on the seat. But Zoop stopped them.

"You ain't going to kick no guy when he's down, not while I'm around," he informed J. Ogden. "Stay right on the ground."

"What? Oh, but I say—this looks like another holdup!"

"It is," said Zoop. "First off, colonel, if you'll fix up this guy's arm, we'll turn him loose to beat it. Yes, you folks out there heard me right. I wouldn't send a yellow dog to a French prison. You didn't get no more than was coming to you, anyway. That

busted arm will hold him for a while. As for you folks, you can figure me right now as a recruiting sergeant for the Cock-eyed Fusileers. Sergeant Zoop Kennedy, squads east and north, that's me. And I'm going to handcuff me some volunteers."

"What sort of a song and dance is this?" H. Beverly demanded.

"First off, none of you lay a hand on that jack. The colonel will take charge of it—if he's willing."

"Anything you say, son!" the old man cried.

"What's more," Zoop continued, "every centime of it goes to an orphans' home for French kids I happen to know of. If it don't, then I know a hard-boiled guy who is a reporter for the Paris edition of the *Herald*. I'll give him the works."

"And I'll back him up!" snapped the colonel.

"Oh, well," Mrs. Dawson capitulated with bad grace, "if that's all——"

"No," said Zoop, "it isn't all. I happen to know that you couldn't probably hire a taxi to-night within ten miles of here. You're going to line up there and sing 'My Country, 'Tis of Thee,' and sing it like you *meant* every blooming word of it, or, by George, you're all going to walk back!"

They stood there staring for a moment, like so many stupefied sheep, seeming not to credit their ears, till grandfather cackled with insane mirth. A babble broke out. J. Ogden seemed to be declaring that he'd be damned if

he'd be made ridiculous. But Travis suddenly laughed out. She kept on laughing, too, as though she couldn't stop, till at last, making a valiant effort to enunciate clearly, she stopped the excited, outraged chatter with the cry:

"You can just bet you're life we're going to sing it, Zoop, and I'm going to lead!"

That is why a lone French peasant, over a kilometer away, heard strange sounds coming down the wind that night; and that is why Travis Dawson, when the singing was over with, walked right up to Zoop, before everybody, and clapped her hands on his shoulders. Her misty eyes were shining. She was no longer the sophisticated, bored, cynical and surfeited girl who sought out such places as the Café of the Blue Horse for a thrill; she was again the girl who had been eager to risk her life for an ideal. Neither did she have to tell him in words that she was heartily ashamed of herself.

"I don't care what any one thinks!" she cried. "But if a French general could kiss you on both cheeks, Zoop, I just guess I can, too. So there!"

But, somehow or other, the impetuous girl missed his cheeks—and, after a moment, Zoop gasped and looked dazedly up at the smiling moon.

"Can you beat it, Mohammed?" he whispered plaintively. "Try and tie it, even. Here I thought I'd make a handcuffed volunteer out of her, and now look how she's set out to make one out of me!"

More tales by Don McGrew will appear in later issues.



THEY ALL RECOVER

The first time a politician runs for office and is defeated he is like a girl who gets her first kiss from a man: it is a great shock to her, but she soon recovers sufficiently to try it again.

Seed of Glory

By
**Will
Beale**



Author of "The Splendid Poltroon," "The Frontiers of the Deep," Etc.

A moving, powerful story of a sensitive man and a viking woman of the North.

IN the midst of peace, security, beauty even, Peter Stanway, of the Stanway Expedition, for the first time in his life was knowing something perilously like downright fear. After more or less precarious years spent in wresting its secrets from odd corners of the earth, chance seemed forcing him to cope with a hazard entirely foreign to him—a woman. And such a woman! In his own nature Stanway himself, like most men dealing constantly with the forces that motivate life and death, had long since gone all humble and gentle and self-effacing, withdrawing farther and farther from his kind; while this woman—

He had heard of her before he had been in Burgus twenty-four hours—an exceptional creature living up among the crags above the town, a dominant woman in the life of the hamlet. De-

spite the country's terrible hardship, she ran her own life with the sure, efficient touch of a man. This was all well enough, but, to increase Stanway's trepidation, report made her also young and of a rather splendid magnificence. In fact the very young men of his band had become wild about her, waxing incoherent over the big hidden meaning of her, arguing that she held a very real significance to life, to her kind, to the land itself.

Stanway had come to Newfoundland to study the plant life of the interior, bringing with him young scientists from many colleges in the States. His first glimpse of the grim, forbidding fortress that was Newfoundland challenged all his forces. He was set for difficulty, for danger, for hardship. But for a woman— Standing on one of the little wharves, he stared at Cornell,

his young lieutenant, helplessly as he listened.

"The trip seems up against it for fair, chief, unless you're willing to hook onto the situation yourself. From the coast we can make the Red Indian Lake Chain in the interior by way of Smith River as planned. But the difficulty is getting from here along the coast to Smith River. When she comes, later in the month, the coast steamer will set us ashore; but it isn't a landing stop, and we'll need to send all our gear on ahead."

Cornell flicked away his cigarette. "And that's not so easily arranged. I never realized how difficult transportation was in Newfoundland. I've found a husky young native by the name of Billard who can manage the trip end of it all right, but absolutely the only boat here in Burgus that's suitable for a run of this sort belongs to this Adair woman. And there are complications."

Cornell's face took on a comic perplexity.

"They tell me," he continued, "that young Billard, who used to pay attention to her, is now fooling round a little new school-teacher they sent here which makes a delicate little situation all around. I went up and tackled her." Cornell was grinning self-consciously now. "As an envoy of stranded science I was a total loss, although I made myself the most charming creature the world ever produced. Looks like the fate of the Stanway trip hangs on you, chief. You'll have to go see her. She won't know science, but she *will* appreciate *you*."

Cornell's face softened almost affectionately. All Stanway's men worshiped him. A man who had wrought for the world's potatoes and the world's wheat such marvels of improvement as had Stanway was a big man in science; and these students were at his feet.

"But, Cornell, I—I know little or nothing of women. And if you failed.

I—I would be useless." An almost comical distress harassed the gentle eyes in Stanway's fine brown face.

"Who knows, chief? She'll probably fall for you hard. And you can't tell—you may discover that you've got a line with a woman like a robin in spring."

Later that day Stanway went. Mounting the rocky trails back of the town, the country itself for a brief moment drew him from his perturbation. Below him was strewn the hamlet like a handful of white pebbles flung among the cliffs. On either hand the outlook stunned with its massive power, and the man knew again something of the awe his first sight of all this had inspired. To him Newfoundland was a new world, a strange world. It seemed a lost fragment of creation that still had to do with the unfulfilled ages—the life in its crannies being hardly a phase as yet.

Stared at curiously by a tribe of wandering goats, he made his way onward and upward to the last habitation visible, a brave, little snow-white cottage clinging stanchly in its lofty perch. And now something about the place struck him like a warm welcome. The grassy little dooryard showed constant care, and flowers had been planted among the sheltered rocks—star-flowers and blood-red pitcher-plants gleaming among the mosses like a wide-flung strewing of jewels. It meant softness, gentleness; his courage rose.

And, now stepping down from the fog-hidden heights, almost too ambitiously proportioned for mere beauty, but moving nobly, like some heroic statue come to life, came Gail Adair; and, in her presence, the timorous eye of Peter Stanway, the man, became the keenly appreciative eye of the scientist. Observed closely, she seemed true daughter of the vigorous, powerful land and the beautiful, mysterious sea.

In spite of his uneasiness Stanway found himself thinking this—compar-

ing her skin to the white froth in the tranquil tides; her soft, dusky hair, to the black-purple fissures of the deep gorges inland; her eyes to the deep, blue water where it holds clear but fathomless, under the cliffs. And somehow, looking into these eyes, all the man's fears suddenly vanished.

So he began easily, without preliminaries. "I have come to ask your help. I—I hope I can make you feel our need. We are eventually going into the interior. We landed here at Burgus, as being the nearest outfitting point to Smith River, by which we hoped to get in. Even knowing there were no horses, I'll—I'll confess I was expecting to find roads, at least along the coast. But strange as it may seem, we are told that no such roads exist. Is that correct?"

He had a strange impression that she was not listening to him so closely as she was appraising him, and—comprehending him.

"That is true, sir. There are no roads, no trails for any distance. Except on the east coast, there are no roads, such as you mean, in all Newfoundland."

Her voice was rather beautiful, which surprised Stanway. He found himself thinking of harp strings—the deep ones.

He went on and explained his difficulty, concluding:

"We have arranged with a young Billard, I think his name is, to make the trip, providing we can secure the boat. Do you see how much it means?" Stanway was smiling in almost boyish earnestness. "He will be enabled to offer a good price for the boat, as we are paying him well."

He was watching her closely. He had no clue as to what she was thinking, but he knew the price of the boat had no part in it.

"Did Gid Billard tell you to ask me for the jack-boat?"

"Oh, no. I have not seen the young man." And then, with due humility, "It is the Stanway Expedition asking."

There was a little silence. Stanway was knowing himself curiously alive to the young woman herself now. She was magnificent, of course. In his own world, or the world he had deserted for science, she would have been sensational, albeit isolated still.

She was speaking now. "You may have the jack-boat, sir."

Stanway's gratitude was very real. "Thank you," he said warmly. "You have done me a great service." And in that moment a certain bond was between them.

He did not go. Something still held him. He was appraising the immaculate little house, the tiny jeweled yard. "Do you live here alone?" he asked.

"Of late years, sir. There was an old grandmother who brought me up from a child." Her face softened. "She is wonderful—of the very bone of Newfoundland. But now she is spending her last days with other kin across in Sydney." The aloofness had gone from her face. Her visitor had been received into a small intimacy.

Stanway had succeeded famously. And something down in him now was stirring with real amusement; he was recalling Cornell's mention of his "line" with this woman, when, as a matter of fact, he had been guiltless of any "line." But now he produced one. He pointed to the pitcher plants. "They are very wonderful," he said. "Do you know anything of their various relatives?" And he embarked on a fascinating, colorful little bit of plant lore, tempered to wonder, and romance, and beauty.

The girl's face upon him now was that of a different creature—all human and warm and lovely in its eager interest. And for five minutes she listened, rapt, to a "line" more marvelous than she had ever guessed.

"Ah, sir, how wonderful is all that!" she said at length. "How it opens the—the real workings of—of the Divine One to us all here." She was an eager novice at the feet of wisdom, and Peter Stanway was more moved at her interest than at anything he had yet known.

His gaze slipped away from her face, found its way seaward. The fog had stolen away. From their lofty eminence, sea and sky and mighty land seemed vast chaos of unconquered loneliness. And his daily wonder at it all seized the man.

"Jove!" he exclaimed. "It's all rather terrific, this country!" He turned back to the young woman, the scientist in him merged in the man of warm humanities. "I've been in Newfoundland a few days only, and already I can see it a country in which life is harder than in all the rest of the world. But," on sudden inspiration, "it has developed your men into a race of supermen for strength and bravery. Their equal exists nowhere else, in my opinion, in the world."

Her face went suddenly somber. There was a deep and moving significance in her answer that remained with him until long after. "Aye, sir, that is true. And the life here develops a woman the same way. But strength and bravery make but empty glory in the life of a woman." She held out her hand. "Good-by, sir."

Coming down to his waiting band Stanway studied closely the content of his own mind. For the first time in many a long day his mind was giving itself to the study of a human being rather than to its never-solved problems of plant life. The young woman was a remarkable human specimen; but she was more than that. She was a species in herself. Life had stored itself abundantly, lavishly in her; and then, by its very lavishness, had set her apart. For what?

For the next few days in this big, cool land it seemed that Peter Stanway lived never so keenly. It was as though he had been lifted sheer to some rarified plane wherein one lived vigorously and breathed great strength.

And now the thing of his mission was coming to bloom within him like a great triumphant cry. For it seemed he had come to the source of much that he sought. In many an instance in the past he had been enabled to work on plant-life wonders, of great value to the race, by the importation of "northern seed," with which to restore and reinvigorate worn-out, depleted strains. Here, he was enabled to study deeper still these basic secrets.

Meanwhile, the seed of the land itself, its people, were drawing him. They awed him with their marvelous endurance, their hardihood of soul. One day, alone on the heights, he had laughed aloud, startling a brace of ptarmigan into headlong flight. Why was there not a certain analogy between the "northern seed" of his plant life and living human creatures? In comparison with these enormously hardy beings he was telling himself that the race, as animals, was getting run out; that the glory had departed, and the beauty and the romance. He was knowing many a strata of human society that might do well if recruited by such "northern seed."

Perhaps it was along the line of such reflection that he came to study the girl, Gail Adair, more closely. In this girl he sensed forces far greater than the usual, and these forces drew the gentleness and chivalry of his own nature with powerful appeal.

As the days went on he found himself seeking her. He fell into the way of using the girl and her boat. To Stanway, her superbly unconscious management of boat and engine was rather wonderful; and when with her he always suffered a small humiliation at

his own unskillfulness. And somehow, she would seem to sense this and would take upon herself a gently humble mood and lead him to talk of things that would reestablish his own supremacy—brilliant, unapproachable. Meanwhile, he was discovering the girl's own mind. Her lore of land and sea, of nature and the interrelations thereof, was amazing. She helped him much.

And then, one day, Stanley awoke to odd realizations. Things in this girl were drawing not only the man, but vague things of depth, of significance in him; drawing them powerfully, like the operation of some deep-working law. He realized this with something like panic. He knew nothing of women; he could not explain matters from past experience. He began to withdraw. Toward the last he even avoided her; shut himself to the girl completely.

Then, matter-of-factly enough, she smashed a way quite to the center of his being, by saving his life one morning. It was all very simple. With no one about, he had managed to get overboard, tangled in a painter—apparently doomed. And she had been the one to rescue him.

The incident had upset him horribly. He knew now that he had wanted beyond all things to be a man of her own kind before this girl. And to have her rescue him imposed unbearable things upon him. As soon as he became fairly revived he sought her. He found her in the little grassy yard, tall and erect in her splendid poise, holding a hurt kid in her arms. Upon her face brooded a tender, melting beauty.

He began, swiftly, abruptly. "I—I suppose I am really deeply grateful. But in saving my life, you have, in a way, thrown it out of gear."

She was regarding him curiously, her face awakening to him, beautiful warmth dawning across it. "Why so, sir?"

"Because," he burst out, impetuously,

"because it—it is a reversing thing. In my world—according to my code—my standard—it is almost a humiliating thing for a man, in such circumstances, to owe his life to a—a woman!"

The eyes, going sober now, seemed absently slipping over Stanway's slight, though fairly well-knit figure, noting lightly his scientist's hands, his scholarly distinction. "But, sir, it was naught of hardship. It was quite easy."

"That's it!" he cried out. "It was so damnably easy—for you!"

At that she turned abruptly to gaze out at the sea. Her eyes found the yachtlike Gloucesterman that lay in the harbor contracting for fish—seemed dealing with it reflectively.

And, staring at the averted face, Stanway suddenly found himself with a deeply penitent feeling welling up within him. Uncertain, confused, he found himself saying:

"I am sorry. Have I hurt you?"

"Not as you mean, sir," she said, after a moment. She turned and faced him. "It is as I told you that first day. In building its lives, this country makes no difference twixt man and woman." There came a little silence, then gently: "And I would be *woman*, sir—all woman!"

With the deep, grave eyes in his, Stanway found his own emotions suddenly drop to silence within him.

Another moment and she was speaking rapidly. "An outporter in this country of great loneliness, it seems that God has also made me an outporter in life. My old grandmother told me that I was to be the mother of great things. And all my childhood I believed that, and as a girl so bore myself and trained myself as to be ready."

And then, in such impressiveness as Stanway never knew: "The old grandmother was wrong! I was born for woe, for great burdens, for loneliness! You yourself show me that I may not

even save life, let alone give life. And, ah, I want to give life!"

The face she turned to Stanway was a thing so gloriously wistful, so immeasurably tender, as to merge any tinge of the self-conscious. And now the wonderful poise of her was all marred and broken.

Contriteness, humility, swamped Stanway. And at the same time some great urge of unfulfilled youth and aspiration swelled in him, and he found himself saying in true earnestness: "I'd give the world to—to feel myself truly in—in *your* class of men!"

A great moment befell on the heights. Overwrought, stirred to his soul, it might have been that Stanway loved the girl then; but he did not know it. There had been nothing of the sort in his isolated life up to now that might reveal him to himself. He only felt that big yearnings were rushing blindly out from him, he knew not whence or whither.

There was a dance that night in the little schoolhouse far up the rocks. The steamer that was to take the Stanway Expedition along the coast had arrived, and the stopping over of the coast boat meant a dance always.

Young Cornell urged Stanway to go.

"Come on, chief. Everybody goes but cradle inmates and the paralyzed. They tell me it's a sight to record."

Since coming down from the heights Stanway was as a man lost within himself. "Oh, I don't dance, Cornell," he evaded. "You boys go. There's the final dunnage to see on board."

"Stuff's about all aboard now, sir. We don't sail until dawn." And then, grinning: "You see, we've got to go. We're the real guests of honor—along with the steamer officers and that pirate captain off the Gloucesterman. The steamer men say he's a bad egg, that one. They say he's always been trailing the Adair woman; and they're look-

ing to see some fun." He seemed regarding his engrossed chief slyly, speculatively, as he added: "Young Billard will be there, too. He came back like a brass band. He went somewhere to blow all his money. He's brought silk stockings for the little teacher; and Burgus is chaotic over them."

Stanway went. Somehow his going hinged on mention of the Gloucesterman.

The tiny schoolhouse back in the ravine was lit like a jewel in the dusk. In the half-glow outside the door men smoked and talked soberly. Inside, the little place held half the lanterns of Burgus pendant about its walls. A big hanging lamp of china and glass hung from one of the beams.

Cornell was right. To Stanway, the hamlet seemed to be there to a child. People of every age, subdued and awed in the presence of the strangers, sat circumspectly about the walls. There was a group of men from the steamer, and his own little band, eager, wide-eyed, alight with curiosity. Moving casually through the throng, sleek, predatory, appraising the women with eager eyes, was the captain of the Gloucesterman. All the young unmarried were paired off virtuously, tenaciously. In a secluded corner, enormously conscious and ill at ease, sat the recreant Gid Billard with his quite superior young teacher. And alone in a corner opposite, eyes brooding on all about, sat Gail Adair, her very impressiveness setting her as far apart from all about her as the poles.

Stanway had to look away from her.

He watched the dancing. The dancing was a rite, a solemn ceremonial in which these people loosed emotions long pent. In the gray dust kicked up by the silent, rapt dancers, the little schoolroom might have been the assembly place for a cosmic ritual. The idea overwhelmed Stanway. He watched.

Dust! The china lamp and the score

of lanterns stinging through the gloom. Silence; save for the rhythmic thudding. Heavy silence! Intolerable silence! The crooning chin-music thrumming through it. The rapt, whirling bodies; stolid, engrossed, hypnotic as bees at the functioning of life and death—Some swift recognition pierced Stanway's absorption. Before him, as with his own plants, might have been the silent pollination of a people, a rudimentary, instinctive nuptial; the deeply enraptured human creatures adrift on a rhythmic wind of emotion, eager to exhaust the things within them; fervidly errant bodies, blown from one to another; the meeting; the silent, whirling ecstasy; the loosing, departure, drifting; the uniting again; the dust, the crooning, rhythmic silence. And—his eyes breaking away—left out from all this, anchored to aloneness, sat the girl.

Stanway was panting. The heat, the sense of mob-tenseness added to his weird idea of elemental functionings, was becoming unbearable. He knew an overwhelming desire to go to Gail Adair. She happened to be watching Gid Billard and his wispy teacher; and Stanway had never seen any one look as she did. He had started from his seat when he saw the captain of the Gloucesterman slip into a place beside her; then he hesitated.

Just then the throng broke up in wildness, in surcease. The abandon of the nuptial was over. There came a little new diversion. The old man of the hamlet, who acted as toastmaster, had come in. The steamer had brought mail for Burgus and he was bringing letters, packets, for the outlying families. Stanway saw him give a letter to Gail Adair; saw her read it, turn to the captain, talk to him earnestly a moment. Then Gail and the captain left the place together.

She was gone. Stanway was feeling strange. He would not see her again,

and he had not said good-by. He was feeling that something of great import was passing him by—as in the dark. And that suavely leering captain—

Some time later he was down nearer the shore, seated among the rocks. With everything finally settled, he was knowing a sense of loss that was overpowering. From the direction of the sea, a great cool breath came upon him—straight, even. And studded into the hollow black void here and there about him, were the green-jeweled eyes of goats—fixed, questioning, as though regarding him from the remoteness of another world, an ancient world, wherein all men and all women may have represented but primitive animal, and science was not. And straight came a thing he never forgot. Seated alone on a rock, staring into the blackness, the structure of his own life burst open before him and he saw children, his own children that had never been, that he had never considered, his own seed and their seed, wending down the ages and—

Suddenly he started. Below him, the vaguely impressive figure of a woman was moving on, straight and direct, down to the shore. And now the rattle of a boat on the pebbles, and the ensuing thumping of oars in tholepins.

Out of the darkness close by two hurrying figures stumbled against Stanway.

"It's Gail, sir!" one of the villagers cried out. "Her old grandmother's sick and sent for her. She'm fair daft at losin' her and bein' left alone. She'm goin' to make the crossin' to Sydney to-night along o' that blarsted Gloucesterman! And no one can stop her!"

A big sickness, as of violated tradition, of chivalry, came to Stanway. And following it came a great instinct toward protection that lifted him out of himself. He stumbled to his feet and ran.

Down at the shore now the figure had

boarded a small boat. He could make out two others in it. It was already well out toward the lights of the vessel.

A few minutes later a white-faced chief of the Stanway Expedition burst into a stateroom on the coast steamer at the little pier. He scribbled a note on the back of an envelope and stuck it in the mirror:

CORNELL: You are to take the expedition into the interior alone. Carry on as planned. Will get word in to you later. I'm leaving Newfoundland.

Then, delving in his own bag, he extracted a pistol and stuffed it in his pocket.

In the midnight silence of the lonely wastes the after cabin of the Gloucesterman was coming grimly alive.

The man lying hidden by a couple of dories stiffened involuntarily. He raised his head to listen amid the humming of the engines and the long-traveling swish of the sea. The time was come to do something. And he did not know what to do.

The noises from the cabin came clearly, sickening him a little. He could hear voices on a level monotone of tenseness; there came a jingling explosion of shattered glass.

Stanway groaned and tried to make himself think. He had boarded the Gloucesterman secretly two hours ago, back in Burgus. He had lain hidden until he might be needed. And in two hours waiting he had solved himself to himself. He knew now that his action had been prompted by something far deeper than chivalry. In two hours his searching scientist's mind had placed his impulse as a call, a basic urge, deep down, elemental—love of a man of a certain kind for a woman of a certain kind. It awed him a little—the force of it. It lifted him. And the love stirred him so; the peace of it, the solace, the fulfillment. If only, now, he could know

himself better equipped! Here, the various points of his situations paralyzed him. He would probably be helpless before actual ridicule.

Laughter, broad, Gargantuan laughter, came from the after cabin; and an activity that stung him, because of its suggestiveness.

Stanway rolled out of his hiding place, and sprang to his feet. He could not distinguish the watch forward; and aft, he could see the man at the wheel but dimly in the far obscurity. Down in the forecabin the crew had long since succumbed to the general conviviality. Stanway seemed alone in the entire night. The sky was dead now; the dim wastes cold and leaden. From all sides crept to him a ceaseless, recurrent gnashing of lonely, slithering foam. Uncertain yet, he felt himself flaming. He was to prove himself worthy—yet how? If he blundered aft, he would probably get disabled, be useless to help; but—

The after cabin became quick with action. And then—a long cry, and a tense silence; enormously sinister.

The scientist leaped. Jerkily uncontrolled, as though functioning without a brain, Stanway pulled out the pistol and stumbled crazily aft.

Up from the after companionway a figure was rising swiftly against the dim, dark sea—a tall, supple woman's figure. It wheeled in his direction. And at the same time, from up forward, the watch was hurrying aft with a lantern. In the concealing blackness of the mainmast, Stanway stretched forth his arms to the woman—a weirdly tragic figure in the flashing light.

She stared at Stanway for one incredulous moment; then, in sudden abandonment to the woman in her, she grasped his hands and faltered:

"Oh, sir, thank the good God! It seemed Gail Adair has overtrusted herself!" And, with moving simplicity, "You must help me, sir."

The rich tenderness in her voice, the trusting dependence, expanded great new things in Stanway.

"I—I was coming to you," he said. "But, great heavens! You are hurt!"

"Not much, sir." She released his hands and stretched forth for inspection two magnificent bare arms. "My arms are cut. But I am afraid I have killed the captain."

He was stripping off his coat. "Here, put this on."

They moved forward on the empty deck, far away from the dim, phantom figure of the man at the wheel. They crouched down in the lee of the dories. In the semiblackness, Stanway ripped off his shirt, tore it into strips, and bound up the wounds in her arms. "Listen, Gail," he said, "I cannot tell how the dawn will find us. So I am saying to you now: You have called me. I did not understand it and would not recognize it. But I know to-night that this call from the things in you to the things in me is a divine ordinance, and that it runs far deeper than mere love."

And again the woman gripped his hands, and the glowing richness of her voice held in it things to transcend time and place and bodily danger.

"Oh, sir, I can tell you now. I felt for you that first day. But, ah! you were so great in the world that I would not let myself harbor such thought. And to-night, alone there in the school-house, knowing that you, too, were going from me, I felt I should die."

Stillness.

Stillness of a great peace, stillness of soul. The two sat, waiting, hands interlocked, knowing neither cold, nor loneliness, nor danger. The craft sped along into the black reaches of the night. About them a deep, brooding heaviness came upon the sea. The wind dropped, strangely. It seemed the night waited, too, in a stifled hush.

Down aft began a certain awakening.

The woman's hands crept a little closer about the man's.

"And now——" she began, and halted for words. "You see, sir, I know you not. I know so little what you can do in times like this. I can only tell you to keep on feeling for me as you say you do. I'll do my all to help us through." She turned her face upward. Then, warningly, "I feel weather, sir. Whatever happens, keep close by me."

Men from aft were coming toward them along the deck. The man in the lee of the dories kissed hurriedly the woman's hands. Then they slipped swiftly behind a barrier of deck gear in the blackness.

In the moments of tension that followed Peter Stanway seemed living swiftly but wholly bodilessly. All his life seemed to have been fused into some volatile essence, fiercely inflammable, and now completely ignited by the spark of his love. Protective-ness seemed a mighty instinct, older than the very hills.

Voices came to them coarsely, commandingly, from the obscurity; and a big shadow strode around the barrier to seize the woman. Stanway fired coldly, without an instant's hesitation. The man reeled back out of sight, cursing. At the same moment, off on the sea, a fierce little rage seemed to gather in the night, to wreak itself momentarily on the sea about them, and die away. Came a moment of silence, with the confused muttering of the voices on the deck around back of their barrier. And again, off on the sea, came that disturbance, giving now a sense of mighty gathering, of towering force, of swift, onrushing malevolence.

In a hushed instant came the woman's low cry in Stanway's ear:

"Quick, sir! Look out for the squall!"

And down upon that deck out of the northeast swept a sudden writhing

blackness of wind and rain and turmoil, as though the very night itself had fallen upon them in tortured fragments.

The men on the deck were leaping to make fast everything movable.

And the woman by his side made Stanway her equal in greatness with a word.

"Help me get the wheel!" she cried.

Stanway could not have described it later, except that he seemed to have the strength of a dozen men moved by an odd animal fury. In two minutes the wheel watch lay prone on the deck, helpless in swift lashings of rope; and Gail Adair was steering, with the scientist standing her guard. In a great laboring moment the vessel was brought about on a different course, and, with all the fury of the squall screaming at her heels, was fleeing straight before it into the blackness.

Followed a time of weird beauty, of superb madness; for the scientist, Peter Stanway, a time of great glory. The wind grew demoniac; the vessel stabbed great seas to half her length. Forward, the forecastle still slept suddenly; on deck the men from the after cabin were frantically involved with the seas and shifting gear; down below, in the lulls, the helpless captain could be heard cursing royally at his engineer attendant. Like some imposing patrol Gail Adair dominated all the night, her face bent on the compass, impersonal, unmoved, in the phosphorescent glow. Beside her stood a figure equally dramatic—a flaming Michael, alert, wary, menacing.

And about them the night took on a barbaric, macabre beauty. The brooding, inky wall astern became laced with lightnings—incessant shuttling bolts, silver slashes of malevolent delicacy. Crackling and snapping, even above its burden of wind, the murk followed on astern, trampling the tortured sea, rawly green in the lambent flare, into agonies of frenzied froth.

It began to hail, and the sable fastness of the night became alive, became ghostly with long, slanting javelins of ice, stalking on and on, storming the maddened sea. There were quivering flares, and the hail became swaying fringes of strung pearls against the living green. Then came the swift instant of total blackness, when the eyes went out; and the ensuing slow recognition of heaving, toppling jet breaking into foaming, racing crusted-silver. Lightning again; ghostliness; livid greens; jet! A racing, flying craft piercing into the night!

Stanway exulted in the swinging, mounting ecstasy of it! In the superb, intolerable madness of it! This woman was his equal in every natural instinct; he was now her equal in dauntless bodily courage.

He had no idea as to the passing of time until, long after, a figure found its way aft out of the blackness, and discovered affairs at the wheel. In a flash Stanway came on guard with the pistol. The woman cried out to the intruder:

"You're not far off your course. A couple of hours more will bring us off the Cape Breton coast; and we'll be leaving you!"

For answer the man hurtled below. They could hear his wild explanations.

Then the cabin blew up.

Hurriedly, the woman had been lashing the wheel. Swiftly she spoke to Stanway: "Quick, sir! Help me ship a dory!" and they were running forward.

Again Stanway functioned like a superman. A confused moment, the dory was over, and they were riding vigorous seas; while the vessel was dissolving like a phantom into the blackness.

Dawn.

A far-off coast under low-lying clouds. And a man and a woman rowing on a placidly musing sea. Curious the

man was in the pearly light—a man of sober mien, with a keenly intellectual face above the dissolute rags of a battered buccaneer. Curious was the woman, also—curious beyond all reason. An imperial creature, she—blood and bandages, of gleaming skin and heavy-wound hair, and great, deep eyes holding in their depths the calm content of all the world.

A deep breath came from the woman. "Already am I far out from the world that bore me, sir. Mayhap I shall not live at ease in the new." There was a great wistfulness in the deep eyes of Gail Adair as she turned yearningly to Stanway.

With an impulsive movement the man shipped his oars, lunged aft, and knelt at her feet. "You would be wonderful in any world. You bear within you the true spirit of a mighty land. I—I am a little afraid of you, of the

very greatness in you. But, ah! I rejoice in you, and—I love you."

The sun was emerging gloriously from the mysteries of the sea. Motion grew swift upon the face of things. Color was born, and startling beauty. The sea became a breathing, pulsating thing of rarest, sovereign splendor; bronze and copper and flashings of purest gold topped the satiny rolls of water, and in their depths lived pinks and mauves and tenderest rose. Life, new life, was born of the deep—vigorous, vital, instinct with power.

Late that day the man and woman stood hand in hand before an old woman who, in her peaceful passing, was already gifted with vision more than mortal.

"You were born for true things, young daughter. I see you, clear, the mother of greatness; your children true seed of glory."

Another story by Will Beale will appear in an early issue.



AN ATHLETIC BANK PRESIDENT

ROBERT VEDDER FLEMING, head of the Riggs National Bank of Washington, and one of the youngest bank presidents in the world, is an all-round athlete. He started his career in sports when he was a choir boy twelve years old. He had heard that the "roughneck" kids of the District of Columbia Reform School were calling him and his fellow choristers "sissies" and "mother's darlings," and his gallant young soul thirsted for vengeance.

He organized a baseball team among the choir boys, was elected captain, and did the pitching. The day of the great battle came and, when the shades of evening fell upon the scene, the "roughneck" kids had fallen in disgraceful defeat before Fleming's fast ones, and the choristers, one-time "sissies," had run their hearts out chasing around the bases so often that young Fleming got his first experience in complicated figuring in counting up the number of their runs. After that, he won fame as a high-school and amateur pitcher in and around Washington.

Fleming is an outstanding example of the fact that hard work and ability will bring swift promotion, even in as careful and conservative a profession as banking. He went to work for Riggs Bank when he was eighteen and before he was thirty-six had risen through every grade of bank employment to the presidency.

THE Golden Leaf

By
Fred
MacIsaac

In Five Parts—Part III

Author of "Two Seats on the Aisle," "The Last Atlantide," Etc.

While attending Omega College, Lincoln Rafter got one good look at a dark, exotically beautiful girl who was passing by. Five years later he is traveling in Macedonia in the interests of the Great Egyptian and Turkish Cigarette Corporation. His guide and companion is Miltiades Darkrino, son of the corporation's Greek agent. Link catches another glimpse of the long-lost lady and learns that she is the American-educated granddaughter of Nicholas Darnyela, an impoverished Balkan prince. Sidi Ben Ara, Mohammedan manager of a rival tobacco firm, has secretly persuaded Nicholas to "raid" warehouses containing great stores of tobacco which have been sold to American firms. Sidi will take over the tobacco and give Nicholas a large sum to use as a dowry for his granddaughter, Princess Anelda, in marrying her off to the deposed King Otto of Westfalisa. Rafter happens upon Anelda in Yastib, where she and Nicholas are visiting Ariathes Mismos. Link tells her of his love and begs for the opportunity of seeing her again. She warns him that it will be very dangerous for him, but agrees to meet him that night at nine o'clock. Sidi has fallen in love with Anelda, and plans to double-cross Nicholas and abduct the lovely princess.

CHAPTER XIV.

LINK GETS ADVICE.

THE curing, drying and aging processes having been completed, the tobacco crop lay in the warehouses ready for shipment. These warehouses were a row of old houses on the outskirts of Yastib in which the

leaf, packed in goatskin bags, was piled from floor to ceiling. A very perfunctory watch was kept by half a dozen native policemen, and by four Greeks who represented the American owners.

His highness did not anticipate any difficulty in carrying out his raid. However, it all depended upon the force with the motor trucks which came up

from Saloniki to remove the tobacco. No whisper of the plot must get abroad, the loading must be permitted in tranquillity; then, when the Americans had prepared everything, a sudden swoop from the hills in the night, a rumbling of motor trucks over rough roads, and in an hour they would be over the frontier and safe from pursuit—most likely without the loss of a man.

His highness received his friends in a corner of the taproom of the inn, which did not differ much from that described at Kronki, save it was smaller and dirtier. It was the sight of the old gentleman with the shaving-brush mustaches which suggested to Link that the princess might be in the vicinity. However, he could secure no information, for Miltiades absolutely refused to ask questions for him, and had warned him again of the danger of pursuing the granddaughter of the old autocrat.

Wandering around the town, his eyes open for a sight of her, Link had chanced to turn into a narrow lane with garden walls on either side. He had chosen it because he saw no vehicles or pedestrians upon it, because wild flowers grew at either side of the path, creepers clung prettily to the stone walls, and because he wanted to be alone to think about Anelda. And so, by miraculous fortune, he had come upon her; and she had been kind.

He returned to the hotel in a condition of ecstasy, his eyes sparkling, his step light, his shoulders squared and a smile on his lips. He was immediately hailed by Miltiades, who was conversing with a small, dark man with aquiline nose and a gray pompadour.

"Mr. Rafter," said Miltiades, "I want to present to you Mr. Vradine, my father's chief agent in the field. Mr. Rafter represents our company, Vradine. The president sent him from New York to look over the business out here."

"Ah!" exclaimed Vradine, with a keen smile. "This pleases me much, sir." He rolled his r's extremely. "I am informed that New York has cabled a protest against the best stroke of business ever put over in Macedonia."

"Indeed?" replied Link, politely. He was thinking of Anelda, and was greatly annoyed at being forced to listen to business matters.

"Yes, sir. These farmers are being educated, Mr. Rafter. They have heard of collective bargaining, as you call it in America. In former times we visited each little planter and dickered with him for his crop; but last year they organized and appointed a business manager. They refused to sell, and hoarded their prepared leaf, finally sending it here to be sold in one lot to the highest bidder.

"There was a great shortage of leaf as a result. Without this Macedonian leaf none of the popular blends could be made; and they held us up. Yes, sir! Though some of the farmers were starving, they stuck to their agreement. The Egyptian companies, the English companies, and the American companies tried every trick they knew to break the combine; but without success.

"And in the end, we saw we had to accept their terms. I was fortunate enough to arrange the purchase of the entire Yastib hoard of two hundred and fifty tons, but I had to pay a higher price than the company expected. The Eastern Tobacco Company, which entered the deal with us, is content; but Mr. Darkrino wires me that our company is not satisfied."

"However, the deal has gone through," Miltiades declared.

"Oh, yes. The money has been paid and distributed to the farmers, and the crop is ours. I wished Mr. Rafter to understand why we had to pay such a price."

"I'm sure you did what was best," Link assured him. "But two hundred

and fifty tons isn't much of a crop. I supposed much more tobacco was raised in Macedonia."

"Of course the association didn't get it all. The Cavala crop amounts to five or six thousand tons this year, and the Drama crop three or four thousand tons; but most of this was contracted for—a good part of it the Greek and Egyptian companies own outright. This is what you might call a corner, like your corner in wheat."

"I see. I congratulate you on your achievement."

"Thank your, sir. Shall we have a drink of brandy on that?"

The drinks were served while Vradine continued to expatiate upon the coup he was instrumental in pulling off and the great dissatisfaction of the Egyptians and the English.

"We have chartered a ship to carry it from Saloniki, and we have secured from the Greek army a score of big motor trucks to transport it to the sea. All our company has to do is to sell a portion of its share to one of our competitors at an advance, and it will be a profitable transaction. If you are writing to the president, you might so inform him."

Link nodded gravely, though he was not in correspondence with the head of the corporation, as the Syrian gentleman seemed to assume.

He was bursting with happiness and in immediate need for a confidant; and when they escaped from Vradine, he grasped Darkrino by the sleeve and led him to their chamber.

"I've seen her! I've talked with her!" he exclaimed.

"With whom?"

"The Princess Anelda."

"But I thought she didn't know you."

"She does now. Think of it, old man. She remembered me after all these years—that is after I reminded her."

"Now you are in for it," said the Greek. "What do you suppose that fierce old prince will do to you if he catches you flirting with his granddaughter?"

"But I'm not flirting. I'm serious. This is real love."

"That makes it worse. Where is she, and how did you happen to meet her?"

Briefly Link told him of his stroll up the secluded lane and his discovery of the two girls beyond the garden wall. Then blurted out about his rendezvous of the evening.

"That is the Mismos residence." Miltiades said thoughtfully. "I supposed the prince was staying at the inn, but he must be living with Ariathes Mismos."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes, fairly well."

"Could you get me an invitation to visit there?" demanded Link eagerly.

"It is possible, but you wouldn't meet the princess. Will you understand that women are closely guarded in this country? Was the Mismos girl with your princess pretty?"

"Why she covered her face with a veil, but she looked sort of nice. To tell the truth, I didn't notice."

"I might call on Mismos. His daughter will be very rich, and he is a friend of my father's," said the Greek. "But I am not getting mixed up in your affair, my friend. I might be accepted as a suitor for the daughter of Ariathes Mismos, who is not a princess; but old Nicholas would carve you into mince-meat. My advice is not to keep this rendezvous."

"Ha! You're crazy! If I am murdered the next minute, I shall be there on time."

"You have got a bad case. I'm sorry for you. Rafter, if you were an American multimillionaire, you couldn't marry the daughter of the Darnyelas, and you have admitted you have no in-

come except your salary from the company."

"I don't care anything about that old idiot's consent. If Anelda loves me, we'll elope."

The Greek gazed at him as one looks at a lunatic.

"And where would you elope, and how? No priest in this country would marry a woman without her guardian's consent. You could not take her out of the country without a passport for her. We are fiercely jealous of the virtue of our women, and the American who carried off a Balkan princess would find every man's hand against him. Cross into Bulgaria, and the authorities would deliver her to her grandfather, while they put you in prison. Greece would do the same. In Jugoslavia they would probably decapitate you, instead of imprisoning you. You are mad, Mr. Rafter!"

The American's distress was so evident that the young Greek laid a commiserating hand upon his shoulder.

"But what do lovers do in this country?" Link asked in bewilderment.

Miltiades laughed shortly. "They don't. In the first place, young girls never meet young men except with the consent and in the presence of their parents. If a swain falls in love with a girl from afar, he may pass under her window and attract her attention; but they have no opportunity for close acquaintance unless he finds a way to make himself acceptable to her relatives. If they do manage clandestine meetings, they are usually caught. Then the girl is sent to a convent, and the man is found dead with a knife in his back."

"Human nature is the same the world over."

"Possibly; but love as you know it in America doesn't exist in the East. If your princess had not been educated in America, she would have covered her face with a veil, as the Mismos girl

did, when you had the impudence to address her."

"What are we going to do?" wailed the American.

"Stop this nonsense. If you must meet her to-night, tell her to try to get her grandfather to send her back to America. He can never find a husband for her, because he can't raise a dowry. Darnyela is almost penniless. In America you can pursue your love affair in safety. All you will do here is to ruin her reputation, get her immured in some convent or shut up in her castle, and lose your own life."

Link nodded. "You're right. Of course I can't endanger her. But how can I give her up?"

"You can't give up what you haven't got," was the shrewd reply.

Link was silenced. The axiom "All the world loves a lover" was only partly true, he was reflecting. While it might apply in America, and perhaps in western Europe, in this part of the world nobody loves a lover, and the obstacles in his path are insurmountable. But suppose he did succeed in eloping with Anelda and getting her upon a ship to America, overcoming passport difficulties in some miraculous manner?

If he abandoned his post over here he could say good-by to his job with the Great Egyptian and Turkish Company; he would land with his bride in New York with few resources, for he had saved very little. How would his father welcome his appearance with an Oriental wife, even if she were a princess? He knew that things had not been going too well with his father during the past five years, and that he could do very little for his son, even if he were so disposed. Well, Link felt he would make good, somehow. With Anelda depending upon him he could not fail.

Miltiades broke into his dismal reverie by touching his shoulder.

"After all I've said," he declared, "if you are still determined to keep this insane rendezvous, I'll go with you and act as lookout. In a fight, if there happens to be one, two men are better than one."

Link leaped to his feet and grasped Miltiades' hand. He had liked the shrewd little Greek from the very beginning; but he had not suspected him of being so strong a friend of himself.

"That's wonderful of you, old man," he said. "You're the real article!"

CHAPTER XV.

"ON SUCH A NIGHT LEANDER——"

THEY dined leisurely and badly, seated by a window which afforded a view of the hills. These were fertile hills upon which were groves of olive trees, and where wild flowers bloomed in abundance. But their color faded slowly as the sun withdrew and the shadows climbed like an advancing black army until they completely enshrouded them. The night was warm and fragrant and intoxicating; even the poisonous food could not affect the charm of it. If vile weather had prevailed until now, Macedonia was trying to apologize to the alien visitor and present him with a sample of a Balkan June evening. Through the open window came the insidious zephyrs whispering to the American of love and happiness. Even Miltiades, now that he had flung away his qualms, was affected somewhat by the romantic night and the evident excitement of his friend.

Somewhere in the middle distance a Bulgarian shepherd began to play upon a reed pipe a melody which might have been of great antiquity, perhaps one of the forgotten airs of ancient Greece.

"The pipes of Pan," Miltiades smiled. "The old fellow roamed through these hills, followed by swarms of nymphs, according to our mythology."

Sitting by the window looking out

into the darkness, hearing the weird squeaking of the shepherd's pipe, and from the village and the inn, the hum of strange tongues, the occasional burst of song from the taproom, the musical cry of a street vender, it was shown to Lincoln Rafter that he was favored by the gods above all his countrymen.

In America, land of complaisant parents, how humdrum was courtship; to what slight tests were lovers subjected. Mutual attraction, and there was nothing to prevent a young man and young woman from seeing as much of one another as they wished. Holding hands in cinema palaces, sipping ice-cream sodas in drug stores, lounging on a sofa in an apartment-house parlor; free, unchaperoned, while fond parents sat in a back room to give the young folks every opportunity to enjoy each other. How could love flourish under such conditions? No wonder people married to discover they had not really cared for each other at all. How many of the girls led to the altar at home would have been wedded, if the grooms had been compelled to fight their way to their sides through a hedge of swords?

These thoughts are not original, of course; but they were original with Link Rafter. The exquisite Princess Anelda Darnyela would be waiting for him soon in a Macedonian garden, and the danger of their interview would give it added bliss. What did he care for knives and guns which menaced?

He, Lincoln Rafter, common, everyday American, graduate of a freshwater college, employee of a tobacco company, was having a love affair with a Balkan princess in whose veins ran the blood of the ancient Greeks, who might be a descendant of Hero or of Helen of Troy. Anelda was certainly as beautiful as Helen could possibly have been.

Although he had hardly tasted the red wine served with dinner, Lincoln Rafter was drunk—drunk with love and

romance and the night breeze and youth. At that moment he was really indifferent to death. Had he been sure that he would be slain as soon as his meeting with Anelda was over, he would have kept his rendezvous.

"Snap out of it!" commanded the Greek. "What were you thinking about?"

Link smiled foolishly.

"On such a night as this, Leander swam the Hellespont," he quoted.

"And you remember what happened to him. Or, if you don't, I'll tell you."

"It must have been worth it," sighed the American. "I'm going up to my room to wash and brush my hair and put on a clean shirt and collar," he added.

"Which she will admire in the dark. No stars to-night. Listen! Thunder."

A low rumble from the mountains confirmed his statement.

"You see," smiled Link. "A flash of lightning may display my clean collar."

"And also display you to Prince Nicholas—in which case, taps."

A few minutes before nine o'clock the two youths left the inn, circled around to the rear, and with some difficulty—for there were street lights only upon the main avenues—located the entrance to the path. It was dark as ink, and they felt their way along by touching the walls upon the right hand. Some of these walls were six or eight feet high, others were low enough to enable them to catch a glimpse of lighted windows in the villas beyond the intervening gardens. Link, who had not paid much attention to the location of the Mismos garden, began to fear that he might pass it by, for night blotted out the landmarks.

"I'll stand beside the wall," Miltiades said in a low tone. "If I see anything suspicious I'll call to you in Turkish: 'Come on.' Do you know the words? *Talle hone.*"

They moved along slowly. Then Link was startled by hearing his name called in a low-pitched soprano: "Mr. Rafter!"

He stopped short and saw a white face appear at the wall a few feet behind him. Anelda, who was garbed in black and whose face had been covered by a black veil which made her quite invisible as she leaned on the wall, had removed her veil.

With a heart which was thumping with joy and excitement, he turned back.

"Who is with you?" she whispered.

"A friend who will watch," he replied.

Anelda emitted a low laugh. "Xantha is watching at the rear door of the house," she said. "This is most romantic."

"May I come over the wall?" he pleaded.

"Yes. We shall sit on the stone bench."

He pulled himself over with the ease of an athlete, and she took his hand and led him to the bench. Four windows at the rear of the house shed a faint illumination upon the garden. But the light did not extend as far as the bench upon which they seated themselves.

"Well," said Anelda with a sigh.

"This is awfully good of you," Link murmured.

Silence. The girl smiled, unseen in the darkness.

To Xantha a clandestine meeting was such a terrific thing that she would have refused to meet any but some one about whom she was mad; and then she would have granted it only to throw herself into his arms and abandon herself to his embraces. To Anelda, American trained, it was nothing so serious. She was not ready to yield to a young man's kisses. And she knew the type she had agreed to meet; he would be most respectful. Yet, as a Levantine, she was aware that she risked her reputation

and the man risked his life for the privilege of sitting side by side in the dark upon a stone bench in silence.

"This is hail and farewell," she said. "To-morrow my grandfather takes me back to our home beyond the Jugoslavian frontier. So, my friend, if you have anything to say, begin."

"You know what I want to say. I've been crazy about you for five years. Before I ever heard you speak a word I loved you. And if you could feel like that about me—well, it would be heavenly."

"If I hadn't liked you on sight, I would not have risked this," she said. "But, after all, we are strangers. How can you expect me——"

He felt for her hand, found it; and she left it in his palm. It was so small and soft, he thought. "I can't expect you to return my love yet," he murmured. "But if I could only keep seeing you, I am sure I could make you love me. I think we were made for each other, Anelda. And you did remember me. I can't stand it, to think of you marrying anybody else, now that we have met."

In some way Anelda's shoulder was leaning against his arm, and in some way that arm slipped around her slender waist. He heard her gasp; then she nestled against him.

"It seems as though it was written that we were to be friends."

"Lovers."

"Well, perhaps. No, you may not kiss me—yet. But you do not understand our country. There is nothing that we can do. What is your first name?"

"Lincoln. Everybody calls me Link."

"We can never marry," she said.

"Could you, in some way, get your grandfather to send you back to America?"

"No," she said sadly. "He told me yesterday that I am to wed King Otto of Westfalisa. It seems the brute de-

mands some huge sum of money as a dowry."

"But I understood the prince was penniless."

"Yes," she admitted. "That is true. Yet he is getting the money through some mysterious deal. A vast sum—I can hardly credit it."

"But you won't consent?"

"You don't know our castle, Mr.—er—Link. It's horrible. I die there by inches. Better to marry this ex-king and live in a civilized country. Perhaps we may meet, years hence, in Lucerne. Perhaps I may be a widow. I understand King Otto eats too much."

"No," he said in anguish. "You mustn't. I'll follow you to your castle. We'll escape together to America. Maybe your grandfather won't get the money, anyway."

"In a week or so he will have it in his hands—twenty thousand English pounds. It's got something to do with tobacco; and I suspect that I owe my coming happiness to that Egyptian, Sidi Ben Ara," she said bitterly.

"The brute! Please, Anelda, try to think of some way that we——"

"Sssh!" she exclaimed. A white streak was darting across the garden—Xantha.

"Anelda!" she panted. "Prince Nicholas and my father are coming out here. He demanded where you were. I told him you were in the garden."

"Go quickly!" cried Anelda.

"Please," he implored, "a kiss."

Suddenly he felt two lips pressed against his; they were moist and soft and warm. He flung his arms about her and she yielded willingly.

"Go, go!" she whispered.

And then from the lane came a call:

"*Talle hone!*"

"I can't go over the wall," he said.

"Somebody is coming up the lane."

"Behind the bench!" she commanded.

"Sit by me, Xantha. Compose yourself, child. Nothing will happen."

There was a man carrying a lantern moving up the lane—a city watchman, probably. And a door in the house opened, throwing an oblong of light upon the garden path. Then a tall figure darkened it.

"Anelda!" called the prince.

"Here, grandfather," she said. "I'm sitting on the bench with Xantha."

"Wait; I'll come to you," he said.

Anelda dropped one arm carelessly over the back of the bench; and Link, crouching behind it, caught the little hand in his and fondly kissed her palm. Her eyes were bright. The Oriental side of the girl delighted in the situation because of its peril; her Western soul quaked at the prospect of discovery. And at that moment she knew that she did love Lincoln Rafter.

"Good news, sweet infant," announced the prince in French, as he dropped heavily beside her upon the bench. "Xantha, please go to tell your father I shall join him in a few minutes."

"What is it, sir?" asked Anelda. Lincoln was now kissing her wrist. She saw that the watchman with the lantern was well past the garden; so the coast was clear when her grandfather departed.

"I have received a telegram from King Otto himself. He is delighted with your photograph; and, were it not for his circumstances, would waive the dowry. However, he shall have it."

"But, grandfather, I cannot understand how you can raise so large a sum of money. It involves a sacrifice. Are you selling the castle? I won't have it."

Old Prince Nicholas roared with laughter. "Not I!" he exclaimed. "Tiny one, your old grandfather is getting your dowry in the ancient manner of the Darnyelas, with his good sword."

"You are not going to war with somebody!" she cried, horrified.

"The Darnyela rides again. A raid, my child, as in days of old."

"I forbid it," she cried, in her excitement snatching her hand from the swain behind the bench. "You might get hurt. There will be fighting."

"Now, don't bother your pretty head, sweet. Come into the house and join my friend Mismos and his family. Why muse alone in a dark garden?"

"It's so warm," she pleaded.

Suddenly the entire garden was made as light as day by lightning which filled the sky with its blaze. And on its heel came a terrific clap of thunder. Immediately rain fell.

"In you go!" cried the old man, lifting the girl like a bale of goods over his shoulder and, roaring with laughter, running with her to the house.

Wild with anger because the impetuous old prince had prevented a farewell or any plans for the future, Link came out from behind the bench and felt his way toward the wall. There he waited for ten minutes in drenching rain, before common sense told him that the storm would give her no excuse to venture out again.

He moved sullenly down the lane and found Miltiades, wet and angry, awaiting him at the foot.

"I never expected to see you alive again," said the Greek. "I saw the old prince come out, and when you failed to respond to my warning there was nothing for me to do but move on. I could not allow that watchman to find me lurking in the path."

"I wasn't discovered; but Nicholas dragged her in the house without giving us a chance to say good-by," he grumbled. "And she's going back to Adrianska to-morrow."

"And the wooing? Did you make progress?"

"Yes," he said, beaming now. "I believe she loves me. She would marry me if she could. She let me kiss her."

"Ah!" rhapsodized the Greek. "The first kiss of love! When the object of your adoration yields and you press

your lips to hers! If at that moment you could die, how wonderful it would be! But if you live and marry her, and kiss her whenever you like, and have children and see her grow fat and old and wrinkled and gray haired—horrible! The first kiss, the rapture of it! That is the great climax.”

“Rubbish!”

“No,” insisted Miltiades. “What makes ‘Tristan and Isolde’ the most sublime opera ever written? The lovers meet in the garden, just as you did. *Isolde’s* servant watches, lest *King Mark* return and catch them. They melt into a kiss, and so great is their bliss that they do not heed the call—just as you failed to attend to my warning to-night. And then *Mark* comes and *Tristan* is cut down. No chance for anticlimax there. In the next act he lies dying, and *Isolde* is crossing the sea to reach his side. Just as he is expiring, she reaches him, they kiss, and he dies. A perfect death!”

“You are a poet,” smiled Link Rafter.

“Now, if Nicholas had run you through, just as you had kissed Anelda, you would have died happy. As it is, you will never see her again, and all your life you will have the memory of her beauty as she kissed you. That will be painful, but, I assure you, much better than to have you marry and grow old together. You are a lucky man, Rafter.”

“Don’t be a chump!” exclaimed Link. “I’m going to follow her to her castle and carry her off. I want to grow old with her.”

“Well,” laughed Miltiades, “let’s get out of these wet clothes.”

As they changed, Link was living over again the experience of the night and tingling with bliss at the recollection. What had transpired after Nicholas came had made little impression. They spoke French, and Link’s French was frail. But he had understood that

Nicholas was going to get the dowry with his sword in some mysterious manner. Most likely he was going to murder some rich man. While Anelda was the most beautiful and divine creature in the world, Nicholas was a brutal old rascal. If Link could discover the prospective victim and warn him in time, that would balk Prince Nicholas and save Anelda from the preposterous King Otto.

It did not occur to him to confide in Miltiades what he had overheard while crouched behind the stone bench. Yet that which Anelda had told him and what he had overheard from Nicholas, and the girl’s statement that Sidi Ben Ara had something to do with the deal which was to provide the dowry, might have revealed the plot to the subtle Miltiades. The American, of course, was not sufficiently experienced to put two and two together in this manner.

Instead, he devoted his thoughts to ways and means of seeing Anelda again, of getting her out of her castle and upon a ship bound for New York. And he fell asleep without devising a plan.

Anelda, also, was considering the problem, and a possible solution occurred to her during the night. When Link came down to breakfast in the morning he was astonished to be accosted in English by a young woman who was waiting outside the dining room. This person was attired in Greek dress, but her face did not match her costume, and her speech was unmistakably of New York.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOVE LETTERS.

“CAN I speak to you?” she demanded. “You’re Mr. Rafter, ain’t you?”

“Why, yes. And you’re no Greek girl,” he said in amazement.

“You bet your life I ain’t. You look like a regular guy, and I’m tickled to

death. I'm Anelda's maid, see? Mary Shane. She hired me in Philadelphia, and I'm still with her. She's a great kid, Mr. Rafter."

"I believe you," he declared heartily.

"Well, I got to go now. I got a letter for you. We're leaving for Tut's tomb. That's what I call the castle. There ain't no answer. It wouldn't be safe. I'm pulling for you, Mr. Rafter. You get that kid back to America, where she belongs."

With these few words Mary Shane fled down the corridor and out of the hotel; while Lincoln, with beating heart, carried his letter back to his room and opened it.

DEAREST LINK: I do want to go to America with you. I think I love you, and I hope you meant what you said. If you can find a way to get me out of the castle I believe I have discovered a method by which we can be married and go to America. My maid, who will deliver this, has an American passport. I can tear my photograph from my Jugoslavian passport and paste it on hers. With these we might be married in Athens or Italy and board a vessel unquestioned. Mary is absolutely loyal and will help us. I shall go riding every day in the vicinity of Adrianska and shall be watching for you, beloved.

Link was transported.

Miltiades was already in the dining room and beckoning to his friend, so Link thrust the letter in his pocket and strolled to the table where the young Greek was seated. Although he tried to appear composed, the heightened color in his cheek and the sparkle in his eyes betrayed him to the keen-eyed Levantine.

"What's happened?" he demanded. "You are wild with joy about something. Old Nicholas given his consent?"

Link no longer doubted the loyalty of his companion, after his exhibition of the night before. And he had to tell his good news or burst. Therefore, he handed over the letter, which Miltiades read with some surprise. He

folded it and returned it, after a moment.

"'Man is fire and woman is tow,'" he quoted. "You seem to have stirred the princess to some purpose. What do you propose to do?"

"Follow her at once."

"Walk right up to the castle and command that the drawbridge be lowered, then ride your horse into the great hall, sweep the girl up before you upon the saddle, and gallop away—something like that?"

"Certainly not. Can't you be serious?"

"Well, what is your plan?"

"Why, she is going riding every day, and I'll hang around and meet her."

Miltiades broke some bread, ate a piece, nibbled at his omelet, and sipped his black coffee, before making any comment.

"Adrianska," he stated, "is a collection of ruined huts inhabited by a couple of hundred ex-vassals of Prince Nicholas. The peasants for ten miles around consider themselves as his subjects, although they are technically Jugoslavians. When their princess goes riding it is probable that they know who she is; and the appearance of an alien in what they consider outlandish dress in intimate converse with her will be reported to the prince in an hour."

Link's eager face fell. "I never thought of that," he admitted. "Of course, you are right. I will go in peasant dress."

The Greek burst out laughing. "Whom would that fool?" he demanded. "You don't look any more like a Serb than I look like a kangaroo. Rafter, this is my first appearance in the rôle of a guardian angel; but I am forced to assume it, despite my dislike for play acting, to save you from a horrible death. Now listen to me. Anelda, at present, is free within certain limits. Her grandfather adores her, and she can go and come at will.

She might induce him to allow her to visit Athens or Fiume or even Rome or Paris, if he happened to have the price of a railroad ticket—which he hasn't. But let him get the slightest suspicion that she is carrying on a love affair with an American or any other common person——”

“Thank you.”

“I mean anybody below the rank of a royal prince. Well, let this happen, and immediately he becomes the stern tyrant of olden times. Anelda gets locked in her tower, if there happens to be one, and the prince's minions prowl around the countryside with long rifles and orders to pot any suspicious-looking stranger and put him in a grave before he's cold.”

“Brrr!” shivered Link. “That sounds terrible. Just the same, the poor girl will be expecting me. I've got to go.”

“You are not going. If necessary, I'll have you forcibly restrained. I have some influence in this village.”

“What am I going to do? Do you suppose a letter would reach her?”

“Why, that's possible. I doubt if her grandfather would think of inspecting her mail. And he couldn't read English, anyway. Still, if it did fall into the wrong hands——”

Ling suddenly struck the table with his open palm. “I have it!” he exclaimed. “The maid, Mary Shane, who delivered this letter, is an American, and she's to be depended upon. I can write to her.”

“That's an idea. Of course, they may open her mail, though it's not likely.”

Suddenly Link began to laugh. “I'll fix that. I'll write her in New York slang. She'll get it; but no European who learned English out of a book could possibly make head or tail out of it. And to prove it, when I have completed this thing I'll read it to you. If you know what it's about, I'll try another one.”

“I imagined I understood English very well,” replied Miltiades, slightly huffed. “I'm told I have no accent, and I can even understand London cockneys pretty well.”

“Bet you a dollar you can't read this.”

“Done. Only make it ten.”

After breakfast Rafter settled himself in his room with pen and paper, and after an hour's travail produced the following fantastic epistle:

DEAR MISS SHANE: Slip it to the lalapa-looza that Jimsey's cuckoo about queenie. Can't shadow count of clucks round Tut's tomb. Hang out here for radios. Dressing dolls in Athens. Mixed mugs the cat's mantilla. Sawdust trail to salvation. Big drink to Luna. Eagle eye never closes.

With a grin he went across the hall to Darkrino's room, knocked, and entered to find Miltiades lying on the bed reading a yellow-backed French novel.

“Read it,” Link commanded, thrusting the letter under his nose.

The Greek read it with growing wonder, reread it, twisted his face into a knot, then handed it back.

“Before I pay you,” he said, “prove to me that she can read it. What on earth does it mean?”

“I'll put it into Oxford English,” grinned the American.

“‘Inform the beautiful one that her young man is madly in love with her but cannot follow because of the gossip of peasants around the castle.’ Miss Shane herself called it Tut's tomb. ‘I am waiting here for news. In Athens are shops for women. The idea of exchanging photographs on the passports is excellent. Take the road to Athens and be saved. Then cross the Atlantic to America.’ Luna is a celebrated amusement park at Coney Island—not the moon, as you probably suppose. ‘I am always on the watch for her arrival.’”

“But good heavens man! The girl will never make that out of it.”

"I'm betting she will. I'll have a letter in a few days telling me if it is possible for Anelda to go to Athens upon a shopping tour and when she will start."

"Is it a thieves' argot?"

The American laughed. "No. Just common Broadway expressions. I'm not much on slang, or I could have made it more cryptic and still understandable to Mary Shane, who is a New Yorker if I ever saw one."

"Well, you are quite safe from interpretation of your cipher. Aside from you and this maidservant, nobody in the Balkans could make it out."

"How long will it take a letter to get there?"

"It's only thirty or forty miles, but it may take a couple of days. Mails are very slow."

"I'll wait four days; then, if no answer comes, I take a chance on the minions of Nicholas. I can't let Anelda think I'm a coward."

"Clear out," suggested Miltiades. "I'm going to take you to some plantations later. But in the meantime I want to finish this chapter. In three or four days you may get your senses back. Go mail your letter."

The American obligingly departed, purchased stamps at the desk in the tiny hotel lobby, and dropped his addressed envelope into the mail box. As he turned, he confronted the Egyptian, Sidi Ben Ara, who had a cordial smile and outstretched hand.

"This is a pleasure, Mr. Rafter," he said. "I rather expected to run across you sooner or later, since we both travel over the same region. Won't you join me for a little refreshment?"

Without being rude Link could not refuse, so he accompanied the suave Oriental into the taproom, and seated himself opposite him at table, while Ben Ara commanded Turkish coffees.

"I presume you are much more fully informed regarding the growing of to-

bacco in Macedonia than you were when we met in Kronki," said the Egyptian.

"I have learned a little."

"And you find their methods very primitive compared to your own, do you not?"

"I presume results count," Link replied cautiously. "They certainly raise wonderful leaf."

"That is the soil and the extraordinary care devoted to each plant. Cheap labor makes that possible."

"Yes, there seems to be a child for each individual tobacco plant. But it is surprising they have no labor-saving devices."

"Ah, but labor is the one thing there is no necessity of saving in the Orient. All these countries are tremendously overpopulated, considering the small quantity of arable land. There is no great empire waiting for hands to till its rich soil, as in America. Introduce labor-saving devices, and the people would starve. Have you visited Egypt?"

"I have not had the pleasure."

"You would find it very interesting, but very sad. Millions of people live in the narrow valley of the Nile. And to provide work for all there must be none of your labor-saving devices, for there is no possible employment for those thrown out of work by machinery. As a result, our people are pitifully poor, but they manage to exist. A few tractors on our farms, and a great famine would result; thus they still till the soil as they did four thousand years ago."

"Indeed!" said Link politely. His dislike of the man was growing; but the fellow was so courteous that Link could not fail in expressing interest.

"So with our cigarette factories in Cairo," continued Ben Ara. "Your machines for making cigarettes are marvelous, and much more sanitary than manufacturing by hand; but few have been installed, because the em-

ployers know that workmen who are turned off will never again secure employment."

"I had never looked at it in that way."

"Yet that is the way we must regard it. You lived all your life in America, did you not?"

"Certainly. I was born there."

"Of course. It just occurred to me to wonder if you had happened to meet a young lady of this country who spent many years there and attended one of your women's colleges—the Princess Anelda Darnyela."

Link hoped his face did not betray him; but the question was sudden, unexpected, and startling.

"Why, no," he stammered. That was the truth. Though he had seen her upon a momentous occasion, he had never met her in America.

The Egyptian smiled roguishly, his manner one of extreme good-fellowship.

"Come, come," he urged. "I won't betray you. It's the most natural thing in the world—two young people."

Link was thinking fast. Had this fellow been spying upon their interview; and, if he had, what was going to happen?

"I don't understand you," he said stiffly. "I assured you that I had not met this young lady in America. It is a very large country, inhabited by a hundred and twenty millions of people."

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed the Egyptian, assuming an air of great distress. "I would not have seemed to doubt your word. It happened that I looked down the corridor this morning and saw you talking to the maid of the princess. Naturally, I—er—I assumed that—"

Rafter gave vent to a loud and unnatural laugh. "Oh!" he cried. "Mary Shane! So she is working for this princess. Certainly I know Mary Shane. I used to know her in New

York. She recognized me and accosted me in the hotel. She told me the name of the people she worked for, but these Balkan names are hard to catch."

"It is Mary Shane whom you know. So that is the name of the young woman. Now I understand. But, Mr. Rafter, she is not—er—very beautiful."

"Oh!" said Link. "You should have seen her seven or eight years ago."

"Ah!" smiled the Egyptian, and the suspicion was gone from his eyes. "So that was it. A little affair, years ago, and suddenly she sees you five thousand miles from home, and naturally rushes to greet you. What a shame that women age so quickly, and how unfortunate it is that their memory does not fade with their beauty."

"How do you happen to know the girl?" demanded Link, hopeful that he had allayed the suspicions of the man, but rather ashamed that he had to permit him to think that at any time he had carried on a love affair with poor Mary Shane.

"I was recently the guest of Prince Nicholas of Adrianska, who is the grandfather of the princess, and I saw this girl about the castle. I knew, of course, that she was an American. The princess is the most beautiful woman in Europe."

"Indeed!" said Lincoln, with feigned indifference. "If you will excuse me now, sir, I have things to do."

"It has been a pleasure to see you again, sir," smiled the Egyptian.

What a narrow squeak that had been! This fellow was on friendly terms with the old prince, and Rafter had no doubt that he would warn him if he suspected an acquaintance with Anelda. Had he seen Mary pass him the letter? Probably not; because he seemed satisfied with the explanation, and had drawn the conclusions of his own evil mind. The oily, poisonous reptile! With a word the fellow could have ruined everything.

He realized, now, how correct Miltiades had been in his forebodings. And Anelda had been very indiscreet in sending Mary to the hotel. But he could not chide her for that. Didn't she love him?

From now on he must keep his eye peeled for this sneaking yellow man who might be in love with Anelda himself. If he had seen her, he must be; for who could resist her?

How fortunate he had not rushed headlong toward Adrianska, where he would be spotted and suspected instantly. If Ben Ara set eyes on Link in that vicinity, he would be sure that Link was pursuing Anelda; for he would not credit a young man of Rafter's type reopening an affair with a girl as homely as Mary.

About five minutes after his departure, Sidi Ben Ara emerged from the café and approached the desk. Handing the clerk a ten-drachma note, he said:

"Will you kindly open the mail box? There is a letter which I wish to withdraw."

The clerk handed him the key of the wooden box, which Ben Ara then opened. He thrust in his hand and drew out a dozen letters. He looked carefully at the addresses, and lifted his eyebrows when he found one addressed to Mary Shane.

"This is it," he said to the clerk, who nodded.

Then Ben Ara dropped the remaining letters back into the box and locked it, turning the key over to the complaisant clerk. Thrusting the letter into his pocket, Sidi ascended to his chamber, where he seated himself and, with a broad smile, drew out the letter and tore it open. The smile faded as he read the contents. Despite his precise English, he could make nothing of it.

"If this is English," he observed in his own language, "my teachers cheated me. So Mr. Rafter desires to continue

the affair with this serving maid. It is unfortunate he writes to her in the Indian language, because I really cannot permit it to be forwarded."

Smiling again, he tore the letter into very small pieces and dropped them out of the window.

And so perished Lincoln Rafter's ingenious plan.

CHAPTER XVII.

WAITING.

UNAWARE that his letter to Mary Shane was no longer in existence, Lincoln Rafter, accompanied by his guide and chum, climbed into the flivver an hour later and rattled over a fair road toward the village of Drama, headquarters of the Turkish-leaf district. It was a larger town than Yastib, with a small residential section of really attractive villas and beautiful gardens. They did not stop in the town, but passed beyond it and turned out of the main road over a muddy bypath to the residence of Porthos Venizelos, one of the tobacco kings of the district. It proved to be a long, low stone house set in a lovely garden, an orchard of olive trees at its rear, with wide-spreading wings and an air of comfort and even elegance. The stone house was painted a bright pink, which caused it to resemble one of the pleasure villas of the Riviera or the Italian lakes.

It was set upon a slight eminence from which a view could be had of a large stretch of hilly country, much terraced and dotted with peasant huts. Young tobacco was showing on all sides.

The proprietor met them as they descended from the car—a portly man with a gray beard and an air of great dignity. He spoke only Turkish, Greek, and French, and addressed Rafter in the latter tongue, whereupon Miltiades asked him to use Greek, as the American understood it best.

He conducted them into a pleasant refectory where a really delicious lunch was spread before them. It was presided over by a plump, pleasant, dark-eyed woman, Venizelos' wife, who was dressed in a Paris morning costume.

Their host was a landed proprietor whose estate was worked by tenant farmers. He lived a life of sweet ease, for he had no duties beyond providing young plants from his nurseries for his farmers. Unlike the tobacco planters of the States, he was not compelled to provide pickers or dryers or storage warehouses or packing plants, but collected his rents from the farmers on the basis of a large percentage of their sales for their crops.

All processes of producing tobacco were carried on in the homes of the farmers. Controlling each year a hundred tons or so of prime leaf, it had not been necessary for Venizelos to join the independents who had hoarded their leaf in Yastib; he could make excellent terms directly with the buyers.

After luncheon he conducted the visitors over several of the little farms.

From his experience in the New York factory, Rafter knew that the goatskin bales of leaf were full of dirt and foreign substances, and that every hand of tobacco had to be picked apart and unfit leaves discarded, while most ingenious machines had been invented to remove from the leaf goat hairs and filth of various sorts. He had never been able to understand why the stuff was not properly prepared at the source, as it was upon the great American plantations.

A visit to a single farmhouse informed him. The farmer was a small, anæmic Greek with a half-starved wife and eight children ranging in age from three to ten years. They cultivated less than an acre of land. They lived in one large room. Yet in this room the tobacco leaves, after being picked by the multitude of children, were hung

up to dry, packed into "hands," and finally, after the fermenting process, placed in bags and stored in an out-house. Goats provided milk for the infants, cheese and meat for the parents and older children, and finally contributed their skins for tobacco bags. A dozen of the creatures were penned in a small yard. Tobacco in all stages was in evidence on the place; and the interior of the house smelled of damp and dry tobacco, cheese, and filthy human beings. Now he understood why the steaming and blowing and cleansing machinery of the New York factory was absolutely necessary, for he knew that the tobacco leaf, before it was ready for pulverization, was absolutely purified.

"I suppose you are wondering," said the lord of the estate with a whimsical smile, "why I do not drive these people forth and raise my crops by scientific methods. Four or five hundred people do the work here that fifty can do upon an American plantation; and they manage to exist upon what they earn—a miserable existence; but they are happy enough, and my profits are satisfactory. Furthermore, since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, hundreds of thousands of Greek tobacco growers have been driven out of Asia Minor and have flocked into this country. Most of them are still in refugee camps around Saloniki, as you doubtless saw. They are eager for the smallest patch of ground upon which to try to grow tobacco.

"This would be a frightful existence for you or me; but my peasants cannot comprehend any other. Let us hasten away. I hate to visit these farmhouses."

They did seem happy. The swarthy children beamed at the visitors; and the farmer and his wife were obviously delighted at the honor of a call from their lord. But Link was almost ill from ten minutes in the dreadful hut; and he

was glad to follow his host out into the air, which, though tintured with the aroma of tobacco, was comparatively fresh.

The old gentleman spoke clear, precise Greek. Link was delighted to be able to understand much of what he said, and what he missed Miltiades translated.

"Ask him what's going to happen when all these children grow up and want farms of their own?" he asked.

The proprietor shrugged his shoulders. "Nature, in her crude, cruel way, manages that problem. War is almost always looming over us, to be followed by plague and famine. The death rate among children is naturally high, due to malnutrition and the unsanitary conditions under which they live."

"But that is terrible. Can't something be done?" Link demanded.

"What can we do? These ancient countries are grossly overpopulated, and the problem is beyond solution, except in the manner I have just stated."

The American was silent. He remembered that the Egyptian had described a similar situation in his own country. Neither permitted the distress of the proletariat to disturb him much.

During the next four days they toured the Drama and Kavala regions; and then, at the insistence of Link, who expected a letter from Anelda or Mary Shane, they returned to Yastib. There was no letter, and his distress touched Miltiades.

"They have no regular mail out of Adrianska," Miltiades assured him. "Letters must wait until somebody has an errand to a big town. Most likely you'll hear to-morrow or the next day, provided the girl was able to read your mysterious message."

To Link's relief, he learned that Sidi Ben Ara had departed for parts unknown. So that menace was removed for the present, and he preached to himself patience.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INTRODUCING MR. PETE BRODIE.

THE next day there rumbled into town a huge motor lorry of the type used to transport troops and supplies in the Great War. This one was followed quickly by several others. The American tobacco companies had rented two dozen of these trucks from the Greek army base at Saloniki; and Vradine, the agent, immediately began the work of loading upon them the tobacco in the warehouses. They were driven by chauffeurs of various nationalities picked up in Saloniki—Greeks, Bulgarians, a Turk or two, and—to the surprise of Link Rafter—a long, lanky, hatchet-faced American who was chewing tobacco as he loafed beside his truck.

Rafter had wandered out to watch the loading process, which was leisurely enough and largely performed by sturdy peasant women.

"Where the deuce did you come from?" he demanded of the Yankee.

The truck driver shifted his cud and looked his questioner over with deliberation; finally decided to converse with him.

"Hello, buddy," he drawled. "It's a long story. I came out here to drive for the American Red Cross in the war, and I just never went back. Who in hell are you?"

"I'm employed by the Great Egyptian and Turkish Cigarette Corporation."

"I want to know! Shake. So am I, till this job is done."

"But how can a fellow like you stand this country for ten years?"

"Oh, I been all over. I drove a truck for the Greeks when they started out to conquer Asia Minor and Kemel Pasha gave them what for. I was the chauffeur of the British ambassador down in Athens, till I got fired for being drunk. Guess I like it out here 'cause liquor is

cheap and I heard they had prohibition back in the 'land of the free.'"

"How many trucks are coming?"

"Twenty-four. We're going to go back in a procession; and you bet I'll be number one. Boy, the dust on these roads!"

"This is an immensely valuable caravan," Link said thoughtfully. "Are you armed?"

"Well, I always carry a gat, from force of habit. And the other drivers have knives to carve their meat—and each other. But I understand a squad of Greek cavalry is coming up to escort us back. If the roads were decent we'd lose them in a mile. They're no good—don't take any interest in their work. One New York cop could lick the lot of them."

"My name is Lincoln Rafter. What's yours?"

"Pete Brodie. No relation to Steve, that jumped off Brooklyn Bridge. I take bigger chances than that guy ever thought of."

"Are those trucks hard to drive?"

"Well, they're tougher than a passenger car; but when you get the trick, it's nothing. Got a lot more gear shifts than a car, and so heavy you need strong arms to steer."

"I never drove a truck," said Link, who was bored. "How about giving me a lesson?"

"Why, sure. They won't be ready to load this one for hours. I'll show you how to drive, see? And you drive right down to where they's a barroom."

Link climbed upon the seat and took his lesson. The shifts were a bit tricky; but he was adept with cars and soon got the hang of it. They lumbered through the town and stopped behind the inn, where Link escorted his curious compatriot into the taproom and asked him his pleasure.

The ruckman repaid him for his hospitality with tall stories of his experiences during his sojourn in the Levant;

and when half an hour had elapsed they reluctantly rose to return to the warehouses. Pete had acquired a liking for his fellow American and urged him to drive the truck back. Link, who had lost interest in operating it, was loath to do so, but yielded good-naturedly. During the afternoon other trucks arrived. Brodie told him they expected to be ready to start back for Saloniki on the morning of the second day.

Link finally escaped from the fellow and returned to the inn, where he hung about waiting for the postman, a kilted individual who carried his bag of mail on his head, as a peasant woman carries a pail of water. There was no letter, which meant that Mary was either too stupid to understand his message or it had not been delivered to her. His gloom that night was too deep to be lightened by Miltiades, who left him in disgust and spend the evening reading. The American mooned about, then strolled up the familiar path past the garden where he had found short-lived happiness. Just the sight of the place would be some consolation, he assured himself. However, it was quite dark, and he could hardly distinguish the Mismos garden, which seemed untenanted.

He really had no more business in this part of the country, and should be making ready to return to Athens, after which he would take ship for Constantinople, accompanied by Miltiades, and make arrangements for a passage on a coaster which touched at the Turkish tobacco ports on the Black Sea. However, wild horses could not draw him from Yastib until he had some word from Anelda.

As the instructions which Darkrino had received from his father were to amuse the young American, show him what he wished to see, and tell him nothing of the inner secrets of the business, the young Greek had no objections to his loitering in Yastib, and was

only concerned to keep Link out of trouble. Link had not confided to him the incident of the Egyptian's spying upon the visit of Anelda's maid—not that he had any distrust of his friend; but he knew it would provide Miltiades with another excuse for a sermon, and he was determined to carry on the affair with Anelda at all costs.

He was again inquiring for mail about ten the next morning, when he observed an automobile drive into the courtyard and saw the chauffeur help a woman out of the back seat. A glance identified her—Mary Shane. She had come in person in answer to his letter.

As she entered the little lobby, he cast her a warning glance and ostentatiously ascended the stairs to the floor above. He heard her demanding a room. He opened the door of his own room and stood inside. In a few minutes he saw the maid of the princess escorted down the hall, followed by two porters carrying a huge trunk. They unlocked a room on the other side of the corridor, and the woman entered. Link peered out and identified the room; then waited until the servants had retired, and knocked on the door, which Mary immediately opened.

"Hello," she said. "I saw you in the lobby and thought you'd be along. Come in."

"Did you come with a message for me?"

"I came with my trunk," she replied. "I'm fired."

"Fired? What on earth for?"

"You can search me. Just chucked out, bag and baggage, by that old ruffian of a prince, with my poor darling crying her eyes out—and not a bit of good did it do her."

"Didn't they give you any reason?"

"Just said my services were no longer required. Gave me a month's pay and money enough to buy my passage back to New York. And I don't mind tellin' you I'm tickled to get away. I wouldn't

leave Anelda of my own accord, and it broke my heart, of course; but, since I was sacked, you bet I'll be glad to set eyes on a New York cop again."

"Did you get my letter?"

"I got no letter."

"I wrote you one in slang, because I was afraid they might open Anelda's mail."

"Never got it; and I always got my letters from home."

"Then what must Anelda think of me? I was ill advised. I should have gone there. I'll go to-morrow."

Mary Shane seated herself on her trunk, pulled off her hat, and tossed it expertly upon the bureau.

"Don't, Mr. Rafter," she said. "Something's up, and I believe that that Ben somebody is at the bottom of it."

"You mean Sidi Ben Ara?" he demanded eagerly.

"How should I know his funny name? He showed up there a couple of days ago; and the next thing Anelda is told she must not go outside the walls for a while. Then the old prince makes me a long speech, winding up by giving me the gate."

"Look here, Mary, the Egyptian saw you talking to me the morning you left Yastib. Most likely he saw you pass me Anelda's letter. I tried to explain it by telling him you were a girl I used to know in New York, and I thought he believed me."

"Well," she said. "Glad I know why I got chucked out—the dirty bum!"

"Did you—did she——"

"Yeh. She sent you a message. She loves you, but she's a prisoner. And she particularly told me to tell you to keep indoors to-night—not to poke your nose out for any reason. She hopes there will be a chance to meet you again, some time; and if she never sees you again, remember she loves you. The poor kid! Now I'm going to bed, because they got me up at four thirty this morning, and I've got to take the

stage down to Saloniki at five this afternoon."

"It's queer advice. I wonder what she means," he murmured. His heart was beating with happiness at the knowledge that Anelda still loved him and was not angry because he had not put in an appearance in the vicinity of the castle. He was wild with rage against the sneaking Egyptian who was responsible for his sweetheart's incarceration, and puzzled at the warning. What could be happening in Yastib tonight? What danger threatened? Was an assassin already on his trail, as Miltiades had prophesied that there would be? In that case he was about as safe out of doors as in this ramshackle hotel, which would present no problem whatever to a murderous marauder.

"Can I help you in any way?" he demanded of the maid.

"Guess not. Just see I get on the right stage, if they's more than one. Say, Mr. Rafter, you got your work cut out for you, yanking Anelda out of that joint on the mountain. Now that it's full of wild men with guns, it's as much as your life is worth to go near the place. Anelda told me to tell you to give her up; but I know you ain't the kind to do that. I'm going to a hotel in Athens—the Bristol, see? And I'll hang out there for a month. If you should elope with her, make for Athens. And then we'll swap passports, the way she said in her letter. Only use the old bean; don't rush in wild. Because I saw enough of this country to know that alongside of it Chicago is a nice, safe place."

"You're a trump, Mary," he said gratefully. "Somehow I'm going to rescue her, and then your passport will be absolutely necessary. How are you off for money?"

"Haven't had a chance to spend a cent since I hit Adrianska. I'm filthy with lucre."

"We'll make up to you for your extra expense."

"Forget it, kid. I'm crazy 'bout Anelda, and she hates things over here as bad as I do. You get her to little ol' New York, and then I'll go to work for her again. Beat it now, and give a poor girl a chance to snooze."

Link grasped her rough hands and squeezed them, then left the room. At five he escorted her to the stage, an ancient Italian seven-seater automobile, and sent her away with the expressions of gratitude that were her due.

During the day he had done a lot of thinking without arriving anywhere. And, being a man in love, he devoted more time to considering ways and means of reaching Anelda than to wondering why she wished him to stay within doors this night.

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO AND TWO MAKE FOUR.

WHEN Rafter was seated at dinner with Darkrino, the warning came back to him, and he decided to ask some questions.

"Milt," he demanded, "is there anything special on to-night?"

"No, I think not."

"Any reason why it would be dangerous to stroll about? Anything out of the ordinary?"

"Lots of festivals, but the people are too poor to feast. It's like any other night in this town, save that those truck drivers are wandering around. And your countryman is the most ferocious of that outfit."

The trucks! An insane suspicion suddenly flashed into his head—so mad he dared not express it. Casually he said:

"What's the value of this load of tobacco?"

"Big. We paid half a million on the ground. It's worth twice that to us."

"Isn't it sort of risky to leave it un-

guarded. I understand the escort doesn't arrive until morning."

"There are a few brigands in the hills who might steal a pocketbook or a bag of gold, but how could they move hundreds of tons of tobacco? And if they were able to carry it off, how would they realize on it? It's safe enough. The escort is nothing but a formality. Most likely the trucks will run away from the cavalry."

But Link was now off upon a wild flight of imagination, putting two and two together and being astonished at how they appeared to make four.

There was the Egyptian, complaining he couldn't get tobacco. And he had been visiting Prince Nicholas. Nicholas was so poor he couldn't raise a dowry for his granddaughter; yet, all of a sudden, he was planning to turn over to King Otto a vast sum. And Nicholas had said he was not borrowing it, but winning it with his good sword.

Mary Shane had suddenly been turned off. Link had assumed it was because Ben Ara considered her a go-between for Anelda and himself. But perhaps there was a different reason. Rafter was an agent of one of the owners of the tobacco in the warehouse at Yastib; and Mary was working for the Darnyelas. Perhaps the Egyptian thought she was a spy in the service of Rafter and the tobacco company. If he had intercepted the letter to Mary, he might consider it a code message.

To-day Mary had told him that the castle had filled up with wild men with guns; and, to top it all, Anelda had sent him a warning to keep within doors in Yastib to-night. That was it! Prince Nicholas was going to steal the tobacco! The Egyptian would pay him a large sum. Ben Ara knew how to dispose of the stuff, if ordinary mountain brigands did not.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Miltiades. "You look very much ex-

cited, all of a sudden. Thinking about her?"

The American nodded. The whole theory was absolutely untenable, of course; Darkrino would laugh it to scorn. Nicholas was a royal prince, not a thief; and he was Anelda's grandfather. Yet it was she who had sent him the warning. Suppose there was a descent upon the town. The problem of carrying off the tobacco was made easy by the fact that a fleet of loaded trucks were waiting for morning to transport it to Saloniki. All Nicholas had to do was capture the trucks and drive them off into some secret place in the hills.

Link looked at his watch; it was nine o'clock.

"Guess I'll go for a stroll," he remarked.

"You have such queer ideas. I'm going upstairs to read. I got some new French novels to-day. Back soon?"

"Yes, I suppose so," he said vaguely.

He was out in the street and headed for the warehouses, without any clear idea why. If Nicholas and a small army raided the town, what could he do with one revolver which he didn't know how to use very well?

Of course, he ought to warn the authorities; but he had seen the authorities. And who would credit his wild story, based on no tangible evidence? Yet it was vital that the plot be defeated. First, because he was working for the Great Egyptian and Turkish Tobacco Co., of New York; and, second—no, that was really first—because Nicholas must not be allowed to get the money which would marry Anelda to King Otto of Westfalisa.

If Link got hold of Brodie and tipped him off that an attack was imminent, he might rally the truckmen and beat off the raiders. Not likely, though; Brodie was the only he-man among them; and, anyway, they were mostly armed with knives instead of guns.

Link hastened his steps almost to a run, and was gazed at curiously by leisurely native pedestrians. After a few minutes he slowed up. What was his purpose in visiting the warehouses? What good could he do? Why not look up Vradine, who was the agent in charge of this business, and put the thing up to him? However, the same reasons which prevented him from confiding his suspicions to Miltiades Darkrino caused him to shrink from telling Vradine; for the man would consider it a cock-and-bull story. Besides, it would be necessary to admit that some of his information came through the Princess Anelda; and it was impossible to draw her into this—dangerous, in fact, to admit that he was acquainted with her.

He was already in the outskirts of the village; and, ahead, he saw the gleam of a camp fire. Four big army tents had been erected in a field behind the warehouses to accommodate the truck drivers; and they were evidently tempering the chill of the night by a roaring fire.

At one moment Link was convinced that Prince Nicholas would swoop down upon the camp; the next, he laughed at his own folly. What a mare's nest he had constructed out of nothing! Anelda might have other reasons for sending him the warning. Perhaps she feared he would catch cold in the chill air of evening; girls in love were solicitous like that. No, Anelda was not foolish. She had good reasons for everything she did. The cleverest girl in the world!

There were no street lights any longer, but the camp fire guided him. He worked in behind the row of warehouse huts—now empty—and saw, parked beyond the tents, the black masses of the loaded lorries. Then he was illumined by the light of the fire. A dozen drivers squatted around it, passing a bottle of brandy. Lying flat

upon his stomach, playing solitaire with a pack of greasy cards by the flickering light, was his acquaintance of yesterday, Pete Brodie.

"Hello, Pete," he called.

The Yankee looked up with a twisted grin. "Hello, buddy. How about a game of two-handed stud?"

"I think you're too good for me. I've got an idea in my head I want to talk to you about."

"Well, squat. None of this gang savvies United States."

Link dropped upon the hard ground and hesitated. Now that he had somebody to talk to, he didn't know what to say. The thing seemed utterly foolish.

"What would you do," he demanded finally, "if a mob of armed bandits suddenly jumped this camp?"

"Roll over into the dark and crawl away on my belly," replied Pete promptly.

"Wouldn't you put up a fight for your employer's property?"

"Think I'm a sap? I'm getting fifteen dollars for three days' work; and for that do you think I'm going to take a bellyful of bullets?"

"Do you know this stuff is worth a million dollars?"

"To a lot of people in New York. Not to me. It ain't worth a cent to me, kid."

"H'm. If you wouldn't fight, I don't suppose the other drivers would defend the tobacco, either."

"Them sheep? Say, what's the matter with you, buddy? Who's going to jump us? What good is this stuff to a lot of mountain thieves?"

"Listen, Pete," Link said earnestly. "I've got a hunch that there is going to be a descent upon the trucks to-night; and not by ordinary bandits, but by men hired by rival tobacco companies. I haven't any real dope; but various things I know lead me to feel that way."

Brodie was serious for the first time. "It's an elegant chance," he admitted.

"Here are the trucks, ready loaded. All they'd have to do would be chase us off and drive away. Only you can't hide a fleet of ten-ton trucks very well. These crooks couldn't manage it."

"I am an employee of the Great Egyptian and Turkish Tobacco Co., and it's my business to try to prevent such a thing."

Pete reached over and squeezed his friend's knee with his big right hand.

"Now, kid," he counseled, "don't you take yourself serious. This is a wild country, and these people had as soon slip a knife in you as take a swig out of a bottle. If there is a ruction and a lot of gunmen start shooting things up, you and me will crawl into a hole and not come out till next week. I been in three wars, and I'll fight when it's worth while, but I'm alive because I know when to burrow."

"I think I ought to do something."

"Then go down and tell the chief of police and this guy, Vradine, that is bossing the job; then you crawl under a bed."

"But I haven't any real reason for my suspicion. They won't pay any attention to me. In fact, I'm almost ashamed to admit what I think, except to you."

While they talked, Vradine himself suddenly appeared on the scene, herding a half score drivers whom he had dug out of cafés in the village.

"You men turn in," he commanded. "You've got to make an early start in the morning." This he said in Greek. Suddenly spying Link Rafter, he shifted to English.

"How do you do, Mr. Rafter?" he said pleasantly. "I've got to get this expedition out of here at five in the morning. I'm surprised to see you here."

Link got up and took his outstretched hand. "I've been chatting with Brodie, who is an American. Look here, Mr. Vradine, may I speak to you?"

He took the man's arm and drew him aside.

"What protection have you arranged for the tobacco to-night?"

"Why, it's perfectly safe. There are twenty-four drivers camped beside their trucks, and three or four watchmen about the grounds."

"Supposing there was a raid?"

Vradine laughed. "Not likely. However, bandits couldn't get far with the contents of those trucks. They are not chauffeurs, you know, and they can't carry the stuff away on their backs. Besides, the country is enjoying perfect tranquillity."

"I suppose you're right."

"The bulk of the tobacco protects it," continued Vradine. "Coming back to the inn?"

"No. This fellow Brodie amuses me; I'll chat with him a while longer."

"Don't keep him up too long," smiled Vradine. "These men have a long drive to-morrow."

Link returned to Pete Brodie and repeated the conversation.

"You ought to have told him all you know," the truck driver said. "Then your conscience is clear, see?"

But Link had not been able to bring himself to tell of Prince Nicholas and the Princess Anelda; and only by bringing in their names could he have made an impression upon the complaisant Vradine.

The other drivers had gone obediently to their tents. The fire was dying out, and Brodie thrust his cards into the pockets of his greasy overalls.

"I don't take any stock in your notion," Pete said. "But I had to take so many chances in my young life that I duck traps; so I'm going to get my blankets and sneak into one of them empty houses for the night. If trouble does start, I won't be in it."

"And if it turns out to be wild nonsense, I suppose you'll beat me up in the morning."

"No, but I'll bet you my fifteen dollars nothing happens."

"I'm not sure enough to take the bet."

Brodie slipped into the tent allotted to him and six others and returned with two soiled gray blankets. "It sure smells in there," he declared. "Sleeping out is a good bet, at that. Come on, buddy; you got to go past them warehouses, anyway."

"I think there are watchmen over there," Link informed him.

"What for? The houses are empty, and they know it. I bet all the watchmen went home for a visit with their wives."

It was about two hundred feet to the nearest house, and they found the door conveniently open. From within came the pungent odor of choice tobacco. Though the leaf had been removed, its fragrance remained.

"Not so bad," approved Pete. "I'll be out of the chilly wind, and I don't hate tobacco a whole lot. Good night, young feller."

"Good night, Pete. You'll have a good laugh at me in the morning."

"Sure. Hark!"

"What is it?"

"Horses' hoofs on the road—a lot of them. Inside, kid! You had a hunch, I'll say."

Link listened but could not hear anything. However, he had not the military experience of Pete Brodie.

"Galloping!" exclaimed Pete. "A troop! Of course, it may be the cavalry escort; but if they are ahead of time, it will be the first time in the history of the Greek army."

A church bell began to clang in the distance; Link counted eleven strokes. Then there came a rifle shot from the town below, followed by a dozen sharp reports and the faint sound of yelling and cheering.

"They separated; one party shoots up the town, the others are coming for the

camp," declared Brodie. "Boy, it was a good move to sneak over here."

Hardly had he spoken when the clatter of hoofs upon the road confirmed his statement; and Link, peering out of the door, saw a band of mounted men come over the rise in the road a hundred yards away, swerve off into the field, and surround the tents.

It was not too dark to distinguish figures, and he saw several men swing off their horses. In a moment a group of men were driven out of the tents, surrounded by horsemen, who moved with them toward the parked trucks. Two or three lanterns shone now in the hands of the horsemen.

"Neat as wax," chuckled Pete Brodie. "Kid, it was a soldier who planned this. Sent a squad to ride through the town shooting off their guns to scare the natives to death, so they wouldn't start to wonder what was happening out here. Now they round up the drivers and make them drive the trucks. But there's one truck they'll have to leave behind. Old Pete Brodie ain't going to be in the party. Buddy, mitt me. You pulled me out of a tight hole."

Link watched the movements in the field with strained eyes, while all sorts of emotions raced through him. So Nicholas was pulling off this coup, just as he suspected. Without the slightest opposition, he would run off the tobacco trucks, take them to his castle, get a huge sum in cash from the Egyptian, send the money to Lucerne, and marry Anelda to King Otto. And there was nothing her lover could do to stop it. He would never see Anelda any more.

By heavens, he would! Suddenly he turned to Brodie.

"Pete!" he exclaimed. "Peel off your overalls. I'm going to drive your truck. Now I know what made me learn to operate the thing yesterday."

"You're crazy," protested Link.

"No, I'm not. The girl I'm in love

with tipped me off to this, and it's ~~he~~ grandfather who is pulling off the raid. I'm going to drive one of the trucks and get into the castle. It's a big chance, but I take it."

"So you had a straight tip, all along. Well, if you try that game, you're going to get croaked; but, if you go, I'll go with you."

"That won't do. I've got to substitute for you. Don't you see? Quick! The overalls."

Brodie was taking them off. "I can't let you do this," he protested.

"You've got to. And when we are gone, you go to the inn and ask for Miltiades Darkrino. Tell him that Prince Nicholas of Adrianska stole the tobacco and took it to his castle across the frontier. Tell him I am driving one of the trucks. Then let him see what he can do. Will you?"

"Sure," grumbled Pete. "But I hate to see you— Oh, all right."

He passed over the overalls, into which Link slipped. Already they heard the rumbling and roaring of truck engines in the field.

"Good-by, old man."

"Good luck, buddy." They grasped hands.

Outside the house Link stopped and rubbed his face and hands with dust. Then he moved cautiously toward the trucks. The ground was now dimly lighted by lanterns. Shots were still heard in the village; that part of the expedition was hard at work.

He was among the horsemen before he was noticed.

"What is happening here?" he demanded in bad Greek. Whereupon a horseman stooped and grasped him by the collar. At the same time there rode toward him a big man whom he recognized at once—Prince Nicholas, in person. The old man had not troubled to wear a mask; but he was muffled in a cloak and a wide, flapping hat.

Link recognized him by the bristling mustaches.

His pistol was pointed at the prisoner. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"Pete Brodie, truck driver."

"Ah-ha!" exclaimed the prince in great satisfaction. "The missing one. Get upon your truck and start your engine. Then follow the convoy."

All the trucks looked alike to Link; but he found one which had no driver and climbed upon the high seat. Immediately a follower of Nicholas climbed up beside him, and menaced him with both a knife and a pistol.

In five minutes the first truck swung out upon the road and headed away from Yastib. The others followed and the entire fleet of twenty-four heavily loaded lorries was en route for an unknown destination—unknown to all the chauffeurs except Link Rafter.

The first chauffeur switched on his lights but was immediately compelled to shut them off. And in the starlight they moved slowly, at five miles an hour, over a dreadful road into the hills.

Link had driven numerous brands of passenger cars in America, and he had moved this particular truck over a mile of ground the other day. But he soon found the operation of a ten-ton truck, in the dark, on a bad road, took up all his attention and demanded all his strength. He tried to keep about twenty feet behind the truck ahead and to follow in the path of that monster without variation; and he discovered this was a very difficult thing to do.

The Molvanians rode by the side of the convoy, some of them leading the horses of the guards of the chauffeurs. Prince Nicholas was either bringing up the rear or at the head of the column; Link saw no more of him. His problem was complicated by the cloud of dust kicked up by the cars ahead; he was nearly at the end of the line. He remembered how Brodie had promised

to be the first away in the morning, and understood now how sagacious the fellow was.

CHAPTER XX.

DARNYELA CASTLE.

AT the end of an hour Link's arms were aching from the effort of controlling the lorry, the wheel of which bucked like that of a sailing ship in a gale. He was bounced around upon the seat, badly shaken from holes in the road; his mouth and nose were full of dust, and his only solace was that the bandit alongside of him was as uncomfortable as himself.

Nicholas, no doubt assuming that the convoy could be heard as far as it could be seen, permitted lights to be turned on now, for they were climbing dangerous mountain roads. Telling himself he could not last another hour, the American was still carrying on when two hours had passed. Then a fusillade thundered ahead. A rescue? No. It was just the method of driving away the frontier guards; and the treasure was now in Jugoslavia, or, more exactly, upon the ancient territory of Moldavia. But this Link did not know.

On and on, surging over hills, and descending into valleys with his foot jammed desperately upon the ponderous brake to prevent collision with the truck ahead, more hours passed. He knew they had roared through several small villages, causing lights to appear and heads at windows. When they passed through *Adrianska* he was not aware that their destination was almost at hand.

Now they crept carefully up a twisting dirt road, and in about fifteen minutes the head of the procession tooted loudly for those behind to stop. The first car was at the gate of the Castle of the Darnyela.

The big gate was barely wide enough for such a truck to enter; but the opening was not high enough for the load

to pass within. The chauffeurs were ordered from their trucks to help unload the first lorry; and they had to take three feet off the load before it was able to enter.

A huge pile of goatskin bags lay beside the gate, and Nicholas pressed his own men into service to carry them within, while the drivers unloaded each truck in turn. It was an hour after daylight before the last truck had disappeared behind the wall and was driven through the streets of the abandoned town within, to be thrust into an open space wherever one was found.

Link was utterly exhausted by the unusually hard physical labor—so fatigued that he could not thrill at the thought that he was, at last, within the walls of the residence of Anelda. He marveled at the vast extent of the establishment erroneously called a castle—for it was more like a city with a citadel—and he realized that he might be in the place for some time without catching a glimpse of the lady of the palace.

His clothes were soaking wet—he had pulled heavy overalls over a warm, woolen suit—he was filthy from head to foot and staggering from weariness. But he responded to the poke of the pistol of his guard, who drove him ahead toward a long, low barracklike stone building in which the other truckmen were being immured.

There was no furniture of any sort within, and the floor was of stone; nevertheless the chauffeurs dropped upon it, and most of them, Rafter included, were sound asleep in two or three minutes. When he woke, five or six hours later, it was because a man was shaking him and offering him some food. He devoured it ravenously.

Now he found that he had a cold in the head, from sleeping in wet garments upon a stone floor; but at least the terrible ache was gone from his back and arms and legs.

The truckmen chattered together and curious looks were thrown at him. This caused him some trepidation. But he need not have worried, for they assumed he was some individual pressed into service to take the place of the missing Pete Brodie.

In about an hour the wide door of the place opened, letting in a welcome draft of fresh air. And an individual entered who wore a sheepskin upper garment, and whose legs and thighs were incased in rolls of red flannel which fell over heavy leather boots. He carried a long rifle, over his shoulder was slung a bandoleer, while in a belt around his waist were thrust two knives and a long-muzzled revolver. However, his errand was amicable.

He addressed the gathering in Greek, and Rafter was able to get the gist of what he said.

The truckmen would be paid for their involuntary services, and would receive in addition a sum amounting to about twenty dollars in American money, if they cheerfully obeyed orders. They would be allowed the liberty of the castle, but they would be watched to see that they did not try to escape. They would be kept here a week, after which they would drive their trucks to a certain place, receive their money, and be set free. Any who refused the terms offered would be held prisoner indefinitely.

The truckmen were unanimous in accepting, after which they were ordered to throw their weapons in a corner. A weird collection of curious-looking knives fell upon the floor. Link declared that he had no weapons, and the jailer proceeded to feel about his waist, but overlooked the small automatic which Link carried in his hip pocket. Such weapons were unknown in that country, and so were hip pockets. Thus he remained armed, and was happy in the knowledge of it.

The officer then called in two men

who picked up the weapons and carried them off, followed by scowls from the truckmen, satisfied, the officer told the prisoners they could go outside, if they desired.

Link Rafter followed the others out into the open, and looked about him curiously. For, in the condition in which he had tottered into the barracks in the early morning, he had been unable to observe his surroundings.

He found himself in a narrow street paved with small, round cobblestones and facing a row of one-story stone houses, the rear walls of which constituted the outer wall of the stronghold, and the roofs of which served as a broad platform for the defense of the place. The street sloped sharply downward, and he saw that two or three trucks blocked the lower end of it. So he turned to the left and ascended until he emerged into a sort of plaza, where half a dozen trucks had been parked. In the center of this place was a stone wall, at the right the main gate in the wall through which they had driven in last night, on either side long, low barracks, and at the farther side a large two-story building from which rose a tall, slender watchtower, at the top of which fluttered a pennant of green, white and red—doubtless the colors of the Darnyelas.

Rightly he judged this to be the palace, or the castle; but he recognized that there was some truth in Mary Shane's comparison of it with Tut's tomb. It was a dismal-looking institution, and evidently of great age.

There was an armed sentinel patrolling the roof of the palace; and he saw the head of a man at the top of the tall watchtower.

Looking toward the wall, he saw two armed men gazing over the parapet above the gate, and half a dozen truculent fellows with rifles in hand were loafing in the plaza.

Several other truckmen had reached the little square and were moving aim-

lessly about, so Link felt he would create no suspicion if he inspected the residence of Anelda from a nearer vantage.

Sometimes it is given to a man to be able to step outside himself and from that perspective study himself as though he were considering a character in a book. And as Link moved toward the castle of the Darnyelas, he saw himself and his situation very clearly.

Rafter was a hero of romance who had won his way into a feudal castle to rescue a veritable princess whom he loved and who loved him; but as a hero he was lacking in all the principal requirements. Such a man should be dauntless, ingenious, resourceful—a Ulysses for stratagem and a D'Artagnan for courage and fighting prowess. Lincoln Rafter could not hold a staircase with his sword against a score of foes; it was doubtful if he could hold his own in single combat with any member of the garrison of Prince Nicholas. A mad impulse had driven him to take the place of Pete Brodie and enter the castle at the wheel of a truck; but, now that he was within, he had not the slightest notion of what to do next, he was utterly resourceless.

Aware of the intended rape of the tobacco hoard, it was his duty as an employee of the company to make an effort to save it. Instead he had actu-

ally transported a load worth thirty or forty thousand dollars or more across the frontier. Had he not rushed into the circle of horsemen, intent only upon getting to Darnyela Castle, it was probable that the bandits would have abandoned that truck and its precious contents, and so much would have been saved to the company. Now that he was here, he was as far from Anelda as ever; and if he did reach her side, he didn't know how he could do anything for her or himself. It seemed to him that everything he had done had been entirely wrong. And in a most despondent mood he stopped about thirty feet from the arched doorway which was the entrance to the prince's residence just as it opened and two men emerged.

One was Prince Nicholas, who had doffed his uniform and wore a suit of gray tweeds and a green Homburg hat with a tiny feather in it, and carried a cane instead of his sword. Beside him was Sidi Ben Ara.

Link stood frozen to the spot while the pair descended the steps and passed within six feet of him. Nicholas paid no more attention to him than if he had been a stone post. But Sidi Ben Ara glanced at him casually; then his black eyes fixed themselves upon the face of the self-appointed truck driver.

To be continued next week.

MR. BORAH'S DECISION

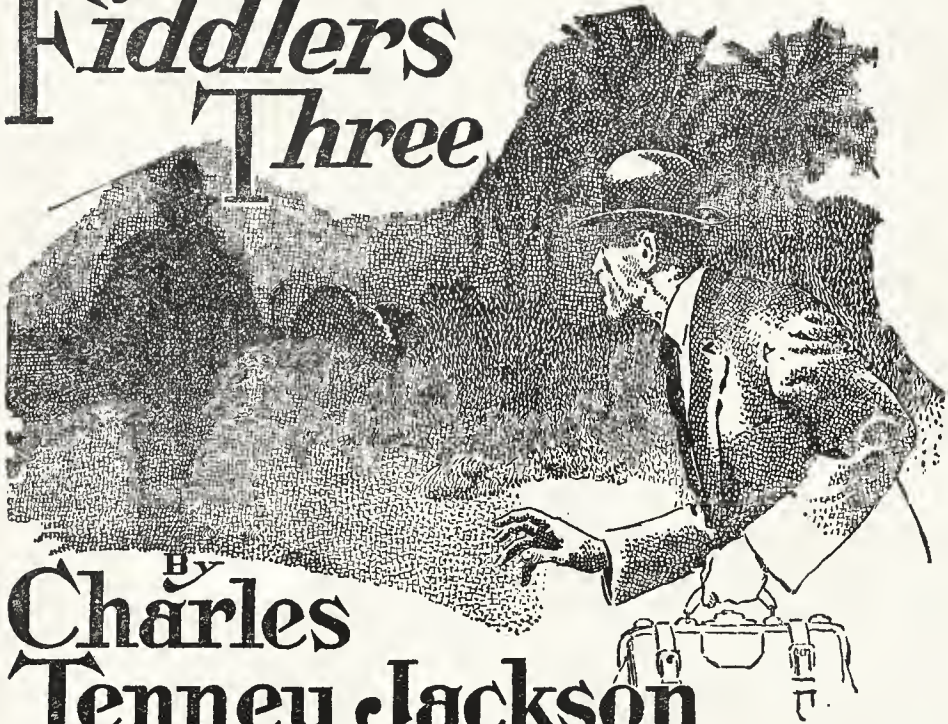
WILLIAM E. BORAH, senator from Idaho, is the supreme individualist of Congress. The party whip cracks, snaps, and whistles about his ears in vain. He goes into neither alliances, combinations nor working agreements. He says what he thinks and votes as he pleases. He cares not a dime nor a damn whether he is on the party reservation or a thousand miles away from it, so long as he feels that he is right. The result of all this is that he has led many a forlorn cause and been on the losing end of many a senatorial fight.

When the talk about Republican candidates for the presidency was particularly hot, Stuart Godwin, the journalist, dropped into the National Press Club and remarked: "I see that Borah says he won't run for president."

"On the popular side at last," commented another news writer, and went on reading his paper:

Fiddlers Three

By
**Charles
Tenney Jackson**



Author of "Let's See Your Thumb," "Western Stuff," Etc.

One night, on a lonely reef off the Florida coast, there stood a solitary man, with his mind made up for suicide. And only the fates knew about his weird future.

THE .38 went off in Sterling's hands while he was idly fooling with the gun as he squatted on the sand at the edge of the mangrove. The shot set the shore birds to wheeling and screaming for a moment, and then silence reigned again. The stars seemed to press close down over the flat, warm sea beyond the bars.

Sterling smiled grimly at the little automatic. He had not had a gun in his hands in the ten years since he left the Panhandle country after making his first hundred thousand to invest it in land and stock schemes with George Mungo.

"First time since I was a kid on the old man's ranch, that a gun ever went

off accidentally on me," he thought. "I got to be steadier than that tonight!"

He stood up to convince himself that at last his nerves were calm as the creep of the Gulf tide out there. The duck boat in which he had come off from the mainland was drawn up in the shoals. His coat was in it, neatly folded. In the pocket were the three letters which would explain this business—one to his wife who had left him after he threw her last dollar into the effort to avert the wreck which Mungo had made of the West Pamello Land Company; one to his Kansas City bankers; and one to the Federal district attorney who had threatened his indict-

ment for using the mails to defraud, unless the Pamello City promoters could recoup the swindled stockholders for Mungo's false promises.

That was a joke. Still, all through his desperate illness in the North, Sterling had clung to his partner's good faith. Not till now, on the actual scene of Mungo's fraudulent venture, did Sterling admit the full disaster and the swindle. He had just struggled through the southwest Florida jungle on the site of Pamello City, and the old sick fever raged in his brain, telling him to end it all. Thirty miles back, at the last telegraph station, he had wired his wife the last hundred dollars he possessed; but even now he knew that if he but said the word, she would wait for him to retrieve his good name and fortune.

But Jim Sterling was past that. Mungo had robbed and wrecked and vanished while Sterling was in the hospital, and when Jim got out it was to face the law alone. And worse was to face the people Mungo had swindled—poor men, mainly, who had trusted their savings to Mungo's schemes of wealth. That did hurt. Sterling had talked his best friends and his own wife into wreckage.

So to-night he sat on this little reef offshore from the abandoned town site. In the starlight he could see the notch in the piny woods and the shore fringe of cabbage palms where Mungo's blue prints had shown a splendid boulevard. Sterling had fought the jungle to the shore. His boots had scraped cheap, thin concrete blocks put down so that promotion pictures might show a street. Like the staked-off lots, Royal Palm Boulevard was a tangle of swamp grass and vines, palmetto and bayonet, and after another wet season it would be vanished from sight of men.

"Pretty rotten—killing myself! Never thought I'd do that! But when a man's shaking—inside and out—smashed——"

He listened. The mangrove islet was not a hundred feet wide. North and south it ran to sand bars, and the tidal waters flowed on each side. The pass to the mainland was not half a mile across. Toward the seaward bar that same quiet water held. A quiet spot and a great peace in which a man could leave the world.

So Sterling would not look back to the mainland. He stared at the sea westward beyond that next hidden reef. The curious thing was that he—born in the short-grass country and to the saddle on his father's cow ranch—had come to love the sea.

It held him now under this mighty bulge of stars down to the sky line. A man could see it faintly lift in calm swells beyond the last bar, and here at his feet the incoming tide crept to the mangrove islet. In the shoals were gleams of mysterious, pale fire where hunting fish stirred the phosphorescent water. Along this gray sand there was a shuffling of myriad life before the ripples. He could hear rustlings, tiny things creeping over his boots. The swarming fiddler crabs of the mangrove isles moving over the sands, feeding on the minute sea life. He saw them where the starlight fell on a higher point, a moving curtain retreating before the tide.

"Full-moon tide to-night," he murmured. "All over this bar then. The fiddlers'll take to the mangrove. I remember now, that's what the crackers called this reef. Fiddlers' Roost—high tides bring 'em here all along to wait for the turn."

Suddenly it struck him as strange that he was thinking of this swarming, intent life of the shore, now in his last hour. When the moon came up he would take this boat and row out the deep pass, and the gun would bark again—once. And now he had made up his mind to it, a great peace held him. The haggard worries that had

torn his mind and body for months seemed fallen away. Something seemed sure at last on the long road that was the ending. Now that his mind was made up, he felt clear and free. Nobody would believe that, but it was true.

"Mungo hated this shore even while he was exploiting it in a swindle," Sterling thought. "Mungo was false inside and out."

Sterling had only been here once, and that was two years ago in the boom when West Pamello City was a check-board of survey stakes among the scrub palmettos. Mungo had been the general manager as well as promoter, and Sterling remembered this about his partner—Mungo's hatred and fear of the sea.

The sea and everything about it. The creeping tides, the swarming hidden life, the desolate burning shores stretching to the distance, the mangrove tangle of these little islets offshore. Especially the fiddler crabs that crept at the edge where earth and water met. Tiny crustaceans in shiny purple pink or yellow armor which moved in armies along the sands, sawing the air with their one big mandible, and utterly harmless.

But Mungo used to curse them when they swarmed along his avenues hacked through the jungle and around his survey marks. In the rainy season they even swarmed over the steps of his corrugated-iron real-estate field office—but that didn't get into the promotion pictures.

Then the harsh sea birds, the bald, slow pelicans and awkward loons, the stealthy, spectral herons in the ponds—even the high-flying graceful man-o'-war birds—Mungo hated them all as if they were jeering at his ambitions.

Sterling could visualize his partner now—short, stout, always perspiring in his tropic cloth golf suit and pith helmet as he hurried about feverishly here

at the edge of the sea which never hurried.

"That was it," said Sterling aloud; "I understand now. He damned the sea and the jungle because he felt they were always waiting here to take back whatever he built here. It was a joke, a mad scheme to start a development away out here. A town to live and sell on paper. I must have been crazy to go into it."

Well, too late for that now. A great many things had happened before his breakdown which it was useless to think about. Sterling got out of hospital to face jail; the ornate offices in Kansas City closed, the stenographers unpaid, the bank balances overdrawn; even his own name forged, and his faithless partner vanished. The investors would not get a cent, for the actual property of the company down here would not meet the suits of the contractors on the reclamation work. All of the ugly facts were not yet known, but they would be.

Sterling was trying to argue with himself that he was not a coward for refusing to face the storm. He and Mungo had each carried a heavy life insurance in favor of the company which they controlled, but suicide would ruin even this slim chance for the stockholders to get a dollar back. Sterling had thought of that; he had tried to figure some way where his life might atone for some of this wreckage and could not.

"Mungo's in hiding—saving his own skin. Well, maybe I can't blame him. He was rotten; but a man's got to fight back even then. Maybe he wasn't as crooked as I thought. Perhaps he really thought he could put this over in the boom days."

He took out of his pocket the copy of the telegram he had sent his wife and read it again by the first light of the full moon just clearing the cabbage palms on the mainland eastward. He

hadn't told her what he was going to do; just sent his love and all good wishes for her happiness. She had sent him away bitterly, but then he knew she would forgive him in time, if he fought back. But Sterling was done with that.

Five years in the pen for George Mungo's crookedness was the best the district attorney offered him to soothe the outraged investors in this gamble, unless he could compromise.

Sterling shut it out of his mind as he sat on the skiff. That old unnerving throb of his brain that he had been fighting all these months came back, and he wanted peace again. Another hour, and he would drift out with the tide. The full moon would be high then.

He went along the spit of sand south from the round mangrove clump. The water would cover this and be all through that dark tangle of arching roots and low, twisting limbs to-night. The fiddler crabs were already retreating from the ends of the sand bars on each side of the thicket. The moonlight showed them as a moving gray carpet, millions and millions of shuffling little crabs, each waving its one unwieldy claw before it—like musicians raising their violin bows.

Out in the pass a giant whipray leaped and struck the water with a mighty splash. A tarpon curved up like a silver crescent under the moon. The sea birds were calling above the outer bar, now all but covered, save for a drift heap here and there. The crawling, flying, creeping things would be here long after Mungo's ditching machines had rusted flat, and the last square of his thin, concrete pavements crumbled under the vines; they would be here when this shore had vanished, when man had died from the earth, Sterling thought. So what was the use of it all?

He came back and sat by the man-

grove shade. Then he heard a splash. It was not a fish nor a diving night bird; the sound came regularly, and then, above it, a voice. Sterling looked about.

He saw three men wading the shoals from the mainland. It was easily done save at flood tide, but back of the ruined city of the blue prints was nothing but a rutted sand road eight miles to the main highway. Curious why strangers came this way!

Sterling went around the seaward side of the mangrove. The tallest of the three had reached the sand spit. He carried a bundle or a bag which he set down and looked up and down the beach. The water gleamed on his leather leggings and ran from his clothes. The second man's grumbling suddenly lifted to surprise. He was pointing at Sterling's skiff across the narrow bar.

"A boat! That ain't Woody's, either. Look out now!"

The shorter of the three men stopped in water to his knees. For a long time none spoke. They were watching every point of the islet. The tall man stole silently toward the mangrove.

Sterling, on the other side, dropped to his knees. Whoever they were, he did not want to be discovered. He crept a yard under the arching roots on the wet sand and listened.

"Go 'round this mangrove, Benny," ordered the tall one. "Shake your gun loose. This ain't Woody's boat—no! We don't want no livin' man offshore here till Woody comes to get us."

Sterling, on hands and knees, made another yard to the deep shadows of the mangrove clump. The man called Benny was on the sand bar opposite to the other one now.

"Nothin' here. Tracks, washed by the tide. Terrill, whose boat? Nobody could be ahead of us!"

The tall man went to the boat cau-

tiously. Sterling saw the gun in his hands. The third man was not visible till Terrill, bending over the boat, called to him. Terrill had lifted Sterling's coat. The three letters fell to the thwart. Anger swept Sterling. Even now, at the end, the race of men would not let him go in peace. But at the next word out there he started abruptly.

Terrill had slashed open two of the letters.

"Mungo!" he yelled. "Listen here. Your partner—Sterling——"

The two others came to Terrill, the tall stranger. Sterling had whirled from his crouch under the thickets.

Mungo! He recognized the short man now. George Mungo, president of the defunct West Pamello Land Company, fugitive from the law, who was supposed to be in South America after looting the concern. Mungo's red, broad face was excited as he snatched the letter the tall man was reading. Sterling knew the third one, now. Benny Ott, a one-time head clerk in Mungo's local office, an oily sycophant in the days of Mungo's greatness whom Sterling had never trusted.

Terrill was a different sort. A powerful, long-armed man whose hard face under his battered white hat showed the ruthless dominance which he held out in this coast jungle over the two town men. He shoved Mungo back abruptly.

"Sterling!" he yelled. "The company letterhead on this note he left—that proves it. That shot we heard, boys!"

"Sterling?" shouted Mungo hoarsely. "Last I heard of Jim Sterling he was down and out!"

"He sure is. He killed himself—this note says so!"

Mungo lunged at the paper. He muttered over it in the light of the full moon.

"Bumped himself off—well, that's funny. To-night, just as I come back here. Come south looking for me, maybe, and then comes out here to finish himself. Well, and that's luck, too! He talked too damn much all the time. I'd never been driven to robbing a bank if Sterling hadn't threatened to squeal about some of my business. He drove me to the swamps, damn him! Killed himself—then he ought to be here."

Benny Ott went down the sand spit and called them. Two hundred yards out, on the farther bar, were dim clumps of drift. The three went to arguing about Sterling's finish.

"No gun in the boat nor on the sand," said Terrill. "He's out there. He waded out toward the sea and stood in the shoal and put the gun to his head. One o' them heaps out there maybe——"

Mungo shrank from staring at the spot. Then he turned back. Sterling crept lower under the mangrove roots. The little crabs were hustling along on the wet sand. Some of them scurried up the crooked lower limbs and the tangle of thick roots.

Mungo searched Sterling's coat and then the boat.

"Jim Sterling carried two hundred thousand dollars life insurance—same as me, in favor of the company. But that's off now, him killing himself. Damn him—if I could get that—if there was some way! Boys, nobody knows he shot himself except us three! Give me the letters, Terrill."

Benny Ott sat down on the bow and chuckled.

"Mungo, this outfit just stuck up the Truckers' Bank back there at Leetown. Now, if Sterling's found out here on the reef with a bullet in him, and this note in the skiff, I reckon the sheriff'll think he had a hand in it, won't he?"

Mungo mopped his perspiring face and broke to laughter.

"Benny, this is the first idea I ever

saw you have in eight years. Sure, Sterling stuck up the bank! You get that, Terrill?"

Terrill snarled at the two.

"Fur as it goes, yes; but it don't account for everything. It was me that lined up the cashier and that girl in the vault while you gathered up the cash, Mungo. Benny watched at the door till we got to the car. We drove forty-five miles till we struck the sand road, comin' to the coast here, and then we run the flivver off a bridge into ten feet o' black water. Then we took to the piny woods over this way. But they'll track us clean to this beach, three o' us."

"Fiddlers three!" exulted Benny. "How much did we take, Mungo? You was the teller on this grab-up."

"There was forty-five thousand I could count as I shoved the currency into the bag," said Mungo. "Then there was the loose stuff right behind the cashier's cage. Then there was some silver and——"

"You lie!" croaked Terrill. "You took off seventy thousand if you got a dime. I got kind of a count myself and——"

Benny, the nitwit, yelled again. But the two older men glowered suspiciously at each other. Sterling saw Terrill's hard eyes narrow. Mungo changed his tune before the outlaw.

"Well—maybe. Wait till Woody's launch comes gets us at midnight. Look at these damn crabs, will you? Crawling, slithering along everywhere. They'll get on your boots, they'll climb your clothes—they make me crawl myself, damn 'em!"

He backed away with the black hand bag, watching the sand. Terrill jeered at his nervous antipathy.

"Yeh, if Woody don't come to run us down into the glades below Cape Romano to-night, the three of us'll be feelin' them insects. Just like Sterling off there on the bar. I ain't going to

be caught by no deputies on this. They got a killin' charge against me now. That's why I been hidin' out in the glades till you got me into this stick-up back at Leetown, Mungo. I ain't goin' to be took. Hear me?"

Mungo laughed mirthlessly.

"No, you ain't. Nor me, either. Look at the fiddlers swarming into the mangrove. The moon tide's driving 'em off the sand. A big tide, Terrill—— How long we got to wait for that friend of yours?"

"Midnight. I told him twelve sharp. We won't be tracked till they find where that car went off in the canal. Mornin' then."

The Everglades outlaw went around the mangrove clump. On the north side it was the same. A narrow gleaming sand spit, slowly being covered by the tide. But he stood close to Sterling's hiding place now. The hidden man, flat on the wet sand, with his face turned under the arching mangrove roots, saw Terrill slip out his pistol, look to its cylinder, blow the sand from the muzzle and drop it to its holster. Then he watched the two townsmen through the narrow fringe of thicket on the point.

Sterling tried to check his labored breathing. Robbed the little Leetown bank, had they? A struggling local institution that had done many favors for George Mungo in the boom days.

And Mungo, masked, as were his two pals, had driven into the village this afternoon, swept up the currency, and fled to the coast. Another confederate would take them down to that vast untenanted wilderness of the Ten Thousand Islands below Cape Romano. A jungle haunt of bad men from which it was an easy jump to Cuba with the rum runners who infested the uncharted sounds and bays. Easy for Terrill, the Glader; but men like Mungo and Ott, once abandoned, were helpless as babes.

Sterling saw that thought flit across Terrill's grim face. On this shore now he was leader, master, not Mungo.

Out on the bar Mungo and Benny Ott were exulting in Sterling's supposed death. Sterling felt a new keen sting of life clearing the fog of his despondency. An hour ago he had thought of suicide! He began to laugh to himself at the idea. A fury was in his veins at Mungo's jeers. Mungo lamenting that his partner's insurance in the company's favor could not be turned to his own profit. Mungo, whose own death by fair means would be worth a small fortune to the swindled widows and workingmen who had trusted their savings to him!

Sterling thought of his own weakness with a sneer. Kill himself? Why, he could walk out there and tell this crook what he thought of him and tell him to shoot and be damned! Mungo didn't have the nerve to shoot a man. But Terrill would. Terrill would crack him down like a rat to cover this get-away.

So Sterling grew calmer as he lay under the fleck of light and shade. He was safe here. They did not dream he lived. That note in his own writing, and the single shot they had heard on this tiny islet. He saw Terrill wade the shallows around the mangrove point to join his companions. Mungo was boasting to Benny, his vacillating tool.

"Him and me was insured for nearly half a million. I done it to quiet some of the fools who kicked about the way things were going when the slump started. And Sterling gone—only I can't figure any way to cash in on him. I reckon nobody will, even if they found him. I don't just know how the law'd be on collecting that insurance. If they found his body out here with a bullet in it, they'd hook him up with this Leetown job sure. He was broke and desperate. Well, it's Honduras for me with this plunder—only we ought

to figure how to plant this job on Sterling, don't you think, Terrill?"

Terrill growled as he watched the sea beyond the last bar. The tide was all over that now. The dark object that might be Sterling's body out there was almost covered.

"Shove that boat adrift," ordered the Glader. "We don't want no mark like that around if the deputies got their dogs on a quick trail from Leetown to where we took to the pine woods."

"They couldn't trail the car. But the posse could. They might be straight out here quicker than we think, Terrill."

"Shut this whinin'! I said I'd get yeh away, didn't I?"

Mungo whined in a lower note. He didn't like the rustling of the fiddler crabs, nasty creeping beasts that rattled over his wet shoes and clung to his ankles. Benny snickered at these nervous fears. He held a fiddler to the moon to show how harmless it was. It couldn't pinch to hurt a man with that ridiculous one big claw with which it sawed the air. But Mungo retreated from it. He hated the sea and all its ways. The Glader snarled again at this joking.

"Git around the other side o' this grove." He stopped at the thin fringe of roots on the point toward the sea not ten yards from where Sterling lay. "Yeh can watch shoreward from here. Then the ridge is higher. But there's more o' them fiddlers that Mungo's belerin' about."

Benny snickered again. Mungo was the last to wade ankle-deep around the dense barrier of mangrove. He muttered when he looked before Terrill's feet.

The gray beach seemed moving in the moonlight. Driven by the tide from the end of the bar, the little fiddlers crept in a close carpet toward the thicket. They parted around Terrill and shuffled on. A fallen palmette

trunk lay a yard out from the mangrove, and over this the rustling armies hurried. They crowded by millions on millions, shoving this van into a ridge inches deep and then on under the mangrove shadows.

Mungo stood in water beyond the tide line. He watched the fiddlers break and scatter about his companions. Terrill swore at the promoter, and Mungo came on uncertainly to the sand.

"Watchin' me!" he croaked dully. "Millions of eyes, and they know I hate 'em. Boys, it was them fiddlers broke me. I'd unloaded this West Pamello proposition on a couple o' Boston men; and then once they came to look the land over. It was a big tide that day. The water was all up in the low spots. The fiddlers were everywhere. We'd just got down six squares of concrete walk, and the crabs come traveling up Main Street in droves. Millions of 'em clacking their claws. It was as if they'd come out of the sea to wreck this big chance I had. I could have sold out for a million and a half that week to these two Boston men. But the crabs! The men watched the fiddlers swarming up from the low spots and laughed. Those slimy sea rats broke me, that's what they did! They drove me to where I am—a hunted man, a—crook!"

Terrill poured withering curses on him. Mungo's voice had quavered off into a sickly, sentimental sob of self-pity. Wet and worn out and bitten by insects, the promoter lacked the iron nerve to go on with this get-away, and Terrill reviled his baby play.

"Crook, hey? You hand over that bag. You laid out that bank job for me back in the Glades. I come out and put it over, riskin' the chair to do it, and now you begin to whine, damn you!"

Mungo retreated before him. He stood with his back to the mangroves, blustering in turn.

But Terrill roared at him.

"Thirty thousand o' that currency comes to me, understand? I know what you got, Mungo! Thirty thousand, or you rot on these reefs somewhere. Woody don't take you away if I say the word——"

"Thirty thousand? There ain't much more'n that, Terrill; don't talk like a fool!"

"You turn that over to me. I'll make the divvy. Come on!"

He advanced a yard toward the thicket. Mungo stood, the hand bag behind him, protesting. Benny Ott was at the water's edge, and now Sterling saw Mungo raise his hand in a nervous gesture which Terrill did not interpret.

But Ott crept on a step toward Terrill's back. Mungo continued his protests, stepping backward as Terrill came on. But Sterling watched Benny. The latter crept silently till he was crouched behind Terrill's right shoulder. Then he leaped, with a hand clutching at Terrill's belt.

The Glader felt the impact. His hand went back, and Benny's nervous fingers just grazed the holster of the .45 as Terrill closed on the grip. It seemed to Sterling that Terrill was catapulting the smaller man back through the air as he whirled and fired.

Benny collapsed in the edge of the tide. Mungo stood fixed in horror. His fingers let go of the hand bag. It fell at the margin of the mangrove thickets. Mungo stepped forward weakly out into the moonlight, faltered and came on toward his fallen friend. The Everglades outlaw watched silently.

"You shot Benny!" yelled Mungo wildly.

"A skunk jump for my gun that a way? Sure I shot him. You signed him to jump me, you crooked snake!"

"I didn't!" quavered Mungo. "Murder—that's what you did!"

"Shut your trap! That makes two

gone in this business. Sterling bumped himself off, and now Ott tries to horse me. It can't be done. Damn you, Mungo, I ought to send you to join 'em! Ott's been kiddin' about the crabs to make you more crazy. Fiddlers three, hey? Well, you heard my music, ain't you now?"

"Terrill," blurted Mungo, "you're wrong. I never tried to frame you. Benny—he was a crazy fool. Well, that leaves just me and you, don't it? You—you did right, Terrill!"

The Glader eyed him suspiciously. A noise had come to his woodsman's ear. He scanned the thicket. If he had known that the shuffle was made by Jim Sterling worming deeper into the mangroves with the loot of the Leetown bank, he'd have done more.

But the fiddlers covered Sterling's retreat. He had reached from the deep shadow to where Mungo had dropped the hand bag, and turned in the sand. All about him was the rustling of the tiny crabs. They scurried before him, behind him, over the trail his body had made and the imprint where the bag had lain. He was thirty feet back in under the arching root thickets when Mungo's voice arose scaredly.

"It ain't nothing. I heard it—just those fiddlers. Look at 'em! Still coming before the tide on the bar. Swarming into the mangrove. Fiddlers' Roost! And Benny there—swarming over him, too."

"Let him be. The deputies'll find him. Him, and Sterling somewhere about. Good thing, too. It'll puzzle 'em all. Two dead men on Fiddlers' Roost."

Mungo shivered. A sea bird was calling over the bars. The shadows were black under the thick mangrove thatch. The rustle of millions of tiny bodies came from that jungle fortress. A man could not have crept through it save on his knees, so closely did the limbs interlock.

"Get that bag, you," said Terrill. "You carry it. You walk ahead o' me. We're goin' to wade to that next bar afore the tide gits too deep. Too much shootin' here. I can signal Woody with the flash light from that reef south o' this one."

Mungo turned with a half groan. A ruthless, brilliant brain in a financial deal, his cunning was not of a sort to avail against Joe Terrill's brute force.

"All right, Terrill," he croaked tiredly, and went to the mangrove edge. He stared down fearsomely. The fiddlers were scrambling inches deep beyond the palm trunk where he had dropped the bag. And the bag was not there.

Sterling heard his thick gasp. Then his voice raised:

"Joe, ain't you got the money?"

"How'd I get the money? What's eatin' you?"

Mungo's eyes were popping out. He fell back a step.

"The bag's gone. I dropped it right here by the log, and it's gone!"

The hopeless fear in his voice could not be denied. Joe Terrill came on from the beach. Mungo was pointing.

"Right there—and it's gone. When you shot Benny I dropped it and jumped forward—and it's gone!"

Terrill eyed the spot. Then he turned on Mungo. This was another townsman's trick.

"You git that stuff, Mungo!"

"Get it? I tell you I left it here, and it's gone!"

Terrill sprang at him furiously. Mungo dodged like a rabbit, and like a rabbit he gave up without a struggle as the Glader's powerful arms smashed down on him. Terrill dragged him to the edge of the jungle at the point where the water was already lapping the roots. There he crushed him down in the wet sands. Sterling could hear Mungo's faint voice choking as Terrill rubbed his face into the dirt. He beat

him and kicked him and threw him on his back to kneel on him.

"Come across! No more tricks. That money, damn you!"

"I never hid it! I don't know what happened! Joe, you saw me all the time. I couldn't have done any trick that——"

"You threw that plunder way back under the brush. You crawl in and get it. Right among them fiddlers—millions of 'em, swarmin' and fightin'—you crawl there, too, Mungo!"

"I didn't! I won't! I'd die first! Terrill, let go! I can't help it—— Good Lord, man, get off me!"

Sterling could not see past the serried roots. A brief struggle was going on at the jungle edge. A short, hopeless struggle, and then Terrill arose.

Mungo was tied hand and foot with his own belt and with Terrill's. Hand and foot stretched from one mangrove root to another just in the creep of the tide. He moaned feebly.

Terrill came to where the bag had lain. He knelt, watching the deep shade of the little jungle grove. The crabs crept and glistened in the moonlight where it struck to the sand. The Glader arose and walked to his victim. Save for the fiddlers, he was sure no living thing was on the reef except themselves.

"You'll lie there spread-eagled, Mungo, till you tell me where you slung that bag. Seventy thousand dollars you got. I seen it. Packages o' bills they were mostly. Fifties and hundreds and five hundreds. Some coin, too. It never crawled off. You hid it while I was jawin' with Benny Ott."

"I didn't. I swear, Joe, I couldn't. You saw me every minute. Joe, this reef is haunted. Two dead men on it—ugh! the crabs are on my clothes, Joe! Crawlin'—thousands of 'em——"

Terrill's cigarette glowed in the

moonlight. He paced the last sand above water nervously. He waded around the point. A hundred yards south in the tide Sterling's skiff was drifting aimlessly. The outlaw watched the piny woods on the mainland.

He could see the notch in the shore jungle where the main boulevard of the phantom city had been cut to the sound. Beyond that, the staked lots, the rotting sidewalks, the rusted ruins of a fraudulent dream. These whispering, creeping warriors of the sea had captured it from men. A full moon like this, and the fiddler crabs would be marching in triumph over all that ghostly farce of a town.

Sterling heard him come around the jungle islet to where Mungo lay gabbling in a delirium of fright and despair.

The little crabs flicked his hair, his hands. They hurried up over his body and on to the thickets before the tide. Terrill watched him silently for a time. Then he muttered:

"Mungo, I went clear around the jungle. There ain't any tracks. The crabs and the tide might have covered 'em. But I never heard nothin'. A man couldn't come from that thicket and not make a noise. I'd 'a' heard him. What you think, Mungo?"

Mungo caught hopefully at the solemnity of Terrill's voice.

Terrill feared no man, but this mystery was something else.

"Joe, I swear I don't know. It stunned me, Joe. Don't leave me here to choke and die in the tide. I'll be square, Terrill. Without the money we're in bad. I see that. I'll go with you, Joe. Be your friend down in the Glades—do anything."

"No, you don't. It's funny about this money. No human hands ever touched it. I'd heard 'em. I'd seen 'em. I was watchin' you all the time, Mungo. I saw you drop that bag, sure. Hold still, now!"

Sterling heard Mungo's scared voice. But the Everglades man was solemn. He was frightened also, but in a different way. The mystery evoked all the superstitious uncertainties in his ignorant awe of the unknown. He unbuckled the thongs that had cut deeply into Mungo's wrists and ankles.

The promoter sat up, almost sobbing his relief. Terrill squatted on the sand, watching the jungle nervously.

"Now, we'll hunt it, Joe—you and me."

"No, I ain't. I've peered every place it could be in. I can see most of that mangrove except the deep shadows. And nothing there but fiddlers. They climb to the limbs a tide like this. They hang in bunches on the trunks. You can see 'em now. I'd crawl through there, but it's no use."

"You goin' to give up this fortune, Joe?"

"I never had hands on the money. It was you carried it. If any man is ha'nted, it's you, Mungo. I ain't touched the money."

Mungo broke to a feeble jeer. He had established his dominance again over the other man's ignorance. Mungo was baffled, but nothing supernatural was in his fears.

Terrill watched to seaward, then looked at his watch.

"Woody'll take me down past the cape. I'll get back in the swamp. No deputies'll rout me out o' there."

"You wait till I figure where the money went."

"No. You ain't goin' with me. I'm through with you. I let you live just now, but I'm done with you, Mungo. You and Benny tried to trick me. You lied to me. Benny tried to disarm me. I guess I know by this how crooked you are."

"You goin' to leave me here? With a dead man? Two dead men? And the fiddlers—and the sheriff's men comin' on a trail? No, you can't!"

"Yeh. You're nothin' to me, Mungo. Git to hell away from me!"

Sterling raised enough, so that he saw them beyond the mangrove screen. Terrill squatted on the sand, Mungo kneeling behind him. Mungo's voice came stronger now.

"You going to leave me, Terrill? I'm done for, then."

"Git away from me. This was a bad job, and you got me into it. I was to do the gun work, and you'd get the plunder. Now, some mystery's happened. If you can't explain it, I'm done."

Mungo was watching him craftily. Terrill's face was toward the sea. And Mungo crept a foot forward. Then Sterling saw the gleam of a knife in the moonlight. It was so short a thrust that it seemed as if Mungo had merely pushed Terrill in the neck. But the Glader stumbled forward on his knees and sank.

Mungo was on his feet, dashing in a panic to dodge a bullet. He made a clumsy fall on the last sand above water back by the mangrove knoll. Sterling heard his thick breathing. But the man out there by the water's edge did not shoot. He waved his hands confusedly about a moment, crawled a yard and began coughing. Then he stretched out on the damp sand and moved feebly.

Presently there was no sound nor any motion. Sterling saw the two of them—Benny Ott in the shallow tide and Terrill on the sand—both inert, mere slumped figures in the moonlight.

Then Mungo began whispering hoarsely to himself.

"Got him—I never used a knife before—it got him in the throat—clean through. Terrill! Well, he had it comin' to him. A cold killer he was. I'd heard him brag and blow about why he had to hide out. And I got him—me! *Me!* Only me now to get that money. Ghosts—hell! That's what

scared Terrill off. Anything that he couldn't explain had him faded!"

Mungo got up, feeling of his sore wrists and ankles. He came along the sand to watch his victim. Then he gingerly bent to get Terrill's big gun. He wiped it and shoved it into his side coat pocket. Then he whirled about in a panic.

The tide had covered the sand ridge. The tiny crabs in retreat before it had reached Mungo as he knelt. They instantly climbed over his legs and raced away. But Mungo sprang erect.

"Damn sea rats! Get away off me!" He backed toward the mangrove. The last high sand was there, but the low tide would be all through under the roots. Mungo turned to stare at the little jungle. It was rustling, whispering with the myriad life of the shore gathered there from the moon tide. Mungo put his hand to a branch and then yelled in fury. The tiny crabs were a writhing shield on the mangrove bark.

He backed away, wiping his hand, then came to peer under the shadows at another opening. He spoke deliberately, as if forcing his logic to consider every possible angle.

"That bag is in there. Seventy thousand dollars. Maybe I did fling it. I was excited. Maybe I gave it a throw back in the Fiddlers' Roost. But no, I couldn't. I dropped it here in the open. And it's gone—three dead men on the reef, and the plunder's gone. Benny and Joe and—Sterling? It's funny about Sterling! But there was the note in his own hand, and I heard the shot. We all heard the shot. Out there he is—on the bar. The others here——"

Sterling saw Mungo watch the tide. Silence, death, under the moon on this tiny islet not a hundred feet through its thicket.

Mungo mumbled to himself, as if to get courage against this silence. The sea—how he hated it! Its stealthy

crawling, swimming, splashing life! In that pass there, giant whiplays, livid with spots as they leaped in the moonlight; rushing tiger tarpon like silver bows as they curved from the water; the gleam of hunting sharks as they scattered the smaller fish to showers of phosphorescent stars; and here on the shores were the creeping myriads of other devouring things. No mercy here for weaklings or failures. Well, men were the same. Three had tried fortune and were dead now somewhere about, and the tide would cover them.

Mungo had thrust his short body into the mangroves again.

"Fiddlers, that's all. Just crabs. Too little to bite. They just crawl and pinch. That bag's in there. They'll be on it, roosting on it above the water. Millions of 'em. But I ain't afraid. Get away, you! A man can smash and kick you, and you just swarm back. Think you own the earth, hey? Fiddlers' Roost!"

He arched his back and crashed into the low limbs.

Ten feet back, lifting his feet to swing over the arching roots under which the tide was creeping, he stopped. Sterling saw him, head turned to one side, listening acutely. There was no sound save the uncanny rustle of the crawling fiddlers.

Mungo shook his hands from the limbs. He was watching his sleeves, his feet, then cocking his eyes up to the green-leafed upper branches. He thought they were moving there, that the swarming crabs were over every little tree that would hold their bodies. He retreated to the edge of the jungle and began to mutter.

"Sterling—I keep thinking of Sterling. He was the first to go. Then Benny. Then Joe Terrill. Three of 'em. But Sterling—he never did any crooked work. And he caught hell the last two years. It broke him soul and

body. It was as if I drove him to death. Terrill's different. Terrill would have killed me whenever it suited him. But Sterling was innocent. That's different."

He looked out to seaward and then past the mangroves to the ruin at the edge of the pine and palmetto land. The jungle was taking that also. Another rainy season, and one would never know that men had dreamed of homes or fortune there. No honest man would have thought it. But Mungo had tricked hundreds of honest men a thousand miles away into believing it.

The promoter put his hands to his eyes bewilderedly and faced the mangrove shade. Fortune was there for him. Desperate fortune for a desperate man. Anyway, he had it for himself.

"I'll tell this friend of Terrill's, the rum runner he calls Woody, to take me down the coast. I'll wade out to the next bar when I see his launch. I'll just say that Joe went back to the mainland to throw the deputies off our trail. I can take the money and hide out in the Glades till I get down to Cuba from Key West or somewhere."

He grumbled on, trying to convince himself that he was man enough to do that. Joe Terrill could, so why not he?

"Damn the fiddlers! They can crawl over a dead man, but they can't hurt a live man. They got my money—seventy thousand dollars back in that jungle, just a yard, maybe. I must have slung it. I was rattled when Benny was shot, and I must have slung it back of me and didn't realize it."

So he moved slowly into the thicket. Once he stopped, for a limb cracked sharply ahead of him. Sterling had crawled to one side of the twisted log where he had laid the hand bag. It was empty now. Sterling had opened the clasp and cautiously, package by package, had taken the bank notes out.

New, clean currency, just as it came from the cashier's cage—fifties and hundreds and some of five hundred, neatly banded and marked.

Sterling scooped a hole in the wet sand and laid the money in it. Then he leveled the sand back. In a moment, when he crawled aside, the fiddlers were marching over the spot. They swarmed on ahead of the low tide to climb the crooked, slanting limbs of the mangroves.

Mungo was on hands and knees now, for a man could not penetrate the heart of the thicket upright, if he wished to see the ground. He made five yards, crouched on the sand and began to whistle. It was a weak little note as from a man who was trying to order his thoughts and divert some fear that crept on him.

Then he shouted. Sterling knew he had found the mark in the sand where the hand bag had been dragged. Mungo became excited.

"Here it is! But I never threw it that far. Scared as I was, I couldn't have done it. Somebody——"

He crouched and looked about him. Nothing but the moonlight flecking through the leaves.

He reached his fingers to the mark in the sand. Then he yelled. This ground was a crawling curtain of crabs. Mungo crawled around the spot. But the fiddlers, driven to the last narrow spit of sand under the thickets, were milling about in a mass many inches deep. They climbed the roots and fell back in festoons. Looking up, he saw the limbs alive with them. This was the heart of their refuge at the high tides. The creeping water here was thick with them. Mungo could not see a spot where they were not, save on the topmost branches against the moon.

"Dirty little sea rats," he muttered "Bluff me, eh? No, when I get that bag I'll stop enough to smash a million of you!"

Then he got to his knees with another hoarse cry. He saw the black bag a yard beyond him. It set upright in an inch of water, closed and looking just as if human hands had put it there.

But there were no human hands on Fiddlers' Roost save Mungo's—and the hands of dead men.

So Mungo plunged forward, still on his knees, regardless of the squirming crabs under him. He smashed them into the wet sand, lunged an arm out and grasped the bag. Then he turned in his tracks. He was in a living maelstrom of tiny bodies racing in every direction. The sound was as if myriad rattlesnakes had set up their sinister whirring everywhere about.

Mungo plunged on, dragging at the black bag. Then he stopped to wipe perspiration from his eyes. When he opened them again he squatted transfixed, staring at that bag. He had jerked it open, and it was empty.

Mungo relaxed his shoulders, peering into it. He put in a hand and felt about. Along the pockets and seams, in each corner. There was not a thing in it. A twisting festoon of fiddlers fell from a limb and scattered over the leather lining.

He just didn't believe it. There must be something wrong with his eyes or his mind. The heat to-day must have unsettled him. So he took the bag and shook it upside down. A fiddler fell out upon his wrist. Mungo sighed patiently. Even one of his feared foes of the sea was a trifle compared with this fixing idea that something was wrong with him. He dragged the empty bag a yard and dropped it.

"I got to get out," he announced dully. "No living man was on this reef. All gone, but something got the money. Fiddlers, hey? They might have clawed the bills out, but—well, I must be crazy! Let's see now; I'll get out in the open and study it."

So he crawled on slowly under the

matted mangrove limbs. Out there the moon was bright. In the deep shadow he felt the crabs race and scuttle over his hands. He flinched and went on.

When he got to the wet sand he arose and fumbled for Terrill's big .45. His pocket was heavy with wet sand, and he shook the gun and then stood with it in his limp hand.

No, a gun was no good. Blood and fraud settled nothing. He had seen them tried to-night, and they got nowhere. So he turned to look toward the sea past the mangrove point.

There he saw Sterling, his broken, ruined partner who had killed himself. Coming right up out of the sea, too, striding through the shallows up to this last sand where Mungo stood. Sterling, tall, silent, gaunt with fever, his great, hollow eyes fixed on Mungo; Jim Sterling, the cowman, who had known nothing of finance or promotion, who had placed his little fortune in Mungo's hands and stood loyally by Mungo to the last, like a true friend should, till even that faith was broken.

Sterling came on slowly, without sound, the water glistening and dripping from his clothes. He watched Mungo gravely.

"Get away, Sterling," said Mungo coldly. "I see you. You're out on that sand bar there. We all saw you, a little dark heap lying there. Benny and Joe both said it was you. I can see you now out there, the water almost over you. So, stay away—don't try fooling me."

Sterling never moved at the water's edge. Mungo suddenly yelled irritably as he dangled Terrill's gun.

"I'll prove it! I'll go out there! You're dead, shot by your own gun out on that bar. I see you now lying out there!"

Mungo started heavily out in the shallows. He lumbered at first and then began to run. The splash of water and the flash of phosphorescent light in

the tide frightened him suddenly, and he ran faster. To his waist, to his armpits, and then, with another shout, he dropped Terrill's gun and started to swim.

He was a poor swimmer. Sterling, on the flooded beach, watched his efforts and then shouted for him to come back. The tide was deep between the two bars now. But Mungo went on. That little black patch of driftwood was afloat now, but he tried to follow it. He would prove that Jim Sterling was dead.

Sterling watched and listened ten minutes. Then he crawled under the mangrove, found the black bag and went on to where he had buried the plunder from the Leetown bank. He got every dripping package of bills and the coin rolls, brushed the little crabs from them and stowed them into the bag. When he came out, there was no sound, nor sight of anything out toward the last bar. The tide was at flood, smoothly flowing under the moon. The little jungle of Fiddlers' Roost was all alive with the little warriors of the beach who clicked and rustled in living sheathes over the mangrove limbs, waiting for the tide to ebb ere they scattered to feed on the minute vegetation which the water would leave on the sand.

Harmless, eager little crabs which ticked against Sterling's clothes as he started to wade toward the piny woods of the mainland. He swung the bag on his shoulder, waded to his neck and came out on the beach end of Royal Palm Boulevard, as the blue-print city

had it. A block away Sterling stumbled over a thin, crumbling concrete square on the first cross-street corner.

But he went straight on into the rutty sand road which straggled away to the highway eight miles beyond. When he saw the headlights of a car he hailed it, and, finding that two deputy sheriffs were making the first dash to the coast to head off a possible escape of the Leetown Bank robbers this way, he told them all and handed over the black bag.

Then he climbed into the rear seat and slumped down tiredly, but with a smile.

"Put me off at the first telegraph station," he said. "I want to wire my wife. Got a lot to say—boys, I'm coming back!"

He hadn't told them why he himself went out to Fiddlers' Roost that night. That was his own business and never to be told, not even to his wife in the big fight for his comeback among men.

So the deputies were puzzled but kindly about it. They figured he would share in the standing reward for bank robbery in the State. But before he left the officers he grinned again.

"Boys, the flood tide will sure leave Mungo's body along the bars somewhere. Get it sure with those other two birds. You see, Mungo, drowned, is worth two hundred thousand dollars to the West Pamello Company. That'll pay about forty cents on the dollar to the poor devils he robbed—and I'm going to pay the rest in the big days coming! Watch my speed when I get going again!"

Another story by Charles Tenney Jackson will appear soon.



ANOTHER FOR THE FOOL KILLER

Following a certain celebrated mistrial in Washington, the general opinion is that the man who tips his canoe is no bigger fool than the one who tries to tip his jury.

A Chat With You

PERHAPS it is regrettable, perhaps not, but the frontiers seem to move away from us, north, south, east and west. There was a time, and not so long ago, when a man might sleep one night in Bagg's Hotel in Utica—we think that was the name, but now more stately hotels have arisen there—and by next noon be striding through the North Woods, rifle in the crook of his left arm, knowing well that there was not a human habitation for eighty miles to the north of him and that the only strangers he might meet would be beaver and chipmunks and deer. To say nothing of the partridges and woodpeckers. This, mind you, was in New York State. Now the roads are so good and motor cycles and small cars are so cheap, that one who wanders through the Adirondacks in the shooting season does well to wear red clothes or at least something red about his hat. A .30-30 bullet is no respecter of persons and there are some folk who shoot indiscriminately at anything they see moving in the woods. And it is the indiscriminate shooter who most often gets the human game—by accident.

* * * *

IT was not so long ago that one who went north across the Painted Desert from old Flagstaff must do it on horseback. And he must take water for the horses in kegs and he must ford that coco-colored, swift-flowing stream the Little Colorado, and there were quicksands on one side. But now there is a bridge across the rolling river. And one may do the whole journey up to Utah in a motor car without more serious adventure than a boiling radiator or a flat tire.

IT is probably all for the best, as most things are—or as it seems sensible to believe they are. California, once the fabled and golden land of the Argonauts, is now a summer and winter resort and the heaven of those who like to drive motor cars over good roads. Florida, once the haunt of the savage Seminoles, a mysterious bourn of sandy beaches and piny woods and impenetrable swamps, is now a nursery for vegetables for the table, such as asparagus and tomatoes, a Riviera of great hotels and a welcome spot in winter for those who hate the ice and snow.

* * * *

AMERICA was once the land of frontiers, unspoiled, untouched and, as compared with the rest of the world, comparatively unpeopled. The mountains were full of gold and silver, the woods were full of game, the seas were full of fish. They used to catch sturgeon as far up the Hudson as Albany. They called it "Albany beef" in those days.

The pioneers had their hard days. They fought Indians, starvation and thirst, but they had a thrill that comes to few nowadays. They were going into a new, undiscovered land. It was the conquest of Canaan all over again. This time they did it in covered wagons. Is it any wonder that so many old Americans loved to read the Old Testament? They, like the Israelites, believed in themselves and in their mission and purpose on the earth. They, like the fighting twelve tribes, were on a great trek, exploring a new land. The first man who saw Pikes Peak must have tingled with indescribable emotion.

The first man and woman who looked down into the valley of the Yosemite must have felt that at that moment they had tasted the utter completeness and fulfillment of life..

* * * *

LET those who have adventurous souls thank their stars that all the frontiers are not yet gone. Still there is new adventure on the misty western ocean. And in the uncharted air there is more still. And to the north of us and south of us, in Mexico and the Canadian northwest, there are untrod-den woods, mountains that have never been climbed and valleys that few white men have ever looked upon. How many who read this, have ever been in the

Henry Mountains in Utah? If any, we would like to hear from them.

* * * *

IN the next issue we will publish complete, a novel by Bertrand Sinclair, the tale of a young man who rides north into a still new country, alone and in the spirit of the romantic adventurer. He finds human people there and things to do and hard fighting—all that calls for the best stuff a man has got. Yes, there is a real, human, charming, adventurous girl in the story. Sinclair has all his life been an adventurer and a seeker of the far frontiers. In the next issue, a week from to-day, he will take you with him on one of his strangest journeys.

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Forked Trails

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BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

Pistols at Daybreak

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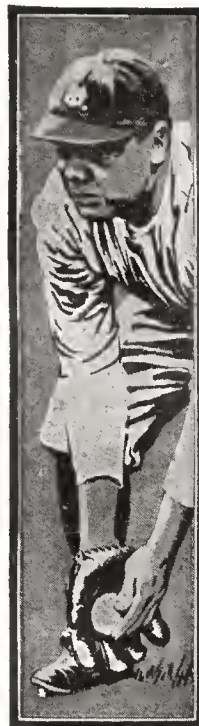
Silence

MORAN TUDURY

A Chat with You

THE EDITOR

A message to every ball player from BABE RUTH



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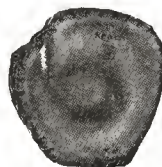
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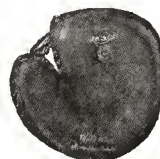
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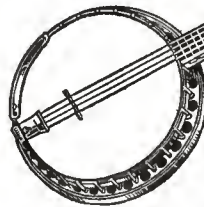


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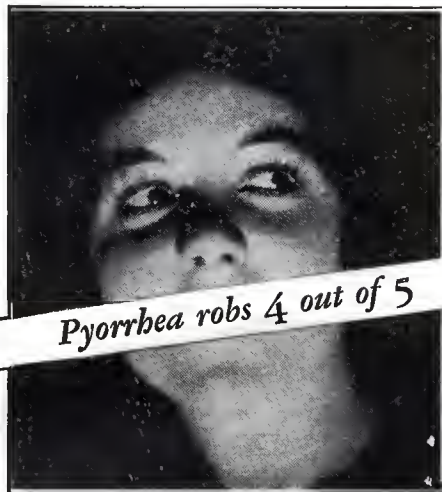
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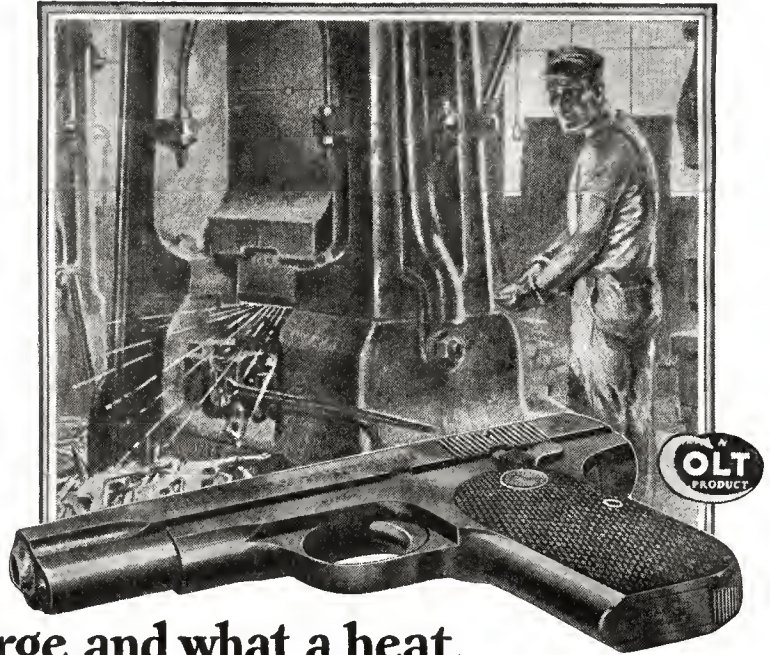
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