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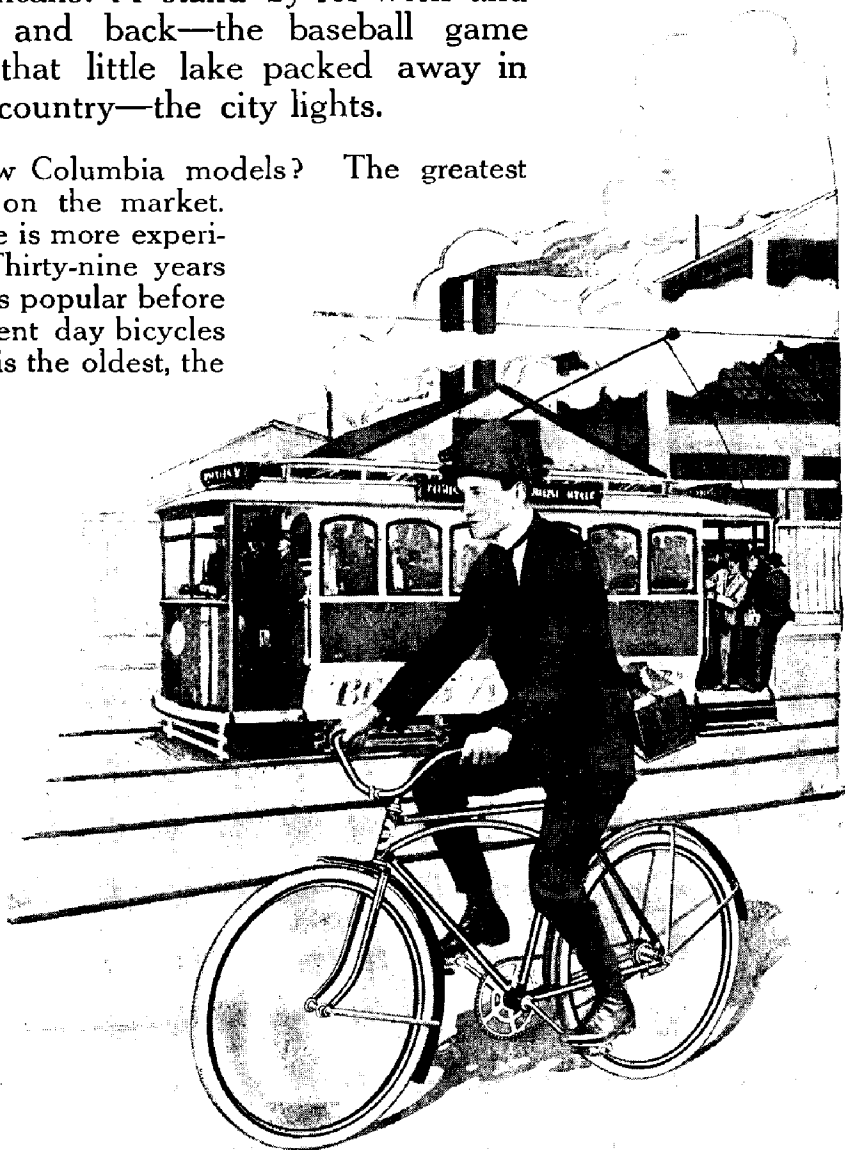
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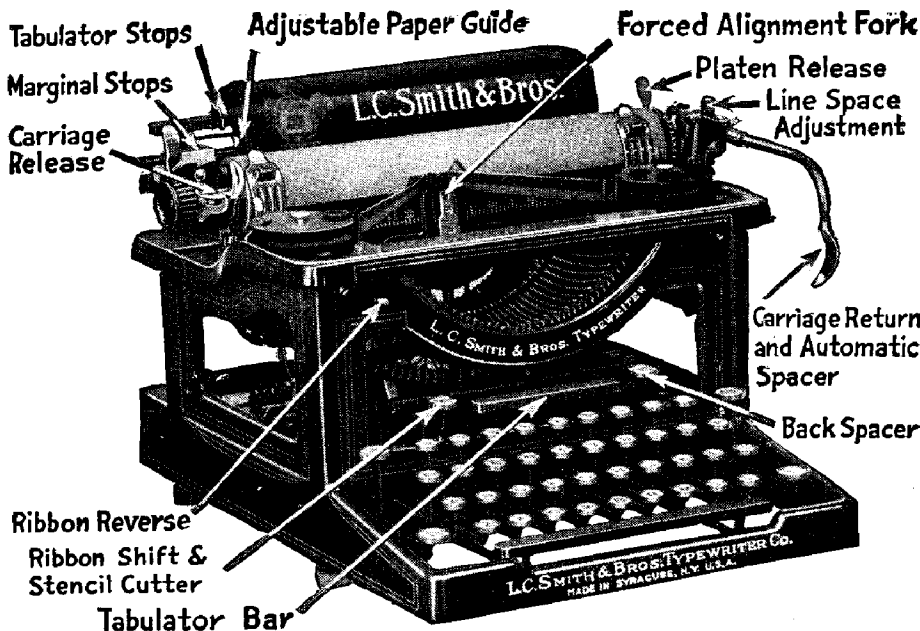
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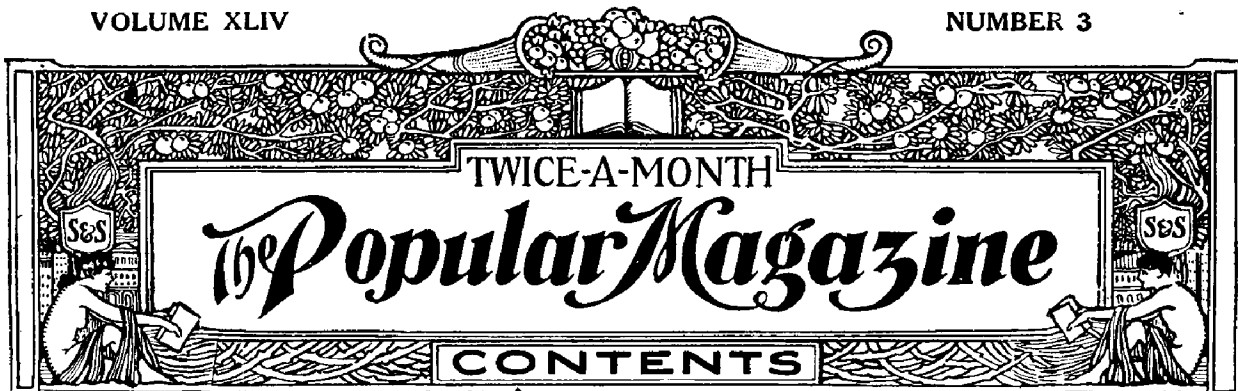
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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XLIV.

APRIL 20, 1917.

No. 3.

The Dictator

By Holman Day

Author of "The Forty-Ninth Talesman," "The Red Lane," Etc.

Here is a man who takes a crowd of young rowdies from the streets and builds up a naval militia with them—the best trained and most efficient organization of the kind on the Atlantic coast. Under his leadership other battles than those of the sword and gun have to be fought. It is a story of politics as well as preparedness.

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CHAPTER I.

SHORTLY after four o'clock in the afternoon, the Coast Artillery Band played the first number of its promenade concert program. The concert was complimentary to Governor Rutillus Thornton. He was officially inspecting his State troops who had been ordered by the war department to join the regulars in war-game maneuvers by naval and land forces in the military district contiguous to the State's chief city.

Society was claiming that afternoon as its own. Several hundred automobiles trailed the governor's party from the city to the parade ground of Fort Caldwell; hundreds of motor cars were there ahead of the party. The angularities of grim war were well hidden by frills and furbelows.

Groups of girls were pyramided on the heaps of old cannon balls which marked off the grassy slopes; the obsolete, ornamental Rodman smoothbores, pitted by erosion and decay, served as

perches for maidens who preened their summer fine feathers like peacocks and chattered as interminably as sparrows. The service khaki of the regulars and the red-striped dress uniforms of the State troops eddied among these islets of fluff and finery polychromatic.

Beyond the turfed ramparts the sea swung lazily, a blue expanse touched by flashing spangles of sunlight. Now and then, above the mellow phrasing of the band's strains, a bugle sounded its call of the day's routine brusquely and businesslike.

However, the bugle, in spite of its curt call to duty, fitted the occasion—seemed to blend.

Governor Thornton most distinctly did not blend. His figure was a discordant blot in the panoramic whole. His personality jarred on the scene, even as it jarred most of the sensitive souls with which it came in contact. He limped from the automobile toward the official marquee; a dusty, flapping frock coat humped over his haunches and sagged in front. The

nap of his silk hat was scuffed in a style to suggest his nickname in politics; men called him "The Old Quill-pig." He was old; the lines in his face were deep grooves which crossed his cheeks and were lost in the bristling beard. But he was tall and broad and brawny, and in spite of his limp he walked off with vigor.

The marquee was crowded with waiting ladies. A samovar puffed odorous whiffs of brewing tea, and charming girls were arranging cups and spoons and the adjuncts of a formal afternoon function—all held in abeyance until the arrival of the guest of honor.

If Governor Thornton knew they were waiting he did not allow that fact to hurry him. He took his own time in his triumphal progress toward the marquee. He swung to right and to left and shook hands—always with men. He looked over the heads of smiling ladies. He disregarded salutes by uniformed men. He sought those whose appearance suggested that they were prominent citizens. He knew many of them and called them by name. There was a veneer of amiability over his harsh tones. Every now and then he pulled a man to one side and whispered. His uniformed staff hitched along at his heels, trying to keep step and failing. They, too, were plainly of the "prominent-citizen" type—they were not soldiers. They tried to look important and soldierly—they only succeeded in looking self-conscious and bored.

Behind them came the ladies of the party, unescorted by their squires, who were obliged to march in formal lines because the governor's visit was official. They were surveyed coolly by the waiting ranks of city grand dames. In most cases the uniformed knights who surrounded the governor had been appointed for political reasons—their wives were not in society, strictly speaking. Nor was his excellency's wife, according to information whispered by Mrs. J. Corey Smuddon to her house guest, Mrs. Esterson Peters, from New York.

"She was a milliner or dressmaker or something—his second wife. She was sixteen when they were married, and he was an old man then. But he was a millionaire timberland owner, and that accounts for it. The girl in mauve—their daughter!"

"Very pretty," commented Mrs. Peters.

"For the type, yes. Personally I do not care for that combination of blue eyes and such intensely black hair; it's too Celtic. I am told that the mother's name was Murphy or O'Brien or something of the sort."

"Socially ambitious, of course."

"I suppose so, considering the money and all the rest. But the daughter is not at all known in the younger set. She has been educated out of the State."

The girl whom they were discussing was unperturbed by the staring eyes of the throng. A chauffeur came to her, leading a leaping and frantic Boston terrier on a leash.

"He jumped about in the car until I was afraid he would break his neck, Miss Thornton," he reported. "I can't manage him."

She took the leash and quieted the animal. Several guard officers on the side lines surveyed the terrier with something like envy.

"Your governor—with all due respect—seems to be a rather gross sort of a creature," declared Mrs. Peters.

"Nobody in the State wanted him to be governor—Corey says nobody wanted him."

"Then why was he chosen?"

"It was—was politics of some sort. I don't understand politics—and Corey declares he doesn't, either. Corey says that the governor wants to be reelected this year."

"I should judge so," agreed Mrs. Peters dryly. "He is shaking hands with everybody."

"But of course the voters will not make another mistake—even if it is politics. Corey says they will not."

"But Mr. Smuddon is shaking hands with him this moment!"

"Oh, that's merely politics. Do you care for their tea?"

"It seems to be rather crowded and common in that tent."

"Let's go back to the car; I brought a thermos bottle."

Governor Thornton did not take tea when he arrived at last in the shade of the marquee. Two pretty girls came to him, one with a cup steaming and brimming on a salver, the other with cakes. They gently forced their way through the circle of men who were listening to his excellency's scraping tones:

"Again, let me repeat, gentlemen! As for me, I don't need any help. I shall be renominated. I shall be re-elected."

Perspiration trickled down the grooves of his cheeks and he took off his silk hat and scrubbed his forehead with his forearm. Dust from his coat streaked his face. The pretty girls, submissive and as silent as slaves in the presence of royalty, tendered their salvers, but he did not lower his gaze to consider what they offered.

"Only political lunkheads believe differently. But remember, men, that I can't continue my business administration if I have a council that won't back me up. Every legislative district in this State must see to it that the right men are sent to the House and Senate. I want men who will elect the right chaps for my councilors, who will give me safe men for State officers, who will then go to work and handle legislation in the interests of the people and the party. Don't let the opposition land a pack of darned fools on my shoulders."

One of the pretty girls gasped and held her tray higher in order that she might fulfill her duty and escape. The steam from the cup caressed the governor's dripping face.

"Take it away!" he snapped. "Hot tea on a day like this! Bring me ice water!"

She fled. He saw the other girl and grasped her arm in order to arrest her flight, for she had turned to escape.

"Just a minute, sissy! I can take care of a few of these cakes." He

scooped up a big fistful. "Now, if they have ice cream, you run and fetch me a good big slice. That's a nice girl!"

Munching an éclair, he continued:

"I'm looking into all the legislative districts, hunting for the growls and the grouches. I reckon that this bull wrastle here"—he flapped his hand to indicate the forts and the tented field—"will bring in a lot of the boys from all parts of the State. That's why I am down here. I don't know anything about war—even a play war like this one. It's a waste of time, effort, and money, as I view it from a business man's standpoint. But no matter; let 'em play! I want to say that I have established headquarters in the city at the Holland House while this thing is going on, and I call on every party worker to come to me there. Thanks, sissy!"

He snatched the plate of ice cream and began to eat; it was soft in the humid heat under the marquee. From the spoon dribbles fell on the governor's vest and added to the other stains on the expanse of fabric.

"That's where the fight is coming, gentlemen. We must have control of the House and Senate. I don't propose to sit and twiddle my thumbs for the next two years with a majority against me."

The band began a march in spirited style, and his excellency scowled.

"It's a poor place to talk sense—in the midst of all this foolishness. I'm glad to meet so many here to-day. Come yourselves and bring the workers to my rooms at the hotel—to-night—to-morrow—any time. I trust you are all with me—members of the party."

Many in the crowd of men waved their hands at him to signify allegiance; the music drowned their voices.

An elderly man in uniform pressed through the ranks of the clustered politicians. He was the chief of staff for the governor, the adjutant general, Warren Wade, a former captain of volunteers in the Civil War. He saluted.

"The ladies and officers of the staff

are ready in the receiving line, your excellency."

"I understood that this was an inspection, not a reception," stated the governor. He exhibited resentment.

"The committee has requested a brief reception."

"I can't bother with it. Let the ladies of the party and the officers attend to the social folderols. I'll attend to the inspection at once."

"The inspection is timed for dress parade, your excellency."

"And that is when they're all lined up out yonder in that field, I suppose. And that cursed band banging away! I'll do my kind of inspecting right now. Do you know the captains of companies in our militia?"

"Yes, sir."

The governor linked his arm into that of the adjutant general and dragged him away.

"I hope you know their politics, Wade," he said, when they had left listening ears behind them. "Take me around and introduce me to the boys of our party. This is a devilish good opportunity, and I want to make the most of it. The captains ought to be able to do some good work among their men here and after they get home."

The veteran sagged back on the governor's arm; his resentment showed in his sullen countenance and blinking eyes.

"I want 'em to carry the gospel, Wade. We can cover a lot of ground with these boys."

"I hate to see politics taken into the guard," muttered the general.

"They're voters, aren't they? I don't ask 'em to parade around their districts in their uniforms."

"With all due respect, governor, I honestly believe it's poor policy to bring up politics at camp. It is mixing in something which doesn't belong here just now. You are here as commander in chief. To talk politics to the men is

—is——"

"Well, what is it?" demanded the governor sharply.

"It's taking advantage of your position."

"I'm glad I have a position from which I can gain advantage, Wade," his excellency declared, with vigor. "The other gang would like to have the same advantage. You are merely playing war down here, but my politics is the real thing."

They passed headquarters on their way into the company streets. General Wade removed his cap when they crossed the line before the colors. Governor Thornton did not bare his head; he was energetically censuring his adjutant general for lack of political enthusiasm.

"I want you to wake up, Wade," he insisted. "Remember that I appointed you to this office you're holding."

"I wasn't told that I was expected to dabble in politics, sir."

"It wasn't necessary to tell you—it goes without saying. And the men who hold office in my administration are not expected to *dabble*, I'll have you understand! They are expected to peel off their coats and pitch in and *work!*"

At sight of the commander in chief an officer rose from his camp chair, saluted, and stood at attention before his tent.

Governor Thornton broke in on a stammering and rather grudging introduction by the adjutant general; the interruption was impatient, harsh, and insulting:

"All right, Wade! All right! Thomas, I understand! Captain Thomas. What town, eh?"

"Dixmont, sir," replied the captain.

The governor pulled a memorandum book from his pocket. "Yes, Dixmont—Abel Trufant, chairman of town committee. When you get home, Thomas, you tell him you have had a chat with me and that I have outlined a plan by which you can grab in with him on the legislative primaries."

Captain Thomas did not seem to be overjoyed.

"I am not much of a politician, sir."

"You listen to me and I'll make one out of you."

But at that moment the captain snapped himself around on his heels and listened to something else.

A bugle was sounding a staccato call. The bugler was outlined against the sky on a hill before general headquarters. Even a novice in military affairs would have understood that there was something sinister in that impatient clarion. Immediately other bugles took up the call. One clamored almost in the ear of the governor. Men came leaping from their tents, buttoning blouses, gathering up equipment. Captains frenziedly were shouting "fall-in" commands to their companies. The headlong rush of one squad, moving at double-quick, drove the governor stumbling into an alley between tents, catching his toes on guy ropes. His adjutant general deserted him.

The marquee poured forth its contents; most of the throng were women in summer white; in their fluttering stampede they suggested feathers escaping from a rent pillow.

The adjutant general reappeared in his excellency's range of vision; the old soldier was lugging a gun and was hopping along in the rear of the company led by Captain Thomas.

"Look here, Wade," shouted Governor Thornton, "what the devil does all this larruping about mean?"

General Wade did not halt. He was beside himself with excitement.

"Attack—attack by the fleet!" he squeaked breathlessly. "Fleet has arrived. Surprise attack!"

"And he acts as if he thought he could hold off the United States navy with that gun," muttered the governor. He narrowed his eyes and stared after his chief of staff. "Soldier silliness! It seems to be ingrowing in some men!"

He limped past the deserted tents and stood at the edge of the parade ground and watched the crowds sweep past on the way toward the ramparts and the higher ground of Fort Caldwell. He scowled at their flushed and excited faces and found his own firm calmness undisturbed.

He wondered how sane folks could work themselves into such a state of frenzy over nothing; it seemed like nothingness to him. The parade ground was empty; even the members of the

band had piled their instruments among their chairs and had gone with the throngs.

Slowly a long black cylinder rose over the rim of a rampart; it poised itself on steel stilts in silhouette against the flashing blue of the sea. Bright as the sunlight was, the governor saw the wicked lance of white fire dart from the muzzle; a moment later the earth jarred under his feet and the thunder of the great gun boomed in his ears.

He went across the parade ground into the empty marquee and ate some cakes and washed them down with ice water.

On the opposite side of the highway which bordered the government reservation there was a row of wooden villas, whose fanciful design and frail structure marked them as summer cottages. From one of them emerged a gaunt old man who looked his part, even as the summer cottage betrayed its character by its façade. His sweeping mustaches and his narrow chin beard were frostily white; the tails of his frock coat flared as the wind caught them; he wore a broad-brimmed hat. One felt like accosting him with the title of colonel and inquiring how were all the folks in Ca'lina.

He crossed the highway, came upon the parade ground, and limped toward the marquee with a gait which much resembled that of Governor Thornton; he saw the governor busy at his al-fresco lunch and entered.

Over the rampart other great cylinders in the various batteries, mercilessly slow and precise, belched and sank back upon their concrete beds.

"A damnation nuisance, sah!" exploded the gentleman from the cottage.

"You're right," agreed his excellency, scratching crumbs from his beard.

"I am up here from my home—home in the South, sah. For my nerves—by physician's orders."

"Glad to have you in our State," said his excellency cordially.

"But I am not glad to be here, sah. I hired that eggshell cottage across there on account of the scenery, because I have easy access to the water—I en-

joy deep-sea fishing; it calms my nerves. And three times while I have been fishing, the howling shells from those damnation guns have narrowly missed me. Good for my nerves—what!”

“Why didn’t you come ashore and _____”

“I did come ashore, sah! I complained—and a Southern gentleman understands how to make his complaint effective. And I was merely told to keep off that part of the ocean—it’s reserved for target practice. And now, after all those weeks of practice—service charges, sah, powder wasted—God only knows how much—cracking plaster in my cottage—breaking dishes—throwing down pictures from the walls—I say, after all the infernal racket, now comes this. Breaking more dishes, cracking all the plaster which has not been cracked! I shall go home and report that this State is no place for summer sojourners, sah. I consider it my duty to do so. This State advertises widely for summer folks—offers a home! What does it give them? Bedlam, sah!”

“There are plenty of other places in our State,” declared his excellency, with some stiffness.

“A gentleman has the right to select his location as suits his tastes and his convenience, sah! And when he has settled he has a right to demand that he be left undisturbed. I do not concede to anybody the right to tell me where I shall reside or to disturb me after I have settled.”

“However——”

“The situation doesn’t admit of a however.”

Governor Thornton was no more a cherub in point of impatient temper than his Southern caller. But he held himself in. He was governor of a State which held out inducements to tourists and needed the money.

“I am of the same opinion as you about this folderol,” he stated. The folderol had settled into awful din. At each earth-jarring and ether-rocking discharge he teetered. “It’s money wasted. There’s no sense in it. We

can lick the whole world if it comes to a pinch—and we don’t need to practice up ahead. We licked the English, we licked the Spanish, we licked the South, and——”

“I beg your pardon,” broke in his caller, with acerbity. “I am Jasper Lithgow, of Georgia, sah, brevet major, late of the Confederate army.”

“I am glad to meet you, major,” returned his excellency, undisturbed. “My name is Thornton—I’m the governor of this State.”

Major Lithgow fixed his eyeglasses more firmly on his nose and looked the governor up and down with something of the air of a man who resents an attempt to hoax him. This individual of the rumpled attire, seamed face, and uncouth demeanor—a straggler whom the major had found devouring the remnants of an official tea function, he certainly did not resemble any governors with whom the gentleman from the South had been permitted to come in contact. But his excellency was entirely oblivious in the matter of the major’s doubts. Probably he mistook the other’s amazed silence for perturbation in the presence of greatness.

“What this country needs to consider first of all, sir, is business. We have had our little scraps, we have shown the world what we can do when we pull up our sleeves and double our fists, and now we ought to settle down to business for keeps. I hope you agree with me.”

“There’s honor to be considered, sah!”

“Well, consider it! But keep on working. That’s the real patriotism. The most patriotic thing a man can do is to build up business and develop his country. A man who lets this country be pulled into a row isn’t patriotic—he’s a traitor. If other nations come up to our fence and make faces, best thing to do is to turn around and keep right on with our digging—turn our back and keep digging.”

“Permit me to observe, sah, that the attitude might be provocative.”

“They’re going to think twice before they kick *us*! As to war—well, didn’t

you Southern fellows get your belly full when it was going on?"

Major Lithgow exhibited frigid indignation.

"I know you did," insisted the governor. "I took a swing down around your way after the war was over. You had to dig out from under a scrap heap and start all over again. You have done well—have come along fast—I'll admit that. But think where you'd have been to-day if you hadn't pulled that war onto yourselves."

The words were bad enough in their way, but the governor's coarsely patronizing tone was insult infinitely worse. The major licked his trembling lips and seemed to be groping in his soul for fit speech.

"As governor of this State, I have noted what you say about this infernal racket. I'm going to take the matter up with the business organizations. Such performances are calculated to drive tourists away. If you will write a letter to me on the subject, I will make it public."

His excellency popped a macaroon into his mouth and drained a glass of water.

Major Lithgow was plainly unconvinced as to the identity of this person; he glared with the withering gaze he would have bestowed on a proven and audacious impostor.

"I don't blame you for not trying to keep up a conversation here in this hulloaloo," proceeded the governor, after he had paid his respects to a few more cakes. "Call on me any day this week at the Holland House. Glad to see you. Will try to show you that this State and the folks in it are not as crazy about this popgun business as this crowd here would lead you to suspect."

He was interrupted by the arrival of a man in chauffeur's dress who came running across the parade ground.

"Miss Thornton has sent me——"

"Who in the devil sent you *off*—leaving my car?"

"I wanted to——"

"Well, I want to get into the city, away from this riot. Swing my car around here—hiper your boots, now!"

His excellency gathered another handful of the cakes and hobbled out of the marquee.

The chauffeur brought the car, leaped down, and opened the door of the tonneau.

"I am sorry, sir, but the ladies——"

"You can come back after the women. Let 'em stay out here with the rest of the fools till they get enough of it," snapped the master.

The man touched his cap.

"Very well, Governor Thornton."

Major Lithgow watched the car out of sight.

"So he is—what he said he is! Well, I'll be——"

CHAPTER II.

Cates, colonel commanding the artillery district, had made his favored guests comfortable in hammock chairs on the terrace before general headquarters. The big red building shaded them.

Around the range finders and the outspread charts were grouped the staff officers of the regular troops on station in the district.

Telegraph men were busy at their keys, transmitting the details of gun elevation and direction to the far-distant forts on the harbor's islands; the ticker slowly unreeled its tape. On that terrace was the principal ganglion, the brain and nerve center of the artillery district; from there the cables radiated. Every one of the hundreds of great guns—some of them ten miles distant—were loaded by command from that terrace, were lifted and aimed and fired by the central intelligence. Men in pits and behind parapets toiled without beholding the enemy.

Seaward, the horizon line was mellowed by summer's haze. In that haze crept gray shadows, carefully spaced. It was the fleet.

"You understand, of course, that this daylight attack is more especially a spectacular show than an engagement in accordance with tactics," explained Colonel Cates to the visiting congressman.

"Exactly! A bit of a show for pub-

lic consumption," agreed the congressman, with the air of a man who knew just what the public needed. He looked into the empty chair at his side—the central chair of the row—a chair ostentatiously reserved. For the tenth time he inquired of nobody in particular: "Where's the governor? He ought to be here."

"We have only the sixteen-inch guns in play at present, congressman. Those ships are nearly fifteen miles distant, but at that range we are registering hits."

"Exactly! A matter of figuring, eh?"

"Necessarily, since we are firing blanks," said the colonel, with a smile.

"I don't see why Thornton doesn't get along." The congressman stood up and peered anxiously in all directions, turning his back on the sea and the fleet.

"They have not attempted to reply as yet," went on the colonel. "They have the guns to cover the range, of course, but it would be a tactical error to give us reply at their distance; they must attack earth and concrete, and their shells would lack penetrative power if fired from their present location."

He took advantage of the congressman's preoccupation to step across to the chart table.

"The primary battery of Fort Scott will now fire," he stated, returning. "The fleet is now making an evolution in order to render their big guns effective. As soon as they swing in nearer we shall put in play our secondary batteries and the mortars."

"Right you are, colonel; give the folks a good show," agreed the congressman. "I wish the governor would hurry along. Can't you send an orderly or somebody? I have a few matters I want to discuss with him. I had planned on this opportunity, you understand."

The colonel dispatched a soldier.

The gray shadows followed their leader in a huge curve which brought them into clearer view; even their spidery fighting tops were revealed. The concerted roar of their broadsides came booming in from the sea. The sec-

ondary batteries of Fort Caldwell joined the ear-splitting, earth-jarring chorus, and the island forts went into the game with all their vociferousness.

"Something like the real thing—this is!" commented Colonel Cates gleefully.

"Too blamed much like it," muttered the congressman, his fingers in his ears.

"Better stand on tiptoe and open your mouth," suggested the colonel. "It's a precaution to save the eardrums."

The congressman obeyed and seemed to feel an orator's embarrassment in finding himself on his feet before a crowd with his mouth open and no words issuing from it.

Below, in the pits, toilers in overalls were wheeling out trucks loaded with bags of powder. The big guns uprose lazily, spat, and sank back, and eager hands twirled the levers of the breech-blocks and then fed fresh powder into the smoking apertures.

The congressman teetered on his tiptoes. His attitude became torture.

"If the governor comes, tell him I'll wait for him down at the marquee," he said, nudging the colonel to get that gentleman's attention. "This is a little too much for me."

Colonel Cates went back to his task, plainly relieved because he was obliged no longer to be nice to a gentleman who required attention because he had a hand in voting for army appropriations.

The onlookers had disposed themselves variously. The ladies of the governor's party had a section of terrace to themselves, but in spite of the vantage point it was plain that they were not enjoying the exhibition overmuch. But the governor's lady, showing the heroic spirit of a martyr, remained in the place to which she had been ushered, for she had been trained to obey the mandates of committees of reception. Her daughter was not so amenable to discipline.

She wound her dog's leash around her hand and rose.

"I think I will go back to the car, mother, if you'll permit. This noise is hideous!"

"Very well, Aileen. And find out

why Wallace has not delivered our errand to your father." Mrs. Thornton was anxious and a bit querulous.

The crowds had blocked the near way to the parade ground, and the girl was obliged to make a considerable detour. She walked along in front of the massed populace, and, having left her party, passed unrecognized as the governor's daughter.

The spirit of utter perversity animated the excited dog; he ran, he leaped, he swung in wide arcs, straining at the leash; he had conquered a mere chauffeur that day; he displayed little respect for the decorum of his mistress.

He swept against the legs of a gentleman who was intently scrutinizing the fleet through field glasses. When Miss Thornton called sharp command, the dog leaped back to her and the leash noosed the gentleman's legs. She threatened the culprit with her parasol, and he made another leap, and then the gentleman was a captive, fast and sure.

He lowered his field glasses and made amused survey of his pinioned legs; the dog stood still and blinked up amiably, mouth wide open and dripping tongue lolling to one side.

Then the gentleman's brown eyes, full of twinkles, took note of the confused mistress. He raised his hat.

"I am sorry," she said. "He is unruly." She perceived that the captive was unable to move his feet, and she was about to walk around him, but he reached for the end of the leash, took it from her gently, and extricated himself.

"I thank you," she said, when he had again put her property into her hand. "And I apologize for Batsie."

He saw that the face under the broad hat wore a very pretty flush, and she perceived, when he lifted his hat again, that his hair was touched with gray at the temples. So they parted.

"Hi, everybody!" warned a bystander in shrill tones. "Up on your toes! Fingers in your ears! The mortars are going!"

The huge oval pit, grassed within with velvety green down to the granite of the substructure, yawned only a few

yards from the scene of the chance meeting. The crowd had not been taking thought of the mortars. That pit seemed as innocent as a sunken garden.

The governor's daughter obeyed the impulse suggested by the voice and followed mechanically the movements of the crowd about her. Her fingers went to her ears--and she dropped the end of the leash. A sparrow was skimming in spirals at the edge of the pit, near the turf. The dog yelped and started in pursuit, over the rim of the pit and around and around the grassy bowl, descending deeper at each turn.

"Good-by, Fido!" commented an irreverent onlooker. "That mutt is spoken for!"

A hundred voices were joined in appeals to the romping animal to "Come out of there!" Shrill whistles were threaded in the uproar. But the heedless terrier continued the pursuit.

The gentleman of the field glasses had ventured a following look full of respectful interest as soon as the lady of the contretemps had passed on her way. He saw the escape of the dog. He understood the distress on her face when rude voices predicted what would happen to "Fido." It was plain that he was either a man of prompt and determined action or else was subject to the vagaries of sudden impulse. He handed his field glasses to the nearest man in the crowd and leaped over the rim of the pit.

"Good Jericho! That man doesn't understand what the concussion amounts to in that pit!" gasped a bystander to his neighbor.

"He is Hart Marston, lieutenant commander of the State naval militia, and I reckon he does," stated the other.

The frolicking dog was deep in the pit; the rescuer slid down the grass like a venturesome ski expert, grabbed the fugitive by the scruff of the neck when Batsie came in reach on his scampering circuit; then he began to struggle up the slippery slope.

The mortars were operated in broadside by one touch of the spark. The operators had retired to the sound-proof casement and were not observers

of the intrusion. Before Marston reached the rim of the pit the mortars volleyed their tremendous blast. The earth rocked and the adventurer fell on his face; but he rose promptly and staggered up and over the edge. Then he walked to the young woman and he was smiling, though his face was pale. He carried the dog under his arm and gave it into her possession.

"Are you hurt?" she inquired, with wistful apprehension. He did not reply, and she repeated the question several times, her tone more wistfully appealing.

"I think I have been made a little deaf for the moment, but I'll be all right presently."

"You should not have risked so much for this wretch," she cried.

"It was not so much for the dog's sake—considered as a dog," he returned dryly. "But I know how much one becomes attached to a pet animal. I am glad I could serve you."

"May I know who has rendered this service?"

"Your desire is a compliment. I am Hart Marston."

"I am Aileen Thornton," she said, careless of listening ears. She felt a little, feminine prick of wounded pride because he gave no sign that he recognized her identity.

She added: "My father is Governor Thornton."

He was frankly surprised and showed it, glancing from right to left in order to discover her escort; she understood the quest of his eyes. She smiled when his gaze returned to her.

"I ran away from our party; the gentlemen were—were looking the other way."

There was a touch of provoking humor in her tones. He replied in kind:

"There's a fine spectacle out there, Miss Thornton, I'll admit, but, after all, sunflowers should obey nature and keep always turned toward the sun."

"But in the case of bachelor's buttons——"

"Perhaps I can answer with some authority for them—at least I can reply for myself. In this fashion: Will you

grant me the honor of serving as your escort until a more worthy one presents himself? The crowd is rather troublesome."

"It is," she confessed. "I have come so far out of my way I hardly know where our car is. It is off somewhere—that way." She made vague motions.

"I believe I know; I saw your party arrive; I was on the hill, here."

He recovered his field glasses from the citizen, joined her promptly, and they walked away together.

They were fronting the west, and the sunlight was frank; he stole glances at her face and decided that she was under twenty. She grasped her own opportunities for observation and was quite sure that he was over forty, though his face was unlined. He was very erect, and his legs were straight; she had noticed them during the episode of the leash. They did not hurry, but even in their leisurely pace she saw that he walked with the snap of youth.

Yes, he might be forty, she reflected, glancing at the gray of the temples, but there was youth in his manner. As they walked on they chatted, and she found buoyancy in his tones and lively humor in all his discourse. He was so wholly at ease with her at once! She had been annoyed by the stiff deference paid her by the politicians who composed her father's staff and by the smug toadying by their womenfolk. Association with these persons and bored attendance at a few receptions had been her only social experience since her return from college in the early summer. In former years she had spent her vacations traveling with her mother; her own State was a strange land to her. She found herself wondering just who was this alert, well-mannered, witty, and plainly cultured gentleman who had volunteered as her squire.

Her own viewpoint on life was that of amused tolerance. She knew how to laugh. He found her a stimulating audience. When they arrived at last where motor cars were parked, she was conscious that he had not uttered one trite, mawkish, or banal commonplace. And he was deciding in his own mind

that she was an especially bright girl—she was so quick to catch a point and so plainly appreciative—there is always subtle flattery in a woman's laughter when it is *with* one and not *at* one!

A strange idea came to her when she looked at the gray in his thick hair: how proud of him she could be were he her father! However, that idea came naturally. One of Aileen Thornton's secret mental quests for many years had been the pursuit of "picking out a father." Rather it was molding a model in dream shape than selecting an actuality in the flesh. She intended no derogation of Rutillus Thornton. She was too loyal and good a daughter to make comparisons where he was concerned.

Years and the uncouth manners of the old and stubborn had removed her father so far from her that she unconsciously ticketed him as her grandfather—to be borne with and humored. In innocent dreamings she pictured a father who would be elder brother, almost, instead of father—a gay, debonair chum—a being who would flash and sparkle when he appeared to her in her circle of girl friends—who would stir envy in every girlish heart—who would be nice to all her young friends, but who would put his arm about her waist and draw her away from all the others, saying: "Now, dearie, just we two, alone!" There had been two extremes in her father building—the man of letters, pale, smiling, sensitive—preferably a great poet, who would consent to pen lines in the albums her girl friends brought timidly. On the other hand, there was the heroic figure—the general, the admiral! She had never been quite able to decide. Therefore her mind was still open. She looked at Marston, in the flesh, and almost decided that he would be satisfactory compromise between her and her dream characters, for here were wit and physique.

However, one cannot listen and laugh all the time.

Miss Aileen arrived at a serious moment when she searched through the ranks of the automobiles. Their car

was not there—Wallace was not there. And the marquee was empty. She walked over there at the suggestion of her ideal father, who doubtless would have been considerably astonished to know that he had been adopted in that fashion by a charming girl.

She came from the tent and stood in the sunshine. Here and there in front of her were scattered cakes. The dog reached and nuzzled for them. She pointed to them with her parasol, calling Marston's attention, and laughed merrily.

"I quite believe that I have happened on my father's trail," she explained.

Marston cocked his eyebrows in mute query and did not seem to understand. Nor did the daughter explain; she set her white teeth over her lower lip and frowned, as if chiding herself for the outburst.

"Perhaps his excellency has gone back to the city; he may have been called," suggested Marston.

"Perhaps so," she admitted. Her flush deepened as she remembered the empty chair on the terrace and took thought of other examples of her father's brusque tactlessness.

"I have many friends here who own cars, Miss Thornton. If you will permit——"

"My father will send our car back for us—at least he will do that," she broke in, unable to keep resentment from her voice. "But there comes Mrs. Bates."

Three ladies were crossing the parade ground on their way toward the cars.

"Probably she has become as tired of this noise as I am. I am sure she will find room for me." She extended her hand in frank and friendly fashion and he took it. "I thank you, Mr. Marston. It has been a bit unconventional; but I hope we may meet again."

"You are very kind," he said gratefully. "For my part, I hope so." He stooped and patted the dog. "I thank you, Batsie, for your very gracious introduction. You see, I remember his name," he told her.

He stood with bared head when she

departed. He heard Mrs. Bates' cordial greeting and eager proffer of conveyance, and then she turned and looked in his direction, plainly prompted by some remark from the governor's daughter. Mrs. Bates fluttered her fingers in token of recognition by a friend and then the car carried them away.

"A charming child," commented Lieutenant Commander Marston, on his way back to the hilltop.

Miss Thornton asked no questions of Mrs. Bates; that chatty lady did not need the corkscrew of query. Her information was not imparted in categorical fashion. However, before the governor's daughter reached the city she realized that she knew considerable about one Hart Marston. His grandfather had been war governor of the State; his father had come home from the war a brevet brigadier general, and had tried to manage the family fortunes and had failed lamentably.

Mrs. Bates was a little vague on matters of business and did not know just how it had happened; she depended on scattered recollections of what her husband had told her about the Marston family. Somehow, as she remembered it, while the amiable and unsuspecting general was busy writing books about the war—he seemed to be all wrapped up in that subject—some cheating speculators took advantage of him behind his back and stole all his money. It was something like that! Her husband knew all about it, for he was in business himself; and he always said that a business man ought to be downtown at eight o'clock in the morning, with a club in each hand and an eye in the back of his head. And it was too bad about Hart Marston—so polite and so popular, but so poor! All the men did speak so nicely about him. But he just would not practice law so as to make the most out of it. Mrs. Bates had heard—per husband—that Hart Marston did not get big cases because folks who went to law with lots of money to spend wanted lawyers who would go at folks in savage style and would play just as many tricks as the other side tried on. And

there was that case—she had forgotten the names, but two men were sent to State prison for robbing a bank—and they had been in General Marston's regiment, and Hart just simply wasted two whole years in proving that they were innocent—and they hadn't a cent to give him. More than that, he went down into his own pocket to help their families. Oh, of course that's a nice spirit and all that, but it isn't what the real successful men do.

If it were not for the estates he managed for two or three old gone-to-seed families who made their money in the West Indies trade at the same time Governor Marston made his, Hart Marston would hardly get along at all. And Mrs. Bates, quoting business husband, said that Hart did not take half the pickings from the estates he was really entitled to take.

Miss Thornton found herself feeling rather ashamed of her limited knowledge of the paragons of her own State; the fact that a Marston was war governor was not included in her stock of information; her Bryn Mawr education had been followed on lines rather more aesthetically eclectic.

Furthermore, said Mrs. Bates, Marston seemed to be perfectly crazy over the State naval militia which he had taken in hand. Now, if it had been the Hamilton Rifles, there might have been some sense in it; the Rifles were made up exclusively of the West End young men, and their invitation hops were society events. But folks seldom saw Hart Marston in society any more. He just buried himself down in that old armory on the water front, and his militia was made up mostly of young fellows who had been the terror of the city. To be sure, it was nice to have them in off the streets, and he was teaching them all sorts of things, and they did look fine in their white uniforms when he led them in the parades, but really it did seem that he might employ his time better than in running a night school for young plug-uglies—it did amount to that.

"It's strange how I have run on about that man," declared Mrs. Bates. "I

really did not mean to. But somehow, when folks begin to gossip about Hart Marston, they keep on and on. If he had done the sensible things—married money and practiced law for what there was in it—he wouldn't be talked about."

The governor's daughter asked her first question at that point:

"And his love affairs?" It was query in tone of polite indifference. Nevertheless, Mrs. Bates snapped a quick glance at the demure face under the big hat.

"I am not a gossip," she said, rather stiffly.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Bates, I did not mean to imply that you were."

"Furthermore, Aileen, the topic, for a girl of your age——"

"An infant at nineteen?"

"I suppose not—not in these days. But I do not know anything about Mr. Hart Marston's love affairs. Perhaps he has never had any."

"Perhaps not," agreed Miss Thornton—this time very demurely.

"Or, what is more likely, he is very sly," stated Mrs. Bates.

Miss Thornton did not comment.

This, however, she said to herself: "I should not have asked such an indiscreet question about my dream father. Of course he has no love affairs."

When she stepped down from Mrs. Bates' car, she felt that she had a good working knowledge of Mr. Hart Marston's habits and character—enough to enable fancy to habilitate him with the virtues of an ideal.

And then she put it all from her with the impatient exclamation: "Silly!"

CHAPTER III.

The first phase of the war game—the spectacular daylight attack attendant on the arrival of the fleet—ended as abruptly as it began. The flagship signaled: "Cease firing!" The big guns of the forts left off and squatted sullenly back on their haunches. In stately procession, the ships came up the broad channel from the sea and anchored in formation.

Then, relieved of the excited apprehension that his country was in danger, Adjutant General Wade gave his rifle into the hands of a soldier and went to hunt up his chief; a new apprehension had replaced the old one with which he had been concerned during the attack: How would his excellency view that precipitate desertion? The adjutant general could not find his chief in order to inquire. The governor's chauffeur, returning from the city, told the adjutant general that the governor had been left at the hotel, and the general called timorously by telephone. The clerk in charge at headquarters in the Holland House stated that the governor was closeted with the chairman of the county committee; urged to inform the governor that dress parade and inspection would occur at "colors," he brought back word that his excellency regretted that he would not be able to attend the function. General Wade was fully acquainted with his chief's style of language, and that report did not sound plausible; he suspected that the clerk had returned an apocryphal answer because of timidity in demanding audience.

"This is important; it's official," insisted General Wade. "Did you explain that I was calling? And just what did he say?"

"If you want his exact words, he said: 'I haven't any time to waste on that flubdubble! And don't come knocking on this door when I'm busy.'"

The general hung up. He was convinced that the governor's refusal was authentic.

Worry was mingled with his resentment. His position was appointive, subject to a governor's whim. He knew that he had repeatedly failed to come up to Governor Thornton's expectations in regard to political activity. And that day the governor had flung at him something very like a threat. Therefore, after the general had girded on his sword in readiness for dress parade, he sat on his camp stool and stared down at the cracks in the floor boarding and was in a solemn mood. The honor of his position gratified every

ambition he had ever entertained; on every place where pride might itch he was comfortably scratched. But now he cowered behind his tent flap, wondering how he could make his captain's pension do for himself and his old wife; pomp and circumstance had been using up his salary of three thousand dollars. He understood the touchy nature of the tyrant when political exigency arose.

Over at headquarters, in the Holland House, a conference had revealed political exigency, according to the view the governor took of the situation. General Wade's depression would have been more profound had he been able to listen in.

Chairman Stokes was finishing his oral report of conditions to date.

The governor had been listening with increasing impatience. The grooves in his cheeks deepened more grimly; every now and then he snorted with disgust. His feet shuffled on the carpet and he thrust rude fingers into his shock of hair.

Finally he slammed the flat of his hand on the table.

"See here, Stokes, are you asleep in this county?"

"No, sir."

"I say you are! A mud turtle would make you take his dust; a Saccarap clam would have to wait for you to catch up in a walking match."

Chairman Stokes was sullenly silent.

"The whole State is asleep! Committee after committee! You're all alike. I've been swinging around the counties. They come in and sit down and look at me out of one eye and gap and swallow and grunt. County committee—even the State committee! I see that I've got to run this campaign alone."

A man less self-centered in his brutal self-sufficiency than Governor Thornton would have noted that Mr. Stokes was certainly not asleep. Resentment flashed in his eyes and creased his aristocratic face. He was wholly urban in manner and attire. He stood up and took his lawyer's green bag from the table and returned his ex-

cellency's angry gaze with calm stare of disgust.

"I'll ask you to excuse me, sir. I have to attend an important corporation meeting at my office."

"You hold on until I get some head or tail to this situation here."

That rasping command was plainly too much for Mr. Stokes' self-control.

"Will you allow me to remind you, Governor Thornton, that I am neither one of your river drivers nor log choppers?"

"I know who you are—you are a corporation lawyer, and a good one, and I have paid you a good lot of money in my time."

"For value received, sir."

"But you are also chairman of our county committee, and you've got to give me an account of stewardship."

"I have done so, sir, to the best of my ability."

"And a punk showing it is! Nothing done, nothing——"

Chairman Stokes understood what was due from him as a party wheel horse, but the goad had been applied too brutally. He broke loose from all the straps of duty, deference, and discipline.

"Just a moment, governor!"

"You let *me* talk, Stokes!"

The lawyer whacked his green bag on the table.

"You have done too much talking. Your kind of talk may go upcountry among the cowhide-boot chaps who are afraid of you, but you can't come down here and hand it to city men, sir." He raised his voice when the governor tried to break in. "You need a little talk handed to you yourself, Thornton. You have been insulting me. You insult every man you talk with. You have rampaged up and down this State, butting into folks until you have made yourself absolutely impossible."

Astonishment made the governor dumb for a moment. This amazing rebellion took his breath away. He tried to bellow the lawyer into silence, but the chairman had the persistence and poise of an angry gentleman with a will and a way of his own.

"You have provoked this talk from me, governor, and you're going to get it. It will be good for you. I'm talking now for our party, which you have put in a hole by your own bull-headedness. You are so infernally unpopular in this State that we're going to have hard work to pull you through. You haven't any perspective on your self. You are such a tough proposition to handle that the committees are lying down; they're discouraged. They can't be blamed; they are men before they are politicians. I'm not sure that you can carry this State."

The governor gasped; this apostasy left him without speech.

"You have insisted on having for your campaign managers a lot of mangy old political hounds who have been running under the party wagon for so many years that they are footsore and no good. They are out of date in these days, governor. These are the automobile days! No more dogs under the wagon! There's another generation to be handled. The younger men can swing things, and they are not with you—they're against you. I'm sorry to be compelled to say all this, but you have driven me to it. You're the biggest load our party ever tried to lug. I believe you're going to break our backs."

The governor got control of himself after a time. This arraignment was hideous, but there was horse sense in his make-up, and this crisp, surely poised, fearless city man had penetrated the shell of obstinate self-sufficiency and touched the sane sense.

"I have never posed as a dude," he said, with more humility than he had ever displayed before. "I have tried to give this State a strictly business administration without fear or favor."

"Oh, I am not criticizing your management of public affairs, sir. But personality has become more and more a controlling element in politics. They are going to put a mighty smooth, fine man into the field against you—the other side!"

"Jeffries is a dude!" snarled the governor.

The lawyer smiled tolerantly and was silent.

"I was elected by over thirty thousand plurality," insisted his excellency. "They can't overcome it this year."

"But you have been governor for a year and a half," suggested Chairman Stokes, with dry sarcasm.

A dark flush settled in patches over the governor's knobby cheek bones.

"There's such a thing as going too far with your frankness," he growled.

"I apologize for what seem to be personalities, sir. I'm talking for our party. It has a lot at stake. We have had control for twenty years, and it's going to be tough if the other side has the parceling out of State offices."

"They'll never get the chance!" shouted the governor. "I'll never have it said that I dumped my party after twenty years—not if this election costs me a million dollars."

"Money can't buy the State, sir."

"But it can help in carrying an election."

"You need more than money. You need younger men as managers. You need to get in touch with the new generation and you must appeal to the younger voters."

"I have started a movement of that sort," cried his excellency, his courage reviving. "I know politics! I started around that camp out there to-day, brushing against the boys. But that old caterpillar of a Wade was no help to me. Stokes, I feel you are right! You have made me infernally mad, but it has done me good. Perhaps I'm the one who needs to wake up. It's hard to teach an old dog new tricks. I made my money because I knew how to boss men in the woods. I've got to come to a realizing sense that I'm out of the woods these days. I'll try to sneeze and wag my tail, even if I am an old dog."

"There's no need of forgetting your dignity, governor. But you just mentioned General Wade, for instance. A man like that can't help you any in politics. He isn't next to the boys. He is not a diplomat. A real diplomat—a popular fellow—could win votes for

you without ever insulting a voter by direct appeal. Direct appeal is crude, is coarse work. You need younger men—with class, with breeding, with personality, with popularity.”

“I reckon I don’t know any,” confessed the governor wistfully.

“I’m sure I can find some.”

“Well, name a sample to me—name one so that I’ll know the others when I see ’em,” snapped his excellency, with some impatience.

“Um-m! Let’s see!” mused the lawyer.

“If I’ve got to start in keeping pets in politics, I may as well make sure of the right breed before I begin.”

“A half a dozen men occur to me right away, of course,” said Mr. Stokes. “But I’ll pick one who is known to you so that you’ll understand what I’m driving at. There’s Marston—you know him—of the Governor Marston family.”

“I knew his grandfather—and the general. Devilish numbhead in business, too. But I don’t know as I have ever run against the young fellow.”

“He isn’t exactly young, governor. Around forty. But you never think of his age. He fits right in with the boys and the old men, too. He has taken a crowd of young rowdies in this city, who used to run the streets, and has built up the naval militia with them until—so I was told by a navy commander this summer—he has the best trained and most efficient organization of the kind on the Atlantic coast.”

“Who pays him?” demanded the governor. “I know that the Marston family went bump financially. I foreclosed on four pieces of their real estate—made some money, too,” he added, with a smack of his lips.

“Yes, a lot of Marston creditors grabbed in to advantage,” commented the lawyer. “It was pretty much of a sacrifice.”

“Oh, I only ran with the pack,” said the governor roughly. “Young Marston doesn’t get a living out of that militia business, does he? I might offer him good pay to—”

“I suggest most emphatically that

you do not offer pay to Hart Marston for any political services he might render,” advised the lawyer. “All his work for those militia boys is gratuitous, of course. He is a son of his father, all right. Patriotism is his obsession.”

“Uh-huh!” grunted the governor. “But you can’t eat it or wear it! You can’t make a business of it. If this Marston chap is your model party saver, you’d better send him around to me. It may be to his advantage.”

“I am not at all sure how the matter should be broached,” confessed Chairman Stokes. “I don’t know whether it can be put up to Marston in any effective way. He has never been in politics at all.”

“Then what good is he?”

“Because he is just the kind of fellow who ought to be in. He would have a wonderful following. Governor, you need him. But—”

“No buts about it! I’ll get him!”

CHAPTER IV.

Lieutenant Commander Marston had been left guessing as to what part he and his men were to play in the war game. All orders to the State troops had come from the war department in Washington, and no mention of the naval militia had been made. Discreet inquiries at the adjutant general’s office had brought forth no information.

General Wade had hazarded the suggestion that perhaps the militia did not fit in with the scheme. The fleet was a “hostile force” in the game and might be expected to limit the personnel of its men to the regulars; on the other hand, “the web-foot militia” had no standing in the land forces, strictly speaking. For some weeks Marston had been trying to elicit some encouraging word for his disappointed boys.

While he stood on the hilltop that afternoon, his ears full of the uproar of make-believe battle, his eager gaze surveying the magnificent sweep of the battling ships, he found himself resenting the situation on behalf of his men. Hoping for some call to duty, in some

capacity, he had ordered them to the waterside armory that afternoon, and he had come unobtrusively in citizen's garb to follow the affair at close range. He felt a twinge of homesickness when he looked down on two of the battleships at anchor. In past seasons he and his men had taken practice cruises on those ships. That his organization had been overlooked even to the extent of no mention of exemption was rather cruel oversight, he pondered. He flinched when his friends put questions to him about the matter.

There was vague hope that the fleet might communicate something through the adjutant general after its arrival in port; there was time to inquire before dress parade. He hurried down from the hill and scratched respectfully on the flap of the general's tent.

No, General Wade had received no word; he remained seated on his camp stool in an attitude of despondency, as if telepathic wireless had brought to him a hint of the governor's state of mind. The general did not seem to be at all interested in Marston's personal gloom. He offered no comment on Marston's observation that it seemed to him rather strange that the naval militia was left out entirely.

"It would be mighty interesting and valuable to us if we had a part in it," ventured the lieutenant commander, after an awkward silence.

"I don't know whether it would or not," blurted General Wade, evidently resolved to nurse his grouch. "We used to know where we were in the old muster days, when the regulars let us alone."

Marston smiled at his memories.

"However, the officers did not know where the men were most of the time, general. It was more of a lark than a training. I was in the guard, you know. Having elective officers means playing guard politics—being good fellows instead of strict disciplinarians. I'm glad to see these maneuvers handled in the good, strong grip of the regular army. The boys are *working* this trip!"

A bugle outside sounded "Assembly."

2B P

The general rose abruptly, pulled the wrinkles out of his coat, settled his sword belt, and marched out, grunting some sort of wordless reply.

Marston followed leisurely and took his place with the crowds who came to witness dress parade.

The low sun shot level shafts which were broken into gleaming fragments on the polished equipment of the massed men. The band made its progress around the hollow square, and its music swept and swelled in solemn cadences.

Then there was a hush.

Somewhere a cannon boomed.

At the head of its lofty staff the great flag rolled its slow billows against the heavens.

Time for colors!

The eyes of all the throng were lifted to the flag.

The band phrased softly, lovingly the first notes of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and the flag began its measured, majestic descent.

Marston took off his hat and gazed upward at the streaming folds with the rapt stare of the devotee; only bits of bunting—red, white, and blue! But his eyes were filmy and there was a clutching ache in his throat—there was almost a sob on his lips.

A soldier stood at the foot of the staff, arms upraised. As the last notes of the music died away in echoes among the hills, he took the flag to his breast, folding it reverently, careful that no portion was profaned by touching the earth.

A girl whom Marston did not know stood at his side. She uplifted brimming eyes and met his tear-wet gaze. Sense of comradeship in a common sentiment emboldened her.

"I always cry like this when they play down the flag," she told him. "I can't help it. I wonder why I cry."

"Don't wonder—not at that," he returned gently. "But if the time comes when you don't want to cry, then wonder what has happened to your love for your country."

He accepted the most insistent of the

half dozen invitations called to him by friends in automobiles and was put down at the armory in the city. But he did not find, within, the disappointment he was so illy prepared to soothe. His men greeted him with suppressed excitement.

"A boat from the flagship has just left that, sir," reported an ensign. He pointed to a big envelope propped conspicuously on the commander's desk.

Marston hastily ripped the official communication from its sheath.

"Good news, men!" he shouted. "We are ordered in our full strength on board the flagship. Boats for us at our landing eight bells sharp to-night. Forty minutes' leeway!"

He rushed for his locker, stripping coat and waistcoat from him as he ran. He pondered while he dragged on his uniform. The delay in giving him orders had been unusual; so was the manner of making the communication—the ordinary routine had been disregarded. It was merely terse notification—he had given his men the entire gist of the orders in his few words. However, the bit of mystery in the thing—this hasty call was mighty stimulating, he reflected. He felt as young as the boys who were furiously preparing equipment in the armory; their enthusiasm was his.

When the launches came towing the cutters to the float, Marston and his men were ready. After they were over the rail of the flagship, he was summoned into the presence of the rear admiral commanding the fleet. He was a small man, and during the formalities of reception he surrounded himself with the dignity which small men so often employ to add to the stature of their personality. But after a few moments his gray eyes, deep set beside his huge nose, began to twinkle. He put aside formality and asked Marston to sit down.

"I offer you compliments on the appearance of your command, sir, as they came on board just now. Perhaps you suspect that I was trying a sort of an experiment."

"I am not allowing myself to do much thinking on the matter, sir. I received orders and I obeyed them."

"Very good, Mr. Marston. I can assure you that the navy department has a very good opinion of your particular organization. All reports have been excellent. It was decided by the board, as a part of the maneuvers, to determine with what celerity a volunteer land force could be mobilized and put on board a battleship without advance notice for preparation. You have acquitted yourself splendidly."

"I thank you, sir, in behalf of my men."

"They show the effects of excellent instruction, commander. But I had another reason for requesting this surprise mobilization." The twinkle in the gray eyes was more apparent. "Also, for the purposes of experiment, we want to steal a bit of a march on the 'shore enemy.' Are you fully acquainted with the details of the coast in this vicinity?"

"I have been a yachtsman all my life, and know it in that way, sir. Since I have been in command of the naval militia I have explored all the coves, reaches, landing places, inlets, and reefs in our cutter. This work I have done wholly from the strategy standpoint."

The admiral was frankly pleased.

"Excellent! Excellent, indeed!"

"In fact, sir, I have spent much time in preparing military charts of this artillery district."

"Differing in any way from the official government charts?"

"I have not presumed to attempt any improvement on the government charts, sir. I have plotted to find possible weaknesses in our coast defense."

"Ah, not taking it for granted that the government has fortified thoroughly, eh?"

Marston smiled.

"I have taken the attitude, sir, that it is not always the best kind of friendship to gloss over all the imperfections of our friends."

The admiral stroked his big nose downward with thumb and forefinger.

"I have given you one reason, Mr. Marston, why I served an unexpected call on you. An even more important reason was that I did not want any information to leak out regarding a pet project I have. Now that you and your men are aboard, I will explain. I am glad to hear what you have told me just now, for I'm sure of excellent coöperation. I have been studying the coast-defense matter myself. Probably on a broader scale than you, for I have had better opportunities. I decided to go a bit more into detail in this war game. So I have arranged to have you and your men assigned to my ship for the sake of the information I can get from local men. Briefly I propose to make a night attack with the fleet, and, under cover of the bombardment of the forts and the city, land a force at some point of strategical importance. You grasp the idea?"

"I do, sir."

"The chain of forts seems to be pretty well linked. The engineers have plotted excellently. Have you found a weak link in the chain?"

"I believe that I have, sir," Marston informed his superior, with eagerness. "My charts——"

"Where are they?"

Marston drew from his pocket a thick parcel of papers, folded in oiled silk, spread them on the admiral's desk, and asked permission to explain.

With an intimate knowledge of detail which evoked frequent admiring exclamations from the master of the fleet, he took the forts in order, stated their armaments, their range, their limitations if it became necessary on account of surprise to depress their guns. He also showed by computations already prepared to what extent they were estopped by natural features from concentration of fire on certain points.

At last, as the climax to which his explanations tended, he put his finger on a spot in his chart.

"This is Beauchamp Island, admiral. It is the weak link. An occupying force could be harmed only by mortar fire—and we have allowed mortar bat-

teries to become almost obsolete. There is bold water to seaward—plenty of water. Bonnet Island is a granite peak and serves as a natural shield to an entering fleet."

"The engineers know it," commented the admiral. "For ten years they have been trying to coax Congress for enough money to blow that island up."

"A hostile navy could establish a land base on Beauchamp Island," declared the amateur. "The entering wedge could be driven in right there."

The admiral took the charts and pored over them one after the other. He asked many questions and he made many notes.

"According to my information, secured by the scouts and the destroyers, the island is garrisoned by State troops during these maneuvers."

"Second regiment of the guard, with six-pounder batteries and machine guns. But the intrenchments are only temporary, sir. Beauchamp doesn't seem to be taken seriously. The adjutant general wanted to give the infantry a little practice in camp, I presume, and he placed it where it would be out from underfoot of the coast artillery."

"Lingering relic of the civilian soldier-excursion idea, eh?" drawled the admiral. "It is hard to slough all the old notions regarding the defense of our country. It may be well to give the attentive public a concrete example of what would happen to troops thus disposed in actual warfare. We are trying to learn something for ourselves and teach lessons to all by these annual maneuvers. Here seems to be an opportunity to teach a lesson which may prevent sacrifice of the helpless in the future when somebody starts to heaving solid shot at us. Infantry forces planted on an island with field batteries, eh?"

Marston's smile grew broader.

"Colonel Barnaby is taking the situation very seriously, sir. I talked with him when his troops were going aboard the steamboat, and he told me that he would defend that island against invasion with his last drop of blood. He

served in the Civil War, and so we humor him a bit in his enthusiasm."

"Since he takes so much interest in the matter, we will meet him at least halfway," stated the admiral, with a touch of cynicism in his dry smile.

"I have been much enlightened by you, Mr. Marston," he proceeded, after a pause. "I compliment you most highly on the work you have done. I'll admit frankly that my original intention was to have you cooperate, merely, with my forces. But you deserve better treatment."

He rose, signifying that the interview was near conclusion.

Marston sprang to his feet and saluted. He felt a strange quiver of excited zeal within himself at the admiral's next words:

"We shall make our night attack within the next few hours. We shall slip our cables and steal out to sea as quietly as possible at eight bells, midnight."

The younger man bowed.

"The especial feature of the attack will be a landing force on Beauchamp Island under cover of our bombardment. I hope to expose a weakness in the defenses and to teach a lesson. I assign you and your men to the honor of the first line—you will lead the landing party, employing the usual maneuvers as to guns and disposal of troops as soon as you are on the beach."

He pressed a buzzer and a marine appeared.

"Conduct Lieutenant Commander Marston to Commander Eberhard."

The admiral put out his hand with cordial farewell.

"I thank you—rather in a personal way—for the information you have given me and which will be so valuable to Commander Eberhard in the case of the marines. I depend on you for wonderful results."

Marston saluted, color flaming into his cheeks, and hurried out on the heels of his guide.

In the tumult of his pride and his patriotism he was making no account of the fact that he had been ordered into war instead of the real.

CHAPTER V.

Four rooms of his five-room suite at the Holland House, that evening, Governor Thornton was devoting to his own special uses; he was entertaining his political adherents. His wife and his daughter were obliged to put up with the limited accommodations of one room which contained two beds to further encumber its narrow space. The apportionment of rooms suggested the governor's opinion of the relative importance of women and politics.

His rooms were filled with cigar smoke which eddied in clouds and drifted in strata. Bottles and glasses were crowded on the sticky top of a table. Men helped themselves unstintedly. The cuspidors were filled with the butts of half-smoked cigars; it was a rich man's "treat," and smokers were not economical.

The governor hobbled here and there, manifestly endeavoring to make his clumsy familiarity amiable. He selected men and pushed them into corners for conferences. He asked questions, sought for information, was polite with a sort of wistful eagerness; the men with whom he talked were plainly a bit puzzled by this new demeanor in Rutillus Thornton.

But his excellency had sat long with his own thoughts that afternoon, after Chairman Stokes had marched away, bowing a cold farewell.

"Bull-headedness," "tough personality," "domineering ways," "insulting everybody," "load on the back of the party"—for the first time he had heard, flung into his face, what men said behind his back.

The governor had pondered. He was not ashamed. He had a coarse man's pride in his own code of manners.

But he had been considerably intimidated by the lawyer's arraignment. Politics did demand some measure of diplomacy. "I'm not a dude, and I'm proud of it!" he growled. "But I suppose I've got to wag my tail a little!"

That evening he was trying his best to wag his tail.

Those phrases from the indignant

lawyer kept grinding in his thoughts—"like a gizzardful of hard pebbles," he told himself.

Therefore his secretary set forth cigars—which his excellency never smoked.

He turned his back diplomatically on the tableful of bottles—he affected serene ignorance of beverages which he never used. He bent himself to the distasteful task of making men feel at ease in his presence—and in many cases this new air of his disconcerted his guests extremely. They blinked at him when he purred, and then they backed away and buzzed among themselves.

Perhaps, if it had occurred to Governor Thornton that women amounted to anything in smoothing politics, he would have had in his wife and daughter. On the contrary, he had ordered them to stay in their room and keep as quiet as possible in order that his men might not be embarrassed by feeling the proximity of women.

His politicians were not embarrassed. After a time and after a number of bottles had been emptied, the politicians became less wary in the presence of this mystifying mildness and meekness; they even took advantage of the governor's apparent humility. They told him brutal truths about disaffection, about workers who were sulking, about resentment of men who had sought office and had been turned down in order that the old men of the ring might be taken care of.

"The party is sick" was the burden of the lament.

Frankness grew more bold.

"I realize that you have found the old bulls easy to handle as you needed 'em," averred one man. "The rings were all set into their noses, and all you had to do was grab with the snap hook at the end of the party pole. You trained with 'em in the old days, and of course it came natural for you to give them the best jobs. But it was wrong policy in these new days of politics. You ought to have remembered the younger men. They have been coming up without your getting a line on 'em."

"I suppose so," admitted the governor. He was reflecting on what Chairman Stokes had said. What was all this new idea in politics? What young man would explain to him and serve as rallying sergeant?

"The opposition is making a play for the young crowd," declared another politician. "They are promising something more than the hind teat of the party cow."

"I'd like to run afoul of a sample of the young crowd," pondered Thornton. "Stokes spoke of Marston."

"There isn't any organization among 'em," stated another adviser. "They are merely running around in circles like young steers, but they will stampede behind the first likely and likable chap."

The governor's soirée had begun late and it lasted long. After midnight, most of the party lingered because his excellency still preserved hospitable demeanor and the tactful secretary unobtrusively renewed the supply of refreshments. He opened all the windows and started the electric fans, trying to dissipate some of the smoke fog.

From far away, evidently from off the sea, came rolling in the thunder of great guns, the volleying detonations blending in a concerted, window-shaking uproar.

"That night attack—by the fleet! They ain't wasting any time," declared a guest, showing prompt excitement and rushing to the nearest window. The others crowded to similar vantage points and thrust their heads out into the night.

But in one man, at least, the spirit of politics throttled the zeal of the patriot hearing the call to arms. He took the governor by the arm and led him into a corner.

"That noise out there reminds me that there's opportunity for a lot of lively electioneering in the guard, now that it's mobilized here and in handy reach."

His excellency beamed on this adviser. A politician to whom guns at midnight suggested merely politics was a patriot of the right sort.

"I have made a start already—personally, Andrews. I was at 'em in the afternoon till that devilish foolishness got to going out there."

"I understand. But the boys at the forts are being worked hard by those army officers—are not settled down for half an hour at a time. We can do the best work in the Second Infantry; it's down on Beauchamp Island, and is just loafing. It's what we have been talking here all the evening—get at the young men."

"Exactly!"

"Now what do you say, Governor Thornton, if we take a trip down there to-morrow? It can be official—with your staff along. Then we'll circulate—I know 'em; I'll put you next."

"That's good talk, Andrews! All I had to depend on over at the fort was old Wade, and he——"

The forts began to reply to the fleet.

"And he is no more use in politics than—than a——"

The governor raised his tones to override the din, and then gave up trying.

At last he had found a man who seemed to know what was what, and again that infernal uproar of cannon was interfering with real business. His natural temper asserted itself.

"Shut down those windows—keep out that infernal noise!" he shouted. A few of the men turned and looked at him; the others kept their heads out.

It was a spectacle worth beholding.

All the stars were out in the heavens above, and the harbor lights below sprinkled the expanse of the bay.

Out at sea, vivid flashes signaled by fire the onrolling thunder of the fleet's guns. The forts spat flame over their ramparts, crashing out fierce reply to the attack. The glasses, set edge to edge on the governor's table top, tinkled when the earth-jarring thuds shook the building.

The governor surveyed the massed backs of his guests with increasing choler.

"We are here to talk business!" he cried. "Shut down those windows, I say!"

"It's a mighty interesting sight, governor," protested a guest. "There isn't a better place in the city to see it than right here."

"And *here* happens to be rooms I'm paying for to transact my business in! This isn't any grand stand! Go somewhere else, if you're not going to attend to business."

His angry authority drove them from the windows. Most of them picked up their hats and went away sullenly. The few who remained displayed only resentful interest in the governor's business.

His excellency's secretary came on obsequious tiptoe, though the outside noise would have deadened the tramp of an elephant.

"The ladies, sir—Mrs. Thornton and your daughter have some ladies, and they cannot see from their windows. Would it be proper for them to come in——"

"Oh, tell 'em to come in and join the rest of the gawkers!" said Thornton roughly. "And after they have cleared out of that back room, Andrews, you and I and any others who have sense will go in there and finish this business."

He acknowledged the entrance of the ladies merely by a brusque word and a nod.

"Buttrick," he told his secretary, turning at the door of the inner room, "you get in touch with General Wade at once, messenger or otherwise, and tell him to be here with the staff at five in the morning, sharp. They are up somewhere, probably, listening to this hullabaloo, and that shows they don't need sleep," he commented with venom. "Also, you charter a steamer to take my party to Beauchamp Island—start at five-thirty.

"It's the early bird that catches the worm in the political field," he informed Andrews, closing the door. "I'll get down there before they begin to build mud pies in this war game!"

Mrs. Thornton had overheard.

"Please arrange so that the ladies may join the party, Mr. Buttrick. I will speak to the governor after he fin-

ishes his business," she added, perceiving that the secretary looked a bit doubtful.

"Isn't it terrible!" gasped one of the ladies at a window. Her face was pale and her lips trembled. "One can imagine that it's all real."

"It may be real some day," declared Aileen Thornton. "I am glad to hear those guns and to know that our boys are firing them; for we have the guns and the boys will know how to fire when it's all real instead of play."

She leaned far out and looked and listened, eyes bright and cheeks flushed.

CHAPTER VI.

Marston found the silence grateful after the hideous din of the thundering guns. The night attack had continued for an hour.

The sweating gun crews came away from their stations and stood on the decks under the stars, breathing deeply, ridding throats and lungs of the acrid fumes of the high explosives.

Shoreward, the myriad lights of the city dappled the hills with radiance. The night was without stir of breeze; the big ships rolled sluggishly on the slow heave of the sea.

Marston's earlier conference with the flagship's executive officer, a grizzled commander with three stripes, had covered all the details with scrupulous exactitude. The boat crews had been told off and assigned. The three divisions of the naval militia's battalion were to go first in the big motor-sailers—boats capable of accommodating nearly a hundred men each. These boats mounted three inch guns on platforms—and wheels, limbers, and drag ropes were in readiness for shore service. The regular marines were given motor-sailers, also, and the bluejackets had pull boats—cutters with oars. Three battleships beside the flagship were to contribute quotas to the landing force. The expedition was an adventure in pure tactics, and the numerical force was theoretically able to cope with the regiment on shore—a skeleton organization recruited to half war strength.

In order that the official observation might be effective, the landing was scheduled for early dawn. The approach was to be made under cover of the waning night. After landing the men, the divisions would automatically become companies under command of the lieutenants.

The big ships swung toward the shore line, taking advantage of the bold water. It was decided, for the purpose of more effectual surprise, to move all the boats with oars between the ships and the shore.

The shrill call of the boatswain's whistle cut through the shrouding darkness. It was the signal for which the crews had been waiting eagerly; the boatswain was piping the boats away.

The ladder booms and the davits had been swung out; the boats dropped in unison and the men swarmed down into them.

Crisp orders sounded: "Up oars! Let fall! Give way!" The fleet of boats swept away into the night. Marston, setting the pace, told his men to take it easy; there was less than a mile to row, and he timed progress accordingly.

The slaty dimness of coming morning in the east showed a flush of sunlight after a time.

Marston scrutinized the seaward lines of Beauchamp Island anxiously through his glasses. The tents of the holding regiment were not in sight from the sea; they had been pitched in a field near the steamboat landing on the reach which separated the island from the mainland. The island was almost a mile in width, and the transportation question had determined the selection of a camp site. Therefore, at that hour, the bulk of his enemy was, in all probability, safely and soundly asleep a mile away from the beach where he had planned his landing. He was searching with his gaze for the location of the outposts. Against the brown ledges, hardly distinguishable from their background, he saw a group of men in khaki; they were squatting on their haunches, and from the motions of their arms he decided that they were eating their snack

or drinking their early coffee. They seemed to have no eyes for the approaching boats.

At a little distance from the squad, earth freshly turned marked the probable location of a field battery.

He ordered his signalman to wigwag orders. The trail boats were told to approach the beach in echelon, their guns ready to sweep the hillside. The advance boats made a dash for the beach.

All at once the men in khaki lost interest in their breakfast. They came upon their feet, they shouted, somebody fired a rifle.

The three-pounders in the boats began to bark. The leaders fired one volley, and then the crews hastily lashed the guns to spars and leaped over into the shallow water; men followed with wheels and limbers, and the pieces were assembled with rapid precision. All the time, the echelon formation kept up a persistent fire on the hillside, a maneuver intended to protect the skirmish line on the beach.

All the while the boats came rushing on, the rowers making the water boil under their strokes.

Marston knew his ground; a gully gashed the hillside obliquely, and he led the way. His men grabbed the toggles of the drag ropes and galloped behind him, hauling the guns. The hillside battery began its fusillade, but inside of a few minutes he had a dozen guns replying from the gully, and the marines and the bluejackets were bringing up their equipment and adding to the uproar. Moreover, three machine guns and the small arms were now in play.

The flagship's captain of marines came close to Marston and shouted, flushed and panting:

"It's good work, sir! How do you figure their strength?"

"Less than one hundred men, five fieldpieces, and a machine gun."

"Just my estimate!"

"I'm going to order a charge, captain. Do you agree with me?"

"Certainly, commander. Technically

their battery is disabled and they have lost three-quarters of their force."

The lieutenant commander went with his men. They came out of the gully with yells when he sounded his whistle; they ran, fired a volley, and fell on their faces. Behind them, following the prepared plan, the three-pounders took advantage of this rest and fired over them, guns trained on the battery. Again they charged, fired, and fell. Three rushes took them up the hill. But the guardsmen were not slackening fire in the slightest degree. At each rush Marston ordered a certain proportion of his men to remain where they had fallen—the estimated sacrifice in the charge.

But the stalwarts on the hilltop, it was plain, were not admitting that they had lost a gun or a man. Their fieldpieces were banging and all their rifles were popping briskly, the operators out in full sight.

A captain came rushing from behind the line of the defenders, slashing the air with his sword. He ran close enough to Marston to make himself heard.

"Don't come up here!" he screamed.

The fire which the guns were spitting made farther advance hazardous.

"Cease your fire!" shouted Marston, his indignant tones carrying far. "You are captured."

"Captured hell! We have killed off the whole of you!"

"I insist on the rules, captain. You ought to know them."

"I'll never give up this position! I'll never betray my country!"

The captain's little eyes were as hard as marbles, the froth of the fury of battle was on his lips, he had screamed orders until his voice was cracked, and he was in a mood only a little removed from the mental condition of a raving maniac. Marston knew him and was aware that in his normal state this gentleman was very well behaved as a garage proprietor.

"Give it to 'em!" howled the captain, whirling his sword wildly.

Advance against those lunatics, Marston reflected, was dangerous, and

he resigned himself to the grotesque anticlimax. After signals and protests and appeals, he managed to secure a cessation of firing on both sides.

"Now, Captain Stilkey, get down on earth," he advised curtly. "This is a war game with rules—and you have had a chance to learn all those rules."

"It's my rule to protect my country against invaders."

"Talk sense, Captain Stilkey! I have told off men in the sectors of your fire, and they——"

"They are all dead; the whole of you are dead!" insisted the amateur warrior. "We fought twice as hard as ordinary soldiers would fight. We were surprised. We were set here to defend our country. We have——"

"Captain Stilkey, you have been outnumbered more than five to one—our guns were well placed—this battery is disabled——"

"No such thing!"

"Your folly is delaying us in our march against the main command. I insist that we have taken this position. All our plans will be spoiled unless we can move at once and make the surprise effective. Now be sensible!"

"Betray this position? Be a traitor to my country? No, sir!"

"But this is only play—according to rules. You have lost this position, I say again."

"I don't care what you say; you're the enemy! I take no orders from the enemy."

The sun was up and Marston was desperate. His plan to sweep on and catch the main body napping was in a fine way to be wholly spoiled by this dogged idiot.

"I am going to order an advance, sir, and if you injure any of my men with fire you'll be held responsible."

"Look at 'em; they're picking up rocks!" declared one of Marston's web-footers. It was true; the guardsmen had laid down their guns and were arming with weapons which they considered more effective than mere barking blanks.

"If that's the way they want to fight, they have picked the wrong crowd to

try it on," muttered a lieutenant, junior grade, in the naval militia. "These water-front boys of ours learned how to heave bricks before they were big enough to wear pants."

"Have you no control over your men?" demanded Marston sharply.

Captain Stilkey showed vicious temper.

"Not in a case like this. We are not surrendering to a lot of dead men!"

Marston showed a temper of his own. This absurd holdup was maddening. He knew that the eyes of the fleet were on him; this delay must seem like most unseemly loafing on the job. The regulars at the foot of the hill were showing much impatience.

He turned his back on Captain Stilkey; he gave his men a meaning stare along their impatient line.

"Rules of war are suspended for five minutes," he snapped. "Get busy!"

"We'll show 'em whether we're dead ones or not," bawled a yeoman. "Fists, boys! Down with your guns!"

He caught the first rock which was thrown with the ease of a ball player pulling down a pop fly. He returned the rock and bowled down an infantryman. Then he led the rush. The lines had been working close, and there was little opportunity for much ugly damage by missiles.

In fist work the boys of the naval militia were the abler antagonists; they were nimble, as sailors must be, their arms had been toughened by boat pulling, and every one had received boxing lessons in the armory.

The captain of marines stated, after it was all over, that in a somewhat wide experience in various scrappy ports in the world he had never seen a hundred men licked so promptly and so thoroughly and scientifically; and then the marines sat on them till the bluejackets ran up with marline rope and tied their feet and arms.

As to Captain Stilkey, Commander Marston saved him from any manhandling and offered parole which the captain refused to accept.

"Very well. You are a prisoner of war, sir."

"Go ahead! Abuse me for protecting my country!" blubbered the captain. "But you wait till the old Second comes whooping across here. You'll be swept into the ocean. My message has got to them by this time."

His delay by an enthusiast's folly, and now this taunt, made Marston still more angry.

"I have no patience at all with you, sir. I shall report you to the department."

"This isn't war—tying up my men like calves!" clamored Captain Stilkey.

But Marston had no more time to waste on this exasperating affair.

He conferred with his coadjutor, the captain of marines.

"Of course the main force has been warned by this time. The sound of the guns was warning, but the messenger has carried more exact information. We may be able to substitute another kind of a surprise—an ambuscade in the broken ground halfway across the island."

That plan was heartily indorsed.

A guard was left with the captives, and the landing force advanced in companies at the double-quick, dragging their guns. A detail of scouts went on ahead, leaping as nimbly as rabbits.

They came doubling back, after a time, and reported breathlessly that the enemy was coming.

Marston intrenched behind natural barriers in the broken ground.

He was able to locate his fieldpieces and hide his men in advantageous positions before any of the opposing force came in sight. He was astonished by what he saw; they were not skirmishers advancing with caution. Three officers came pelting along on horseback, making the best work they could of the rough going.

"It's old Colonel Barnaby and two of his majors!" Marston told the captain of marines. "Out here alone! This thing has become ridiculous!"

"It sure has!" agreed his new friend. "Wonder if *they're* in a condition to be tied, too?"

The officers were too intent on steering their mounts past the coppices and

between the bowlders to take careful note of what was ahead of them.

"You are prisoners!" shouted Commander Marston, rising suddenly almost under the nose of the colonel's horse. The effect was more precipitate than Marston had reckoned on. The startled horse swerved, reared, and the colonel slid off the animal's rump while the commander dragged at the bits in an effort to control the brute. The majors whirled and galloped away, disregarding all commands to halt. The captain of marines gave a sharp command, and a volley of musketry followed the fugitives.

"But according to their notion of this game, they have only been tickled in the back," muttered the disgusted regular, beholding the final flutter of the horses' tails.

"My horse, sir! My horse!" demanded the colonel, advancing on Marston and snapping his fingers. "What does this mean?"

"It means that you are a prisoner of war, Colonel Barnaby."

"Certainly not, sir! Certainly not! I am inside my own lines. You have no right to be here."

"We have taken your outpost by assault, sir. We have obeyed all the rules as far as your captain, out there, allowed us to obey them."

"I still insist that I am inside my lines—my fortified lines, sir. I have no official knowledge that you have any right here."

"Colonel Barnaby, this is a war game, and not a joint debate. And by certain sounds I judge that your men are coming." There were frantic bugle calls beyond the woods, and the distant clamor of voices in orders. "We are going into action, and I am obliged to send you to the rear under guard."

"This is a trick—a fraud—a damnable outrage!" furiously protested the colonel. "My place is with my men."

"That is right," agreed Marston stiffly. "You were certainly out of place galloping through the lines of our ambuscade."

"I will admit my possible error, sir, still insisting that you have exceeded

rights and bounds. I will return to my command——”

“Errors in warfare are not adjusted in any such fashion, Colonel Barnaby. I have no time for any more talk. Please retire with the guard.”

“I’ll be eternally condemned if I’ll be bottled in any such fashion! Look here, Marston——”

“Ensign, escort the prisoner!”

“Marston, the governor and his party are coming down to my headquarters this morning. I must entertain them.”

“This little affair on this island today is not a social function, Colonel Barnaby.”

“There’s politics in it where I’m concerned,” pleaded the colonel, growing desperate.

The captain of marines hid a grin behind his big hand.

“You mustn’t put me in wrong, Marston.”

“Colonel, you came in wrong—of your own accord—on board this horse. I have exhausted my patience. Since I have met up with your regiment this day I have been doing more talking than fighting.”

He turned and gave orders in ringing tones, ordering the gun crews to make ready to shell the woods in front.

“Colonel Barnaby,” he cried, swinging to confront his clamorous and profane captive, “you can either start in ten seconds to walk to the rear, or I’ll have you carried there by my men.” He told an orderly to lead the horse into a small ravine.

“I’ll fight this thing with the last ounce of my blood,” insisted the frantic colonel of infantry. “I’m protecting my native soil.”

“Carry him!” said Marston curtly. And the men bore away the prisoner.

“They’re all patriotic ashore here,” commented the captain of marines.

“This country is full of patriots—all built on the broad scale,” returned the commander. “But it’s time we all learned some of the details on the small scale of how to be an effective patriot. After a few more practical lessons we may wake up.”

“It’s what is needed, sir. The colts

are full of life, but colts have to be trained.”

“I’m sorry for Colonel Barnaby—he’s in a ridiculous position,” confessed Marston. “But I guess he needs his lesson in regard to impulsiveness. The war checker game these days needs study before every move.”

He pointed to the woods; men in khaki were appearing. It was a thin skirmish line, and the soldiers were taking advantage of every inequality of ground to conceal themselves.

“There’s good work, captain! The boys know how when they remember to be soldiers.” He trained his glasses on the skirmishers. “It’s Hassett’s company. He has been a sergeant in the regular army. But there come a lot of blunderers to spoil his work.”

Crashing along behind the skirmish line came troops close massed.

“Get into ’em, men!” screamed an infantry officer. “Get your colonel!”

Swift orders went down the line of the invading force. The three-pounders barked and the machine guns added their ferocious chatter.

But it was immediately plain that the main force of the excited guardsmen did not intend to play the game according to the book of tactics. They came on, shooting furiously, exposing themselves recklessly.

“It’s no use,” stated Marston angrily to the captain of marines. “It’s their first war game, and they have simply lost their number.”

“Half of ’em have gone crazy, commander. I don’t think it’s sensible to risk our men. It will mean a scrap again, and heads will be broken.”

Marston’s quick mind took stock of the situation.

In his vigil of the night before he had gone over all points of the proposed invasion, had made allowances for certain checks, and had blocked out substitute plans for emergencies. But what had happened was wholly outside of all his calculations.

“The thing has been all shot to pieces,” he reflected angrily.

But a spirit of grim humor replaced his protesting resentment. If the others

proposed to indulge in lunacy for a time, he decided that he might as well match them in craziness of operation. It would afford basis for profitable reconstruction of methods after it was all over.

He devoted thirty seconds to hasty consultation with the captain of marines. They hurried orderlies in both directions along their lines. Their men obeyed with appreciative understanding—entered into the spirit of the huge jest.

Out into the open space which was then debated by the guns the marines tossed smoke grenades, and behind this wall of opaqueness they performed their evolutions. Three guns were left to continue the defensive fire and fifty riflemen remained to add to the deceptive uproar. The rest of the invading force took advantage of ravines and bushes and dodged to left oblique on the double-quick. Marston ran ahead as guide, leading the colonel's horse. The meager force left with the guns had been ordered to break and run for the boats after ten minutes if they were able to hold off the infantry by their bluff for that length of time. This was not straight tactics; it was a joke. But Marston had decided that a joke was needed to impress certain facts upon the citizen soldiery.

More smoke grenades were dropped in the rear of this flanking movement; in a short time Marston had his men beyond the woods in a clear space and was leaving the sounds of combat behind. Then the din began to die down; the infantry was in pursuit of the dummy force.

CHAPTER VII.

The morning was well advanced and the sun was high.

A ridge hid the upland pasture from the woods where the combat was in progress and Marston's troops mustered, after their dash, with the good humor which quietness and security produced in them.

The commander gave his men a breathing spell. Birds swirled and

twittered overhead in the bland summer haze. Among the daisies the crimson little blobs of field strawberries peeped, and the men kneeled and plucked and ate with zest. Seaward over the sparkling waves smoke trailed from the stacks of the fleet.

"Ten to one they haven't even left a corporal's guard at the camp," said Marston. He straightened the stirrups and mounted the colonel's horse.

"It's a sunny day for a ramble," said the captain of marines. "It will do the boys lots of good to stretch their legs ashore."

The orders were "March at ease!" and the expedition started off.

After they had crossed the pasture, the daisy stalks snapping across their feet, a lane conducted them to the edge of the hill overlooking the field where the Second's tents were pitched. Hasty survey showed only the cooks, busy at the mess houses, and a few sentries who patrolled the guard lines with gait which suggested their disgust at missing the big show.

Marston whirled his horse and faced his men.

"Attention! Dress ranks!"

There was mock gravity on his face, but fun twinkled in his eyes. The regulars caught the spirit of the occasion as quickly as did the boys of Marston's own command.

"Soldiers, I desire to congratulate you on the completion of an arduous campaign. We have won the victory. To the victors belong the spoils. We will eat the Seconds' breakfasts before our enemies get back. Forward, march!"

He galloped his horse down the hill straight toward regimental headquarters, and his men followed on the run, yelling shrilly. Persons came hurrying out of the colonel's tent, but the commander did not recognize them until he came to a precipitous halt, his horse skating to a standstill on the torn turf.

He faced the governor of the State, his staff, and his ladies.

He had been warned of the visit by Colonel Barnaby, but this peep-o'-day earliness was rather disconcerting.

He dismounted hastily and saluted and gazed past the governor into the dancing eyes of Miss Aileen Thornton. Down the hill scampered marines, militia, and bluejackets, trundling their guns; they halted at his back.

"I beg your pardon, your excellency. I didn't know your party was here."

"I'm glad to see somebody here at last beside our party. What is going on here?" demanded the governor.

"We have attacked the island—a landing force from the ships, sir."

"You mean that you are fighting against the infantry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, why aren't you fighting 'em, then? What are you doing up here in their camp? Haven't eaten all of 'em, have you?" The governor's tone was distinctly amiable. He blinked cordially at the commander and seemed to see humor in the affair. Then he turned on Adjutant General Wade.

"If this gang has eaten up eight hundred voters, Wade, I shall hold you responsible," he said.

"We simply outflanked them, governor." Marston hastened to explain. "We have captured this camp."

"Then I'm in a serious position," stated his excellency. "Prisoner, eh? Devilish nice bunch of State troops I've got!"

"It's hardly as bad as that, sir." Marston smiled and showed a little embarrassment. "It's all hardly regular, I fear, considered from the standpoint of tactics. But there was a mix-up—the plans didn't work out right, and we sort of took advantage of conditions."

"But you have captured this camp! Where are those fellows—Barnaby and his gang?"

"We captured Colonel Barnaby, sir. He was impudent. We left the regiment chasing a decoy body of our men. I suppose they are at the other end of the island."

General Wade's face expressed varying shades of emotion.

"I can well believe it was not regular," he blurted. "It looks to me like pure farce. I shall be obliged to inves-

tigate this affair, Commander Marston."

"I hope you will do so, sir; there are some valuable lessons to be learned."

"All this does not interest me—not now," declared the governor, showing impatience. "I expected to be properly received here by Colonel Barnaby. I sent word that we would take breakfast with him."

"Under the circumstances I trust you will allow me to act as host," pleaded Marston, saluting. He returned Miss Thornton's understanding smile. "I presume I have some rights here as commander of the victorious forces."

"I don't know as I'm so sure about that," stated General Wade, with official gravity. "As you have admitted, this is all very irregular. You seem to be intruding here on State property which is assigned to the infantry and issued through my office."

"With all due respect, I hardly like the word 'intrusion,'" was Marston's reply. "I was ordered in due form by the admiral commanding to make an attack on this island. I have not been recalled from that duty and am still under orders apart from your authority, sir. I claim jurisdiction over captured equipment."

"And yet——"

"Look here, Wade," broke in the governor, "you can do your argument over this poppycock business after breakfast." He limped forward and put his hand on Marston's shoulder. "I have just woke up to what your name is! I thought at first you were one of those regular navy fellows. But your name is Marston, eh?"

"It is, sir."

"Yes, I see now that you're at the head of the naval militia. I don't know much about these war matters, and you'll have to excuse me for being slow. We'll have breakfast with you, sir, with the greatest of pleasure. That's enough, Wade!" he snapped, whirling on the general, who was muttering remonstrance. "If there's any red tape about this thing, tie it onto me, and I'll know how to cut it."

Marston made prompt disposal of his

troops, and fifteen minutes later his bugle sounded the mess call.

He was under apprehension that the breakfast might be subject to some rather startling interruptions if the guardsmen were allowed to return to camp without proper notification of the presence of the governor, their commander in chief. Therefore he sent a flag of truce over the hills, accompanying a lieutenant charged with explanations.

In the minds of those who sat at headquarters mess that morning there was no questioning the fact that Lieutenant Commander Marston had risen to particular and peculiar favor in the eyes of power. The governor asked questions exclusively of Commander Marston—he addressed his remarks wholly to Commander Marston—he had placed the commander next to Aileen Thornton on his excellency's left. And the listeners and the onlookers believed that this favor was shown merely because the commander had presented a picturesque figure that morning and was custodian of the camp, pro tem, by right of conquest.

But the hard and bitter words of Chairman Stokes were grinding within the governor as he narrowed his eyes shrewdly and took stock of Marston. "If this is the kind I need, I'll get him," he told himself.

However, as he pondered further on the inflexible dispositions of the elder Marstons, whom he had known in the old days, he was conscious that he was at a loss what bait to use. "Ramrods in backbone and numbheads in business," the governor reflected.

Colonel Barnaby rode at the head of his straggling and sullen troops when they returned. He was on a horse which had been loaned to him by one of the majors. When he passed headquarters mess he scowled and muttered at sound of the clatter of tableware and chatter of lively conversation. Marston observed this return and dispatched an orderly with a polite message:

"Commander Marston regrets all the circumstances of the case and asks Col-

onel Barnaby to join the breakfast party."

Replied the colonel, in tones quivering with wrath:

"Colonel Barnaby presents his compliments to Commander Marston and adds that he is not hungry."

He continued in this uncompromising mood when the party came out of the mess tent and strolled across to headquarters. The governor walked ahead of his party, with Marston at his elbow; his excellency insisted on continuing the conversation with his new favorite, and was chewing on a toothpick with the amiable satisfaction of a man who had fed well and desired to advertise the fact.

"Well, Barnaby," he remarked, jocularly condescending, maddeningly patronizing, "the web-foot boys seem to have put it over on you for once. What is it you do about prisoners of war—bail 'em out, exchange, pay ransom, or what? Hope you know how to get me out of the scrape I'm in. I've got politics to attend to."

"Has any lunatic presumed to tell you that you are a prisoner, Governor Thornton?" demanded the colonel, in fresh fury.

"But I am," chuckled his excellency. "You were not here; you left the camp unguarded——"

"I have not surrendered, your excellency. I will guard you with the last drop of my blood!"

"Oh, I don't think I need a guardian, Barnaby. The thing has not gone as far as all that."

"The thing has gone too far, sir. We have all been mocked at. I have been insulted by a lot of ruffians. Instead of war on a dignified basis, it was peek-a-boo business! I register my protest——"

"Oh, don't be so infernally serious, Barnaby," broke in the governor, with impatience. "There's no skin off anybody, as far as I can see."

"My men have been beaten up, battered, and bruised—left tied hand and foot by water-front plug-uglies, sir!"

He pointed trembling finger at Marston.

"By men he has trained to do just such cursed tricks," he declared.

"Just one moment, sir!" pleaded the commander. "I must justify myself. The infantry attacked us with rocks, contrary to all the rules. My boys simply made their bigness in a scrimmage which they did not provoke."

"Of course they did!" commented the governor. "Is that the way you make war, Barnaby? Heave bricks?"

The colonel goggled at the governor and gasped; this championship of the enemy passed understanding.

"I have admitted that much of the affair has been irregular," Marston went on. "I refrain from criticism at the present time. But I shall demand a hearing on the matter in order that such irregularities may not happen again in a war game between State forces."

"Exactly," agreed the governor. "Learn by mistakes. I'm growing to adopt that policy more and more myself." He looked at Marston with an ingratiating grin.

"But in this case——" began the colonel.

His excellency broke in rudely:

"What was the order to you, Marston? What did the admiral—I believe you said it was the old He One himself—what he tell you to do?"

"Land a force on this island and capture it."

"And you did it, didn't you?"

The colonel took the words out of Marston's mouth:

"He did it by tricks—by underhand methods—by taking advantage of me—by fooling my men—by——"

"Well, all that is war, isn't it, Barnaby?" shouted the governor. "War as they run it to-day? Anything to beat from cannon balls to poison gas! What in the devil are you whining about?"

"But, your excellency, his number of men——"

"He has taken this island, hasn't he? They told him to do it. He has done it. I saw him do it. I had breakfast with him after it was done."

"But what Colonel Barnaby means,"

put in the adjutant general, "is that unfair advantage was taken by the invaders."

"That is not true, General Wade," protested Marston, with indignation.

"He took the island; that's the main point," insisted the governor, exhibiting peculiar interest in the controversy. "Wade, why are you butting into something you don't know anything about?" It was an insulting query to pop at a chief of staff.

"I do know about it, governor. My position gives me the right to talk."

"And dispute me, eh?"

"But war is a matter for trained men—officers who know——"

"That's right—it is! And it is plain to me that our friend Marston, here, knew just how to get what he was sent to get. That's the main point. That's the whole point. When I have hired men in business that's the point I have insisted on. And war has become more or less of a business in these days. Now shut up!" he bawled, making his tone of insult more emphatic when he checked his adjutant general again.

General Wade stiffened and grew white. He had a job; it was a gratifying job; but his old soldier soul had been goaded cruelly in the past, and now it was lashed into unthinking fury.

"I shall tender my resignation at once," he shouted.

"A good idea," barked back his excellency. "You have got ahead of me. I was going to ask you for it."

He whirled on his heel, called to Andrews, his political friend, took his arm, and started to limp away.

"Marston, I have some matters to attend to," he called over his shoulder. "I hope you'll tend out on the ladies and do as good a job of it as you did in taking this island."

"I am sorry, your excellency, but I must lead my men back to the ships."

His bow of apology and regret included them, but as he resumed his cap he singled the governor's daughter with his gaze for a moment.

His bugles sounded the recall, his men formed, and he led them away over the hill through the sunshine.

"Now we can get down to some sensible business after all this flubdubbe," the governor informed Andrews. "I'm glad that navy sculch is out from underfoot here; the two packs were scowling and growling at each other like bulldogs. Couldn't get their minds on politics with that going on. By the way, that Marston seems to be quite a hustling fellow."

"Sure does, sir."

"Knows the military game, I should say."

"Seems to be up to date."

"Anything in politics?"

"Never heard he had done anything."

"Glad of it," declared his excellency.

"I'd like a man like that in the adjutant general's office, now that Wade has left me in the lurch. It would keep it out of politics."

To Andrews, leading the governor around the company streets of the encampment, that utterance sounded rather cryptic.

CHAPTER VIII.

During the next few days, Governor Thornton dropped that utterance in divers places and in various ears, and the politicians blinked at him as if they were wondering whether to admire him for artful dissimulation or were deploring his folly in his old age. They remembered that Rutillus Thornton had not been in the habit of taking anything out of politics.

The news reached Hart Marston that the governor proposed to keep the militia branch of his administration out of the political game. "Whispering Bill" Saunders, one of the governor's trail snuffers, imparted that information to Marston in quite a casual manner—and then hurried up to the statehouse and told the governor that the matter had been planted according to others.

"I told him that it was more or less hearsay with me, but that if he would inquire around a little he'd probably find out that you had been talking the thing pretty generally, governor."

"He belongs to a family that's gunshy in regular politics. I've known 'em

in the past, Saunders. He would have bolted if I hadn't come up behind him carefully—and he may, as it is! But we'll see!"

His secretary appeared at the buzzer's call.

"Buttrick, get Lieutenant Commander Marston on the long distance for me."

When the connection was made, his excellency was noncommunicative. He merely asked Marston to come to the State capital at his earliest convenience on a matter of some importance, and Mr. Marston amiably consented to come.

He walked in on the governor the next forenoon.

"You know that Wade has resigned as adjutant general," stated his excellency, without preface.

"I did not know it, governor."

"But you heard him resign—stood right there and heard him with your own ears."

"I saw that General Wade was considerably wrought up, spoke without thinking; I did not take the matter seriously."

"Well, I took it seriously, sir. He has resigned." He tapped a paper on his desk. "In order that there might be no doubt about it, I have had him write his resignation." The grooves about the governor's mouth deepened. "I have found that he has been dabbling in politics. That might have been excused in the old days, but not now when the whole country is waking up on the war question."

"I am glad to know that you take that attitude, governor."

"Of course I take it! The political game is all right; it has to be played. But that's *one* thing, and defending this noble country of ours is *another*. I find out that you are very progressive in military affairs. I ask you to take the position of adjutant general of this State and bring the department up to date."

Marston was too frankly surprised to make immediate reply.

"I shall consider it a particular favor if you will accept, sir. I have not acted

hastily. I have looked over available men, and I want you."

"But the custom has been to give the honor to Civil War veterans, sir."

"The Civil War was fought a good many years ago. We need new blood and new ideas, Marston. I know you will accept. You have the knack of this thing, and it's a duty you owe your State."

The commander tugged at his ear and stared at the carpet; the wrinkles of hesitation creased his forehead.

"You haven't been mixed into politics at all, have you?" demanded the governor.

"No, sir."

"I'm glad to hear that. However, I suppose your acquaintance is pretty wide in militia circles, isn't it?"

"I'll admit that it is, governor. I was in the guard for many years before I got interested in the naval militia."

"You're just the man I want," insisted the commander in chief, with vigor. "Can't you see that you're going to have an opportunity for a lot of big work? And don't you admit that the guard needs a good overhauling? Don't be too modest about yourself, Marston."

"The war maneuvers showed that we do need some sort of readjustment to conditions, governor."

"Then accept a position where you can be of some value to your State, sir." He brought down his big hand on his table so violently that Marston snapped his eyes. "Accept, I say!"

"I will take the position, sir."

"Good!" He pressed a button and the secretary appeared. "Post the nomination of Hart Marston as adjutant general, quartermaster general, and paymaster in chief."

The governor stood up and took the hand of his new chief of staff.

"I shall be glad to have you confer with me and submit plans at any time, general. I wish I had the power to appoint you for a term of years. But of course you know that your fortunes end with mine—and there are vicissitudes in politics."

"However, there's no doubt about

your reelection, Governor Thornton," said Marston, with a smile.

But the governor was serious and a bit wistful.

"You have never been in politics and you don't know the tricks they can work, Marston."

"But defeating you for your second term—it's inconceivable, sir. Why, you were elected by—by—I forget, but —"

"By more than thirty thousand plurality, sir. But as soon as a man gets high office he begins to pile up enemies for himself—if he tries to assert his authority. They're mad with me, Marston; a lot of 'em are ugly. I have been governor of this State—that's the trouble. I have kept their fingers out of the treasury; I have kept everything on a business basis. And the result is that they say I'm domineering, I'm not polite, I have bad manners, I don't fit their cream-tart aristocracy. I know what they say behind my back. You needn't blush; you have heard 'em say it. But I never had the advantages the dudes have had, Marston. When I was fifteen years old I was helping my father cruise timberlands. My only schooling was a few summer terms while the black flies kept us out of the woods. Winters I was with the crews. I have walked thousands of miles through the wilderness, exploring for lumber operations; I have slept thousands of nights under the open sky with my back against a tree; and because I had to go lightfoot I ate raisins and I didn't fry my pork—I ate it raw so as to get all the good out of it. I haven't had the parties and the pleasures and the easy-chairs and the down pillows in my life, Marston. I'm an old man now—past the age for enjoying things which human nature really does enjoy. I'm too old to make myself over. Nobody wanted me to be governor; I fought my way to it. It is the only good thing which has come to me in my life. I don't count money a good thing for me; I don't know how to enjoy money. You can see that for yourself."

This outburst took power of speech

from Marston; it rather shocked him as if he had been peering and eaves-dropping. In all that he had heard of the personality of Rutillus Thornton he had gathered that the old man's taciturnity regarding himself was that of the Indian stoic. Sudden, peculiar, sympathetic interest was evoked in the younger man. He looked at the crumpled garments—one trouser leg was caught up on the tag of an old-fashioned, long-legged boot. He had heard many men make mock of those garments of the State's chief executive. Stains were on the vest, and it yawned because it was buttoned awry.

"And so they would like to deal me a wicked stab—a lot of 'em would, Marston! For twenty years in this State every governor has been given his second term—complimentary. But they want to kick me out!"

"I can hardly believe that there are men of that sort, Governor Thornton."

"I suppose it's the younger crowd—the voters of the new generation that has come along. The younger folks are apt to go more on looks than actions. They don't know how proud I am to serve my State well, to serve my party. They don't know how many nights I have spent here alone in this room going over State business so that no department could fool me; I have slept in that chair, betweenwhiles, as I slept in the woods with my back against a tree."

It was a strange, new picture of a man that Marston was getting. All the harshness so usual in Thornton's tones was gone. He was wistful; there was a hint of a quaver in his voice.

"It's the young generation that's coming—the younger voters of to-day who will have to pay the taxes to settle for what we are assuming now for burdens, Marston. I wish they realized how I have studied and have worked to economize for the State."

"It can be explained to them; it must be explained to them," declared Marston eagerly.

He felt a sudden rush of sentiment toward this old man; he did not dare to call that sentiment pity. And yet

it was pity, in spite of the fact that Thornton was a millionaire and a governor. This arid life was so bitterly bare, even with its climax of honor! Marston felt that in comparison his own life had been full and opulent and altogether desirable in spite of his poverty. In his new emotion and in the presence of this old man who confessed and lamented, he felt as if he had been guilty of usurping something somehow, some privileges which had belonged to somebody else.

"I don't know how it would seem to 'em if I had a few real friends to explain for me," said the governor. He walked up and down, limping more than was his wont. "The leg is bad to-day," he told Marston. "I jumped into a log jam once to pull out a river driver—it got its pinch then. As I was saying, if I had a friend! The right sort! Oh, I can hire pussyfooters and campaigners and electioneers and all that ruck of politicians. But it's got to such a point in this world to-day that folks don't take much stock any more in what politicians tell 'em."

"Governor Thornton, I believe in you and in your honesty of purpose," blurted Marston. And yet, even as he spoke with such precipitancy, he was not quite sure that he knew anything of an intimate and definite nature in regard to Thornton, and he did not just understand why he was willing to volunteer as a champion. He was sure that it was not because he had been tendered an appointment. He did not particularly care for the office; the job meant cares in abundance and monopolization of his time for small returns from the money point; his acceptance had been a part of his sudden conversion to the side of this old man.

The governor halted in his march and faced this new recruit; his gaze was a bit quizzical.

"And yet somebody has probably told you that I stole half a million acres of public wild lands from the State by juggling tax titles."

"I don't remember that I ever heard anything of the sort, sir," faltered Marston.

"Then they haven't been sneering so much about it in these later days. But I didn't steal the lands, Marston. I simply beat the gang to it. I got 'em at a good bargain. It's easy to call a man a thief if you're mad at him."

"I say I have never heard your honesty questioned, governor."

"Not even by your own family?"

"No, sir." There was sincerity in the younger man's tone.

"The Marstons were always good sports; never anything else," grunted his excellency, resuming his slow march. "When a man plays business marbles with me it's for keeps, not fun. But after the game was over I've had a lot of men whine to me that they were playing in fun. If they want charity after it's all over, they'll have to ask for charity—they won't get back anything on any other basis."

"I am quite sure that my grandfather and my father never asked for charity, sir."

"I wasn't talking about them; I was talking of the other sort. And I haven't been popular, Marston. I wish I knew how to be—I do! I don't know how. People who have been brought up right and know all the right things to do because it's second nature—they don't understand how anybody else can make mistakes. I'm ignorant; I know it. I do things and they think I'm coarse. They don't know how much blood I'm sweating under this shell of mine!" He beat his fist against his breast.

Again that wave of sympathy swept through Marston.

"I wish I could show you in detail what I have done for the benefit and the finances of this State," cried the governor. "By gad, sir, I *will* show you! I want an unprejudiced chap, who isn't in politics, to understand what I have accomplished."

"I'll be glad to know, sir. Governor Thornton," he went on, with enthusiasm, "I hope you won't think I'm officious. But I understand just how an honest man may be misunderstood. I would be sorry to see foolish prejudice keep you from an honor which is rightfully yours. If I hear men attacking

you behind your back, I propose to make myself heard in protest."

The governor fingered his nose reflectively and looked down at the carpet.

"I wouldn't want you to get into politics, Marston," he protested mildly.

"I don't think that it would be merely playing politics, sir. It would be plain and simple loyalty to my chief." He spoke warmly, and the governor smiled. He went to Marston and put his hand on his ally's shoulder.

"My boy," he said gratefully, "I know you are not offering this service because I have coaxed you to accept a trumpery office. It sounds awful good to me when you say it. I haven't had a disinterested offer of help from a man before in all my life."

"I prefer to decline the adjutant general's position in order that I may be free from all suggestion of self-interest, sir. I'll go out and frankly work for you among the boys."

"The first need in this State is the rehabilitation of the guard. I can't spare you from the office, Marston. I put State affairs at all times ahead of my personal interests, and yet I know you could do wonders for me."

"Then I'll accept the position—and I'll be a man in it and not a politician," declared Marston. "But in order to be a man and loyal to my chief I'll do all in my poor power, sir, to see that you are renominated and reelected. Here's my pledge!" He took the governor's big hand in a warm clasp.

"I accept that service, General Marston. I accept with all confidence that you will operate to help me without hurting either of us. For you have tact. You know how to do it right. I have no tact; I need yours. And if you are willing to add a bit more to the pleasure of this day you will join me here at one o'clock and have your snack with me at home with my wife and daughter."

"I gratefully accept, governor." Marston's cheeks flushed with pleasure.

"I'll send Buttrick with you to the adjutant general's office so that you may begin arrangements for the official transfer."

After Marston had departed the governor sat down at his desk and sighed.

"It's as Josh Billings said," he muttered: "'To be a successful politician a man has got to be buttered on both sides.' Well, I don't believe I'm any worse than the rest of 'em who are operating."

He drummed his stubby fingers on the table in a tattoo.

"He's the right kind of a chap to have on a job. I have seen him operate. Ordered to capture a camp—and he captured it! Rules be condemned! That's the material to make a good politician out of!"

CHAPTER IX.

Corporal John Candage, quondam noncom of the old Seventeenth in the Civil War, arranged the function.

He was captain of the statehouse night watch and usually slept until noon, but his wistful eagerness pulled him out of bed early that morning. He put on his best blue suit—his Memorial Day parade garb, with insignia on the breast. His old wife brushed his Grand Army hat with tender solicitude and saw to it that the cord was settled into place just right; she gave him his clean handkerchief and white cotton gloves, freshly laundered by her own hands.

"It's my own idea," repeated Corporal Candage. "I reckon some of the other boys around the statehouse would have thought of it in due course, but it came to me like that!" He snapped a finger into his palm. "Says I to the boys: 'We'll give him a couple of days to get settled in his office—nor wanting to presume whilst he's too busy, and waiting till Wade gets out from underfoot. Then we'll do it!'"

The old wife picked off the last fleck of lint.

"I hope all the others will look as well as you do, John."

"They will, 'Liza. They're taking pride in it."

They were!

In the rotunda of the statehouse the corporal marshaled his corps and gave

the old men critical inspection; they were all veteran soldiers, employees in the State capitol building, rewarded for valor by employment in the public service.

"'Tention!" said Corporal Candage. He began to lift his feet alternately, marking time without moving ahead. It was thus plain that the function was to be strictly formal.

"Ump! Ump! Ump, ump, ump!" called the corporal, seeking unison. "Left, left—march!"

They tramped across the rotunda's flagged floor, up the broad main stairway, turned to the right with sharp and orderly swing of ranks, and marched through a door which a forewarned deputy had opened for them, straight into the presence of Adjutant General Hart Marston.

The general arose, genuinely astonished, and received Corporal Candage's salute. The old soldier's white-gloved hand shuttled meteorlike in the salute and then dived into the breast pocket of the blue coat. He pulled out a paper, and while he unfolded it he said: "Sir, it being the case that no one of us is ready with his tongue, it has been thought best to put our heads together and compose on paper a statement which stands for our opinion."

He cleared his throat.

Marston waited, grave, pale with sudden pallor, and plainly ill at ease; his quick apprehension told him that the old soldiers of the statehouse had assembled to rebuke him for having broken precedent by stepping into an office which had always been the reward of a Civil War veteran.

"GENERAL HART MARSTON.

"SIR: It so happens that all these men here present took their colors from the hands of Governor Aaron Marston when they marched away to war. It so happens that more than half these men were in the old Seventeenth when General Henry Marston was its colonel commanding. That governor and that colonel honored the State which honored them. And in these days when the country is waking up again to what is needed for its defense it is a grand thing that a third Marston has been put in charge of State military matters by the foresight of Governor Thornton. We have assembled here to say

that you honor the position, and we humbly pledge our devotion, and respectfully thank you."

The affair had so suddenly developed into something so wholly outside Marston's first startled calculations that he was swept out of his usual calm. The Marston family had never been accused of being phlegmatic, nor yet had it been wont to display its emotions to the crowd. But in Hart Marston's case the reverence he entertained for his grandfather and the love growing out of sweet comradeship with his soldier father had become sentiments which he enshrined as holy. Those old men who had come to him had touched the magic key and had reverently swung open that shrine.

They were gazing at him wistfully, and he opened his mouth to reply to them. But he found no words to voice what he felt. Formal response, he knew, would leave his deeper feelings inarticulate.

He allowed the tears to trickle frankly down his cheeks. He went among them, his hands outstretched.

"It's no use!" he sobbed. "I can't stand up here and reply in words. Give me your hands."

Corporal Candage called for three cheers, and Marston thanked him with grateful glance; the cheers relieved the tension of the occasion. Then they sat down around him and pulled off their white gloves and accepted cigars and were unconventionally sociable for the few minutes of their stay.

"We're going on from here and thank the governor for making this appointment," stated Corporal Candage. "It shows that he isn't playing politics the way most folks accuse him of doing—it's going to help him with the folks at large—and it's only right that he should be told and thanked when he has done a good job."

"I hardly dare to comment favorably on your plan," smiled the general. "That would not be exactly modest. But I hope Governor Thornton will be given credit for all the good things he has done for the State."

A grizzled veteran spoke out with intrepidity:

"When a politician loosens up enough to do something for his State and his country out of pure patriotism, instead of figuring merely for himself and his party, he's due to get thanks, general. But you know how it is, even in Washington. It's time for some of those fellows to wake up and remember that we've got such a thing as a country as a whole, instead of just a lot of States and two or three political parties."

Marston nodded indorsement.

"Your grandfather made us a speech the day we started off for the front—we boys," said Corporal Candage. "I cut it out of the paper and saved it. 'Liza has it laid away in her rosewood box. I wish I had thought to bring it. He talked to us about courage. I won't try to tell over what he said. I won't presume to. I haven't got the education to remember his words, sir."

"I can remember one point he did make," said the grizzled veteran, who seemed to be surer of his vocabulary. "He said that it took just as much courage to do right as it did to grab a gun and go howling and cantering in a charge against the enemy—not his words, but that's the gist. And he said he believed it took more courage to do right against our own personal interests than it did to go up against an enemy with fixed bayonets."

"I believe so, too," agreed Marston gravely. He remembered when he had stood his ground and had paid the score when his associates in a certain business venture had taken advantage of a chance to duck and leave him alone.

And he was to remember that conference of this day, with its sentiments, in a bitter hour later.

"There are all sorts of courage," declared old Sergeant Copp, of the state-house elevator corps. "One day at Malvern Hill a Johnny Reb came charging at us out of a piece of woods we had been shelling. He was all alone. We let him come on, for he interested us. He ran right through our lines, past hundreds of us. His eyes were set and

his face didn't have any more expression than a block of wood. But he kept yelling and stabbing the air with his bayonet."

"Crazy," said Candage.

"But if a regiment was doing the same thing it would be called bravery. Anyway, he run himself to death—frothed at the mouth and fell down and died. I suppose a lot of men have got promoted for bravery when they didn't know what they were doing any more than that Johnny Reb did."

The old men were silent for some time; they sat and smoked and narrowed their eyes, beholding certain visions.

"I reckon I'll have to tell of a kind of courage I saw," said Corporal Candage. He spoke softly, as if he were approaching a sacred subject: "I have an idea that we were all thinking of the same thing just now. When a soldier gets to talking about courage, he thinks of the first time he was under fire. Human beings have always fought and probably they always will fight. But when God put life into human beings He put in the hankering to stay alive. And when you're out in the open and hear guns and know for the first time in your life that the stuff they're vomiting is headed in your direction, there's an awful sickness inside you. I was nineteen—that's all. Most of my company right around that age—boys who had grown up together and gone to school together and played together, most of 'em. There was the Delano twins—fine boys. Old Reverend Delano was their father. We all had been wondering what a battle was like; we had only seen pictures, and you know what pictures are.

"Our first one wasn't like pictures. We heard cannons all the morning. But we didn't know what was going on. Then they told us to march—and we marched and marched. Then they stopped us on the side of a hill and we sat there and waited—hours we waited. It looked like they had forgotten us. The cannons were still going and I was finding myself feeling glad they had forgotten us, if thinking of

us meant getting any nearer to the cannons. I drank all the water out of my canteen, my mouth was so parched. It was awful to wait and wait. Then all at once it was worse. Cannons started in right near by—just over the hill. And patches of ground began to fly up. They told us to dig holes, and we dug; that gave us something to do. But the ground was hard and we couldn't dig much. And then they told us to stop digging because we were going to move. I'll never forget how ugly I kept growing all the time. Why didn't somebody come and tell us to go one way or t'other? I kept muttering over and over that fools must be running the thing. I didn't see any sense in a battle like that. And we looked at each other, and pretty soon we began to say things—like a pack of scared boys will scold. About all we had ever done was milk the cows and do the chores; we were all country boys off the farms.

"Then a shell dropped and busted right near. One of the Delano twins was on his back when the dust settled—and his heart was torn out and laid on his face—and his brother was looking at him.

"And then we were all ready to run. We didn't see any sense in that kind of a battle, I say. That wasn't fighting. We were only poor boys from the country; we were ready to run and be disgraced. We had bragged a whole lot about what the Seventeenth would do—how we would show 'em all. We had made songs about it. We didn't sing any of them then. 'Oh, my God!' whined one boy, and he put handfuls of dirt on the Delano twin's face so as to hide it.

"'I ain't going to stay,' said another boy. He whimpered just like a young one who had been told to stop after school. 'I ain't going to hang around here where I've been forgotten.'

"We were all hugging the ground, flat on our faces.

"'We've been forgotten—that's what. All the rest have run away—all the rest of the army! I'm going!'

"'No, we haven't been forgotten,' said somebody, so loud that we could

all hear. 'We're the reserves. We're the mainstay, boys. We're going in and do the big job just as soon as they're ready for us.'

"He walked right out in front of the lines and sat down on a tussock and lighted a cigar. He didn't scooch down on his belly. He turned his back to the balls—he looked at us—and it's a mighty good man who can turn his back on the danger that's coming from behind!

"'I've just thought of a story,' he said. 'It's rather tedious waiting here, and if you don't mind I'll tell you the story.'

"It was a good story. Almost before we realized what we were doing, while he talked on, we were sitting up on our haunches listening to that story. And then he told some more. The first thing we knew we were just as cool as he was.

"If he had run out there and sliced his sword and made a speech and told us to remember our duty and not disgrace our State and all that, we would have only felt that the case was mighty desperate. Like as not we wouldn't have had the courage to stay, no matter how much he talked to us. And while he was telling stories the order came for us to go into the fight, and we did; and we rushed their lines, being mighty fresh and mighty ugly after being their targets so long—and that's how the Seventeenth got a reputation that lasted it all through the war. We weren't scared boys any longer; we were good soldiers. We had learned our lesson."

Corporal Candage rose to his feet, looked up at the ceiling, and saluted.

"And the man who taught that lesson to us—by showing courage of a kind that ain't set forth in make-believe war pictures—was our colonel, Henry Marston. He didn't insult his boys by pleading with 'em to be brave, and he didn't let his boys make fools of themselves."

Marston's emotion was choking him once more.

"Gentlemen," he declared, "I realize my responsibilities now more than I ever did in my life. Please do not mis-

understand me. In my poor way I can add nothing to my family's record. But what has been left to me——" He paused, unable to proceed.

"General Marston," volunteered one of the group, "we know you better than you know us, perhaps. My sister, who is a widow, got back all of her money out of that corporation which was ruined by other men than you—and I know that the money came out of your pocket. That's all I need to know about a man."

"I cal'late that we have bothered the general enough for one day," said Corporal Candage briskly, again relieving the situation. "We will now go and pay our respects to Governor Thornton. 'Tention!"

They all came to their feet as nimbly as they could.

"'Bout face! March!"

The new adjutant general was left alone with his thoughts and his duties.

CHAPTER X.

Half an hour after the old soldiers had marched out of his office, General Marston received a call from Buttrick, the governor's secretary. Buttrick brought a note—a square of paper headed "Executive Chamber," folded carelessly, without envelope. With lead pencil his excellency had scrawled an invitation to dinner that evening at the executive mansion. "No fuss and feathers; family party; come as a friend of the family," he added, under his signature.

Marston, studying the note, reflected whimsically that the social aphorism required at least two amendments in his case.

"We invite our enemies to breakfast, our acquaintances to dinner, but our friends to lunch."

Marston's obedience to the code, in the case of breakfast, had been involuntary—and his enemies had been technical ones merely, eating Colonel Barnaby's food.

The luncheon two days before had been a hurried affair because the governor had business on his mind; the

new adjutant general was certainly not there as a friend; he was presented to Mrs. Thornton, who received him with the tolerance expected from the wife of a public man who is forever bringing somebody home with him. As for Miss Aileen, she seemed to find the plane of the formal meeting much more to her taste than the mild freedom of the unconventional first acquaintance; she made no reference to the first meeting, and seemed to be entirely willing to let her father do all the talking for the luncheon party.

As to dinner——

Marston took up his pen.

"No need to make it formal, general. The governor said word of mouth would be all right."

"My respects and thanks to the governor. I accept with pleasure."

Mr. Buttrick relaxed his official demeanor. He was a young man with a brisk manner, a pompadour, eyes close-pinned at the top of a big nose, and one corner of his mouth had an upward twist which showed that Mr. Buttrick was more or less sure of himself. When he relaxed he propped himself on one corner of the general's desk.

"You probably don't remember me, general, but I used to do newspaper work—political end—and it was my business to know everybody, and I have bumped into you a few times here and there. Oh, just casually," he broke in on Marston's polite apology. "Never had to interview you. Want to add my little mite to the general congratulations. I'm mighty glad the Old Man is waking up and weeding out some of the mossbacks and dubs. He has been lugging too much of the old gang. I have told him so. Something has been happening to him. He's willing to take a little good advice once in a while. He'll take it from you, all right. Let me tell you: you're standing in mighty clever with him."

"I'm not in the political game at all," protested the general.

"Wha's 'at?" demanded the brisk Mr. Buttrick, with a profound wink. "Don't put pepper in nunky's tea!" The secretary was very affable and

plainly felt on easy terms of familiarity with his fellow lieutenant. "I have just drum-majored that battle-scarred veteran procession into the executive chamber, and I heard what they said about your appointment and about you and about the governor's political goodness and general wisdom. And, believe me, the Old Man is some tickled. Why, six of those hornbeams are voters with the other side—hold their jobs, though, because we can't kick out Grand Army men. You're a tidy operator, general, take it from me!"

"I assure you——"

"It's all right! It's in the family! We don't talk outside. I thought I'd let you know that you have delighted the Old Man."

Mr. Buttrick went on his way.

"I wonder if a politician thinks everything in this world between men is figured on a political basis," mused Marston, not wholly pleased by the commendation he had received. Nevertheless, putting his personal case to one side, he decided that if the governor's new progressiveness was viewed with favor even by the opposition, further efforts could not be condemned as mere political activity. Appreciation in high quarters was not displeasing. If the governor thought well of him, so much the better for the adjutant general's department.

He finished his day's work, went to his hotel, and dressed for dinner with a contented sense that the world was going very well with him.

At the executive mansion he was shown in to the governor, evidently by special direction, in a sort of den where his excellency was busy with a lapful of newspapers. His excellency was in his usual garb. Marston, a bit disconcerted, wondered whether the phrase, "no fuss, no feathers," was equivalent to a command from the throne for mufti. But the governor paid no more attention to the attire of his guest than he regularly did to his own.

"I wanted to have a word with you, Marston, before we sit down with the folks. I have been afraid of what the Grand Army boys might do or think in

regard to dumping Wade. You know they're pretty stuffy about their privileges and their precedents. But a delegation waited on me to-day to thank me for appointing you—think it's time to be modern in our military plans—think the country generally needs to wake up."

"As for my part," faltered Marston, "as for me being—I think it was simply a little personal——"

"That's exactly it, sir. It was personal. That's why I am so grateful to you. You have tact and a following."

"But the political——"

"The political part of it will take care of itself when a man has a following. The Grand Army isn't in politics, of course, but the local post in this city is going to send out some kind of a letter—something that will help me. So enough about that! We're coming along fine! I'm glad to have you here in the family to-night. I want you to meet Lesbitt. Maybe I'm a little previous in placing him in the family," his excellency chatted on, plainly in high good humor, "but it looks much that way. Young Lesbitt, you know—Burton Lesbitt, the son of Lesbitt of the Paper Trust. I own the lands where the pulp wood grows, and Lesbitt has the paper mills. The combination is all right, eh?" The governor chuckled. "But for Heaven's sake don't let on I ever told you. I'm letting the womenfolks run the matrimonial department. Guess we'd better be moving on, Marston." He hobbled toward the door, kicking the scattered newspapers in his progress. "And speaking of matrimony——"

He halted and nudged his guest with a rude elbow, and Marston discovered that Rutillus Thornton's humor was of a grain to match his demeanor.

"Speaking of matrimony, we have somebody for you to be nice to this evening—somebody around your age, general. Mrs. Trueworthy! Folks met up with her when they were in Florida last winter, prancing it in society. Widow of Jarvis Trueworthy, the steamship man, and she is rich, hand-

some, and has fallen in love with this State. Eh, Marston?"

And again he nudged his guest and led the way.

The edge was gone from Marston's sense of contented good humor when he followed to the drawing-room. He did not know exactly why. He knew that he did not relish the brand of facetiousness handled by the governor. He was not ready to admit to himself that being ticketed as fitting consort for a middle-aged widow had wounded the ever-verdant and masculine idea that the right man is never too old to be a maiden's suitor. Whether he resented the presence of a young and eligible gallant as accepted escort for Aileen Thornton he certainly did not argue with himself.

He entered the drawing-room, was greeted, was presented, and responded without displaying special enthusiasm in the social amenities. He took in the governor's lady when dinner was announced. She was scarcely older than himself, as strikingly handsome as her daughter; he felt more of that strange discontent when he looked at the mother and found her so much of a girl. Somehow he did not feel his natural and manly impulse of pleasure at coming in contact with wholesome young manhood when he had chatted for a moment with young Lesbitt in the drawing-room. When the governor had first spoken of the rich man's son, Marston had mentally pictured a vapid young cub, sicklied o'er with metropolitan degeneracies. But now, across the table, young Lesbitt, his tan set off by the expanse of linen beneath his chin, his strong brown hands in silhouette against the napkin he was unfolding, was explaining his regret at missing the spectacle of the war game to which he had been invited as a member of the governor's party; he had been in direct charge of the installation of turbines at their Canadian mill and a treacherous cofferdam had delayed the work. Men who could build great works had always been admired by Marston; this young engineer, who mentioned his exploits so modestly, stirred something like jealous envy.

He found himself studying the attitude of Aileen Thornton toward this—so family favor and fortunes presaged—complement of herself. But the young lady was demurely sphinxlike, and he was conscious that he was rather irritated because she was so noncommittal. He would have liked to know—then he damned his mental intrusion into matters which were none of his business.

He turned to Mrs. Trueworthy—and found her charming.

She had heard the Stedmans—the Stedmans, of Washington—speak of him so many times! And of his father Colonel Stedman was such an admirer, and their work in organizing the Loyal Legion had brought them so close together.

Marston beamed on her.

Yes, and her grandfather had also known his father.

Might he be allowed to ask—— He marked her pretty flush of pride when she answered, and understood the caressing tone with which she voiced her reverent affection.

“My grandfather was General Cavanor—I was born Leila Cavanor.”

“I know,” he said warmly; “of course I know. His book, autographed to my father, is one of my dearest possessions.” He turned to Mrs. Thornton in order that he might include her in a three-cornered conversation; after he had uttered his commonplaces he had been at a bit of a loss for further material in her case. There was no longer any paucity of topic—and the governor’s lady displayed appreciative interest. Even the younger folks across the table seemed to find this conversation of more account than their own exchanges, and listened.

The governor took the lead in conversation after he had vigorously cleared his dishes, and while the others ate; rather, he discoursed in a monologue on politics. He continued that monologue after they had retired from the table, and they listened meekly. And when he had said his say he excused himself and retired abruptly on the plea that he had matters to attend to.

Lesbitt had noted Marston’s respectful attention.

“Of course you are interested in politics, general,” he remarked. He chuckled boyishly. “I’ll say frankly the subject bores me; I had not the least idea of what the governor was talking about. I suppose I ought to know, but I have been in business. But you politicians——”

“I am not in politics, Mr. Lesbitt.”

“But your position—a State office——”

“I simply have charge of the military department.”

“I fear you are speaking too softly about your abilities,” said Aileen Thornton, with a smile. “Father tells me everything, and he says you are his ‘best bower.’ From his choice of language I fear my father has whiled away evenings in lumber camps, playing euchre.”

“I value your father’s good will, Miss Thornton,” stated Marston, rather coldly. “But I don’t think I deserve his compliments, if he refers to my activity in politics. I don’t know the game.”

“I figure it is more or less a game,” suggested Lesbitt. “A boardful of checkers and everybody trying to get up into the king row. All I can see is a scramble toward that king row—trying to get into office. Perhaps after they get there they all become statesmen and do a lot for the country; but they seem to be only using their left hand once in a while for the country, while their right hand is busy all the time keeping themselves in office.”

“I fear that you also are decrying your political shrewdness,” expostulated Mrs. Trueworthy. “You have just showed a great deal of knowledge of the subject.”

“Oh, I am only quoting dad. Dad is the bright thinker in our family. Dad was expressing the business man’s view.”

He turned to Marston and spoke ingenuously:

“I wanted to be a soldier, general. But dad wouldn’t hear to it. You have the job I’d like.”

"And I was just thinking, a little while ago, that if I could design a turbine pit and install the wheels, I'd be sure I had done something worth while in the world," confessed Marston.

Mrs. Thornton had subsided into frank boredom when the governor began his monologue; this persistence in the matter of fact seemed to prove a bit irritating.

"And if the mutual-admiration society will now take a recess of a few minutes, we may be able to clear the atmosphere of politics with a little music," she suggested. "Aileen, please!"

The girl turned to Marston after she had seated herself at the piano. Mischief sparkled in her eyes. She touched the keys lightly, phrasing an undertone of melody which was barely audible; it was apparently mere, careless preface, a running of the scales.

"I hope you have a favorite composer, general. Do ask me to play what you like; I'll consider it an honor."

He searched his thoughts, trying to remember, desiring to please her. Then he became conscious that there was a little lilt threading among the soft notes. He recognized it as "My Hero." She smiled with even more arch mischief when his countenance told her that he knew what she was playing.

"Remember that my debt of gratitude is still unpaid, General Marston. May we not exchange music for bravery?"

Somehow he could not command the smart wit he had displayed in their first meeting. He stammered when he attempted to reply. He was conscious that he was just a bit nettled because she was teasing him. It seemed like a child's playfulness toward an elder instead of the more charming liberty on the plane of intimacy between friends. He wondered why he was allowing this young woman to provoke discomposure in him.

"While the general is thinking, you might play my favorite," suggested Lesbitt.

"Yes, Chopin's 'Funeral March!' I'm not in the mood for it, Burton. Really, for a man who would a soldier be, your ideas in music are depressing."

She turned to the piano and began to play without waiting for further suggestions.

Mrs. Trueworthy sang, later; sang so wonderfully, with such thrilling contralto that Marston stared at her with frank admiration. His eyes were lowered and he felt a little guilty when Aileen Thornton intercepted his stare.

There were guests after a time; informal callers, members of the State capital's official corps. Miss Thornton found opportunity to talk apart with Marston.

"She's wonderful, I think—our friend," she told him, the direction of her gaze marking whom she meant. "And I am so glad you like her so much."

"But——"

"I have ears to hear and eyes to see, General Marston! And it is natural—for both of you. You have so much in common. I'm glad we are to have so much of you in the capital city. Leila is to be with us for a long time, we hope, and it's nice to be able to bring companionable folks to her."

There was no hint of mischief in her eyes then; there was no suggestion of mental reservation in her tones. She was manifestly in sincere earnest. Her next words convinced him and touched him:

"I have no illusions in regard to ourselves—myself and my father and mother, General Marston. I know exactly how the really refined and polite folks, like yourself—the folks with real ancestry—— No, no; I am not to be put down, sir!" She spiritedly overrode his protests. "Of course it's rude for me to talk to you in this fashion. I know it is. I suppose I'm only the daughter of my father when I do it. I know Leila cares for us very much—for just ourselves. And we love her so much and are so proud of her! I'm saying it all awkwardly, I know. But I do hope that you'll come often to this house. We want her to meet folks of her own kind, and you——"

"Miss Thornton, please—please!" he pleaded gently. This outburst astonished him, but her ingenuousness and

her pride in her avowal appealed to his most generous sympathies and absolved her in his estimation. "I know you do not mean to classify me as a snob. I am honored by an invitation to this house. I say that to you with all the sincerity of my soul. And I'll be delighted to come whenever I am invited; not because of the guests, but because of my hosts."

"I believe you are sincere enough yourself to understand my father."

"I do understand him; he has opened his heart to me a bit."

"And I know him, of course; he has always told me everything. I used to be silly—I am silly now every once in a while. I have been a traitor to my father in my thoughts. I used to give my 'dream father' the best place in my heart. And I know that you understand what I mean by my dream father," she added wistfully.

"I believe I do," he returned, with comforting smile.

She regarded him with strange intentness. "I—I——" she faltered. "Do you know, when I saw you first——" She stopped in confusion.

"Well?" he queried gently. But in spite of himself his smile faded. He guessed at her meaning and was a bit shocked. It was certainly flattering to be selected as Aileen Thornton's ideal in any relationship—but as father! His expression hinted that something very like consternation had taken possession of him. And consternation in the extreme did overwhelm Aileen Thornton at that moment.

"I did not mean that—— You have misunderstood; it was the ideal—no, of course not you! You are too young——"

He was smiling again.

She stamped her foot, furious at herself.

"There's no mistaking me, General Marston; I am Rutillus Thornton's own daughter. As little tact—as little——"

"Believe me," he said earnestly, "if I have inspired any interest—the slightest—for any reason—in you, it delights me. It is like a precious gift."

"Forgive my folly," she entreated, getting control of herself, her tones cold. "And now, perhaps, I shall show more of the Thornton tactlessness. But I can't help it. It's choking me; it must come out. General Marston, my father talks to me—I have told you—he tells me everything. I help him all I can with the knowledge his money has paid for; he has been generous with me in everything. He is worrying. He wants to be elected again. He is an old man, and an old man's heart is easily broken. He doesn't show to the world what he shows to me. It's almost pitiful the way he depends on you to help him. The idea seems to have come over him suddenly. He is wise in politics; it must be true that you *can* help him."

"I shall do all in my power to help your father, Miss Thornton. Of course it must be after my own fashion, for I do not understand the sort of game which politicians play. I have modest notions of my own ability. I have promised your father to help him."

"Promise me, too! I shall feel that you are forgiving me."

"Rather allow me to make the promise so that I can be giving you gratitude instead of forgiveness. I do promise; I pledge you my word."

She took his hand in both of her own, pressed it fervently, and hurried away.

General Marston had a little of the cynic's tougher fiber mingled with the softer elements of his abundant good nature. He took account of stock before he went to sleep that night, and realized that he was harnessed to the Thornton chariot in a manner which made him the wheel horse of the outfit; and he did not exactly relish the position any more than he relished having been selected by an impulsive young lady as her "dream father."

CHAPTER XI.

The next day the Honorable Stedman Sawtelle walked in on General Hart Marston, propped himself on his palms, leaned over the desk, and said, with

a convincing air of finality: "Marston, you're a devilish poor politician!"

The young man had been reviewing his promises of the night before, had been taking account of his modest stock of political perspicacity, and had not been cheered by the prospect.

He looked up meekly at Mr. Sawtelle.

Mr. Sawtelle was attorney general of the State and was a man whose judgment was unquestionably good.

"I agree with you, sir," admitted Marston.

"Your insulation against political currents seems to be perfect, absolutely perfect."

Marston did not welcome a verbal duel with the attorney general, whose tartness of rejoinder was one of the well-known features of the State's public life.

"I have always been on the outside of politics, Mr. Sawtelle."

"What if you have? If you were on the outside of a circus tent and heard a brass band and the crack of the ringmaster's whip you could understand more or less of what was going on inside, couldn't you?"

"I don't see the analogy, sir."

"Deaf, dumb, and blind, eh? Now don't give me that Marston optic cold bath," protested Sawtelle, drawing back from the general's stare and taking a seat beside the desk. "I mean what I say for the best. I haven't any delegated right to bawl you out, but I must say that you have spilled the beans!"

Marston queried with his eyes in dignified silence.

"If anybody had told me that you'd either be picked for a State office by Rute Thornton and would take one from him, I'd never have believed it. That's the reason why you have slipped one over on us."

"I protest, sir!"

"So do I! So do the boys! We weren't expecting anything of the sort to happen. We were lying low, waiting to spring the surprise. It had to be a surprise. We were not letting in outsiders because outsiders don't always understand the importance of

keeping their mouths shut. But at the same time we did think—even though you are a rank outsider in politics—that some inkling of the thing must get to you. We were figuring on you for a safe proposition because we didn't think you'd possibly get into the mess you're in now."

"What mess?"

"Office holder by the gift of Rute Thornton. Perfect insulation, I say again, Marston! Didn't you ever get one little spark?"

"I think you'll have to be explicit, sir."

"I reckon so! With diagrams! With full and complete rules for self-measurement! With footnotes! Marston, listen here: Didn't you know that you were going to be put into the primaries as a candidate for the nomination against Rute Thornton?"

"I certainly did not know it."

"Well, I'll admit it wasn't planned to hit you over the head with the fact and then explain all details after you recovered your senses. It was a touchy proposition, and we were handling it carefully. We——"

"Mr. Sawtelle, you must know that I would not have considered any such action."

"Oh, yes, you would," stated the emissary. "Forget for one moment that you are tied up to Thornton by this State job. Suppose you are free and I'm putting the matter up to you. Now what?"

"My finances would not——"

"All looked out for, Marston. In these new days of primaries, it isn't the bunch of boodle which wins."

"I couldn't take money from anybody."

"Look here, my dear fellow, Presidents of the United States—honorable and high-minded men—are elected by contributions from their friends and supporters. You are not assuming any title to sainthood, are you?"

"Governor Thornton has the office and the power——"

"Thornton was nominated by the old convention system—by the party machine. This year we have the pri-

maries. The people are having the say. The people of this State never wanted Thornton—they don't want him now. They are sick of the old sore-paw political hounds."

"And I am not a man who would _____"

"You are just the man who would. You haven't any perspective on yourself and on the peculiar situation. The boys have been studying it, and we know what we're talking about. This 'psychological-moment' talk has been much overworked, but that's exactly what this moment is. The name of Marston is one to conjure with right now. We're having a flareback of the old war spirit. The country is waking up to needs of defense. We want to mix into this situation some of the blood of our old war governor. Hold on, don't try to tell me about political exigencies, Marston. Don't undertake to give me lessons on the manner of managing political stampedes! I know. The moment is ripe for a stampede, and you're the one to head it—the only one, I insist. Your grandfather was our war governor; your father was our greatest soldier. You are as clean as a hound's tooth, have no political rag-tags hanging to you, will appeal to the people as a Marston and more especially as an opportunity to kick loose from all machine harness in this first exercise of their primary rights. They are anxious to make an object lesson of the job."

Marston shook his head.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Mr. Sawtelle sharply. "Don't you believe that I know what I'm talking about when I talk politics?"

"I am certainly not going to dispute your knowledge in that field, sir."

"By gad, you don't mean that you're going to refuse the governorship of this State, do you? Handed to you on a silver platter!"

"With all due respect to you, sir, I think that you are exaggerating the situation a bit. I am not vain enough to presume that the people will give me the great honor merely because I reach

out my hand. I am not qualified to _____"

"Come down to cases with me, Marston. You're an honest man. Just now you're only beating around the bush. Whether you're trying to fool me or yourself with such talk, I don't care. I demand candor because I have been candid myself. You're holding back because you have accepted an office from Rute Thornton. Well, resign!"

"No, I shall not resign."

"But it's only a pancake position, compared with the governorship."

"I can do a great deal for the military forces of the State."

"But you can do a blamed sight more as commander in chief. Come across—come across, Marston!" cried the attorney general, with impatience. "I'm over seven; I don't like this stalling."

"I don't want to be governor—that's sufficient."

"No, it's not, when your party needs you—makes a call on you. Only once in a generation does a call like this come to a man who is outside the game as it is usually played. You owe it to the memory of your father and grandfather to accept. It's their party that's calling you."

Marston had been objecting with a stiffness in which there was a tinge of embarrassment. His astonishment had not wholly left him. The result of his conflicting emotions was to surround him with an air which seemed to lack ingenuousness. He realized that himself. Both the rebuke and the appeal from the attorney general had touched him in tender spots.

"I don't mean to assume either airs or virtues, sir," he replied. His demeanor softened, and there was no doubt as to his sincerity. "If I have appeared awkward you must remember that you have jumped me. Bear with me a moment, please. I want to understand. Hasn't it been party politics to give a governor a complimentary second term?"

"It has been machine politics; but now the people are going to run matters."

"But Governor Thornton has——"

"Has trampled with cowhide boots over all the sensibilities in this State, Marston. Oh, I'm not going to discuss his manners at table! Don't think I'm that sort of a critic! We elect governors instead of dancing masters and professors of deportment in this State. But his type of man is no longer the type which should govern us. The old gang needs an object lesson, and that's why we want to turn him down for renomination. When we lick Rute Thornton in the primaries we are serving notice on the old bosses to keep out of our politics."

"And yet Governor Thornton has done effective work in straightening out the finances; he is honest in his administration."

The attorney general gave the adjutant general a quick glance of examination and appraisal.

"You understand that I myself am not saying that he would pick pockets or loot the State treasury, Marston. But how does it happen that Thornton has taken a man of your stamp into camp? There has been some gossiping and wondering since you took this office."

Again did Marston, under the keen scrutiny of the lawyer, exhibit signs of his peculiar embarrassment.

"I don't think that I have been taken into camp, as you put it, sir. But I will admit that a little association with Governor Thornton has given me a new and different idea of him. I am going to be frank and say that I would like to see him renominated."

"You're a devil of an encouraging proposition as the opposition candidate!" growled the attorney general.

"I am not the opposition candidate, and I don't intend to be."

"Marston, we're going to draft you. You must serve. We don't want Thornton. He has been a ruler during his first term; in his second term, with no further need to smooth down folks, he will be an unbearable tyrant, and there's no telling what harm he will do the interests in this State, working with that bunch of officeholders who believe that to the victors belong the spoils.

They may be honest enough men in private affairs, but in the public matters they employ the old, discredited tactics. All the business interests in this State are banded together to make progress faster during the next few years than ever before. Just now the times are ripe for establishing new enterprises, coaxing in new investors and settlers. Thornton and his bunch will surely keep such folks and such capital out. Resign this position. Take what's coming to you."

"But there are hundreds of men in this State better qualified, better known, equally——"

"No, sir! The situation is extraordinary. Thornton can win in a regular political contest. I have told you that this must be a surprise—a stampede. The others you talk about are merely politicians—or men who haven't the right name behind them. I tell you, Marston, your name is one to conjure by. You are the one man who can defeat Rute Thornton in the primaries."

"Do you absolutely believe that, speaking as a politician?" asked Marston, showing a more lively interest than he had displayed before.

"Absolutely! There's no time to groom and work out a regular political candidate in the ordinary way."

"Mr. Sawtelle, you have asked me for candor. You shall have it. I want to state my side in this thing before you intrust any more political secrets to me. What you have imparted I have not asked for, except the last, and that was to fortify me in my decision. I most certainly will not stand in the primaries. I shall come out to-day with a declaration that I intend to support Governor Thornton."

"But that's lugging this office into politics."

"I hope not. Furthermore, you have already informed me that I'm a devilish poor politician."

"Marston, what's the matter with you? Why are you perpetrating this folly?"

"Because I have pledged myself to support and help Governor Thornton

with all my power, sir. Until you came in just now, I was wondering how on earth I could help him, knowing, as well as you do, that I'm a poor politician. Now I see a way to keep my promise."

"I know you and your race too well, Marston, to believe for one moment that this dinky job has influenced you in this stand you're taking. What has Rute Thornton done to you, anyway? I'd like to know so that I can play a little better game in politics."

"He has neither bribed nor hypnotized me—I can avouch that," returned the general, with a smile by which he tried to placate the sullen agent of the opposition.

"By the gods, this comes pretty near to betrayal of your party, Marston!" blazed the attorney general, refusing to be placated. "I don't believe Thornton can be reelected. You are turning the State over to the other political party."

"Making an innocent man the scapegoat in politics is quite the usual plan, I believe, sir. I have heard so. I say again, I think you are exaggerating my importance. However, I am going to carry out my pledges made as a man rather than undertake any wild-goose chase in politics."

"Rute Thornton has one pet that's properly trained—I'll say that!" Mr. Sawtelle picked up his hat.

General Marston bowed.

"Thank you, sir. Politics, I believe, has a language to go with its practices."

Mr. Sawtelle got as far as the door, then he whirled and came back. He was thoroughly, visibly, cruelly angry. This anger indicated how important he considered his mission—how vital to the success of the plot he estimated the coöperation of Hart Marston.

"I'm going up to see the governor, Marston. If we have got to have him for two years more, I prefer to tell him my side of this thing before anybody else gets to him. I shall——"

The general's composure left him suddenly.

"The other insults I have taken in the course of politics, Mr. Sawtelle, but this insinuation that I shall run to the

governor with a tale is a damnable outrage on my decency."

"I shall arrange for a few conditions to cover my personal interests," proceeded Sawtelle calmly. "All of us State officers may as well get all the protection we can. And in order that the governor may know how faithful to him you are, Marston, I shall tell him at once that he can owe his re-nomination to you. Hold on! I'm angry; I admit it. You have given me a devil of a flop. But when I tell Rute Thornton the truth I shall be making up for some nasty talk I have made to you."

"Will you kindly omit all mention of me, Mr. Sawtelle?"

But that callous gentleman was not influenced by the freezing tones.

"I must insist, Marston. You're making a big sacrifice, and I don't want you to lose one mite of the advantage that ought to come to you." He started again for the door. "I'm afraid you're too backward to do much talking in your own behalf. That's why you'll never get very far in politics unless your friends turn to and help a bit."

"Curse politics!" cried General Marston soulfefully.

"Exactly my own state of mind at this moment," declared the attorney general, and he banged the door behind him.

In spite of the fact that he appeared to have fulfilled his pledge to the father and his promise to the daughter in sudden and amazing fashion, Marston did not sit down to his duties wearing the air of a successful diplomat. He scowled and slatted his papers about his desk. That insufferable and sarcastic politician had called him "Rute Thornton's pet." He began to wonder how the men of the State at large would view this new devotion of his. He understood well that in this selfish world folks are apt to interpret deeds according to their own prejudices and to misjudge motives as spite or envy prompts.

It occurred to him that at least one attitude was enjoined on him if he wished to escape further malice: His

duties as a "dream father" must needs be circumspect and circumscribed. He had no appetite for any reputation as a fortune hunter. In his own heart he knew how far he was removed from any such activity. He found himself wishing that Miss Aileen Thornton would soon and publicly be ticketed as the fiancée of young Mr. Lesbitt. Then he ascribed his sudden melancholy to the irritating new problems which public life had forced on him.

CHAPTER XII.

The governor was affable the next time he came in contact with his adjutant general. But he was by no means effusive. He took an entirely matter-of-fact view of the affair.

"So Sted Sawtelle had a dream, did he?" he chuckled. "He came to me and snapped that whiplash tongue—but we have got so in this State that we don't pay much attention to what Sawtelle says."

"Nor did I," stated Marston. Nevertheless, in his heart—and he was distinctly ashamed of the wounded vanity he felt—he was a bit disappointed because his excellency did not express more lively sense of gratitude. He was not realizing that potentates too often lack perspective on their weaknesses; that the possession of power blinds a man to the possibilities of reverses.

"Of course Sted didn't understand how closely you and I are tied up," declared his excellency. His air was that of condescending proprietorship, and Marston winced. He was finding fresh evidence of what his new partnership meant. He wondered whether his natural good humor smoothed the situation for him, and he warned himself that pride may easily become priggishness.

"When Sted saw that he had got one foot wet, he went and jumped in all over," the governor went on. "That's characteristic; he's impulsive. I'm glad because he had a chance to see that the men I pick are loyal." He slapped Marston's shoulder. "And I appreciate loyalty. Don't let anybody fool you!"

"And outside of loyalty," said Marston, wishing to minimize the affair, "Sawtelle's project was a silly one."

"Absolutely crazy!" agreed the governor, with serenity.

"I would not like to be nominated as governor under any such circumstances."

"You couldn't have been. I had the thing right here," stated his excellency, pinching thumb and forefinger. "A little while back, some of the kid-glove fellows tried to throw a scare into me. They said the young chaps of the State were out for my scalp. But here you are, most representative one of 'em all, my first lieutenant." Again he clapped Marston's shoulder. "Now let 'em talk; they can't say much." He limped away, chuckling. He left his adjutant general wrestling with some rather large thoughts.

Those thoughts were further amplified a few days later.

A limousine swung to the curb ahead of him as he was marching briskly downtown from the statehouse; the governor's daughter leaned out and waited for his approach. With her in the car was Mrs. Trueworthy, and both of them gave him unaffectedly warm greeting.

"We are told that you are most wondrously busy these days," said Aileen; "but does that excuse you for your total neglect of us?"

"Can it be that somebody is slandering my life of dreamy leisure, Miss Thornton?"

"Oh, we know that you are busy, sir. And important in these days, too!"

"Additional and more malicious slander!" he declared, with a smile.

"You shall do penance by being sentenced to the companionship of your chief slanderers, general." The girl opened the door of the car. "Into your cell, sir!"

He remembered certain resolutions he had made after the tempestuous departure of the Honorable Stedman Sawtelle: he had resolved to starve gossip, if possible. When Aileen looked at him and smiled, he fell to wondering just how much he was willing to al-

low his own pride and other folks' tongues to command his acts.

And while he was wondering he faltered some sort of banality concerning office confinement and need of exercise. The girl stared at him with frank wonderment and was equally frank in her speech, with some of the paternal bluntness which amused and disconcerted Marston on occasions.

"General Marston, if you do not care to ride with us or have important business, for goodness' sake say so!"

"Aileen!" protested Mrs. Trueworthy gently.

Marston raised his hat and entered the car, mumbling apology for his hesitation. He was irritated to find himself awkward and ill at ease in the presence of this explosive young person.

"I wish to thank you for important services rendered," she went on. "I do not wish to expose political secrets by shouting those thanks to you across a curbstone. Now wait! Do not bother me with the obvious! Don't say what they always say when they try to be polite. Don't say it was a mere nothing—glad to oblige, and all that! You promised to help my old father. You went right away and did more, single-handed, than all the rest of those flub-dub politicians."

"My dear Aileen!" More of her companion's gentle protest.

"You smoothed everything so that he will be renominated without opposition."

"Honestly, I can't claim for myself _____"

"I know you did. My father says you did! Whatever other faults the Thorntons have, they don't lie to each other!"

"I, too, have heard your praises chanted by those in high places," affirmed the widow, with a charming smile.

"I do hope you'll overlook my awkwardness in discussing the value of my services," said Marston manfully. "Because I have placed no value on them. But as for the spirit—well, my whole heart went into the thing in your father's service."

"I have a most insane hankering to clap my hands and shout 'Atta boy!'" confessed Miss Thornton, with a laugh of reckless mischief.

"It's a rebuke and I accept it," said the general.

"No, no! It's not a rebuke, sir."

She was instantly grave.

"Yes, it was, Miss Thornton. I feel myself propped on stilts in language every now and then when I am in the presence of ladies. That may be because I lack experience in the usual chatter of drawing-rooms."

"Intimating that I am a mistress of chatter, sir?"

"Not for one moment! I mean that you are deliciously natural and honest and open and unaffected—a real girl—and I like it and I like you for it," he declared boldly. "I told you I'd help your father all I possibly could—and I did so in my own way. And if I have pleased you and him I'm mighty glad. There!"

"There!" she echoed. "Now we are getting comfy and social and you are coming right along with us up to the house to have tea. And Leila will sing your favorite song; you can be thinking it up."

While she was brewing the tea he asked politely for Mr. Lesbitt.

"I was hoping he was still in the city—that I might meet him here to-day. I admired his ways and his views."

He eyed her a bit intently, telling himself that he hoped she would betray by look or word that the romance was nearly ready to blossom for the public gaze to note—the vulgar gaze which might persist in ascribing mean motives to those on whom Aileen Thornton cast an occasional glance.

"Oh, Burton has gone back into the woods with a new paper mill in his pocket or in his mind or in a shawl strap or somewhere," she said demurely. "After the election we are all going up hunting. I shall stand on a limb and boo at him like an owl. We'll all live in a lodge in the vast wilderness—father's wilderness, all blocked off by timber cruisers' posts. Will you come up with us, Mister General? Will

you come and bring your sword and kill the wild animals who threaten us? Will you come if Leila comes to sing to you under the hunter's moon?"

"Yes," he agreed.

"You shall have a summons served on you; it will be on birch bark and sealed with spruce gum. But you shall not receive that invitation unless you are more neighborly here in the city—no matter if you have grown so busy and important. Will you come to dinner to-morrow evening?"

"Yes, with pleasure!"

He was ashamed of those past ponderings of his when he had pared rules of conduct like a snob.

From that time on, his welcome in the executive mansion was an assured and grateful relief from the loneliness of his hotel. His excellency, harnessing his willing aid with new responsibilities, demanded his presence at frequent conferences in the paper-littered den. He was the ever-dependable and desirable guest at table; he was the tactful and unobtrusive master of ceremonies, bridging the gap left by the host who was usually contemptuously absent from social festivities.

And the politicians who relished and quoted the questionable sarcasms from Stedman Sawtelle's tongue called him—without malice, but with a grin—"Rute Thornton's pet."

Governor Thornton was unanimously renominated in the primaries. But the vote for him represented but little more than half of the regular party strength, as gauged by the regular elections in past years.

In the campaign the opposition made much of this as indicating a party slump.

But the governor was serenely indifferent to any possibilities of portent in the figures. Nor did the opposition believe half the claims it made. The governor was the only candidate for the nomination, and in most of the legislative districts there were few contests; busy voters stayed at their jobs and let the politicians do the nominating. The party was in no wise alarmed. And the election which followed the

primaries justified their faith in the endurance of natural majorities.

Governor Thornton was reelected. As the head of the ticket he even ran ahead of the regular party vote in that election.

However, in other directions there was trouble which threatened the whole fabric of his administration.

He had persistently clamored at the State committee for work in the legislative districts. He had received only lukewarm support, only indifferent service. He was not of the sort who could rally workers. On the face of the returns, the complexion of the incoming legislature was uncertain. The two parties were so nearly balanced that a working majority for either was in doubt until recounts and hearings should settle contests.

And the legislature was to elect most of the profitable State offices, control the State budget, distribute State patronage, and in general do service for the deserving patriots of the political brigade!

That prospect of being a king without a realm stirred Rutillus Thornton more profoundly than any setback in his tempestuous life.

The members of the State committee met in executive session after the election in order to receive final bills of expense and wind up campaign affairs.

Upon the committee came bursting his excellency, profane, belligerent, caustic, accusatory, and wholly careless of the privacy of the "executive session" which had been imposed by the cautious for the express purpose of keeping the governor away from them.

"You listen to me first and then get into your holes and go on with your executive session, you confounded woodchucks! What has happened is what I predicted would happen if you didn't get out and hustle. You, there, Stokes—Adams—Blake—the whole of you! What did I tell you?"

Nobody seemed to have memory or sufficiently luminous language to state.

"I told you that I didn't worry about myself! I knew I could and would be elected. I told you to look after the

legislative districts. I did what work I was able to myself. Districts in my own native county have come along all right because I gave them my own attention. And I personally ran ahead of my ticket. But as for the rest of you, we've got to wait till after the legislature meets to make sure that we have a working majority. That's a nice situation for me to be in—for our party to be in! Not sure of my executive council, not sure of being able to handle finances or elect our State officers. But let me tell you! My vote shows that the people of this State want me to be at the head of affairs. If that is so, then I'm going to run matters according to my best judgment. I'm going to have a council and State officers of my own party. And, by the gods, the critters who get under my feet when I'm acting for the State will get stepped on! Anybody got anything to say?"

A committeeman ventured on defense of his fellows:

"I think, your excellency, that an analysis of conditions in the legislative districts will show that personalities of the candidates——"

"To blazes with your personalities talk!" shouted the governor. "Don't you think I fully realize what my own personality is? You may think I fool myself about it, but that isn't so." He glared at them, and no man had the hardihood to reply to that amazing confession. "I got out and worked for myself—and I am not ashamed of my figures. The rest of you didn't work! Let me add that I am not done working. I don't propose to see State patronage handled by the opposition while I am governor."

"The votes have been cast. There isn't much we can do about it now," suggested one of the group.

The governor banged his fist on the table.

"Perhaps there isn't much *you* can do," he sneered. "But there's a whole lot *I* can do if I am forced to do it. I'll give the politicians of this State an object lesson in results. Now go ahead and add up figures and pay bills. If

you need more money, call on me!" He looked them over with the superciliousness of an employer viewing inefficient clerks and then stamped out.

"Personally I have reached the point where Rute Thornton's bellowings impress me about as much as the moodings of a Durham steer," stated a committeeman. "But he is the head of our ticket and when he threatens to do this and do that on his own account—just as if we didn't have courts and election laws in this State—he is in a way to put us in mighty bad, gentlemen. Does anybody here have any idea of what he means to do or attempt?"

"Yes," said a man; "I say yes, speaking from what I can guess after knowing Rute Thornton all my life."

"Well, what do you guess?" demanded the chairman testily.

"That he will run over his own party, law and all, to get to where he wants to go; and if we holler 'Whoa!' too loud he will back up and run over us again. About the only sensible thing to do is to keep still and stay out of the road until we see which way he is heading."

And in that apprehensive state of mind, the State committee went on with its labors.

CHAPTER XIII.

Hart Marston walked forth with Rutillus Thornton.

They climbed a ledgy eminence which thrust its bare poll above the forest and gave them view of a vast domain.

November rains and lashing winds had stripped the leaves from the hard growth, the beeches, birches, and the maples; and the magnificent evergreens dominated the landscape. As far as vision reached they crowned the undulating hills, crowded the valleys, and framed the lakes whose white-capped waters flashed under the brilliant autumn sun. Here and there were mountains on whose peaks the first snows gleamed.

"All mine," said Rutillus Thornton. But he said it simply, almost humbly,

if that word may be made to fit the tone of his voice. The rude arrogance with which he so often addressed men was gone. Marston looked at his host and felt that he was meeting up with a man he had not known before. The slouchy, formal garb which he wore in town in deference to his high office—the silk hat and the manners which he assumed with them—had been laid aside; it was as if an actor had doffed a grotesque stage attire and appeared as himself. The lumberman's belted jacket and high-laced boots fitted his real personality.

"From Telos to the Enchanted Range it's mine," he said. "More than a million acres. I love it, every foot of it."

Marston felt a sudden and strange sense of humility in the presence of the lord of this majestic barony.

This man's honors as chief magistrate of the State seemed tawdry as Marston surveyed him. Outside this noble domain the man subjected himself to sneers behind his back, to the contempt of sticklers for society's forms, to misunderstanding and malice.

"I have beat 'em," said Rutillus Thornton. "They didn't want me the first time I was elected; they'll want me less this time, now that I'm re-elected. I'm going to do things to 'em, Marston. They deserve it. They have spoiled my taste for this, here!" He waved his cane. "I can't come back here and be contented. I have been here two days, and now I must hurry to the statehouse. The rest of you are going to stay here. You can enjoy it; I can't."

At the foot of the ledgy eminence was the land baron's estate. He called his buildings "camps." But the structures were made of carefully chosen logs, their bark smoothed and varnished, their interiors furnished with luxury; there were more than a dozen of these buildings, affording privacy for groups of guests or for families. He called this house party a "hunting trip." But it was a convocation of some twoscore of the notables of the State, with their wives and daughters. They were served lavishly by a little

army of retainers; the chef had been imported from the metropolis; the dinners in the great dining hall were daily exhibitions of prodigality; a horseman galloped twenty miles every day across the barony of Thornton to fetch hot-house flowers for the table.

Even as Marston found Rutillus Thornton a more consistent and imposing figure in the midst of his forests, so did he realize something which had not occurred to him so vividly in the tamer surroundings of the executive mansion. For, compared with all this, even the executive mansion was ordinary. He saw Aileen Thornton in truer light so far as his affairs were concerned. In realizing that he had nothing to offer her, he also awoke to the truth that he loved her.

The conviction rather shocked him.

It was the bitter, yearning, tender, jealous passion which so often seizes upon a man who has suddenly found maidenhood compelling after he has lost his youth.

She came up the hill to them, scampering with the zest and strength of athletic girlhood. She was in hunting garb, gaitered to the knees, a red cap with single upright feather cocked smartly on her unruly curls.

"I am going into the woods. There may be dragons. I need a brave soldier to protect me. General Marston, do you volunteer?"

"Most certainly."

"Then it's forward march! I told Leila and the others to go on ahead down the brook road; we shall overtake them."

"Where is Burton?" demanded her father.

"In his camp, drawing plans. I think they're for a dam on the river Styx. Burton always looks well ahead into the future."

"That boy ought to forget his work for a little while," grumbled the governor. "Tell him he must go along with you."

"It would be like telling you to forget your politics or to stop adoring this beautiful stretch of saw logs standing

up on end. We will leave you to your devotions, father."

"You needn't bother to wait for me," blurted his excellency, noting that the adjutant general was lingering politely. "That harum-scarum wants to race me down this hill, and I don't want to break a leg at my time of life. You'd better call on Burton and insist, Aileen."

"No, I'll not trouble him. Burton does not like folks who trouble him—and I know you want him to like me real well, dad. On, Mister General, on!" She set a brisk pace, and Marston hurried away at her side.

"I suppose you think I'm very saucy toward my elders, sir. I fear that I am. But a rude tongue is a Thornton failing. I am going to be very saucy to you. Very saucy, indeed! Why haven't you proposed to dear Leila?"

He felt as if he had collided with a hitching post in the dark. He stared at her without speech.

"There must be some wonderfully good reason, sir, why you haven't. She is handsome and has lots of money, and you are han—you are not in love with anybody else. I know, for I have asked questions of all the folks who know you."

His love, newly discovered, made him timorous in her presence. His stupefaction made him dumb.

"I have really jumped you, haven't I, Mister General? One must be very forward and bold and rude to be able to jump you. And yet you need to be jumped. Else you'd never come out of yourself. Have you never thought of proposing to Leila—or to anybody?"

"No, I have not, Miss Thornton."

"Now, please don't put all that acid into your tone, sir. You mustn't think I'm merely trying to tease you. I'm not making game of you."

He was silent.

"Oh, I'm sorry you misunderstand me. I know what you think. You think I'm a very presuming, vulgar young woman who——"

"Now I protest, Miss Thornton—I really do," he said, with some heat. "You know nothing about my thoughts, and they are certainly not——"

"And it's none of my business, anyway, eh?"

"No," he snapped, "since you will persist."

"There!" she cried, with real relief. "I'm glad you're nicely provoked. This genteel iciness always awes me. It seems sort of superhuman. When anybody gets real cross and answers me back I feel right on the same comfortable level with that person. I think I'd honestly enjoy a spat with you."

"I'm at your service; anything to give you pleasure!"

"Yes, you're truly annoyed," she said, appraising him. "And I wonder if it's wholly because I'm pecking into your own private affairs."

"No, I think it's because you make me feel that you're mocking me as if I were some bald-headed old patriarch."

"Goodness gracious, now really you don't think that!" She opened her eyes wide. There was honest concern in her demeanor and tones.

"Yes, I do. When a man is about so old he——"

"General Hart Marston, that's enough of that sort of talk! No girl—no one, I mean, thinks anything about your age. You are one of that kind who doesn't seem to have any age. I mean—well, I'm getting all snarled up, and I guess that's because I'm meddling in your business. Forgive me; I'll keep out of it."

"I apologize for my silly sensitiveness, Miss Thornton. I should have known that it was only good-natured fun."

"I don't know," she returned gravely. "As I think it over, it doesn't seem at all funny—asking you about proposals, asking you about Leila. But I wanted—well, no matter. I'd better confine myself strictly to my own business."

She paused for a moment.

Then her next words of declaration about her own affairs took him off his feet as completely as had the question she plumped at him in the beginning.

"I have just had a proposal of marriage," she said. "Perhaps that's why

I had the subject on the brain when we started out just now."

Again he was speechless.

"It was Burton," she explained. "And that's why he has penned himself up in his camp, drawing plans for that windwill in purgatory—or whatever it is. He positively wouldn't be sensible and come along."

He did not dare to ask her questions. And there was a pinching of his throat. In his dizziness he did not grasp the import of her comment; he had only heard that she had received a proposal of marriage.

"He is a charming boy," she declared.

"I agree with you, Miss Thornton."

"I think the world of him."

"It is quite natural."

"But of course I said no, and that's why he wouldn't come along."

"Do you mean——"

"Why, I said no." She looked at him with some surprise, for he had displayed sudden tumult of emotions. "That is, I said no for the time being. Maybe it will be final, maybe—well, how is one to know very much about the future? Little things which one never reckons on change all our lives for us. Somehow I felt that Burton was proposing to me because his father wished him to do so—or because my father did. My father is positively reckless about the manner in which he throws hints around. There might have been something about paper mills and pulp timber and all such in the affair—marrying the mill to the timber and throwing in the boy and the girl. I don't know! Business deals are getting to be perfectly horrible in these days of money mania. I asked Burton all about it—questioned him very sharply. And it made him very indignant."

"I can understand that, Miss Thornton. In his love he——"

"Do you think he really loves me?"

"How could anybody—how could he help loving you?"

"That's a very nice compliment you pay me, sir."

"I was not trying to pay compliments, Miss Thornton. You asked me

a question and I answered to the best of my ability."

"We have become quite confidential, haven't we? We are running on to each other about our private affairs—oh, well, I do believe you haven't told me so very much about *yourself*, but perhaps you are going to do so, maybe, and that will even up matters."

She paused, but he did not take advantage of her silence to even matters.

"Any time you'd like to confide in me, to find out what viewpoint a girl takes, I hope you'll do so. I'll consider it a compliment. I'd like to ask you for the man-side views. Now what do you think about Burton? Do you think I'd better marry him, providing he hasn't already changed his mind?"

"You must excuse me," he said, with a pitiful attempt to smile.

"But just a little hint, sir."

He shook his head.

"Don't be selfish!" He flushed under her earnest gaze. "I mean don't be stingy with advice. Perhaps you don't understand how much I need it."

"And now I feel again as if you were mocking me. There's your mother, your father——"

"Oh, I know exactly what they will say. That would not be asking advice; that would be getting orders."

"My advice is to marry the one you love," he said firmly. "I realize perfectly that that is a banal and obvious remark. It means nothing."

"Yes, it does," she affirmed.

Her declaration was so positive that Marston regarded her with fresh intentness.

"It may mean a great deal, Miss Thornton, I'll admit, providing it is possible to know absolutely when one is in love."

"My distinguished father says that considerably more than half the folks in this world don't know beans when the bag is open. Now, in this love matter which you have insisted on making a topic of conversation——"

She glanced sideways at him and found him gasping and open-mouthed.

"I say in this matter of love, isn't it probably true that only the especially

favored ones are able to know what love really is? Or to feel real love? Just as only persons specially capable or specially trained can detect real gems or tell wool from cotton or something like that. You have lived longer than I have, and I rather hoped you were specially trained."

"I am not," he said curtly. "I insist that I am completely ignorant."

"I am sorry. Do you know any expert who can develop intuition in such matters, just as physical trainers can develop muscle?"

"No, of course not." They were crossing a rustic bridge. "Furthermore, I am convinced that your present spirit of mischief would prompt you to stop and throw stones at frogs in this brook if they were not luckily in winter quarters just now."

"You are very suspicious, sir—and also you are growing saucy. I'm afraid I have set you a poor example. You feel that, lacking frogs for target, I'm throwing pebbles at you, eh?"

He held his peace.

Ahead of them in the forest aisles they heard the chatter of voices and knew that they were overtaking the loitering guests.

"The training of girls in these days, at institutes of learning, does not lead them to think of matrimony as the ultimate object of their existence," she said, in stilted tones. "That sounds like an essay, doesn't it? It is. It's from a paper I prepared for our girls' club. I think I was about fifteen years old. It's strange how good advice may lead us to change the settled convictions of a lifetime—up to the age of fifteen! I think I'll take your advice."

"But I have given you no advice."

"Oh, yes, you have."

"I dropped some silly commonplaces, that's all."

"You advised me to marry the one I love. It now becomes necessary to study symptoms, examine conditions, and analyze the psychological side of the thing, being very careful not to mistake mere upheavals of sentiment for real love. I wish you'd canvass the matter a bit among your married

friends, Mister General, in order that I may get light on all sides. It's not a matter to be treated carelessly or hastily. I think you agree with me there."

"Yes, I do agree."

"We can confer occasionally."

"I must ask you to excuse me, Miss Thornton."

"If it would embarrass you to talk to me directly I can delegate Leila to represent me."

He was glad because a turn of the road brought them in sight of their party at that moment. This incomprehensible girl had brought him to the limit of his patience. He was divided between hankering to cuff her ears in the belief that she was mischievously impertinent and desire to take her in his arms—nay, rather to kneel and beg her love, for he knew that the grand passion of his life had seized upon him.

It was not merely that she was beautiful. He had met many beautiful girls.

But the puzzle of her piquant personality, her zest in life and living, her constantly changing moods kept his interest in her ever on the alert, made her with every day that passed a new person with whom he enjoyed fresh delights in the struggle to form acquaintance, and the full and despairing conviction that she was unattainable made of his emotions such a vivid mingling of pain and pleasure that his love became obsession.

He went to the side of Leila Trueworthy when they had overtaken the strollers. In her presence and listening to her, he felt a saner sense of what his pride and condition demanded from him.

He determined to return to town with the governor the next day, and he told her so, making lame explanation to account for this sudden change in his plans. She offered no remonstrance or comment at the time.

But before he left her to join others of the party, she asked: "Have you told anybody else, General Marston, that you are leaving here to-morrow?"

"No."

"Then I'm going to say something

to you as a soldier's daughter to a soldier. If the battle is inevitable and you cannot expect to be any stronger in the future, why run away in order to fight another day?"

He gazed at her for a long time before he replied.

"You don't think I'm either coward or knave, do you?" he entreated.

"You are neither. If you stay here you can win."

"Yes, over myself. I will stay."

She smiled and patted his arm.

CHAPTER XIV.

General Marston neither avoided Aileen Thornton nor did he seek her during the remainder of the sojourn in the forest. On her part, she preserved as careful indifference. There was no more raillery, no more of that indiscretion in speech. Furthermore, young Mr. Lesbitt concealed his feelings and squired the daughter of the domain on occasions, and the ladies of the party beamed graciously on the young couple, commending a budding romance.

The governor came again, and the Thanksgiving feast was spread in the great hall as final festivity of the house party.

There were venison pasties, smoking joints of bear meat, partridges browned in the roasting pans—all the spoil of the forest from the acres of Thornton.

A State senator, garbed as a herald, read the published Thanksgiving proclamation signed by Governor Thornton. "And I ask the people of this State to look forward to blessings to come with as lively sense of gratitude as they may survey blessings which they have enjoyed," was the concluding sentiment of the proclamation.

His excellency knew that he was safe in the society of his political intimates.

"There won't be many blessings to come, not for our party, unless we can control that legislature," he stated across the table to all who cared to listen. "The devils are trying to steal it from us."

"We are advised to fight the devil with fire," squeaked a bromidic diner.

The governor banged his fist on the board.

"I shall fight them with the law, ladies and gentlemen. The councilors and myself have been sitting as a returning board, canvassing the election returns in the legislative districts. For once, in this State, the law will be strictly observed."

They applauded him.

"Returns that were not made up in open town meeting, that were not certified to by the clerk in proper fashion, that were not signed by all the selectmen, will be thrown out. They have been getting too careless in the country towns. If any of you gentlemen, when you get back into the heart of things in your communities, hear criticism of this plan of action, speak out and say that it's the law that I'm following. They'll be howling that I'm trying to negative the expressed will of the voters. They'll claim that I'm figuring to our own advantage. But point to the law, gentlemen, and back me up and tell your friends to back me up. That legislature belongs to us, and we're going to have it."

"Lots of towns have ignoramuses running their affairs," said a guest. "It seems too bad to have men lose their votes because of mere technical errors."

"You are not criticizing my attitude in regard to the law, are you?" demanded the governor sharply. "I didn't make the law; I'm carrying it out."

"No, but some allowances have always been made when the intent of the voters has been made clear."

"Don't you realize, sir, that every allowance, viewed through the strict interpretation of the law, is illegal?"

"But I say——"

"I say it is!" shouted the governor, again banging his fist.

"Please! Please!" urged the first lady of the State plaintively.

His excellency dragged his fingers through his hair and grunted.

"We are assembled here under a Thanksgiving proclamation, not a declaration of war," said his excellency's daughter, with considerable tartness. "If you don't behave, father, I'll be

obliged to send you away from the table."

"Politics has spoiled me," acknowledged the governor. "I guess that's why politicians make me so mad. Forgive the outburst. Aileen, shake your head at me if I start the subject again."

After the dinner, General Marston walked forth again with Governor Thornton, and they ascended the ledgy eminence. The governor had asked Marston to accompany him.

The day was overcast, the wind was chill, the distant lakes were like gray medallions set in the framing black growth.

"Of course you heard what he said. Marston—that fellow at table?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're no politician and you don't understand the whole idea," said his excellency rudely. "I don't expect you to be a politician. But you can understand that something is brewing in this State. Even men in my own party may turn against me. Now I'd like to have something of a line on you right out of your own mouth. You are adjutant general of this State. There may come a time when I'll need you, and need you devilish bad. What do you understand your duties are?"

"To obey the orders of the commander in chief—yourself."

"Exactly! And how much conversation are you going to have about it? You know what kind of trouble I had with Wade."

"My understanding of my position is that a soldier obeys the orders of his superior without asking questions or offering any comments, sir."

"You heard what I had to say about the law, Marston. I want it to be known that I am for the law, down to the finest point. Naturally you understand that my orders to you will not include picking pockets or burning buildings in the night. But how about your loyalty to me? There's quite a lot of difference between us; you're pretty high-toned."

"If I had any doubt about my loyalty to you I should resign this moment, Governor Thornton. Please don't make

me feel any smaller than I feel this moment, standing here with you in the midst of this!"

He swept his arm to include the vast reaches of forests and mountains.

The governor gave his adjutant general shrewd survey; one might guess from his expression that he had not brought Marston to this eminence merely for air and exercise.

"It is something, eh? Something to match against blue blood! We can't all have the same things to brag about in this world. I started with a pair of oxen. I took a job to haul logs. When I wanted another pair and gave a bill of sale due in thirty days, the man was willing to extend the time, for he knew I was honest. I lacked two dollars when I counted my money. I went into the house and took two dollars in old-fashioned copper cents away from my wife—my first wife—and made up the amount. I wouldn't accept any extension. She had been collecting them ever since she was a baby. Bungdown cents, they were called. She cut her teeth on one of them. She thought a lot of them. But I wouldn't take an extension, because that writing said that I would pay in thirty days. I have kept all my promises, Marston. That's something. I promise to hold the State offices in our party as long as I'm governor. I stand for my party. You are with me, eh? Very well. Remember it. I value loyalty—a promise. Now let's go down; it's cold here."

When they turned to descend, they saw Aileen Thornton coming up.

"Thus does history repeat itself," she called. "But it is not a coincidence. I knew you were here, and I have followed deliberately. They are deadly dull down below; the dinner has made them torpid. I hope you are talking about something that's interesting."

"We have finished talking," said the governor. "We're going where it's warmer."

"But I'm not cold," she protested. "I'm up here to have the cobwebs blown away. Won't you stay a few moments, General Marston, even if father must get back to the fireplace?"

"The two of you will get enough of it in short order," commented his excellency, going on his way.

"I hope you won't think that the Thornton family is working your patience in double shift," she said. "But I did want to come up here and say good night—good-by to it! And I think there's going to be a sunset, after all."

She pointed to the west; there was a slash of red light at the horizon.

"To-morrow we must go back and be tamed by the town," she went on. "I know that you have your emotions under better control than I, sir, but haven't you grown to feel a little primitive and wild and all that since you have been up here in the woods?"

"I think I have, Miss Thornton," he returned gravely. "I cannot account for certain wild thoughts, otherwise."

"And I suppose you're glad that you are going back to town where you can become normal again?"

"I think it's best for me to be in town at my work."

He lowered his eyes under her steady gaze.

"It's a wonderful ability—to be able to decide what is best to do and then do it, no matter how much one longs to do the other thing, sir. I'm afraid I lack that ability; it's a natural defect, it's a temperamental failing. Haven't you noticed that I need to be repressed, to be guided, to be kept from doing and saying foolish things?"

"No," he lied bravely.

"I'm sorry. I hoped you had noticed that much about me. I'll go a bit further and inform you that you have noticed it. However, I'll excuse your falsehood; you are merely trying to be polite. I'd like it better if you were entirely frank now, out here on this bare hill, with the woods and mountains all around—two folks held up against the sky! You can be merely polite when you get back to town. I can be the meek little slave of rule and custom when I get back to town. You admit, don't you, that you didn't tell me the exact truth about myself just now?"

"Yes."

"You see, I'm a rather keen observer where you are concerned. I have been watching you very closely up here where folks allow themselves to get back to the primitive more or less and show what they really think. So I have found out that you are in love with me."

He opened his mouth, but she hurried along, checking him:

"No, no—don't say anything in your present state of mind. You'd simply tell me another falsehood; natural and human impulse to protect yourself. I'm saying all this to-day, out here on this hill, because if I waited till we were in town I'd never be able to say it. I'm taking advantage of my last opportunity; I have been waiting till the last day. That's why I came up here. I should have sent father away if he hadn't gone willingly of his own account. Because I want to ask you if you won't marry me."

He fairly staggered; but this astounding young woman, who seemed determined to deal him blow after blow, surveyed him with great calmness.

"You'd better not speak yet," she warned him. "You are not in condition; you'd be incoherent. Listen to me! Naturally I'd much rather you'd ask me to marry you. That's the usual custom, so far as word of mouth goes, but in reality the girl is the one who asks by eyes and actions. But it's only a minor matter just now, when folks are in love with each other, as we are. I knew you'd never ask me. Partly because of that!"

She swept her arm with indifferent gesture to indicate the barony of Thornton.

"But mostly just because you are yourself, a gentleman whose pride forces him to do just the right thing as he sees the right. I need to have my actions governed by just such a person. That's why I have proposed to you. Wait! Don't speak yet! I want to say what I have nerved myself to say, else I never shall be able to say it later. I have written it all out beforehand so as to have it run right. I spent a lot of time on planning what to say. Bur-

ton Lesbitt is a dear boy. But he would not make the right husband for me. I wouldn't mind the least bit what he told me to do. He is too young to carry authority. And young men are always selfish. When I was floundering around in my feelings, after meeting you; when I was trying to class you, knowing full well that you were meant for me in some way, I called you my dream father. You didn't like that notion a bit, nor did I. So we have fallen in love with each other. And I——"

"I love you! I love you!" he cried; choking. He put out his arms and started toward her, but she stepped back quickly and stopped him with voice and gesture.

"I am glad you said that just at this time; it helps me along ever so much. But of course I have known it for some time. But wait! If you are not positively certain that you are giving me much more than I am giving you, I do not want you to marry me."

"I can only give you myself, my life, my love——"

"Yourself—that's what I want," she said gently. "Gold is not love and land is not love—and what is life without love? I have talked strangely to you, Hart. I have talked as if I were engaging a preceptor. But what I have meant is that I love you so much that I have put aside modesty, sanity, everything that could stand between us."

"You have shamed me," he confessed. "I was a fool in my pride. It was not merely that!" In his turn he pointed to the vast landscape. "It was consciousness of my age, my unworthiness, Aileen." Again he put out his arms to her, but she eluded them.

"I want to go to my father first. It is not settled as yet."

"You must let me go to your father. I insist. I am now awake. At least I can do that much."

"No! You must leave the Thorntons to deal with each other. They understand each other's peculiarities. I know what to say to my father."

"I feel——" he blurted.

"I hope you feel warm enough to stay outdoors until I can come to you," she

broke in, with a smile. "I'll be gone only a few minutes. The Thorntons do not make long prefaces. It will be a short and a lively session."

"Can I be cold with all this radiance of joy within me? I'll wait here, Aileen. This hill is a sacred altar now."

She ran away.

The dusk came slowly and the red glow faded and he paced to and fro, trying to settle the chaos of his emotions.

To himself, he seemed particularly little and cowardly. But he was obliged to admit the good sense of her determination to intercede with her father. Marston had seen in the past that Aileen Thornton had a way of asserting herself in matters which concerned the family. He could talk with Rutillus Thornton in manly fashion when opportunity presented itself. Now his love for her blazed into passion more vivid than ever; her generous bravery in coming to him as she had done was exalted by his thoughts and blessed by his gratitude.

When she came running back to him, the glory of victory shining on her face in the gloom, he took her into his arms and held her for a long time, his speech no longer fettered, his love pouring forth.

Then they went down the hill together, hand in hand, so supremely happy that they found no alloy in the present and no problem for the future.

"I have been bold and forward," she whispered. "But you will not remember it, will you?"

"Only to love you the more for saving me from myself, my sweetheart."

"It's like a story," she declared.

"A story whose end is: 'And they lived happy ever after!'"

CHAPTER XV.

Society hazarded a few guesses, of course, but society was not at all certain about the situation.

The lovers were discreetly circumspect when they returned to town.

"We opened our hearts to each other up in the clouds on the hilltop, where

there were none to hear," said the girl. "Let's stay in the clouds a little while. It's a precious secret just for ourselves."

He agreed gratefully.

As for Rutillus Thornton: "Let the womenfolks run it, Marston. The marriage question ought to be turned over to the management of the womenfolks. That's why I told Aileen to go and suit herself. My mind was on young Lesbitt; I didn't think of you. You're all right if she likes you. I have plenty of money for the whole of us—and I shouldn't wonder if I owed the Marston family something in a business way. We used to cut sharp corners in the old days when we were doing business."

It was a rude speech, but Marston was accustomed to Thornton's rudeness, and this new happiness had made him tractable.

The governor's lady smoothed any hurt he may have felt.

"I am glad that Aileen has grown to love you," she told him. "I am proud that you have honored us by loving her. You have so much to give us, General Marston. You'll forgive me for saying that, I'm sure. But I'm so anxious to have you put aside all those thoughts which bothered you when you first knew Aileen."

He thanked her with emotion.

As the days went on, his affection for this quiet, patient, self-deprecatory woman increased.

"Really," Aileen told him, in mischievous mood, "we are overturning all the practices and conventions in matrimony. I deliberately proposed to you, Hart, and here you are falling deeply in love with your mother-in-law—to be. Perhaps the venture will be a wonderful success, after all; it is all so different."

He drew her to him and kissed her. "I don't know how to talk to you any more," he confessed. "I can only show you how much I love you by deed and act."

"I believe I'm growing to understand that language perfectly."

When it came to deciding on the date

for the formal announcement of their engagement, they deferred to Aileen's mother.

"It shall be at dinner the night before the assembling of the legislature," she told them. "I want everybody to know how happy my dear girl is to be—and all the folks from all over the State will be near at hand. We will have our close friends at the dinner—only our chosen few."

"But the governor will be held so closely at the statehouse that evening——" protested Marston.

"I think you know fully that one of my husband's peculiarities is that he leaves all family affairs to the womenfolks, as he puts it. I think he would manage to stay away from such a dinner, no matter what date we select."

"No, on the contrary, I know that mamma—sly mamma," laughed the daughter, "has chosen a day and hour when she is absolutely sure that dad cannot be on hand. She wants to be happy on that occasion—and she couldn't be with dad's lamentable table etiquette."

"That's not kind, Aileen," protested the governor's lady. "Your father will be thankful for an excuse to stay away; I'll admit that, if you insist on a further motive on my part. He loathes social affairs. I hope you will as carefully consult your own husband's tastes when you get one."

"Bravo, mamma!"

But the mother did not smile at this raillery. She turned to Marston.

"I want you to know this before you come into our family, general. I know all that the gossips in this State have said about my marriage to Rutillus Thornton. They say that I married him for his money. That is not true. I married him because I understood him, and I still love him because I understand him now. When he speaks rudely to me, I know that under it all are the dearest truth and loyalty and tenderness I have ever known. We have had none of the quarrels which take place between young folks who have not learned to control their jealousies and their passions. I know that in my case

I was fortunatē when I married a man older than myself by so many years. That's my dearest reason for being so glad that Aileen has chosen you. Of course I am glad that she has chosen so wisely in other respects; but my own, my dearest, reason is that I believe her mother's good fortune will be hers."

Her cheeks were pink, her voice trembled. In all the time he had known her, Marston had never heard her speak so much at one time and declare so bravely her opinion.

He crossed to her and took her hand and kissed it. He knew that any words from him would profane that womanly outburst.

Then came the night when he could proudly hold up his prize of utter joy for all the world to behold!

It was the night before the convening of the legislature.

It was a crackling, snappy, frosty night—a hard, crystalline, white, electric, winter night, with vivid shuttlings and flutterings of the northern lights in the starry heavens.

It was a night which seemed to accord with the crackling tempers of the men who came from north, east, and south and west, hiving into the hotels of the State capital.

There were both reticence and tenseness in the groups which formed in lobbies, mumbled in undertones, and then dissolved to form new groups. An observer received an impression of bodeful accumulation of hidden and potential trouble.

Isolated and serene, thrust high against the stars on the shoulder of a hill, looming above all other roofs of the city, the statehouse loomed majestically; the hard light of the winter night flashed from its golden dome. The lights within the structure were dim and scattered; the preliminary caucuses had been held, and the throngs had returned to the hotels.

The executive mansion at the foot of the hill shed a glory of illumination from all its windows. Feast and festival were in evidence there, even though the master of the mansion was absent.

He was in his canopied chair on the dais in the council chamber. The ten desks of his councilors faced him in a half circle, and all the desks were occupied.

The great center chandelier was dark; the side lights gave dim illumination. The canopy of the big chair partly shaded the governor's face, and its deep grooves gave it the appearance of a study in arabesque. He sat there so quietly that he might have been a carved idol on a throne.

A man stood before him in front of the desks of the councilors—a man who was speaking with vigor. He had been declaiming for some time; his voice was hoarse.

The orator argued fervidly and shook passionate fist and thudded indignant heel into the nap of the thick carpet, but not one line or wrinkle was shifted in the broad face under the canopy. The countenance displayed no emotion, either commendation or disapprobation. Its expression marked utter indifference.

"But I have said enough, your excellency and members of the council. You knew it all before I began to speak. However, it was necessary to speak—to put the matter in words. I stand here in the person as the people's protest. You have heard me. The people don't believe that you will try to do, will dare to do, what they are whispering you intend to do. Do I need to remind you that you are governor of all the people, not simply a member of the political party which has elected you to high office? I am a member of your party. I am not simply one of the political opposition, seeking selfishly, fighting the ordinary political fight. I have resigned my position as attorney general of this State so that I could come here and protest as a citizen, uninfluenced by politics. That's my sacrifice for the best interests of our old State. What shall be your sacrifice, gentlemen? I stand here and for the people I say"—he lifted both arms above his head and screamed with the passion of an inspired prophet—"you shall not be allowed to steal this State!"

He stopped. He stood panting for breath after his mighty effort.

Fully half a minute of profound silence followed.

Then Governor Thornton spoke. His lips did not appear to move. His voice seemed, rather, a sort of nasal trumpeting in harsh monotone:

"The council will go into executive session!"

It was formal dismissal; and the angry man, ex-Attorney General Stedman Sawtelle, bowed and retired, his fingers inside his limp collar, easing the swollen veins of his neck.

Governor Thornton moved for the first time in many minutes.

He raised a gnarled hand from the chair arm and beckoned to the messenger of the executive department, "Whispering Bill" Saunders. Governor Thornton made no secret of his command. He said for all to hear:

"Go to my house and tell General Marston to report to me here—at once."

Saunders started on tiptoe for the door.

"No matter what anybody says to you, insist on seeing him and tell him to hurry."

The governor picked up papers which lay beside him on his table.

"Now, gentlemen, having patiently listened to the squeaking of that infernal windmill, we will proceed with sensible business."

The governor's mansion was offering more cheer than the big house on the hill. Nevertheless, there were tears in the eyes of the first lady of the State when she looked down the table and gazed on Marston and his fiancée. In her heart she was calling them her children and was offering up an honest little prayer for their happiness, and so her tears were happy tears.

Burton Lesbitt rose to give the toast of the evening; he had asked that he be allowed that privilege. It was an intimate little party, a gathering of close friends, and he chose to be frank, though his smile was just a bit wistful.

"I have been adopted as a brother," he said, "and so I am permitted to bespeak happiness and all good things for my dear sister and the true gentleman who has won her."

Their eyes invited the general after they had risen to do honor to the sentiment which Lesbitt had manfully proposed.

Marston came to his feet, and gazed down into the brimming eyes of the girl.

"Constancy and love and faith; sincerity, devotion, and abiding trust—all these I pledge." Then he bent down and reverently kissed her forehead.

"Pearls of words on a golden thread," declared Leila Trueworthy.

Under cover of the gayety a servant passed unobtrusively to the side of the mistress of the mansion.

"Tell the messenger to go away," commanded Mrs. Thornton. She displayed a flash of indignation.

"But he says he is from the governor, madam."

"General Marston cannot be disturbed. Tell him."

"But he says it is very urgent."

Mrs. Thornton looked on politics and the men and the movements of politics with rather indifferent toleration, so long as she was not especially disturbed. The persons who consorted with her husband in his library and littered the floor with cigar ashes were creatures from whom she fled. She knew the political game as a sort of necessary evil to be embraced, providing a man wished to gain office.

But now the evil was treading too closely on her own affairs.

This seemed to be particularly impolite thoughtlessness on her husband's part. She dared to break her rules of usual obedience and to show her resentment.

She rose from her place and went into the hall, her departure unnoticed by those at table.

The tall clock in the reception room was striking the hour of ten on a mellow gong.

"Go back to the governor and inform him that under no circumstances must

General Marston be disturbed this evening."

Mr. Saunders shook his head slowly. He put his palm at the side of his mouth and prepared to speak.

"The governor knows very well why General Marston cannot come to the statehouse this evening," she insisted. In her thoughts she added: "But it's just like him to forget all about it."

"Be that as it may," purred Whispering Bill behind his palm, "I have orders, and they're strict. There's something frizzling up there, ma'am."

She blinked thoughtfully, her little rebellion ending as she pondered on her husband's methods of dealing with disobedience. She returned to the table, and leaned over Marston:

"There's a messenger from the statehouse in the hall."

The adjutant general rose hastily, patted Aileen's hand, and went out.

"What is it, mamma?" asked the girl, her brow wrinkling with annoyance.

"Your father has sent for him."

"My father is absolutely, ridiculously impossible sometimes."

Too impatient even to apologize to the guests, she hurried out into the hall.

"My compliments to his excellency," Marston was saying. "I will come at once."

"But you cannot leave like this," expostulated the girl at his elbow. "My father is——"

"Is my commander in chief," he returned, with a smile. "I will follow you at once," he informed the waiting Mr. Saunders in a tone which hinted that Mr. Saunders had better be on his way. The messenger gave the two a prolonged and understanding stare and retired.

She nested her hands in his palm, detaining him. He smiled down on her with more gentleness.

"Oh, why did not you string one more word on that golden thread?"

"And that word, dear heart?"

"Obedience."

"But I am obeying."

"Yes, but every time a man says 'I obey!' it seems as if he must push some

woman aside and leave her behind. Oh, you look at me—I know what is in your mind! You think I am a foolish girl and have no right to hold you back for the sake of my own happiness."

"No, I am glad because you want me to stay with you. But——"

She had been speaking with girlish petulance. Now she put her hands on his shoulders, and looked up at him with such wide-eyed seriousness that he ceased speaking and returned her gaze.

"It sounds silly, what I have been saying; I know it does. It sounds as if I were making much out of a small matter. But something came over me when I saw you go out just now. I don't know what it was. I was frightened. I am frightened now. I am confessing it to you just as I shall confess all my feelings to you. I know I risk having you think I am silly. Why should I be frightened, Hart?" She went closer to him and trembled.

"I think you mistake your feelings; you are a bit nervous—the evening——"

"No, I am frightened. I don't understand. It's not like me to be this way."

She put her arms about his neck, and, on tiptoe, held her face close to his lips.

"Good-by, my own sweetheart. I know you must go. That's the woman's part—to smile and say 'Go!' Forgive me and forget my folly. Thank God, this is America, and soldiers are not going away to fight."

He kissed her, but she did not release him.

"Why am I afraid?" she quavered. "I don't understand. What is the matter with me? Has love taken away all my good sense?"

The sincerity of her distress puzzled him.

She took her arms from his neck, and stepped back and stamped her foot with Thornton determination.

"I'm a fool!" she cried. "Hurry along, Hart, or father will take you across his knee. Remember, please, that I became sane before you left me."

"I have sweeter things to remember."

"If it is not too late when you finish your business, come home with father and say another good night."

"I'll do it. Make my apologies in there, please." He nodded toward the door of the dining room. "I must hurry."

The wistfulness of her parting smile pained him. More than ever was he puzzled by this strange emotion which seemed to come from feminine premonition. He had always found her free from whims and weakness.

He wondered what was happening at the statehouse and what was wanted of him.

CHAPTER XVI.

He went up the hill at a brisk gait, his heels creaking on the crisp snow.

The big building looked especially and majestically calm.

Although he wondered at receiving a summons at that hour he did not resent the governor's curt command. For a good many years he had practiced for himself, and had imposed on others, a soldier's unquestioning obedience.

Since election Marston had been keeping politics out of his mind as carefully as he kept politics out of his office. The governor had not talked politics to him; on the contrary, seemed determined to keep off the topic.

They who had broached any topic of politics to the adjutant general found him an inattentive and impatient listener; therefore, he had kept the news of politics out of his ears. When he was out of his office he had dearer concerns to engross his attention. He had heard without especial interest that the opposition claimed the legislature, and therefore contended that it could swing the State offices and patronage to itself, but Marston had usually found all brands of officeholders to be very much alike, and his own position was appointive, derived from the governor's favor. Therefore, in the matter of executive-department concerns, he had been dwelling apart in the serenity of indifference.

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He entered the statehouse by one of the side doors.

When he passed the watch room, old Corporal John Candage struggled up from his chair and saluted.

"Is all quiet on the Potomac, John?" inquired the general amiably.

"All quiet, sir, to date."

Sergeant Tarr was asleep in his chair beside the elevator door, and Marston went past him on tiptoe, unwilling to disturb the old man. He ran up the main stairway, two steps at a leap, exulting in his vivid sense of well-being. He traversed dim corridors to the anteroom of the executive chamber. In the anteroom he found the Honorable Stedman Sawtelle tramping to and fro, easing a damp collar away from his neck with irritable jerks. He scowled at the big fellow who came bustling in, radiating his joy in life and love.

"All the best of a Happy New Year to you, sir," was the general's exuberantly cordial greeting.

"Unf!" grunted the other. "So you are here, are you?"

"Yes, I'm here, sir." Marston did not moderate his smile.

"Seem to think you're going to have a good time doing it, eh?"

"Perhaps so, whatever it is you're talking about."

"You know perfectly well what I'm talking about. So he has decided to commit the crime, has he? You're here to do it for him, hey?"

"Really, Mr. Sawtelle, I have not the least knowledge of why I'm here."

"Do you take me for a fool?"

"I don't understand why you should ask me such a question as that, Sawtelle," retorted the general, his smile fading.

"Because you do know why you're here, I say. You do know what those buccaneers behind that door are planning on. You're in with 'em in their damnable scheme." He shook his fist at the massive door which had been closed to mask the executive session.

"Mr. Sawtelle, I do not know!" The adjutant general's tone was acrid. "I say I do not know why I'm here."

The lawyer halted in his nervous and angry pacing. He straddled his short legs, stuck his hands under his coat tails, and squinted up at Marston, venom in his gaze, deliberate insult in his tones when he spoke:

"The whole State knows that Rute Thornton expects, demands, and gets one service from all his pets. You are specially qualified. You are his chief pet."

"You have called me that before, Sawtelle, and I serve notice on you that I don't relish the name."

As little men often do, the lawyer took advantage of his puny size.

He continued to stare up at the big fellow who towered over him.

"I say you're specially qualified for that service."

"May I ask why?"

"You're a good liar!"

General Marston stiffened, narrowed his eyes. He brought up his hand suddenly, his fist clenched. But he unclosed the hand, and began to stroke the gray hair at his temples. Then, much to Mr. Sawtelle's astonishment and considerably to that gentleman's discomfort, he laughed with real whole-souled fervor.

"My dear sir, now I understand that you're trying to talk politics with me. I always refuse to discuss politics. I lack all inclination. I also lack the proper vocabulary."

He turned his back on his provoking antagonist, went to the big door, and rapped. Whispering Bill opened the portal slightly and cautiously, and shoved out his head. He admitted the adjutant general, and closed the door with no sound but the clicking of the latch.

Marston crossed the chamber, and stood before the grim figure in the big chair. He saluted.

"General Marston, how soon can you place a company of militia in this state-house?" demanded the governor, speaking sharply and loudly.

"Within fifteen minutes, your excellency."

His excellency exhibited frank surprise.

"It happens that the local company of the National Guard is giving an exhibition drill in the armory this evening, sir. I can call them by telephone."

"Go call 'em!"

"With what equipment, sir?" Marston was concealing his emotions behind the mask of soldier discipline.

"Rifles, ammunition, blankets, rations, and a machine gun."

"Very well, sir."

"I will give you further directions after you have called the soldiers."

The adjutant general bowed and went out of the chamber.

In the anteroom, Sawtelle seized his arm, jabbering in his excitement:

"I had my ear to the door. I heard the old devil. And now do you tell me you don't know why you're here?"

"I have received orders from my commander in chief, Mr. Sawtelle."

"Yes, orders to steal this State. Godsake, man, don't you know what this means?"

"I only know that I have received orders which I shall obey."

He took the lawyer's fingers in a firm clutch and freed his arm.

"It's political——"

"I have nothing to do with politics. I am not interested in your politics."

"But this is knavery. It's theft, and you're helping it. It's robbing the people of their victory at the polls. Those men in there have turned into black-legs."

Marston started away, and again the lawyer grabbed the general's arm.

"They have counted men out of this legislature—men who have been elected. It's a scheme to hang onto the State offices."

Marston roughly shook off the man's grasp.

"It's not a matter which concerns me, I tell you, Sawtelle. There are courts in this State, and their duties are laid down for them. Keep your hands off me! I shall forget to be patient."

"When you call soldiers into this state-house——"

"Even as there are judges, Mr. Saw-

telle, so there are State troops, and their duties are laid down for them when orders come from the commander in chief."

He went to the telephone, which was inside the inclosure of the private secretary, and called his number.

Then, while he was waiting for response, the big door of the executive chamber was thrown open; the session was ended.

"So you're going to put soldiers in here, are you?" demanded Sawtelle in strident tones, beside himself with passion. "You're going to hold the people's own against the people, are you?" He went to the threshold of the chamber, and stood there and shook his fists. "By the gods, governor, it's a State steal and our party will get the cussing. I beg. I urge. I protest."

"How much money are you getting for this job, Sawtelle?" inquired the governor sarcastically. "You're a paid attorney for the bunch that wants offices, that's what you are!"

"My legal practice is——"

"You resigned as attorney general because you saw a chance to grab off more boodle in the lobby." His excellency had descended from the dais as soon as the door was opened; now he walked across the chamber, his hands in his trousers' pockets.

"I am speaking for the people," declared the lawyer.

"At so much per speak," scoffed the governor. "I know all about it, Sawtelle. Remember that I'm president of one bank and a director in several more. I have seen the checks which have paid for this outflow of patriotism."

He pushed past the lawyer, giving him a contemptuous grin.

Marston came away from the telephone, and listened with interest.

"I am entitled to honest wages in my profession. And it's no reason why my protest against this State steal——"

The governor was on his way to his private chamber. He turned.

"Enough of that, Sawtelle! Messenger, call men from the watch and put that man out of the statehouse!"

"You needn't bother! I'm going. I

have business outside this statehouse right now—business with honest men. When I come back with 'em, look out for yourselves!"

He went away, muttering oaths.

"They have paid him well; he is trying to earn the money," observed Thornton. "Come along in, gentlemen; you, too, Marston."

He led the way, and set out a box of cigars on his desk. The councilors helped themselves; they were grave, and did not seem to care to talk.

The governor tramped to and fro, his hands in his pockets.

"General Marston," he inquired, "do you know just what the situation is?"

"No, sir."

"I was afraid not. You're not much of a politician."

The general stood at attention with a soldier's impassivity.

"This is a political exigency, and we must use a political expedient. I hope you can put some dependence on those tin soldiers of yours. They'll realize, won't they, that with their uniforms on they are soldiers and not voters?"

"The State troops are well disciplined, sir."

"In a few words, Marston, I'm going to give you a primary lesson in politics so that you'll understand what your responsibilities are. My councilors and I, according to the State constitution, have canvassed the returns. We have found irregularities in certain legislative districts. We have decided that certain representatives have not been legally elected. We shall not allow those men to take their seats in the House to-morrow and vote on the election of State officers. A legislative body has the right to decide on the eligibility of its members; the House will later take up the matter of contests for seats. We do not propose to allow men who have no right to seats to assist in organization. That's why I want this statehouse guarded against a mob."

The general bowed.

"You understand that we are upholding the law, strictly interpreted. Sawtelle has been making a lot of cheap

talk because it happens that the irregularities we have discovered affect mostly the men of the other party. That's their misfortune, not our fault. We can't go behind the ballot law of this State. You understand the situation now, eh?"

"I'm quite sure I do, Governor Thornton. In any event, your commands constitute my authority."

"Exactly! I assume all responsibility. Here are your instructions: Guard the doors of the statehouse. At ten o'clock to-morrow forenoon the members of the council will attend you at the main entrance, and you will admit only those men whom they vouch for. The councilors and I will stay here all night. Between now and ten o'clock to-morrow admit nobody except by orders from me personally. That's all!"

The adjutant general saluted and left the chamber. He hurried down the stairs and went straight to the door of the watch room.

"John," he informed Candage, "I'm obliged to be your boss for a time. The governor has ordered troops into the statehouse."

"I heard there was a prospect of it, sir. Mr. Sawtelle just went out cussing about it."

"Only a bit of precaution, I take it. But I wish they'd make a cleaner business of their politics."

"I don't know what the row is about, sir, but it doesn't look good to me when it's necessary to guard the people's house against the people."

"Still, a soldier mustn't ask questions, John. You know that."

"I do, sir."

Marston went out and stood under the carriage porch of the side door. After a time he heard, far away, the measured screeching of many boot heels on the hard-packed snow of the street. His men were coming. He reviewed them as they marched past him into the statehouse. The captain obeyed Marston's finger signal, and stepped to the general's side.

"Post sentries outside the doors, relieving them every hour, Captain Holt.

No admittance for anybody except by orders from the governor. The men on guard duty may be at ease and catch what sleep they can on their blankets."

Eager curiosity flamed in the captain's eyes, though he asked no questions.

"War has not been declared, captain, and I do not expect war to be declared. But they seem to be playing a little politics up on the hill here to-night," explained the general, with a smile. "We are only to see to it that some grabbing politician doesn't carry off the statehouse in a shawl strap."

The machine gun came last, drawn by men, its wheels squalling on the snow.

"Leave it on the terrace here!" commanded Marston. "Have the men throw a few blankets over it; it's not a pretty exhibit in front of a statehouse."

He followed the soldiers indoors, inspected the arrangement of the troops, and then kept vigil, pacing the dim rotunda.

CHAPTER XVII.

Corporal Candage, returning from his hourly visit to his time clocks, found General Marston standing before the great cases which protected the returned battle flags, relics of the Civil War.

"I always stop in front of 'em, myself, this time o' night, sir," said the old soldier. "They seem to talk to me when it's nigh onto midnight—to whisper to me, as you might say. I wish they could talk to everybody the same as they talk to me—and make 'em understand. There'd be more love of country and there'd be less war!"

"They have just been talking to me," confessed Marston. "I understand what they say, John."

"Once I saw a girl break away from a sight-seeing party and run over in front of this case, sir. 'What's in the case, Mabel?' they asked her when she went back to the party. 'Pooh! Nothing worth looking at,' she told 'em. 'Only some old flags!' Oh, she didn't know, sir! There are so many of 'em who don't know!"

At that moment, faintly audible, they heard something.

Marston was honestly startled for an instant; it almost seemed as if the sounds came from within the cases. They heard fifes and drums.

"God help us!" gasped the old corporal. "Are we hearing ghosts?"

Marston listened intently and understood.

"It's outdoors, John."

Halfway across the lobby on his way to the door he was intercepted by Captain Holt, who saluted.

"There was a lot of excitement downtown when we marched through the streets," he reported. "Some talk of a demonstration. I think they're coming."

"Double the guard at the doors!" commanded Marston.

While the words were on his lips, Aileen Thornton came hurrying to him across the rotunda; Mrs. Trueworthy followed her more leisurely.

"What is it—what are they going to do—what is it all about?" the girl cried. "They threw stones at our windows. The police came and drove them away. They are shouting in the streets. They are making threats."

"It's only political excitement. You should not have come up here, Aileen."

"But there's danger. Father would not answer on the telephone. I could not stay away."

"You ought not to be here. Did not the guard—"

"Oh, he's only the shoe-store clerk at Lord's," she said with impatience. "What is the danger, Hart? Tell me!"

But he turned from her to Captain Holt.

"Bring that fellow here!"

The captain saluted and hurried on his errand.

"Hart, what is the matter with you? You look at me as if you do not know me!" Amazement at his apparent indifference was mingled with her fears.

"I am sorry you came up here, Aileen. Nothing serious can happen. But it's no place for you. I'll send you home with an escort." The fifes and drums were nearer.

"I'll not go! I'll not go!"

Captain Holt arrived with the delinquent soldier.

"What were your orders when you were placed at that door?" demanded the general.

"But I knew Miss Thornton, and —"

"What were your orders, sir?"

"To admit nobody, General Marston," confessed the soldier, red-faced and shifting his gaze. "But the governor's daughter—"

"Captain Holt, place this man under arrest."

"Hart, it was my own fault! Don't punish him, please don't."

He took her arm and drew her away.

"Aileen," he said gravely, in low tones, "I am doing my best to make soldiers out of these boys. It's a hard job. You are making it harder. That fellow disobeyed orders, and fifty men were watching and listening to find out what I'd do. They know now. You must go up to your father, you and Mrs. Trueworthy, if you will not go home." He led her to the elevator.

"Forgive me if I am a little hasty with you," he pleaded. "But I must go out and ask that crowd what it wants."

"But you cannot go out there, Hart," she insisted. "I have heard their threats. I have—"

"Mrs. Trueworthy!" He gave Aileen's hand into the keeping of her companion and smiled at both of them when the elevator's grille clashed shut.

"I don't know just what this all means, Captain Holt," he said, hurrying toward the side door, "but we must be ready for 'most anything. Have your men fall in and await orders!"

When the general stepped outside, the fifes and drums were clamoring under the carriage porch. He stood at the head of the granite steps, his sentries behind him; the big light above the door showed him plainly to the throng. There were many hundreds of men. Marston recognized some as members of the incoming legislature; but the others, and the majority, were the ready-and-rough adventurers who

flock to any cause which promises excitement.

Many carried torches; others burned red fire. They shouted and sang.

General Marston discovered the Honorable Stedman Sawtelle in the throng; that gentleman was in the center of a group of men who were serious, silent, and respectable looking.

After a time Sawtelle succeeded in silencing the noise of his camp followers.

"I am not responsible for a great part of this gathering or its methods, General Marston. I have come here with members of the legislature; and in behalf of the people of this State and those who have been elected by the people, I demand the privilege of free entrance into our statehouse."

"I take my orders from our governor, sir. I have been commanded to keep all persons out until the convening of the legislature."

"I question the authority of the governor to keep respectable citizens out of the statehouse."

"I cannot argue that question—I shall obey orders as a soldier."

"The orders of Rutillus Thornton, eh?"

"The orders of our governor, I repeat."

Sawtelle unbuttoned his overcoat and pulled out his watch. He looked at the time and then held the watch high above his head.

"Take note, everybody!" he shouted with all the power of his voice. "It is now eleven minutes of midnight. On the stroke of midnight Rutillus Thornton ceases to be governor of this State. Thus says our constitution. He will not be governor after midnight until he takes the oath of office to-morrow, at ten of the clock in the forenoon. You know that, don't you, General Marston?"

"I do know that it's the law, though I'll confess I hadn't thought of it until this moment," confessed Marston ingenuously.

"When you said just now that you are not a lawyer, I reckon you told the truth," said the attorney dryly; "even

though you studied to be one. Well, General Marston, you are now obeying the orders of our governor. Very well! Your commander in chief is *Governor Thornton*." He dwelt on the title. "But in about ten minutes he will be Rute Thornton. Will you continue to obey the orders of Rute Thornton, a rascally politician?"

"Just one moment before you answer that question or try to answer it, General Marston!"

It was the governor's well-known, rasping voice behind Marston, and his excellency spoke in clarion tones. He had appeared suddenly and stood in the doorway between the soldiers who guarded the portal.

"So you have come here with a mob, have you, Sawtelle?"

"I am here with members of the legislature, demanding free entrance, sir."

"I see men down there with clubs in their hands. I see men holding rocks. I have been informed by telephone that stones have been thrown at my house this night. I say that you have come here with a mob."

"It is not a mob now—but things can happen to make it a mob before to-morrow morning," declared the lawyer, with venom.

"State property is now threatened by mob violence," bellowed the governor. "Under the circumstances I have decided to declare this State under the rule of martial law from midnight, to-night, until I take my oath of office, to-morrow."

He waved a paper above his head.

"This is the official proclamation, duly signed and sealed by the great seal of State—it's the last official act of my closing administration. I delegate to Adjutant General Hart Marston full power to guard State property and administer affairs. And if you will look at your watch again, Sawtelle, you'll see I'm well inside the time limit. Good night, gentlemen!"

He went in and slammed the door behind him.

"We have with us still General Marston, perpetuating the dynasty,"

sneered Sawtelle. "Let me ask you, sir, if you inherit the opinions of Rute Thornton in regard to political decency?"

"I refuse to discuss politics, Mr. Sawtelle."

"You've got to discuss 'em enough to tell me whether you propose to help that crowd steal this State."

The general was silent.

"Are you afraid to tell me what you intend to do?"

"Not at all, Mr. Sawtelle. I shall not open the doors of the statehouse to you or any of this gathering tonight. I agree with the governor that it closely resembles a mob."

Furious howls greeted his statement. He surveyed the noise makers with serenity until they had finished.

"You are fast proving the thing," he told them. "I'd deserve to be court-martialed for criminal negligence if I opened these doors."

"You're a coward of a tin soldier!" yelled somebody.

Marston smiled tolerantly.

"Look what they've got here—look what they want to do to us!" cried a shrill voice.

They had discovered the blanketed machine gun and had stripped off its coverings; its gray metal gleamed coldly and bodingly under the light of the stars.

"It's ours—it belongs to the people! Turn it around and blow that door off the hinges," advised a rioter.

"Hands off State property!" cried Marston, starting down the steps. "Send a squad of men, Captain Holt, to fetch this gun in."

But when the soldiers appeared, the rowdies in the crowd began to throw stones and fragments of ice.

A big fellow was doing the most to make trouble; he had constituted himself leader of the gangsters in the crowd. He leaped upon the limber of the gun.

"Don't let the little tin soldiers scare you, boys!" he shouted. "Slap their wrists and they'll run and cry. I told that tin officer he was a coward. I tell him so again."

He fired a chunk of ice at Marston, and the elevation was so commanding and the aim so true that the general's face began to bleed.

"Call him Thornton's pet—he likes that name best," advised the intractable Sawtelle.

"All right. You're Thornton's pet. You are also a coward. You need guns to fight with. You don't know how to fight man fashion."

Marston had vivid and instant conception of what that situation meant to his boys. They had halted and were shielding their heads as best they could against the missiles, crooking their arms across their faces. To order them to charge meant the use of bayonets; to allow them to be driven meant the loss of morale he had been cultivating so earnestly in his citizen soldiers. He knew that only something desperate in the way of diversion could save himself and his men from present shame and future ridicule. He rushed straight at the man on the gun limber, knocking others out of his way; he resolved to make an example of the ringleader if grit and muscle could do it.

It was immediately evident that, in spite of his size, the fellow did not propose to give man-fashion battle. He kicked viciously at the general, and this assault was so unexpected that Marston was knocked off his feet and fell on his back.

The crowd voiced protest. The husky brute was losing the sympathy of his adherents. They even cheered the general when he rose.

"Come down off that perch!" yelled somebody. "Else we'll yank you down!"

Marston put up his hand in protest. "Stand back, men!" he urged. "This is my affair."

Again he ran at the fellow, and, when another kick was launched, he grabbed the man's leg and yanked him off the limber. The chap staggered when he came to the ground, and fell heavily.

"Get up! I'm waiting for you," stated Marston.

"That's the talk! That's the square way!" commended the bystanders.

The general met the man's onslaught calmly and with a certain sense of contented confidence. He had been boxing instructor for his naval militia boys too long to fear any such antagonist as this fellow plainly was—making his rush blindly, bellowing his oaths with the Chinese spirit of intimidation, flailing his arms. Marston held his head aslant, presented his body edgewise, and drove his fist under the man's ear with a forceful hook. The fellow went down on his knees.

"Get up!" advised the general. "That's for calling me a coward. You called me another name. Get up!"

"Be a man. Get up!" shouted the crowd.

The chap obeyed, and made another rush.

Marston's next blow was more vicious and brutal.

It was plain that the object lesson had served sufficiently for the onlookers as well as the victim. The latter rose, after a time, and staggered away, and the men in the crowd were silent.

"If there's anybody else here who thinks that national guardsmen are cowards, let him speak up and I'll have one of my boys attend to his case; none of us is afraid," declared the general.

The silence continued.

"Listen to me one moment! It's time for certain persons in this country to wake up and encourage our soldiery instead of handing out insults and abuse. You are going to find out all of a sudden that you need soldiers, and a lot of 'em."

He turned to his squad.

"Run this gun into the statehouse!"

He followed, and on the steps turned and faced the throng.

"You all ought to be ashamed of yourselves," he said, with indignation.

"General Marston, when you wake up—when you come to a realizing sense of what you're doing to-night, you'll be the one to be ashamed!" shouted Sawtelle.

"I am maintaining the law against a mob, sir."

"You are maintaining the scheme of a gang of crooks, I say! And you're

too pig-headed to listen to the word of men who know! Marston, your grandfather and your father are turning in their graves to-night. It's a wonder they don't appear to you! And let me tell you that by making a plug-ugly of yourself just now you haven't settled this question! The trouble is just beginning."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Whispering Saunders caught step with General Marston after the latter had paced for a time in the rotunda.

"I saw it. It was good work," purred the confidential agent of the executive. "I went up and told the governor and his party."

"That wasn't necessary," objected the general. "I am not proud of the affair."

"I told the governor there wasn't any doubt about his being able to depend on you after this. He thinks so himself."

"It isn't a matter of the governor and myself, Saunders. I am guarding State property, that's all."

"To be sure! And I want to congratulate you, General Marston. I have just heard the news about your engagement. It's a fine thing all round."

"I thank you," returned Marston coldly.

"Now I can talk to you, knowing that you're in with us. They are ugly outside. You're going to keep a stiff backbone, aren't you?"

"I'm going to keep this statehouse out of the hands of a mob."

"To be sure! Just right. It's all working slick," chuckled the messenger. "Sted Sawtelle is a keen sniffer, light on his feet, and good on the trail. But here's a fox he ain't going to dig out. With you to depend on, we're all right. We can do a little bragging. Blast a new election law, anyway! Those country boneheads never can get used to it. Just think of it! There were fourteen legislative districts—our own—carried strong by our men—where we had to do tinkering to make the election legal and seat our representatives."

"You had to do what?" demanded Marston.

"Tinker! Of course the governor has told you about it, but probably you didn't pay much attention, not being specially interested in politics. I am, you know, and that's why I had so much fun out of the job they gave me. I put on false whiskers and felt like the king of detectives. I went to those districts and had the technical errors fixed up by the town officers. Our returns are as right as a trivet—it was all done very nicely under cover."

"But how about the errors on the other side?"

"We are not helping the other party to run its business. The chap who said that possession is nine points of the law said a whole lot. We have possession, with you in charge. And if there is any more law needed, the governor has it on his side. He interprets the law strictly. He throws out those returns on account of errors."

"Supposing they were not thrown out, what would be the situation?"

"Oh, on the face of things they would have about five members to the good," confessed Mr. Saunders, with serenity and some indifference. "But they have been thrown out, because the law says they must be. The returns speak for themselves—there are the documents with the errors."

"Then Sawtelle was right."

"In what way?"

"Governor Thornton and his council propose to steal the State."

"No such thing, general. As party men they are only seeing to it that the party vote is properly credited."

"But they are not allowing the other party to count its full vote."

"They are simply letting it stand as it shows on the face. That's law. I have never heard of one party working to put the opposition party into control. That would be a fine brand of politics to hand out to party supporters!"

Captain Holt intercepted them and saluted.

"Compliments of Mr. Sawtelle, sir.

He asks if he may be admitted, alone. He has important messages."

"Escort him in."

"Hold on, there!" protested Saunders. "I heard the governor give you strict orders to let nobody in here."

"I heard him, sir! That was when he was governor." He pointed to the rotunda's big clock. It marked twenty minutes past midnight. "Now he is not the governor. I am in charge."

"It's only temporary, General Marston. You mustn't take chances. You are responsible. You are only holding this thing over for the party."

"Captain Holt, why are you waiting? Bring in Mr. Sawtelle."

The lawyer had telegrams in his hands.

"General Marston, you have assumed control of affairs under the late governor's proclamation. Therefore I have come to you direct. Early in the evening I foresaw what was going to happen, as I have told you. I wired to five of the justices of the supreme court of this State. I asked them for a snap judgment. I explained that the unofficial opinion might prevent the bloodshed of citizens and the disgrace of the State. In each case they have replied that their opinion is that probably the new election law will be broadly interpreted, so that mere technical errors will not be allowed to negative returns where the wishes of the voters have been clearly shown. Here are the messages I have just received."

He placed them in Marston's hands. The general read them.

"Mr. Sawtelle, I see that each justice expressly warns you that the opinion is purely personal and unofficial, and he speaks only because it is represented that there is an exigency and he wishes to prevent bloodshed. Do you look for any such crisis as that?"

"I do, sir, unless the people get what belongs to them. A military coup d'état was never in fashion in this country, general. Their own statehouse is being held by force against the people; the people will take it by force if there's no other way. I realize that you think the crowd outside there is a pretty

feeble proposition. It is! But something else is on the way. One of the members whom Thornton is keeping out of his seat owns the Avon granite quarry. He has wired and has two hundred men on the way; they are bringing their sledge hammers and dynamite. Another man has routed about a hundred ice cutters from the river boarding houses; they are all rough and rowdy men. It's bad business! But stealing this State is worse!"

"Mr. Sawtelle," declared Marston firmly, "these telegrams contain no authority."

"I have admitted it already. Take them for what they are worth."

"You assert that there is a rough and ugly mob on its way. Are you its spokesman? Do you demand that I shall give up this statehouse to that mob?"

"I do not. I demand that the statehouse shall be given up to the people, so that the representatives whom the people have elected to office shall be able to take their seats to-morrow."

"I advise you to call off your mob, sir."

"It is not my mob. The matter has gone so far that my authority is nothing now."

"I am trying to be patient and just, Sawtelle. I ask you to note that."

"You are too blamed patient," broke in Saunders. "You've got the law and your orders and a machine gun! What are you standing here and dickering with the enemy for?"

"Mr. Saunders, you are the messenger for the governor and council. You belong upstairs, in the executive department. Go up there!"

"I'm going to stay here and see whether you're proposing to betray your party or not."

"Captain Holt, detail a guard and remove this man to the department where he belongs."

Saunders started for the elevator, muttering oaths.

General Marston turned again to the lawyer.

"You say you have no authority. If

that is so, we are simply wasting time. You will please step outside, sir."

"You say it's dangerous to let a mob inside here, general. Let me tell you it will damage State property a devilish lot more if you keep that mob outside."

Marston did not reply.

"What shall I tell 'em?" demanded Sawtelle.

"Do you insist that you have no authority?"

"I can't stop 'em unless you quit."

"Then you tell the crowd outside that I shall stand for the good name of our State, and shall not allow a mob to run things in defiance of law and order."

"It's civil war, then?"

"That's for you fellows outside to say, unless you can wait for the law to prevail."

A harsh voice broke in:

"Drive that man out of this statehouse even if you have to brad him along with bayonets!"

Governor Thornton had come down a part of the main stairway and stood at the break of the first terrace of steps.

Behind him were members of the council. Beside him were his daughter and Mrs. Trueworthy.

"I do not need bayonets, sir," retorted the lawyer, beginning his retreat. "I am going. It isn't safe inside here any longer."

General Marston walked up the stairs after the lawyer had withdrawn.

"That was good talk I heard from you just now, Marston," called his excellency. "But Saunders told me you were quitting."

"Mr. Saunders has just told me something, also. Governor Thornton, may I speak with you in private?"

"Isn't this private enough? We're among friends—all standing for the same thing!"

Marston shook his head.

The governor turned and led the way.

Aileen slipped her hand into Marston's when he started to follow, and went along by his side.

"It is so wonderful," she whispered.

"When I asked you, so long ago, to help my father, I didn't know you would save him when the time came, Hart."

His lips were set close and he did not answer her.

"It is all on your shoulders. I understand now. I was wrong to worry you with my poor questions. I shall not trouble you any more, dear heart."

But when they came to the door of the governor's chamber she did not release his hand.

"It cannot be so private that I cannot be present," she protested, when he tried to free himself, lifting her hand gently.

"It's best for me to see the governor alone."

"Father!" she appealed. "You don't care, do you?"

"Let the girl come in, Marston. It's all in the family, whatever it is. Bad idea to start in having secrets from the womenfolks. Their guessing is worse than the truth."

He laughed, but he did not appear to be wholly at ease in his attitude toward Marston; he seemed to welcome the presence of his daughter at their interview.

When the door was shut, and the three were closeted, his excellency walked to and fro.

"Speed up, Marston! If they propose to try their fool tricks, you'll be needed below. The responsibility is on you just now."

"I realize that, sir. I still insist that you and I should have our talk in private."

He bowed to Aileen, and caught an indignant flash from her eyes.

"I have never had to hide anything from my own daughter, Marston."

"And why should you have secrets that I should not know, Hart?"

He looked from one to the other.

"Very well," he agreed. "Here is the situation: they are going to send an ugly gang of irresponsibles against the statehouse."

"Only threats and hoorah, Marston."

"Bribed rowdies will do almost anything under cover of darkness, sir. It means a nasty fight. It means the dis-

grace of this State. Here are a few messages from justices of the supreme court."

The governor gave them hasty inspection.

"Only unofficial guesswork; they say so."

"However, I have other information that isn't guesswork—unless Saunders lies. He tells me that our own party returns were sent back for rectification."

The governor walked for a few moments. Then he came and stood in front of the adjutant general.

"Look here, Marston, I'm coming frankly into the open with you. I'd insult you if I didn't. You are in our party, you're an officeholder under me. You're in my family. You're closer to me than anybody except my wife and daughter. I'm merely playing politics, as they all play it when they're forced. You talk about disgrace. Puh! The only disgrace is being licked in the game."

"I don't agree with you, sir."

The governor stared, scuffed his mane, and bristled.

"I haven't picked up a traitor, have I?"

"It is a fact, then, that all the election technicalities were used against the other party?"

"We only played the game. If the other crowd had been in control, the same thing would have been done."

"I haven't had much training in politics, sir. But I did get certain things from my grandfather and my father. And on that account I am not the right man for the service you demand. I am sorry."

"Marston, you have your orders. You're a soldier, you're in command. Your duty is clear."

"It might be clear in a monarchy, sir. But this is America, where a good citizen must subscribe to right instead of might."

The governor's temper was on the hair trigger. It was evident that he felt too sure of this ally who was bound to him by so many ties.

"Look here, Marston, you're talking like a damnation prig and snob."

"I know it sounds like spread-eagle buncombe, sir. I have heard stump speakers get off the same stuff. But I don't know how to say it any other way—for it happens that I mean it."

"Mean what?"

"That I absolutely refuse to be a party to any such tricks."

"You know as little about politics as your folks did about their business."

"Possibly." The general bowed.

"If you don't mean to help me and your party, what do you mean to do to hurt us?"

"Hart, you must listen to my father! He is older and wiser than you in political matters," urged the girl. "Just think what you are to him—to me—to all of us!"

"I have thought it all over, Aileen. The matter doesn't admit argument from my standpoint."

He went to the desk and wrote for a few moments, and they looked at him in silence. He rose and gave the paper to the governor.

"There is my resignation, sir."

"I cannot accept it. I am not the governor of this State at this moment."

"If you will glance at it, sir, you will notice that it goes into effect the moment you take your oath of office to-day. I intend to serve until you are once more governor."

"Serve how?"

"By handling this situation as best I know how so as to prevent blood spilling. There can't be war unless there are two sides to a fight. I shall immediately march the troops out of this statehouse!"

"By the gods of Gomorrah! You don't dare to betray me in any such manner!" roared Thornton.

"Those troops invite attack; their presence here will bring on attack. I shall clear the statehouse, sir."

"Even if your condemned idiocy leads you to betray your interests and your party and me, you don't mean to tell me that you propose to betray your promised wife to the mob you will let in here?"

"I shall look after her safety, sir."

Aileen's eyes were big and round with amazement and anger.

"You do not mean it! You can't mean it!" she cried.

"I am obliged to mean it."

"Then I do not require any of your kind of protection."

"The trouble with you is you're a devilish coward," raged his excellency.

"I have been called a coward once to-night; I think I disproved it."

"I say you are a coward. You don't dare to stay here and protect your party interests and this State property. You hear there's going to be a fight and you run away."

"There will be no fight, and I shall not run away, sir."

"Look at that cur, Aileen! By the gods, I run my family even if I am not running the State just now. I break the engagement."

"I can attend to that for myself, father. General Marston, do you forget all you have said, and do you desert my father and myself in this fashion?"

He had been holding himself under control with all the power of the Marston will—that same will which had enabled his father to forget himself and hold his raw troops in the line of battle. Though love and personal interests and all that might win a man's selfish inclinations were strong within him, those considerations could not battle against that single-hearted and simple spirit of the right which had come to him as a heritage from the men whom he had enshrined as his models and his mentors in the holy sanctuary of his love.

His devotion was as completely ingrained in his nature as the rectitude which guards the honest man against the sin of premeditated murder. He did not even pause to argue the matter.

But his self-possession left him when he looked at her.

His shoulders drooped, and he gave her piteous regard, seeking her forgiveness. But she stood close to her father,

and her eyes were hard with the Thornton resentment.

"I'll not marry a cur!" she cried.

"I would not have you do so. That's why I refuse to assist in stealing this State."

"You insult my father."

"I haven't any words left for answer. I will not answer."

His face was white, and he was trembling.

"You are a coward! I would never have believed it. But you are."

"I have dropped from a heaven into a hell in a few hours, and I am what I am," he returned.

Then he left them hastily.

In the rotunda he found Corporal Candage.

"Take what force you need from the watchmen and post them at the doors of the executive department. Let no one leave the chambers until I give orders."

He strode across to the soldiers who were grouped at ease.

"Captain Holt, assemble equipment, and have your men fall in and remain at parade rest. When I give the word you will march out and return to your armory and disband."

Before Marston was halfway to the door the bugle was pealing its orders.

CHAPTER XIX.

There were more of them outside—many more of them.

He noted that at least a part of the hired bravos had arrived.

Sledge hammers gleamed in the light from the torches, and men were lifting joists to their shoulders, arranging battering-rams.

Counselors of violence were circulating in the mob.

"The tin soldiers won't dare to fire! Break in the doors! The statehouse is ours!"

Marston climbed to the pedestal of one of the pillars supporting the carriage porch. He stood revealed to all of them. They looked up at him and became silent.

"Listen to me!" he shouted. "Let

me tell you that if you come up against this statehouse with weapons the soldiers will fire, and, by my orders, they will fire to kill. Some of you know me, and those who do know me know that I'm not much of a liar."

"But you are backing up thieves!"

"I am not. I am out here to declare to all listeners that I am not. Sawtelle, I see you back there! Will you come forward and bring the more responsible men in this crowd?"

They came promptly, and lined up in front of the speaker.

"I am ready to march my troops out of the statehouse. You have heard that bugle. It means that the men are in marching order. They will come out of that door when I give the word, and will proceed to the armory and disband. If they do not remain in the statehouse, there can be no fight here to-night."

"But how about morning—and that legislature?"

"I am in control until the legislature has been seated and organized. And I want to say here publicly that every citizen of this State who comes to these doors in orderly fashion will find the way into the people's house made clear for him. That's on my honor as a man. The law will decide who are entitled to sit in these chambers. I shall march out my troops. But first I want a pledge from you men outside here that when the soldiers come out they will be treated with the respect due to men who are serving their State truly and well. I also want a pledge that this crowd will about face and follow the soldiers down the hill and away. I want a pledge that you will all respect this statehouse even as I respect it. Do I get that pledge?"

"I will answer," shouted Sawtelle. "I realize fully what General Marston has done for this State to-night. I know the sacrifices he must be making. I ask his forgiveness for what I have said. It isn't the first time the Marston blood has blessed this State of ours. In behalf of all here I will say that we will respect our fellow citizens when they come out, and that I

will lead the march away behind them. And if there is a man in this crowd mean enough or cheap enough to forget himself, I call on the man nearest to him to beat him up and I will pay for all damages."

The voices of the throng indorsed that sentiment.

Captain Holt was framed in the door.

The crowd was cheering so loudly for General Marston that the latter could not make his voice heard. He signaled with his hand, and immediately the march of the troops began. When the soldiers appeared cheers greeted them, and the fifes and drums which had led rebellion up the hill now led amalgamated citizenry down and away.

"Do you need any further pledge that this statehouse will be opened to all in the morning?" the general asked Sawtelle.

"I do not, sir. Good night!"

After the door was closed, Marston went up to the executive department.

He dismissed the watchmen, and walked in.

Governor Thornton, his councilors, and the ladies surveyed him with frigid silence, which was more bitterly accusatory than angry words.

His excellency broke the silence:

"How long am I to be a prisoner?"

"The doors are open for all to come and go, sir. The troops are out, the mob has dispersed."

"Then we will no longer intrude on your majesty's privacy," said Thornton, with stiff sarcasm. He offered his arms to the ladies, and led the retreat.

Leila Trueworthy gave Marston a glance of sympathy as she passed. The others did not look at him.

He was left alone in the deserted chamber of the chief executive, master of the situation, master of the State for a few hours, but no longer master of his emotions. He turned off all the lights except the one at the governor's desk, sat down in the big chair, and allowed the tears to roll down his cheeks when the reaction overwhelmed him. The hush in the great building

was supreme. The distant bells of the city clanged two o'clock, but he was not interested in time then; he had resolved to keep vigil until the law again placed responsibility in other hands.

Old John Candage came at last on his rounds, flashing his electric torch. He gazed at the silent figure in the big chair, sighed, and passed on. He searched his soul for words to give to the son of his old colonel, but he was afraid to speak, even to express the sympathy that quivered within him.

"The boy is up there fighting it out," he told Sergeant Tarr. "Hell is shelling him with all kinds of ammunition, but he won't run any more than his old father would have run that day he told us stories on the hillside. He'll stand his ground. He has the same kind of courage to do right, no matter what price he pays."

Then came the newspaper men. General Marston knew they would come; he had been waiting for them. He had seen them outside in the mob, giving close attention to the exciting developments of the evening.

He received them in the executive chamber.

"We have come to you for a statement," the spokesman informed him. "The governor refuses to see us—will not be interviewed."

"I can explain the situation, gentlemen." The general's face was pale, and his jaw muscles were ridged with resolution. "Governor Thornton called troops to the statehouse because it was reported to him that irresponsible men were gathering to do damage to State property. When his excellency saw that his attitude was misunderstood he sent the troops away." It was a chivalrous lie, but the face of Aileen Thornton was before him, and her father's reputation was at stake. He had determined to protect her and her family.

"But the opposition claims that a State steal was attempted."

"We know that all kinds of wild charges are made in the heat of political talk, gentlemen. I would think twice before I put any such charges in print. Guard the reputation of our

State. You will be libeling men in high positions; it will be dangerous."

"We'll admit it's mostly gossip—and now that the statehouse is open——"

"It is open. It will stay open."

"But we need the governor's statement."

"I think I can arrange for it. Wait a moment!"

He turned to the telephone.

He gave the number.

"They do not answer," stated central after a time.

"It's urgent. Ring until they do answer."

Finally he got grudging acknowledgment, and he recognized the servant's voice.

"This is Adjutant General Marston at the statehouse, Joseph. Tell the governor that I must talk with him."

"He has given strict orders, sir, that he——"

"You go tell him what I have said," broke in Marston sharply. "Tell him he must talk with me; it's the State's business. He *must!*"

He waited, and at last the governor's rasping voice grated in his ear:

"Well!"

"Governor Thornton, I have just issued a statement to the newspaper men. It is absolutely essential that you indorse it."

"I'll indorse nothing, sir."

"Wait a moment! I have told them that you ordered the troops to leave the statehouse because you found that politicians were taking advantage of the situation and that rowdies were misunderstanding it. I am sending the newspaper men to your residence. They will read to you my statement. Of course you will corroborate what I say."

There was a long pause. Marston detected a dull muttering—whether the soliloquy was composed of oaths or expressed amazement he could not determine.

"Tell the newspaper men to come down here," said the governor, after a time.

"There's one thing about my lie and the one I expect Thornton to tell," muttered Marston when he was alone

again; "the actual conditions are backing us—Sawtelle's props of proofs have been knocked out from under him."

But as he sat in the big chair and pondered on his pitiable case, he understood that the wreck of his own hopes was complete. The spirit of tyranny was as thoroughly ingrained in Rutillus Thornton as the finer sense of honor was a part of the Marston nature. In the estimation of the man who had won fortune and power merely because he could captain men, disobedience was the sin unforgivable. And Marston knew the girl's nature; unquestioning loyalty served her as the touchstone to prove the man.

It had happened so suddenly! The disaster was so complete!

He was like a man benumbed by shock—he had not begun to have full understanding of the cruelty of his wounds. He set his forehead into his cupped hands, and found himself unable to steady his thoughts. There in the silence, in the big room, he found unreality. When, after a time, he heard footsteps, and raised his head and saw Aileen Thornton he did not show any surprise. He did not speak to her. He did not rise to greet her. She, too, seemed a part of the unreality.

"General Marston," she said coldly, "you certainly have kept your word to our political enemies; the statehouse is open! I just came in and nobody noticed me."

He crossed his arms on the desk, and looked up at her without speaking.

"I realize perfectly that it's a most unheard-of thing—my coming here. In fact, the most of our acquaintanceship has been made up of peculiar actions on my part. We may as well end that acquaintance by the most singular performance of all. So I am here. I think I have the right to ask you why you have allowed a perfectly idiotic political row to ruin our love, to separate us forever. Why did you do it?"

He shook his head slowly, staring vacantly ahead of him.

"You must realize perfectly that all is over between us. You deliberately ruined my father's plans when you had

the power to do so. Your love for me must have been a pretense."

"It was not." He spoke without emotion; his strange torpor still controlled him. "It was the only precious thing which ever came into my life."

"I can't believe that, sir. I am a woman. Love can be proved to a woman only by sacrifice."

"There are some sacrifices a man cannot make."

"Listen, sir. Do you still love me?"

"More than my life."

"I have been talking with my father. It is not too late to save this situation if you will act with us. You have power to close the statehouse until my father is inaugurated and can take over the authority. You need not use troops."

"I have given my word that the statehouse shall remain open."

"I have sacrificed my pride—my modesty—to come here, because it would have embarrassed my father to come. The affair is simply politics, anyway. Men change their minds in politics, and nobody blames them except the rogues who were trying to play their own tricks. Think what it means to you and to me if you help now! It will undo what has been done by you! It will prove that you do love me. Hart, help my father!"

She sat down at the desk, and put out her hands across it to him.

But he did not reach and take them.

"I'm sure you do not look at the thing in the right light," she insisted. "You have coddled family pride too much. You can't expect everybody to understand it and make a fetish of it. These are new days, and there are new ways."

"But a man's word of honor——"

"Don't be priggish!"

"And a lie——"

She broke in again. She looked straight at him, a strange light in her eyes.

"You lied only a little while ago, sir."

"It was a sacred lie. I did it for your—— I believed it was right."

"It made father think you had come back to your right senses. So I am

here! Are you going to spoil it all again?"

In herself she was temptation supreme. Her eyes were vivid, her cheeks, framed by her furs, had been painted in rosy colors by the touch of the frost outside and by the excitement of the interview.

She drew a folded paper from the pocket of her cloak.

"Father has sent it back. Let me tear it up?" she pleaded. "You are mine!"

He rose and drove his fist down on the desk.

"Yes, I am yours. Body, brain, heart, and soul, I am yours. My love for you has been so wonderful that I am afraid of it."

"Hart! Again I beg you!" Her eyes were more brilliant, her lips were apart. "Be ours—not theirs! Be mine—you are mine, I say!"

"But when others say, and you come to know that they say, that I sold myself, my word of honor to men, my pride, my self-respect, my good name and all that goes with manhood, you will feel that you own a cur, Aileen! You'd despise me! Though I gave you everything, it would not buy happiness for either of us. I will not do it!"

"You are sure of it? Nothing can influence you—our future—having me through all the years ahead of us?"

"Nothing can influence me to betray my word and this State!"

She stood up and faced him.

"Hart, what happened here a few hours ago happened very suddenly. There was no time for reflection then. I hardly understood what had happened. I didn't understand my own self. I went home and pondered. And while I was trying to see all more clearly those men came to my father with your statement, and I overheard—and I understood what you were. I came here to make sure of it. I have made sure. I would not have you anything else. For I have found a man who is honest and true and whom I can worship as well as love."

She hastened to him before he could shake his amazement from him. She clasped her arms about his neck.

"I am your own, my love, life, everything! Teach me how to live to be worthy of you!"

After a long time she drew herself gently out of his arms. In the ecstasy of their passion he had forgotten all serious matters; but when she picked up the paper which held his resignation he became grave.

"There is something important I have to say to you, Hart. My father and I sat down together and talked after we got home. He is an old man; he lived in the old days. He was chosen by a political party to high office which satisfied all his ambitions. He has felt under obligations to that party. He almost forgot that he was governor of a State instead of a party. The men who were closest to him expected him to control affairs for their profit. He did the best he could to satisfy them. But you have grown to know more about my father than most men know. You have seen under the surface. He is not a rascal. He found out suddenly to-night that there is something beside political tricks needed in the game. Oh, we have had a good, long talk! And while we were talking those men came, and he found that you had saved his honor and his reputation for him, and

in his old age he has grown to prize his good name among men, though he does forget himself occasionally."

She smiled at her lover.

"He knows now that when he walks into the statehouse within a few hours he can come and take oath as the governor of the people, not as the tool of a few selfish politicians. He woke up all at once. He is thankful, Hart; so thankful! But remember that old men are slow to swerve from their obstinacy. He asked me to tell you that he is sorry. He asked me to do this!"

She slowly tore the resignation into shreds.

"And he asked me to put my arm in yours and lead you down to him, after my trial of you, so that he can sleep better, knowing that all is forgiven and that all's right with us. Come!"

They went down the stairs together, and old John Candage saluted as they passed the watch-room door.

And when he saw the happiness on their faces he winked at Sergeant Tarr.

"I reckon love can't be dammed when it gets to flowing full tide," he said. "It'll bust down even the kind of a dam Rute Thornton puts up. Step here to the door, Sergeant Tarr. Look! They make a pretty picture, don't they, going down the hill in that white light from the stars?"

He was right. They did.

FLAT GOLD

BY JAMES B. HENDRYX

FLAT, "like coins from the mint of hell;" drifted and hammered and ground—this is the gold that one man goes in quest of on a tributary of the Yukon. Hendryx tells the terrific tale in the next issue. A big, forceful, book-length novel.

Peace with Connor

By H. C. Witwer

Author of "Ye Gods," "Pie," Etc.

Concerning two interesting warriors who play the war game on and off the baseball diamond: one of them a pro-Ally, a left-hander with more curves than Venus and the speed of a frightened bullet; the other a pro-Teuton, who came along with the usual spring bunch of reservists from the mulberry circuit. They loved the rough-house in Europe, and if it hadn't been for Connor—

I DON'T know who started that mêlée over in the old country, and, to get real confidential with you, I don't care. Also, my sympathies in the thing is with Hawaii; in other words, I ain't gonna take no bichloride no matter who wins it. I never get mixed up in none of them bulletin-board parties, and the only thing a war extra means to me is a plot to get a nickel for the *Evening Annoyance* or the *Morning Bunk*.

Of course, I got private opinions—I wouldn't be neutral if I didn't—but I would no more think of speakin' 'em in public than I would of keepin' my cousin's divorce suit alive. I've tucked my dope on the war away in the back of my dome with the most scandalous secrets I was ever let in on, and nothin' will ever get it out of me but an operation.

I figure it'll be time enough to worry over the thing when *we* get declared in on it and I have to go down and get my teeth examined so's the recruitin' sergeant will be sure I can bean some guy with a bullet at a mile. I hope when that time comes I'm in the hands of some good union embalmer and the insurance people ain't welshed on the missus. I ain't exactly yellah, understand, but I can't see that war stuff.

When I die I don't want to kiss off like a clay pipe in a shootin' gallery, and if give a choice between pneumonia and shrapnel I'll take the *first* one myself. It's neater, if nothin' else.

The thing that makes the biggest hit with me about the war is the fact that we ain't in it. I'm simply infatuated with dear old peace. That's one reason why I'm a great fan of Grant's. He was a big-league fighter, but he knew when to call it a day and when he had the other guy hangin' on the ropes, primed for the morphine wallop somebody hollers: "What'll you have?"

"Let us have peace!" says Grant. "What's yours?"

That's me! My favorite army is the Salvation.

I can't figure them birds that get all worked up over the box score from the other side every day. They either hope the kaiser stops one with his chin or the Alleys lose everything but their back hair. To hear them guys arguin' with each other you'd think they was fresh from the trenches; and as a matter of fact, if a call for volunteers should go out from Washington, most of them birds would have to be run down with bloodhounds and William J. Burns.

I had two of 'em with me last year.

Bill Altberg and Shorty Journot. I'm twistin' their names about a bit, because both of them are in there tryin' with different clubs this year and what's the use of startin' somethin'? But them guys put on in the clubhouse every battle that was fought in France, and if it hadn't been for Mike Connor we'd never of got in the world's series on account of the way they loved this rough-house in Europe. The funny part of it was that neither of them had come to Washington's favorite country by way of Ellis Island, or had ever got nearer Europe than Coney. Both of them was born on this side of the big drink and was as much American as the Star-Spangled Banner, but that didn't make no difference to them. Altberg's grandfather had started life in Berlin and Journot's mother had married a Viva la France, and that settled it.

Journot was with the club the year before and come near bein' the best thing I had on the pitchin' staff. He was a left-hander with more curves than Venus and the speed of a frightened bullet. Every club in the league had made him a proposition, but I had him tied up with a contract that did everything but gimme leave to shoot him if he run out. Altberg come along with the usual spring bunch of reservists from the mulberry circuits.

This bird was as big as Jess Willard, and when they was givin' out brains he must of been around the corner playin' pinochle. When he got back there was nothin' left but concrete, and he got a headful of that. At least that's the way he checked up to me after the first flash I got at him. But I wasn't runnin' no bank; I was lookin' for some .300 hitters; and after viewin' this guy with a bat in his hand, I wouldn't of cared if he thought twice six was nineteen and grammar was a disease.

I put a uneyform on him the second day he was at the spring trainin' camp and took him out on the lot with the rest of the bunch. Journot happens to come along just then, and, after gettin' an eyeful of Altberg, he sneers and stands there within easy kiddin' distance.

"Let's see," I says to Altberg. "What club was that you was with out there in the wild West?"

"Barnum and Bailey, I'll bet!" butts in Journot. "Eh, Stupid?"

Altberg blinks at him for a second.

"I seen you tryin' to pitch a minute ago," he remarks, "and if you're as wild at everything else as you are at that, they must of grabbed you from a, now, zoo!"

I stepped between 'em.

"On your way!" I tells Journot before he can come back. "Don't let these guys kid you," I goes on, turnin' to Altberg. "You got to expect a little of that stuff, but don't let 'em get your goat."

"I ain't got no goat!" pipes Altberg; "and, besides, I don't have to take no kiddin' from a little fathead like that, which, if he's in the, now, American League, Ty Cobb would laugh himself sick!"

"All right, all right!" I shuts him off, as Journot reaches for a bat and steps closer. "Now, what position do you play?"

"I play in a stooping position!" pipes Altberg, bendin' down to show me.

"Oh, boy!" yells Journot, droppin' the bat and holdin' his sides. "Did you get that one?" he shrieks. "He plays in a stoopin' position, hey? Say! If this bird is a ball player, I can walk a tight rope!"

"Well," I says, "suppose you try him out!"

I grabs up a catcher's mitt and tells Altberg to get a bat, while me and Journot walks out to the diamond. The bunch is out there chasin' flies that some of the regulars is knockin' out, and I shooed 'em aside as Journot breezes over to the box and starts to limber up. I put on a mask because I knew this bird was gonna uncork everything he had for the benefit of Mister Altberg, and I only hoped he wouldn't start by beanin' him. He looks at the big feller with the same passionate affection a motor-cycle cop watches a guy tryin' out a twelve-cylinder Gazoopis on Fifth Avenue, and before Altberg can get set with the wagon tongue in his hand

he shoots one over that would make a telegram look like third-class mail.

Plunnnnk!!! It socks into my mitt, missin' Altberg's nose by a stitch of the cover. Altberg blinks and gets pale.

"How was that, Mac?" sings out Journot, windin' up again.

"Keep 'em over a little," I says. "They're still hangin' 'em for murder in this State."

"Lowlife!" hisses Altberg, regardin' Journot with manslaughter in one eye and mayhem in the other. "The next one I'll betcha I'll——"

He turns around to me, and—— Zaaaam!!! The reason we paid Journot seven thousand a year shot past him, cuttin' the plate as clean as a knife.

"Where did you get this tramp?" yells Journot. "Get the position, will you? He looks like he was playin' this golf thing!"

"Go on, leff!" says Altberg, the color of any fifteen-cent catsup. "Always the first two I don't bother with. But the next one—well, I'll betcha it comes down in El Paso for the first bounce if I'll hit it!"

"It just took two of them babies to make you yell for the cops, eh, square-head?" hollers Journot. "Well, take a swing at this boy and then go back to the sticks!"

Altberg took a swing at it, and the first time it touched grass it was passin' the left-field bleachers. It may have finally stopped in Chicago, but if I had money up on it I'd of picked Denver.

Journot hops around on one foot and yells that the ball slipped out of his hand.

"I'll bet you five bucks you can't do that again!" he screams, grabbin' up another ball. "You big stiff, that's the first hit you ever got in your life!"

"That's because I been, now, battin' against pitchers which they had somethin' more besides a uneyform!" says Altberg, reachin' in his hip pocket. "I don't want I should take your money, and, besides, I ain't got five dollars, but——"

"I knew you'd crawl!" bellers Jour-

not. "You're as yellah as the rest of them lemons west of Ohio, and——"

"——I ain't got five dollars in change," goes on Altberg, "but this I'll do if they'll stand for gembling here. I'll betcha twenty you couldn't make me fan on six pitched balls!"

"Where d'ye get that stuff?" sneers Journot. "Do I look like a sucker? I suppose you'll also lay me eight to five gasoline will burn, hey? You Western birds are certainly game; it must be a gift. Many's the pot you come near openin' on three aces, hey, Reckless?"

"I'll betcha on the ball, then, lowlife!" yells Altberg, gettin' sore and wavin' the bill in his hand. "Twenty dollars I could hit safely out of the first two you'll put over. Now who's a sucker?"

"Listen, Canfield!" says Journot, winkin' at me. "Put up your twenty and I'll cover it. Here's the bet: You can't get four safe hits out of six pitched halls, fouls to count as strikes. What d'ye say?"

"Suits me!" snarls Altberg, handin' me the money.

Journot gives me two tens and walks back to the box with his cap over his face so's Altberg won't see him laughin'. I didn't go out of the way to hide my feelin's from the big boob, though; I thought the thing would do him good and help him develop his brain. Here he was, layin' one of the best hurlers in the league even money that he can hit four out of six balls. All he had to do was miss three and he was through.

By this time, the bunch, havin' heard the argument, is gathered around the plate, and the remarks bein' made about Altberg would never of made his parents stuck up. Instead of botherin' him, though, it only makes him cool off and clout the dirt in front of the plate with his bat; but the gang standin' there put Mister Journot about twenty-three miles up in the air. Somebody told him that Altberg was simply usin' that name to cover up his record of twenty hits in twenty times at bat which he made in the American League back in

1911, and Joe Weil runs out with a box of baseballs, sayin' he can get more when them give out.

By the time Journot got ready to wind up, he was as cool and collected as a guy with St. Vitus' dance drivin' a fire engine through the shoppin' district.

The first one he put over would of made Speaker get hysterics, and Altberg missed it from here to Virginia. I don't know whether he pulled that swing or not, but I do know that he put the next one on the clubhouse roof, the next bounced off the center-field fence, and the next went over third base to the railroad tracks. By this time all Journot had left was his blond hair, and Altberg takes a cigar out of his pocket, lights it, and stands waitin' for the next, leanin' on his bat.

That was a plenty for friend Journot. He discovered a kink in his arm and beats it for the showers, while the gang yells things about his family and so forth that I'll bet they wasn't braggin' about.

That started it!

Of course, after the exhibition of swat the pill that Altberg had put up, I wouldn't of let him go for a schedule callin' for all games with the Cincinnati Reds. I dragged him over to the hotel and made him use a fountain pen on a contract that would of broke Abe Lincoln's heart. He was to be mine, body and soul, for one year and two thousand bucks. Don't get the idea that I got hysterical over this bird simply because he was handy with a bat. I've sent enough of them kind back to the dear old farm to bust up a convention with bellers for Roosevelt. No—Altberg had a couple of more tricks. He was a circus fielder and had one of the greatest throwin' arms I ever seen. I'll bet that bird could of stood in the clubhouse and nailed guys goin' from third to home.

I put him in at left field and he got three hits against Charleston in one of them exhibition things on the way up. Journot had come back to life and pitched shut-out ball. Not one of them birds got an inch past first base for the

whole nine frames, and the outfielders could of started a crap game and got away with it.

After the mêlée, we're dressin' to catch a train when Journot comes in with a newspaper. He sits down on a bench near the lockers, right opposite Altberg, and opens the thing out.

"Well," he says, "I see they're still gettin' the worst of it!"

"Who—the Athletics?" asks Weil.

"No, the Germans," says Journot. "The Alleys are chasin' 'em all over Europe and makin' 'em like it!"

Altberg looks up and growls.

"Don't make me leff!" he says. "You mean the Alleys is *pacin'* them Germans, not *chasin'* 'em!"

"Yeh?" barks Journot. "Well, accordin' to this here paper, the English alone took three miles of trenches, four towns, and two thousand prisoners in one drive yesterday."

"Puh!" sneers Altberg. "I'll betcha I could tell you the name from that paper."

"What is it?" asks Journot.

"Natural it's the, now, London *Daily Mail*!" says Altberg.

"This is the New York *Blooie*," pipes Journot, "and that stuff is as level as a pool table. You don't think them Germans have a chance, do you?"

"All I wish," says Altberg, "is that I'll have it the same chance of battin' four hundred this year, that's all! Here's them, now, Germans which they're fightin' the world, and give a look from the battle they're puttin' it up. All them lowlifes in Europe is tryin' they should sock the kaiser, and instead of gettin' beat he's got them Alleys yellin' for the police!"

"You're crazy, you big stiff!" hollers Journot. "The Alleys can win any time they want; they're simply lettin' the Germans stay so's them Wall Street birds can grab a piece of money. When the right time comes, the Germans will be all over."

"You betcha they'll be all over," yells Altberg. "They'll be all over France, England, and Russia! I only hope they wipe them sure-thing players like this, now, Italy and like that off the map!"

I'm for the neutrals myself, but if I was gonna help any of them out you could take my word for it I'd go to bat for the kaiser."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughs Journot. "You guys are a riot to me! You wouldn't climb in no trench if the Mexicans landed at the Fort Lee ferry. I bet you was the bird that fainted away dead at the six-day race when the starter fired off the revolver!"

"Say, why don't you guys stop that stuff?" butts in Mike Connor. "If you're so strong for that set-to in Europe, go on over and get in it! They been at it now for two years, and here you simps get moanin' about it like the thing just broke out last night. Lay off, will you?"

"Who's askin' from you?" snarls Altberg.

"Mind your own business, Stupid!" says Journot. "Don't be always buttin' in somethin' that don't concern you!" He turns to Altberg again. "I suppose you're gonna claim the Alleys started the war, hey?"

"Well, and why not?" asks Altberg. "Is it a secret from you? They was all jealous from Germany's, now, doin' all the business on the block. My father had it the same trouble on Sixth Avenue with some lowlifes—but that's neither here and there. Did you ever see them words on the bottom from a plate, 'Made in Germany?'"

"I never look at the bottoms of no plates," snarls Journot.

"Well, sometimes you couldn't help it," says Altberg, "especial when a feller is sittin' across the table from you when you're drinkin' soup. Y'know that habit you got of sayin' 'Here's how!' and tossin' off the consommé like it was a high ball!"

"Don't kid me, you big hick," yells Journot, gettin' feverish, "or I'll bust you in the nose!"

"If you'll so much as make a face from me," roars Altberg, "you'll think you was Belgium!"

"Aw, shut up, you fatheads!" hollers Connor.

"I know where that 'Made in Germany' thing belongs!" snarls Journot.

"Where?" asks Altberg.

"On the war," snaps Journot, "and not on no soup plates. How 'bout it, hey?" He turns to Connor.

"You're both wrong!" says Connor. "I know what started the war, but I don't go round blowin' about it. It was the same thing that starts all wars!"

"And what's that?" asks Altberg.

"Bullets!" hollers Connor. "That's what started the war! How can you start one without 'em?"

I chased 'em all over to the train before there was any further battles.

They get in an argument in the smoker at Washington, and at Baltimore they gotta be dragged apart. Journot climbs up on a seat in back of Altberg and dropped a suit case full of bats on his head in order to show him how a Zeppelin bombs innocent people, and Altberg comes back the minute he could see by crawlin' on the floor under where Journot is sittin' and buryin' half a dozen pins in him, which he claimed was the way the U-boats worked.

Now, I didn't mind this stuff so much because they was both playin' good baseball, but Mike Connor lost his goat every time they got together and opened up with the latest news from the front. He swore he'd cure them birds if it was the last thing he ever did, because the thing was drivin' him nutty. They'd be up at daybreak every mornin' and race each other to the news stands to get first crack at the papers; they hung around the tickers until dinner time; and as soon as they got through for the day at the ball park, they'd beat it for the nearest bulletin board.

If the Germans took a trench, Altberg would go outside Journot's room and warble the "Wacht Am Rhein" through the keyhole. He was one of them adenoid tenors, and he was always blowin' about bein' able to take E sharps. I guess he was right at that, because Journot claimed his voice went through him like a knife. On the other hand, if the Alleys had a good day with the bayonets, Journot would stand out

in the hotel corridor murderin' the "Marseillaise" on a mouth organ.

We opened the pennant scramble with Brooklyn, and Journot pitched such a wonderful game for eight innin's that as far as hits was concerned we could of been playin' a team of armless wonders. Our infielders could of read novels for all the exercise they got until the ninth. In that frame, Altberg comes runnin' over to Journot just as we're takin' the field and shows him an extra which says the Germans has gone through Rumania like a hot poker through a can of lard.

"What of it?" snaps Journot. "They probably was a reason for it and them Rumans let 'em through!"

"Oi!" hollers Altberg. "Them Rumans!" Then he busts out laughin'. "Ha, ha, ha!" he hollers. "You could believe it I seen a lot of, now, ig'rant fellers in my time, but you got 'em all lookin' like professors from Harvard! You must of been brought up for luck."

"What is it, then, Stupid?" snarls Journot, commencin' to aviate.

"Rumaniacs, you boob!" howls Altberg. "If I had it a three-year-old son and he didn't know that, I'd shoot him!"

"If you had a kid you wouldn't have to," bawls Journot, "because the first time he got a good flash at his father he'd drop dead!"

Connor pushed 'em apart, but Journot was through for the day as far as throwin' baseballs was concerned. The first guy up for Brooklyn got a double, and he could of had two more, only he was so surprised at the clout he hit the pill that he stopped to watch it. The next man singled, and then some left-handed bird goes in and put the first thing Journot throwed up against the scoreboard. At that point I give him the bum's rush and sent in Harmon. He held 'em safe for the rest of the innin' and we was lucky to cop, three to two.

Of course Journot blames Altberg for his blowup, and they was lovers before compared to what they was after that. The next mornin' there's a picture of one of them German generals

that was hittin' about six hundred on the front page of the papers. We was all lookin' at it and Connor says:

"Humph! He don't look much like a German at that, does he?"

"I don't blame him!" pipes Journot. "D'ye see what it says underneath that boob's picture?" He reads it out: "'French Plan New Offensive.'"

"You could believe it them French is offensive enough to me already!" pipes Altberg. "And as for the English, they *admit* they're gonna lose!"

"What d'ye mean they admit it?" sneers Journot.

"I'll leave it to anybody," answers Altberg. "Ain't they got a, now, song called 'God Save the King?'"

"Will you guys shut up?" bawls Connor, throwin' the paper on the floor.

"Who do *you* think will win it, Simple?" hollers Journot. "You know so much about it!"

"I'm bettin' on Samoa, you big stiff!" yells Connor, slammin' out of the room.

Well, that's the way the thing went all season: Altberg and Journot scrap-pin' about the war, and Connor tryin' to make 'em forget it. We took the lead in the middle of August, which is the time the real ball clubs begin to show what they got, and we kept out in front till they rung the bell on us in October. But if Mike Connor hadn't come through with a lulu of a scheme, we'd of watched the world's series from the tickers.

The last three weeks of the season we was so far ahead of the others that all we had to do was win four games out of the bunch that was left and we was in. There was no way any of the others could lap us, and, as usual, with that soft world's series money in sight, the gang begins to ease up a bit. I had my hands full keepin' the supply of pep evenly distributed, and I hung fines on the ale hounds until the sight of a bartender made 'em faint.

Everything would of been peaches if it hadn't been for them two stiffs, Altberg and Journot, and that fracas in Europe. I'll bet many a guy with the rent money up on us to cop the gon-falon, as a Boston sport writer with

a bun on once called the pennant, had a stroke of paralysis before them last three weeks was over. We won them four games, all right, but they was the last four we played. We lost all the others from here to Missouri, before crowds that would make the Russian army look like the rush in a butcher's on a rainy Friday.

Every time Journot was pitchin', Altberg would pull some trick out there in left field that let somebody get on a base. When they come at him with anything like speed, he'd stand there and wave at 'em, and if they was long flies Altberg let 'em bounce before he put a glove on 'em. Journot did his bit whenever Altberg come to bat. He'd sit in the dugout and kid the big guy till he had him swingin' at wild pitches, and if Altberg got on first Journot would beat it to the coachin' line and tell him that Berlin had just fell captive to the Alleys and the kaiser was last seen passin' Ceylon in a racin' car.

Now, neither of them boobs realized what they was doin' on account of bein' so sore at each other. They figured we had a good, safe lead, and, bein' the last days of the schedule, what was a couple of ball games to them?

It took me a long time to get wise. At first I thought their punko playin' was due to the strain we'd been under since we went out in front, but that sixteen-innin' thing with the Cubs was the tip-off. We got a run apiece at the end of fifteen frames, and the Cubs grabbed another in their half of the sixteenth. If we lost this one, it meant that the Braves would only be two games behind us, and they was to be entertained by the Reds for the rest of the week, while we had to play baseball with Hans Wagner and his playmates from Pittsburgh.

We got two out when Weil doubles on the first ball shown him. Then Big Mason singles, puttin' Weil on third and the crowd in hysterics. Up steps Altberg, and all the Canfields in the grand stand offers three to one we cop. I sent Journot, who wasn't pitchin' that day, down to the third-base coachin' line, and he slows up as he's passin'

the plate. The Cubs' pitcher shoots one over and both the base runners gets under way. Altberg fouls the pill into the grand stand and the crowd yells like he'd tripled. Then Journot calls some-thing to him and he looks around. When he looked back again there was two strikes on him and the mob is yellin' murder. I run down to shoo Journot away, and the umpire pulls a watch on him as he shuffles along.

So's the fans will realize he's still in the game, Mason tries to rubber heel us way to second, and only by doin' an Annette Kellermann into the bag was he able to get there neck and neck with the ball. The umpire gazes at the maniacs in the bleachers and calls it safe. The pitcher winds up again, the base runners get goin'—and this little tramp Journot yanks a newspaper from his hip pocket.

"Hey, listen, Stupid!" he bellers at Altberg. "The kaiser says he's got enough and is beggin' the Alleys for peace!" He waves the paper.

"I wouldn't believe it if you swore it from a stack of Bibles!" yells Altberg, lookin' over his shoulder. "And, besides——"

Zipp! The best outshoot I ever seen cuts the plate and Altberg fans!

The crowd goes crazy, and I plastered a hundred-buck fine on both them birds, after givin' them a bawlin' out that they'll remember when they have forgot their names. If it wasn't that they meant big money to me, I'd of shipped 'em so far back to the bushes that Peary would of had to get 'em out. Mike Connor grabs my arm as we start for the showers.

"Leave them babies to me!" he hisses in my ear. "I'll have 'em kissin' each other in a week!"

Now, there was a movie outfit that had been botherin' the owners for weeks to let 'em take a picture at the ball park while a sure-enough game was in full swing. Finally the magnets give in and said go ahead and shoot, provided none of the advertisin' signs in left field appears in the thing, because in that case they would have to shake down the tobacco people and so forth

for some extra money for puttin' 'em in the movies.

The next day we take on the Pirates, and between the third and fourth innin' there's a commotion in the boxes back of first base. Three guys with them trick cameras tears out on the field, and in another minute a guy with a wart on his nose and a megaphone joins 'em, yellin' that all he desires is a little speed, because they can't hold up the ball game. While the crowd is standin' on each other's necks to get an eyeful, a handsome devil with ravin' black, curly hair, a baseball uneyform, and more curves than a scenic railway dashes out on the diamond and up to the plate. He gets about twenty feet away from the thing when the bird with the megaphone bawls: "Ready, there—cameras—shoot!"

With that, the dashin' young thing runs like a nervous rabbit along the line from third to home, dives headfirst into the plate, and the crowd yells its head off. Old Megaphone Mike hops around on one foot, barkin' at the boxes, and a lot of "enter with others" which was sittin' there begins to ad lib. They jumped in the air, waved their hats, soaked each other on the back, and yelled murder, while them birds with the cameras worked like waiters at a newsboys' banquet takin' pictures of it.

Then the high diver gets up, brushes off his uneyform, and dashes over to the dugout, where what Pirates that ain't standin' there with their lower lip touchin' their shoes is pushin' each other out of the way to get in the thing. The best-lookin' dame I ever seen at a ball park suddenly appears and bawls, "Harold!" the while rollin' her eyes to heaven like a kid eatin' pie.

"Rotten—but it'll have to do!" hollers the bird with the megaphone.

"You *said* somethin'!" yells one of the umpires, comin' out of his trance and gazin' at his watch. "Git this troupe of hicks outa here, will you? We got a little baseball to play, and it's gittin' late!"

This dame and the guy that did the slide for life into the plate pulls a "all-is-forgiven-come-to-my-manly-arms act,

and if that bird could play ball like he made love, he'd of had Ty Cobb lookin' like a busher. He looked like sweet spirits of niter, but, boy—he was there!

They beat it then, and as they was goin' out, the movie queen asks Altberg if he is Matty Johnson, and which one is Alexander Speaker, the great fourth batsman. The big stiff falls off the bench laughin' and she gets as red as a four-alarm fire. Journot butts in and smiles.

"Don't mind this here roughneck, lady!" he says. "He'd laugh in church. You know how stupid them Germans is!"

"Is that so?" she snaps at him. "Well, I happen to be German, you big stiff! Do you mean to insinuate that I'm stupid?"

This Dare-devil Dave that was with her presents each of them with a sneer, and they blow, while Journot sits down on the bench tryin' to laugh it off.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roars Altberg. "Oi, I'll betcha I'll break at least a rib from leffing! Every time you open your mouth, somebody puts it their foot in it! You and the, now, Czar of Russia should ought to shake hands from each other. Only this morning the Germans throwed half his army in the lake."

"Yeh?" snarls Journot. "Well, the Alleys will run that lucky stiff Hindenburg ragged before he gets out of dear old Russia, you can gamble on that!"

"Hey, listen, guy!" pipes the umpire, grabbin' his arm. "Let's have a piece of baseball here this afternoon, will you? I just got rid of them other nuts and you guys git goin'. What d'ye think this is here to-day—New Year's Eve?"

Well, we went in then and helped make it a close race by droppin' another one.

That night, while Altberg and Journot are fightin' the day's battles out at the hotel, Mike Connor comes over to me and says he's got his peace plan all doped out, and if he gets the breaks, the war will be over as far as we're concerned by the end of the week. I asked him what he was gonna do, and he closed up like a foldin' bed when the

company sleeps in it. All he would give out was that he got the idea from the war itself. He claims the Alleys would be like Altberg and Journot, fightin' among themselves, if they wasn't banded together for the time bein' to wallop somebody else, and what could be done in Europe could be done here.

About two days later, Connor comes around with the press agent for the movie company that had pulled off the picture in the ball park. This guy says that the annual ball and dinner of the St. Vitus Film Company will be pulled off the followin' night, and all the movie stars, male and female, will be on hand to meet their admirers and thank Heaven they are gettin' away with it. He claims the evenin' will be practically spoiled if I don't bring my ball team up as guests and an added attraction. They're all dyin' to meet what looks like the pennant winners, and he trusts I won't cheat 'em of their desires and stay away. He adds that the idea of invitin' us up was give him by Mike Connor, and he had jumped at the chance, hopin' we'd do the same.

I thought the thing over, and the more I figured the better it looked. With all them dames there, and so forth, the chances was that the thing wouldn't turn out to be an alcohol bee, and the excitement might do the bunch good. I told this guy that we'd be there, and Connor jumps up and blows to cigars.

The next mornin' I'm tryin' to get a safety razor to make good, when I hear Altberg and Journot at it out in the corridor.

"Well, Stupid!" pipes Journot. "I suppose you're goin' to the racket to-night, hey?"

"A hundred and six girls there's gonna be there, and he asks me if I'm goin'!" says Altberg, makin' a cluckin' noise with his nose.

"Say," butts in Connor's voice, "have you guys got your costumes yet?"

"Which?" they says together.

"Costumes," says Connor. "Of course you know what a masquerade ball is, don't you?"

"Yeh!" pipes Altberg. "There was

only one pitcher could throw it. It was, now, a combination of an inshoot with —"

"Cease!" says Connor, while Journot gives himself up to laughin'. "I'm talkin' about a dance where everybody goes in disguise. Do you make me?"

"Oh, now," answers Altberg, "that's another colored horse you're talkin' from. Sure I know what kind of a dance that is. I been to them when I was a kid. A feller should got to put green paint on his face and wear his sister's dress, hey?"

"Take him away!" shrieks Journot. "He's breakin' my ribs!"

"Yes, and in another minute I'll betcha I'll be breakin' your nose!" snarls Altberg. "Don't start with me again, lowlife, or——"

"Can't you guys let go for a minute?" butts in Connor. "Listen—you want to get somethin' swell for this thing, and you'll have to hustle. We're all supposed to meet in the lobby of the Askmore Hotel at nine. What are you gonna be?" He turns to Altberg.

Altberg scratches his chin.

"I guess I'll prob'ly go as an Indian," he says finally. "I'll betcha nobody could know me then, hey?"

"Why don't you simply put on a clean collar," asks Journot, "if you don't want nobody to know you?"

"If I'll ever wallop you," snarls Altberg, "your own father wouldn't know you."

"Good-by!" says Connor. "I got enough! Don't forget the costumes and be there at nine!"

I nailed Connor in the writin' room before we went out to the park.

"What's this I hear about costumes for that frolic to-night?" I asks him.

"Costumes?" he says. "What d'ye mean costumes?"

"Ain't it a masquerade?" I says.

"Oh!" He grins. "Well, I should say not! Just wear the old soup and fish, get a shine, and have the shirt clean. That's all."

I didn't ask him no more.

At eight o'clock that night we all left for the Hotel Askmore. That is, all except Altberg and Journot. They had

blowed in different directions after the game that day and nobody had seen 'em since. The minute we got in the banquet hall among all them white shirts and evenin' gowns, everybody starts to ask for them. To tell the truth, them birds was pretty near the biggest thing in the league just then, and to show up without 'em was like a parade without no bands. I remembered hearin' Connor tell 'em to show up at nine, so I said nothin'. But when they wasn't in sight at ten, I grabbed Connor aside and demanded him to come through with his scheme. He said it was so harmless a child could use it and that the idea run somethin' like this: When Altberg and Journot come there all dressed up like Hallowe'en and seen that everybody else was in citizens' clothes, they'd get so sore at *him* that they'd forget about the war and pull together to put somethin' over on him. That, he said, was about what would happen to all the peacemakers which was tryin' to make 'em cease on the other side. I asked him where he figured to come out on it, and he said he was Irish, and any Irishman that couldn't handle two men at a time was lyin' about his place of birth!

I didn't get no chance to ask him any more because we start into the main dinin' hall for the assault and battery on the eats. There must of been five hundred of us all told, and all dressed to the last notch. Some of them dames would of made the Follies quit, and they was all fresh-air fiends when it come to clothes, believe me! Up on the galleries I seen guys with cameras, grabbin' movies of the mob.

Connor and me are on the same side of the table, with a dame on each side and likewise in between. The one on my left asks me am I havin' a nice time.

"If it was any better," I says, "I wouldn't be able to stand it."

"I'm afraid you're a jollier!" she laughs. "All you ball players are great kidders. We had several work in a picture last week, and——"

"What was their names?" I butts in.

"I forget now," she says, passin' the rolls, "I meet so many people."

"You must be a traffic cop, heh?" I says.

"Ha, ha, ha!" she giggles. "I must tell that at the Screen Club to-morrow."

"All right!" I says. "You can use it if you mention my name when you get your laugh. But what about these ball tossers?"

"Oh, yes!" she says. "They appeared on the scene in full uniform. It was horribly funny! Their—their—er—trousers only came to their knees, and they didn't wear any stockings! Don't you boys get cold playing out in the open like that?"

"We'd get pinched," I tells her, "if we played like that. What club was them guys with?"

"I think it was the Clan MacQueens," she says. "Isn't that who the great Ty Cobb plays with?"

"I don't know what he does at nights," I says, stuffin' a roll in my mouth to keep from laughin' in her face. "I think you're a little twisted. Them birds must of been soccer-foot-ball players and not ball tossers."

"Why? Is there a difference?" she asks me, without battin' an eye.

"A little," I says. "Y' see, in baseball the nets are farther apart, and——"

That's as far as I got with it.

There was a noise at the doors away down at the end of the room, and, without bein' no Sherlock Holmes, I figured that the Russian army was tryin' to get in and join the festive board. This dame jumps up and grabs my arm.

"This will be great!" she says. "That's why I love to come to these dinners—they always have something unexpected like this, and——"

Crash!!! Zam!!!

The doors called it a day and quit cold, goin' down as three waiters comes in the room on third speed. They hit that polished floor, and in tryin' to keep their feet they give an exhibition that would of made Charlie Chaplin cut his throat if he had seen it. On top of the waiters comes a couple of hat boys and some more noise.

Then a guy made up like a devil and

another one rigged up like an Indian chief busts into the room, standin' in the middle of the floor kinda dazed while the movie crowd shrieks with laughter.

"That's what you call art!" pipes this dame in my ear. "That must be them two big Plandome comedy stars who _____"

The devil rushes over to the table, and he only beat the Indian chief by a foot. They stopped right in back of me, and the devil grabs Connor by the shoulder.

"What's this—a frame-up?" he hisses.

"Are you tryin' you should make a, now, monkey from me?" snarls the Indian.

"Now, listen," says Connor, gettin' pale. "At the last minute they decided not to have a masquerade ball, and I couldn't get in touch with you guys to tip you off."

"I'll betcha I'll get in touch with *you*, lowlife!" yells the Indian, tearin' off the mask. "I'll——"

"Why, it's the ball players!" shrieks a guy sittin' opposite, in a high soprano voice. "My word! How ridiculous!"

In a minute the whole room is wise that this is Altberg and Journot, the diamond stars, and somethin' has been put over on 'em. One of the movie heroes slaps Journot on the back and laughs, while another one asks Altberg if he can do any tricks. Then them actors starts pushin' 'em from one place to the other, laughin' themselves sick.

Altberg slips on that glass floor, and in tryin' to get up he stabs out at the table with his hand and hits a bowl of consommé with noodles, slidin' it off on his head. I thought the bunch would go crazy, and Altberg did! He springs up and takes a healthy wallop at the first guy he sees, which happens to be Harold Heavenly, a big feature star. Harold calls for volunteers, and drew about eighty at the first draft, includin' a dozen waiters which went to the front. Journot gets in it with a chair,

and all the wronged wives, vampires, bankers' daughters, and sweet country lasses screams. Them that featured faintin' went the limit, and pretty soon there was a mob scene under way that would make a lynchin' bee look like a chess tourney.

It only lasted about twenty minutes, because some traitor to the films put out the lights when the movie gang rung in a squad of waiters from another floor. With the help of Mike Connor, who looked like a guy that has struck a match and seen the Singer Building go up in flames, I got Altberg and Journot from under a table and rushed them to a side entrance just as the cops and reporters rushed up in answer to the third alarm. I give a guy a dollar to call a taxi quick, and while we're waitin' a kid comes along with a war extra. Connor kicks me in the shins and buys one.

"The big stiff!" mumbles Altberg, lettin' three teeth fall. "I'll betcha they won't give it no more of them dinners for ten years!" He turns to Journot, who looks like he'd been sparrin' with a buzz saw. "That was a great wallop which you handed it to that rat who's playin' the, now, Kansas City Blues on my head from a plate!" he says.

Journot nods.

"It's a good thing you give that red-headed murderer the knee," he says. "He liked to choked me to death!"

"I see the Germans have took three miles of trenches in France!" says Connor, pointin' to the paper.

"I should worry about the Germans," snarls Journot, "I did more fightin' tonight than them birds in Europe will ever see!"

"Yeh," says Altberg. "Let them fellers have it the war over there. Why should we interfere with their pleasure? Besides," he goes on, slappin' Journot on the back, "if they're, now, crazy enough they should fight with each other, I wouldn't interfere." He looks at Journot just as the taxi skids up. "Hoch der France!" he yells.

"Viva le kaiser!" bellers Journot.

Opals Are Unlucky

By Victor Maxwell

Author of "When Little Things Count," "Why Arabia Kissed Me," Etc.

Insured for twelve million dollars—a unique little consignment from Europe in which Arabia Marston and the secret-service agents of several countries were interested

BEFORE the Stalwart Twelve was put on the market I drove the car for more than half a year, making a tour of the country and writing up my adventures afterward under the title of "Six Stalwart Months," which Jerry Koven, head of the Koven Motors Company, was good enough to say was the best piece of publicity work he had seen, and worth the money it cost him. And it was while I was pulling this stunt that I ran in with Arabia Marston again and had the fun of helping Kelly more or less in a battle of wits with her. You may remember that I've told you of Kelly before—one of Uncle Sam's sleuths who occasionally got something less prosaic than seeking counterfeits in the line of his duty. And Arabia Marston—well, she was the little girl who smuggled thirty thousand dollars' worth of pearls into New York just because she cried.

It was along in the latter part of the summer, when I was touring up the Atlantic coast in the last lap of my swing around the compass in the Stalwart, that my little adventure started. I was lolling lazily along a road near Washington, about a hundred miles from the national capital, when the roaring exhausts of a high-powered car behind me warned me that I was to have another opportunity of testing the speed of the Stalwart Twelve. Up to that time I had enjoyed probably about two hundred impromptu races with ambitious drivers of other cars, and the Stalwart was still clean of the other fellow's dust. So I advanced the spark,

opened the throttle, and hunched myself low in the seat behind the wheel as the big car picked up its gait.

To my surprise the Stalwart didn't pull away at once from the pursuing roar of the car behind. In fact, the staccato reports of the other machine's exhausts grew louder and nearer, and presently the weird screech of its siren burst impudently upon my ear. That was too much for me, and, stepping firmly on the accelerator, I gave the old girl all she would stand. With a shiver of power the big machine under me leaped ahead, and the noise of the other fellow's exhausts grew fainter in the distance. But just as I was smiling to myself at another victory for the Stalwart, the roar behind me increased in volume, and, with the incessant whining of its siren maddening me, my rival rapidly drew up.

We were on a superb road, full forty feet wide, and there was no danger of a collision. Favoring the Stalwart as much as I could, I used every grain of auto sense that I had; but in spite of that the other car slowly gained, and though my speedometer showed better than seventy I was shocked presently to note out of the corner of my eye that the front wheels and sloping radiator of my rival's machine were drawing even with me. For over a mile we were neck and neck, and then the other car slowly drew ahead until I could catch a hazy glimpse of its driver—a diminutive figure swathed in fur and with goggles hiding the face.

Desperate, I pressed the red button on the dash that controlled the Stal-

wart's emergency manifold, and almost instantly regretted it. I had never given my machine the limit of its great power before, and I had all I could do to hold it to the road, so great was its squirming thrust of power as its mighty engine drove it madly along the highway. So much of my attention was taken up by the wheel, which writhed in my grasp, that for the moment I forgot my audacious rival, and when I realized at last that I was alone on the road the needle on the speedometer was quivering over against the pin beyond the ninety-five mark, and the Stalwart Twelve was shooting along like the ghost of fear.

Knowing that I had given the other fellow plenty, I snapped off the gas and spark, and pulled in to the side of the road to wait for my pursuer. The other machine, a rakishly lined foreign car, drew up alongside a few minutes later, and the fur-clad driver descended to look the Stalwart over, as they always did. I was just going to "talk up" the merits of the new model when I was stricken dumb, for the fur-clad driver, tossing aside cap and goggles, revealed a mass of tawny hair falling in wind-torn ringlets about her laughing face. Arabia Marston faced me, the last person in the world I expected to see, and loosed her mirth at my confusion.

"Well, well, Smith," she gurgled, gasping for breath, "that was the first time you beat me, wasn't it? Where'd you get the boat, and what are you doing with it?"

I told her all about it. There was never any use in my trying to keep things from Arabia, anyway, and in this case it was part of my job to tell people about the Stalwart. She listened, occasionally throwing in a bantering comment, and when I had finished my tale she reached over and jerked open the hood of the big machine and ran an expertly appraising eye over its engine.

"I'll give you this foreign devil of mine and five thousand to boot for your car, Smith," she said after her examination was complete. "I want to boast

that I've got the fastest thing on wheels in this part of the world, and I can't do it unless you'll trade."

"The Stalwart isn't on the market yet, Arabia," I said. "But I'll be glad to take your order, and I'll promise you one of our first deliveries."

She shook her head, and gurgled out a laugh. "No, Smith, we trade now or never. But never mind—drive down the road a way with me. There's a decent place about five miles on where we can get a bite for lunch and a chance to talk over old times. Hop in and follow me."

The "decent place" that she mentioned proved on our arrival to be a lavish sort of combination of country club and road house; a resort just far enough from Washington to be reached by an enjoyable run, and gorgeous enough in its equipment to attract the spenders that make the national capital their headquarters during sessions of Congress. Arabia seemed to be well known at the place, for the liveried attendants who greeted us and took our cars to the garage welcomed her with that special brand of attention that is only won by frequent and ample tipping.

After brushing off my clothes in a dressing room just off the entrance, I joined Arabia in the spacious lobby beyond, and she led me through a vista of doorways and corridors to a shaded pergola somewhere in the rear of the resort, where tables covered with white linen, sparkling glass, and gleaming silver lined a railing that separated the tiled floor from a perfect lawn.

"We'll have lunch," she said to the waiter who drew out our chairs, and then, turning to me, continued:

"One of the beauties of Rhohan's is that you don't have to order things. You just tell the waiter whether you want breakfast, lunch, tea, or dinner, and the chef sees to it that you get just what you ought to have. It's a lovely scheme."

"And Mr. Rhohan looks after the bill, too, I take it," I said, with a laugh. I had a liberal expense account with

the Koven people, and I wasn't worrying very much.

"You guessed right the very first time, Smith," Arabia replied, with a laugh. "You're improving, aren't you? By the way, seen Kelly lately?"

I had been expecting some such question from my fair companion, but from the tone in which she asked it I couldn't make out whether she was interested in my friend's whereabouts or his present mission. I shook my head.

"I haven't seen Kelly since the time you gave us the slip at Port Townsend. You remember that time?"

"I ought to remember it, Smith. It was the first time I kissed you."

Her retort made me blush, for it was my surprise over that kiss that enabled her to dodge away from Kelly and me just as we were closing a net about her in connection with the attempted smuggling of a boatload of Chinese into the United States from the north. Arabia laughed at my discomfiture, and said:

"Well, if you go on to Washington, you'll probably see him. That is, if you look for him. He's working on some war stuff—I don't know just what it is. I saw him at the White House last week."

"You saw him at the White House!" I gasped.

"Uh-huh! Went there with a friend of mine to try and get a chance to shake hands with the president. But he was busy, and no callers were admitted. Just as we turned away Kelly dashed out of the executive offices and made a run for an automobile. That's what makes me think he's working on war stuff; otherwise he'd hardly have been at a White House session."

"I'll look him up to-night; I expect to spend the night in the capital, and maybe longer. What are you doing, Arabia?"

She laughed at me, and nibbled at a stuffed olive. "You won't believe me, Smith, but I'll tell you the truth—I'm not doing a single, solitary thing. I'm just enjoying myself, loafing around Rhohan's here and flirting with the men who come here evenings."

She was right. I didn't believe her. And I as much as said so in my next question:

"Why the big car, then, Arabia? And why did you offer me five thousand to boot for a trade with my Stalwart?"

"I knew you wouldn't take my word for it, Smith, yet it's true. I'm just loafing around. As for the car, I've got the fastest one around here—or I had till you came along. And now, like a spoiled child, I want yours. Be reasonable and let me have it!"

Our luncheon was served just then—a deliciously cooked and perfectly served meal. As we ate we bantered about the Stalwart, about our former adventures together, and about inconsequential things. Arabia gave me no more information about herself, persisted that she was simply having a good time while she could, and urged me to run out from Washington again and see her before I continued on my tour with the new Koven masterpiece. This I promised to do, and we parted when our meal was finished, I charging up "luncheon for two, twelve dollars," as I climbed into my car and gave the liveried attendant a dollar for bringing it around from the garage. As Arabia said, Mr. Rhohan surely looked after the bill, as well as the comfort of his guests.

After I got settled in my room at the hotel in Washington I called up the treasury department and got in touch with Kelly. It took a few moments to get him on the telephone, but the warmth in his voice as he greeted me more than repaid for the waiting, and he assured me that he was exceptionally glad that I had arrived at such an opportune time; that he had something in hand that he thought would interest me, and that he'd be right over. A few minutes later he was shaking hands with me heartily, and in less time than it takes to tell it we were seated in armchairs, mingling the smoke of our cigars in friendship.

He wanted to know what had brought me to Washington, and after I outlined the Stalwart trip and the

publicity scheme behind it, I told him that I had run across Arabia on the road and had lunched with her at Rhohan's.

"You interest me extremely," said Kelly, laughing at me.

"Then you knew Arabia was there?" I asked somewhat disappointedly, for I had hoped to bring him news.

"One of the boys has been watching her for two weeks," he answered. "But he hasn't uncovered anything. I have often wished you would turn up, Smith; you have such a taking way with Arabia. In fact, I was thinking of wiring for you."

"Don't be sarcastic, Kelly. Lord knows I realize how I bungled things every time you let me in on any of your cases concerning her. Is she up to her old tricks again?"

Kelly reached out a hand and patted me on the back. "You didn't bungle things, Smith; you helped a lot. Perhaps you didn't do just what you always expected to do, but you helped just the same. If you hadn't, I should not have continued to ask you to work with me. As to Arabia, she isn't up to any old tricks. Her tricks are never old; she has a new one each time. And maybe you can help me find out what she's doing this time—if you want to?"

"You know I'd be glad to, Kelly," I replied. "But if you're after Arabia again, I'm afraid I won't be much use to you. She told me you were in Washington, and I told her I'd look you up. So, you see, if you put me to watching her, she'll already be on her guard."

"She's always on her guard," answered Kelly. "And the fact that she told you I was in Washington shows that she hopes I'll get you to work on her with me. I think it would be a good plan to let her have her way. Did she tell you what I was doing?"

"She said you were on 'war business——'"

"She knows better than that, Smith," snapped my friend. "And I'll tell you this: When there is any 'war business' for the department to worry over, Arabia Marston will be working for her

Uncle Samuel, just like the rest of us. Don't look surprised; I mean it, and for two reasons. In the first place it would pay us to have Arabia working for us; she'd be safer, and so would we. And in the second place, in spite of her adventuresome disposition, you'll find that she is a patriotic little girl at heart. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend her to the chief to-morrow if we should get into any real international trouble."

"I hope you're right, Kelly. And I suppose you are, for you know her pretty well. But just the same I'd want to be awfully sure. What is it you want me to do to help you?"

"The usual thing, Smith. Stick as close to her as you can for a few days, and find out what she's doing at Rhohan's."

I laughed. "She told me she wasn't doing a thing aside from having a good time. What sort of a place is Rhohan's, anyway, Kelly? It strikes me as being queer in some way."

My friend smiled as he answered: "It is. And it's more than that, too. This fellow Rhohan, who is running it, was formerly a secret agent of the Austrian government. Just before the war broke out we heard that he had gotten in bad at home, and a few weeks later he came over here, plentifully supplied with money, and opened up this resort near Washington. Of course it attracted all kinds of people at first, but as the prices were high and the morals almost as high, it soon rid itself of the rougher crowd and became the haunt of the well to do and idle element. It also attracted a group from official Washington—secretaries and lesser officers from the legations, army and navy men and some Federal-bureau heads—those who could afford the sort of entertainment offered. I fancy the place has already paid good returns on the capital invested."

"Charging six dollars a plate for lunch, it ought to," I interjected, with a laugh.

"I don't mean that way," said Kelly, smiling at my allusion to the high cost of living there. "I mean as a clearing

house for information. You see, Smith, the people that go there know a number of things, and it is safe to presume that they gossip more or less about what they know. Discreet waiters, overhearing their talk, should be able to put two and two together and make four—or perhaps more. And a person like Arabia, for instance, ought to be able to pick up quite a good deal of interesting news in the course of a pleasant evening with the distinguished guests of Mr. Rhohan. And I think one of the reasons that Arabia is there is to find out all she can—possibly for Rhohan and possibly for somebody else. That's one reason why I'd like to have you cultivate Arabia a bit; maybe we can get a line on who she's working for. We've got a couple of men at Rhohan's now, but aside from giving us a list of who's there each night they don't seem to be finding out very much."

"If Rhohan's bothers you, I should think you could close it up. I am sure there is gambling going on there, among other things."

"Rhohan's doesn't bother your Uncle Sam a bit," replied Kelly. "And while we could close the place in a minute on half a dozen different excuses, we'd rather let it run. It may give us some information, as well as the other fellows. In fact, Smith, there's something coming off right now that I am convinced will 'break' at Rhohan's, and I wouldn't for worlds have the place shut up before then; it might spoil our chances."

"What is it, Kelly? Tell me, and perhaps I can get Arabia to give me a lead on the matter without knowing that I'm pumping her."

My friend looked at me silently for some time, evidently trying to decide on the advisability of taking me entirely into his confidence. I did not in the least resent this, for I knew that Kelly dealt largely in government secrets, and I also knew that in times past I had permitted Arabia Marston to find out from me things which I was not supposed to reveal. Very shortly, however, Kelly made up his

mind, and, drawing his chair closer to mine, he began to talk:

"I'll tell you part of it, anyway, Smith. Over in that strip of Europe that separates the Old World from the Older World—the Balkans—there is a certain very rich province or kingdom that is directly in the path of the war torrent. If the central powers capture it, they capture vast stores of supplies, and more particularly the crown jewels. These jewels are almost priceless, Smith; they comprise a collection that is barbaric in its reckless selection and in splendor, and that is probably worth five or six million dollars, or possibly more, in the present-day market. If the central powers get these jewels, it will be equivalent to giving them a pretty considerable windfall of capital. And if they get them, we have reason to believe that the entire collection will be sent to Rhohan to dispose of. He will receive instructions either to sell them or to negotiate a loan upon them; he'd get more on a loan, just at present. And quite naturally the Allies are anxious to prevent the jewels from falling into the hands of the central powers or any of their agents. So——"

"But how could the jewels be sent to America?" I interrupted. "Every day we read of British warships stopping vessels at sea and searching——"

Kelly laughed at my interruption. "You reason just like a congressman, Smith. You forget that submarines, armed and unarmed, are making successful voyages to this country apparently at will. And the Allies, knowing that, and also knowing the value of these crown jewels, have politely suggested that the state department do what it can to prevent the disposal of the jewels here, basing their action on the allegation that if the central powers get hold of the jewels and try to sell them, they will be disposing of stolen property. And as disposal of stolen property is dealt with in our treaties, the matter of the jewels becomes a question of ordinary criminal law, instead of international diplomacy. Do you see the point?"

I nodded my head to show that I ap-

preciated the fine distinction, and Kelly resumed:

"Of course I don't profess to know what may or may not be legally termed 'spoils of war'—where 'commandeering' stops and 'theft' begins. Personally I believe a nation that conquers another has a right to grab everything in sight, but there's been lots of new turns to the laws since the war began, and the U. S. government in its struggle to keep neutral has tacitly agreed to corral the jewels and let the courts say who is the owner."

"But why don't the idiots turn the crown jewels over to the Allies for safe-keeping?"

"I guess that's been planned, but you know 'there's many a slip——' and with Europe teeming with secret agents there's no telling what may become of his majesty's knickknacks. With some of the other boys I've been fussing around on this for quite a little while. We've been ably assisted by Scotland Yard, by the Sûreté Bureau, and by various military-intelligence bureaus. But owing to war conditions in the Balkans, nobody really knows where the jewels are. I look for them ultimately to turn up at Rhohan's or at some place where he can dispose of them. And I'm strengthened in this belief by the fact that Arabia Marston has been at Rhohan's for several weeks. Arabia, by reason of her past successes in matters concerning the transportation of jewelry, is just the person they'd pick up to engineer the deal over here. You know this bunch has used her before. In fact, when you first met her, Smith, she was working for Baron Honsloff, who, in turn, was working for——"

"But she double-crossed the baron, Kelly," I objected. "She threw him down when she found that we were too near her trail."

"True, Smith; but the baron didn't know it. All he ever knew about the deal was that Arabia saved him from arrest and gave him a chance to get safely out of the country when his mission failed. He has no reason to distrust her, and he is still active in the

secret councils of his government. Hence I claim that I am justified, in connection with all the information to which I have had access, in believing that Arabia is engineering this crown-jewels deal. Now you can see what I want, Smith, and what it is necessary for you to do at Rhohan's. Watch Arabia and see with whom she talks, and try and find out if any of the people who see her at Rhohan's would be the sort to be interested in the proposition I've outlined."

Before Kelly left me I had accepted his commission, but I didn't hold out any great hopes that I'd be able to accomplish much. He said he was willing to have me do the best I could, left a small fortune with me for expenses, and gave me a telephone number at which I could communicate with him directly, or at least leave word for him. When I tumbled into bed I went almost at once to sleep, and, though I had jumbled dreams about Arabia and our former adventures, I felt refreshed when I woke the next morning and went down to the hotel dining room for breakfast. As I ate I glanced over the morning paper, and saw in the war news that the advance of the central armies was carrying them across the border of the little kingdom whose crown jewels were just then of so much interest to the other nations of the world.

It was about nine o'clock, or a little after, that I had the Stalwart brought around from the garage and took the road into the hills toward Rhohan's. It was a beautiful, peaceful Southern morning, and I was congratulating myself on the contentment I was actually absorbing from the surrounding air and country when the sound of a smothered explosion on the road ahead of me brought me back sharply from my day-dreaming. Automatically I stepped on the accelerator of the Stalwart, and as the car shot around a curve in the roadway I beheld just ahead of me the blazing wreck of an automobile. Crawling across the road from it, and apparently barely escaping the shooting flames, was a woman.

I jammed on my brakes, and, leaping from the car, rushed to her assistance, only to recognize her as Arabia Marston. She scrambled to her feet, and tottered toward me.

"Oh, I'm so glad somebody came!" she said, and then, recognizing me, she added, with a laugh: "For the second time you are my preserver, Smith. How shall I reward you?"

"What happened?" I asked, looking at the blazing wreck, which by now was burning too fiercely to leave any hope of saving the machine.

"I don't know," Arabia answered, with a sort of a frightened sob. "You never can tell about these foreign cars. I just opened her up a bit to see if she wouldn't run better—the valves had been balking all morning. And she went up with a bang; must have back-fired, I guess. I was thrown out, and I was just crawling away when you came."

"I heard the explosion," I said, and together we stood and watched the flames leap and play over the wrecked roadster, devouring the upholstery and woodwork, and leaving but a twisted mass of metal for the frames. The tires exploded with four loud reports, and the smell of burning rubber added to the unpleasant odors that were already defiling the sweet morning air.

"I was going in to Washington on an errand," said Arabia finally. "But now I guess I'll have to throw myself on your mercy, Smith, and ask you to take me back to Rhohan's, where I can get another car. You won't mind doing that?"

"I'll do better than that, Arabia. I'll take you in to Washington. I was just on my way out to hunt you up; you know you urged me to come out again before I continued my tour in the Stalwart. I've got nothing to do for the day; let me be your chauffeur, and take you for a ride in a real car."

Arabia gave me one of her most bewitching smiles, and her dull brown eyes glowed with golden lights that had turned my head in the past.

"You're a dear, Smith," she said. "You'll really save me a lot of time."

And brushing the dust from her cloak and skirt, she climbed into the seat beside me in the Stalwart, which I at once turned about and headed for Washington. As we sped away we left the blazing car behind us for the next passing automobile party to marvel at, and to make a mystery for the afternoon newspapers. The accident and possible narrow escape from death or serious injury seemed to have affected Arabia but little, for she was soon chatting in her usual gay manner, making no further allusions to her mishap. In the course of time she asked me if I'd seen Kelly, and if he'd told me what he was working on.

"I saw him last night," I answered. "He came to the hotel, and we had quite a talk. But you know he wouldn't be apt to tell me what case he was on unless he wanted my help."

"You're a poor liar, Smith," answered Arabia, with her gurgling laugh. "What you've just said means that you're trying to hide from me the fact that Kelly told you he was watching me again, and that he's put you on the trail, too, with orders to hunt me up this morning and stick to me as long as I'd let you. I suppose he told you all about the crown jewels, and how he's had a gang of S. S. men watching Rhohan's to see that the precious baubles aren't smuggled in, hidden in cabbages and squashes?"

Accustomed as I was to Arabia's directness of attack, her words so surprised me that for a moment I forgot the speed at which the Stalwart was rushing along, and we would have gone into the ditch had not Arabia jerked the wheel sharply and kept us in the road.

"Come, Smith, get over it!" she said. "When I accepted you as a chauffeur I at least thought you'd be careful of my life. One escape from a wreck today is enough for me."

I pulled myself together, recovering my "driving nerve" and my wits by a considerable effort.

"You did surprise me, but I'll try to bear up under future shocks," I said.

"I tell you what we'll do, Smith,"

said Arabia, apparently in all seriousness. "Let's be perfectly frank; then we'll get along better. You think you know what I'm doing, and I know what you're trying to do. So let's make it easier for both of us by acting sensible and not like a dime-novel sleuth and adventuress. You can tell Kelly all about it when you see him again, and in the meantime let's be friends and pals. Now I'll tell you about those jewels; they're what I'm going to Washington about this morning. Certain people have already got hold of them, and they are on their way here; you know by that what I mean, so there's no use naming names. I don't know when they'll arrive, but it will be soon. I'm going to find that out this morning—when they'll reach this country and where they'll be put ashore. Then I'm going to arrange to have them shipped here, and I'm going to plaster them all over with insurance. When they get here you can see them, and you can bring Kelly along, too, to the show, if you like. The jewels are nothing to me; I'm just doing this errand for Mr. Rhohan, who's been a good friend to me. If he is getting in bad by monkeying with the stuff, that's his lookout, not mine."

Arabia's statement seemed frank enough, and it jibed fairly well with what Kelly had told me, so I could do nothing but accept it at its face value. Yet I could not help marveling at it, and feeling that there was a trick being planned somewhere. Then I recalled what Kelly had said about Arabia's patriotism, in spite of her former adventures, and I decided that she was giving me proof of it.

"I'm glad to hear you say that you've got nothing to do with the jewels," I said, "for I don't think the deal is as simple as it looks to you."

Arabia shrugged her shoulders. "That will be for Kelly to fuss over," she replied. "You can go with me wherever I stop in Washington, and then you'll be convinced that I'm telling you the truth."

She dismissed the subject with that, and I learned nothing further about the

jewels until, at Arabia's direction, I drove to the patent office, near which we parked the Stalwart, while she led the way to a dingy office in an old-fashioned building across the street. The door we entered bore the legend "Abner Dooberry, Counselor," and opened into a suite of two rooms, the first a dirty and poorly lighted reception chamber, furnished only with three decrepit chairs and a bookcase filled with law tomes. Beyond this was a smaller room, in which, seated at a desk, was a wizened old man with a fringe of white hair bordering the bald dome of his head and hanging down over a collar that sadly needed laundering. His clothes were several seasons out of style, and were shiny with wear. He looked up at our entrance, but did not rise.

"Mr. Dooberry?" asked Arabia.

He nodded, and motioned to an old-fashioned horsehair sofa, upon which Arabia and I both found seats.

"I am Arabia Marston, Mr. Dooberry," she said, "and this is my friend, Mr. Smith, of Denver. My car broke down on the road—in fact, it burned up—and Mr. Smith was kind enough to bring me in to town in his machine. I'm from Mr. Rhohan, Mr. Dooberry; he asked me to call and find out if you'd had any word yet regarding an express shipment from Denmark that was consigned to you and him together."

The little old man nodded his head again, and searched through the untidy pile of papers on his desk. Presently he found a yellow telegram blank, which he passed to Arabia.

"Came this morning," he said in a cracked, cackling voice.

Arabia held the message so that I could read it also. It ran as follows:

ABNER DOOBERRY, *Washington, D. C.*

Twelve packing cases consigned you and Maximilian Rhohan shipped eighteenth instant on steamship *Olaf Heglund* due Fall River, Massachusetts, twenty-ninth. Total weight nineteen hundred fifty, insurance prepaid Lloyds to port of debarkation. Please make arrangements bonding to Washington to avoid customhouse delay.

TUDOR, OSEA EX. NEW YORK.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Dooberry," said Arabia, folding the telegram and putting it in her purse. "If you'll let me keep this a little while, it will be easier for me to attend to the bonding; Mr. Rhohan asked me to do that. I'll call at the local office of the Oversea Express Company and have things fixed up. Perhaps you'd better call up Mr. Rhohan and get his sanction; you can describe me to him."

Mr. Dooberry smiled and shook his head. "It is unnecessary," he said. "You look honest, and besides nobody but Mr. Rhohan knows about this shipment, so you must be from him. If I am not here when you get back, you can slip the telegram under my door. Good morning."

When we were in the Stalwart again, Arabia passed me the telegram. "You'd better copy this, Smith," she said. "Kelly will be interested in it. And don't forget to copy those funny signs and hieroglyphics at the top; they tell where it was sent from and all that sort of stuff."

"Thank you for your thoughtfulness, Arabia," I answered. "I had the message pretty well memorized already, but perhaps it would be better to copy it." And, pulling out a notebook, I diligently transcribed everything that was on the yellow sheet, while Arabia sat beside me and laughed. When I handed her the message again, she asked me to drive to the most modern of Washington's business structures, where the Oversea Express Company had its offices. There, as at Dooberry's, she took me with her, and after a little parleying in the outer office we were ushered into the private room of the manager, an office in marked contrast to the dirty cubby-hole we had just left. And seated in a magnificently sumptuous leather armchair, I listened to the amazing business which Arabia transacted with Mr. Jellison, the Washington representative of the big shipping concern.

"Mr. Jellison," said she, "I am Arabia Marston, a friend of Mr. Rhohan's and of Mr. Dooberry. They have asked me to see you about a shipment your

company is handling for them; here is a telegram concerning it from your Mr. Tudor, in New York, which will explain the matter. I want to have you make arrangements to bond the shipment to Washington, and I also want to have it insured for twelve million dollars; it is almost entirely jewelry and plate."

The Washington manager of the express firm must have been accustomed to receiving unusual requests in connection with his business, but the expression on his face as he took the telegram from Arabia showed plainly that he was in the midst of one of his most surprising and novel adventures. He controlled himself by a visible effort, and made no comment as he read the telegram. Then he placed it before him on his desk, and, reaching for the telephone, demanded to be put into communication with the New York offices immediately. The rapidity with which he got his connection showed that the telephone service is sometimes—as advertised—instantaneous.

"Hello, Oversea, New York? This is Jellison, Washington. Give me Mr. Tudor, please. . . . Hello? Tudor? . . . This is Jellison. You got a shipment coming on the *Olaf Heglund* to Fall River, consigned Dooberry and Rhohan, here, nineteen hundred and fifty pounds, due about the end of the month? . . . Well, what about it? There's a party here wants to have it bonded and insured for twelve million. . . . Yes, twelve. . . . Oh—oh, is that it? Yes, I remember now. Yes, all right; thank you. Good-by."

As he turned from the telephone and faced Arabia again his expression was entirely different. In fact, it was deferential.

"Yes, yes, Miss Marston," he said. "Pardon me for not recognizing the matter at first, but to tell you the truth it had slipped my mind. I have been informed about this—only I wasn't expecting the shipment so soon. You know, this war has shot our business all to—er—I mean, it has complicated things tremendously, and it's been all I could do to keep each day's affairs

straightened out, let alone figuring on the future. Now let's see, you say you want us to attend to bonding this shipment to Washington, and you want it insured also——"

"For twelve million dollars, Mr. Jellison," said Arabia calmly. "That is slightly more than the intrinsic value of the shipment, but as the contents could not be replaced if lost, Mr. Rhohan feels that such a sum is justified, and will gladly pay the premiums. The insurance is to cover the shipment from the moment it leaves the boat until it reaches Mr. Rhohan's place on the Virginia road. You can arrange it for me, can't you?"

"That is a very large sum to place just now, Miss Marston. But still, as it is all domestic, perhaps I can arrange it if I split it up between two or three companies. That will be all right, I suppose?"

Arabia nodded her head. "And get action, Mr. Jellison," she added. "Mr. Rhohan desires that all these matters be arranged before the arrival of the shipment. If you will call him up when you have the papers prepared, and all that sort of thing, he will come in and sign the bonds and pay the premiums."

"It shall have my personal attention," said the manager, and, favoring him with one of her rarest smiles, Arabia led the way down to the Stalwart again.

"Let's go out to Rhohan's for lunch," she said. "You can say that you picked me up after my accident. But I wouldn't tell Rhohan, if I were you, that I let you know all about his business affairs. And of course you won't tell him about Kelly's interest in him."

I willingly agreed with Arabia as to the wisdom of not confiding too much in Rhohan, and we were well on the way out from Washington before I happened to think that we had not returned Dooberry's telegram. I mentioned this to Arabia.

"Oh, bother!" she said petulantly. "Well, I guess he won't die if he doesn't get it till to-morrow. I'll mail it to him, or no, better yet, you take it in to him to-night, Smith. Here it is." And she passed the yellow blank over to me.

It was early in the evening when I returned to my hotel in Washington, after having spent the afternoon with Arabia at Rhohan's, where I had been introduced to the proprietor of the resort and a number of his guests. I telephoned Kelly at once and asked him to come over and join me at dinner, and, shortly afterward, over soup and olives, I was recounting to him my adventures of the day. And as evidence of my accomplishments I passed him the telegram Dooberry had given Arabia, and which I was supposed to return.

"You had a fine time, didn't you, Smith?" laughed my friend. "But cheer up, the telegram is something, and the order to Jellison to bond and insure the stuff is something more. We'll look into those things after dinner. Aside from that, though, Smith, you've been beautifully bunked."

"Bunked! What do you mean?" I demanded, flushing in spite of myself.

"You've been 'framed.' Just to what extent I don't know. But Arabia evidently wanted you with her to-day, Smith. All that stuff about her car exploding and burning up was pure moonshine, and so was your rescue."

"But I heard the explosion, and I saw the machine burn——"

Kelly laughed dryly. "So did two of the boys, Smith. They have been shadowing Arabia ever since I found out she was at Rhohan's. This morning, before nine o'clock, she and Rhohan left out there together in her car, the one she raced you with yesterday. Behind it they were towing a faked-up machine that looked pretty much like it. They had a flunky steering it. When they got to the turn in the road they put the make-believe car at one side of the highway, and then Rhohan and the flunky went down a side road in the real car. From where they were they could see the main route from Washington. Arabia waited beside the faked machine until they signaled you were coming; she was evidently expecting I'd send you out, just as she told you. When she got their signal she lighted a fuse under the machine

they had fixed up, and the thing went off. The boys were in a clump of brush beside the road a little way back, and they saw it all. Just as your machine came round the corner they saw Arabia throw herself in the dust and start to crawl away, and they heard her tell you that for the second time you'd been her preserver. When you and she drove off toward the city Rhohan and his flunky came out from the side road, heaved the burned machine into the ditch, and then went home. Now the thing for us to do is to find out why all this elaborate 'plant' was made for your benefit, and what there is to this stuff about a shipment on a Danish vessel. As for me, I don't get it at all."

I was silent through the rest of the meal. Not because I was enjoying my dinner too much to talk, but because I was so humiliated to think how Arabia had made a fool out of me again. I really should have known better than to think that mass of twisted metal and burning stuff in the road was her high-powered car—by the frame, by the engine, by half a dozen things. But to tell the truth, I was so tickled at the time at having reached Arabia just when she was in distress, that doubt never entered my head. As it was, I had been glad, way down in my heart, that she hadn't been hurt in her accident, and now Kelly was laughing at me and telling me that two other government operatives had witnessed my foolishness. How Arabia must have laughed to herself at me throughout the entire day we had been together! By the time we finished dinner my self-pity and chagrin had turned to anger, and I was anxious to get out with Kelly and commence work on the riddle that had been so carefully arranged for us. Kelly appreciated my mental condition, for he was good enough to say I might go with him and to slap me on the back as we left the dining room. "Cheer up, old man!" he said. "We'll be revenged yet." And he laughed boyishly.

A taxicab took us to the residence of Manager Jellison, of the Oversea Express Company. The butler who opened

the door said that Mr. Jellison was at dinner with some friends, and doubted if he would see us.

"You tell him Mike Kelly wants his ear for a moment," said my friend, and the butler had hardly left us to deliver the message when Jellison came out into the hall and ushered us into a small reception room. He looked at me with some surprise, evidently recalling my face from the morning's visit with Arabia. Kelly he greeted warmly.

"Sorry to disturb you, Jellison," said my friend, "but Smith, here, tells me he sat in with you to-day when a Miss Marston asked you to do certain rather unusual things for Rhohan and Doo-berry; here's the telegram concerning the matter from your man Tudor, in New York. Now what's all this about?—your Uncle Sam wants to know."

Jellison favored me with a smile. Evidently he thought, from Kelly's words, that I was a full-fledged government man, and that I'd put over something pretty clever by getting myself into Arabia's company.

"All I know about it, Kelly, is this," he said. "About a month ago I got a letter from the London office of the company telling me that some jewels of surpassing value were coming across pretty soon, and that we were to handle the shipment as if our salvation depended upon it. Later I got a message from the president of the company, telling me that the shipment would soon be on its way, and that it would pass through my territory, and urging me to do whatever I could for the consignees. I was given to understand that it was diplomatic business, in a way, and that it had to be handled with gloves. That was all I heard about it until to-day, when this Marston woman came in with this telegram. I called up Tudor, and he said everything was O. K. Since Miss Marston left me I've been breaking my neck to place the insurance for her. In fact, I've got a couple of casualty men in at dinner now. But some way they don't seem to be crazy to take the business. However, I think I shall

be able to fix it up all right. Nothing wrong, is there?"

"As far as you know, then, there really is a valuable shipment on the *Heglund*?" asked Kelly, ignoring the other's question.

"I'm sure of it, Mike. After Miss Marston and your man went out, I called up Tudor again, and he told me he'd been advised of the shipment in a letter he got a day or two ago from our agents in Denmark. The stuff was turned over to the Oversea Company from Hamburg, and was shipped on the *Heglund* because she wasn't a boat that would ordinarily attract attention. She's under charter to our shipping division, and it's understood she's going to Fall River to load refugee materials for Europe—clothes, shoes, and so forth for the Belgians. What's your interest in the stuff, Kelly?"

"Can't tell you, Jellison. I'm just inquisitive, I guess. Much obliged to you for seeing me so quickly. Now run on back to your dinner and forget it. Only you might make a note to let me know when the *Heglund* gets to Fall River. Some of the boys would like to look her over, and they might miss her."

Jellison laughed. "Swell chance of your bunch missing a ship that size," he said.

When we were back in the taxi again, Kelly told the bandit on the front seat to drive to the patent office, and there we dismissed the cab.

"Let's turn burglars, and take a look at this fellow Dooberry's place," said Kelly, and, following his suggestion, I led him to the old-fashioned building across the street where the wizened counselor had his offices. Kelly looked the place over, and, drawing a bunch of keys from his pocket, approached the door. Placing his hand on the knob, he gave it a test twist, and suddenly put his other hand to his lips, signaling me caution. Then he carefully released the knob, put the keys back in his pocket, and drew me close to him.

"Go get a cop," he said, speaking scarcely above a whisper. "And when

you bring him back, tell him to walk as if he was traveling on eggs."

Thrilled by my friend's manner, I tiptoed away. Around the corner and half a block away I found a patrolman, and, cautioning him to make no noise, bade him follow me. He evidently took me for a stray maniac, but he was willing to humor me, and he followed me quietly enough back to the doorway, where he showed an increasing interest in the proceedings on seeing that I had a companion.

Kelly buttonholed him, and, speaking softly, said:

"I'm a treasury detective, officer. What's-your name?"

"Jamieson, sir."

"Well, Jamieson, I've got a job for you. You stand in front of this door, and don't let anybody come out till I return. Remember, don't let *anybody* leave the building—not even the president, should he come downstairs. Get me?"

"Yes, sir," answered the patrolman, touching his helmet in salute as Kelly flipped back the lapel of his coat for a moment, showing some sort of a badge.

My friend then cautiously and noiselessly opened the door before which we were standing, and motioned to me to follow him. Once within the vestibule, he shut the door again as carefully as he had opened it, and motioned to me to take off my shoes. At the same time he removed his own footwear, carefully took off his coat and placed it beside our shoes, and, reaching into one of his pockets, slipped me an automatic revolver, which gleamed dully blue in the light that filtered in through the dusty panes from the street lamps.

"You lead the way to Dooberry's office," he said.

Wondering what Kelly had suspected because the outside door of the building was unlocked, I crept silently up the stairs to the narrow corridor on the second floor, and, like a thief, with the automatic before me, piloted my friend to the door that bore Dooberry's name. There was no light save a half

gloom from the dirty windows at the end of the hall, and the place seemed to be deserted.

Kelly shoved past me, and bent before the door, with his ear against the panels. A warning touch from his hand told me that he had heard something within, and I leaned forward and strained my ears. Very faintly I made out the rumble of voices, but I could distinguish no words. A moment later I felt, rather than heard or saw, that one of Kelly's hands was caressing the doorknob, that it had gripped it softly, that the door was slowly, noiselessly but steadily opening little by little. Then the sound of voices was plainer, and I could occasionally catch a word, spoken in English, but with a foreign accent.

When the door was opened perhaps a third of the way, Kelly nudged me, and crept like a ghost into the little reception room outside of Dooberry's private office. I followed him well across this room, and then we both stood up close to the door that led to the chamber from which the voices were coming. A faint fringe of light around the doorcasing showed that the next room was illuminated, and I had barely time to notice this when Kelly threw the inner door open, flashed on an electric torch, and, shoving his own automatic into the glare, called sternly:

"Don't make a move!"

Sitting beside Dooberry's desk, on which was a shaded student lamp, turned down so low that it smelled vilely, were two men—Dooberry and a tall, gaunt, bearded stranger, who wore a long cloak of European design and cut. Both glanced as if fascinated at the glare of the electric torch and at the menacing automatic in Kelly's hand.

"Step in behind me, Smith, and turn up that lamp," said my friend.

At the mention of my name I noted a flicker of surprise in the squinting eyes of the wizened Dooberry. The next moment I had flooded the room with the subdued, green-tinged light from the student lamp. The tall, bearded man, who had been watching me, turned his eyes toward the door-

way, and a smile broke out over his features.

"Ach, Meester Kelly," he said, "did you t'ink itt wass a couple of burglars you had found, no? I did not know such mundane affairs interested you."

Kelly kicked the door of the inner office shut behind him, but otherwise made no movement.

"Many things interest me, colonel," he said. "Pray do not attempt to move for a few minutes; I'm nervous tonight. Smith, reach under the colonel's arms and see if he's wearing a shoulder holster."

As I stepped forward to obey, the man Kelly had addressed as "Colonel" frowned slightly.

"This is too much, Meester Kelly," he said. "You haf no right; you know I am a member of——"

"In this case, colonel, might gives right. I have the advantage over you, and I'm just mean enough to use it. Go ahead, Smith, get his artillery."

Reaching under the man's arms, I found a holster containing a Lugar pistol. This I transferred to my coat pocket. Then I slid my hand down his side, and found a small automatic, of American design, in a leather pocket at his belt. This I also confiscated.

"Frisk the other one, too, Smith," said Kelly. I did, but the frail form of Mr. Dooberry was innocent of shooting irons.

"Now, Smith," continued Kelly, "you take my place here at the door and keep these gentlemen covered. If either of them makes any move that your nervous mind construes as being improper or dangerous, shoot—and ask questions afterward."

Kelly and I changed places, and my friend then took up the business he had in view.

"Dump out your pockets, colonel!" he said. "I want to take a look at what you've got."

A flush of rage spread over the bearded man's features, and he raised his voice in protest.

"Dis you dare not do!" he exclaimed. "The embassy to your chief shall com-

plain of dis. You forget that I am immune from arrest or search."

"Do as I tell you, colonel," said Kelly. "Dump your papers out, or I'll just naturally tear the clothes off your back. You can complain to the chief about it afterward. Come on, jump out your stuff, or I'll help you!"

The colonel's manner suddenly changed, and with a shrug of his shoulders he forced a smile. Reaching into first one pocket and then another, he placed a mass of papers, a wallet, two bunches of keys, a penknife, and some coins on the table.

"Dere, mein friendt, I yield to you," he said.

Kelly pawed over the papers on the desk, glanced into the wallet, counted the coins, and then, with a lightning-like move, pounced upon the seated colonel, jerked him backward from his chair, and slammed him roughly against the wall, where he held him with one hand at his throat, while the other hand slid here and there like a snake about the pinioned man's clothes. I had seen exhibitions of Kelly's strength and quickness before, but I was as surprised as the colonel at the onrush. That Kelly had good cause for his actions became presently apparent, for he drew from some secret and concealed pocket in the colonel's clothes a long, narrow, thin wallet, which he tossed on Dooberry's desk. Then he released the wizened counselor's evening caller.

"You can pick up your stuff and go now, colonel," he said, turning and selecting a legal-size envelope from Dooberry's stock.

The tall, bearded man rubbed his throat, stretched his neck a couple of times, and took a long breath.

"Mein Gott, Meester Kelly," he said, "you near killedt me!"

"I'm liable to do the whole job some day, colonel," responded my friend, writing an address on the envelope he had taken. "Now you and Dooberry get out; Smith and I will follow you in a second. Let 'em out, Smith, and shut the door after them."

Dooberry hastened out at once, but the colonel stopped to gather up his

papers. While he was doing this Kelly slipped the long, thin wallet into the addressed envelope and sealed it. When the colonel had departed, he gave this envelope to me.

"We'll go down now, Smith," he said. "There'll be a fuss at the door when the cop refuses to let them out. Never mind that; you run right out. On the corner there's a letter box; you drop that envelope in it, and be sure it goes down into the box below the receiving tray. Then come back and put your shoes on. But make that mail box, if it's the last thing you do in this world."

Kelly was right about there being a fuss at the door. The colonel was having a heated argument with Patrolman Jamieson, and I caught the words "military attaché of the embassy," as we went down the stairs.

"I don't care if you're the ambassador himself," replied Jamieson. "I have my orders, and you don't leave this building till I'm ready. Get back in the doorway there, or I'll bust you one!"

"The Washington police are to be relied upon, colonel," said Kelly, as we reached the bottom of the stairs. "Don't blame the patrolman; I asked him to hold the fort here. Just as soon as Smith, here, has skipped over to the corner in his stocking feet, you can go, colonel. Jamieson, let this man out."

Kelly pushed me out onto the paving, and then turned back to pacify the colonel, while I ran to the corner, shoved the envelope Kelly had given me into the slot, snapped the tray back and forth two or three times to be sure it was clear, and then returned to the door of the building where we had found our adventure.

"All right, Jamieson," said Kelly, as I approached. "You can let these gentlemen go now. Much obliged to you for your good work; you won't lose anything by it. And if this bearded man here tries to make any trouble for you, just tell your captain to call on Mike Kelly, at the treasury department. Good night, colonel; I'll send your ar-

tillery to you at the embassy in the morning."

With a hearty Teutonic oath the colonel took Dooberry's arm and hurried away. Patrolman Jamieson thoughtfully held his flash light while we put on and laced up our shoes, and then bade us a cheerful good night as he left us, stuffing three of Kelly's best cigars in his helmet.

"Wasn't it a bit risky to mail that thing?" I asked Kelly, as we turned toward my hotel. "I don't know what it is, but you evidently thought it was valuable."

"Not a bit of risk in the world, Smith," answered my friend. "It is true that you can break a mail box open with a medium-sized ax, but that sort of thing isn't done. Even our friend the colonel wouldn't think of doing it. And once in the hands of the collector, that envelope is as safe as if it was in the treasury vaults. Uncle Sam's postmen, Smith, are the most trustworthy and faithful men in the world. That envelope will be in the state department twenty minutes after it is collected, and then we'll see if there is anything of real value in it. I rather fancy that there is, because it is the one thing the colonel didn't throw on the table. Anyway, it's safer where it is now than if you or I had it, and we're safer, too."

The next morning Kelly was at my hotel when I went down to breakfast, and he sat with me in the dining room.

"They've got those jewels," he said. "Found that much out from the papers in the colonel's wallet. Seems some special agent promised to smuggle them away to the Allies for safe-keeping, and then turned them over to the central powers. It's the old story of the double cross. Maybe the jewels are coming over here on the *Heglund*, as Arabia told you, but somehow I doubt it. You stick around with her, anyway, for a while, and we'll see what we can find out."

For the next three weeks I spent much of my time at Rhohan's or driv-

ing about the country near Washington with Arabia in the Stalwart. And as a matter of course, practically every one of the more wealthy patrons of Rhohan's peculiar resort came to admire my car, and asked me to place orders for them when the new model should be put upon the market. I wired the Kovens of the hit their machine was making, and they answered with congratulations and with permission for me to remain in the capital as long as I found orders plentiful. My commissions from this later amounted to several thousand dollars, so you can see I really was not wasting time.

As for Arabia, though she must have known of the encounter Kelly and I had with the colonel, there was never a suggestion in her conversation with me during our long hours of companionship that she regarded me otherwise than as a friend. She was a most charming person to while away the time with, and I fancied as the days rolled by that I was really getting to know her thoroughly. However, now that I look back at things, I don't believe anybody knows Arabia Marston thoroughly—unless it be my friend Kelly.

One morning toward the end of the month Arabia met me with her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm, and even before she spoke I knew that a new chapter in the adventure of the jewels was about to open.

"Can you get hold of Kelly right away?" she asked me, as I alighted from the Stalwart in front of Rhohan's.

"I can get him from Washington," I replied.

"Meaning that you could telephone him from here, only you don't want us to find out the private number he gave you," she replied, with a laugh. "Well, hop into the car, then, and drive me to town. I want to see Kelly right away; I have news for him."

In less than two hours we were in the capital, and I left Arabia in the car while I entered a drug store and called up Kelly from the public booth. I told him Arabia wanted to see him,

and he said he'd been expecting something like that.

"The *Heglund* docked at Fall River yesterday morning," he added, "and the shipment is now en route here in bond. It ought to arrive this morning. I'll meet you at noon at the B. & O. depot."

Promptly on the hour Arabia and I rolled up in the Stalwart, and found Kelly waiting for us in a big touring car that bore the government's shield on its radiator.

"Hello!" he called out. "I suppose, Arabia, you want to take me down to see that express shipment that you're so interested in. It's in the yards. I've brought along the big car so we could all travel together. Better leave your prize roadster here, Smith, and pile into my machine."

Arabia was laughing, and as she shook hands with Kelly I saw him blush.

"You're always so thoughtful of me, Kelly," she bantered. "Of course we'll climb into your car. Smith's machine is a lovely little thing for two, but it won't do for a crowd at all."

Once transferred to Kelly's car, which was driven by a neatly uniformed chauffeur, we gossiped and joked in the tonneau while the big machine made its way swiftly through the city to the freight yards. There I was surprised to see Rhohan waiting in one of the machines from his resort, while standing about an express car on one of the sidings were a number of customs inspectors and several quietly dressed men, who, I presumed, were aids of Kelly's. Rhohan waved a greeting to us, and acknowledged Arabia's introduction of Kelly as "one of my dearest friends and most persistent enemies."

Kelly laughed at this characterization of himself, and, turning to Rhohan, said: "Well, Mr. Rhohan, what is your pleasure? Do you want this stuff taken to the government warehouses for examination, or shall we proceed with the formalities here?"

"If it can be done here, it will save a good deal of cartage," answered Rhohan. "But I am at a loss to under-

stand, Mr. Kelly, why the government should take such an interest in this little shipment. I have already made a declaration as to its contents, under oath."

"Just a customhouse formality, Mr. Rhohan," replied my friend. "The government doesn't doubt your word, but all jewelry has to be formally appraised so the duty can be definitely fixed. Let's get a look at it."

At a nod from Kelly several of the customs inspectors mounted the platform of the car and entered its narrow door, and we all followed. Within two guards, heavily armed, rose from a bench and stepped to one side. They wore caps bearing the name of the Oversea Express Company, and seemed glad that their vigil was near its end. In the middle of the car was a row of twelve packing cases, each heavily banded with metal hoops, and constructed of substantial timber. They bore the marks of considerable wear and travel, and were chalked on all sides with numbers and shipping directions and signs.

"Let's start with the first one," said the customs inspector in charge, and two of his assistants stepped forward, carrying nail pullers, and attacked the foremost box. As one of them started prying at the stiff metal band that bound the heavy boards together, the packing case slid across the car floor, and the inspector fell sprawling on his stomach.

"You're a strong man," said Rhohan, laughing.

"Not so strong as you think," replied the inspector, rising and brushing the dirt from his uniform. "That box was a lot lighter than I expected."

"It ought to weigh at least a hundred and fifty, but I suppose you're used to little things like that," offered Rhohan.

The customs inspector looked at him oddly for a moment, and then reached out one hand, and, gripping a corner of the packing case, dragged it back to the center of the car. "If it weighs over thirty pounds, I'll eat it," he said, and again began working with the nail puller.

Rhohan, as if doubting the man, stepped forward and took hold of the case, lifting it easily.

"That's queer," he said, with a puzzled expression on his face. "That's very queer."

Then he stepped down the car to the next box and kicked it. It toppled over on its side with a hollow noise.

"Good Lord! Something's wrong here!" he cried, and in a frenzy he rushed down along the line of packing cases, throwing his weight against each one, and in turn sending each skidding across the floor and against the side of the car.

"Open them quick!" he shouted. "Get an ax! Break them open—never mind how!" The man was as pale as a ghost, and looked excitedly from one face to another in the small group that filled the car.

The two express guards also, I noticed, seemed much disturbed. They hefted the boxes and looked blankly at each other. Kelly, the first to get into action, reached up to the car's emergency kit, and, tearing the heavy fire ax from its cleats, attacked the boxes one after another. He knocked in the top of each with but slight effort, and every box was empty save for a mass of excelsior packing and many crumpled German and Austrian newspapers.

I turned to see what Arabia was doing. She was standing apparently unconcerned at one side of the car, watching the proceedings. The minute she noted that my eyes were upon her, however, she jumped forward and peered into one of the battered packing cases.

"Why, it's empty!" she exclaimed, with well-simulated surprise.

Rhohan, in the meantime, had become as a man possessed. He ran back and forth the length of the car, his hands gripping his temples.

"Robbed! Robbed!" he shouted. "I've been tricked! Oh, this is unbelievable!"

Kelly swung sharply to the two express guards. "How about this?" he demanded.

"They were as heavy as lead when they were put into the car; that I'll swear to," one of the men answered.

"And have you been with them all the time?" Kelly snapped.

"Yes, sir, all the time; that is, except on the transfer barge at New York. There was nobody outside on the boat—couldn't possibly have been, sir—but the crew and the trainmen. We stepped out then to get a breath of air. You see, sir, the car came through on the express and mail train—no passengers, sir. And we figured it was all right. When we got back there was no sign that anything had been disturbed, sir."

Kelly looked at the men sharply, and then turned away and upended one of the broken packing cases. Turning it about so that the bottom was in full view, he examined it closely. The metal straps that seemed to go entirely around the cases did not cross the bottom boards; instead, they ended about four inches from the edge. This left unprotected a board about five inches wide in the middle of the lower side of the box. Gripping one end of this board with his fingers, Kelly pulled. The board came away from its place easily, only two small nails holding each end.

My friend looked at the customs inspector in charge of the little force, and nodded his head. Then he turned to Arabia. "Get your excited friend there, and let's go and have lunch," he said.

Rhohan overheard him, and raved. "Lunch! Who wants lunch?" he shouted. "I have been robbed—robbed of——"

"You're insured, aren't you?" asked Kelly calmly. "Come on and get a bite to eat with us; then you can think more calmly. In the meantime you can trust the express company and the insurance and casualty men to make every effort to locate your property."

"But I could not eat," protested Rhohan, who by this time was trembling all over, like a man with the ague.

Arabia took him by the arm, and led him to the door of the car, and Kelly and I followed. Outside, the quietly dressed men who were standing around

looked at us curiously, but none of them followed as we made our way to Kelly's car and climbed into the tonneau. At a word the driver threw in the gears, and we sped away back to the city. Rhohan sat like one in a trance, muttering to himself and looking from one to the other of our faces. Arabia, with an inscrutable smile on her lips, watched Kelly steadily, but if he knew this he gave no sign.

In half an hour our car drew up before the entrance of a restaurant located just off one of the Circles, and Kelly led the way within. While we were checking our wraps I noticed he was holding a whispered conversation with the head waiter, and a moment later we were ushered to seats at a table near a window at one side of the large dining room.

"I've taken the liberty of ordering," said Kelly, as he settled himself in his chair. Rhohan nodded as if he didn't care what happened; Arabia smiled and leisurely drew off her gloves. On her right hand flashed a magnificent ring—two heart-shaped opals of unusual size and "fire," bound together by a band of twisted gold and platinum. It fairly dazzled my eyes as it reflected the rays from the candle lamps at our places, and I thought how out of place such a ring would be on any other woman's hand, but Arabia's dash and daring beauty enabled her to carry it off. Kelly appeared not to have noticed it, and at once began a bantering line of small talk in an effort to remove the strain under which we were all of us more or less laboring.

Luncheon had progressed to dessert, and we were enjoying a delicious pineapple ice, before Kelly alluded to the matter that was foremost in our minds.

"Feel better, Rhohan?" he asked.

The foreigner sighed. "Yes, friend Kelly, the man is better, but the mind—ah, that is different! Just think—how could they have been stolen?"

"Very easily," replied Kelly. "Very easily, granting in advance that the thief knew about those bottom boards. A strong man, or two strong men, could have upended those packing cases, taken

off the boards, removed the heavy stuff inside, and put the boards back again in not more than fifteen minutes. And the two express guards were probably on the deck of the transfer barge at least half an hour. There was plenty of time."

"But even supposing they knew about the boards, how could they get the contents away?" asked Rhohan. "They were on a boat——"

"All they had to do was to throw it overboard," answered Kelly, to my surprise. "They didn't even have to do that; they could have dumped it off the end of the car, between the tracks, and let it lie there till the train was pulled off the barge. Then they could have——"

"But you talk as if the contents were of no value," protested Rhohan, his voice rising. "Why should the robbers, supposing they did as you say, throw such valuable loot away?"

"They might have been paid to do it; somebody might have rather seen the stuff at the bottom of the East River than in your hands."

Rhohan looked at Kelly, and seemed about to make a reply, but thought better of it. And just then my friend, for the first time, appeared to notice the blazing ring on Arabia's hand.

"What a ring, Arabia!" he exclaimed. "Let me see it."

She smilingly drew the gems from her finger, and passed the jewel across the table to Kelly. He examined it attentively, and then handed it back to her.

"It's a beautiful thing," he said. "But I'm surprised that you wear it. Don't you know that opals are unlucky?"

Arabia fondled the ring between her fingers and laughed. "I didn't know you were superstitious, Kelly. Do you really think opals are unlucky?"

He nodded his head. "Some of them, my dear, are very unlucky," he answered. "And those two you are wearing are fairly dripping with misfortune. Do you know their history? They caused a queen to kill her husband once, and they have brought woe to a whole

kingdom since that time. They are

Kelly stopped abruptly, and reached across the table with a lunge, but he was not quick enough. Arabia's eyes had grown big and glistening fiery as he began speaking, and with a catlike movement she had reached out and grasped a pair of heavy silver nut-crackers from a cut-glass tray in the center of the table. She brought the solid metal down with a resounding blow upon the almost priceless ring, which she held against the table with her left hand. As Kelly's outreaching hand gripped her wrist, the two heart-shaped opals flew in a scintillating shower of iridescent sparks over the white damask cloth, and fell as gleaming bits of dust over the dishes and silverware.

"If they're as unlucky as that, I don't want to have anything more to do with them," she said, with a catchy laugh.

Startled as I was by her actions, my emotion was no match for Rhohan's. He jumped up in his place and leaned far over the table, his snarling face close to Arabia's. "You fool, you!" he almost shrieked. "Those were worth——"

Arabia leaned back in her chair and laughed—the unpleasant laugh that was in her repertoire, and that always reminded me of the rattle of the pebbles on the shingle as the surf's undertow dragged them out to sea.

"I've got *my* fingers crossed, anyway," she said, and flashed a look at Kelly.

Kelly pushed Rhohan back into his chair rather roughly. "That isn't your loss," he said sternly, "so don't beef about it. And the people who will have to bear the loss will think it's cheap. The jig is up, Rhohan; now it depends on you whether you get into real trouble or not."

Rhohan sank back into his chair, and looked from Arabia to Kelly.

"What do you mean?" he asked in a faint voice.

"Try to collect your insurance and see," answered Kelly.

Arabia was smiling happily and un-

concernedly. Rhohan had turned pale, and was breathing heavily. To me it was all a mystery, and my face must have shown this, for Arabia, after a glance at me, turned to Kelly.

"Rhohan and I understand, Kelly," she said. "But for Heaven's sake, tell poor Smith here, or he'll go insane. And, anyway, I guess Rhohan would like to hear how you did it."

"I didn't do it, Arabia; it was mostly luck," said my friend. "It was luck and Smith. It was Smith who led me to Dooberry's office the night of the day you took him there. We happened to find the colonel—you know the gentleman—there in secret conference with Mr. Dooberry. I had a hunch and I took a chance—stood him up and got a wallet from his clothes. Over at the state department they have a collection of foreign ciphers, and we were able to read the latest news he had. From his stuff I learned what I was already beginning to feel sure would happen or had happened—that your people, Rhohan, had got hold of these crown jewels and were shipping them over here by submarine. Then I saw that this scheme of having a shipment come over by a mysterious neutral ship was only a fake to throw the secret agents off the scent, and you took advantage of it to plan for the collection of insurance if the submarine didn't arrive. However, the submarine had good luck, and arrived all right—put the jewels ashore on the Florida coast, from where they were shipped up to Rhohan's in orange and grapefruit boxes—with a layer of fruit on the outside. Our agents found that out. Since then we've been lying low to see what you'd do with this other shipment; the fake one.

"Our men never left that shipment for a moment after it got to Fall River on the *Olaf Heglund*. The whole train crew on the special that brought your car down was composed of government men; the whole crew on the barge was made up of our men. And we wanted to see what your 'frame' was, so we gave you every chance. We got the express guards out of the cars on the

barge, and that gave Rhohan's men their chance. They'd been riding on top, and we knew it. As soon as they saw the coast was clear they dropped down, got into that car, and ripped the bottom of those boxes open and dumped the scrap iron that was in them out on the barge between the tracks. We've got the scrap iron and the two crooks in Jersey City right now. We had Rhohan lined up from the start, and the only thing that connected you with it, Arabia, as far as evidence went, was that ring you were fool enough to wear. I wish——"

"Maybe you do," interrupted Arabia. "But wishing is futile now, Kelly, and you know it. I defy you to try to prove, in any court of law, that this twisted bit of gold and platinum was ever in any way connected with the crown jewels of the kingdom of——"

Kelly broke in: "You're right, Arabia. As you said, you've got your fingers crossed. And really I'm glad of that. But your friend here isn't so lucky."

Rhohan laughed unpleasantly. "Very clever, Mr. Kelly," he said. "Miss Marston was right when she told me you were clever. But you admit yourself that I received the jewels."

"You received them all right," Kelly answered, with his dry smile. "But while you were play acting down here to-day, Rhohan, and framing what you thought was the support of customs men and government operatives for your claim for twelve million dollars' worth of insurance, the police and the high sheriff, along with some of our

boys, raided your place on the Virginia Pike. It was raided on a warrant charging you with conducting a gambling house. The government has the jewels by this time, and the state department will hold them in trust until the case is adjudicated. It's up to the courts to decide whether the jewels are legitimate spoils of war or whether they must be returned at the close of the conflict to the kingdom to which they originally belonged. My advice to you, Rhohan, is to beat it while the beating is good; the raiding party may be back any minute and start looking for you. Personally I'd like to hold you, but a certain embassy has suggested to the government that you're hardly worth fussing with. And as we are theoretically friendly with the power the embassy represents, you will be allowed to get a flying start."

Rhohan turned a shade paler. "Does the—does the embassy know of the—of the insurance matter," he asked throatily.

"Not yet," answered Kelly.

Maximillian Rhohan rose and bowed formally. "I thank you, Mr. Kelly. And you will permit me to pay for this little luncheon, too? I would like, in some small measure, to express my appreciation. And now I trust you will excuse me?"

Kelly bowed, and Rhohan hastily left the table. We saw him pause and hand the waiter a yellow-backed bill just before he vanished.

"Let's have some champagne," said Kelly, with a smile at Arabia. "Justice is done again."



A SEARCH FOR STOLEN PROPERTY

DURING last summer there was in a Southern town an epidemic of church sociables, picnics, and lawn parties. Merriment ran high. Joy was ter-magant. Mirth was king.

The day after one of the lawn parties, the committee which had been in charge of the affair published in the town journal the following notice:

We do not wish to hurt anybody's feelings. We would hesitate to cause the blush of shame to mantle anybody's cheek. We shall keep the matter a profound secret. Consequently, if the young man who sat in the chair where a young lady had left a plate of maple sugar to cool last night will return the plate to the committee, no questions will be asked.

The Soldier's Way

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "Rimrock Jones," "Alias Bowles and the Far West," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS

Dare devil gun-runner and recruiting agent for the Mexican Army of Liberation, Beanie Bogan finds in Bruce Whittle likely material for his business. Whittle is in a condition bordering on suicide because he has lost the one girl in all the world. She had married a flabby fool named Pedley on grounds of honor rather than of love. Also, strangely enough, she and her husband had seemingly followed Whittle down to the Mexican border. Beanie Bogan persuades the lorn lover to forget the lady in the service of Mars. So Whittle becomes a member of the Foreign Legion enlisted under General Montaño. By his courage and recklessness in skirmishes, Bruce Whittle wins the fighting heart of Beanie Bogan, and a singular friendship is forged. In the important attack on Fronteras, Bogan and Whittle agree for ten thousand dollars to burn bridges and destroy railroad communications, a most desperate undertaking. To help them in the venture, General Montaño and his master of strategy, Gambolier, promise to surround the city of Fronteras, to cut off Federal pursuit. The dynamiting is accomplished successfully, but Bogan and Whittle discover themselves without the promised assistance. They are pursued by Federal cavalry, but in their flight come upon a good natural defensive position. Advantage is taken of it, and Beanie shoots with telling effect into the besieging ranks. But night is falling, and Beanie informs Whittle that the Federals will probably get them in the darkness.

CHAPTER VII.

A RECKONING.

AN hour wore on miserably, and, beating up against the wind, a pair of ravens came over from the distant mountains to hover above the unburied dead. Bogan became moody and irritable, Whittle despondent and oblivious, and as the morning passed and even the scouts disappeared they slept, turn about, in the dirt. At last the sun set, and, rousing up from his apathy, Beanie once more took command. The horses were released from their bonds and saddled, the pack was reduced to almost nothing, and, as the darkness gathered and no Mexicans appeared, Bogan slipped away down the draw. Some time that night when they least expected it their enemies would come tumbling into their hole, and then of course there would be nothing to it but a running fight in the dark. So they waited, worn and nerve-racked, until at last Bogan came

back and stripped the pack horse of his load.

"Let's get action!" he said, and, lashing the animal with his quirt, he sent him at a gallop across the plain. The wind had gone down, and they could hear him clearly as he clattered along over the flat; but no guns spat fire, no lurking troopers charged, nothing checked him as he raced away.

"Well, what's the answer?" demanded Bogan, and then, leading out his horse, he tightened the girth and mounted.

"I'm tired of this," he said. "Do you want to make a run for it?" And Whittle followed willingly behind.

He had no nerves now, no fears, no hopes; just a wearied acceptance of his fate. They rode out slowly, heading for the mountains to the west, but nowhere about them in the echoing darkness could they see a single movement of life. They rode a mile across the barren flat, and, as his horse found

some bunch grass by a sand hill, Bogan stopped and let him eat.

"Don't see nothing," he muttered as Whittle came alongside, and, while their famished animals grazed, they sat in silence and listened for the sound of pursuit. "Well, let's take a chance," said Bogan at last, and, reining up his mount, he spurred him into action and went dashing away toward the hills. They gained them unchallenged, and at the entrance to a cañon Bogan turned in his saddle and cursed.

"Well, dang a Mexican!" he burst out incredulously. "Where in Hades do you think they are?"

"They all went back to the train," answered Whittle at last, "this morning, when the bugle gave the call."

"All right, then," boasted Bogan. "According to that I cleaned the whole outfit. You have to hand it to me. And yet," he added, "it ain't like them Federals; they could have got us like shooting fish." He rode up the draw where the bunch grass grew rank, and dismounted to let his horse feed, but still he muttered on to himself. "It ain't right," he declared, "there's some trick here somewhere; they don't let no bridge burners get away." They rode up the valley and then into a narrow cañon, and on until the trail forked at the divide, and the cold dawn found them far up in the mountains without a single soldier in pursuit. "I got it!" cried Beanie when he realized his good fortune. "Montaño has made his raid on Fronteras!"

That was his last word on the enigma with which he had wrestled all night, and Whittle had no theory to advance: All they knew was that the cavalry, which had surprised them in such numbers, had disappeared as suddenly as it had come, and three days later, when they rode into their old camp, they found Beanie's guess was good. Montaño's soldiers were gone, their camp fires were dead, and the tracks all pointed toward Fronteras.

"Why, the lazy Mexican dastards!" cried Bogan in a passion when he perceived that the tracks were still fresh. "They ain't been gone two days. We

had about one chance in a hundred thousand of getting out of that jack pot alive, and here Montaño and his pot-licking greasers have been bumming around camp all the time. You wait till I find 'im; I don't care what he says, I don't care if he's taken the town. I'm going to cuss him out for a palavering coward, and then I'm going to quit him. I won't work for no man that'll lie to me like that. Can't you see it sticking out? Well, it's easy for me; they don't want to let go of that ten thousand!

"Yes, certainly!" he exploded. "I know that's why they did it; it's just some more of Gambolier's strategy! We go down there first and burn all the bridges—that cuts off the troops from Chulia—and then, by grab, they let the cavalry go down after us, and that cuts off two hundred more. *And*—by getting us killed that saves the ten thousand dollars and they win, both ways from the jack. That's the way they do all of us Americans—they work us for suckers—but you watch 'em when I stage my come-back. They'll be surprised, and, take it from me, they won't dare to look me in the eye. A man can't do it; if he's plotted to murder you, he can't look you straight in the eye!"

Their journey toward Fronteras was filled with threats and mutterings, for Beanie was in a villainous mood. On their long ride north they had encountered few houses, and those of the poorest class, and Bogan's stomach had turned against jerked beef. Yet so poor and miserable were the mountain dwellers that they could offer them little else. And now as they rode in on their half-starved mounts, with the strain on their tense nerves let down, they paid without knowing it for those nights of excitement when they had burned the Central bridges. They were nervous and twitchy, impatient over trifles, and torn by contending moods, and as they encountered a camp of Montaño's soldiers at the head of the narrow cañon they passed them without a word.

The Army of Liberation was en-

camped in a brushy valley that led up from the Rio Grande, and as Bogan saw visitors from the American side moving about among the fires he exploded in heartfelt oaths. If it had been a fiesta on the streets of Fronteras, there could not have been more tourists and kodaks. There were no outposts, no guards, no signs of army discipline, but each insurrecto band was camped by itself as if there were no enemy for miles. Guns and equipment lay everywhere, men rode about at will, and in the midst of it all—the smoldering fires, the bright serapes, the big-hatted mountaineer Mexicans—there eddied a throng of sight-seers from Del Norte, distributing tobacco and food to the men. As the two haggard men came out of the box cañon and rode down through this assembly, Beanie Bogan became the object of all eyes. He was gaunt and bearded, with unwashed features, and his clothes torn and stained with dirt, and behind him, no less travel worn, rode the wraith of the man Whittle, who had stood off the rurales with a shotgun.

He was changed now from the immaculate Whittle, who had done his first fighting in decent black. The sad eyes that had once been so gentle were bloodshot and defiant, his clean shoulders were bowed with fatigue, and as he followed after Beanie he bore a certain likeness to that ruthless master of men. The wild life was telling on him, he had been harried and hunted, and now suddenly he was a fighting animal. Men gazed at him in silence, as they did at Espinosa and others of Montaña's famous outlaws, and the women drew together as he passed. And Whittle was aware, without knowing the cause, that he was suddenly set apart from other men. He was a bridge burner, a wrecker, a soldier of fortune, the partner of the fighting Beanie Bogan.

They found the Foreign Legion encamped near the river, in full view of the other side, and as they rode on toward the whitewashed adobe, before which Montaña stood receiving his

friends, they were greeted by an American cheer. It came from big Bill McCafferty and Jimmy Sullivan, the deserter, and hulking Helge Whalgren, and from twenty more grinning recruits.

"Three cheers for Beanie Bogan!" shouted Big Bill with unction, but Beanie regarded him coldly.

"Hello, you big stiff!" he responded, with a sneer. "What are you fellers doing up here?"

"We're preparing to attack Fronteras!" replied Sullivan joyously. "What's the matter, Beanie? You look kinder sick."

"Yes, and I feel kinder sick," returned Bogan sarcastically. "What have we got here—a Sunday-school picnic?"

"Well, it's Sunday," admitted Sullivan, "if that's what you mean. But we're waiting for further reinforcements."

"Ain't surrounded the town yet, eh?" inquired Bogan shortly, and spurred through the crowd toward Montaña.

"Ah, my friend!" cried Montaña in an ecstasy of excitement when he recognized Bogan beneath his beard, and ran and caught him in his arms.

"Yes, like hell!" returned Bogan, releasing himself impatiently. "Something like your other friend, Buck O'Donnell!"

"Buck O'Donnell!" repeated Montaña, raising his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Yes," answered Beanie with brutal directness, "only *this* friend didn't happen to get killed!"

He tapped himself on the breast, which heaved with sudden anger, and then he burst into a tirade. The crowd became larger, newspaper reporters fought their way forward, while Montaña strove in vain to check him.

"Just a moment!" he protested. "Only listen, my dear Bogan. Come inside—it can all be explained."

"Yes, sure it can be explained," agreed Bogan irascibly, "but would that bring me back to life? I can explain to you why Buck O'Donnell got killed—and tell you whose fault it was, too!"

"Come inside—and bring your friend," suggested Montaña quietly, and they followed him into an inner room.

It was a plain adobe house, with dirt floors and rawhide furniture, but in this, the inner sanctuary, there was a great table strewn with maps. And on the opposite side of it, immersed in some problem, sat Gambolier, the military adviser. He rose up slowly, and regarded them questioningly, and to the excited Beanie his aloofness was proof enough of guilt.

"No, I won't shake hands!" he grumbled morosely as Gambolier stepped forward to congratulate him. "I came here to get my money."

"What money?" demanded Gambolier, and Bogan rushed at him threateningly and wagged his finger in his face.

"You know what money!" he shouted accusingly. "The ten thousand dollars that was coming to us if we went down and blew up that bridge. Well, we blowed her up, and we burned a lot of trestles, and, now by the Lord, we want our money, and we're going to get it, too!"

He added this confidently, turning his keen eyes upon Montaña, who had ventured once more to intervene.

"Yes, yes, my dear Bogan," he protested smilingly, "but don't make a scene with Gambolier. The agreement was with me, and you shall have the money, so sit down and make your report."

"I've made my report," answered Beanie sharply. "The Arroyo Grande Bridge is a total wreck and we burned seven trestles coming north. And then, by grab, when we'd scrapped the whole railroad and rode our horses to a standstill we come over a hill and here's a whole troop train of cavalry that's been sent down from Fronteras to take us. Now you can explain that all you want to, but there's nothing talks to me like—ten—thousand—dollars—in my hand."

He held out his hand and patted it dramatically, but Montaña still smiled at him tolerantly.

"Ah, yes," he said, "you shall have the money. It is still there, in escrow, at the bank. When the two weeks are up, if no trains cross the bridge, you shall have it without a doubt. We are very sorry about that matter of the cavalry, but——"

"It was a military necessity," explained Gambolier suavely, and Beanie Bogan nodded sneeringly.

"Yes," he said, "I was listening for that."

"It was, indeed!" exclaimed Gambolier warmly. "It was impracticable to surround the town."

"But what about me?" inquired Bogan meaningly. "Where did I get off in your military calculations? It was distinctly agreed before I started out that on the twentieth of April I was to blow up the bridges and you was to surround Fronteras. But you've got three thousand men camped up here in the cañon, and you don't seem to have surrounded it yet."

"Ah, but you don't understand," cried Gambolier excitedly, "we have no effective artillery."

"No, and I don't want to understand," answered Bogan roughly. "I've quit, and I've come for my pay."

"Oh, *no!*" burst out Montaña, and rushed to restrain him, but Beanie jerked violently away.

"It's a wonder," he suggested, "that some one don't ask me how I come to get away from that cavalry."

"Well, how did you?" flattered Montaña, patting him affectionately on the shoulder. "By some foxy-Quiller trick?"

"No, I whipped 'em, by gad!" responded Bogan proudly. "And youse guys afraid to surround Fronteras!"

He put a world of scorn into the lash of those words, and Montaña shrank back as from a whip.

"Perhaps we were waiting," he suggested coldly, "for you to come back and show us how."

"Well, I'm back," replied Bogan, "and I could show you how. But it would be easier to recruit a hundred fighting Irish and go in and do it myself."

"You are confident!" observed Gambolier, with a thin-lipped smile, and Montaña ventured a scornful shrug.

"I'm a soldier," returned Beanie stoutly, "and fighting is my business. But how about that ten thousand dollars?"

"It is in the bank," answered Montaña stiffly. "You will receive it when the two weeks are up."

"No, I'll receive it now. Just write me out an order before I begin to get rough."

Bogan's beady, terrier eyes glowed red from beneath his eyebrows, and, as silence fell upon the room, he fingered his pistol suggestively.

"Very well," spoke up Montaña, but as he shook out his fountain pen he gave way to a sigh of bitterness. "Very well, Sergeant Bogan, but according to our agreement——"

"Our agreement? You broke it first! You was to protect me by surrounding Fronteras!"

"——You were to wait till the two weeks were up. What assurance have we that the bridge is destroyed? None at all but your own unsupported word."

"My word is good," observed Bogan as he slipped the check into his pocket, "and I'll give you a little advice before I go. You better get you another military adviser!"

He stuck out his chin at Gambolier and started for the door, but Montaña ran hastily after him.

"Just a moment, Sergeant Bogan," he implored in a whisper. "Would you consider—bringing over some big guns?"

"Nothing doing!" answered Bogan, but his steps lagged a little, and at the outer door he stopped. "I'll tell you," he said, "we'll see if this check's good first." And with a leering grin he was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO CHERISH AND PROTECT.

On their return to Del Norte, as on his departure, Bruce Whittle was no more than a sad-eyed automaton, a patient shadow of Beanie Bogan. He

followed him silently across the swaying suspension bridge and past the rigid and oblivious soldier who stood guard at the American side. He followed him into the closed and waiting automobile which had appeared so mysteriously to receive them, and with the admiring murmurs of the crowd in his ears he went flying with Beanie into town. It was all a part of the terrifying death machine to which he had committed his poor self and which, after whirling him through the wilds of Chihuahua and back through a phantasmagoria of flight, now spewed him out, at the end of the journey, safe as a child who has dared to shoot the chutes.

He had gone out to die, but, now that he had escaped, his mind was purged of petty hopes and fears, and he gave no thought to what was going on. If the people stared and pointed, if the barber refused his fee, or high officials smiled wisely and shook hands, it was no more personal to him than the very evident fact that Del Norte had gone war mad. The city was crowded with transcontinental tourists who had taken stop-overs to wait for the big fight, the barrooms were jammed with old soldiers and frontier characters, making prophecies on the date of the battle, and at every place he went, still the shadow of Beanie Bogan, he found himself lauded as a hero.

The news of the dynamiting of the Central bridges had set the whole city in an uproar, and then, hot upon it, had come the word that Montaña was marching upon Fronteras. He had come, and the moment his high-hatted insurrectos appeared Del Norte went wild with excitement. After lurking for months in the mountains of Chihuahua, recruiting peons, raiding ranches, and attacking towns, Montaña, the master mind of the ever-spreading revolution, had come out into the open to fight. It would be a spectacle that men would always speak of, the attack on the stronghold of Fronteras—within the town, the trained Federals of Reyes, fully equipped with artillery and machine guns; without, the swarm-

ing-hosts of half-savage insurrectos, clothed in rags and inspired with the high valor of patriots.

A host of correspondents and special writers descended upon Del Norte overnight, and as the Army of Liberation, dirty, hungry, and out of tobacco, came boldly down to the river they were overwhelmed and astounded by the onrush of visitors and by the gifts that followed in their wake. In a day there was tobacco for every insurgent and presents of food and clothes; peace officers and government officials felt the influence of public opinion and winked at the violations of neutrality, and suddenly, in a great burst of popular enthusiasm, every man became a partisan of Montaña.

But the great battle had not materialized. Fronteras was not surrounded, and, though the Foreign Legion had been doubled in a week by a rush of adventurous Americans, Montaña had done nothing but delay. Hence the riotous welcome to Beanie Bogan and his bridge-burning partner, Whittle—the man who never talked.

It was in the lounge of the exclusive Cholla Club, where, with Bogan, he had retired to escape the attention of the crowd, that Bruce Whittle suddenly woke to his old life. For two weeks he had moved in a waking dream, responding quickly to every reaction, but wrapped in a blessed oblivion. The sharp agony of his loss had produced its own anodyne, and he was drugged by the contemplation of sudden death; but now in a moment, as a face appeared before him, the curtain of Nephenthe was torn. While Beanie, always the center of interest, was replying in guarded sentences to the jovial accusations of his friends, a man peered in through the door. His eyes met Whittle's, then were quickly averted, and in a moment Broughton Pedley was gone. Then the old memories rushed back, and Whittle sat tense and staring, while slowly, as if moved by some ponderous mechanism, a wedding scene passed before his eyes.

He saw the bridal hall, the decorated chancel, the huddle of silent guests, and

then down the stairway she came again, Constance, the woman that he loved. Once more she met his glance, then moved on to the chancel, and the old irresolution came over him: He heard the words of the ceremony, hurried forward so precipitately; he heard her answer and Pedley's, and then the end. Again he woke to the feeling of horror, to the sense that he had lost her forever, and, too late, he roused up from his trance. He was brave, now that it was too late; his strength could move mountains, but what was there now to win? Nothing but a kiss to remember always, to cherish to the end of his days. He moved forward with the rest, he met her, she rushed to his arms, and then—the kiss!

It changed now and mingled, the slow-moving vision that had been burning on the tissues of his brain; but always it came back, that appeal in her eyes as she gazed after him and called him by name. She had called him Bruce, and ever since in his dreams he had thought of her as Constance. And she loved him still, though she had suffered the martyrdom of marriage with Broughton Pedley, and, he knew this, too, she would always love him and remain faithful to his memory. She was there, in Del Norte, and he had come back as from the dead. Perhaps—well, perhaps he might see her once more.

Whittle had never forgotten the well-meaning arguments with which Beanie had attacked his resolve, and it did seem unreasonable, since she wished to see him, to deny her that moment of grace. It would be painful—for when he looked at her now she was not Constance, she was Pedley's wife, but if it would make her any happier in the years to come he must go through with it for her sake. And she would be watching for him now, she would read in the papers of his desperate adventures in Mexico, and would know that he had sought death for her.

He rose up suddenly as a twisted bit of paper was thrust into his hand from behind, but though he turned quickly he saw only a call boy slipping deftly away through the crowd. Beanie had

not seen it—he was busy telling stories—and Whittle glanced at the hasty note. It was written awkwardly in a cramped, left-handed fashion that was obviously intended to disguise, but at the bottom was signed her name: "Constance."

Am watched, but must see you. Follow man at club door.

Whittle glanced over at Beanie; then, when his attention was diverted, he rose and started for the door. But, despite his preoccupation, Beanie had not missed the proceedings, and he grabbed him as he passed down the hall.

"Here!" he said. "What's the big idee? Don't you know you're liable to get pinched? Your name's in the paper—you're alleged to be a dynamiter—but you're safe inside that door."

"I—I was just going out for a little walk," began Whittle lamely, but Bogan was not to be deceived.

"Nothing doing!" he declared. "You stay right here by me. If you don't, you'll get into trouble."

"But I don't like it in here," answered Whittle fretfully. "I want to get some fresh air."

"Well, it ain't fresh, believe me," returned Bogan fervently, "the kind they have in the jail. I broke in there once before I learned my business——"

"Well, I'm going, anyhow," broke in Whittle sharply, and Bogan's lip curled in a smile.

"All right," he said. "Give 'er my regards, and send for me when you land on your ear."

"You mind your own business!" flashed back Whittle, and whipped out the massive door.

It was dusk, almost dark, but as he stepped into the street a man appeared from a sheltering archway and beckoned him to follow. He was not a man that Whittle had seen before, and yet in some way he seemed familiar. There was something about the set of his heavy neck and the way he planted his feet, and he was leading him down toward the river. The streets became narrower and the houses lower, and,

at a bridge across the canal, Whittle stopped. Below the canal, as he knew very well, lay Chihuahua town and the mud huts of the Mexicans. It was none too safe even in the middle of the day, and—what would Constance be doing there?

"Come on!" called the man, and as Whittle shook his head he turned back impatiently to join him. "Say, listen," he said, "I'm a private detective in the employ of a certain lady. My client wants to see you——"

"Well, she isn't down there," answered Whittle, with decision. "Perhaps you've got the wrong man."

"Ain't you Mr. Whittle?" demanded the detective, coming closer. "Didn't you get her note at the club? Well, come on, then; she's crazy to see you. She said you was just to have faith."

"Well, where is she?" questioned Whittle, following after him reluctantly. "There's nothing but Mexicans down here."

"I'll tell you," whispered the detective, speaking hoarsely in his ear. "She came down here to hide from her—husband!"

He gave him a playful dig with his elbow, and strode on toward a lighted house, but at the entrance Whittle halted irresolutely. The house stood by itself, on the edge of the river, and it had a sinister air. He recalled of a sudden the warnings of Beanie and that other affair with a detective.

"Step in, sir," said the detective, still holding the door open. "You'll find her just inside."

"Well, ask her to come out," suggested Whittle at last, and then suddenly the man's attitude changed.

"Say," he blustered, "you're going in that door or I'll know the reason why. Now—are you coming, or must I throw you in?" He stepped out swiftly, as if to cut off Whittle's retreat, and then he spoke more quietly. "You don't need to be afraid," he said, "but she offered me a reward of several hundred dollars, and I'm sure going to deliver the goods."

He moved forward ponderously, and, after facing him a moment, Whittle

turned and stepped through the door. What did it matter to him if the detective was lying? If she wished to see him, she would have to engage some messenger, and detectives were much of a kind. The fact that this ruffian imputed a dishonorable motive to her note and his instant response to it should not bar the way to those few precious moments which he must snatch before he went back to die. And if he was deceived—well, what did it matter? What did anything matter, after all?

He entered the room doubtfully, and a candle on the table guttered low before the draft of air, but when the puny flame threw its light into the shadows he saw Broughton Pedley smiling.

"Well," he said as he stepped out from his hiding, "so I've caught you, have I, at last?"

"Yes," answered Whittle, but though he said it quietly his chest began to heave with excitement. The sight of this man, whom he had so scrupulously avoided, released a gust of fierce passions in his breast, and as he noticed the smile his lips began to tremble, and his hands clutched and worked with rage.

"Yes," he said, "but you may live to regret it. You may wish you had let me alone. I warn you now——"

"Oh, you warn *me*?" taunted Pedley, and then he laughed unpleasantly. "I may as well tell you," he went on, "that I've got you dead to rights." He raised his hand, and, from a darkened doorway, two men emerged with pistols drawn. "Just search him for arms!" ordered Pedley confidently, and Whittle submitted in a daze. "And now step outside!" continued Pedley to his men. "I'd like to talk with this gentleman alone."

The door closed behind them, and, as Whittle stood waiting, Pedley paced up and down the room.

"Mr. Whittle," he began at last, "you have made me a lot of trouble, and I feel justified in using strong-arm methods. In fact, the way things have come about, I am greatly tempted to dispose of you. But I will give you another

chance in order not to disturb my wife."

He paused, and as Whittle winced at the word he looked him in the eyes.

"Yes, my wife!" he repeated. "I have sworn to love, cherish, and protect her, and, before God, I will keep my promise! If you won't listen to reason, if you won't go out of her life and promise never to return, I'll throw you into that river with as little compunction as I would the body of a dog. I know who you are—a cowardly blackmailer—but you can't work your game with me. I might, if I were easy, offer you a certain amount of money to give up your designs on my home, but there are other methods, and I have chosen to employ them. Now—here's the way matters stand."

He folded his arms, and regarded Whittle sternly while he went on with portentous calm:

"By rights I should take you across the river and deliver you to the Federal commander. There is a standing reward for your apprehension, and the penalty of your crime is death. But if you will sign this paper, which simply states the truth, that you were only trying to marry her for her money——"

"I was not!" denied Whittle in a white heat of anger. "You lie, you dirty crook! You have no understanding of honor. If you were only a gentleman, you might know that my motives——"

"Didn't you come here to-night," broke in Pedley accusingly, "in response to a fake note from her? Didn't you come sneaking down here, thinking you would meet her alone? And didn't you know that she was my wife? Well, no wonder you are ashamed. I think, under the circumstances, that I have behaved very handsomely in not resorting to absolute violence."

"Well, I did come," admitted Whittle at last, "but I thought she might need my aid. She's unhappy—I know it—and I'd give my right hand——"

"Not necessary," answered Pedley glibly. "Just sign your name to this statement."

He whipped out a paper and spread it on the table, while he held out a fountain pen, but Whittle struck it out of his hand.

"You poor, ignorant fool!" he hissed through his teeth. "Do you think I'd sign anything for you?"

"You will," threatened Pedley, "or be dragged across the river to be executed as a self-confessed dynamiter. Now you can take your choice, but I've notified the commander and he'll —"

"Go ahead," challenged Whittle. "If you think you can do it, just put me across the river. No, you—*you!*" He rushed at him impetuously as Pedley called for help, and they went down together on the floor.

"Help! Help!" cried Pedley, and an instinctive loathing made Whittle's fingers close on his throat. He hated the very touch of his plump, yielding body, the gasp of his breath against his cheek, and he shook him as a dog shakes a snake. They rose up struggling, the table crashed beneath them, and as they went down again in the darkness Whittle struck him with all his strength in the face. Rough hands laid hold upon him and wrenched him away, but the old animal hatred, the primordial savagery which bade him kill the man who had stolen his mate, rose up in an instant and he jerked himself free while he aimed one more blow at his enemy. He struck out indiscriminately, for they were all against him, until in the darkness a pistol, swung at random, caught him fairly across the head. He went down, half stunned, and in the silence that followed the babble of Spanish smote their ears. A crowd of Mexicans was gathered about the doorway, gazing in, but afraid to enter, until suddenly a fat man bearing a lantern and a pistol came striding into the room.

"*Quién viva?*" he demanded, throwing his lantern upon their faces, and at sight of Whittle he stopped. "Ah! My friend!" he cried, and, looking up from the ground, Whittle recognized the purple visage of Rico. "My friend!" he cried again, and, raising his pistol

vindictively, he felled a burly detective to the floor. "*Socorro, amigos!*" he shouted to his friends. "Give me help, and *viva Montaña!*"

"*Viva Montaña!*" yelled the crowd, and, with a savage rush, they came tumbling in through the door.

"Hah, my friend!" exclaimed Rico, dragging Whittle to a corner and protecting him with his body from the rout. "I have saved your life—like mine!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SOLDIER'S WAY.

With Rico to the fore the chances were small that Whittle would be delivered to the Federals. Though the Mexican was a drunken brute, with a black record as a smuggler, ingratitude could not be charged up against him, and so great was his anger at the assailants of his friend that he flew at them again in a fury. The crowd followed suit, for in Little Chihuahua Rico Puga was an uncrowned king, and the combat assumed the proportions of a riot, until, at a signal, the mob rushed away, carrying Whittle bodily in their midst.

"No be afraid," panted Rico in his ear. "Officers come—no want a fight."

The darkness behind them was punctuated by pistol shots, as the officers discharged their guns in the air, and the hurried slap of brogans marked the precipitate flight of most of Rico's mob, but enough remained to carry Whittle to the *fonda* and hide him in an upstairs room. There, while Rico stayed below and stoutly asserted that he had no knowledge of the riot, an old woman bathed the cut on Whittle's head and bound it up in a clean rag. Then, as the excitement subsided and the officers left the quarter, Rico scurried up the stairs to get the news.

"What they fight you for?" he demanded eagerly, as a bevy of staring Mexicans appeared behind. "You smuggle guns? You start one scrap? Them men work for Porfilio Reyes?"

"No, they're private detectives," answered Whittle unwillingly, "but they were going to deliver me to Reyes."

"Ah, I weesh I had *keel* them!" ex-

claimed Rico fiercely. "What for they want to ketch you?"

"Well," began Whittle, and then he hesitated, for Beanie had warned him not to talk. "They said there was a reward on my head."

"On your head? Oh, to geet you! But what for, my frien'; what for?"

"Never mind. Well, for burning bridges."

A great light came into Rico's staring eyes as he rolled them wisely at the crowd.

"But you ain't burn them bridges, hey?" he questioned, laughing heartily. "Hah, my frien', we understand all that, and when you have tro'ble, when them bad mans try ketch you, you come to my house, understan'?" He made some remark to the Mexicans behind him, and they turned and tramped down the stairs. "By gol," he went on, flashing his teeth at Whittle, "I hear all about that bridge. And my frien', Beanie Bo-gan, he is sure one brave man; but Montañio, I don' know. Why don't he march up and battle Fronteras? All them people been move out, maybe one week, maybe two; they don't like be in that town. But now pretty soon they all go back; they go home to keep bad men from steal."

The sorrows of *el pueblo*, the poor people of Fronteras who had so accommodatingly crossed over to Del Norte to allow Montañio to take their town, were very near to Rico's heart, but as he was still in the midst of an account of their flight there was a step on the stairway below.

"Hah! Bo-gan!" cried Rico, but as he rushed to welcome him Beanie shoved him rudely aside.

"Hey! Come on!" he said to Whittle. "Your friend has turned out the guard."

"What?" demanded Whittle, rising up from his couch. "Are the detectives out after us again?"

"And the soldiers," answered Bogan as he hustled him down the stairs. "They've given orders to prevent us from crossing. Your friend came up-town with his nose battered out of shape, and the first man he run into

was the United States marshal and the commander of the provost guard. Then he made a big holler about how you had beat him and turned him over to a mob of Montañistas, and of course the marshal and the captain sent out word to have you arrested. But I'll get you across—large bodies move slowly, and we'll beat the captain's orders to the dam—but, oh, boy, you're a vindiktive cuss. Now come on up the track—and take off that rag or you'll never get by in the world—but, oh, lawzee, I'm never going to speak cross to *you* again, the way you chopped up Mr. Pedley. I seen it in your eye when you left the club, but I never looked for nothing like this."

He set off up the track at a long, soldier's trot, still murmuring his admiration and awe, and Whittle let it pass in grim silence. It was nothing to him what Bogan believed or disbelieved, and nothing mattered now; he had lost. But Beanie was so pleased at his supposed act of vengeance that, even after they had started across the dam, he turned back to tell the joke to the sentry. They are a clan by themselves, these soldiers of the line, and love nothing so much as a fight. Also they love no man more than the top cutter, the father of the company. The first sergeant is to them the leader of the clan, and they acknowledge a greater loyalty to him than they do to the captain or the colonel. That was the reason why Beanie Bogan turned back—and why the sentry let him pass.

He waded across, chuckling, and when he caught up with Whittle he slapped him on the back.

"Whit, old boy," he declared, with an oath, "you should have been a soldier! That's the soldier's way—never ask for help, just step to 'im with your own two hands. I knew by your eye you was thinking about that dastard—and oh, Lordy, how I would love to've been there!—but you never said a word; just told me to hike and went out and cleaned him yourself. Oh, you had some help, did you? Well, I heard about that, too; but it was three to one at the start, and Rico's compadre

said you kept 'em all busy until they cracked you on the bean with a gun. Lemme feel of the place. Aw, that'll get well. Come on, let's go up to camp."

"I thought you'd quit Montaña," suggested Whittle, the better to change the subject. "You certainly talked that way."

"Ahhr, talk!" returned Bogan. "I always talk like that. It's the only way to get your pay. Look at them poor boobs in the Foreign Legion—two hundred a month and pickings. Do you ever see 'em get their pay? Not a dollar, by grab; they're still bumming their tobacco, and will till we take Fronteras. But say, do you think I'm going to lose out on the fireworks, after four-flushing around for months? Ump—umm, boy, there's loot enough in the customhouse alone to make every man jack of us rich. No, I'm going back to fight, and if Montaña is afraid to, I'll hop in and take Fronteras myself!"

"You can't do it!" challenged Whittle, but Bogan only grunted and kicked at a rock in the trail.

"Gimme a hundred trained soldiers," he answered deliberately, "and I'd take the town to-morrow. And," he added, "I could go out to the fort and get that many deserters. Them boys is crazy to enlist, but I've got too much respect for the service. But these Mexicans will fight, if Montaña gives the word, and them Federals are just dying to quit. I've talked with their deserters—you remember that Yaqui Indian with the big '3' burned on his face? Well, he's a deserter, but they put their mark on him first. The major knew he was going to quit him, so he took the battalion branding iron and stamped a big '3' on his cheek. Well, 'Numero Tres' says the men in his battalion had to be locked up in the cuartel every night, and all their arms were locked up somewhere else, for fear they'd start a mutiny. A hundred fighting Irish could take the town."

"Well, why don't we take it, then?" asked Whittle impatiently, and Bogan clucked his tongue.

"When you get a Mexican to fight," he said, "you're pulling off a miracle. But they will fight, dad burn 'em, if you once get 'em started; but it's always: 'Mañana! Mañana!' They're out of ammunition or they're short of guns or they're waiting for somebody else; but the trouble with Pepe Montaña, as I found out to-day, is that the whole Montaña family has butted in. Up to a week ago, when he marched on Fronteras and the papers all took up this hooraw, they said he was crazy and everything else; but now they see a chance to win. It seems the Southern Mexicans are starting a revolution, and Reyes is so busy right near home he can't send up any more reinforcements. We isolated Chulita when we blowed up that bridge, and now here's Fronteras, ripe and waiting to be picked. And then the Montaña family butts in!"

"What's their graft? Well, I'll tell you. They've formed a peace committee, and they're talking over the wire with Reyes. Do you ketch the idee? If he'll come through with what they want, they'll call off little Pepe, who's always been the family goat; but if Reyes won't, they'll tell Pepe to turn the bunch loose, and Mr. Reyes will be left belly up. Because if we take that town, with public sentiment what it is, it won't be two weeks until the United States will recognize Montaña as a belligerent. They'll have to recognize him, because he'll open up the customhouse and begin to do business, anyway. And say, my boy, it won't be so bad to be a friend of Montaña's then. Look at the guns he'll be ordering, and the ammunition and equipment, and the artillery and machine guns to boot! Oh, glory, and I know a man in town that would give ten thousand dollars to land the first contract for munitions.

"But listen here, Whit," he went on confidentially, as they paused on the outskirts of the camp. "I've got a scheme, and I'll split with you half and half, but it calls for a little rough work. Now sit down here a minute, where we won't be observed, and I'll

tell you where you come in. It's all to our interest to pull on this battle in any way we can. Once we get it started, the Mexicans will join in, and then all hell wouldn't stop it. This Colonel Bracamonte that's in command of the town killed our wounded after the battle of Villa Nueva, and Pedro Espinosa and the rest of those bandits have sworn they'll have his blood. They've got him bottled up, and they won't let him go, no matter what anybody says. But all the same, being Mexicans, they will sit around and wait.

"Now, here's the proposition. There's two things against us—Montaña's family and this snaky Gambolier. That guy's a bad actor, you take it from me, and he's got to be put out of the way. You heard that crack I got off to Montaña about getting another military adviser? Well, that was just a starter; we've got to undermine him and turn the whole legion against him. Now I can't do that, because I enlisted some of them boys for a bonus of ten dollars a head, and the Irish never forget; but here's you now that enlisted when they did, and they'll listen to what you say. Just slip in among 'em and give this one some tobacco and another a pleasant word, and then, when they take to you, just tell 'em about Gambolier and how he ditched us to save paying that ten thousand dollars. That'll settle the dastard because he's cold as a snake, and they hate him like the devil already.

"But now, to get rid of him. You're so kind of deceiving nobody would think for a minute that you'd fight; but some day in camp when Gambolier comes through you tax him with being a coward and with trying to get you killed. Then beat the face off him, the way you did Pedley, and we'll laugh him out of camp. To get rid of him, that's the point, anny way you can do it, and then we'll pull Montaña over the fence. We did it once, at the battle of Villa Nueva, but we got to get rid of this strategical Frenchman or we'll never smell powder again. As

for the Montaña family, we'll just cut the wires on them and trust to luck for the rest. Now will you do that, Whit, me boy, or will I have to look further?"

"You'll have to look further," answered Whittle after a silence, "but I'll be there when it comes to the battle."

"Ah, still thinking of the lady," observed Beanie sympathetically, "but sure now, you're entirely wrong. You've no cause to be downcast; 'twill all work out nicely, so put all them thoughts from your mind. You've come back a hero, with your name in the paper and your bold deeds on everybody's lips. 'The Dynamite Devil,' they called you in the *Tribune*, and sure that's praise enough. They're all the same, I tell you, Whittle; these women all love a bold man. And then to have *him* come home with his face all disfigured from running against your fist! But there's one thing more you'll have to have to win the lady for sure, and that's the hard money in the bank. They're all the same there, too. Ye must have the money, and how else can you get it but with me? So come now, forget it, and when I get to the loot I'll lay aside a gift, like, for her."

"No, thank you, Beanie," answered Whittle from the darkness. "I'm afraid you don't understand. It's no use trying to help me; the best thing I can do is to get killed."

"Ah, be a man!" reproached Beanie, and then, as his exhortations fell on barren ground, he muttered and went on to camp.

CHAPTER X.

THE POST OF HONOR.

Beanie Bogan's plans for a benevolent mutiny, led and fathered by the turbulent legion, were rudely disrupted and brought to naught by the arrival of Pedro Espinosa, a fire-eating, gringo-hating bandit who had left Montaña the week before. Of all the Mexican leaders he was the only man who refused to submit to delays. Prickly Pete, as he was called, was the embodi-

ment of brutal courage, and he had wiped out the word "mañana" from his vocabulary. Having been a bandit for years, he was no dabbler in warfare, and, like the fighting Irish, he believed in direct action and results. But that was perhaps the only bond between them, for he hated the Foreign Legion as he did the rurales of Reyes.

He came riding into camp from one of his wild forays with four hundred high-hatted outlaws at his back, and without mincing words he notified Montaña that he, Pedro Espinosa, intended to attack Fronteras immediately. With his men drawn up in military order and a mob of clamoring insurrectos behind him, he seemed for the moment to hold the high card, and the Foreign Legion prudently withdrew. Then they argued and debated and bandied hot accusations, the bandits and Pepe Montaña, until at last Prickly Pete gained his point. Montaña agreed that Espinosa's cavalry should instantly surround the town, while he, as soon as his artillery was available, would batter it down from the west. And meanwhile the army, which could no longer be restrained, was to engage the first line of intrenchments and drive the *pelones* back to town.

So the bugles were sounded, the advance began precipitately, and as the eager insurrectos in a disorderly mob went shooting and yelling to the fray the Foreign Legion, eclipsed and forgotten, remained to bring up the artillery. This consisted of a single three-inch fieldpiece, bored out of a seven-inch locomotive shaft and mounted on ponderous wheels. For months, in the machine shops of a captured mining camp, American mechanics, under the direction of Gambolier, had been laboring on this masterpiece, and now, as the Mexicans rushed forward to take the town, they dragged it slowly up the bluff. Gambolier, who had served in the French artillery, took charge of the emplacement of Long Tom, but before they had more than got it on the mesa the battle burst out below them.

From the brushy flats there came volleys and cheers as the insurrectos be-

gan their long-range attack, and then there was a boom from the cuartel at Fronteras, and a shell burst above the plain. As the flying shrapnel struck up a storm of dust, the attacking horde fell silent. The reckless firing of their .30-.30's was checked as if by magic, and then *boom!* the gun spoke out again. *Bang!* crashed the shell as it burst far above them, and as the scrap iron began to fall like rain in their midst the insurgents broke for the hills. Gambolier had been right; with such undisciplined troops it was impossible to even menace the town. There were in Fronteras both field guns and mortars, and experienced gunners as well, whereas Montaña's men had never seen a cannon until they gazed upon the handmade Long Tom.

A superior smile came over Gambolier's face as, with field glasses leveled at the plain, he watched the insurrectos retreat.

"Very well," he said, "if we are to be coerced by every bandit, let Espinosa take the town."

The panting Chihuahuans, their eyes big with terror, came crowding up to watch Long Tom's reply, but though Montaña and his men both implored him to shoot it Gambolier refused to serve the gun.

"No," he declared, "the attack was premature. Of what use is artillery now?"

"Ah, *tira le!*" begged the Mexicans, making motions at the breechblock, but Long Tom was not fired that day. The attack came to nothing, the Federals took heart, and Gambolier worked on placidly at his emplacement. As military adviser he had objected most strenuously when Espinosa had clamored for war, and now, jealous of his authority and determined to make the most of it, he resolutely refused to be hurried. And there were other considerations, known only to the Americans, which made it inadvisable to fire. It was a matter of doubt whether the breechblock was safe; the question had been debated for days, and Beanie Bogan and other ex-soldiers insisted that it would blow out the first shot. So

for various reasons the Foreign Legion stood pat and let the Mexicans rage.

But if Gambolier, the military adviser, refused to take the attack seriously, there were others more hot-headed who had jeopardized their freedom in the belief that the great battle was on. The first wild charge had proved too much for certain soldiers still wearing the United States uniform, and when the fiasco was over the despised Foreign Legion found itself recruited up to forty-five men. The new recruits had come across the river with their guns in their hands, ready to fight the whole Mexican nation, but when that day had passed, and the next and the next, with no move to advance upon the town the hearts of the deserters turned sick with disgust and then bitter with hate and scorn. Pedro Espinosa had subsided, contenting himself with tearing up the railroad track below Fronteras, but if Pedro, in his anger, had chastised Montaña with whips, the Foreign Legion chastised him with scorpions. Yet it all came to naught, for Montaña and his peace committee were simply using their war ardor as a club to intimidate Reyes, and at last the word came that the dictator had capitulated and all was arranged but the terms.

Then the deluge broke, and the outraged Foreign Legion demanded an immediate assault upon the town. As they gathered before the house where Montaña and his relatives were bartering away their last chance for a fight it was Beanie Bogan, still the father of the company, who put their hot anger into words. At another time their invincible ardor would have won their commander's heart, but now Montaña begged them to be patient. A great victory, he said, was almost in their hands, and it could be gained without shedding blood; whereas, if they undertook to assault the town, many brave comrades at arms would be killed. So he begged their indulgence while he communicated still further with Reyes and the City of Mexico, and if the surrender was agreed to, he would reward them even greater than if they had

taken Fronteras by force. So he spoke, but a high howl of Irish protest was the only response that he got.

The Foreign Legion as now suddenly constituted was composed almost entirely of ex-soldiers. Some there were who had bought out, and others had been honorably discharged, but a large number had deserted with their guns in the wild rush that preceded the battle. That was their business—to fight—and yet for three enlistments there had not been an echo of war. In the distant Philippines perhaps a brush with the ladrones or a clash with some naked hill tribes; but a real, open battle, such as young soldiers dream of, had not happened in all their world. And now, with all the makings of a battle before them, they were being balked by this man who talked peace!

Nor was their protest unseconded by the mountain Mexicans who had gathered for the assault of the town. There were many among them who were tainted with outlawry and proscribed by this same Porfilio Reyes. His rurales and soldiers had been pursuing them for years, and, with the return of peace, would pursue them again. As the rumor spread of a possible understanding, of a peaceful surrender of all Mexico, they came in droves, led by their fiery chiefs, and registered a most violent protest. Once more Montaña, the dreamer and pacifier, appealed to their loyalty; but just as he had them won over to be patient Pedro Espinosa came dashing up. He rode a sorrel horse the color of burnished gold, and brandished an angry pistol to clear his way, and when he had confronted the chief of the insurrectos he called him a coward and a traitor. It was not peace they wanted, but war—war against old Porfilio, war against Bracamonte and the Federals, who had murdered the Villa Nueva prisoners and shot all the wounded where they lay. What good would peace bring? It would simply give Reyes the opportunity to wipe out such as he. So raged Prickly Pete, the bandit chief of the Sierras, and all the lesser bandits swung their hats and yelled for war.

But Pepe Montaña, though he was not warlike, was fearless, and he refused to be moved by their threats. He held out for peace, and in the end they had a conference, which lasted two days and resulted in a Mexican proclamation. Montaña read it to his assembled army, and won them over to a man. In it he set forth that, by the valor of his brave men, he had struck fear to the heart of the dictator; but that now he must ask a final sacrifice of their devotion greater even than the laying down of their lives. For the second time they had marched upon Fronteras, and they now held it in their power, but because it lay across the river from a friendly city, whose inhabitants might be killed by flying shots, he was going to ask all true lovers of Mexico to withhold for a time their hands. The prize was theirs, but it must be spared and their valor turned to other exploits. Therefore he had ordered an immediate advance upon the capital city of Chulita, and in recognition of the services of the Foreign Legion, which had fought so bravely at Villa Nueva, he would give them the position of honor as leaders of the van.

Mere words, of course, and artfully devised to produce a certain effect; but as the sun went down, and the guns of Fronteras were shrouded in the protecting darkness, the Foreign Legion set forth. They marched out, grumbling, for it was far to Chulita, and a waterless desert lay between; but that word of tribute to Buck O'Donnell and the heroes of the vanished legion had won them in spite of themselves. Even Beanie Bogan, who knew Mexicans well, was disarmed by the reference to his friend. And Beanie, too, had received his meed of honor, for he also had fought at Villa Nueva. He bared his breast to show the new recruits the three furrows the machine gun had plowed, and in the dramatic recital of that battle in the night he forgot the artful cunning of Gambolier.

Gambolier stayed behind, with his gun crew intact, to supervise the removal of Long Tom, but as the legion marched off, with Bogan at its head,

he smiled under cover of the darkness. A little hike, as he had suggested to Montaña, might divert the restless energy of the Americans, and meanwhile the peace committee could proceed with its negotiations without the continual menace of a mob. And if, for reasons of military necessity, it became advisable to reconsider their plan, a courier could be sent to recall the legion in ample time for the assault on Fronteras.

There was always something deep, something looking far ahead and providing against all possible contingencies; in everything which Gambolier suggested. This it was which won for the colonel the regard of Pepe Montaña, who was himself concerned only with dreams. He had conceived a great dream, of Mexico freed and ruled by justice alone, of its people dwelling in a communistic state wherein caste and class were abolished, but the necessary details of the bloody business which must precede such an ideal estate, those must be conceived by others more apt. Having malice toward no man, how could he plot out the death of the poor *pelones* who fought for Reyes? And, heartily despising the business of a soldier, how could he be interested in its inhuman strategy? No, he must leave that to Gambolier, and it was at Gambolier's suggestion that he ordered the advance upon Chulita.

The Foreign Legion marched out bravely, followed by the rag-tag of Montaña's army which they soon left far behind. It was the pride of the infantrymen that they could outwalk a horse, and, now that the order to advance had been given, they swung off in route step down the road. Bogan rode at their head, though not as their commander, for the new men were beyond all control, and for an hour or more they hiked down the road that led to the south and Chulita. In vain the cowboys and civilian members called out from the rear for a halt, the fever of long waiting was like fire in their veins, and the deserters pressed on to the divide. There, with all Chihuahua before them and Fronteras far

behind, they sat down to wait for the army and let the stragglers catch up.

They came in limping, and, as no army appeared, the footsore ones took off their boots. A half hour passed, and the moon, which was near its full, lit up the desolate desert like day. One man after another stretched out in the road to snatch a little sleep—and still no army appeared. Then Beanie Bogan rose up, and, taking out his field glasses, gazed long in the direction of the town. It was almost midnight, and their position would be unenviable if they were caught out on the desert at dawn.

"Well, what say, boys?" he ventured at last. "Let's go back down the road and meet 'em."

"What, and walk clear back?" demanded Jimmy Sullivan. "Let's go on until we come to a town."

"You'd find it a long walk," answered Beanie soberly. "Come on, boys; they's been some mistake."

"What mistake?" asked big Bill McCafferty, rousing up from an uneasy sleep. "Have them Mexicans took the wrong road?"

"No, that's just it," replied Bogan; "they's only one road, and we're on it."

"Then they ha'ven't started!" burst out Sullivan angrily. "They just packed their horses for a bluff."

"I dunno," returned Bogan, "but I can tell you one thing—we're a long ways from water and grub."

"Well, dang a Mexican!" exclaimed Big Bill in a passion, rising up and grabbing his gun. "Let's go back and kill the last one of them; they've sent us with bags to ketch snipe!"

"You may be right, Bill," said Bogan, routing up the sleeping soldiers and starting them back down the road. "And if you are," he added, "this is no place for Martin Bogan's son."

CHAPTER XI.

AND A PAIR OF SOCKS.

The advance upon Chulita, as Gambolier had surmised, had done much to abate the fighting fever of the legion; but the ignominious retreat, after hav-

ing been tricked into starting, seemed to reverse that favorable process. As several hours of travel brought forth no signs of the following cavalry, or of any of Montañó's advance guard, the footsore Americans extended their revilings to include the entire Mexican nation. Even the gallant general in whose name they invaded Mexico was not exempt from this universal execration, and as daylight came on without revealing a sign of his army, Beanie Bogan added his voice to the chorus. Only one man remained silent, and that was the Dynamite Devil.

Since he had crossed the river after his battle with Pedley, Bruce Whittle had gone into the silence. He kept by himself, and the wrangling of his companions fell unheeded upon his ears. He had a problem to solve and a decision to make, for it had become manifest at last that Constance's love for him was something more than a memory. She had followed him to Del Norte immediately after her marriage, she had sought him out in the plaza, and, though she had acknowledged Pedley's authority as her husband, she had not yielded to him in everything. For certainly, if he could command her absolutely, Pedley would have hurried his bride away, and the very fact that he himself remained argued the continued presence of Constance. The question was whether she had separated from her husband, and, if so, what action he, Whittle, should take.

Should he go back to Del Norte, braving officers and United States marshals and the certainty of landing in jail, for the poor consolation of one look into her eyes before he was denounced by her husband? Or should he, like a gentleman, stay quietly where he was and seek the ultimate solution in death? There were ways, of course, of sending her word, but none of them escaped the objection that he was intruding where he had no right. Had he not bowed his head in voiceless shame when Pedley confronted him with his acts? It was true; he had gone to that lone house by the river in the hope of seeing Constance. And

Constance was Pedley's wife. How much more, then, would he be humiliated if, after all that had happened, he persisted in his efforts to see her? And how could he again protest, if he were confronted by Pedley, that his motives were above reproach?

It was a long, bitter struggle, now with hope rising high, now with the certitude of defeat; until, in the end, he had ridden off with the legion to accept whatever fate had in store for him. He would put it to the touch, this nice point of honor, and if, from the dangers and uncertainties before him he escaped as he had before, then the hand of God, or whatever molds our destinies, would seem to be saving him—for her. But if, with all these other misfits, he should go out and be mowed down by guns, then the answer was plain and apparent to every one, and he would trouble his loved one no more. He would be dead, and for the dead there is nothing but tears and a forgetting. It was better to pass on in silence.

He had gone out grimly, knowing the desert before him and the dangers that lurked for them all, but as he turned back toward the line and saw death and dangers vanish he was filled with an unutterable weariness. So it always came about—when he sought heroic death it eluded him and left sordid hardship in its place. He got down from his horse, and gave his place in the saddle to a runaway Texas boy named Jackson, whose high boots tortured his feet, and at daybreak, tired and hungry and out of water, he straggled with the rest past Fronteras. From the tracks in the dust it was now a certainty that Montaña's army had only started out and turned back, and, to add the last drop to their cup of bitterness, the Federal outposts opened up on them. They replied with a volley; then, as the artillery joined in, they turned and fled to camp.

They came straggling in, hot and sweaty from running and faint for something to eat, but the Mexican contingent had turned sullen and inhospitable,

and one campo after another refused them food.

"No *tengo*, hey?" snarled Big Bill McCafferty as a black Chihuahuan showed his hands and said he had no food. "Then what you call this"—he hefted a flour sack—"and *this*?" And he picked up a strip of jerked beef.

"Not cooked," returned the Mexican, his eyes burning with resentment, and Bill grunted and went off with the beef.

But the poor camps of the insurrectos could not furnish food to the whole legion, even if the sulking peons had willed, and, led by Helge Wahlgren, they headed for the commissary, while Bogan rode over to Montaña's quarters. There were certain things which he desired to know, and others which he wished to impart, but a hair-trigger atmosphere seemed to pervade the place, and Montaña sent out word he was busy.

"Well, you tell him I'm *hungry*!" answered Bogan fretfully; but, fume as he would, he could get no audience until at last Gambolier appeared.

"General Montaña," he announced, "is engaged with very important business, and must, under no circumstances, be disturbed."

"Oh," said Beanie, forgetting his hunger to give vent to an accumulation of spleen, "in connection with the advance on Chulita?"

"The advance," lied Gambolier, "has been abandoned for the present. And by the way," he spoke up hastily, "are those your men over there? Go and tell them to leave that commissary alone or I will report them to General Montaña."

Bogan looked over his shoulder to where the Foreign Legion was surging up against the door of the commissary, and then he turned to Gambolier.

"No," he replied, "those are your men, Mr. Gambolier. And I thought General Montaña was busy."

A crash from the adobe which served as commissary was followed by a rush through the doorway, but as the Americans swarmed in the lazy Mexican camp became suddenly a seething

ants' nest. From every camp fire the envious insurrectos, who had been watching the legion from afar, leaped up and ran toward them, waving guns and brandishing pistols, while the Americans stood on the defensive. As Beanie spurred over and tried to quell the riot a fist fight broke out at the door, and only the arrival of Espinosa's cavalry prevented a resort to arms. The Americans, starved and ugly, were in no mood to take dictation, and even after Espinosa had dispersed the mob they maintained their stand at the commissary. Gringo hater that he was, there was small hope indeed that Prickly Pete could arrest them without a battle, and a war of words was bringing them rapidly toward that goal when Montaña himself appeared.

Under ordinary circumstances he was smiling and unruffled, but now, by the look in his eyes as he shoved his way through the crowd, it was evident that his patience was exhausted. They were blazing with anger, and as the troops opened before him he confronted the sullen legion.

"Come out of that house!" he ordered tremulously. "Come out of it, every one of you!"

The Americans slunk out, some dropping their loot, others brazenly tucking food inside their shirts, and Montaña regarded them sternly.

"Sergeant Bo-gan," he commanded, turning to the shamefaced Beanie, who had joined his renegade followers, "you will order your men to lay down their arms and march under guard to their quarters."

"They ain't my men," answered Beanie disrespectfully, "and I'll lay down my arms for no man. Colonel Gambolier is in command of the Foreign Legion, and you can give your orders to him." He hooked his thumb in the slack of his belt and surveyed Espinosa and his bandits with scorn. "I've resigned," he declared, "and they ain't Mexicans enough in Mexico to make me give up my gun."

As Prickly Pete and his band of outlaws spoke only the *pelado* of the Sierras, the boldness of this statement

escaped them, and Gambolier made haste to intervene.

"The Foreign Legion," he announced in formal tones, "is hereby disbanded and dishonorably discharged for willful insubordination. You will stack your arms, and, within one hour, depart from the borders of Mexico."

A murmur of dismay and then of protest burst forth from the ranks of the deserters, and then Big Bill McCafferty stepped forth.

"I'd like to ask, sir," he said, coming to attention and saluting, "what act of insubordination you mean. I've a personal reason for not wishing to cross, and I'm sure I've meant no disrespect."

Big Bill's personal reason was the moral certainty of being arrested and imprisoned as a deserter, but Gambolier had suffered too much in the past to be moved by pity now.

"It was the order of General Montaña," he answered stiffly, "that, pending the peace negotiations, no attack should be made upon Fronteras. But for the second time, upon your return to camp this morning, the members of the Foreign Legion have seen fit to disobey this command, and for that reason you are dishonorably discharged."

"What! You'll bobtail us for fighting?" demanded McCafferty in a fury. "Well, to blazes with an outfit like that! I can take these byes here and stand off the whole ahrrmy of you, and then to git a dis-honorable dis-charge!"

He picked up his gun and started for the river, and the Mexicans prudently gave way, but in an instant he was back again, clamoring.

"I want me pay!" he demanded fiercely. "Four hundred and fifty dollars for the two months and more that I've served!"

"Yes, and me!" bellowed a great voice, and Helge Wahlgren stepped forward with his little eyes glinting. "You pay me, or I don't know *what* I do!"

He wagged his huge head at every word, and the crowd stood clamoring at his back, but Beanie Bogan sat his horse and smiled.

"They'll never get it," he muttered to Whittle, and fixed his shrewd eyes on Gambolier. "Ahr, you rabbit-footed coward!" he cursed under his breath. "You slick Mexicanized dastard! I know who framed this up. But God help poor Pepe if he lets you do the thinking for him; Prickly Pete will be chief in a week. Come on, Whit, we've got our ten thousand; what say if we skip across the bridge?"

"And get arrested?" inquired Whittle despondently.

"Well, let 'em arrest," responded Beanie. "I'll get you out of jail. Come ahead!"

"No, I—I'd rather not," replied Whittle, and Bogan looked him straight in the eyes.

"Say, lookee here!" he said. "Be a man or a mouse. Don't let that geezer Pedley worry you. I'll run him out of town so danged quick and easy he won't know where's he at, and then you jump in and cop out the lady and get this thing off your chest."

"No, I've decided not to go back," answered Whittle firmly, and Beanie's argument was cut short by a yell from McCafferty that made the horses jump.

"Wan dollar!" he shouted, starting back from the doorway where Montaña stood surrounded by his guard. "Wan dollar! You owe me four hundred and fifty!"

"That is all I have now," answered Montaña firmly, "and you can take it or nothing at all. You have engaged in mutiny and refused to surrender your arms, and for that reason you have forfeited your pay."

"Nah, ye don't!" threatened McCafferty, but as he whipped up his gun twenty rifles were leveled at his breast. There was a tense, anxious silence as Americans and Mexicans cocked their guns and stood waiting the attack, but no shot was fired, and as Big Bill looked around him he saw that the legion had lost.

"Well, gimme my money," he grumbled sulkily, "and to blazes with you Mexicans, anyhow!"

"Very well," replied Montaña, now quietly smiling, "you may march by and

receive your pay. And in order to show I have no hard feeling against you I will throw in a nice pair of socks."

"Ahr, yes, thankee," returned McCafferty, with a gleam in his eye. "I wore out a pair last night."

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER THE OLD FLAG.

Badly shaken by their misfortune, which would mean a penal term for some of them, the dishonorably discharged Foreign Legion took their dollars and filed dolefully down to the river. It was a mystery to them still how Montaña could dispense with them, the only trained fighting men he had—and obtained at such a cost, in promises—and the shock had left them dumb; but, at the edge of the stream, Big Bill stopped.

"What are you going to do, Bill?" asked Sullivan, as McCafferty sat down on the bank, and Big Bill thrust out his lip.

"I'm going to try on me new socks," he said, "that I won at the battle of Fronteras."

"I'll go you one better," grinned Sullivan sociably. "I'm going to wash me feet."

"Sure, there's no hurry at all," responded Big Bill glumly. "It's Judge Duffy and the mill for us the moment we cross the bridge. Why not take a swim farther down the river, away from this crowd of rubbernecks, and maybe on the road we can think up some way to kape from being railroaded to Leavenworth."

"Let's go down to the dam," proposed Sullivan, jumping up, and soon, like a band of schoolboys, the whole legion was preparing for a swim. They went in by relays, for Pedro Espinosa was watching them with a jealous eye, and when they had eaten a few oranges and apples that admiring Americans had thrown across the stream they sat down to discuss ways and means. The situation was desperate for every one of them, for there were few indeed who could safely cross the river, and their hour of grace was up. Already

Prickly Pete had deployed his cavalry to prevent their return to camp, and it was an open question whether he would not advance and force them to leave Mexican soil.

"Let's go down and join the Federals," suggested the impractical Sullivan, "and come back and clean out the bunch."

"Vell, I tell you what I *will* do," agreed Helge despondently. "I kill that feller Espinosa, if he comes."

"Yes, that's right," spoke up McCafferty. "We've took enough from him. I'm going to shoot him right through the hat. But look who's coming, with that American flag that we went off and left at the house. Yeh, old Beanie Bogan!" he went on, raising his voice insultingly. "That recruited us for ten dollars a head! They's no troubles for him; he's squared himself already, while we poor devils must go to the mill."

"Ahr, you talk too much!" retorted Beanie from the distance. "Didn't I warn youse guys not to shoot at them outposts? Well, what's the use of crabbing at me when you brought it all on yourselves?"

He rode up before them, with Whittle close behind, and struck the shaft of the flag into the dirt.

"There's your flag," he said, "that those young ladies give you to place on the cuartel of Fronteras. But now, by Judas, you ain't got no flag nor country, and Montaña sends you this thing back." He motioned toward the flag, which was a large American standard, with a Mexican flag fastened across its center. "That's a whale of a flag!" he went on bitterly. "Neither one thing nor yet the other, and we might have made it famous. But, no, you shanty Irish had to have the run of everything, and now you've got the straight kick. Montaña says to tell you to get across that river or he'll come down and put you across."

"Yes, he will!" said McCafferty, laying hold of his rifle and jacking up a cartridge viciously.

"I tried to make a talk, boys," continued Bogan apologetically, "but Gam-

bolier has got us in bad. He's told old Pepe that there'll never be any peace as long as there's an Irishman in camp, and I'm canned along with the rest."

"Serves you right!" growled McCafferty. "What you going to do now? Can't you work it for us to join the Federals?"

"In the graveyard, yes," answered Beanie sarcastically. "Ain't we burned all their bridges twice?"

"Well, what *can* we do?" demanded Big Bill frankly. "I ain't a-going across until dark."

"So ye say," returned Bogan, "but look here who's coming like a bat out of hell! Get behind the bank, boys, and let me do the talking; it's nothing but Prickly Pete!"

He whirled his horse, and swung in behind his men as Espinosa came dashing toward them. The bandit chief was mounted upon a shining golden sorrel that he had stolen from some ranch in his raids, and as he reined in before them a shower of gravel was thrown out by its plowing hoofs.

"Pigs of gringos!" he cursed in his low *pelado*, and, swinging down from his saddle, he hurled their flag into the dirt. A torrent of threats and abusive epithets accompanied this astounding assault, and then Jimmy Sullivan leaped fearlessly out and caught the flag from the ground.

"You leave that alone, you dirty greaser!" he shrieked as he planted it on the bank, and for a moment they stood bristling, both yelling at once, like a pair of fighting dogs.

"Oh, you don't like it, hey?" barked Sullivan. "You don't like it even with this on it! Well, how will *that* do?" And with venomous swiftness he tore off the Mexican flag. "We're Americans!" he cried. "And there's the old flag, and we'll fight for it until we die!"

He waved it in the air, and a rousing cheer rose up from the downcast Americans. A moment before they had been refugees and suppliants, desiring nothing more than to remain there on sufferance until they could slink across

the river in the dark, but now, in an instant, they were caught up by the contagion, and they cheered for the flag they had served.

"*Que caramba!*" shrilled Espinosa, drawing his pistol in a fury, and then Bogan rode in on him with his gun.

"Here! None of that!" he said, jumping his horse against him, and, holding his six-shooter upon him, he talked to him in Spanish. The wild, staring eyes of the bandit suddenly widened, and he slavered at the mouth with rage; then, wheeling his horse, he thundered back to camp, raising the war cry to summon his band.

"Into the river!" yelled Bogan, grabbing Sullivan by arm and leg and hurling him into the stream. "And swim if you don't want to get shot!"

Sullivan came up sputtering; then, cooled by the water, he turned and struck out across the river. It was narrow at this point, just above the low dam, but hardly had he made a start, when, lashing his horse at the head of his troops, Espinosa came charging back.

"Get under the bank!" ordered Bogan quickly, and every man of the forty Americans dropped down and shoved out his gun. "Now hold your fire until I give the word!" And Beanie stood erect behind them.

Espinosa came up like a thunderbolt, and, at sight of his menacing pistol, Sullivan dived, and was lost to sight; but there were others interested besides the Mexicans and the legion—there were the American soldiers on the other side of the river. They had come out in force at the first sign of trouble, and now, as Jimmy Sullivan disappeared beneath the waves, they jerked up their rifles and challenged.

"Don't you shoot!" they warned in a chorus, and Espinosa lowered his gun. It was borne in upon him suddenly that if he shot at the fugitive, the American soldiers would shoot at him, and even in his anger he was human. He knew that the Americans could shoot straight, and he knew also that he could not, and so he curbed his rage. Jimmy Sullivan came to the surface and

ducked like a seal, and the next time he appeared he had floated to the dam, and was under the guns of his friends.

"Aha, you dirty greaser!" he screamed back at Espinosa, and then turned and dodged behind the guard. But, foiled though he was by the escape of one recreant, Prickly Pete still saw a chance for revenge. The insulter of the Mexican eagle had fled from his just punishment, but the Foreign Legion was left. He turned to where they crouched beneath the Stars and Stripes, and demanded in a tantrum that the flag be torn down, and as the men of the legion defied him to touch it his battle rage seemed to pass all bounds. Yet here again he was facing Americans, the picked fighting men of their kind, and it needed but a glance to convince the most confident that in a clash it would go hard with the Mexicans. They were out in the open, mounted upon prancing horses and surrounded by a mad crowd from the camp, while the Americans were under cover, with their guns at a rest, and commanded by the iron-faced Bogan. So in the pinch his nerve cracked, and when Montaña himself arrived the American flag still waved above the soil of Mexico.

"What is the meaning of this disturbance?" he demanded impatiently, after he had spurred his big bay through the throng. "Sergeant Bogan, you were ordered out of Mexico!"

"So I was," returned Bogan, whose fighting blood was up, "but no low-browed Mexican *pela'o* can come down and *put* me out!"

He glanced hatefully at Espinosa as he spat out the word "*pela'o*," and Prickly Pete responded with a rush.

"Ye-es, you're *bad!*" taunted Bogan when the rush had been stayed. "But you can get anything you want out of me!"

"What about this flag?" inquired Montaña more pacifically, after he had listened to a tirade from Espinosa. "Don't you know you are on Mexican soil?"

"Yes, sure we are," admitted Beanie. "But after the deal we got from you

it's a cinch we're none of us Mexicans. We're American soldiers, and there's our flag, and you can go as far as you like!"

There was another long and heated colloquy in which Gambolier took the lead, and then Montaña spoke again.

"May I ask as a favor," he began quite pleasantly, "that you take this American flag across the river?"

"Yes, sure you can," returned Beanie politely, "but will you kindly request Mr. Espinosa to withdraw? I don't want that highbinder to get it into his nut that we give a cuss for *him!*"

Once more, with great argument, the conference was on, and in the end Espinosa withdrew. With him went his cavalry, and, to save his face, he drove all the Mexicans before him.

"Now, Sergeant Bogan," said Montaña firmly, "I will ask you and your men to leave Mexico."

"All right, General Montaña," replied Beanie, saluting, "we'll do that—when we get good and ready."

"Very well," answered Montaña, after gazing at him intently, and rode away to his camp.

"And now," burst out Beanie as soon as he was gone, "I'll take this American flag across the river. It's been disgraced enough, God knows, by our cussedness, without being wallowed in the dirt by no Mexicans!"

He caught up the flag, which the combined forces of Montaña's army

had not been able to cast down, and strode off with it down to the dam.

"Hey!" he called across to the seething mass of sight-seers who had been watching the drama from afar. "Is there a U. S. marshal over there? Well, tell him to vamose, and send out your ranking noncom to take charge of the national colors!"

There was a rumble of laughter at this soldier's jest, and the sergeant of the guard, after taking off his shoes, waded out and received the colors in mid-stream. The great crowd of Americans, roused to a frenzy of patriotism by the gallant defense of the flag, gave way to cheer after cheer; but as Bogan and his men were staging a salute to the colors there was a volley from the Federal trenches in front of Fronteras. *Rrrr-rap!* went the guns, like tearing a blanket, and then bullets began to splash into the river.

"Now what?" exclaimed Bogan, and, glancing swiftly down the stream, he saw a lone man on the Mexican sky line. It was his partner, Bruce Whittle, standing erect like a soldier and firing back at the Federals. And, running swiftly toward him, yet tottering in his tight boots, was the sore-footed Texas boy, Jackson.

"Here! Come back here!" yelled Bogan, as his soldiers started off on the run; then, plunging back to the shore, he grabbed up his gun and went splashing through the water after them.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE MAY 7TH POPULAR.



RIGHT THERE WITH THE ORATORY

ONE of the leading industries of the printing business since the National Guard was sent to the Mexican border, there to revel in heat, dust, and watchful valor, has been the publication by the "home paper" of what has happened to "our soldier boys."

There appeared in a Southern daily not long ago this interesting information regarding "our boys:"

The new year finds us still at the post and ready for service, though we are somewhat worse for wear and tear. The band did its part in a recent farewell meeting to speed our parting guests.

The colonel, an old county boy, was the speaker of the occasion, and his remarks were both timely, humorous, and serious.

No Piker

By Wilbur Hall

Author of "White Men and Red," "The Two Terwilligers," Etc.

The story of an "oil-made man"—to use his own declaration. A stammering, hesitant fellow, but the gods flung him into the whirlpool of high finance

MOSS GOWAN, gauger for the Midland Oil Company, could calculate almost offhand, with a piece of line and a cubic-contents table, the amount of petroleum stored in a tank, but when it came to gauging an abstract proposition Moss was lost. For instance, in spite of what the little schoolma'am up at Lebec had been telling him concerning the intrinsic value of all the old-fashioned copy-book precepts, here was Jerry Lynch suggesting that Gowan permit him to draw more oil than he paid for, make a falsified gauger's report to the office, and split the profits fifty-fifty. There was not much doubt that the hoary precepts in question were sound; on the other hand, there was no doubt at all that Lynch was generally respected and was getting rich fast. On sixty dollars a month, moreover, it was perfectly apparent that even an honest, sober, and industrious oil gauger could never marry a little schoolma'am.

Gowan's hesitant speech, a reproduction of which, on paper, it would be difficult indeed to contrive, was a standing joke in the field. He drawled now, contemplatively: "How much do you—figure—Lynch, my half of this—would come to—say?"

Lynch, cat-eyed, sleek, and furtive, answered with a running calculation: "If I make two hundred barrels, y' understand, on 'n average, and y' measure me hundred eighty, that's twenty barrels at ninety cents 's eighteen dollars; you'd get nine. Not much, Moss, but it'd make y' better'n a hundred a year. And I'll be buying more later, maybe twice that."

"Then about all—I'd have to do is—some poor guessing—on the tanks—is that it?" Moss asked.

Lynch laughed. "Sure. And y' understand, Gowan, if Midland was little one-horse-power concern, I'd never suggest it. What difference twenty, thirty barrels of oil a month'd make th' company? Puh!" He snapped his fingers eloquently.

Moss stretched one long leg. "Well—I'll tell you, Lynch—how it is. I'm probably about as—crooked as anybody. Show me a chance to clean up—a few thousand, now—and I might could see it. But a hundred a year—no, I guess maybe I could do just as well—passing up your—proposition. I'm no—piker, that's the—size of it."

Lynch grunted. "It's up t' you, Moss," he said carelessly. "Guess you'll change your mind."

"Maybe so," the gauger replied, and turned to his daily report blanks. At the moment he thought the incident closed, but it kept coming back to him. Lynch's suggestion was an easy one to accept, with small risk of discovery by the office. When a storage tank was low it was the gauger's business to notify the superintendent, who would order a well or two "hooked on" and the tank pumped full again. Oil wells fluctuate very much, and no one but the gauger himself could possibly know how many barrels were run in. If by any chance his figures should be checked up from the office he could plead a mistake in calculation. What was more, Moss knew very well that other gaugers and even some superintendents had their little "arrangements"

with oil buyers, and they certainly had money enough to get married on, at any rate.

He spent an extra half hour Saturday night taking the oil stains off his hands, and went up to Lebec on the stage Sunday to see the little schoolma'am. He contemplated asking her about it in a roundabout way; putting it, for instance, that he had heard about a fellow who knew a gauger who had been tempted by such an offer—to see what she would say about this sort of small graft, piking, he called it. But what with one thing and another the day flew, and it was almost stage time before he was ready to approach the subject.

He was clearing the way to mention it when the little schoolma'am interrupted. "There!" she exclaimed. "I'm letting you go now without asking you the most important sort of question. About that oil land you bought a year or so ago; have you sold it?"

He laughed. "No, Miss Ellen—I haven't sold it—not yet. Did you—think you might—want to buy it?"

"Not to-night, no. But Uncle Bert wrote me from Los Angeles this week. He said he had a buyer for oil land; he expects me to let him know if I hear of anything. And I thought of you."

"Did you, now?" The gauger's face beamed. "You're the kind of a friend! But that twenty-acre piece—no, I guess it wouldn't—hardly do—not for any friend of your uncle's. No—I know it wouldn't. Jerry Lynch—worked that piece off on me—bought it for sixty and then—turned around and sold it to me for—a hundred—an acre, that is. Three weeks in the year it's pretty good—sheep pasture. The rest of the time it isn't even that, Miss Ellen."

She sighed and made a face. "I was hoping it might do, Moss. But of course if there's no oil under it——"

"There isn't—not a drop under the whole twenty acres, I'm afraid."

"Well, I knew you would tell me the truth about it. If you weren't the squarest man I ever knew, Moss, I wouldn't—like you so much."

Moss Gowan took off his hat and

wiped his forehead, which was suddenly hot. "I'm not any—squarer than—anybody, I guess," he stammered painfully. "But I'm no piker. Dog-gone it—there comes the stage! I've had a good time—Ellen."

They shook hands formally, although a carping critic might have maintained that the form required rather too much time and was a trifle ardent on his part, at least, but he made connections with the stage by hurrying, and the little schoolma'am went back to her room and wrote her uncle in full and her aunt in confidence.

Moss communed with himself all the way into the fields that night, alternately congratulating himself on his narrow escape from jeopardizing his standing as "the squarest man" and shaking his fist at the fate which made honesty such a matrimony-forbidding policy, and when he arrived at his boarding house found a note from headquarters requesting his attendance the next morning on the pleasure of the general manager. With many innocent speculations as to the reason for this polite command the gauger reported at eight-thirty Monday, and was shown in. The general manager, a shrewd and clear-eyed young man of fifty or fifty-five, smiled at Moss in greeting, and Moss grinned in return.

"Hello, Gowan," the boss said. "I notice that this man Jerry Lynch has just signed up with us for crude. You made him his first delivery last Thursday, didn't you?"

"Why, as near as I can—remember it was—about Thursday, yes, sir."

"Take your time, Gowan," the manager laughed. "We've got all morning. What would you do, I wonder, if you had to answer yes or no in a rush to save your life? Did you ever think of it?"

Moss grinned again and colored. "Well, now, Mr. Thatcher," he drawled, "I can't say I ever did—think about it—much. I suppose if I ever had to—do a thing like that—though—I might be able to——"

The manager leaned back and roared.

"Gowan," he said, breathing hard, "the next time we need an expert witness to kill time for us I'm going to put our lawyers on to you. The very next time. It would be a regular party!" He had to stop and laugh again. But all his merriment was of such nature that it seemed to take Moss in on the joke instead of making him the jokee, and the gauger, whose principal assets were brawny strength, sound common sense, and an imperturbable good nature, laughed with him. This put them immediately on a pleasant, friendly footing.

"Don't you mind me, Gowan," Mr. Thatcher said then. "I was asking you about Lynch's delivery. I see you turned him two hundred barrels."

"I haven't got my books here, Mr. Thatcher—but as near as I—can recollect—that was somewhere about——"

"Sure, there you go!" the manager interrupted. "I ought to have known better than to give you the chance. Let's try an experiment, Gowan. If you'll answer yes or no, nothing else, not a word, to my next three questions I'll buy you a box of cigars. What do you say? Wait a minute now! What do you say—yes or no?"

Moss opened his mouth, as a matter of fact, to say "Well," but thought better of it, gulped, and said: "Yes."

"Fine! You're on. Two more questions. Did Lynch say anything to you about giving him more oil than he paid for, and splitting the graft with you—or anything that sounded even remotely like that?"

Moss leaned back in his chair and pulled a barley beard from his pants leg. He rolled it between his thumb and finger a minute, blinking. Then he flushed redder, gulped again, and blurted: "Yes."

The manager delayed the inquisition to laugh for a while. "I thought he might, Gowan. We've had some dealings with him before. Now, just between you and me, man to man, did you take him up?"

The gauger's head whirled, but he brought his eyes around until they looked into those of the genial boss,

and he answered uncomfortably: "No."

"Great, young man! You win, both ways." The manager pressed a button. His chief clerk appeared in the doorway. "Billy, want you to send a boy over to the Palace for a box of those cigars I smoke—you know 'em. Give them to Gowan, here. He's just won a bet from me."

His assistant nodded. "Yes, sir."

"And Billy!"

The clerk reappeared. "Yes, sir?"

"Wish you'd send a memorandum over to the treasurer's office for me, too. Beginning the first of the month we'll pay our gauger seventy a month; not as a reward of merit or anything like that, Billy, you understand."

"No, sir." The clerk grinned.

"Not a bit of it, my boy. But just because we've been neglecting to do it for two months or more. That's all, Billy."

II.

The increased wage satisfied Moss Gowan momentarily, but as the weeks passed he found himself no nearer the culmination of his cherished plans for the little schoolma'am than before. By employing mental arithmetic he was able to compute the number of months which would be required to save and bank a thousand dollars, supposing that every pay day found him with an accumulation of twenty or twenty-five dollars, and the net result of the computation was not heartening. No, scrimping and saving alone would not do; he must plunge somewhere and come out in funds. He was no piker, was not Moss Gowan; he recognized his own weakness.

Just to tantalize him, it seemed, a chance was thrown in his way in January to try his hand at speculation. He overheard a conversation between two officers of the Fortuna Company which indicated that that corporation was anxious to dispose of an old sump, filled two years before with the overflow from a gusher they had tapped. Moss knew to a barrel how much crude petroleum there was in this old reser-

voir, and he knew that the figure the two men decided on was ridiculously low. But it might have been lower by some two or three ciphers before the gauger could benefit from their recklessness, and with a deep sigh he gave up the opportunity himself, and took it, instead, to his friend and employer, General Manager Thatcher of the Midland. Thatcher seized it. In two months he had drawn off and sold at a good profit all of the oil he could handle conveniently, and then he sent for Moss.

"I'm about through with that old Fortuna sump, Gowan," he said briskly. "Have you noticed it lately?"

"Well—yes, sir, I have," the gauger drawled. "That's a nasty emulsion that's—left there—I'd say. Mean to sell—isn't it, now?"

"It is, Gowan. In fact, it's so mean to sell that I'm going to give it to you. Want it?"

"Well, now, Mr. Thatcher," Moss stammered, confused; "I want it—yes—but why do you—figure on giving it to—anybody?"

"I owe you a commission, don't I? You told me about the sump in the first place. I made a good clean-up. Now you can have what's left—if you'd like to see what you can do with it. If not, I'll make you out a check for bringing the deal to my attention. What do you say?" He laughed good-naturedly. "Come now, Gowan, yes or no!"

"Why, I'll tell you, Mr.— Yes."

"All right. Mind if I make a suggestion?"

"Mind? Say, Mr. Thatcher, you know there isn't—anything you could —" Moss stopped and swallowed. "Yes," he said, blinking.

The manager laughed. "You'll learn, Gowan," he chuckled. "What I was going to say was that you better borrow a few lengths of that old four-inch casing back of our warehouse—you can string it yourself nights and Sundays—and connect the sump with that little layout of Jerry Lynch's. Get him to heat the emulsion for you and then split with him."

Moss nodded. "I was sort of—thinking of that—yes, sir."

"But watch Lynch!" the manager snapped. "He's so crooked that spaghetti is the only food he can eat comfortably. Watch him. And good luck to you!"

The gauger thanked him, with painful slowness, and that evening sought Lynch, now owner of a small refinery below the Midland plant.

"Hello there, Moss," the cat-eyed man said shortly. "Made your fortune yet?"

Gowan, fresh from his lesson in brevity, said: "Not yet." But his sudden break in a lifelong habit of speech upset him, and he was compelled to stop there. So Lynch said encouragingly:

"Oh, you haven't, eh? What's on y'r mind, then?"

"You know the Fortuna sump Mr. Thatcher has been—selling off, don't you?"

"Yeh."

"Well, you see, I just—made a—deal to take over the oil that's left—in it."

Lynch snorted. "The oil that's left? You mean the b. s. that's left? B. s. and mud and water; that's all Thatcher's left!"

In oil terminology b. s. stands for "base sediment," and comprises sand, gravel, and foreign matters from which the oil itself can only be separated by treatment in a topping or refining plant. The worthy Mr. Lynch was intimating, in his vernacular, that the old Fortuna sump wasn't worth a great deal to its new owner. Moss Gowan nodded.

"I've been figuring that there isn't a powerful sight of crude in the—sump, Lynch," he agreed. "But prices are—going up—and I can make a little—cleaning—if I can heat that emulsion—somehow. I was wondering, now—if you'd want to—"

"How much is there in it?" Lynch interrupted. "According to your figures?"

"Why, I was estimating—about a thousand barrels."

Lynch grunted. "You're a good ol' scout, Moss," he said pleasantly, "but

y'r head's weak. Wouldn't be three hundred, net, 'n the whole deal. Tell y' what I'll do—heat it for y' and give y' quarter of the clean-up."

Moss rose. "I guess I'll go over—to-morrow night and see—if I can get a chance to talk to the—Kern County Refining Company. Good night, Lynch."

The oil jobber frowned. "What's your proposition, then, Moss, if y' don't like mine?"

"I was thinking probably that—you'd be willing to—divide half and half, Lynch. But I wouldn't stand around here and—waste my time talking about any—less."

"I'll get stung!" Lynch groaned. "I always do. How y' going t' move that stuff down to th' plant?"

"Well, now I had a notion——" Moss stopped, recalling his coaching in brevity. "I'd pipe it," he barked.

"Buy pipe? You're crazy wi' the heat!"

"No, I wasn't counting on—buying—— But I'll get the pipe, Lynch—and lay it."

"All right, go ahead, Gowan. It's robbery, but I'll treat the oil for half."

"Thought you would," Moss replied slowly. "I'll be over again to-morrow."

He did return the next afternoon, presenting for Mr. Jerry Lynch's signature a carefully worded contract drafted by a lawyer. The refiner squirmed a good deal at this further proof of the gauger's astuteness, but he affixed his crabbed John Henry in the end, and on Saturday Moss rented a horse, borrowed a wagon, and strung his pipe along the ground from the sump to the refinery. Whenever he was off duty thereafter he worked at laying it, with one helper, and ten days later his oil began running into Lynch's storage. It was a disagreeable and very slow task to coax the mixture of sand, water, and oil out of the reservoir, but Moss was resourceful, Manager Thatcher loaned him a wheezy old pump, good-humored fellows provided slathers of advice and an occasional valuable helping hand, and at last the

old Fortuna sump was as dry as a bone. The Lynch refinery did its part as the exigencies of other contracts permitted, Moss checked the whole run closely, and the day came for a settlement.

Jerry Lynch was grouchy. "What'd y' make your share, Moss?" he asked, when the account was tabulated in the refinery office.

Moss countered. "I figured that you'd—probably have it down, Lynch," he drawled.

"Well, I have," the other snapped defensively. "Our statement makes your cut six-ninety-four."

Much to his relief, Moss brightened. "That's what I call—pretty good, Lynch," the gauger said. "I hadn't expected—quite that much. It pays—well enough, now, I should say—for what I did to—get it. If I could make money that easy—all the time——"

Jerry Lynch, who had shaved quite a neat little sum from Gowan's share and had applied it to his own use and profit, began to regret that he had not taken more. With that regret was born the idea of recouping, even at this late date. There was no time to concoct ways and means, but in general a plan mapped itself out for him.

"Trouble with you, Gowan," he said thereupon, "is that y' keep y'r nose to th' grindstone an' don't look around. Sharp fellow like you ought t' make three, four hundred a month in this field. Fact. Look at me—easy a thousand twelve times a year."

Moss Gowan sighed. "I don't doubt that, Lynch," he drawled. "But if I was to go—speculating around the way you do, it wouldn't be long before I'd have a job making my own bed in the—poorhouse. I can't figure money in—small chunks—and I never seem to be—around when there's anything like a—thousand or two—rolling uphill. I'm no piker—but all I ever have on me—is small change."

"Piker!" Lynch expostulated. "That's the trouble with you, Moss. Got no pep! Y' want to mix around more—meet people—spend a little. Take this seven hundred now."

"What do you mean, Lynch?"

"Mean? Roll it up in a bundle of ones, a twenty on th' outside. Buy y'rself some class—clothes, hat, cigars. Put on some dog. That way, any minute—bump into a chance!"

"You mean—you think I might run across somebody maybe who would let me in—on a good thing, Lynch. If I thought that——"

"Tell y' what y' do, Moss," the clever one interrupted, hit with an inspiration. "Get Sat'day off and come with me. We'll go int' Bakersfield. Buy some clothes. Spread ourselves. Keep an eye open. And if we happen to hit the right pace—*bango!* Right like that!"

"Saturday?" Moss questioned slowly. "I had been thinking maybe I'd—catch the Lebec stage—— But come to think of it again, I suppose, now, Lynch, that you've got about the right idea. I'd like to—sort of try it once. We might—ring the bell, eh?"

"Absolutely! Th' lives ones 're always loose Sat'day nights. Kick in with 'em, play up to 'em, show 'em you're there! I'll introduce y'—make 'em believe you've got a million more where this comes from. All you got to do is look wise and pull th' roll out now 'n' then. But, Moss!"

"Well, what is it, Lynch?"

"None o' this cheap, small-town stuff, y' know! If you only want t' spent twenty cents, better stay out here 'n' spend it playin' pinochle! Get me?"

"Sure I do," Moss drawled confidently. "You don't need to worry about that, Lynch. If I go in to—make a noise—I'll make a regular noise. You leave it to me, Lynch—I'm no piker!"

III.

There are some bell boys who will do anything for money, probably there are others who will not; but it may be asserted without successful fear of contradiction, as Dick Culver says, that no one of that sophisticated fraternity will forgive you the supreme sin of forgetting to fee them at all. This profound philosophical observation is essential here, because it was the revenge

of a mere bell hop on Mr. Abel F. Feather, of Erie, Pennsylvania, for the offense referred to that brings this newcomer into the story. Mr. Feather was not penurious, nor was he poverty-stricken; he merely failed to drop a gratuity into the hands of one Henry, of the staff of the Malta Hotel, in Bakersfield, mainly because he was worried and anxious over his failure to connect with an oil magnate he had crossed the continent to meet. Not knowing this, Henry was wroth.

Having telegraphed and telephoned and paced the floor and asked at the desk innumerable times on this particular evening, Mr. Feather finally snapped his fingers to attract the bell boy's attention, and summoned him to his side.

"Yes, sir," Henry said suavely, thinking of his grievance, but masking it adroitly with a blank and babylike stare.

"Son," Mr. Feather said crisply, "I've come here from the East to do some business with an oil man named Graham, from Los Angeles. Haven't been able to locate him. He ought to be here. Before I go to bed I wish you'd take one last look around. I'll wait."

"Certainly, sir," the boy said, and scribbled the two names on a card. "I'll page him, sir."

Cruel as it may be to relate it, Henry not only did not page Mr. Graham, but he had no intention of doing so. Once out of sight of Mr. Feather, he put the card in his pocket, twiddled his thumb mockingly at the end of his nose, and ran down a corridor to the kitchen, where he knew that a friendly waiter could be depended on to produce an ownerless piece of pie on demand. One-half of the cut had already disappeared when the bell boy asked casually:

"Who's poppin' the joy corks in the private dining room, Frenchy?"

The waiter grinned. "Meester Gowan—friends of Meester Leench. Fife bottle zey haf open'—t'ree more is ice'. Verr' good sport, Meester Gowan!"

"Gowan, eh?" Henry repeated.

"Never heard of him. Any class, Frenchy?"

"But, no, he will have all ze waiter dreenk wis zem! He will have any guests what come. Already zat two-card sharp fellers Feenck and Joe Brown invite' in. Bourgeois!"

"Bushwah, eh? All right, Frenchy, I'm not here. Much 'bliged!" The bell boy finished the pie with a gulp and strolled out. In the corridor he doubled back, ran up a flight of stairs, and in a narrow hallway applied his ear to the panels of the door of the private dining room. What he heard were the voices of four men uplifted in merry chatter over a well-wined meal. The smooth voice of one of the gamblers broke in with a carefully worded tale of a huge fortune made at poker a few nights before by a novice. Henry, the bell boy, was more or less familiar with the ways and wiles of Joe-Brown, and he was now informed that the first steps were being taken to interest a victim in a "little game." Having satisfied himself to this extent, he knocked softly and then opened the door and called to Jerry Lynch. Lynch rose and met him.

"Now what, buttinsky?" the refiner asked crossly.

"Excuse me, Mr. Lynch," the boy said, winking one eye wisely, "you don't happen to know if Mr. Graham is here in the house, do you?"

Lynch stepped outside and closed the door. "What's up, kid?" he asked.

Henry lowered his voice. "Nothing," he said, innocently enough. "Only there's a man downstairs who's from Erie, Pennsylvania, and who packs real alligator-skin bags. He came to fix up a deal with Graham, the big oil man, and Graham hasn't shown. I thought maybe you might know where Mr. Graham'd be here."

"Me?" Lynch demanded. "What in—— But wait a minute! Come to think of it, I guess I know this man. What's his name?"

"Feather. Erie, Pennsylvania."

"Yeh, Feather. Know him—slightly. Tell him friend of Graham's 's up here. Send him up. And then forget it."

Jerry Lynch handed the clever bell boy a silver dollar, Henry disappeared, satisfied with himself, and Lynch returned to the dining table.

"Joe," he said abruptly to the gambler, "you mustn't forget that engagement of yours. Sorry to see you 'n' Finck leave us, but bus'ness's bus'ness. It's ten 'clock now. 'Night!"

Brown rose, scowling, and Finck followed him. Lynch handed them their hats smilingly. "See you to-morrow, anyhow," he said. "Mr. Gowan's going to be in town sev'ral days. So long!"

They went, throwing black looks on him, but he paid no attention at all. When they were outside the door he returned swiftly to Moss Gowan.

"Look here, Moss," he snapped, "I guess we're in luck. Fellow here from East to close some kind of oil deal, I expect. With Graham, of Los Angeles. Graham isn't in Bakersfield. It's our chance. You follow my lead, see? Don't play till I kick y'r shins. Get me?"

Moss Gowan nodded. "I get you—all right, Lynch," he drawled. "But I don't know—Graham. You don't know—this man from the East—do you? What's the main—idea?"

"I don't know, you poor simp! Wait till he comes, then play him. If he's got money to invest, what's use giving it to Graham, c'n y' tell me that? We'll invest it for him, won't we? I should say we would! Lay off—here he comes!"

Mr. Feather entered on the word, looking somewhat puzzled, but eager to have news. He extended a card to Jerry Lynch, who met him cordially. One glance at the stranger's pasteboard, which was engraved, and which bore in one corner the legend: "Lake Shore Rolling Mills," heightened his cordiality measurably.

"Well, well, Mr. Feather," Lynch said, offering his hand; "you're just 'n time. Meet Mr. Gowan—friend of Graham's. We're mixed up with Graham 'n business, Feather—all oil men together, y' see. Have a chair."

Lynch's wits were nimble, and he

was as nimble as his wits. In a moment the stranger had shaken hands with Moss Gowan, had been seated, and had found a glass of sparkling wine thrust in his hand. In another moment a clean place had been made for him, and there was food spread there. In another the first of the food was in his mouth, half a goblet of wine had reached its destined internal recess, warming him, and Lynch was saying cheerfully:

"Sorry y' missed our friends Brown and Finck. They just left. Directors' meeting. Plaguey nuisance. Little more wine? There! Waiter, a napkin! Good! Well, what d' y' think 'f California?"

Mr. Feather replied, when he could, that he had been too busy trying to locate Mr. Graham to think about the glorious Golden State as yet. Had no doubt, though, that he would like it. If this was a fair sample of its hospitality, was sure he would. Wanted to get into the oil game; in fact, had come West to meet Graham and accomplish that very purpose.

Lynch filled the guest's glass and filled the glass of Moss Gowan. "Graham's good man to tie to, Feather," he said breezily. "Only one better; that's Mr. Gowan here. But if you get any of Gowan's oil properties away from him, Feather, have to rise early and stay up late. No business now, though—pleasure first."

Moss Gowan, chafing somewhat at Lynch's voluble fiction, saw his first opportunity to edge in. He tried to take it in his characteristic drawl. "I guess, Mr. Feather, you expected to meet—Mr. Graham—here," he began, "and didn't—do it, now. Did you—ask around——"

Lynch interrupted with a laugh. "Of course he did, Moss," he said brusquely. "Seems t' me Graham said something th' other day 'bout you. From Erie, didn't you say?"

"Yes." Having neglected, in his anxiety over his appointment, to eat supper, Mr. Feather was attacking the viands placed before him with gusto, not unaware of the fact that they were

costly dishes, ordered recklessly as regards expense and quantity, and at the same time was consuming a rather large amount of sparkling liquids of a diversified and heady quality. He had answered with a full mouth: "Yes—from Erie. Great town? Been there, Mr. Gowan?"

The gauger nodded. "I've been—through there," he drawled, and then grinned. "That was in the old—days, when all the freight cars had—brake beams."

The Easterner dropped knife and fork and stared. "You don't mean to say you came West that way?"

Lynch interrupted: "Mr. Feather, on y'r right y' have one of our most self-made men—Mr. Moss Gowan. Born poor, no education, kicked out int' th' world at age of seven, tramped West, broke int' oil bus'ness—and now look at him!"

Gowan nodded. "Well, yes," he said slowly, coloring, "I guess oil has made me—what I am all right. But you mustn't—get the notion——"

"There!" Jerry Lynch broke in hurriedly. "Now he's going to spoil it all, Feather." He leaned closed to the visitor and lowered his voice: "Tell y' what it is—there's the most modest man 'n America! Beside Moss Gowan, I tell y', Colonel House, of Texas and Washington, District of Columbia, is a regular notoriety seeker. Fact! Don't pay any attention to him, Feather." He leaned still closer, and this time dropped to a whisper. "Reg'lar clam, that man Gowan!" he mumbled. "Couldn't get him to boost himself 'ny more 'n y' could to boost 's own properties. Ask him about that twenty-acre patent of his up in North End. Ask him—see what he says!"

Mr. Feather's eyes brightened. "Twenty-acre patent?" he whispered in return. "Oil land?"

"Biggest piece of undeveloped oil land in the fields. But ask him."

Moss had caught the purport of the conversation. He had also caught the drift of Jerry Lynch's project.

When Feather turned to him, therefore, with an abrupt request for in-

formation about the twenty-acre piece of patented land Moss owned, the latter said characteristically: "Oh, that? Well, now, Mr. Feather—I don't know as I'd—advise anybody to—take that piece up. There may be—oil under it—and there may not be."

Jerry Lynch slapped his knee. "Didn't I tell you?" he demanded of Feather. "See? Modest—why, Moss Gowan makes a shrinking violet look like it was yelling f'r the spotlight, don't he? Ask him some more!"

The Easterner, whose sense of his own limitations were half drowned in a little sea of liquors complied readily enough. Manipulated to a queen's taste by the adroit Jerry Lynch, he found himself first interested in this twenty acres, then wishful for it, then greedy to buy it, and, by midnight, becoming irascible and peevish at Moss Gowan's obstinate attitude of depreciation. Lynch warmed to his work; Feather warmed to his liquor. The cat-eyed promotor leaned over to Moss Gowan.

"Now, boob!" he growled, sinking his fingers into the gauger's knee. "Get busy! Get going! Here's y'r chance; let's see if you're a piker!"

IV.

Late in the afternoon of the next day Moss Gowan, sitting disconsolate and remorseful in his hotel room, his head in his hands, and a large roll of bills lying accusingly on the floor under his eyes, was jerked out of a reverie by a knock at the door.

"Well, come in!" he drawled wearily.

A bell boy opened the door. "Lady to see you in the parlor, Mr. Gowan," he said.

"A—what? Lady to see—me?"

"Yes, sir. Said she wouldn't send a card."

Moss picked up the greenbacks and stuffed them into his pocket. Then he took a long, plaintive look at himself in the mirror on the bureau, and followed the boy. In the parlor, trim and neat and pretty, sat the little schoolma'am.

"Well, now," Moss stammered, completely taken aback, "this is a regular sure-enough—surprise on me—Miss Ellen. How did you—manage to get—this far from home?"

She laughed, quite pleased with his amazement. "This is teachers' institute week, Moss; I've come up to be as gay as a schoolma'am can for seven whole days. I didn't expect to find you in Bakersfield, though. And, Moss!"

"What is it—Miss Ellen?"

"How stylish we are! Forevermore! Turn around. And a striped vest! And a necktie rivaling the rainbow? Moss Gowan, are you going to be married?"

Moss turned colors to shame his tie. "Oh, now, Miss Ellen," he pleaded, "just because I had to—have a few new clothes—and things, and went out and—bought them—— But they're not on my mind. I'm not going to be—married—not yet, anyhow—but I'm in trouble."

The capable young lady eyed him shrewdly. "You look it, Moss. Let's sit down. There now! Sit back and take it easy. That's better. Now, what's the trouble?"

"I ought to be—ashamed to tell you—I guess," he began hesitatingly. "It was all because I—let Lynch fool me—and I fooled myself—and between us, somehow, last night, we—fooled this Mr. Feather."

"Mr. Feather! Yes?"

"Well, I've got to let—some one know about it—and I'll give you the—whole mess. Lynch and I cleaned up on that sump of oil Mr. Thatcher—gave me—and my share was seven hundred dollars. Lynch said—if I'd come into Bakersfield and—spend a little of it I might meet some—some live ones—he called them—and make easy money—the way—he does. He talked me into it—I guess it wasn't very hard work—because I thought I ought to be—smart enough to make more than—seventy a month."

She laughed again. "You weren't starving, though, Moss—even on as little as seventy dollars a month."

"No," he said, gulping. "That's true—too, but, you see—if I had a little

put away—I might—we might—that is, if you—well, that's not the story."

"Certainly not," she smiled. "Go on!"

"Well, I let Moss—fit me up—this way, and we had a supper here in the hotel last night. Had a private dining room—things to eat I'd never heard of—and wine, and that sort of thing! I was wise to—that is, I saw what Lynch's game was. He introduced me to a couple of gamblers first—I suppose his idea must have been to—get me into a game—and maybe win my money. But right in the middle of that—here comes this Mr. Feather."

"Another gambler?" she interrupted.

Moss shook his head, then grinned. "Not a regular—one," he drawled. "No, he was from Erie, Pennsylvania—was looking for Mr. Graham, from Los Angeles—they'd planned to meet here. Lynch made out that we were—friends of Graham's—partners maybe—I don't know. Mr. Feather—he's a nice old gentleman, too, Miss Ellen—well, he had quite a little to—to drink. I did, too—but my capacity sort of—fooled Lynch. The point is, though, that Lynch worked Feather—and worked me. I sold him that no-account twenty acres—of mine—for ten thousand dollars—and he gave me two thousand, cash!"

"Moss Gowan!" the little school-ma'am cried, aghast.

"I know," he said weakly. "But that isn't the worst. As soon as I got up this morning I—went to Feather. Told him it was all—a mistake—tried to make him take his money back. No use—Lynch had been there first!"

"Lynch?" she snapped, with infinite disdain.

"Yes—he'd been telling Mr. Feather that I—might regret selling and want to—back out. So Feather wouldn't—talk to me. Just laughed. I can't find Lynch—and—the way I feel now, maybe it's just as well—I can't!"

She sat thinking for several minutes. Then suddenly she brightened. "You said this Erie man had come to meet some one—Mr. Graham, was it?"

"Yes—S. C. Graham—he's a big independent operator from Los Angeles."

"Is Mr. Graham here?"

"He wasn't here—last night, Mr. Feather said. But he might——"

"Certainly," she interrupted decisively. "He may have come to-day. He will come, sooner or later, probably. The thing for you to do is to go to him and tell him the whole story. Fess up, and get him to warn Mr. Feather and to make him take back his money."

"Say, Miss Ellen," he blurted, his face lighting, "that's the—ticket! I'll try—right now. Will you wait—here a minute?"

"I'll wait."

Moss took the stairs in leaps. His agitation made his speech abrupt. The desk clerk nodded to his question.

"Mr. Graham just came in, by machine—two or three hours ago. Shall I send him a card?"

Moss scribbled his name on a blank, and waited impatiently. The boy returned shortly to say that Mr. Gowan was to come up to the oil king's room. Moss went, charging. Shown in, he stopped abruptly, with his jaw dropping. For the first man he saw, one of two seated at a small table poring over a map of the west-side fields, was his own boss, General Manager Thatcher, of the Midland Oil Company.

"Hello, Gowan!" Thatcher said, smiling and putting out a hand. "Come in. How did you know I wanted to see you? This is Mr. Graham."

The oil baron nodded and shook hands. "Sit down, Gowan!"

The gauger gulped. "Thanks," he said, "but I guess I'd better stand maybe—because I could get out—easier. I played a—a joke on your friend, Mr. Feather, from Pennsylvania—last night—and I don't know how——"

"Feather!" Graham interrupted. "What do you know about him? I was afraid I'd missed him. Infernal tangle in Los Angeles—delayed me two days. Is Feather still in Bakersfield?"

General Manager Thatcher inter-

rupted with a laugh: "Come, come, Gowan, sit down and tell us about it. Suppose I give you another box of cigars to make it short. Can you win?"

Moss flushed, swallowed hard, and nodded. "I'll try—yes," he said explosively, and proceeded to relate, as briefly as he could, and as rapidly, what had developed at the personally conducted party of the previous night. And he did not spare himself at all, nor attempt to incriminate Jerry Lynch.

"So, you see," he concluded heavily, "I've got Feather's money and he says—he don't care whether I'm—a partner of S. C. Graham's or of—J. P. Morgan's—he's not going to let me out of—my bargain."

To his utter amazement both the men, who had been holding themselves in during his recital, burst into a roar of laughter as he finished. The more they laughed the more difficult it appeared to be for them to recover from their merriment. Discomfited, but hopeful, Moss Gowan watched them, uncomprehending. At last the oil baron sobered down, wiping his eyes.

"Gowan," he said, "if we were all as much worried over taking other people's money as you are, a lot of business men would close up shop to ward off melancholia. I'll tell you what you've done for me, without knowing it—you've kept Feather busy and amused when he was on the verge of leaving for San Francisco this morning. He wired me that much last night. He's around somewhere now, I'm sure. Give me the money he paid you and don't lose any more sleep about selling him a gold brick. Is that all right?"

"Is it?" Moss cried, diving into an inner pocket for the bills. "It's nearer all right—Mr. Graham—than anything that ever happened to me. He gave me two thousand—down—and there it is. That's my—last promoting—believe me!"

"Good! High finance don't seem to be your main line, for a fact. But there's another little matter. Mr. Thatcher's been telling me about you, and I've got a proposition. Sit down again."

IOB P

Moss Gowan sat down on the edge of a chair, and listened for five minutes, gulping now and then. When he was dismissed he went out walking on air. On the stairs he met Mr. Abel Frederick Feather, of Erie, Pennsylvania, accompanied by Mr. Jerry Lynch. Moss stopped.

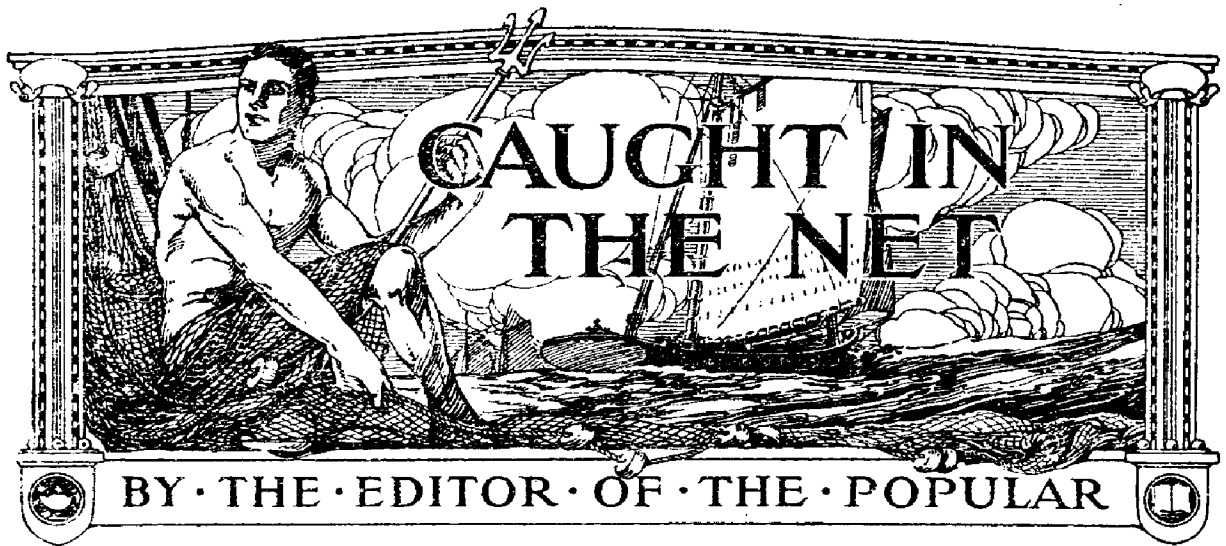
"Hello, Mr. Feather," he said, as steadily as he could, "Mr. Graham just got in from—Los Angeles, and is up there—Room Two-eleven. He wants to see you. I thought you'd like—to know."

Feather nodded. "Thanks, Gowan; thanks. I'll go right up. I've just been out with your friend Mr. Lynch, looking at that piece of land you sold me. Lynch has shown me the oil belt—guess you can't talk me into backing out now. Not now. I'll see you later."

The Easterner hurried up the stairs buoyantly. Jerry Lynch, watching him out of sight, turned to Moss with an elaborate wink. "Well, Moss," he said, with unmasked glee, "I told y' we'd land 'em when we got out among the live uns. Didn't I tell you? Now, before he changes his mind, how 'bout splitting that little roll, eh?"

Moss Gowan tried to answer, but his words came too slowly. Action came much more easily. He reached for the coat collar of Mr. Jerry Lynch. He heaved the oil jobber from the floor as though he had been a bag of meal. He swung him about, nicely calculated distance and speed, and kicked. Mr. Lynch hit the twelfth stair down, bounced to a landing, rolled over twice, struck every fourth stair below as regularly as though he had practiced the evolution, and brought up at the bottom with his head in a waste-paper basket and one foot in a bucket of mop water.

Gowan, whistling contemplatively, turned up the stairs again toward the parlor. "Assistant superintendent," he said thoughtfully and slowly. "A hundred and fifty—a month—to start with! I wonder if Miss Ellen likes—this mission kind of—furniture—or what they call—fumed oak. I'll have to ask her. I think maybe I'll—have to ask her!"



ARIDITY

THERE is every indication that the entire United States will be dry territory within five years at the most, with liquor as taboo nationally as cocaine. Individual differences will not matter—the flood tide of prohibition has swept too far to be checked.

Of the twenty-five hundred and forty-three counties in the whole country, twenty-three hundred and thirty are on the dry list, leaving only two hundred and thirteen counties where liquor can be bought openly. These figures include Indiana, which will close its saloons in 1918.

Bryan's proposition of making prohibition the Democratic battle cry in 1920 is logical. Of the twenty-three States dry at the last election, seventeen went for Wilson, two others ran close, and four of the other States carried by Woodrow had practically been won over by the dries.

Whisky was an inseparable part of the old West. There it got its favorite nicknames—"hardware," "redeye," "nose paint," and "third rail." Sixteen of the twenty-two Western States are now dry as a covered bridge, and the West will be solid prohibition territory long before the East.

Twenty-six States are now dry, or pledged that way; ten more in the dry column will make possible the constitutional amendment threatened by the temperance people.

THE CREDIT PROBLEM

QUICK conversion of liabilities into assets has always been the main credit problem of the American business man.

Some of the modern corporations are run on such a close margin that their profits come mostly from discounting their bills. When a business fakes "two per cent off for ten days," and then has to wait ninety days or more before the customer sends his check, a needless amount of capital must be kept for juggling purposes, or else the business man becomes embarrassed and has to run to the bank and pay several times what a loan is actually worth.

In Germany, a merchant needing cash can take his books to the bank and get cash on accounts due him, the bank deducting a discount from the total amount due as its commission. The account then becomes payable to the bank instead of the man from whom purchase was originally made.

German's money system for years has been so elastic that American fur importers who purchase stocks in Leipzig are given a whole year in which to pay their bill.

It simmers down to the fact that the German business man can buy money just as he would go to a store and buy flour or tacks.

Our new Federal Reserve Board is rapidly working into a similar function—by its discounting of commercial paper through member banks. In substance, it is much like the German system. The person or business that owes the money indorses a bill the same as if it were a note, and the bank discounts and advances on it. This is not generally known, for the working is limited to the very few who have charge of handling credits in the various business concerns. The discounting and rediscounting of commercial paper is growing tremendously in volume.

The immediate result will be that capital will be used three times where it was used only once under the old system. Money is cheaper and more active as a business dynamo. No matter how eager people are to work, there must be money, the medium of exchange, to turn on the current that permits activities to begin and go through to completion. Making money work three hours a day instead of one is a mighty good proposition.

This process of discounting commercial paper is one of the features referred to when bankers speak of the Federal Reserve Banks making the money system more elastic. Money panics appear to be ended for good. While bankers can still hoard the gold-circulating medium, the banks are now working toward a position where they can circulate credit in the absence of money—and with the same results. After all, money is only the guarantee of payment in credit transactions; poker chips or pants buttons would serve the same purpose if we all had faith in them.

RECRUITING

DESPITE the lamentations of the army and navy, and the deplorable collapse of the recruiting drive made for the guard regiments on the border, two arms of the service have made excellent recruiting records. The coast-guard service almost doubled the results of the army's recruiters, man for man, in Greater New York since the increase throughout all branches was authorized by Congress last summer. Yet there is no more arduous service, and only men who have had sea service with either a deck or engine-room force are accepted for the coast guard. On the other hand, the pay is double that of the other services, and the term of enlistment but a year. By the same token there is no higher physical standard required, for Uncle Sam is not prone to accept an applicant for this exacting service, with its ice patrol, salvage of life and property in thick weather, and its risky searches for derelicts, unless he is sound as the timber that we built into our old clipper ships.

The marine corps, with its four-year enlistment, and pay lower than the navy, engineers, or coast guard, is the other branch that has not complained of the difficulty of recruiting men. It has not only kept pace with its annual losses from expiration of service and other causes, but in one-third of the year added to its rolls one-third of the authorized increase of five thousand. A well-devised recruiting system and a highly developed publicity campaign are the outstanding features of the marine corps' success. The appeal it features in its recruiting literature is "the two-in-one service." It does not scorn to hold out the lure

in bold print on its recruiting posters "From the Spanish Main to the Orient." Its posters are aflame with color showing marines hoisting the flag over a tropical town, and carry the neat phrase "Soldiers of the Sea." Its tempting promise of service both on land and sea is not held out by any other branch. And the applicant who passes its strict standards knows that he will barely be out of the awkward squad before he is slinging a hammock on a modern sea fighter or hiking out on a West Indian trail after bandits.

The recruiting officers of the marine corps will have nothing to do with a "down-and-outer." The pay is certainly not the magnet. Dissatisfaction with humdrum civilian life, the itch for adventure and strange lands, appear to be their best recruiters. The successful drive of these two services would seem to prove that their offer of adventure is more potent than playing them up as labor-employment bureaus.

STARTING THE SAVINGS-BANK ACCOUNT

AMERICANS are reputed to be a spending people. They have been indeed prodigal with their money and their natural resources. But the dangers of such a course are becoming more apparent every day. We must check the tendency to lavish expenditure. One of the best correctives is in the public-school savings bank, whereby children are encouraged to save money and realize its value. Recently we were in receipt of a report from a large school in New York City which had established its savings bank in 1911, and had met with great success. The following figures tell the story:

Number of pupils on register January 31, 1917, 2,703; number of depositors in school bank January 31, 1917, 1,751; average to credit of each account in school bank January 31, 1917, \$3.23; number of school depositors in depository bank January 31, 1917, 1,180; amount on pupils' accounts in depository bank January 31, 1917, \$37,275.42.

The depository bank is the regular savings bank where the funds are kept by the officials of the school bank. From the little bank book given each thrifty child we copy the excellent "regulations:"

Deposits must be received every Monday only, at the morning session, by the teacher of each class. These deposits will be entered by the teacher in the pupil's bank book. The money thus received will be delivered to the bank manager, who will deposit it the same day in the Metropolitan Savings Bank in the name of Public School No. 14.

One cent upward will be received by the teacher. When a pupil has a deposit of five dollars or more, a bank book will be given free of charge by the bank.

Deposits may be withdrawn at any time. But to withdraw the money, the pupil will require the presence of either father or mother and the signature of the principal. During the summer vacation of the school, deposits may be made in, and withdrawals may be made from, the bank direct, the cashier acting during that time for the teacher; but if the applicant is unknown to the cashier, he must be identified before receiving the money.

Deposits of five dollars or over will bear interest.

THE GREAT AMERICAN PLAY

OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN threatens to put "Uncle Tom's Cabin" into grand opera.

Why not? It is the only American play recording an epoch in our history. Its power hastened the Civil War by bringing the problems of States' rights and negro slavery to a head.

From a strictly dramatic standpoint, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is the greatest American play ever written. Time, ridicule, and bad acting have failed to kill

it. A year ago there died at the Vermont Soldiers' Home one Daniel Worcester, famed in the dramatic world of the old days as the original *Uncle Tom*; he played the part in the first production—at Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1851.

Think of a show that has been running continuously for sixty-six years! Compare it with other great hits of their day—"Floradora," "The Wizard of Oz," "The Prince of Pilsen," or Kiralfy's "Excelsior," which toured the country in 1884 with three hundred and fifty people. Where are they now? All the time "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was running—and is still running strong; this season twenty-eight companies are out on the road with it, all the way from tent shows, that travel by wagon, to the big companies burlesquing it with two *Uncle Toms* and two *Evas*.

We have cried at this show, laughed at it, kidded it, and still go to see it. What if it is melodramatic? So is "Hamlet." Its situations are a byword—*Elisa* crossing the ice, the death of little *Eva*, et cetera.

Kin Hubbard has a good line: "'Uncle Tom's Cabin' played at Melodeon Hall last night. The dogs were good, but they had poor support."

There is the answer; that is why "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is not recognized as The Great American Play. It has never had a competent cast. The melodrama has been in the actors and a few crude lines, not in the show itself. What it needs is an all-star cast.

The book was amateurish, crudely written, but the play shows vivid flashes of dramatic genius and elemental psychology. By all means put "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in grand opera, Mr. Hammerstein. Caruso singing *Uncle Tom* black face wouldn't be half as funny as "Madam Butterfly" where the little Japanese girl sings in Italian.

"THE GREATEST GAME IN THE WORLD"

A THEATRICAL man whose eccentricities of dress keep him lined up as a lead for a good story at any time on any New York newspaper, made his first stake as a salesman of railroad equipment, notably cars. That was years ago, when railroad buying was nearly as crooked as railroad financing.

"I never got turned down," he boasts. "They couldn't keep me out of their offices. Sometimes my card came back with the 'nobody home.' That didn't stop me. I'd take a thousand-dollar bill, tear it in two, put half in an envelope, and write on the outside: 'The other half is waiting outside to see you.' It always worked. Of course, I didn't send a thousand-dollar bill in to every purchasing agent I called on—had to grade the denomination down to fit the prospect. But I never went lower than fifty dollars. I figured that a railroad buyer who wasn't worth fifty dollars to talk with, wasn't worth talking to at all.

"You couldn't get away with that line of work these days, but thirty years ago business was shady, if not downright crooked, and we had to fight fire with fire. Other salesmen used to wonder how I got in to the prospects that were hard to reach. To-day I'd use different tactics, but I'd get in somehow. There's always a loophole to crawl through. It's the matching of wits that makes salesmanship the greatest game in the world. It's got stud poker knocked through the ropes for real sport."

The Wire Devils

By Frank L. Packard

Author of "On the Iron at Big Cloud," Etc.

III.—THE THIRD PARTY

THE grooves were well oiled. The bolt made no sound in slipping into place as the Hawk entered and closed the door of his room behind him. He had come up the narrow staircase nonchalantly; he was quick, alert, silent now, as, in the darkness, he crossed swiftly to the window and crouched down against the wall. A minute, two, went by. The fire escape, passing at any angle a short distance below the window sill, and at first nebulous in the blackness, gradually took on distinct and tangible shape. Still the Hawk held there motionless, searching it with his eyes, and then abruptly, satisfied that it sheltered no lurking shadow, he straightened up, thrust his automatic back into his pocket, pulled down the shade, and, turning back into the room, switched on the light.

MacVightie, chief of the railroad detective force, it appeared, still had lingering suspicions of this room over the somewhat disreputable saloon below, and still had lingering suspicions of its occupant. All that afternoon the Hawk was quite well aware that he had been shadowed, but the result was rather in his favor than in MacVightie's. From the moment he had discovered that he was being followed, he had devoted his time to making applications for a job—for MacVightie's benefit—that being the reason he had given MacVightie for his presence in Selkirk. Later on, when it had grown dark, having business of his own, he had left MacVightie's satellite standing on a street corner somewhat puz-

zled just which way to turn. That, however, had no bearing on the watch that had been, or might be at the present moment, set upon this room.

The Hawk, in apparent abstraction, was flipping a coin up in the air and catching it. There was a slight frown on the Hawk's face. MacVightie's suspicions were still lingering for the simple reason that MacVightie, utterly at sea, was clutching at the only straw in sight, unless—the coin slipped through the Hawk's fingers and fell beside his trunk. He stooped to pick it up—yes, not only had the room been searched, but the trunk had been opened! The single strand of hair, almost indiscernible against the brass and quite innocently caught in the lock, was broken. Well, he had not finished that mental sentence. Unless—*what?*

He tucked the coin into his pocket, and, standing up, yawned and stretched himself. With the toe of his boot he lazily pushed a chair out from the wall. The chair fell over. The Hawk picked it up, and quite casually set it down—near the door. He took off his coat, and flung it over the back of the chair.

The Hawk's face was grayer now, as it set in rigid lines, but there was no tremor in the hand that inserted the key in the lock of the trunk. He flung back the lid, and his eyes, for an instant, searched the room again sharply. The window shade was securely drawn; the coat over the back of the chair completely screened the keyhole of the door. He laughed a little then—mirthlessly. Well, the trunk had been

opened! Had MacVightie found *all*—or nothing?

His fingers were working swiftly, deftly now, around the inside edges of the lid. He was either caught here, cornered, at bay, or MacVightie, once for all, would be satisfied, and, as far as MacVightie was concerned, the coast would hereafter be clear. The Hawk's dark eyes narrowed, the square under jaw crept out and set doggedly. It had been a close call, perilously close, that other night when he had taken the ten thousand dollars from the paymaster's safe, and MacVightie had followed him here to this room. He had pulled the wool over MacVightie's eyes for the moment, but MacVightie had returned to the old trail again to-day. Well, the cards were on the table now, and it was a gamble that was grim enough. Either he was quit of MacVightie, could even count on MacVightie as a sort of sponsor for his innocence, or——

"Ah!" An ingeniously fashioned false top, in the shape of a tray, that fitted innocently into the curvature of the lid, had come away in the Hawk's hands. He was safe! MacVightie had missed it! In the tray, untouched, where he had left them, lay the packages of bank notes from the paymaster's safe; in the tray still glittered the magnificent diamond necklace, whose theft from the wife of his excellency the governor of the State had already furnished more than one of the big dailies back in the East with attractive copy for their Sunday editions; and there, undisturbed, were the contents of Isaac Kirschell's cash box, a trifling matter of some three thousand dollars; and there, too, snugly tucked away in one corner, was the bundle of crisp, new counterfeit ten-dollar bills. The Hawk grinned maliciously as his eyes rested on the counterfeit notes. He had sent one of them, inscribed with the Hawk's compliments, to MacVightie, when he had returned the otherwise empty paymaster's bag to the detective, and it had not pleased MacVightie.

Quite at his ease now, the Hawk

fitted the false top back into the lid, closed the trunk, locked it, drew a chair up to the table, and sat down. With MacVightie removed as a possible factor of interruption, there was another and very pressing little matter to which he was now at liberty to give his attention. He produced a folded sheet of paper from his inside vest pocket, spread it out on the table before him, and inspected it with a sort of cynical curiosity. In each corner were tack holes. He had removed it less than half an hour ago—not through any misguided dislike to publicity, but simply because he had urgently required a piece of paper—from a conspicuous position on the wall of the railroad station. It was a police circular. The Hawk had not before had an opportunity to absorb more than the large-type captions; he filled his pipe calmly now as he read it in its entirety:

\$5,000 REWARD—FOR EX-SING SING CONVICT.

Five Thousand Dollars Reward Will Be Paid For Information Leading To The Arrest And Conviction Of The Hawk, Alias Harry Maul.

Here followed a description tallying with the one given by MacVightie to Lanson, the division superintendent, and which Lanson had caustically remarked would not fit more than twenty-five thousand men in Selkirk City; followed after that résumé of the crimes recently committed on the railroad, among them the theft of the diamond necklace and the robbery of the paymaster's safe, and, at the end, in bold-faced type again:

\$2,000 REWARD.

Two Thousand Dollars Reward Will Also Be Paid For Information Leading To The Arrest And Conviction Of Each And Every One Of The Hawk's Confederates.

The Hawk smiled broadly as he held the flame of a match to his pipe bowl. The last paragraph was exquisitely ironical. Those whom MacVightie so blithely called the "Hawk's confederates" were vying with each other at that exact moment, and for the exact amount of two thousand dollars offered

by the Master Spider of the gang for the privilege of putting an even more conclusive end—in the shape of a knife thrust, a bullet, or a blackjack—to the Hawk!

"And," said the Hawk softly, as he turned the circular over, "I guess they'd make it a whole lot more if they knew that I had—*this!*"

The back of the circular was covered with line after line of what seemingly was but a meaningless jumble of scribbled letters, nor, in this case, were the letters any too well formed. The Hawk had labored under difficulties when the telegraph sounder had "broke" unexpectedly with the message. He had been listening—as he was always listening when within sound of a telegraph instrument—but he had never known a message from the Wire Devils to come through at so early an hour in the evening before. He had shaken MacVightie's man off the trail, and had gone down to the depot, intending to go up the line to the first small station, where, with little chance of being discovered, he could spend the night within earshot of the operator's instrument—in the hope that his vigil would not, as it sometimes did, prove futile.

He had been standing under the dispatcher's open window waiting for a train, when the police circular tacked on the station wall had caught his eye. The large type was readily decipherable, but the platform lights were poor, and he had stepped closer to read the remainder, and instead, glancing quickly about him to see that he was not observed, he snatched the circular from the wall, and, whipping a pencil from his pocket, had scrawled on the reverse side, as best he could, the message that was rattling in over the dispatcher's sounder from the room above. He had taken chances, but he had played in luck. No one had noticed him, and—well, he was here now with the message, and, since it must sooner or later have been put to the proof in any case, he was back here, too, to find that he was quit of MacVightie.

"Yes," confided the Hawk to himself, as he reached for a blank sheet

of paper in the drawer of the table, "I guess I played in luck—both ways. Wonder if there's another ripe little melon here going to be shoved my way on a gold platter by the Butcher and his crowd?"

The Hawk studied the cipher for a moment.

"lqrtvy . . . key letter . . . stroke at six . . . two-three-one," he murmured.

He drew the fresh sheet of paper toward him, and began to work busily. Occasionally he paused, staring dubiously at a letter; he had taken the message under far from ideal conditions, and a mistake here and there, if not fatal, was annoying and confusing. Finally, however, the Hawk leaned back in his chair, and whistled low under his breath. The message, deciphered and arranged into words and sentences, ran:

Final orders. Number One, Three, and Six hold up fast mail three miles east of Burke's Siding to-night. Cut wires on approach. Express car next to engine. Uncouple and proceed. Diamond shipment in safe. Messenger drugged. No interference with remainder of train. Deliver safe five-mile crossing to Number Four and Seven. Number One, Three, and Six take engine and car farther along the line. Return separately to Selkirk.

Again the Hawk whistled low under his breath, and for the second time reached into his inside vest pocket. He took out a letter that was addressed, care of general delivery, to Mr. J. P. Carrister. The Hawk puffed pleasantly at his pipe as he read it:

DEAR FRIEND: The folks are all well, and hope you are the same. I haven't had time to write much lately. I like my new job fine. Say, I felt like a Fifth Avenue dook for about umpty seconds to-day. One of the fellows in the office let me hold a package of diamonds in my hand just to see what it felt like. Gee! Say, you could almost shove it in your vest pocket, and it was invoiced through customs at twenty thousand plunks. They were unset stones, and came in from Amsterdam. It made me feel queer. I wouldn't like to be the fellow that has to keep his eye on it any of the way from here to San Francisco, where it's going to-morrow by express. If you see any bright lights flashing around your burg that you can't account for about eleven-fifteen next

Wednesday night, you'll know it's the diamonds going through in the express-car safe. I'm getting to be some joker, eh? We all went down to Coney last Sunday. It's been fierce and hot here. Say, don't be a clam; write us a line. Well, I guess there ain't any more news. Yrs truly,
 Bud.

The Hawk, instead of folding up the letter and returning it to his pocket, began meditatively to tear it into minute shreds, and with it the police circular and the sheet of paper on which he had worked out the cipher message. The fast mail scheduled Selkirk at eleven-fifteen—and *this was Wednesday night!*

"Twenty thousand dollars," said the Hawk gently, under his breath. "Thanks, Bud, old boy! You were there with the goods all right, but it wasn't a one-man job, and I didn't think there was going to be anything doing." The Hawk grinned at the ceiling. "And just as I was about passing up the last check, here they go and fix it for me to scoop the whole pot! Three miles east of Burke's Siding, eh?"

The Hawk relapsed into silence for a moment; then he spoke again.

"Yes," said the Hawk, "I guess that ought to work. She won't make the three miles from the siding under five or six minutes. She's due at Burke's at ten-ten. I can make it on the local out of here at eight-thirty. Twenty thousand dollars—in *unset* stones! Just as good as cash, and a lot easier to carry!"

The Hawk looked at his watch. It was five minutes of eight. He rose leisurely from his chair, stooped for a precautionary inspection of the trunk lock, put on his coat, and, moving toward the door, switched off the light.

"If I get away with this," observed the Hawk, as he went down the stairs and let himself out through the street door, "it'll be good night for keeps if any of the gang ever picks up my trail, and they won't quit until they do. And then there's MacVightie and the police. I guess there'll be some little side-stepping to do—what? Oh, well"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I guess I'll get a bite of supper, anyway; there's

no telling when I'll have a chance to eat again."

It was not far to the station—down through the lane from the Palace Saloon—and, close to the station, he remembered there was a little short-order house that was generally patronized by the railroad men. Old Mother Barrett's short-order house, they called it. She was the wife of an engineer who had been killed, he had heard, and she had a boy working somewhere on the railroad. Not that he was interested in these details; in fact, as he walked along, the Hawk was not interested in old Mother Barrett in a personal sense at all, but, as he reached the short-order house and entered, his eyes, as though magnetically drawn in that direction, fixed instantly on the little old woman behind the counter.

The Hawk was suddenly very much interested in old Mother Barrett. It was not that she made a somewhat pathetic figure, that she drooped a little at the shoulders, that her face under her gray hair looked tired, or that, though scrupulously neat, her clothes were a little threadbare; it was none of these things. It was old Mother Barrett's hands that for the moment concerned the Hawk. She was in the act of adjusting her spectacles and picking up a very new and crisp ten-dollar bill that a customer from the stool in front of her had evidently tendered in payment for his meal. The Hawk shot a quick glance up and down the room. There were several other customers at the long counter, but the stool beside the owner of the ten-dollar bill was vacant, and the Hawk unostentatiously straddled it.

He glanced casually at the man at his elbow; allowed his eyes to stray to the kindly, motherly old face with its gray Irish eyes that was puckered now in a sort of hesitant indecision, and glanced a little more than casually at the bank note she kept turning over and over in her hands. No, he had not been mistaken. It was one of those counterfeits, according to MacVightie, had flooded the East and were now making their appearance in Selkirk, and it was a

duplicate of those in the false tray of his trunk. His eyes perhaps were sharper than old Mother Barrett's; in any case, his identification was the quicker, for his gaze had wandered to the coffee urn, and he was drumming idly on the counter with his finger tips before the little old woman finally spoke.

"I—I'm afraid I can't take this," she said slowly, handing the bank note back across the counter.

"What's the matter with it?" demanded the man gruffly.

"Why—it's—it's counterfeit," she said a little anxiously, as though she were fearful of giving offense.

The Hawk's eyes, with mild and quite impersonal interest, were on the man's face now. The man had picked up the bill, and was pretending to examine it critically.

"Counterfeit!" echoed the man shortly. "Say, what are you giving us! It's as good as wheat! Give me my change and let me get out; I'm in a hurry!" He pushed the bill toward her again.

She did not pick it up from the counter this time.

"I'm sorry." She seemed genuinely disturbed, and the sweet old face was full of sympathy. "I'm sure you did not know that it was not good, and ten dollars is a great deal to lose, isn't it? It's too bad. Do you remember where you got it?"

"Look here, you're dippy!" snapped the man. "I tell you it's not counterfeit. Anyway, it's all I've got. If you want your pay, take it!"

"You owe me thirty-five cents, but I can't take it out of this." She shook her head in a troubled way. "This is a counterfeit."

"You seem to be pretty well posted—on counterfeits!" sneered the man offensively. "How do you know it's a counterfeit, eh?"

"Because I've seen one like this before," she said simply. "My son showed me one the last time he was in from his run, and he warned me to be careful about taking any."

"Oh, your son, eh?" sneered the man

again. "Some son! Wised you up, did he? Carries it around with him, eh? And who does *he* shove it off on?"

There was a queer little sound from the old lady—like a quick, hurt catch of her breath. The Hawk's eyes traveled swiftly to her face. She had turned a little pale, and her lips were trembling, but she was drawn up very proudly, and the thin shoulders were squared back.

"I love my boy," she said in a low voice, and tears came suddenly into her eyes. "I love him with all my heart, but I should a thousand times rather see him dead than know him for a thief. And a man who attempts to pass these things knowingly is a—*thief*. I have been very respectful to you, sir, and I do not deserve what you have said. I assumed that you had been swindled yourself, and that you were perfectly honest in offering the bill to me, but now from your——"

"What's the trouble, Mother Barrett?" A big railroader farther up the counter had laid down his knife and fork, and swung round on his stool.

With a hurried glance in that direction, the man hastily thrust the counterfeit note into his pocket, laid down thirty-five cents on the counter, and, with a dive across the room, disappeared through the door.

The Hawk stared thoughtfully after him.

"I couldn't butt in on that and hand him one," said the Hawk to himself almost apologetically. "Not with twenty thousand in sight! I couldn't afford to get into a row and maybe miss the local and spill the beans, could I?"

He looked around again to find the little old woman wiping her spectacles and smiling at him a little wistfully.

"I'm sorry that you had to listen to any unpleasantness," she said. "My little place isn't very pretentious, but I would not like to have you, a stranger, think that sort of thing was customary here. What can I get you, sir?"

It was no wonder that the railroaders evidently swore by old Mother Barrett, and that one of them had been quick to shift her trouble to his own shoulders.

"I guess he was a bad one all right," growled the Hawk.

She shook her head regretfully. There was no resentment left; it was as though, indeed, the man was a charge upon her own conscience.

"He meant to be dishonest, I am afraid," she admitted reluctantly; "but I am sure he cannot be thoroughly bad, for he wasn't very old—just a young man."

She was a very simple, trusting little old lady, as well as a sweet little old lady. Why should her illusions be dispelled? The Hawk nodded gravely.

"Perhaps," suggested the Hawk, "perhaps he hasn't had any one to keep him straight. Perhaps he hasn't got what keeps a good many chaps straight—a good mother."

The mist was quick in her eyes again. He had not meant to bring that; he had meant only to show her a genuine admiration and respect.

"Perhaps not," she answered slowly. "If he has, I hope she will never know." She shook her head again, and then: "But you have not told me yet what you would like, sir?"

The Hawk gave his order. He ate mechanically. Back in his mind he was reviewing a rather extensive acquaintanceship with certain gentry whose morals were not wholly above reproach. Failing, however, to identify the man with the counterfeit note as one of this select number, he finally dismissed the man somewhat contemptuously from his mind.

"Just a piker crook, I guess," decided the Hawk. "I'd like to have found out though how many more of those he's got, and who the fool was that let an amateur skate like that loose with any of the goods!"

He finished his meal, paid his bill, smiled a good night to old Mother Barrett, walked out of the short-order house, and made his way over to the station. Five minutes later, having purchased a magazine, the Hawk, with a ticket in his pocket for a station a number of miles beyond Burke's Sid-ing, curled himself up with his pipe on a seat in the smoker of the local.

The train started, and the Hawk apparently became immersed in his magazine. The Hawk, however, though he turned a page from time to time, was concerned with matters very far removed from the printed words before him. The game to-night was more hazardous, more difficult, and for a vastly greater stake than any in which he had before pitted his wits or played his lone hand against the combined brains of the Butcher, his fellows, and their unknown leader, who collectively were referred to by the papers as the Wire Devils.

The Hawk tamped down the ash in the bowl of his pipe with a wary forefinger. He, the Hawk, according to MacVightie, was the leader of this ingenious criminal league. It was very complimentary of MacVightie—very! Between MacVightie and the Wire Devils themselves he was a personage much sought after. MacVightie, however, was not without grounds for his assertion and belief. The Hawk grinned pleasantly. He, the Hawk, had certainly, and for some time back, helped himself to the leader's share of the spoils and helped himself very generously.

The grin died away. He had beaten them so far, appropriated from under their very noses the loot they had so carefully planned to obtain, and he had mocked and taunted them contemptuously in the doing of it; but the cold fact remained that luck sometimes was known to turn, and that the pitcher that went too often to the well ran the risk of getting—smashed. If they ever caught him, his life would not be worth an instant's purchase. He knew some of them, and he knew them well for what they were, and he labored under no delusions on that score. The Butcher, for example, who was the Number One of the message, had already nearly done for him once, and the Butcher had nothing on Number Three, who was the Bantam, or on Number Seven, who was Whitie Jim, or, it was safe to presume, on any of the others that he had not yet identified—this Number Four and Number Six,

for instance, who were mentioned in the cipher message to-night. And how many more were there? He did not know, except that there was the Master Spider of them all.

The Hawk had ceased now even to turn cursorily the pages of the magazine. He was staring out of the window.

"I wonder," muttered the Hawk grimly, "when I'll run up against *him*? And who he is? And where the head office is?"

He nodded his head after a moment. MacVightie had called the turn. The Wire Devils formed as powerful and dangerous a criminal organization as had probably ever existed anywhere. And not for very long would they put all their resources at work to pull off some coup, only to find that he, the Hawk, had made use of their preparations to snatch the prize away from them; they were much more likely to put all their resources at work—with the Hawk as their sole objective.

The Hawk's lips tightened. He might underestimate, but he could not exaggerate, his danger. The man in the seat behind him might be one of them for all he knew. Somewhere, hidden away in his web, at the end of a telegraph wire, was the Master Spider directing the operations, and there must be very many of them—the little spiders—spread all over the division. Where there was a telegraph sounder that sounder carried the messages, the plans, the secret orders of the brain behind the organization, and the very audaciousness with which they made themselves free of the railroad's telegraph system to communicate with each other was in itself a guarantee of success. If one of their messages was interfered with, they threatened to cut the wires, and that meant, if luckily it meant no more, that train operating was at an end until the break could be located and repaired. Were they tapping the wire somewhere? What chance was there to find out where? There were hundreds of old splices on the wires. Or, if found, what would prevent them tapping the wire on the

next occasion many miles away? Also the sources of information that they tapped must be far flung. How, for instance, unless they, too, had a "Bud" back there in New York, did they know of this diamond shipment coming through to-night?

The Hawk's lips grew still a little tighter. His safety so far had depended on the fact that he possessed the key to their cipher messages, which not only enabled him to reap where they had sown, but warned him of any move they might make against him. But it was becoming increasingly difficult to intercept those messages. He had MacVightie to thank for that. Where before he had only to crawl into some little way station where there was no night operator, MacVightie now had every one of those stations securely guarded. Yes, it had become exceedingly more difficult. If only he could find out *where* those messages emanated from, or the system in force for receiving them!

The Hawk slid farther down in his seat, tossed the magazine to one side, pulled his hat over his eyes, and appeared to sleep. All that was neither here nor there—to-night. He had the message to-night, but he had not yet got that twenty thousand dollars in un-set stones. He would, perhaps, do well, now that he had the leisure, to give the details of that matter a little more critical attention than they had received when he had made up his mind that his best chance lay in the three miles between Burke's Siding and the point where the Butcher and his men planned to hold up the train. According to the message, the implication was that there would be nobody in the express car at that time except a drugged messenger. And now, somehow, he did not quite like the appearance of that. It seemed a little queer. What was the object of drugging the man if they did not take immediate advantage of it? He pondered the problem for a long time. No, after all, it was logical enough; that was why they meant to remove the safe bodily. There evidently was not a specialized cracksman among them

who had lifted his profession to the plane of art, no "knob twirler" such as—well, such as himself. The Hawk opened his eyes sleepily to inspect the tips of his carefully manicured fingers. Otherwise, with no one to interfere but a drugged messenger, they could have opened the safe, looted it, and, since the fast mail carried only through express matter, dropped off the car at the first stop, with no one being the wiser until, somewhere up the line, the messenger returned to life and gave the alarm.

Yes, it was very craftily worked out. The Master Spider was far from a fool. They would have to "soup" the safe, and blow it open. If they attempted that while the train was en route, they ran the risk of being heard and trapped like rats in the car, and, if they were heard, even if they managed to stop the train and make their escape, they invited instant and definite pursuit on the spot. The reason for drugging the express messenger became quite evident now. If the man were already helpless when they held up the train, they, at one and the same time, assured their access to an otherwise guarded car without danger to themselves, and without danger of being balked at the last moment of their reward, which the messenger, with a small package like that, might easily have done if he were a game man. He could have opened the safe, say, the instant the first alarm came as they tried to force the car door, taken out the package, and secreted it somewhere. It needed only the nerve after that to defy them, and they had evidently given him credit for it whether he possessed it or not.

Yes, decidedly the Master Spider was no fool in the spinning of his web. As it was, the safe, which would only be a small affair anyhow, would disappear bodily, and between the point where the train was held up and the point where they finally left the engine and express car there would be a distance of at least ten miles, even allowing that they approached no nearer than within two miles of Bradley, the first station west

of Burke's Siding. With the wires cut and the coaches of the fast mail stalled three miles out of Burke's, considerable time must elapse before any one could make a move against them, and even when the pursuit finally started, MacVightie, for instance, would be confronted with that somewhat illusive stretch of ten miles in which to decide *where* the pursuit should begin. Ten miles was some little distance. MacVightie would be quite at liberty to make his guess, and there was the chance, with the trifling odds of some few odd thousand to one against it, that he might guess right—unless he guessed that the safe had been removed at the point where the engine and car were finally left, in which case MacVightie would guess wrong.

If the Hawk was asleep, he was perhaps dreaming, for the Hawk smiled. The chances were just about those few odd thousand to one that MacVightie would guess exactly that way—wrong. Yes, it was an exceedingly neat little web that the Master Spider had spun. If he, the Hawk, were permitted to make a guess, he would guess that the safe would never be found.

His mind reverted to the cipher message. The safe was to be delivered at "five-mile crossing." Where that was the Hawk did not know, except that it must necessarily be somewhere between the point where the train was held up and Bradley. However, that was a detail with which he need hardly concern himself. Long before this "five-mile crossing" was reached, his vest pocket, if he played in luck, would be very comfortably lined. He would enter the express car as the fast mail pulled out of Burke's, trust to certain long and intimate experience to open the safe, and get off the train as it slowed down at the Butcher's very thoughtful request. For the rest the details—circumstances must govern there. In the main, that would be his plan.

The Hawk "slept" on. Station after station was passed. His mind now dealt in little snatches of thought. There was MacVightie and the police

circular, and the search of his room that day, and speculation as to how they had managed to drug the express messenger, and the man with the counterfeit ten-dollar bill in old Mother Barrett's short-order house, and the little old woman herself, with her shabby clothes and her tired, gentle face, and finally the Hawk stirred, glanced at his watch, and, as the train whistled, picked up his magazine and sauntered down the car aisle to the door.

They were approaching Burke's Sid-ing. The Hawk opened the door, went out on the platform, and descended to the lowest step. The train slowed. A water tank loomed up, receded, and the Hawk dropped to the ground. A minute later, as the tail lights winked by and came to a stop at the station a short distance down the track, he had made his way back to the water tank, crossed to the opposite side of the track, and stretched himself out on the grass in the hollow at the foot of the embankment. The fast mail's sole excuse for a stop at Burke's was the water tank, which would bring the express car to a halt directly in front of the spot where he now lay.

The local pulled out, and racketed away into the night. The tail lights vanished. Silence fell. There was only the chirping of the insects now, and the strange, queer, indefinable medley of little night sounds. Burke's Sid-ing was a lonely place. There was a faint yellow gleam from the station windows, and there was the twinkle of the switch lights; no other sign of life. It was pitch black—so black that he could just barely distinguish the outline of the water tank across the track.

"It's a nice night," observed the Hawk pleasantly to himself. "A very nice night! It's strange how some people prefer a moon!"

The minutes went by—ten, fifteen, twenty of them—a half hour—and then, from far down the track, hoarse through the night, came the scream of a whistle. From his pocket the Hawk took out a diminutive flash light, thin as a pencil. It might have been the wink-

ing of a firefly, as he played it on the dial of his watch.

"On the dot!" murmured the Hawk. "Some train—the fast mail! I guess, though, she'll be a little late at that to-night—when she pulls into Selkirk."

A roar and rumble was in the night again, increasing steadily in volume. Down the right of way, in the distance, a flash of light stabbed through the black. It grew brighter and brighter. The Hawk, wary of the spread of the powerful electric headlight, edged farther away from the trackside. And now the rails gleamed like polished silver, and the water tank stood up out of the darkness, a thing of monstrous size. There was the hiss of steam, the rasp and grind of the setting brakes, the glinting rays from the windows of a long string of coaches that trailed back to the station platform, and a big ten-wheeler, like some human thirsty thing, was panting beside the water tank.

The engineer, with his torch, swung from the gangway for an oil around. There was the creak of the descending spout, the rush of water, and, silhouetted against the water tank, the Hawk could make out the fireman standing on the back of the tender. And now, poking with his long-spouted oil can, weirdly swallowed up in the darkness at intervals as he thrust the torch far in under the big machine, the engineer moved slowly along the side of the engine, and finally disappeared around the end of the pilot. The Hawk stole forward closer to the track again, his eyes on the fireman, who, now that the engineer's torch was on the other side, was more sharply outlined than before. Came then the swish and gush of water as it overflowed, the spout banged back against the water tank, and the fireman scrambled back over the tender into the cab. It was the moment the Hawk had been waiting for. Swiftly, but still crawling as a safeguard against being seen by any of the train crew in the rear, he moved up the embankment, and in an instant had swung up between the tender and the forward door of the express car. There

was no platform here, of course, but the end beam of the car, making a sort of wide threshold, gave him ample room on which to stand.

The roar of escaping steam drowned out all other sounds; the back of the tender hid him from any chance of observation from the cab. He tried the door cautiously. It was locked, of course; there were twenty thousand dollars' worth of stones in the safe inside! The Hawk felt carefully over the lock with his fingers, classifying it in the darkness, as it were, by the sense of touch, and produced from his pocket a bunch of skeleton keys. He inserted one, worked with it for a moment, then shook his head, and selected another. This time he felt the bolt slide back. The train was jerking into motion now. He exchanged his keys for his automatic, turned the knob softly, opened the door an inch, and listened. Even the Wire Devils were not infallible, and if by any chance the messenger—

The Hawk whistled low and contentedly under his breath. He had caught a glimpse of the interior of the car, and now he slipped quickly through the door, closing the door behind him.

A quarter length down the car, in the aisle made by the express packages which were piled high on either side, the messenger, a young man of perhaps twenty-two, was huddled, apparently unconscious, in his chair. In a flash the Hawk was down the car, and bending sharply over the other. The man sat in a helpless, sagging attitude; he was breathing heavily, and his head, hanging forward and a little to one side, swayed limply with the motion of the car. There was no question as to the messenger's condition; he was drugged, and well drugged. From the man the Hawk's eyes traveled to a sort of desk, or ledge, built out from the side of the car and topped by a pigeonholed rack stuffed with express forms and official-looking manila envelopes. On the desk was a small leather satchel containing some lunch; a bottle of what was evidently cold tea, though now but barely a quarter full; and, as though to sup-

ply further evidence that the man had succumbed in the midst of his meal, a little to one side lay a meat sandwich, half eaten.

The Hawk nodded quietly to himself, as again his eyes shifted, this time to a small safe about three feet square that stood beneath the desk. It was quite easy to understand now. The Wire Devils had only to ascertain the fact that it was the messenger's habit to eat his lunch at a certain time, choose the point of attack on the line to correspond therewith, and see that a sufficient quantity of knock-out drops was introduced into the cold tea: not a very weighty undertaking for the Wire Devils.

Well, it was a bit rough on the boy—the Hawk was kneeling now in front of the safe—but he, the Hawk, was greatly indebted to the Wire Devils. Twenty thousand dollars was a snug little sum—quite a snug little sum!

The figure in the chair, with swaying head, breathed stertorously; there was the pound, quick in its tempo, of the trucks beating at the rail joints; the give-and-take of the car in protesting little creaks, and, over all, a muffled roar as the fast mail tore through the night, but the Hawk heard none of this. His ear was pressed close against the face of the safe, listening for the tumblers' fall, as his fingers twirled the dial knob.

After a little while the Hawk spoke aloud.

"Left, twenty-eight, one quarter—two right, fourteen—two left, eighteen, one-half," he said.

He straightened up, swung the handle of the safe, and a dismayed, anxious look flashed across his face. There was not much time, very little time, and he had missed it. How far along those three miles from Burke's to where the Butcher was waiting had the train already come?

He tried again coolly, methodically, and again he missed.

"I guess I'm out of practice to fall down on a tin box like this," he muttered grimly. "But the first two are right, that's sure; it's the last turn that's

wrong somewhere. Give me another minute or two"—he was twirling the dial knob with deft, quick fingers once more—"that's all I ask, and——"

A sudden jolt flung him forward against the safe. Came the scream of the whistle, the screech of the tight-set brakes, the bump and jerk and pound and grind of the flying train coming to an emergency stop. The limp form of the messenger, sliding down, was almost doubled over the arm of the chair.

In an instant the Hawk had recovered his balance, and, his face set like iron, his jaws clamped hard, he snatched at the knob, and with desperate haste now made another attempt. There were a few seconds left, a few seconds before the train came finally to a standstill, and—no, they were gone now, those seconds—and he had missed again!

His automatic was in his hand as he stood up. It was no longer a question of twenty thousand dollars' worth of unset diamonds; it was a question of his life. There was a bitter smile on his lips as he ran for the forward door. It looked as though the pitcher had at last gone once too often to the well. The train had stopped now. He reached the door, and opened it cautiously a little way. A great red flare from somewhere ahead lighted up the night. He heard and recognized the Butcher's voice, menacing, raucous, punctuated with vicious oaths:

"Get out of that cab, and get out darned quick! Down you come! Jump now! Now, boys, run 'em back, and keep firing down the length of the train as you go, and if these guys don't run faster than you do, let 'em have it in the back! Beat it now! Beat it like hell! I'll pull out the minute you're uncoupled. You two grab the rear end as she moves—there's room enough for you, and you can bash in the door, and——"

A fusillade of shots rang out. Flashes cut the black. The Butcher's two companions, evidently driving the engineer and fireman before them, were coming on the run along the trackside

from the cab. The Hawk retreated back a step, and closed the car door. He heard the men rush past outside. The fusillade seemed to redouble in intensity, and now, added to it, were shouts and yells from the rear of the train itself, and—if he were not mistaken—answering shots.

His hand on the doorknob, he stood waiting tensely. With the Butcher on guard out there in front, it would have been equivalent to suicide to have opened the door again until he knew the other was back in the cab; against the background of the lighted interior he would have made a most excellent mark for the Butcher.

His eyes swept past the huddled form of the young messenger in the chair, and fixed speculatively on the safe. He nodded suddenly, grimly. Twenty thousand dollars! Well, he wasn't beaten yet; not till he threw down his own hand of his own accord, not till he lost sight of the safe for keeps.

Over the shouts and revolver shots came the sharp, vicious hiss of the air hose as it was uncoupled, and then, with a violent jerk, the car started forward as the Butcher evidently whipped the throttle open. And coincidentally there was a smash upon the rear door, and the Hawk opened the forward door and slipped out again.

A din infernal was in his ears. Like a maddened thing under the Butcher's unscientific spur, the big ten-wheeler was coughing the sparks heavenward in a volleying stream, while the huge drivers raced like pinwheels in another shower of sparks as the tires sought to bite and hold. And now the rear door of the car crashed inward; the shots came fast as a gatling, and shouts, screams, and yells added their quota to the uproar.

The Hawk, crouched by the door, moved suddenly to one side as he caught the dull, ominous *spat* of a bullet against one of the panels. The train crew and those of the passengers who were armed were very obviously keeping up a running fight from the stalled section of the train, and pumping their bullets through the broken rear door

and up the aisle of the express car as long as they could hold the range, and, from within, he could distinguish the duller, muffled reports of the Butcher's confederates firing in return, preventing any attempt being made to rush the rear of the car.

And then the sounds began to recede and die away. The men inside ceased firing, and he could hear them now moving the safe out from the side of the car. It seemed as though a very long interval of time had been consumed in the holdup, but in reality he knew it had been little more than a matter of seconds—the time it had taken the two men to run the length of the car, uncouple it, and leap on the rear end. The fight afterward could hardly count, for once the express car began to pull away the thing was done.

They were moving fast now, and with every instant the speed was increasing. The Hawk clutched at the handrail, and lowered himself to the iron foot rung which, on the express car, served in lieu of steps. Here, having chosen the opposite side to that of the Butcher at the throttle in the cab, he ran no risk of being observed. This "five-mile crossing," wherever it was, promised to concern him a great deal more than he had anticipated. He leaned out and clung there, staring ahead.

The big ten-wheeler was swaying and staggering like a drunken thing; the rush of the wind whipped at his face; a deafening roar sang in his ears. The fast mail usually ran *fast*, but the Butcher was running like a dare-devil, and the bark of the exhaust had quickened now into a single full-toned note deep as thunder.

With a sort of grim placidity, the Hawk clung to the lurching rail. Far ahead along the right of way, a shaft of light riven through walls of blackness, played the headlight. Shadowy objects, trees that loomed up for an instant and were gone, showed on the edge of the wavering ray. They tore through a rock cut, and, in the confined space and in the fraction of a second it took to traverse it, the roar

was metamorphosed into an explosion. And then suddenly, as though by magic, the headlight shot off at a tangent, and the glistening lines of steel that were always converging, but never meeting, were gone, and the ray fell full upon a densely wooded tract where leaves and foliage became a soft and wonderful shade of green under the artificial light. The Hawk braced himself, and just in time. The ten-wheeler, unchecked, swung the curve with a mighty lurch, off drivers fairly lifted from the rails. She seemed to hang there hesitantly for a breathless instant, then with a crunch, staggering, settled back and struck into her stride again.

The thunder of the exhaust ceased abruptly, and the speed began to slacken. The Butcher had slammed the throttle shut. At the end of the headlight's ray that was straight along the track again, a red light flashed up suddenly three times and vanished. The Hawk leaned farther out, tense now, straining his eyes ahead. It was evidently Number Four and Number Seven signaling from "five-mile crossing."

The Butcher began to check with the "air." And now, in the headlight's glare, the distance shortened, the Hawk could discern a large wagon drawn by two horses that appeared to be backed up close to the right-hand side of the track. Two forms seemed to be tugging at the horses, which equally seemed to be plunging restively, and then, being on the wrong side of the car, the angle of vision narrowed and he could see no more.

The Hawk turned now, his eyes on the door of the car. There was a possibility, a little more than a possibility, that the men inside, knowing that they had reached their destination, would come out this way. No, he had only to keep hidden from the men out there with the wagon until the car stopped; the men within were sliding back the side door. He swung himself farther out on the foot rung, then, curving back with the aid of the handrail, flattened himself against the side of the car.

They were close up to the wagon

now, and he could hear voices cursing furiously at the horses as the frightened animals stamped and pawed. And then the car bumped and jerked to a standstill, and the Butcher was bawling from the cab:

"Take the horses out, you blamed fools, and tie 'em back there on the road a bit till we're gone! We'd have a sweet time loading the wagon with them doing the tango every second. Take 'em out! We'll back the wagon up against the car."

The Hawk lowered himself silently to the ground to find that the car had come to a stop directly over a road crossing. The men in the car had joined their voices with the Butcher's, and in the confusion now the Hawk slipped quickly along the side of the car, stole around the rear end, and from that point of vantage stood watching the Butcher and his men at work.

He could see quite plainly, thanks to the light from the car's wide-open side door that flooded the scene. The horses had been unharnessed, and were being led away along the road. One of the men in the car jumped to the ground as the Butcher called out, and together they backed the wagon close up against the car doorway; and then presently the men who accompanied the horses, one carrying a lantern, came running back. The Hawk's eyes, from a general and comprehensive survey of the scene, fixed on the man who until now had not left the car, but who had now sprung down into the wagon and was running a short plank, to be used as a skid evidently, up to the threshold of the car door, which was a little above the level of the wagon. The light shone full in the man's face.

"Number Six—Baldy Kline!" confided the Hawk softly to himself. "I'm glad to know that. The last time I chummed with Baldy was back in little old Sing Sing. Guess he got out for good behavior; thought he was elected for five spaces yet."

Baldy spoke now, as he jumped back into the car:

"Look here, Butcher, I'm telling you

again, this guy in here's in pretty bad shape."

"Never mind about that!" replied the Butcher roughly. "Get the safe out! All hands now! We've got no time to monkey with him. He'll come around all right, I guess; anyway, it's none of our lookout."

The men were bunched together now, three in the doorway of the car and two in the wagon, the safe between them. The Hawk was studying one of the two who stood in the wagon. One was Whitie Jim, as he already knew, but the other had had his back half turned, and the Hawk had not been able to see his face. The safe slid down the plank, and was levered and pushed forward into the middle of the wagon.

"French Pete!" said the Hawk suddenly and as softly as before, as the man he had been watching straightened up and turned around. "Say, I guess Sing Sing's gone out of business, or else somebody left the door open!"

But if the Hawk's words were indicative of a facetious mood, his actions were not. There was a sort of dawning inspiration in the dark, narrowed eyes, and the strong jaw as it was out-thrust drew his lips into a grim, hard smile. They were spreading a huge tarpaulin over the wagon and safe, and abruptly the Hawk drew back, dropped to his hands and knees, crawled along the trackside on the opposite side of the car again until almost opposite the wagon, and there lay flat and motionless at the side of the road. There was a chance yet, still a chance, a very good chance, for that twenty thousand dollars' worth of unset stones.

"All right now!" It was the Butcher's voice. "Pull her away a few feet into the clear!" The wagon creaked and rattled. "That's enough! Now get a move on—everybody!"

Steps crunched along the trackside—the Butcher and his two companions obviously making for the cab, and a moment later came the cough of the engine's exhaust, and the express car began to glide past the spot where the Hawk lay.

The Hawk raised himself cautiously on his elbows. Two dark forms and a bobbing lantern were already speeding toward where the horses had been left. The Hawk crawled forward, crossed the track, and paused. The engine and express car were fast disappearing in the distance; the lantern glimmered among the trees at the side of the road a good hundred yards away.

There was no shadow to fall across the back of the wagon.

"I said it was a nice night, and that it was strange how some people preferred a moon!" observed the Hawk cheerfully, and, lifting the end of the tarpaulin, he swung noiselessly under it into the wagon, and stretched himself out beside the safe.

The Hawk felt upward with his hand over the safe. It was faced, he found, toward the rear of the wagon. This necessitated a change in his own position. He listened tensely. They were coming back with the horses now, but they were still quite a little way off. He shifted quickly around until his head and shoulders were in front of the safe.

"It was the last turn of the combination that I fluked up on, though I don't see how it happened," muttered the Hawk.

He felt above his head again, this time rubbing his fingers critically over the tarpaulin, and then the diminutive little flash light winked, winked again as it played around him, and finally held steadily on the nickel dial. There were no inadvertent openings, and particularly no holes in the tarpaulin, and the texture of the tarpaulin was a guarantee that the tiny rays of light would not show through.

They were harnessing the horses into the wagon now. The Hawk, in a somewhat cramped position, due to the wagon's narrow width, his legs twisted at right angles to his body as he lay on his back, reached up and began to twirl the dial knob slowly and with painstaking care.

"Left, twenty-eight, one-quarter," murmured the Hawk, and, a moment

later: "Two right, four——" The Hawk swore earnestly under his breath. The jolt of the wagon, coming unexpectedly as it started forward, had caused him to spin the knob too far around.

It was hot, stifling hot, under the heavy tarpaulin, that, slanting downward from the little safe, lay almost against his face. A bead of sweat had gathered on his forehead. He brushed it away, and began again to work at the dial. It was more difficult now; the wagon bumped infernally. And as he worked he could hear the muffled clatter of the horses' hoofs and occasionally the voices of the two men on the seat.

And then suddenly the Hawk's fingers traveled from the dial knob to the handle. Had he got it this time, or—yes! The handle swung easily; there was a low, metallic thud; the bolt had slipped back to the end of its grooves. The safe was unlocked!

"Twenty thousand dollars!" said the Hawk very softly, and, inch by inch, without the slightest sound, he edged his body backward to afford space for the swing of the opening door. "Twenty thousand doll——"

The word died, half uttered, on the Hawk's lips. The flash light was illuminating the interior of the safe. On the bottom lay a single, crisp, ten-dollar counterfeit note, over the face of which was scrawled in ink, "*With the Hawk's compliments!*" Otherwise the safe was empty.

For a moment, like a man dazed, he stared at the counterfeit note. He could not seem to believe his eyes. *Empty*—the safe was empty! The diamonds were gone—gone! Gone, and these poor fools were driving an empty safe to the Master Spider, and another poor fool, with dropped jaw, was staring, gaping like an imbecile into one! And then, a grip upon himself again, he laughed low, grimly, unpleasantly. "With the Hawk's compliments!" He had sent a bill like that once to MacVigtie inscribed, "With the Hawk's compliments!" This was very neat, very clever of—*somebody*. Of some-

body who must have known what the Wire Devils were up to to-night. There would be no doubt in the minds of the Wire Devils, who would have heard of that little episode with MacVightie, but that the Hawk had again forestalled them and left them a ten-dollar counterfeit bill in exchange for twenty thousand dollars' worth of unset diamonds! Only it was this somebody, and not he, the Hawk, who was twenty thousand dollars the richer for it.

He reached in, picked up the bill to put it in his pocket, and suddenly laid it back again and closed and locked the safe. Why deprive the Master Spider of a little joy? And, besides, it would carry a message not perhaps so erroneous, after all; for, in a flash, logically, indisputably, apparently impossible though it appeared to be on the surface, he knew who that *somebody* was. The shelving of the theft to the Hawk's shoulders would have defeated its own object unless the theft were committed and discovered on this particular division of the railroad where the Hawk and incidentally his supposed gang of desperadoes were known to be operating.

The messenger certainly had not been in a drugged condition when he went on duty, and, since it was only reasonable to assume that he would have satisfied himself everything was all right at the time, it was evident, as he had given no alarm, that the contents of the safe had been intact when he took charge, whether as a "through" man in New York or at the Eastern terminus of the road or at the last divisional point; it did not matter which.

The robbery, then, had been committed while the messenger was present in the car, and it had been committed on this division. The safe had not been forced—it showed not the slightest sign of violence—it had been opened on the combination. Some one, then, an expert safe worker, in the first stages of the messenger's drugged condition, had happened into the car just ahead of him, the Hawk, and had done exactly what he, the Hawk, had intended to do.

"No," said the Hawk. "No, I guess not." He was wriggling noiselessly backward, and his feet were hanging out now over the end of the wagon. "No, coincidences like that don't happen—not very often." The Hawk's head and shoulders were still under the tarpaulin, but his feet now could just feel the ground beneath them. "I guess," said the Hawk, as he suddenly withdrew his head, and, crouching low, ran a few steps with the wagon, then dropped full length in the road. "I guess it's—the third party."

The wagon disappeared in the darkness. The Hawk rose, and, turning, broke into a run back along the road. He had been longer in the wagon than he had thought; it took him ten minutes to regain the railroad tracks.

Here, without pause, still running, he kept on along the right of way, but there was a hard twist to his lips, and the clenching of his fists was not wholly due to runner's "form." How far had the Butcher taken the car before deserting it? A mile? Two miles—three? He could not run three miles under half an hour, and that would be *fast* over railroad ties. How long would it be before the train crew of the stalled mail got back to Burke's and managed somehow, in spite of the cut wires, to give the alarm; or how long before the dispatcher at Selkirk, with the fast mail reported "out" at Burke's and no "O. S." from Bradley, would smell a rat? It would take time after that, of course, before anything could be done; but, at best, the margin left for him was desperately narrow.

He ran on and on; his eyes, grown accustomed to the darkness, enabling him to pick out the ties with a fair degree of accuracy. There was not a sound save that of his own footsteps. He stopped for breath again and again, and again and again ran on at top speed. It seemed as though he had run, not three miles, but six, when finally, far ahead, he caught a glow of light. The Butcher and his confederates had evidently not taken the trouble to close the side door of the car.

Instinctively the Hawk cautiously

slowed his pace, and the next instant, smiling pityingly at himself for the act, ran on the faster. The Butcher and the other two would long since have made their get-away. There was only the messenger, and the messenger was drugged. That was all that need concern him now—the messenger—to find some way to rouse the man so that he could talk.

The Hawk reached the car, ran along the side to the open door, and stood suddenly still. And then, with a low, startled cry, he swung himself up and through the doorway, and, running forward, knelt beside a huddled form on the floor. It was the messenger, sprawled on his face now, motionless, and it was no longer a case of being drugged; *the man had been shot!* There was a dark, ugly pool on the flooring, and a thin red stream had trickled away in a zigzag course along one of the planks. The Hawk's lips were tight. The Butcher's work! But why? *Why?* Yes! Yes, he understood! The Butcher, too, in some way had discovered that the messenger was—the third party!

The boy—he was even more of a boy now in appearance, it seemed to the Hawk, with his ashen face and colorless lips—the boy moaned a little, and, as the Hawk lifted him up, opened his eyes. The Hawk produced a flask, and forced a few drops between the other's lips.

"Listen!" he said distinctly. "Try and understand what I am saying. Did they get the diamonds from you after they shot you?"

The boy's eyes widened with a quick, sudden fear. Perhaps the drug had begun to wear off; perhaps it was the wound and the loss of blood that had cleared his brain.

"The diamonds?" he faltered.

"Yes," said the Hawk grimly. "The diamonds! You took them. Did you tell those men where they were?"

"It's—it's a lie!" The boy seemed to shiver convulsively. Then, his voice scarcely audible: "No, it's—it's true. I—I did. I—I guess I'm going out—ain't I? It's—it's true. But I—I didn't

tell. There weren't any men—I——" He had fainted in the Hawk's arms.

"My God!" whispered the Hawk solemnly. "It's true; the kid's dying."

He held the flask to the other's lips again. It wasn't the Butcher, then, who had shot the boy, and besides he saw now that the wound was in a strangely curious place—in the back, below the shoulder blade; the boy had been sitting in his shirt sleeves, and the back of his vest was soaked with blood. And the Hawk remembered the fusillade of bullets that had swept up the interior of the car, and the *spat* upon the forward door panel as he had crouched there outside, and he understood. The boy, sitting in a stupor in his chair facing the forward door, had been directly in the line of fire, and a stray bullet had found its mark.

"I—I don't know how you knew"—the boy had roused, and was speaking again—"but—but I'm going out—and—and it's true. Two days ago a man gave me a hundred dollars to stand for—for knock-out drops on the run to-night. I—I couldn't get caught—I—I was safe—whatever happened. I'd be found drugged—and—and no blame coming to me—and——" He motioned weakly toward the flask in the Hawk's hand. "Give me—give me some more of that!"

He did not speak for a moment.

"And, instead," prompted the Hawk quietly, "you double-crossed the game."

"I—I had a counterfeit ten-dollar bill," the boy went on with an effort. "I'd heard about the Hawk—and—and MacVightie. I knew from what—the fellow—said that the Hawk—wasn't one of them. I—I got to thinking. All I had to do was empty the safe—and—and write what the Hawk did on the bill—and—and shove it in the safe—and—and take the diamonds—and—and then drink the tea that had the drops in it. I—I would be drugged, and they—they'd think the Hawk did it while I was drugged before they—they got here—and—and that's what I did."

The boy was silent again. It was still outside, very still—only the chirpings

of the insects and the night sounds the Hawk had listened to while he had lain below the embankment waiting for the train at Burke's. There was a set, strained look on the Hawk's face. The kid was paying the long price for twenty thousand dollars' worth of unset diamonds.

"To make it look like—like the real thing"—the boy's lips were moving again—"I—I cleaned out everything in the safe—but—but of course there mustn't any of that be found—and—and I tied the stuff up—and—and weighted it and dropped it—into—the—river as we came over the bridge at Moosehead. And then I had to—to hide the diamonds so they wouldn't be found on me, and yet so's they—they'd come along with me—and—and not be left in the car. I was afraid that when some of the train crew found me drugged—they—they'd undress me—and—and put me to bed—and—and so I didn't dare hide the diamonds in my clothes. They're—they're—in——"

He raised himself up suddenly, clutched frantically at the Hawk's shoulders, and his voice rang wildly through the car:

"Hold me tight—hold me tight—don't let me go out yet—I—I got something more to say! Don't tell her! Don't tell her! I'll tell you where the stones are; they're in the lining of my lunch satchel—but don't—oh, for God's sake, don't tell her—don't let her know that—that I'm a—thief! You don't have to, do you? Say you don't! I'm—I'm going out—I—I've got what's coming to me, and that's—enough—isn't it—without her knowing, too? It—it would kill her. She was a good mother—do you hear?" He was stiffening back in the Hawk's arms. "And this ain't coming to her. She was a good mother—do you hear—everybody called her mother, but she's *my* mother—you know—old Mother Barrett—short-order house—you know—old—Mother—Barrett—good——"

The boy never spoke again.

The Hawk laid the still form gently back on the floor of the car and stood up. And there was a mist in the

Hawk's eyes that blotted out his immediate surroundings, and in the mist he seemed to see another scene, and it was the picture of a gentle, kindly-faced old woman, who had silver hair and who wore clothes that were a little threadbare and whose gray Irish eyes behind the spectacles were filled with tears, and he seemed to see the thin shoulders square proudly back and he seemed to hear her speak again: "I love my boy, I love him with all my heart, but I should a thousand times rather see him dead than know him for a thief."

Mechanically the Hawk moved over to the desk where the lunch satchel still lay, and emptied out the remainder of the food.

"No," said the Hawk, "I guess she'll never know, and I guess I'd have to take the stuff now, anyway, whether I wanted to or not—if she's not to know."

He was examining the inside of the satchel. It was an old and well-worn affair, and a torn piece of the lining, stuck down with paste at the edges, would ordinarily have attracted no attention. The Hawk loosened this, and felt inside. At the bottom, carefully packed away, were strips of cotton wadding. He took one out. Embedded in this were a number of diamonds, which, as he drew the wadding apart, flashed brilliantly in the light of the oil lamps above his head. He wrapped the stones up again, and put them in his pocket, took out the remainder from the satchel, put these also in his pocket, and replaced the portion of the lunch he had removed back in the satchel. It mattered little about the torn lining now.

"He kind of put it up to me," said the Hawk slowly. "Yes, and she did, too—without knowing it—old Mother Barrett. It's kind of queer she should have said that; kind of queer." The Hawk pulled the drawer of the desk open, and nodded as he found and took out the messenger's revolver. "Thought he'd have one, and that it would most likely be here," he muttered.

He crossed the car, and listened in-

tently at the open side door. There was no sound—nothing, for instance, coming from Bradley yet. He closed the door, and stood for an instant looking down at the boy's form on the floor.

"I guess I can fix it for you, kid, maybe," he said simply. "I guess I can."

In rapid succession he fired five of the seven shots from the revolver; then, stooping, laid the weapon, as though it had dropped at last from nerveless fingers, just beside the boy's outstretched hand. He straightened up, stepped to the side door, and slid it open again.

"It'll let the smoke out before anybody gets here," said the Hawk. "The Butcher isn't coming forward with any testimony, and with all those shots fired

at the time of the holdup who's to know the boy didn't fight till he went down and out? And now I guess I'll make my own get-away!" He dropped to the trackside, and started forward at a brisk pace. "I'll keep on a bit until I hear something coming," he decided. "Then I'll lay low while they're cleaning up the line, and wait till I can hop a freight, east or west, that will get me out of this particular locality. After that, there's nothing to it!"

A hundred yards farther on the Hawk spoke again, and there was a twisted smile on the Hawk's lips.

"It'll break her heart, anyway, I guess," he said; "but it'll help some maybe to be proud of him. Yes, I guess they'll tell her that all right—that he died a game kid."

The fourth story in this series—entitled "The Lead Capsule"—will appear in the May 7th POPULAR.



STR-I-I-I-I-I-K-K-K-K-K-K-E-E-E-E-E-E

THE late Tim Hurst, one of baseball's most famous wielders of the indicator, used to say of himself:

"It's a hard life, me boys, but where can ye beat thim hours?"

Not so long ago a youngster broke into the National League. He was ambitious. He had read everything in the history of the game, and particularly had he followed the careers of "Hank" O'Day, Billy Evans, "Silk" O'Loughlin, and other well-known judges of play. He was assigned to be a mate to Rigler, one of the National's veteran umpires.

The first day he got by without even a kick from John McGraw, whose Giants formed one end of the exhibition. That night the recruit felt pretty proud of himself, and he proceeded to imbibe freely and unwisely. He returned to the hotel looking for compliments from the older man. Instead, he got criticism.

Rigler ended up his talk with:

"You got by out there because you were lucky. The Giants won. Let me tell you something, though. Get a distinctive motion, or yell so the spectators will understand your decisions."

Then Rigler went to bed.

Two hours afterward, or, to speak precisely, at two o'clock in the morning, Rigler was awakened from a sound sleep. His charge was standing by the open window, looking out onto the court, and bawling at the top of his voice:

"Str-i-i-i-i-k-k-k-k-e-e-e! Str-i-i-i-i-k-k-k-k-e-e-e!"

"I have been umpiring for more years than I care to recall, and that was the first, last, and only time I was ever fired out of a hotel," declares Rigler.

“One Moment, Please”

By Max Rittenberg

Middle-aged schoolboys in a financial game, with a much-desired toast for the cleverest pirate among them

CLASS of ninety-six,” declaimed Marvin, standing by his toast-master’s seat at the center of the big oval banqueting table, “we are proud of one another! We have all made good. You remember, at our first meeting, how we all declared that before we were forty we would be pulling down our fifty thousand dollars a year? Many of us have far exceeded that modest estimate, and to-night, gathered here around this festive board

“One moment,” piped McCloskie. “One moment, please!” He merely held a lectureship in social economics at a bush university, at a stipend equivalent to pocket money among this gathering of financial and mercantile notables.

“Prof. has the floor,” conceded Marvin indulgently.

The diners rattled their spoons noisily against their fruit plates. Now that the waiters had departed and they had the private banqueting room to themselves, these men of forty felt and behaved like so many schoolboys.

“Gentlemen,” piped McCloskie in that reed voice of his, and that Oxford accent so easily ridiculed by his students, “I wish first to propose a toast—to—er—the cleverest pirate among us.”

“Name! Name!” laughed the gathering. “Good for you, Prof. ‘At-a-boy! Give him a name!”

“That is my difficulty, gentlemen,” continued the professor. “Among so many great successes in finance and commerce, how shall I choose the one to be toasted? But I have a test to propose. A little game, so to speak.”

Spoons and cups rattled appreciatively. Here was something out of the routine of set banquets. These schoolboys of forty were eager for any novelty.

“I suggest that we each stake the sum of a hundred dollars. That would mean”—he looked around and counted up rapidly—“two thousand dollars altogether for what my young students would term—er—the kitty. Not a large booty, but still worth piratical attention. We will then line ourselves against the wall of the room, extinguish the lights, and go for the money. The one who succeeds in annexing the largest portion and getting outside the room with it, him we will adjudge the cleverest financier of the class of ninety-six, and toast accordingly. Gentlemen, do you approve my test?”

They roared good-humored approval of his nerve in framing such an ironical test of financial ability. In sober daytime they would have frowned at it or presented the frozen face, but to-night, flushed, celebrating, among friends only—

Marvin, of the Rector Trust Company, put in a thoughtful caveat. “Will that prove your point? The fellow that’s snappiest in a rough-and-tumble will annex the cash. He need not be the cleverest.”

Orchardson, munitions, fleshly and out of physical condition, did not back up the protest, as might have been expected, but supported the professor with a burbling laugh: “You haven’t got onto the game, Marvin. Prof. doesn’t elect the man who grabs the money, but the one who *gets outside* with it. Me for holding a door!”

"Besides," smiled little Weissman, who passed half of his waking life in close proximity to a ticker tape, "we shall combine. We shall form our pools."

The possibilities in the idea caught the fancy of all these middle-aged schoolboys. The race need not be to the swiftest or the strongest. Wits ought to win. They began to rise from the table and whisper in clusters, endeavoring to form alliances and blue print their plans of campaign.

Meanwhile McCloskie took up a fruit bowl and went round from man to man, gathering in the stakes in tens, twenties, fifties, and hundreds.

"Watch him or he'll skip out of the room with it!" boomed Orchardson, with his big, burbling laugh.

"Trust me to see to that," answered a hard-bit mining engineer who bore his years lightly.

"No, that would be against the rules of high finance," piped McCloskie. "We must not do our pirating so brazenly. No one is to leave the room before the lights are extinguished."

He completed his collection, and placed the overflowing bowl of yellow-backs in the center of the table. Then a thought struck him, and he frowned and clicked his tongue irritably, just as he did over his students' blunders.

"We shall not be able to identify all this pile of bills and prove who is the winner. Will anybody change them for two thousand-dollar notes?"

There was a perfunctory searching of pockets, but men of commercial standing and wordly-wise prudence do not carry thousand-dollar bills about with them to festive banquets in New York. They leave that brand of ostentation to roisterers from the rural districts. McCloskie ought to have known it, had he been a student of human nature rather than a professor of highly theoretical social economics.

"In New York we carry checks," commented little Weissman, with his knowing smile.

"Will some one give a check for the pile?" inquired McCloskie.

There was an instant response. Eight

men, thinking on similar lines, flourished blank checks at him.

Orchardson exploded with noisy laughter. "That game won't catch me! Nothing but a certified check will take the place of my good money."

The profferers, found out in their scheming, joined in the general laugh, and melted back into their several groups of alliance.

"What is the best to do?" frowned McCloskie as this flaw in his plan deepened.

Marvin, man of decision, pressed the electric bell for a waiter. "Change them in the hotel. And the waiter can clear the table as well."

Presently they had a bare table with only a fruit bowl on it, and in that bowl two smoothly new thousand-dollar bills.

Marvin, accustomed to the fifty-one per cent which gives control in stock operations, tossed in a dollar bill. "So that some one can grab a majority vote," he explained dryly.

Delighted approval. The game was now set—an epitome in miniature of the game which so many of these men played in their business lives. Two thousand dollars in the pool, and the man who could get his hands on one thousand and one dollars of it, and carry it out of the room, would prove his right to the professor's toast.

"Line up against the wall!" boomed Orchardson.

"One moment," interjected the professor. "I think my first thought was right. The bills might get torn to pieces. We ought to have a token instead of actual money in the—er—kitty. Suppose one of us were to give his I O U—for that two thousand and one dollars? I suggest—er—Marvin."

Marvin looked around for agreement, found it nodded to him, and wrote out his paper promise. Gathering up the notes, he stowed them very safely away.

They moved to the walls of the room, and stood in runner's positions, with one hand touching the wall behind.

It was a large room, overdecorated according to the fashion of New York hotels catering to revelers, with two

central doors. Orchardson and his followers gathered themselves about one door; Weissman and his pool protected the second. Marvin took up an apparently chance position against a side wall, and the professor stationed himself by the electric-light switch.

Click! Blackness.

Instant schoolboy yells. Sounds of wild scurrying.

"At 'em, boys! Tackle 'em low! Throw 'em in the discard!" boomed the voice of Orchardson from his strategic post by the door.

"Sweep the bowl off! Eight-fifteen-two!" yelled Weissman to his followers.

"That isn't the bowl, it's my stomach!"

"It's empty. Some one's got the paper!"

"Hold the doors!"

Sounds of scrapping near Orchardson's guard post. A wild rush to the other door.

"A thousand dollars if you let me get out!"

"Nothing doing!"

Then a groan. "Oh, my God, I'm hurt!"

"What's the matter?"

"Some one kicked me. Turn the lights up!" It was Marvin's voice, imperative.

The professor clicked on the lights. Marvin was indeed lying crumpled on the floor. He twisted in agony, his hands pressed about his groin, his face white.

"Put me on the couch, and phone for the doctor."

There was no couch in the room.

"We had better carry him into the lobby," suggested the professor. Sobered at this unfortunate outcome of their joke, the diners gathered up Marvin and bore him carefully out of the room into the adjoining lobby.

"I'll have them phone for a doctor," said McCloskie, and sped away.

When he returned it was to find Marvin sitting up and chuckling delightedly over the success of his ruse.

"Boys, I've won! Here's the notes, and here's the I O U. I've got 'em

both. Come back to the room and toast me!"

"How'd you pull your grab?" asked Orchardson as they filed back to the banqueting room.

"I never grab," explained Marvin. "I stayed quiet. I merely picked out the fastest-looking man in the bunch"—he patted the shoulder of the hard-bit mining engineer who bore his years so lightly—"and promised him five thousand dollars if he could fetch me the I O U out of the bowl. That's the principle of my success. Pick out the right man for the job, and pay him well. Getting the paper was easy, but *getting away with it*, getting it outside the room, boys, that needed financial genius!"

He resumed his toastmaster's seat, and rang for the waiter to reset the glasses.

"Class of ninety-six," he declaimed, "I am asked to propose a toast to myself, and unusual though the procedure may be——"

"One moment," piped McCloskie.

"One moment, please!"

"Prof. has the floor," conceded Marvin indulgently.

"It is a principle of economics," expounded the professor, "that paper tokens take their value from the gold standard which lies behind them."

"We all know that."

"The I O U is really valueless. The two thousand-dollar bills are also valueless."

"Rubbish, man!"

"No, fact. They are—er—what my young students would term phony notes, which I had previously placed in the hands of the waiter for this very purpose. I reckoned that they would be called for in the progress of the game. The only real money is here"—he displayed a roughly bunched pile of the contributed yellowbacks—"and I think you will admit, gentlemen, that *I*, in the popular phrase, got away with it."

A moment of silent astonishment.

"Yes, an epitome of how to succeed in high finance—if one cares to tread the path. Do I not deserve the toast?"

The Machine-Gun Man

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "The Forgotten Land," "Slowdown," Etc.

An Eastern tenderfoot, who wrote yarns and hardly knew one end of a cayuse from the other, invades Mexico with a typewriter. He wrote well, but, as it happened, his reputation was made on a machine gun, not a typewriter

BANTLEY came to the border town of San Felice bringing a suit case, a small, compact typewriter, and a New England conscience. Down on the border he found a use for the suit case and the typewriter. He had read much about brigandage on that same border. He knew that the newspaper versions of conditions were exaggerated. He would see for himself—and then write *the* story.

From Alberto Pacheco he rented a solitary, thick-walled adobe house at the extreme southern boundary of the town. From the walled roof of his hermitage he could view the Mexican desert for many level miles.

The few Americans in San Felice did not interest him, as he didn't smoke or drink and he was almost a stranger to profanity. His needs were as simple as his equipment implied. He cooked his own meals, carried firewood and water, and bargained for provender in a kind of stringhalt Mexican, the limp in his hybrid conversation being assisted over the rough spots by that sturdy old crutch, the sign language. He drifted about town accumulating local color and registering smells. He sketched in these bits of color as a background for his story—and tried to forget the smells. Despite his diligence, the soul of the story—the theme—eluded him.

There was a girl in San Felice; an American girl, who was all that could be desired in the way of a heroine. She

was the daughter of Bob Davis, cattleman and despiser of greasers. But she was more than that; she was golden-haired, blue-eyed, warm-hued, and rode an amazing pinto pony that never seemed to have more than one foot on the ground at a time. Bantley had already sketched her in, with a desert background of gray-green chaparral and blue spaces that made a really effective picture, but a picture without action. Then came the inevitable interruption.

The interruption was welcome, because Hamilton Rindge was first an American, secondly he had been a classmate of Bantley's some not too many years ago. Hamilton was alliteratively huge, wholesome, and hearty. He wore a flannel shirt and Stetson as though erstwhile and ever entitled to do so. And he wore tailored whipcord riding breeches "as though born to the pants," as Bantley told him. Hamilton laughed, recalling amusing incidents of their school life, and moved himself and his few effects into the thick-walled adobe with gusto, later recounting mild adventure by land and sea—having journeyed coastwise from New York to the Gulf—while Bantley rearranged his own modest equipment that his big friend might be comfortable.

The first glad tumult of meeting having subsided, Bantley informed his friend that his working hours were from nine to twelve in the morning and from two until four in the afternoon. This, he asserted, would give Hamilton

plenty of time to take in the local landscape without interruption.

Hamilton smiled, laid aside his coat, and unbuckled a heavy belt which he hung on a chair back.

"Goodness, Ham! Did you carry that thing all the way from New York?"

"Assuredly, son! Why not?"

"Well, I consider firearms dangerous."

"How about typewriters, Banty?"

"Well, in competent hands——"

"Exactly! Now I'll hop along and see things. When do we eat?"

"At fifteen minutes to six. I have made it a rule——"

"From infancy, eh? Same here. So long, old stocking! See you later."

Bantley sighed, sat down, and struck a key, but the machine did not respond easily. The tang of life had evaporated with the going of his breezy friend. After a period of slow tickings and erasings, he sat back and lazily watched an alert lizard whisk back and forth through the doorway. He came to himself with a start and conned the written page before him. The heroine was just bidding adieu to the hero. "Farewell, if you must go, Richard; but remember, Manuel is not to be trusted!" To which the printed hero, doffing his broad sombrero, had replied via the stubborn typewriter: "So long, old stocking!"

Bantley rubbed his ear and carefully erased the hero's sprightly farewell, substituting something less boisterous and literally more masculine.

With the coming of Hamilton Rindge, Bantley sniffed romance from afar. Things would now shape themselves to a satisfactory conclusion of the hesitant story. And he was unwittingly prophetic. Things shaped themselves to a conclusion, but whether satisfactory to all concerned with the story is still a matter of sore doubt to certain Mexicans along the wrong side of the border who lived to tell of the mad gringo of the lone adobe on the San Felice Road. And there were other Mexicans whose doubts never matured to speech—at least on this side of the Great Divide—which was just as well

for Bantley and his romance. The oratory of a machine gun is compelling, indisputable.

Bantley blinkingly observed Hamilton Rindge's love-making. It became robustly evident that Ham would have to be the hero of the border romance seeping through Bantley's typewriter. Bantley would have sketched himself in as the hero, but physique, diffidence, and eyeglasses forbade. To be sure, he could have eliminated the glasses, but even then he would not have measured up to his own ideal of a live American hero. So Hamilton was sketched in unselfishly, almost literally, although Bantley did reduce his friend's chest measurement a few inches, so to speak, for Ham was without doubt the least bit "chesty" and Bantley was a modest man.

Rindge became acquainted with the girl. He purchased a half-educated and somewhat egotistical saddle horse of her father. Davis, shaped to the saddle and judging men primarily through their horsemanship, admitted that the young Easterner could ride. He told his daughter that if Rindge could stay with that bronc long enough to get the saddle warm, he would take off his hat to him. Hamilton Rindge "stayed with that bronc" through main strength and grit. Davis took off his hat to him, incidentally inviting him to "light down and rest his saddle while Lolita cooked the supper."

Rindge accepted the invitation. And later, while Rindge and the girl rode the mesa trails, Bantley rode herd on his typewriter with fair success. He had plotted an invasion of American territory by the Mexican bandits—a mere skirmish, just to give color and supply action—and a swift, spectacular rescue of Lolita by a Hamiltonesque caballero, and then—little, shriveled Alberto Pacheco, straw sombrero in hand, poked his head through the doorway of Bantley's adobe. He had come to collect a little rent in advance. Provisions were high. The señor had a big heart. A few pesos. Bantley proffered a chair, and the little old Mexican sidled to it and sat down on its edge. There was

another matter—and Alberto's voice became hoarse with whisperings. For the love which Alberto and his *mujer* bore the señor who made books, he would divulge a terrible secret. A cousin had ridden in that very day from across the border, bringing word that San Felice was to be invaded, sacked—burned to the ground! The attack would be within the week. The cousin thought on a saint's day—the fourteenth.

Bantley asked questions. Alberto shrugged his humped shoulders like one who would shake off rain that could not be avoided. Señora Pacheco had insisted that the Americano be told at once. The Americano was a good man, prompt in paying his rent and courteous to Mexicans. As for the other gringos of San Felice—again Alberto shrugged his shoulders expressively. Their fate lay in Bantley's hands.

Bantley thanked the Mexican, who straightway departed.

The rancher, Davis, laughed when Bantley told him breathlessly of the threatened attack. "Why, they don't dare try it," asserted Davis. "There's too much flat, open country between us and them hills." And he pointed toward the south.

Hamilton Rindge, in the seclusion of their home that night, admitted the possibility of an attack, but made light of the source of information. "Old Alberto has bad dreams, so Davis tells me. Davis says that Alberto swapped his yarn for the pesos you gave him—probably to ease his conscience, if he has any—for every one here knows that the Pacheco outfit live off your rent. Why, Davis says that San Felice is immune because it isn't worth shooting up. There's no plunder here. He tells me that old Alberto has warned him six or seven times of an invasion. Alberto has the habit. And, by the way, Banty, Miss Davis invites you to chuck to-morrow night."

Bantley accepted the invitation. At a distance his heroine was attractive enough. At short range she was irresistible. Bantley bloomed to speech in the warmth of her smile, amusing her

with bits of unexpected humor, flattering her with an occasional glance of admiration, and withal evincing a sincere, quiet homage so unconsciously that Lolita asked him to come again and named the evening.

The following day, much to the surprise of both Rindge and Bantley, there came a written invitation asking Bantley to supper, but making no mention of Rindge. Hamilton chaffed his friend good-naturedly, declaring that it was Bantley's turn to bask in the sunshine of Lolita's gracious presence. Bantley spent some time before his small hand glass, and with sudden vehemence asked Rindge to lend him his Stetson. He would have asked for the pony, only it was pastured at the Davis rancho. Bantley determined to make the most of the occasion—which he did.

Lolita greeted him with a hearty welcome. And "Why don't you always wear a Stetson? It is becoming to you."

Bantley breathed deep. "Do you mean it? That is, are you fond of Stetsons, Miss Davis?"

Lolita laughed. "I like Mr. Rindge's hat—on you."

Bantley seized Opportunity by the curl papers. "Then I shall never wear anything else!"

Lolita laughed again. Bantley inwardly condemned what he termed his "careless construction" and wisely pulled his foot out of it noiselessly.

Their little joke brought them closer together than heretofore. After supper, Lolita made a swift flank attack on the dishes, whistling the while, and later joined Bantley and her father on the veranda. Davis talked cattle and politics for an hour, and then retired. Lolita shrugged closer to her guest. "Now, I haven't the least notion that the greasers will attack San Felice—but they might. You haven't a horse. What would you do in case they did come?"

"Well, really, Miss Davis, I hadn't thought of that. I think I should borrow a horse from your father and ride the other way."

"Alone? But you don't know the country."

"Not alone—if your father—er—and you would accompany me."

"Yes. But we might not have time. Listen, amigo: I wanted to talk with you alone. I have tried to get Ham—Mr. Ringe—to be more careful. He laughs at me. I have talked with dad. He doesn't laugh and he doesn't say anything. Promise me that you will come straight here if there is the least sign of trouble. We have horses. I am really worried. The Mexican women tell me things that they would not tell father. Two families left for the north last night."

"Indeed! I will tell Hamilton at once."

"Oh, I think Mr. Ringe is quite capable of taking care of himself. He is—well, rather masterful."

"Inferring that I—er—need looking after, Miss Davis?"

Lolita was too whole-souled to take offense at Bantley's boyish seriousness. "Don't be silly," she said, smiling. And for some reason Bantley was immediately elated. "I won't," he declared soulfully. "And I think you are the most wonderful girl—er—in San Felice, Miss Davis."

Lolita studied Bantley with half-closed eyes. Suddenly she leaned forward. "You pack a gun, of course?"

"No. Never dreamed of doing that."

"But you should! Now, to-morrow—"

Down the dim road past the rancho drifted an interruption in the shape of a string of pack mules, headed south. Lolita sat forward, finger on lips. "Gun runners!" she whispered.

"Great!" exclaimed Bantley. "The real thing!"

From gun runners their talk drifted to other and less warlike subjects. What they said to each other in the dim light of the southern stars had nothing in common with the high cost of loving, nor with Roman architecture. Bantley departed buoyantly.

When he neared the adobe he was startled by a shadowy something moving along the broken-down corral. He

strode to the corral and discovered a huge pack mule browsing along the twisted cedar fence. Bantley thought of Lolita's exclamation. One of the pack animals had strayed. Some one would come for it, and soon. He decided to investigate, approaching the animal, which seemed too tired and hungry to resent his fumbling with the pack rope. Unfamiliar with packs, Bantley had recourse to his knife. The mule, freed from its burden, swung away and disappeared in the darkness. Bantley lugged the two heavy packs into the old adobe stable, covered them with brushwood, and strode to the house. Ringe was asleep, nodding above an open book. Bantley roused him and told of the mule and the packs. Ringe grinned sleepily and made off to bed.

Next morning Ringe was astir early, made coffee, and departed to ride the mesas. He left a note for Bantley which was succinct. "My turn," it read. Bantley thought of Ringe's pony pastured on the Davis rancho, and he sighed. Still, last evening had been pleasant, decidedly pleasant.

Late that night Ringe returned. He seemed unusually subdued, silent, until Bantley invited him to climb to the roof of the adobe.

"More bad dreams, Banty?"

"Yep. Regular nightmare this time. Come on up!"

Ringe rubbed his eyes as he stood on the low, walled roof. In the light of the lantern he saw a shimmering blue something mounted on a tripod, and across the thing ran a white belt studded with cylinders of glowing brass. "Great Cæsar! Where in hop did you capture that? It's a machine gun!"

"Correct, Ham; it is. It is a Ringe Automatic—so the directions say. I had some difficulty in putting the thing together, although it was oiled and the directions were simple enough. Then I studied the operation of the thing and that belt affair with the cartridges works beautifully—just as smoothly as a cream separator, when one gets the hang of it. I——"

"You didn't turn it loose?"

"Just twice—to see how it worked. Bullets struck about a half mile out there. Kicked up the dust lively. Made a racket, but it's down behind this wall and no one seemed to notice."

"But what's the idea?"

"Simply this: In case of an attack—Alberto said it might be pulled off the fourteenth——"

Rindge laughed. "Why, to-day is the fourteenth, old man! That's about all these yarns amount to."

"That's right! I was so interested in getting the thing organized that I forgot the date. But, sec! I can command all the open country for miles south of town. And a child could operate the gun. Here are the ranges—one hundred to four thousand yards. One could approximate the distance of an enemy, you know. What do you think of it?"

"Why, it's all right, Banty—but it is a joke. You are some little tarantula when you really get going. A machine gun, and stolen at that!"

"Beg pardon, Ham—confiscated. This gun was made in America and it ought to be used in America. I have some feeling about that. We make and sell arms and ammunition to the Mexicans and they use our inventions to murder us."

Hamilton Rindge smiled. "Perhaps you didn't notice that it is a Rindge Automatic. The governor is the big stockholder in the concern that makes it. And we sold a thousand of 'em to the Mexicans last year."

Bantley's blue eyes hardened. "That's not your fault, Ham. But it is an outrage! The man who sells arms to the Mexicans is a murderer!"

"Oh, come, Banty—that's putting it pretty strong. It's all in the game. We aren't supposed to know what the Cholas do with the rifles and stuff we sell them. That's not our business; our business is to *sell*."

Bantley bit his lip. "I can't help it, Hamilton. And, by the way, I noticed that you weren't interested when I told you about that pack mule last night. Perhaps you came down here to see that the Rindge Automatics got across

the border without interference? I'd hate to think that."

"You come close to the mark, old man. I came down here to collect. I'm no gun runner. The Mexicans can take that risk, and I take the dineros."

"Well, if that is all this means to you, Ham—why, I want to tell you straight that it means a whole lot more to me."

"You really mean it?"

"Every word!"

Rindge turned and climbed down the ladder. Bantley followed, lantern dangling in one hand. In the adobe Rindge moved about, whistling and packing his effects. Bantley watched him silently. Rindge strapped up a suit case and stooped to pick up another. "Better wait till morning, Ham." And Bantley smiled.

Rindge shrugged his shoulders.

"See here, Ham. You aren't sore because I called on Miss Davis the other night?"

Rindge glared for a moment at Bantley and then laughed. Bantley's smile faded, for the laugh told all too plainly what Rindge thought of his companion as a rival.

Bantley followed him to the doorway. "Sorry that you can't see it my way," he said in farewell.

"I'll send for the rest of my things to-morrow," said Rindge.

Alone in the adobe, Bantley awoke next morning with an unpleasant premonition that something was about to happen. His friend Hamilton was gone—but it was not that. They had disagreed in a quiet way. Evidently Rindge looked upon Bantley's warlike preparations as a huge joke. And Rindge was taking money from Mexicans across the border for arms and ammunition. Well, the threatened attack was a false alarm. Bantley had breakfast and turned to his story.

Toward noon he became drowsy. The day was biting hot. He stretched and strolled to the doorway. Then he thought of the machine gun up on the roof in the burning sun. He wondered if the heat would explode the cartridges in the box beside the gun. Dragging a

blanket after him, he climbed the ladder and laid the blanket over gun and box. About to descend, he caught a glimpse of a cloud of dust on the southern horizon. He descended and secured his field glasses. Again on the roof, he focused the prisms and saw through them a tiny band of horsemen spurring toward San Felice. He knew there were no cattle south of the town. The riders swung on, now distinct, now blurred by the dust cloud. The riders swung toward the west, then back again. This caused Bentley to sweep the mesa with his glass. Suddenly his ruddy face went pale. A scant half mile ahead of the band rode a man and woman, spurring desperately. An occasional puff of thin smoke, almost invisible, spurted from the pursuers. "It's Hamilton—and Miss Davis!" he gasped.

Whipping the blanket from the gun, he tried to signal the fugitives to ride to one side. Frantically he waved the blanket. Rindge must have seen, for he suddenly swung to the right, crowding the girl's horse with him.

Bantley squatted, sighting along the shimmering barrel. Tiny figures bobbed up and down beyond the front sight. He estimated the distance, drew in his breath, offered a prayer, and, depressing the gun as the riders drew nearer, began to press the trigger.

Spurts of dust flickered in front of the pursuers. Bantley elevated the muzzle a hair and kept on pressing the trigger. The riders were now within a half mile of the adobe. Suddenly a horse reared and fell backward. Then another horse galloped off to one side, saddle empty. The riders had swung to the right, following the man and the girl. Bantley swung the gun round and took them at an angle. A horse lunged and turned completely over. He pressed the trigger again, but the gun did not respond.

With shaking hands he refilled the belt and ran it back. At closer range the hail of slugs ate into the horsemen, tearing a ragged hole through the troop. The man and the girl had had time to gain a little. Bantley could now clearly distinguish Lolita Davis on her pinto

pony and Rindge on the big sorrel. Rindge was bent forward, holding to the horn.

Then, in the lull, as Bantley gazed, the attacking troop began to fire. Bantley turned and saw the townsfolk scurrying from adobe to adobe, lugging packs of household things, or standing in the streets wringing their hands and shrieking. Bullets began to tear up streaks in the road near the adobe. Down below, a windowpane tinkled. A man, running toward Bantley's house, doubled up and lay in a black heap in the road. Rindge and the girl were riding for the Davis rancho. Bantley turned and depressed the gun. He saw Davis run out and mount a horse. He held the rope of a led horse, and the three riders spurred toward Bantley's improvised fortress.

Bantley began to press the trigger again. It seemed murderously easy to wither the oncoming horsemen. They lunged from the saddle or wilted and dragged. Horses, riderless, broke from the band and tore across the levels. Bantley saw that he was overshooting and closed the rear sight, taking point-blank aim. Just then a voice hailed him from below. For an instant he had forgotten Davis. Bantley ran to the edge of the roof. "Got a horse for you!" called Davis. "Come on!"

"Thanks. But I'll stay. If you get through, just write to my folks—Cambridge—stuck it out—matter of principle—American manufacturers ought to see this—good-by!" And he ran back to the gun and dragged it to the west side of the roof. The disorganized horsemen had reformed. Bantley shot a spray of lead among them, melting them to scattered groups again. He was startled to feel a hand on his shoulder.

"I told Lolita and Rindge to ride for it," said Davis. "Rindge took the bet; but my girl—why, she just led Apache through your big doorway and barricaded herself. She's down there, listening to the music."

Bantley nodded, still pressing the trigger. Davis squatted and crawled to the roof wall. A sting of adobe

spattered in his face. He ducked and wiped his eyes. Bantley, moving to get an angle on the raiders, suddenly spun round and sat down. His face went blank and he coughed almost apologetically, as though to cover his seemingly strange behavior. Slowly he got to his feet and knelt behind the gun again, but his right arm hung dangling like the grotesque arm of a motionless marionette. Davis crawled to him. "Did they get you bad?"

"I don't know. Arm feels funny, but my head is clear yet."

Davis crawled back to the wall as Bantley worked the gun with his left hand. The raiders were in the street now, attempting to charge past that withering storm of slugs. A bullet scattered dust on Davis' sombrero, but before he ducked his six-gun leaped and barked. A rider flung wide arms and rocked from the saddle.

Bantley, white and rigid, knelt behind the stuttering automatic, sweeping the road as bunch after bunch of horsemen attempted to spur past and enter the town. A final trill of explosions, a horrible maelstrom of plunging horses and writhing shapes—and the gun became silent.

"Belt's empty again." And Bantley's voice sounded almost musical.

Davis refilled the belt, working silently. So this was the Eastern tenderfoot, who wrote yarns and hardly knew one end of a cayuse from the other! Working that almost red-hot gun with his left hand and biting his lip till it bled to hold himself together; raking the roadway with a hail of slugs that tore men from their saddles and plunged horses into the brush-lined ditches in heaps!

The rancher wondered as he saw two

tears slowly form and trickle down Bantley's white cheeks. Bantley bit his lip harder and pressed the trigger with quick regularity. "It's the horses!" he sobbed. "I always loved horses. But the men—I don't care a damn about them."

Again the rancher wondered, lying belly down on the roof, neck crooked that he might watch these two machines fighting for the lives of San Felice and for a flag that floated somewhere in the East—perchance near a factory where they made machine guns.

Presently Bantley sat back and brushed his arm across his forehead. "They have slowed up. Could you get some water?"

"Sure thing, pardner! If I have to shoot my way to it! Just you wait a spell."

Bantley waited, chewing his finger nails. Davis climbed down the ladder to reappear with a bucket. Bantley waved him away as he proffered the water. "Pour it on the gun. She's getting too hot to function." And then he fainted.

Davis carried him to the room below.

The streets were emptied of riders. The machine gun had ceased to chatter. Bantley lay dreaming strange dreams in the old adobe on the San Felice Road. When he came to himself, an army surgeon was bending over him. San Felice was safe.

He is down on the border now, doing newspaper work for the syndicate. Although a civilian, he is known among the troopers as "The Machine-gun Man."

His right arm and hand are almost useless, so Mrs. Bantley, née Lolita Davis, types his manuscripts for him.

H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON, one of the greatest living writers of adventure fiction, author of "Hurricane Island" and "The Skirts of Happy Chance," will tell, in the next issue, of a multi-murder mystery that startled England. It is a four-part novel. The first part in the May 7th **POPULAR**.

Ghost-Driven

By Francis Metcalfe

Author of "The Third Phase," "The Tower of Terror," Etc.

(A Three-Part Novel—Part Three)

CHAPTER XI.

IN spite of the many indications that money was being lavishly used by the people who were endeavoring to hoodwink Lisenard Douane, Ned Riordan was surprised by the developments of the following morning. The generous reward which he had promised brought the desired results; before nine o'clock he had received the address to which Doctor Sinclair had escorted the young woman the previous evening, and he smiled grimly as he remembered the professor's comments on her luxurious existence. They had driven to one of the most fashionable and exclusive of the new apartment houses in a most select neighborhood, curiously enough the property of the Douane estate which he believed the conspirators were bent upon looting. He went up there immediately, although he strongly suspected that the girl had gone there simply as a blind. Ignorant of her name, he would ordinarily have found it difficult to obtain information concerning her, for the managers of houses of that class are extremely reticent concerning their tenants; but as a lawyer attached to Mr. Grant's office he found that austere individual courteously communicative.

He knew that the young woman could have lived there but a few months, and that, together with his assumption that she was unmarried, made the identification of "Miss Martha Fosdick," who had lived there less than half a year as the woman of mystery, seem plausible. For the first time the

manager became evasive when Riordan, tactfully concealing his intense personal interest, asked him about her.

"Mr. Riordan, the precautions which we take in leasing these apartments are sufficient to guarantee the desirability of our tenants," he said. "Our investigation of references is most rigid, but naturally we regard the information which we receive as confidential. In any case, I could tell you little about Miss Fosdick. It goes without saying that there is nothing which we could tell about her here; we do not discuss the affairs of our tenants. Of course, Miss Fosdick's position is above questioning; she was sent here by Mr. Douane himself, accompanied by one of his confidential employees. I am quite sure that Mr. Douane could supply you with any information you desire about the young lady. Her rent is always paid by a check on her account in his bank, and she must be a frequent guest at his house; his butler has escorted her home two or three times—after evening parties, I presume."

"Jackson?" suggested Riordan, his tone indifferent, his face imperturbable, although he was conscious that his pulse had quickened and his nerves were tingling.

The manager nodded. Ned rose abruptly from his chair.

"I'll send up my card; it is necessary for me to see Miss Fosdick on a matter of business," he said, and maintained a thoughtful silence until the hall boy returned with the announcement that Miss Fosdick would receive

him in her apartment. He was prepared for any possible hostility or defiance; for anything, in fact, except the smiling and cordial welcome which he received from an exceptionally beautiful and sweet-faced girl. She met him in a cheerful and luxuriously furnished room, extending her hand as he entered. She was tall and slender, dressed in a simple black gown. In age and appearance she answered perfectly to Mr. Grant's description of Jessica Brewster as a girl and to that ghostly counterpart of her which he had encountered in Lispenard Douane's study.

"I have often wondered if I should ever have the pleasure of meeting you, Mr. Riordan," she said, and a little flush came to her face as in his confusion he made a reply which was unintelligible. "When I saw your name on your card I was sure that you must be the grown-up 'Little Ned' of whom dear Papa Phao used to speak so often and so affectionately. Am I not right?"

"Sure—er—yes; I mean certainly!" stammered Riordan, his confusion almost painful. "Yes—er—certainly. How is the old boy—er—I hope he was well the last time you saw him?" He had hardly known what he was saying; hearing that sweet-faced, refined girl speak in terms of affection of the old man whom society regarded as one of the vilest of outcasts had obliterated what little of equanimity he retained after her unexpectedly cordial greeting.

"Oh, you do not know, then? Perhaps that is why I have not heard from you before!" she exclaimed. "I thought that you had not received my message. The poor dear passed over six months ago; so suddenly that I could not reach his bedside, and he was buried before I even knew. Do you know what I hoped when I read the name on your card; the thing which will make me inexpressibly happy if it is true?"

Riordan shook his head hopelessly, not daring to trust again to speech. She motioned to him to take a chair, and sat down facing him, her slender white hands clasped about her knees as she leaned forward.

"I thought—I hoped—that perhaps you had come to tell me that the thing he devoted his life to trying to prove, he had demonstrated positively after he passed over," she said quietly. "He always promised that he would return; he was confident that what he had learned on earth would enable him to recross that barrier which others have found impassable; that he would, at least, be able to transmit a message." She paused, as if fearing to meet disappointment, her large eyes pathetically wistful as she looked at him. "Is my hope justified, Mr. Riordan? Do you bring me a message from him?"

Ned had regained a measure of his ordinary composure. It was difficult for him to retain his suspicions of this most surprising girl, but it was just as difficult to dismiss or discredit the most convincing evidence that she was in league with a band of swindlers. He hesitated before answering, averse to saying anything which might pain her, and in that hesitation she read the shattering of her hopes, and spared him the effort of evasion.

"Just another disappointment added to the many I have experienced!" she continued, taking his denial for granted. "Only this is harder to bear than any of the others; perhaps because my faith and hope were stronger. I had a curious experience last evening which convinced me that dear Papa Phao was nearer to me than ever before; that he was just at the barrier, and only prevented from crossing it because of the atmosphere of trickery and avarice which was always so repugnant to him in his earthly sojourn."

Riordan's bewilderment returned as he listened; she spoke in the jargon of spiritualists; of those on the outside of the circle; but, if human testimony could be believed, she had been the apt pupil and assistant of the shrewdest and most skillful trickster of the inner ring. His doubts and uncertainties were irritating and confusing, and he made an effort to dissipate them with a direct question.

"Miss Fosdick, are you a spiritualist, a believer?" he asked abruptly.

"That's a difficult question to answer with a simple yes or no," she said earnestly. "Of course, you know that none of the tricks and devices employed by the ordinary mediums are mysteries to me—any more than they are to you; but no one could have been the close associate and devoted assistant of dear Papa Phao in his search for 'The Great Truth' without being more or less influenced by his sublime and implicit faith, and in that sense I suppose that I am a spiritualist. I am at least open to conviction and perhaps more than that, for I wish to be convinced."

"But Phao Trott was the worst trickster of the lot!" protested Riordan. "Remember that I knew all about it; that I helped——"

"The best; not the worst," she interrupted. "Of course, I know what you would imply, but Papa Phao was an experimenter, an investigator, and he never employed trickery with evil purpose or design. He was working on a certain theory to demonstrate the truth of his belief; he believed that through simulating as closely as human ingenuity could contrive it the conditions which would enable a spirit to materialize in earthly form he could make it easier. You have helped him in those false materializations, and you know that they were not employed to his own profit or to the harm of those whom he deluded. That I, too, know and it was that knowledge which made me willing and eager to assist him. I did become very expert at it, so expert that I have seen many people leave the séances comforted and happy in the delusions which his ingenuity and my skill had fostered. Nothing could have convinced them that they had not been in close communion with their departed, and in that communion they had found happiness, for Papa Phao was too gentle and kindly to give pain. It was trickery, yes; but not the fraud practiced purely for their own profit by the miserable brotherhood of petty swindlers who pose as mediums and batten on the credulity of their dupes."

She spoke with the earnestness and fervor born of conviction; but, watch-

ing her intently, Riordan determined that conviction had come through an appeal to her emotions and affection; not through reasoning. He realized instinctively that the girl was absolutely sincere. He had not the slightest doubt that she was the daughter of Lispenard Douane and Jessica Brewster, and he found her a more puzzling enigma than her mother had been to Mr. Grant twenty years before. He looked significantly about the expensively furnished apartment, and indicated it with a sweep of his hand.

"Still, these surroundings suggest that Phao did not find his trickery altogether unremunerative," he said. "In the old days——"

"Just a moment, Mr. Riordan!" she interrupted, and the suggestion of a frown came to her brows. "This is not an evidence of fraud perpetrated, but of fraud prevented. I am glad to have the opportunity to explain to you, to tell you who were his friend that after a lifetime of self-denial and poverty—for we were always poor, although never in actual want—dear Papa Phao knew a few days of that independence and comfort which money brings, and, what must have meant far more of happiness to him, he knew when that sudden summons came he was not leaving me in want." For the first time Riordan felt absolutely sure of the girl, and she quickly read the confidence and sympathy in his face. To it she made instant and sympathetic response; a smile came to her lips, and there was friendliness instead of defiance in her tone as she continued:

"That is the thing which brings me the greatest happiness in it, for I do love this luxury and comfort; the knowledge that it must have made his passing easy. And I contributed to it, too, although I am not at liberty to tell you about it all yet. And, best of all, just as you might expect of dear Papa Phao, the good fortune came through helping others, through bringing peace and comfort to a lonely and heartsick man and gaining his support for others, old friends whom Phao had not seen for years. Oh, it is a wonder-

ful story, and some day I may tell it to you, if——” She paused abruptly, and a flush of embarrassment came to her face.

“But, Mr. Riordan, I owe you an apology!” she exclaimed contritely. “I must be intruding upon your time and good nature. Is this just a friendly call, or did you come to see me on business?”

“Don’t let that worry you, Miss Fosdick, and I want you to believe that it is the friendliest sort of a call,” protested Riordan eagerly. “I can’t tell you how interested I am; I wish that you would tell it all to me right now.”

“I am sorry; but it isn’t all my secret, and it must be a secret for a little while, for something even better is going to happen,” she answered. “Why, things are happening all the time, and do you know that I have an indescribable feeling that even in the spirit world dear Papa Phao is interested with us in it all? I have the sensation that he is always protecting and helping me. Would it interest you to hear about my experience last night—the experience which raised such false hopes when I recognized your name on the card?”

Riordan nodded his assent; he did not dare open his lips for fear of letting a whoop of victory escape between them.

“I believed that I was on an errand of mercy, rescuing a poor old man from the clutches of a precious pair of swindlers who would have stripped him to the bone,” she continued. “My friends had discovered his danger, but he was so thoroughly under their influence that it would have been useless to warn him in the ordinary way; so they determined to make the very men who had duped him the agents of his salvation. The poor old fellow has been fleeced by them for months, and he thoroughly believes that the communications they palm off on him are real letters from the spirit world. My friends went to the swindlers and scared them so thoroughly that they were frightened into obedience; but they could not be trusted, and they asked me to guard

against possible treachery. They wrote a letter which also purported to come from the other side, but it was a letter of warning against the men who had duped him that was to be substituted by the swindlers themselves for the communication which they would ordinarily have given him, and I carried it there and watched the whole proceeding, for they couldn’t fool me. That part of it wouldn’t interest you, but there is something which I think will.”

“It all does; intensely!” prompted Riordan when she paused. “You know what the letter contained, of course?”

“Only in a general way—a warning, as I told you—but I did not read it; but that is unimportant,” she continued. “Of course the light was dim, but it was something about their dupe which puzzled me. He was absolutely convinced, and you know how earnest and absorbed they always become. Well, as I watched him sitting there, waiting anxiously for a spirit communication, I suddenly realized that his face was assuming a strange, distorted likeness to that of dear Papa Phao; distorted and unreal because it was distinctly avaricious—and avarice was a vice to which you know he was a stranger. But it was there, and it almost frightened me, for I believed that it was the result of his spirit making the supreme effort which he had promised to communicate with me. But if it was, he failed; that old miser would have been odious to him in life. What do you think, Mr. Riordan? Is it possible that I can be right? Is it not possible that the impulse which brought you here might have been stimulated by the effort of Papa Phao influencing you unconsciously?”

Riordan rose to his feet, and she looked wonderingly into a face which had become set and stern.

“No, not unconsciously; I came with my eyes open, and they opened a lot more from what you have told me, Miss Fosdick,” he said grimly. “It isn’t the time to think; it’s the time to act. See here, Phao Trott always trusted me. Will you?”

"Why, certainly; I do trust you, Mr. Riordan; why not?" she asked.

"Well, just remember that there will never be reason why not, no matter how much appearances may be against me, and you'll be the big winner in the end," he answered. "I've got a mighty unpleasant duty to perform, Miss Fosdick. Will you help me in it by being as brave as you know how and as trusting as you can? I'm afraid that you are going to be hurt and pained, aroused from a pleasant dream to a mighty tragic reality; but I'll do my best to give it a happy ending for you. And I'll tell you this—that everything I do and ask you to do will contribute to the happiness of Phao Trott in whatever heaven or hell he happens to be."

She shuddered and drew back from him, but there was nothing but kindness in the blue eyes which met hers so frankly, and the sudden realization that for many a day there had been a suggestion of furtiveness in other eyes she had met strengthened the trust she had first given him instinctively.

And watching her, noting every change in her expressive face, Ned Riordan for the first time understood thoroughly just what Mr. Grant had tried to convey in his description of Jessica Brewster. The girl was perfectly self-possessed, entirely mistress of herself; she had the poise of an experienced woman of the world, but she had sacrificed none of the simplicity of girlhood. In fact, it was with almost the trustfulness of a confiding child that she held out her hand to him.

"Mr. Riordan, I've known you only a matter of minutes, but I've known of 'little Ned' ever since I can remember," she said quietly. "I am just beginning to realize that I have lived the strangest sort of a life; it is only comparatively recently that I have known anything else and have been able to make comparisons. Even under Papa Phao's kindly but close guardianship I sometimes had misgivings; since his death they have grown stronger. It is difficult for me to tell you just what I mean, but those misgivings have subtly increased until they have almost

grown to distrust. I felt, when you came into this room, that you had brought with you something which I have missed since I lost Papa Phao's protection; that your presence banished something unpleasant from which that protection had always shielded me. You have asked two things of me. The first I have given you; of the second, my bravery, you need have no misgivings; I have never known the meaning of fear. Now what is it that you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to come with me—at once and without letting any one know of it," answered Riordan quickly. "You'll have to take it all on trust; but, believe me, I am acting for your protection—and you need it. How soon can you be ready?"

"I am ready now," she answered without a moment's hesitation. "My wraps are in the hallway. Come!"

An hour later the warden greeted him warmly in his office at Sing Sing and glanced inquiringly at the closely veiled woman who accompanied him. Riordan presented him.

"I'm extremely pleased to meet you; I shall be even more pleased if I am correct in my guess that your Christian name is Martha," said the warden as she raised her veil.

"You've guessed right the first time, and, if you don't mind, that's the only name we'll mention just now," interposed Riordan before she could answer. "What's up, warden? How's your patient?"

"I've been trying to get you on the phone for the last hour to tell you about him," answered the warden gravely. "He's pretty weak, but he seems to have experienced a change of heart. I'm not sure that he is entirely rational, but he has been calling for you and demanding that you bring 'Martha' to him. His other visitor anticipated you; he was here an hour ago. I turned down his request to see him, and he went off in a huff to get a court order to see his client. I'll make an exception in your case; you have brought this young lady as a visitor, too?"

Without question or protest, almost

automatically, the girl accompanied them through the gloomy corridors to the prison hospital. The warden indicated a closed door, and tactfully, but with very evident reluctance, turned back. Riordan's hand on his arm restrained him.

"Please come in with us," he said quietly. "Martha, you are going to need all of the bravery which I asked you to show, but nothing will hurt you."

Together they entered the room, and Riordan softly closed the door. Stretched on a hospital cot, only his face visible above the white covering, lay Phao Trott, his eyes closed, his lips moving, although no sound came from them. For a moment it was only bewilderment which the girl's face expressed. In that crop-headed, smooth-shaven convict with the shadow of a bar in the small window falling across his face gray with prison pallor there was little to suggest the kindly old man who had cared for her so tenderly and whom she had mourned as dead for many months. But when those closed lids opened, and he turned his eyes toward her, that old face, seamed and lined with suffering, was suddenly transformed. Such a cry of joy as human ears are rarely privileged to hear came from his lips, and in spite of his weakness he managed to half rise in his cot.

And before he could fall back she was beside him, her strong young arms about him, her own sweet young face radiant with new-found happiness as his head found a resting place against her breast.

CHAPTER XII.

The employees in the outer office missed the morning greeting of the senior member of the firm; for, restless from his anxiety, Mr. Grant arrived at an unwontedly early hour and was at his desk before the first of them reported for duty. At his club the previous evening the spectacular rise in Phosphates Concessions had been almost the sole topic of conversation and discussion, for from the opening to the closing of the market the price had

advanced steadily, reaching par in the first hour and closing at twenty points above. Knowing his close association with Douane & Co., friends and acquaintances had besieged him with questions concerning it, and the form of some of those questions had served to increase his anxiety; for they implied the suspicion that the old firm was forgetting the traditions of conservatism and venturing into the troubled waters of frenzied finance. A direct inquiry made to Lispenard Douane had brought a curt and positive denial that either the bank or any one connected with it was in any way interested in the stock transactions and the gratuitous information that the original concessionaires had not withdrawn from their safe-deposit box the common stock which they had received in partial payment for the property.

Under ordinary conditions there would certainly be nothing discreditable to any firm in having a stock which it had marketed advance, but the conditions under which Phosphates Concessions had been floated were anything but ordinary, and this advance was certainly neither a healthy one nor justified by known facts. So far as any one knew, the dealings were purely speculative; there was no change in the market conditions of the product they expected to sell, and as yet no report had been received from the expedition which had been sent to develop the properties which were situated far from the beaten track of ocean traffic. The Fosdick Contracting Company had chartered a steamer to transport their men and materials to the two islands which lay several hundreds of miles from the coast of South America, and from the estimates made by their chief engineer whose report appeared in the original prospectus it would be at least six months before the first shipment could be made.

While awaiting the appearance of his young assistants Mr. Grant went carefully over that prospectus, looking for some possible clew which would explain the feverish speculation in the stock, but there was nothing enlighten-

ing in that prosaic array of figures. The experts' reports were entirely technical. The mining engineer, after complete surveys and borings, estimated that the supply was practically inexhaustible and easily brought to the surface. The chemist's analyses of samples gathered by himself in widely separated portions showed that the product was extremely rich and uniform. The contracting engineer's estimates proved that it could be cheaply transported to the proposed docks for shipment. On the face of those reports and the analysis of market conditions the whole thing looked like a conservative business investment, but certainly not a proposition to gamble on before production had started.

At first, as he studied it, the figures alone appealed to him. Unless they lied, the proposition was a good one. But, knowing the trickery and fraud which had been practiced to induce Lispenard Douane to promote it, he was confident that they did lie. He reflected a little grimly that the public had taken it on appearance, just as he had taken so much for granted in the other Douane affairs, and that reflection led him to examine the prospectus again and from another viewpoint—examining the substance rather than the figures in the reports, estimating the human element rather than the purely business side. The name of his own firm appeared in it; in fact, the first report bore its signature, certifying that after due investigation the concessions offered to the new company were found to be valid and in proper form. Following that came the chemist's analyses and the report of the mining engineer, and as his lips almost mechanically repeated the names signed to them there was something in the combination which stimulated his memory and imagination. Professor Witherspoon was a man of brilliant attainments whose research work had gained him an enviable position in the scientific world, and Colonel Rathbone had fairly earned his reputation as a wizard in divining the location and value of mineral wealth hidden beneath the surface of the earth.

But well known and highly esteemed as were those two names in scientific and business circles, there was something vaguely associated with them in the back of the old lawyer's mind—something which he could not at the moment exactly recall, but which he was sure was not connected with their professional activities. Neither of them had been numbered among his clients; in fact, he had never even met either of them, but he was positive that both of them had been more or less connected with some one of those curious complications which he had succeeded in settling out of court. But, try as he would, he could not recall the exact circumstances, and nothing in that array of imposing names staring at him from the tiers of black boxes served to refresh his memory. He was still puzzling over it when Spaulding entered with the announcement that Phosphates Concessions was selling two points higher at the opening of the market.

"And it's still going strong, sir," he continued. "There are a dozen different rumors circulating about the Curb; one is that a secret report has been sent back quietly by the developing expedition, a report that they have stumbled upon unsuspected mineral wealth. You know that the concessions from the Chilean and Peruvian governments are both blanket ones, covering all mineral and mining rights on the two islands?"

"Yes, I have just read that statement in the prospectus, but that rumor is absurd," answered Mr. Grant. "Douane is so anxious to demonstrate his sagacity in promoting the thing that he would have notified me immediately of such a report; he couldn't have resisted the temptation to gloat a little."

"Just a moment, sir; there is a suspicion that Lispenard Douane is not in on this. You will remember that the development was to be done on contract which was taken by the Fosdick Contracting Company. They organized that first expedition, chartered the ship, and sent their own men and materials. So far as I can discover, no officer of the Phosphates Concessions Corpora-

tion sailed with them. So it is probable that any report sent back would go to the Fosdick office, not to Douane. We were discussing yesterday the impossibility of keeping a secret in Wall Street, sir, and there was a very convincing demonstration of that this morning. Old Joel Fosdick was down there early, and as soon as he could get to his safe-deposit vault he took out a cabload of gilt-edged securities and carried them to his brokers."

"Are you speaking of Phosphates Concessions stock?" asked Mr. Grant dryly, and Spaulding smiled and shook his head.

"I haven't come to that part yet, sir," he continued. "No, those securities were mostly bonds—of the Savings Banks list, too. Fosdick is notoriously a shrewd and safe investor; he has never been known as a speculator. Now, transactions between brokers and their customers are supposed to be absolutely confidential, but there is always the possibility of a leak, and soon after Fosdick carried his pigs to market his brokers sent orders to their Curb representatives to buy Phosphates Concessions common and to keep on buying. There's no wash sale about it, sir; they are buying it as fast as it is offered. You can guess how quickly that news flew about and the conclusions which were drawn from it, especially when the wireless reports state that the *Alvarado*, the steamer chartered by the Fosdick Company, would arrive at San Francisco at daylight. This bids fair to be a record day in the stock, for with a tip like that flying about all the small fry are trying to get in. It's a queer deal, for it doesn't seem possible that an expert like Colonel Rathbone could have spent two months prospecting those islands without knowing pretty much all there was to know, but there is nothing in his report which even suggests the presence of other deposits."

"Harry, how much do you know about Rathbone?" asked Mr. Grant. "I don't mean about his professional ability; we'll concede that."

"We'll have to concede his integrity,

too, sir, I think; he is one of the few men in his profession whose reports on a property are always considered as above question," replied Spaulding. "Of course, mining is always more or less a gamble, but he has hit it right every time he has advised development. Why, his position corresponds to that of Professor Witherspoon, and more than one murder trial has been decided on his expert testimony."

Mr. Grant's smile was very grim as his eyes traveled over the names on those black boxes.

"Harry, I've learned from experience that it's dangerous to take things for granted," he said. "There's something crooked about this whole deal, and I can't understand how any man in his sober senses can be on the inside of a crooked deal unless he is crooked himself. I'm giving Douane the benefit of the doubt; he's so strongly obsessed with this spiritualistic delusion that I believe it has pulled the wool over his eyes. But I can't understand these experts being mixed up in it if they are as straight as the world believes them to be. Rathbone is clever, and he couldn't be fooled. Witherspoon's report leaves nothing to the imagination; he gathered his samples himself, so there could have been no substitution. I don't know anything about Fosdick's engineer, but the company must trust him or they wouldn't make a three-million-dollar contract on his figures and estimates. I don't want to be unjust, but——" He broke off suddenly and banged the desk with his fist.

"By Jove, we don't see the forest for the trees!" he exclaimed. "This old Fosdick was caught in the spiritualistic net, too. Can it be possible that they have been able to impose upon men like Witherspoon and Rathbone? I'll confess that they had me puzzled, at least, and perhaps Riordan was right in saying that under favorable conditions they might have succeeded in making me a convert. By the way, where is Ned? It would be worth while to get him to make inquiries in his peculiar circle of acquaintances."

"He hasn't been here this morning,

sir, and the office has received no word from him; but from what I know of his habits I suspect that is just about what he is up to. And if you can spare me to-day I think it would be wise to keep an eye on the Curb, Mr. Grant; I have an idea that it is a sort of barometer in this case and that the operations there will bear watching."

Mr. Grant nodded assent, a little absent-mindedly perhaps, for he was cudgeling his brains, trying to grasp that indistinct memory which vaguely coupled together the names of Professor Witherspoon and Colonel Rathbone. He had an engagement to lunch that day with Lispenard Douane, and he was rather relieved to receive a note from the banker asking him to dine with him that evening instead, prepared to discuss afterward the proposed new venture in promotion which Douane & Co. contemplated entering.

Until he had more tangible proof of fraud he did not care to confront Douane and discuss the startling manifestations in the old library. Remembering how thoroughly he was convinced, he realized that his faith could not be shaken by the simple explanations which Riordan had offered, and he trusted that before evening his young assistant would appear with something in the nature of evidence which would be irrefutable. He had implicit confidence in Riordan's ability to gather that evidence, and he waited impatiently for his return, conscious of an acute feeling of disappointment when, in the middle of the afternoon, it was Harry Spaulding who entered after an eager tapping on the door.

"The market has closed, sir, after one of the merriest, maddest days of trading in the history of the Curb!" exclaimed Spaulding. "Phosphates Concessions has had the center of the stage all day; the last actual transaction was the sale of a hundred shares at a hundred and seventy; that was at two-thirty, and during the last half hour the offers jumped to two hundred without bringing out another share. Some one has apparently cornered the entire visible supply and does not intend to let

go. The report is that it is old Joel B. Fosdick; they say that he has bought nearly two million dollars' worth, and I think the report is true."

"That's a big order, Harry," said Mr. Grant incredulously. "I should say that represents pretty much all of his fortune, and from what I remember of the old codger he would hardly put all of his eggs in one basket. Was your information straight?"

"I believe so, sir, and there is this much corroboration of it. The securities of the Fosdick Contracting Company are pretty closely held. Since the incorporation of the company until to-day there have not been ten thousand dollars' worth of them sold on the Curb, but to-day there was a big block of it on the market, and it is supposed to have come from his vault. At any rate, it was offered through his regular brokers, and most of the orders to buy Phosphates came from them. I happen to know that he has spent the entire day in their office; he never left there until after the market closed. I saw him come out and heard him tell the taxi driver to take him to the Fosdick Company's office."

Mr. Grant looked up expectantly as the door opened, but it was only one of the clerks with a card.

"I know that you gave orders that you were not to be interrupted, sir, but the old gentleman insisted, and he seems to be in such an excited state that I consented to bring this in," he said apologetically, as he placed it on the desk before him.

Mr. Grant gave an exclamation of surprise as he read the name.

"Speaking of angels, Harry, it's Joel B. Fosdick himself!" he said. "It's all right, Wilson; kindly ask him to come in."

Fosdick was bent and decrepit, his wrinkled old skin was ashen in color, but there was fire in the eyes which gazed malevolently upon Mr. Grant.

"I've been swindled and humbugged!" he exclaimed, disregarding the lawyer's courteous greeting. "It's a fine state of affairs when a firm like

yours joins a lot of crooks like Douane & Co. to swindle the public."

Mr. Grant rose to his feet, and pointed imperatively to a chair.

"Mr. Fosdick, you may either sit down there and tell me quietly what you mean by such an astounding accusation, or get out and get out quick!" he said sternly. "It is needless to warn you that such an accusation made to others will get you into serious trouble."

Fosdick obeyed in so far as he sat down in the chair indicated by the lawyer's gesture, but he did not lower his voice.

"You know what I mean well enough. There it is!" he persisted, a trembling finger pointing at the prospectus lying on the desk between them. "There's the name of your firm in black and white, giving the first certificate of honesty to this infernal swindle!"

"Easy, Mr. Fosdick! Our firm states in that letter that the concessions are regular and valid, and I have every reason to believe that statement is correct. They are certified to by——"

"Regular and valid—of course they are. Who would want to contest the title to that worthless junk?" interrupted Fosdick angrily. "Don't you know that the whole thing will be exposed before you are a day older; that the expedition our company was swindled into sending out on a wild-goose chase has returned and the thing can't be kept quiet? I've had the first report by telegraph from our superintendent; I received it only a half hour ago. He's the only man who has landed from the steamer, but before to-morrow the captain and every one else on board will tell the whole story, and it will brand every man whose name appears on that lying prospectus as a crook and a swindler."

"Suppose that you tell us that story now, Mr. Fosdick," suggested the lawyer quietly. "There will be no branding of names if it can be avoided, and I would remind you that the Fosdick Contracting Company's estimate of the cost of necessary improvements is one of the main items on this prospectus;

it was made upon the report of your own engineer."

"Yes, a crook who shot himself when the *Alvarado* was reported; a coward who wouldn't live to face the music!" screamed Fosdick. "That's why I hurried here before the rest of you could run away or——"

"Stop!" interrupted Mr. Grant, and the imperative note in his voice impressed itself. "We shall have no more of this. We shall start with the assumption that the Fosdick Company acted in good faith, and take it for granted that if there has been a mistake it was due to the dishonesty of a trusted employee. Now, if you please, let us have the rational and connected story, without these absurd and unjust accusations. What is wrong with the property? Do you challenge the reports of the chemist and the mining engineer?"

Fosdick looked at him suspiciously, but the lawyer met his gaze without flinching.

"Mr. Grant, is it possible that you don't know the truth about that property?" he asked incredulously. "If you don't, I'll tell you in mighty few words, and I'll make 'em plain. The value of the deposits there isn't the question; it's the value of the product landed in America, and not a ton of it will ever reach here. There isn't on an average more than one day in a month that even a small boat can land at either of those islands; it's impossible for a cargo ship to get within five miles of them without being smashed on the reefs. Every trader on the South American coast knows that; those concessions have been a joke down there for the last twenty years. It didn't take Rathbone's and Witherspoon's reports to tell people in South America of the value and extent of those deposits; they've known all about 'em, but they also knew that it was impossible to get at them commercially. Rathbone did spend two months going over the property; he didn't have much else to do, for the day after he was landed the usual storm came along and they couldn't take him off for sixty days. I suppose that you've fixed it

up so that you are all on the safe side of the law. All of those reports tell the truth as far as they go; the deposits are undoubtedly there, and they are as rich as you claim. It would be easy enough to mine them, to build the docks and everything else, but no captain would be fool enough to try to take his ship within five miles of 'em. That's what our superintendent of construction found when he got down there on his fool's errand; that's the story that will go broadcast to-morrow, and it's a story that ought to land a lot of crooks in jail. Oh, yes, the Fosdick Company was taken in; that combination of swindlers must have bribed our engineer, the rascal who put a bullet through his head this morning, but that isn't the worst of it. What the company loses won't break it, but think of me!"

His voice had become shriller and shriller as he reeled off his story, and at the end it was almost a scream, but when he ceased speaking there was a marked and pitiful change in his appearance and demeanor.

Defiance had died from his eyes, and he huddled down in his chair, a crushed and broken old man, muttering an incoherent protest between flabby and tremulous lips, his shaking hands convulsively grasping his heavy walking stick. Angry as Mr. Grant had been at the baseless accusations of fraud, he could not restrain the feeling of pity which that picture of helpless senility aroused, and, although he was himself guiltless, he realized that public opinion would never acquit his client, Lisperard Douane, of complicity in the swindle if the story which Fosdick had told proved to be true.

"Why should we think especially of you in this matter, Mr. Fosdick?" he asked quietly. "Even if the case is as bad as you believe it to be, the loss to your company will not be a killing matter. You have done no work on the contract, and the materials——"

"But I'm ruined—ruined!" interrupted Fosdick, his voice a curious mixture of snarl and whine. "Almost every dollar I own I invested in the

stock of this company to-day, and to-morrow it will not be worth the price of waste paper."

Grant exchanged glances with Harry Spaulding, and there was little of sympathy in his voice when he answered.

"Ah, that is a horse of another color, Mr. Fosdick," he said grimly. "You may have just cause for complaint if you were induced to take this contract upon false information, but not for losses incurred in a speculation which was entered into entirely upon your own judgment. I can't conceive of a man of your experience and reputed financial acumen making such a plunge, but that was entirely your own lookout, and that part of your loss you will have to pocket without complaint."

"My own judgment! My own judgment!" whined the old man as he fumbled in his pocket and with a shaking hand drew out an envelope. "Do you think that I am fool enough to take such a chance as that without advice? Read that and you will understand—why your infernal scheme was clever enough to humbug the greatest financiers of history, even in the spirit world!"

Mr. Grant took it, and the color faded from his face, for as he turned it about in his hands before withdrawing the contents there came to his nostrils that faint but unmistakable perfume of sweet lavender as a confirmation of the truth of Fosdick's accusation.

The contents, a half dozen closely written sheets of note paper, quickly brought him back to the stern realities, however. The communication was ostensibly dictated by the spirit of Fosdick's long-lost twin brother and was a most astonishing production, a jumble of spiritualistic jargon and commonplace business. It purported to be an accurate report of the tremendous interest excited in the spirit world by the Phosphates Concessions' operations. In the spirit world they were aware that besides the phosphatic deposits the islands were crossed and crisscrossed by large seams of the very highest-grade ore which would bring untold

wealth to the discoverers, and the long screed ended in an appeal so fervent that it was almost a command for Fosdick to avail himself of this inside information and buy all of the stock he could get before the other spirit financiers could cross the boundary line and give the tip to their respective friends and relatives.

Mr. Grant looked at the old man in blank amazement after he had read the letter. It did not seem possible that this shrewd and miserly old skinflint could have been influenced to part with his carefully hoarded fortune by such balderdash; that he would have deliberately sold his gilt-edged securities and invested the entire proceeds in this wild-cat venture on such a palpably fraudulent tip. But that faint perfume which came from the paper reminded him most persistently that Lispenard Douane, a man of wider vision and of infinitely greater intelligence, had been quite as thoroughly imposed upon, and he was forced to acknowledge that without Riordan's explanation of the alleged phenomena he had witnessed he himself would have had his skepticism and incredulity rudely shaken. But ignorant of Riordan's discoveries of the previous evening and the activities which were keeping him away from the office, he was puzzled to account for the apparent connection between the schemes of the two old sharpers who had gained an influence over Fosdick and the unknown originators of the plot against the Douane millions, for without prompting or suggestion the old man had mumbled out his account of how he had received the communication, mentioning Doctor Sinclair and Professor Calkins by name. Fosdick looked at him with an eagerness which was almost childish.

"Do you get it?" he whined. "Can't you see why I made that investment? I had it straight; from the spirit of my own brother."

"I get it all right, but not in the way you mean, Mr. Fosdick," answered the lawyer, shaking his head. "You have been swindled, most outrageously swindled, not by the people whom you sus-

pect and accuse, but by those you trusted so implicitly. Mr. Fosdick, I happen to know that those men are arrant frauds; they have been playing upon your cupidity and avarice for months. There is one thing which puzzles me; I can't understand how they happened to switch from those Indian reservation oil lands and gold mines with which they intended to mulct you to this stock gamble."

The old man was so far rejuvenated that he straightened up in his chair.

"Don't you dare to interfere with that!" he exclaimed, his rheumy old eyes suddenly blazing. "You've robbed me of everything else, but I've got enough hidden away to get even with that property, and it's mine by rights—by the gift of my dead brother, who gave it to me from the spirit world."

"But, my dear sir, don't you understand that it is all a rank swindle?" argued Mr. Grant impatiently. "Those men never heard of your twin brother until one of them pumped the information out of your housekeeper and saw the entry of his birth in your family Bible. That Indian story is all manufactured out of whole cloth; they intended to get your money with it, but they evidently discovered an easier way."

Fosdick became livid with rage, but it was directed toward the man who was trying to warn him, and, to his amazement, Mr. Grant realized that even the loss of the bulk of his fortune had not served to lessen the power of the spiritualistic delusion under which he labored.

"You have no right to try to get in on this, you old scoundrel!" he screamed, shaking his clawlike fist in the lawyer's face. "I tell you it is mine; all mine. The spirit—the spirit—the spirit of my—of my brother—of my dear twin brother—gave it to me and——" His passion was too much for him, and he sank back in his chair, muttering incoherently.

Mr. Grant and Spaulding both rose to their feet, but before they could reach him Riordan entered, and the exclamation which came from his lips as

he caught sight of Fosdick's convulsed face gave them pause.

"For the love of Mike, chief, I believe I'm going dippy since I've mixed up in this ghost business!" he said as he stared at it. "How did you manage it? How did you get him here so quick?"

"Manage it! Get him here?" demanded Mr. Grant. "What do you mean? I had nothing to do with it. He came himself. You know him, don't you? That's Fosdick—Joel B. Fosdick, the man whose twin brother's spirit has been advising him through the mediumship of your old friends, Calkins and Sinclair."

Riordan gave a whistle of astonishment, and a sheepish grin came to his lips as he rapped his forehead with his knuckles.

"Chief, if I hadn't been solid ivory from the neck up, I'd have tumbled to all that before!" he said ruefully. "That accounts for Martha's name and a whole lot of things. Chief, maybe he has been getting advice from his twin brother, but not from his spirit, for he hasn't croaked yet. I left him alive and kicking not more than three hours ago, and I expect he's right there yet, for he's doing a twenty-year stretch in Sing Sing. He's the man you knew of as Phao Trott."

Old Fosdick, aroused perhaps by the interruption, had partially recovered himself; enough, at any rate, to get a glimmering of Riordan's statement, and he drew himself up painfully from his chair.

"There can be no doubt about it, chief; they're alike as two peas!" continued Riordan. "That's who old Phao is—this man's twin brother and——"

"You lie!" screamed Fosdick, with unsuspected strength raising his heavy walking stick threateningly above his head. "My brother is dead; all that he had belongs to me and—and——" The stick fell from hands suddenly relaxed, his eyes rolled until only the white sclerotics were visible between the lids, and one side of his mouth drew about until it seemed to touch his ear.

Riordan jumped toward him with

outstretched arms, but before he could reach him the old man's knees doubled up, and he fell limply to the floor.

"It's a stroke, chief!" announced Riordan curtly. "I don't believe it will do much good, but, Harry, you'd better call a doctor."

CHAPTER XIII.

The ambulance surgeon quickly confirmed Riordan's opinion that his services could be of little use to the stricken man, and it was late in the afternoon before he was carried from the office. Mr. Grant's face was white and haggard as he sank back into his chair when he was again alone with the two young men.

"Boys, this miserable matter is fast developing into a tragedy!" he exclaimed. "Have you heard of the suicide of Fosdick's engineer, Ned—the man who made the original report on the property?"

Riordan shook his head. "I've been too busy to listen to that sort of thing, chief. He's only a small cog in the machinery, anyway. Do you feel up to keeping that dinner date with Douane this evening?"

"Certainly; but I can't say that I look forward to it with pleasure. How did you know that I was dining there?"

"Never mind that now, chief. See here, how do you want this thing handled? What's the big idea; to do it on the quiet and let a bunch of crooks get away, or to land on them and make the whole thing public?"

Mr. Grant hesitated. "I'll have to know all of the circumstances, Ned, before I can decide that question. We owe a duty to our client, and it would not be a service to the community to start a financial panic for the sake of punishing a pair of miserable swindlers like Calkins and Sinclair. Tell us what you have been doing, what you have discovered?"

"Chief, I haven't time to do justice to it," Riordan protested. "I wasn't thinking of those two old pikers. They've beat it, but it wasn't for fear of the law. There's some one with

real brains behind this—with real brains and a whole lot of inside information. I don't believe that there is anything in that prospectus on which you could land any one in jail, and yet the whole thing is crooked as a ram's horn. Our firm's opinion is straight."

"Certainly; absolutely so."

"Sure; your partner hunted for flaws in the title; that's what he was sent to Washington to do. There were none, but he never asked about the value of the stuff, and no one volunteered any information, although every one at the legations knew it was worthless. Now, chief, the experts who were sent down there must have known the truth, but they kept mum. Yet you can't hold Rathbone and Witherspoon legally responsible if their technical reports are justified, which I understand they are. The stuff is there; it is of the quality shown by the analyses. Now those two men have reputations to sustain; they wouldn't have kept quiet about the physical conditions unless some one made them, and the only way I figured that could be done was by holding a club over 'em. To go back to the original proposition, chief, some one 'had something' on both of them. They were not straight in this deal, but their crookedness is of the kind the law can't reach. They didn't certify to anything false; they simply didn't tell all they knew. Fosdick's engineer could probably have wriggled out of it, too; that whole prospectus was drawn up by somebody who knew his business, and it smells of the work of a crooked lawyer."

Mr. Grant sprang from his chair as if he had been electrified and hurried to a filing cabinet in the corner of the room. A moment later he returned to his desk with a bundle of documents and quickly withdrew a paper from it.

"Ned, you've put me on the track of something which has been puzzling me all day," he said, after glancing over it. "These are the documents we collected when we were arranging the case against Hodge & Strumel in the proceedings for disbarment. You may remember that we had complete evidence

in one case which was so flagrant that we did not need to go farther, but here is a list of people whom we believed to have been blackmailed by them. We never went into the cases—it was not necessary—but two of the names on that list are Rathbone and Witherspoon."

Riordan, too, jumped to his feet, and again looked at his watch.

"Great Scott, chief, that settles it!" he said. "That's the one point I was afraid old Phao was steering me wrong on; his mind isn't working entirely straight, and I couldn't believe him when he whispered those names into my ear. That answers my question; we don't want any publicity about this thing, for stirring up a mess that they are mixed up with would make your skeleton collection so uneasy that they would kick the covers off those boxes and start a fine ghost dance. We could never land 'em anyway, chief; only Jake Haselburg, and he's got his already. I met him just outside of Sing Sing this afternoon and attended to that myself. I'll see you later, chief."

"Hold on, Ned; where are you going? What are you up to?" demanded Mr. Grant, as Riordan started for the door. "You can't run off this way; there is a lot you have got to tell me," he continued. "Young man, you mentioned a woman's name a little while ago. Suppose that you start in by telling us about her; I am suspicious that she plays a big part in your story."

"She does, chief; so big a part that she is the real reason for a whole lot of things which have been going on. I can't stop to tell you now, but very soon you can judge for yourself, and it will be up to you to say what shall be done with her. I'll tell you all about it later."

"But, my boy, I am dining with Douane to-night and shall be there all the evening," protested Mr. Grant. "If I know just what——"

"If you don't know anything, you can't tell anything, and that will make it a lot easier for you, for I don't want you to say a word," interrupted Riordan. "Chief, right here in this office

to-day you've seen what this spiritualistic thing can do to a man. You saw old Fosdick, a close-fisted miser whose one god has been money through his whole miserable, distorted life, cling to the delusion after it had been used to swindle him out of his fortune. If he should recover his senses, you could argue with him for a month of Sundays and never shake his belief. If you want to cure Douane, don't try to do it with argument. Go up there and dine with him to-night; sit tight, no matter what happens. He isn't going to get out of this without having to pay the piper, but he's got enough to square the whole thing without hurting him much. That can all be arranged later; the main thing is to cure him so effectually that he won't continue the dance. That's up to me, and I'll do it. Take as much time as you like over your dinner—I need every minute I can get—but don't let on to Douane that there have been any new developments. Will you do that, chief?"

Mr. Grant nodded a reluctant assent, but when Riordan again turned to leave, Spaulding confronted him.

"Ned, if you don't let me on this, I'll murder you!" he said resentfully, and Riordan looked at him with an aggravating grin on his lips.

"You come right along with me, and then you'll be sure not to miss anything," he answered. "It's time you were going, too, chief, for I'll promise you a busy evening."

CHAPTER XIV.

In Lispenard Douane's well-appointed household everything ran smoothly and without visible friction that evening. Nevertheless, Mr. Grant was conscious of some subtle change in the atmosphere of the house and its occupants. Douane seemed to be laboring under a suppressed excitement which verged on anxiety, and more than once he noticed Jackson watching his master's face with a suggestion of solicitude in his eyes.

"I suppose that you noticed the recent performance of Phosphates Con-

cessions in the market," said Douane as the dinner drew to a close. "The public seems to indorse our judgment in that venture, doesn't it?"

"I've always believed that the part of the public which gambles on the Curb market is largely composed of fools," answered Mr. Grant, and Douane laughed as he nodded assent.

"Certainly; but if the rumors flying about down there to-day have any foundation, that wasn't so much a case of gambling as of investment on accurate inside information," he said. "I'm beginning to think that I missed an opportunity to make a tremendous fortune; I could have financed that whole thing myself without straining my resources, and I have so much confidence in it that I would gladly take over the entire issue at the original price. You needn't look so worried, old friend; I mean as a personal investment, not for the bank. But after the course the stock has taken in the past two days there's apparently no chance. I believe the rumor was straight, and old Joel B. Fosdick has apparently stolen a march on the lot of us."

"I heard something of that; I believe that he invested heavily to-day. Do you happen to know what induced him to do it?"

"My dear sir, no one has ever been able to induce Fosdick to invest in anything; he never bought a bond or a share of stock without being sure that he got a good deal more than a dollar's worth for every hundred cents he put in," answered Douane. "That stock wasn't bought on margin to-day; not a dollar's worth of it has been hypothecated for loans; it was bought outright and paid for. It's rather significant that the contracting company's ship was reported at daybreak, and the supposition is that Fosdick received an advance confidential report from their representative. From the way he went after that stock to-day I suspect that is correct and that the report shows even greater value than the preliminary surveys. Fosdick's right and left hands haven't even a bowing acquaintance in money matters, and I understand that

his brokers have orders to keep on buying, although he gave no reasons. As it isn't probable that the old skinflint was acting under the same advice which induced me to take the matter up originally, it is fair to assume that the information he received shows how shrewd that advice to me was; he has never been known to touch anything that wasn't sound. But we can forget Phosphates now; our books closed on that with a handsome balance in favor of the bank. I'm ready to go into that other matter with you; I brought all the data with me from the office, and I think that in an hour I can convince you that it is even more promising than our first promotion, and I believe that you will agree with me that it will be wise for the bank to retain a good block of the securities. After the way Phosphates has turned out I expect that the offering will be largely oversubscribed."

For the first time there was just a little doubt as to Douane's absolute honesty and integrity in his legal adviser's mind. Fosdick's accusations and the insinuations which he had heard at the club did not seem so absolutely unjustified as he looked at this man of unquestioned business ability and long training in the highest finance, very evidently perfectly sane and in full possession of his faculties, but who had risked millions and was prepared to risk many more on the alleged advice of a materialized spirit.

Now such a suspicion, once conceived, grows rapidly, and Grant was forced to acknowledge to himself that every circumstance which he had accepted on appearances as an indication of Douane's entire innocence might, without undue strain of the imagination, be twisted into even more convincing proof that he was acting in collusion with the perpetrators of the swindle.

Mr. Grant tried to banish suspicion from his mind, but it would not down. He was in absolute ignorance as to the nature of the new venture which Douane was about to propose, but convinced that Phosphates Concessions

was a swindle he was prejudiced against it in advance, and determined that no spiritualistic hocus-pocus would be permitted to interrupt a thorough investigation of every detail. Douane, however, detected no trace of suspicion or suggestion of antagonism in his attitude, and he linked his arm familiarly in his, chatting and laughing as they walked together to the library.

"It's so difficult to keep a thing of this kind quiet until the details are perfected that I haven't taken any one else into my confidence," he explained as Mr. Grant seated himself at the table and looked inquiringly about for the promised documents. "I have kept all of the papers in my private file at the office, and it is such a big thing that even in the security of my own home I don't take any chances of prying eyes." He slid back the panel which concealed the safe as he spoke, but before turning the combination knob, he walked back to the entrance door and locked it.

"We'll secure ourselves from interruption—at least from earthly visitors," he continued as he returned to the safe, and Grant smiled grimly as he remembered that if Riordan's explanation of the spiritual phenomena was correct, the closing of that door would prove an effectual barrier against the alleged spirit as well. To make sure he walked over, and, after trying the knob, took the key from the lock and slipped it in his pocket. As he returned to his chair Douane was standing in front of the safe, holding a large bundle of papers in one hand as with the other he moved the account books nervously about on the shelves.

"By Jove, I can't understand this!" he exclaimed. "That money is gone. It was there when I placed these papers in the safe before dinner; I remember distinctly, for I had to move it to make room."

"What money? The twenty-five thousand which was so mysteriously returned to you?" asked Grant.

Douane nodded assent as he examined the door of the safe and tested the bolts by moving them back and forth.

"Yes, that money which means a lot more to me than its face value," answered Douane quickly. "I can't understand it—unless Jackson took it out by mistake; the safe has not been tampered with."

"Jackson has the combination?"

"Yes, only Jackson and myself. Excuse me a moment; I must look into this. He keeps the household-account money there, and it is possible that he mixed the parcels up."

Grant halted him with a gesture as he turned toward the door.

"I'm afraid I took an unpardonable liberty, but I wanted to make assurance double sure, to prove that your familiar spirit would find a material closed door a more effective barrier than the shadowy boundary which she finds it so difficult to cross," he said as he held out the key. Douane looked at him curiously as he took it; there was a new note in the lawyer's voice.

"Do you mean to say you still have doubts?" he asked incredulously. "After seeing her, touching her, hearing that sweet voice which you must well remember?"

Mr. Grant would have found it difficult to frame answers which would not have given offense, but he was spared the effort. Just as during his last visit in that room, the electric lights commenced to flicker and grow dim, and again Douane reached out and grasped him firmly by the wrist. His face was suddenly transformed; it became set and stern, and there was a distinct threat in the eyes which a moment before had been so wistful.

As they sat there in the darkness, Douane still clasping Mr. Grant's wrist with a grip which was almost painful, that mysterious light—at first only a glowing ball near the floor—again appeared. It gradually assumed a columnar form, in the center there was that same curious movement as of something enmeshed struggling to escape. Gradually the light seemed to take on substance, to assume the form of flowing draperies, and then the same face suddenly flashed from the darkness. Identically the same in feature

and coloring, and an exact replica of that Jessica Brewster whom both of them remembered so vividly, but wearing a very different expression from that radiant happiness which had glorified it at the previous materialization.

Wonderingly Mr. Grant realized that the dormant and underlying strength of character and determination which he had suspected in Jessica Brewster when he dealt with her in the flesh was visibly evident in the face of this ethereal creature which claimed to be a materialization of her spirit. Eyes which seemed able to pierce the veil of darkness which enveloped them looked at them without flinching or wavering, and there was no suggestion of a smile on the delicate lips nor of indecision in the resolute set of the chin. Douane was quick to note the change, and he uttered a little cry of dismay as he released his grip of Grant's wrist and rose from his chair.

"Jessica, my darling, what is it? What has happened?" he exclaimed, and without speaking she checked his impetuous advance with a quick and imperative gesture. She had remained standing in the place she had first appeared, separated from them by at least twenty feet, and there was something in her posture which suggested readiness for instant flight.

"That is well," she said quietly after Douane had halted. "It will be even better if you resume your seat and keep it. Very much has happened, Lispenard Douane; things which make it necessary that you and your companion should listen to me, for never again shall I appear to you as I have so many times during——"

Douane was feeling about for his chair in the darkness, and a cry of protest from his lips interrupted her. There was a quick swirl of the luminous draperies as she turned as if about to flee, for in his agitation Douane had overturned the chair with a startling crash. Strangely enough, it was Grant who prevented the immediate termination of the séance; for, reaching out, he grasped Douane by the arm and held him firmly.

"Let her finish what she has to say," he said quietly. The figure paused abruptly in its flight, and there was a little smile of gratitude on her lips as Grant pressed Douane into the chair from which he had risen to intercept him.

"It will not take me very long—if you will aid me," she continued. "I have a confession to make, and you must not make it harder for me. I will only ask you to believe that I have made a great mistake, an honest one. I believed that my appearance here gave comfort and happiness; that Mr. Douane——"

"It did! It does! You must not desert me!" protested Douane pitifully. "The happiest moments I have known have been spent in this room with you. You must not leave me alone again!"

"Wait until I have finished, and then tell me if you feel the same," she answered, a curious, hungry wistfulness in her eyes. "Let me get the worst of it over with quickly, please. Let me tell you that with the best intentions in the world I have made a horrible mistake; that through following the advice which I gave to you in all sincerity and good faith you have imperiled your fortune, your good name, your standing in the community. The Phosphates Concessions Company is a huge swindle from start to finish, and I have been the unwitting instrument which made its perpetration possible. And, although I do claim honesty of purpose, I am not what you believe me to be—the materialized spirit of Jessica Brewster. You must do me the justice to acknowledge that I have never claimed to be; that, carried away by a fancied likeness, you fastened that identity upon me. I have many sins to answer for, but——"

Shaking the old lawyer's hand from his arm, Douane again rose to his feet and started forward.

"I do do not care what you say, what sins you have committed—you *are* my Jessica!" he exclaimed passionately. "Some horrible, adverse influence has crept between us to separate us now as it did twenty years ago, but I swear

you will stay with me or I shall go with you!"

He fairly jumped toward her, his arms outstretched, but a heavy chair was suddenly shoved between them, and through the darkness came that sound of a ripping fabric or a finger nail rasped across a wooden surface. With a little cry of dismay the radiant figure stepped back, and with incredible swiftness repeated that curious procedure of dematerialization which Mr. Grant had found so convincing before. This time, however, he was master of himself, and, suspecting more than half the truth, he quickly took advantage of the interruption to Douane's advance and threw his arms about him. Douane's struggles quickly ceased, for the last trace of that curious radiance had disappeared before he could move the heavy chair aside, and they were left in complete silence and darkness.

Then the full power of the electric lights was suddenly switched on, and, standing in the exact spot where the girl's figure had been, with the dark oak paneling and its distorted shadows for a background, was a very substantial and human male form surmounted by the very practical head of Mr. Ned Riordan.

"Chief, I think I have proved to you that my guess was right," he said quietly. "I managed the whole performance to-night, but that's only the curtain raiser for the real thing."

Freed from the restraining clasp of the old lawyer's arms, Douane strode forward.

"Who are you—what is the meaning of this outrageous intrusion?" he demanded furiously.

Riordan side-stepped, backed against the wall, and placed one hand behind him.

"Just a moment, Mr. Douane," he said. "Mr. Grant will tell you all about me, and my intrusion here isn't the worst jolt you are going to get this evening. It won't do any good to call for Jackson and his bunch to throw me out; with the twenty-five thousand he pinched from your safe, he's well on his way to some place beyond the

reach of extradition, and he wised me up to this before he beat it."

As he finished speaking he turned and pointed to the wall, and one of the panels slipped noiselessly aside, revealing a narrow staircase which evidently led to the basement.

"That's why locking the door wasn't sufficient, chief," he said, warding off Douane with one hand as he closed the panel with the other. "It would be wiser if you could induce Mr. Douane to listen to what we have to tell him before he goes to meet what he will find at the foot of that staircase."

CHAPTER XV.

Stunned and bewildered, Douane was easily persuaded to seat himself at the writing table, and he gazed across it with puzzled eyes at the face of this mysterious newcomer who had made such astonishing statements and who seemed to know his house better than he did himself. He acknowledged Mr. Grant's introduction and brief explanation with a curt, mechanical nod, and, regaining a measure of self-control, motioned to Riordan to be seated.

"I think that I am strong enough to stand those jolts which you threatened," he said in a voice so harsh that it sounded strangely in his own ears. "The statements you have made certainly require explanation, and the quicker you make them the better I shall be pleased."

"Mr. Douane, I fear that you are not going to be pleased with anything I have to say," answered Riordan quietly. "You haven't heard the truth in a long time; you have been the victim of one of the most elaborate swindling schemes ever devised—a scheme which has kept you in a fool's paradise. Do you want the plain, unvarnished truth now?"

"All of it!" snapped out Douane. "You need not attempt to spare my feelings; nothing can hurt me now."

Riordan turned to Mr. Grant.

"Chief, I've got to dig back into ancient history, the kind that you have stored away in those black boxes, the kind that you tried to make straight

and a bunch like Hodge & Strumel tried to make crooked," he said. "You drove them out of business; it looked as if they were down and out when you finished with them, but they have come back. They didn't accumulate written archives, but they had good memories, and they had a lot of stuff stored away under their hats, an inside knowledge of pretty much every crooked deal for the last twenty years: They kept under cover, but remember that they 'had something' on a whole lot of people, and they hadn't forgotten how to use it; there is the key to this whole swindle. And they had something else, chief; an inside knowledge of just how far they could go without getting outside the law, and they went the limit." Douane struck the table with his clenched fist.

"Get down to our business!" he exclaimed impatiently. "We have no interest in the history of those scoundrels."

"Perhaps not; but they had a mighty keen interest in yours, and they came to know more about it than you do yourself," answered Riordan. "Perhaps you will be more patient if I tell you that it is those scoundrels who have used you as a cat's-paw to pull their chestnuts from the fire and that they were clever enough to get away with close to three millions of easy money because you fell for it. See here, Mr. Douane, I'm mighty sorry for you, and I don't want to make it harder. You've had a raw deal, and it started twenty years ago, when your father instructed Mr. Grant to arrange with Jessica Brewster to divorce you."

Douane jumped to his feet, his face livid with passion. "By what right do you drag her name into this?" he exclaimed angrily.

Riordan met his blazing eyes without flinching.

"Mr. Douane, you need have no fear that the name of Jessica Brewster will be smirched by anything I shall say," he answered quietly. "From all that I have learned about her she must have been one of the finest, squarest women ever born into this world of sorrow.

Now sit down and listen to what I have to say."

Mr. Grant looked at his young protégé wonderingly; there had been an astonishing development in the boy during the past few hours—a development which brought to the surface all of the strength and worldly knowledge which had accumulated in his years of training beneath the rough exterior which he had acquired as an Arab of the streets. He seemed absolutely confident and sure of himself, and while there was nothing of arrogance in his attitude he tacitly claimed at least a temporary mastership of the whole situation. And even Douane, accustomed to deference and to laying down the law both in business and social life, was so impressed that he virtually conceded that mastership by obeying the injunction to be seated.

"Chief, when I tell you that Hodge took refuge in South America when you made things too hot for him here in New York, and that Strumel joined him there after he was released from prison, you will be able to figure out the main points of the proposition," continued Riordan quietly. "In spite of the big incomes they had made in their crooked practice, they didn't have much left; they had always been big spenders and lost consistently in Wall Street. They didn't carry much in the way of cash with them, but they did carry away a lot of information which could be readily turned into money when they discovered a way to utilize it. It didn't take them long to discover the way; every roustabout on both coasts of South America has at least one government concession to sell to the unsuspecting gringo, and Hodge saw a quick and easy opening to pass the buck. Not to keep you in suspense, I'll tell you now that Erskine, the alleged Englishman, is in reality our old friend Hodge, and he cooked up the whole scheme. He got those concessions to the phosphates signed, sealed, and delivered in due and proper form; there was no opposition, for every one knew that they were commercially valueless. There is no question about

the deposits being exactly as represented, but there is absolutely no way of getting the material to market. Mr. Douane, I believe that it was at your suggestion that Professor Witherspoon and Colonel Rathbone were sent down there to look over the field?"

Douane nodded. "Certainly; I selected them because they were the leading authorities in their respective lines."

Riordan smiled. "You thought you did," he said grimly. "As a matter of fact, those nantes were probably thrust upon you in about the same way a conjurer forces a particular card on the man who believes that he is exercising complete freedom of choice. Hodge wanted those two men sent down there, and I'll wager that if you think back you'll remember that the names were suggested to you; indirectly, perhaps. I'm not sure about all of the minor details, but we'll assume that they accepted your commission in all sincerity and honesty. Hodge attended to the rest of it after they arrived on the ground, and you got just the kind of reports that he wanted you to get, signed by names which inspired confidence when you submitted those reports to the public."

"See here, Mr. Riordan, you are going too far!" exclaimed Douane angrily. "Those men bear the highest reputations for——"

"Cut it out!" interrupted Riordan sharply, for just a moment letting the repressed street urchin come to the surface. "If the chief should loosen up and tell ten per cent of what he knows, you'd see a good many bright and shining lights scurrying for the tall timber. There's one item he did know, and he could tell it without betraying confidence; both Witherspoon and Rathbone had been in Hodge & Strumel's clutch before. When they got down there they both found out that the clutch hadn't relaxed. Possibly they couldn't have been dragooned into deliberately making false reports, but they certainly were bullied into keeping quiet about the part which would have queered the whole game. I'll tell you

this much—it didn't take long to dig it up after I had the tip; both of those men personally deserve the reputations for integrity and ability which you gave them, but each of them was unfortunate in his family relations. Witherspoon has a worthless son whom he idolizes, and Hodge had evidence which would have sent him to prison for the rest of his life. Rathbone resigned from the engineer corps of the army to avoid an investigation which would have betrayed that his extravagant wife had been selling advance information concerning government contracts to a lot of crooks—clients of Hodge & Strumel. Think it over and you'll remember that those names were suggested to you, and I've just told you the reason for their selection."

Douane evidently had been doing a lot of thinking, and just as evidently found little of comfort in the result.

"Do you realize just what you are saying—what you are implying?" he demanded. "I have nothing to conceal; perhaps those names were suggested to me, but my selection was indorsed by advice which was infallible—by one having sources of information which——"

"Excuse me; we shall come to that part of it in due time!" interrupted Riordan again, his marked courtesy in curious contrast to his former abruptness. "I know all about every source of information connected with this business; there were just two of them—the memories of Hodge & Strumel and their knowledge of crooked manipulation. They had to keep away from the jurisdiction of the American courts, but they still maintained control of the machinery they had perfected during the many years they had more or less successfully bamboozled them. Now they didn't have any crooked hold on you, Mr. Douane, but they did have a pretty good bunch of inside information about your most private affairs and a strangle hold on your most trusted personal servant, Jackson. His foot slipped when he was a young man. Do you remember when one of your father's horses, an odds-on favorite in the bet-

ting, was beaten by a nose in the Futurity?"

"Of course; it was a piece of bad racing luck," answered Douane, evidently puzzled by the irrelevant question.

"It was a piece of mighty tough luck for Jackson; he had so fully shared your father's confidence that he borrowed money from him—without mentioning it—to bet on it," said Riordan dryly. "Hodge fixed that for him; he played the races regularly, and Jackson had been giving him the inside information from the Douane Stable. But Hodge wasn't entirely a philanthropist; he took a written acknowledgment of the obligation, duly attested before a notary, and he slipped in a little joker which made that acknowledgment a sworn confession that Jackson was a thief, and he filed it away for future reference."

Douane glanced toward the safe, and there was hopeless bewilderment in his eyes when they again met Riordan's.

"Will you leave me faith and belief in a single human being when you have finished?" he asked bitterly. "I should have trusted Jackson with everything I had in the world; I can hardly believe what you tell me, but that money is gone and——"

Riordan's face softened, and for the first time there was a note of sympathy in his voice when he continued after the older man had paused abruptly.

"I hope to inspire faith and belief where it is deserved—and there is a whole lot of good in human nature, as I have every reason to know," he said kindly. "There was good in Jackson, for instance; lots of it. After that one slip he served you faithfully, and probably never cheated you out of a penny until Jake Haselburg, working under Hodge's instructions, flashed that half-forgotten paper on him. You trusted him implicitly in many ways; you even left the supervision of the changes in this room in his hands. I understand the work was done during your absence abroad?"

"But how long ago was that?" asked

Mr. Grant. "Surely those rascals had not started to——"

"It was just two years—so Jackson told me," answered Riordan before Douane could speak. "They had started to lay pipe even before that; they were playing for big stakes, and didn't neglect anything in the preparations. Now, Mr. Douane, you'll have to brace yourself and take one of the jolts I promised you. Remember that those men knew all about your tireless search for your former wife; they had fleeced you through it, and it didn't take them long to find out that after exhausting every usual method of search you had taken to the unusual and started the round of spiritualistic mediums. That made it easy for them. Without making many exceptions it is safe to assert that those fakers are crooks, recruited largely from the class which had formed Hodge & Strumel's clientele in the old days. To go back to the original proposition, they 'had something' on pretty much every one of them, and those they missed were easily rounded up; all but one—the one they most needed in their business, the only one who could be depended upon to produce a convincing materialization—Phao Trott."

Douane's face flushed. "Must we go into that?" he asked. "I know all about the horrible end of that man's career, but there are reasons why I should rather not discuss him; I never saw anything but the best side of his character."

"Yes, we must go into everything—and right to the bottom of it," answered Riordan earnestly. "Just remember that we are dealing with men who were without moral compunction or the bowels of compassion. Phao Trott wasn't a saint; he was an arrant old trickster, but there was not an ounce of harm in the old boy nor a mean hair in his head, and he did a lot more good than harm. He trailed along with that bunch of crooks for a while, not knowing just what they were up to. They paid him liberally for their lessons. Remember that they didn't have anything on him. And then, quite

by accident, they made a discovery; he had an assistant who was exactly what they had been looking for. In their eagerness they pretty well exposed their whole hand, and Phao threw his down, refusing to play longer in the game. Right there was where the whole scheme threatened to blow up, and right there was where those two scheming devils screwed down the lid. Working through Jake Haselburg, the lawyer for most of the crooks in New York, they had prepared a mass of evidence against Phao; perjured, every item of it, but convincing enough to convict him. They showed Phao just where he stood and where he would get off if he dared to make a defense other than the very perfunctory one which Haselburg would present to the court. They would not rest with him; they would involve in his disgrace this very assistant for whose sake he had rebelled. Phao took his medicine—a twenty-year sentence for a crime so revolting that even his criminal associates in prison shunned him—a crime of which he was absolutely innocent. And there, for the moment, we shall leave him."

The flush had died from Douane's face, leaving it blanched, almost livid, and he gazed at Riordan with horror-distended eyes.

"This is horrible; too horrible; it can't be true!" he protested. "He couldn't; no man could remain silent under——"

"Phao Trott *did*; there's the answer," said Riordan curtly. "But we'll leave him now and go back to Jackson; it's all part of the same scheme. Jackson carried out directions absolutely in making these alterations, but they were not the directions you had given to him; they contained additions suggested by agents of Hodge & Strumel. One of them was this movable panel which conceals a narrow staircase leading to a room in the basement; another was a switchboard which permitted an operator to do about what he pleased with the electric lights. The house was out of commission during your absence, and that gave Jackson

the opportunity to dismiss most of the servants. When he opened up again he replaced them with new ones—he was working under the whip—and they were selected by Jake Haselburg. And then, Mr. Douane, the stage was set and the performance began. In your office you were approached in the regular course of business and asked to float the Phosphates Concessions Company; in the ordinary course of business you would probably have turned the proposition down, and that's where the value of this plant demonstrated itself. You would have laughed at business advice in a clairvoyant's joint; you would have been suspicious of any materialization in a medium's parlor. Remember that the managers of this conspiracy had unusual means of acquiring accurate information, and they knew every detail of every experience you had ever had with the fakers whom you had consulted. But the fact that you persisted in consulting them was enough for them; they knew if they went at it in the right way they could land you—and they proved that they were right."

Douane turned to face Mr. Grant when Riordan voluntarily paused in his narration.

"Are you able to vouch for the truth of these statements?" he asked in a tone which made the question a challenge. "If not, I think it is useless to go farther, to listen to wild and unfounded accusations which will be painful."

Mr. Grant hesitated, and Riordan, quickly realizing the truth, came to his assistance.

"Chief, I warned you this afternoon that shattering delusions of a certain character would not prove an easy matter," he said, ignoring Douane. "I'm not asking you to vouch for the truth of my statements; I've got absolute and convincing proof of every one of them, and I'll produce it in proper time. But I think it might save time and trouble if you would tell what you know of old Fosdick's experiences. I don't blame Mr. Douane for doubting me; it's always difficult to convince a man

of things he doesn't want to believe. Perhaps it will let him down more easily if he knows that he is not the only victim, and he must have known that Fosdick wasn't an easy proposition."

"Lispenard, I'm afraid that you will have to swallow a bitter dose, for I have every reason to believe that Riordan has stated nothing but the truth," said Mr. Grant. "You will also have to retract one statement which you made at dinner—that it was obvious that Joel Fosdick, in plunging on Phosphates, could not have been influenced by the same sort of advice which induced you to father the flotation. I have reason to know that the advice was precisely of that nature, an alleged communication from the spiritual world. It is absolutely incomprehensible to me—the whole thing was so transparently fraudulent—but on the strength of that advice he sold the best investment securities in the market, securities representing the bulk of the fortune for which he had slaved, and invested the proceeds in this wildcat venture. It was a letter purporting to come from the spirit of his twin brother—palpably a fraud—and yet Fosdick followed the directions which it contained without a moment's hesitation, and acquired a mass of worthless stock which has only the value of waste paper."

Douane had listened attentively, but the effect upon him was not at all what the old lawyer had expected.

Instead of carrying conviction, the revelation of the motives which had led to Fosdick's wild and spectacular plunge in the Curb market evidently aroused hope and strengthened Douane's weakened confidence, and Mr. Grant was amazed to see that it had brought a smile in which there was a suggestion of triumph to his lips.

"I'm afraid that I shall have to ask you to retract one part of that statement," he said defiantly. "The market quotations hardly bear out your assertion that the stock is worthless. As for the rest of it, knowing your avowed skepticism, I can hardly admit that you are an impartial judge as to the authen-

ticity of a spiritual communication. Fosdick is a shrewd and suspicious man; I cannot believe that he would be imposed upon so easily. There have been many startling and amazing statements made here this evening, and I have had one most astonishing revelation, a revelation which I can only believe was dictated by the adverse and hostile atmosphere which seems to have intruded itself into my house. Do you, who have twice been vouchsafed the privilege to see with your own eyes and hear with your own ears, seriously tell me that you still doubt; that the skepticism which you expressed when you entered this room has not been banished?"

"Douane, do you think that I have taken leave of my senses?" retorted Mr. Grant impatiently. "Don't you understand plain English—that this alleged materialization this evening was an imposition managed by Riordan to convince you? How he accomplished it I do not know myself, but it is evident that he has acquired control of the machinery devised by the scoundrels who have been imposing upon you and employed it to show you how you have been duped and swindled."

Douane rose to his feet, his eyes blazing, his face distorted with anger, but Riordan stepped forward and confronted him.

"Sit down!" he said quietly, but there was authority in his tone. "The chief has given it to you straight, but there's a lot that he does not know. I understand just how hard it is to give up a delusion which brings happiness; we saw old Fosdick cling to his to the last gasp to-day, and he'll never let go. I'll tell you this straight, Mr. Douane; the same bunch of crooks who fleeced him have been after you. They picked him up by accident, stole him from two miserable old pikers in the spiritualistic swindle who intended to pluck him for a few thousand. I'll tell you how it came about. As a first proposition let me tell you that you were flimflammed by Alcantara and Menendez into believing that they left the stock which was issued to them in that

safe-deposit vault in your bank. They smuggled it out, and if there is anything in that vault at all, it is probably waste paper. They unloaded at the top of the market, and when the bottom dropped out of it they picked it up again for a song. They had discovered an opportunity to make another killing with it, for they were not only the 'Wops' of the financial district; they were the Wops who, acting under the direction of Erskine, alias Hodge, had put the fear of God into the hearts of the spiritualistic brotherhood.

"Calkins and Sinclair thought they were fooling them, but they knew everything which was going on, and simply held off until the fruit was ripe enough to pick. Then they stepped in and took it, and those two old rascals, with the knowledge of what Phao Trott received for rebelling, didn't dare to make even a protest. The Wops were wise enough to see that the jig was up when I got after Phao Trott, and they made a quick turn for get-away money. They had all of that stock, and they fed it out to old Fosdick as fast as he could absorb it. They collected the cash, too, and they carried it away with them as soon as the market closed. Jake Haselburg won't be found in his usual haunts to-morrow; I didn't stop to make explanations, but what I did to him up the river this afternoon probably convinced him that he would be persona non grata. Perhaps I compounded a felony in letting Jackson get away; I suspected that he had taken that money, but I thought it was cheap at the price. He was forced into his rascality, and that will only be a drop in the bucket when you come to square up the losses. He put me wise to all of this business, made a clean breast of it, and showed Harry Spaulding how to manipulate the switchboard while I managed the rest of the performance. Mr. Grant instructed me to be careful about creating a scandal."

Douane's anger had vanished, and he relaxed helplessly in his chair. But there was a hopelessness, an abject misery in his expression which caused Mr.

Grant to rise and place a friendly hand upon his shoulder.

"I think I was right in giving that advice, Lispenard," he said. "This has been a terrible business. It is going to require a great sacrifice upon your part to adjust it, but it would be a public calamity to have the matter made public. The principals in the conspiracy have protected themselves so carefully that I doubt if we could bring them to justice in any case. You will have to stand the loss; it may take a considerable part of your fortune, but a Douane cannot——"

Douane shuddered under the kindly meant pressure of that hand, and, drawing away, looked at him with resentful eyes.

"Even if this incredible story is true, you need have no fear that any innocent person will suffer loss through me," he said bitterly. "That is a small part of it all, for more than twenty years ago you and my father inflicted an injury which makes everying else seem trivial. Now you will both of you do me the justice to listen to what I have to say, although you apparently believe that I am a poor, weak, deluded fool. Perhaps in my business venture I have been imposed upon; I will admit that, if your statements are true, I have been the victim of unscrupulous and clever scoundrels. How it has come about I do not know; how they managed to impose their wills beyond terrestrial limits I cannot conceive, but there is so much that we cannot understand that it would be a rash man who asserted that anything is impossible."

He paused for a moment, and then, ignoring Riordan, addressed himself solely to Mr. Grant.

"Old friend, I shall leave the arrangement of this business matter to you," he continued. "You have acted wisely in avoiding publicity; I know that you will act justly in dealing with those who are threatened with financial loss through trust in the name of Douane. I will concede the cleverness of Mr. Riordan; I appreciate that he has taken advantage of conditions created by a band of sharpers who took advantage

of real conditions. I know of many of the frauds of spiritualism as practiced by the so-called mediums, and I will even admit that his performance to-night was extremely clever and convincing, but as I look back on it now I realize that it was fraudulent. Perhaps it was because my intense desire dulled my perception that I was for the moment imposed upon, but I now realize that the wretched woman whom he introduced into this room was an impostor. It was not that sweet spirit who has so often visited me in my solitude, fearlessly submitting to my embrace, but a miserable trickster, base enough to trifle, at his dictation, with the most sacred human emotions. It was a clever deception—the likeness was skillfully imitated—but I now realize that I was conscious of the difference from the moment she entered."

Mr. Grant could hardly credit his ears, but Riordan was evidently not in the least surprised at the persistence of Douane's credulity, and before the old lawyer found words to protest he stepped between them.

"Mr. Douane, this situation has developed to the stage where the less that is said the less there will be to mend," he said, motioning to Mr. Grant to be silent. "There will be no more manipulation of the electric lights, for my friend Harry Spaulding, who presided at the switchboard, is more pleasantly occupied. I realize that nothing we can say could shake your conviction that you have many times been in communication with the materialized spirit of Jessica Brewster. Nothing could convince Joel Fosdick that he had not received direct communications from the spirit of his dead brother. But that is susceptible of proof which cannot be disputed, for that brother still lives; he is the man who, under the name of Phao Trott, is serving an undeserved sentence in prison. And now I shall offer you as indisputable a proof that you, too, have been deluded, and it rests with you to find in the reality a recompense for your shattered delusion."

He stepped over to that portion of

the paneling on which the antlered head cast distorted shadows, and the panel slipped noiselessly aside in response to a tap of his finger tips. From the recess behind it—for the first time in the full illumination of the electric lights—Martha Fosdick stepped into the room, a living, breathing image of the woman Douane had mourned for twenty years.

CHAPTER XVI.

Of all the people in the room the girl was the most self-possessed. Dressed in a simple street costume, her face innocent of the slightest trace of make-up, her only jewelry the old-fashioned locket which Jessica Brewster had worn, she seemed to Douane and Grant a veritable reincarnation of the girl whom they remembered so vividly. Perhaps enlightened by the triumphant smile on Riordan's lips, the old lawyer guessed the truth, but the exclamation which rose to his lips was silenced by a significant gesture of his young assistant's hand.

Douane, who had fully expected that Riordan would introduce some brazen creature who had acted as his accomplice in trickery, and had prepared himself to utter the bitterest and most scornful reproaches, stood rigid and silent, as if fearing by sound or movement to frighten her away, and it was not until Harry Spaulding followed her into the room and closed the panel behind him that he found himself. Then, as an exclamation in which welcome seemed to be struggling with protest came from his lips, he started toward her, but Riordan quickly stepped between them.

"Mr. Douane, before we go any farther you must listen to a word of explanation," he said. "This is Martha Fosdick, the ward, protégée, and most competent and efficient assistant of William Fosdick, known in spiritualistic circles as Phao Trott, a remarkably clever materializing medium. She will tell you how she happened to become involved in all of this trickery of which you have been the victim, but I wish

to make it easier for her by assuring you that she personated to-night that spirit which you have identified as the spirit of Jessica Brewster; that she has personated it on every occasion upon which it has appeared to you. If you will be patient, it will simplify things tremendously. Just remember this—and you, too, Mr. Grant, will please to bear it in mind. You, an educated, cultivated man, reared in an atmosphere in which spiritualism never intruded, denied nothing which wealth and position could give, and afforded every advantage for training and development, have in your maturity been completely deluded. In listening to the story which Martha Fosdick has to tell you, remember that from the day of her birth, when Phao Trott assumed the care of her, she has been reared in surroundings of trickery and mystery."

"Confound it, man, do you think that a woman appearing in that likeness needs your advocacy with me?" exclaimed Douane. "Get out of the way! Let her speak for herself. Can't you see that she must tell me the truth, or that I——"

"Mr. Douane, she will tell you the truth—as much of it as she knows—but you must let her tell it in her own way," interrupted Riordan. "And there is one thing of which I must warn you before she starts. For months she has believed that Phao Trott, the man who gave to the nameless little waif his own name and who gave her the only protection and care she ever knew, was dead. It was only to-day that from his own lips she learned the truth; that to save her the shame of being involved in the horrible conspiracy framed against him he had gone uncomplainingly to a living tomb. Until to-day she never knew the name of the mother who bore her; she is still ignorant of the name of the father whose blood runs in her veins."

Douane's face suddenly went white. "For the love of God, man, don't torture me!" he exclaimed brokenly. "Tell me that name—of the mother!"

"Only a little while ago you forbade me to utter it," answered Riordan

quietly. "I told you then that from all I had learned of her she was one of the finest, squarest women I had ever heard of. I wish that I might add the wisest, for that would have saved a lot of trouble and sorrow. Perhaps in the end she would have spoken, but death came suddenly and unexpectedly to seal her lips within an hour of her child's birth, and she left it without a name. Without legal formalities, Phao Trott virtually adopted it, giving it the name which was rightfully his. He was a fanatic on the subject of spiritualism, and beneath all of the trickery with which he made a pitiful living for himself and the little girl he was always delving and digging for something real and tangible; for what he called 'The Great Truth,' which he believed would place him in full communication with the spirit world. Remember that she learned all that she knew from his teaching, and as she developed into a sensitive, imaginative, and intelligent girl he employed her more and more in what he called his experiments, making her adept in simulating conditions through which he believed that he would reach the truth for which he sought. From him she never received anything but kindness and consideration; in all of his so-called experiments she was never used save to bring happiness and comfort to the lonely and heart weary. And then, in all innocence, she became the tool of the most unscrupulous band of sharpers, the unwitting instrument to swindle you."

He stopped abruptly, and, extending his hand to the girl, led her to a seat on the far side of the table from Mr. Grant and Douane. The latter, yearning and heart hungry, noted enviously her smile of gratitude and the absolute trustfulness in her eyes as for just a moment she looked at the face of the younger man before turning to study those which confronted her across the broad table.

"Mr. Riordan has told you the truth—as much as he knew of it—as much as I knew myself until a few hours ago," she said quietly in a voice which intensified the memories which the like-

ness to Jessica Brewster had aroused. "There is nothing to be gained by going into exact details, but never for a moment did the question of right or wrong occur to me when I was working with Papa Phao in what he called his experiments; to me they were neither more nor less than that. I was just what Mr. Riordan has described to you—his assistant, made skillful by his teaching. And always when I helped him he was watchful and alert, hoping that he might discover through me the truth for which he was seeking. And, Mr. Douane, in imposing upon you I believed that I was carrying out his instructions, for I, too, was imposed upon. There is very, very much which I do not understand, but I believed that Papa Phao was dead, and I saw no wrong in acting for the men with whom I knew that he had been associated during the last weeks of his life. I have been kept always secluded, in ignorance of the world; to-day I have learned more of evil than I knew existed. Mr. Douane, I knew nothing of the contents of that package which I placed in your hands; I found it in the little box in which Papa Phao had preserved for me a few little keepsakes of that mother I had never seen—whose name I never knew until Phao Trott whispered it to me to-day. Would you like to know why my mother, Jessica Brewster, refused to avail herself of it?"

Douane nodded assent; he seemed afraid to trust his voice in speech.

"I learned to-day, from a little book—her diary—of which Phao told me the hiding place," she continued, for the first time a little tremor in her voice. "After her death he sealed it up without even opening the covers—to keep for me when I reached womanhood. No names were written in it, Mr. Douane, but it was a very human document—the story of a girl abnormally sensitive, prouder than Lucifer, and, as Mr. Riordan very justly said, perhaps not blessed with worldly wisdom; certainly not with worldly experience. She was married, Mr. Douane, legally married to a man whom she loved de-

votedly. For some reason which she does not state that marriage was legally dissolved. But between the lines I read the reason; her pride was wounded to the quick. Ignorant of many things which she should have known, she was anxious only to get away and hide her hurts. She consented readily to every proposition which would hurry the necessary legal procedure, and in an incredibly short space of time she was legally freed. She would have starved before she would have touched that money; she had taken it mechanically to hasten the proceedings. Perhaps she was not entirely sane; through every page of that diary there is a subtle betrayal of high principle, of chivalry which does not fit the common standards of to-day. She appreciated that she had tacitly agreed to do everything possible to prevent the knowledge of her marriage from becoming public. Even when she realized her condition she never for a moment thought of violating that agreement. Mr. Riordan is mistaken in one thing, gentlemen; death did not come to her unexpectedly. Almost the last entry in that diary proves that. She knew that she was about to die; she firmly believed that her unborn child would not come into the world alive. That diary betrayed no one; she had destroyed everything by which the identity of the man who abandoned her could be established. Just one thing she left to be delivered—a sealed package so carelessly and openly left about that no one suspected its intrinsic value. She believed that it would carry to at least one man, whose name it bore, the sure message——”

“But don’t you understand—have you not guessed—do you not know that I am——”

“Stop!” she interrupted sternly. “There has been too much misunderstanding in the past; there shall be none in the present nor in the future if plain speaking will prevent it. Remember this; until to-day the name of Jessica Brewster meant nothing to me. Dozens of times before, when I have helped Phao Trott in his alleged materializations, I have been identified by other

names which meant as little. Those who bring their sorrows to a medium delude themselves. When I first entered this room, brought here by Jackson, I was uninstructed. It was you who fastened that identity upon me. Then I did not understand why the men employing me were so jubilant at the result; I only knew that they treated me with greater consideration and kindness, showering me with a luxury which I had never known. Until to-day I never knew that I was the tool of sharpers; I believed absolutely that the advice which I gave you at their dictation was justified by the facts; that the business scheme was sound and a good one; that in inducing you to further it I was only repaying a kindness which these men had done for Phao Trott years ago. This much I say in justice to myself, in justice to the memory of my mother, who suffered pain, humiliation, and dishonor to keep a promise which the world would have considered quixotic. I believe that details are already known to you. You are probably aware that those who profited so enormously through my deception and Mr. Douane’s credulity have fled with their ill-gotten gains. I understand that they managed the affair so skillfully that the law could not punish them if they were apprehended, but I have no desire to cheat it. Mr. Douane, through me you have lost a large part of your fortune; the only repayment I can make is in shattering once and for all your belief in a delusion through which you would eventually have been stripped of everything. I ask only one thing; that you gentlemen speedily right the wrong which has been done to Phao Trott, a wrong which he suffered in silence for love of me. As for me—I am at your disposition, fully prepared to make open confession of the part I have played in this miserable swindle and to take my punishment.”

Douane rose unsteadily to his feet, and held out his arms to her, but she, too, rose from her chair, and, raising her hands in protest, moved quickly to keep the table between them.

“My girl, my girl! Don’t you know

that you are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh?" he exclaimed. "When I believed you to be the spirit of your mother you gave me the only happiness I have known in all of the dreary years I have searched for her. I am the man who abandoned Jessica Brewster. I was a weak, immature boy, and for years I have suffered for my folly. What would the loss of everything else mean to me now that I have you, come in the likeness of your mother to let me make a vicarious atonement for the wrong I did——" She still retreated from him until, in circling the table, she approached Mr. Grant's chair, and, reaching out quickly, he grasped her hand in one of his, employing the other to check Douane's advance.

"My dear, this time I shall not release you so easily," he said, and, in spite of the grim, determined smile on his lips, she read sympathy and understanding in his kindly eyes, and left her hand unresistingly in his. "There must be no talk of punishment for any of us; we have all received plenty. You know the truth now; you know that it would be impossible for Lispenard Douane to pillory——" She snatched her hand away and faced him defiantly.

"Remember that it is Martha Fosdick who offers to take that punishment!" she answered. "There has been no acknowledgment of anything which would tarnish the name of Douane. It was my mother who bore the shame——"

A cry of protest, as bitter as her tone was scornful, came from Douane's lips, and, picking up a pen from the tray, he seated himself and wrote hurriedly, only the scratching of the steel nib breaking the silence which had suddenly fallen in the great room. It was a different Lispenard Douane who rose from the table after his task was completed. There was no indecision or hesitation in his face; he was the Douane of the banking house, Douane, the social arbiter, forceful, self-reliant.

"Old friend, I have executed here a power of attorney which will enable you to use my private fortune to the

last dollar to prevent loss to any one misled by the name or the advice of a Douane to invest in the Phosphates Concessions in which both of the Douanes believed implicitly. Mr. Spaulding, I believe that you are a notary and can take the acknowledgment of my signature. I have also written three notices which I wish you to have duplicated and published in every New York paper. The first is the announcement of the marriage of Jessica Brewster to Lispenard Douane; the second is the notice of the death of my beloved wife, Jessica Brewster; the third the notice of the birth of Martha Fosdick Douane. And then, old friend, I authorize you to go through the contents of that horrible black box in your office and to destroy every record of that miserable divorce. I think that is all."

Mr. Grant looked at him apprehensively, alarmed by the sudden change.

"Lispenard, this savors too much of putting your house in order!" he protested. "You would not be so rash——"

"Don't be a fool!" interrupted Douane harshly, and then, as he turned to the girl, there was in his face another and a more surprising change, for it was softened by that rare smile which few, even among his intimates, had ever known. "Yes, I am putting my house in order that I may make it a fit habitation for my daughter, the reincarnation of a bitterly wronged woman whose image has been in my heart since the day she entered my life." Wisely he said no more, but stood with outstretched hands, an unutterable, hungry longing in the eyes which were fixed upon her face.

Without speaking, she answered that appeal, gliding forward gracefully and silently. And then for the last time the mediums' warning sounded in that great room, and Mr. Ned Riordan made its meaning clear by motioning to his associates to follow him as Lispenard Douane clasped his new-found happiness to his breast.

Victuals for Venus

By Henry Rucker

Author of "A Cheerful Giver," "Something Like Samson," Etc.

Proteids and propinquity are responsible for this astonishing romance, which has its amusing as well its serious angles. The self-sacrificing hero is Inny Gunnish—accent strong on the Nish, and hardly anything at all on the Gun

HIS name was William Gilray, but the old Lenk Street gang in Wauseon, Ohio, began calling him Inny Gunnish about the time of his first measles, and Inny Gunnish it has been ever since. It is a youthful corruption of his right name, and, speaking as one born in Wauseon, I will concede that there certainly was a heap of youthful corruption in those days.

So that's the name; Inny Gunnish—accent strong on the Nish and hardly anything at all to the Gun. Inny and I have been comrades in joy and woe since early childhood, and it was from me that he caught the black mumps that nearly killed him and his three sisters.

We have been broke together in a great many large cities, and when we went flat again in San Bernardino it was I who landed the jobs for us with the national forest-reserve commission. The letter said to report for work in two or three months.

"You wouldn't call them real impetuous about having us go to work for them, would you?" Inny remarked, reading the instructions over my shoulder. "We'll just about have time to go through some large college and learn this here science before they'll need us."

"You can't get a job in an hour," I argued, "especially a fine government position like this."

"No, but I could eat in less than an hour," Inny retorted, "and three months

from now I won't look so good to the eye without any meals in between."

"We'll eat all right," I assured him. "You stick to me, boy!"

"I have been sticking to you, and all there is to show for it is a job three months from now. When do we begin regular eating habits?"

"We will go as far as Guthrie," I explained, "where we will find temporary employment."

"Why Guthrie?"

"We can't find work here in Berdoo. At least you can't. But Guthrie contains one of the biggest and noisiest restaurants in the known world. I always like to be broke in a town that supports a large, busy restaurant. There is comfort in the thought that where so many people are feeding, one may horn in and suffuse himself with food amid the excitement. Have you never heard of Guthrie University?"

Inny had never heard of it, the same as he had never heard of adenoids, but Guthrie University is a series of red brick buildings, surrounded by an iron fence and filled with throbbing young Americans of both sexes, who are determined to snag whatever loose education the place affords. The university is the main reason for the restaurant.

You journey to the little town from San Bernardino on a freight train, if you are traveling by freight that season, and presently Inny and I coasted in upon the intellectuals and looked about for a place to anchor. First we

had to have work to tide us over the three months between us and ranging the forests.

It was definitely my intention to join the United States government in its laudable effort to keep the forests full of trees. There was a future for both of us as forest rangers, with Inny as chief ranger of one mountain and me on the next. We would have our deputy rangers, who would do the hard work, and all we'd have to annoy us would be bottled beer, cabins full of food, a free life amid the towering peaks, and a monthly report. And it was high time we settled down to some regular occupation.

There was one quite definite understanding between me and the national forest-reserve commission in Washington. In our official correspondence it was stipulated by the department and agreed to by me that we were both unmarried men and would remain in that skirtless condition.

"The work," said our favorite republic in the letter, "is of such a nature that the employment of married men is not feasible at this time."

"Well, we ain't married men, are we?" Inny demanded, when I laid a warning finger on this paragraph and held it under his nose.

"No, and I ain't liable to be," I retorted, "but you're different. You're a fuzzy-witted and vealy guy, and nobody can depend on you. I want you to keep this requirement constantly in mind. You're liable to dash out into the open night and get yourself all wedded up."

"No chance at all," Inny said coldly.

Upon reaching Guthrie, we walked from the railroad yards, there being nobody to meet us in a purple limousine, and surveyed the university. Finally we halted across the street from the far-famed restaurant, which Inny regarded with a wistful eye. Over the door was a sign leading you to believe that the place was owned and operated by a gent named Jabez Pettibone.

"The Pettibone Restaurant," murmured Inny, studying the gay crowds coming and going, picking their teeth as they emerged, without a thought of

the distress it caused us. "And a nice, large, busy joint, too."

"Behold the place where we work and eat, as soon as we reach financial arrangements with the proprietor," I affirmed.

"Maybe you better surge in and hypnotize the man," Inny suggested. "You seem to have a lot of confidence."

"I have, and I will," was my reply. So we waited till the rush hour was over, and I approached Pettibone's Restaurant. Seeking out its owner, I found that Jabez was a large, dark man with whiskers and gold teeth and an uneasy habit of lingering near his cash registers.

Twenty minutes later, I came forth with two brand-new jobs for Inny and myself, the wages being low, very low indeed, but the board and lodging certain and of fair quality. Inny met me with an inquiring gaze.

"We start to work to-morrow," I told him.

"That's better than three months from now," he agreed. "When do we eat?"

"Not until to-morrow," I replied, because Mr. Pettibone had said nothing to me about eating, and my pride refused to tell him the gnawing truth.

"When do the lodgings begin?" Inny faltered, and I informed him that we could occupy our room immediately.

"Then if I don't eat, I lodge," Inny said somewhat irritably. "Walking around only loads me with more appetite, and I've got enough now." Thereupon the annoyed partner of my joys went upstairs to bed, while I spent the rest of that long day looking over the town.

II.

We tackled the new jobs on the following morning, and I found myself assigned to the ladies' department, while Inny was planted across the building among the men. Pettibone's University Restaurant was a coeducational affair, with one-half of the lower floor set apart for the female students, while, opposite them, the young male yearners stuffed themselves daily.

From the very first I began to observe one of the lady students with an astounded gaze. She was twenty or twenty-one, and if there was a National Museum of Thin Dames, this tender young thing would have occupied Pedestal Number One.

"Who is she?" I asked a morose-looking waiter.

"That," said he. "That's Annabelle Doty. Ain't she a bird?"

He said this in a manner indicating that she was far from a bird, no matter how many kinds of birds you knew.

She was tall and rangy, and built like a telephone cable, only without its symmetry. Up at the university, so I learned, she was studying science, fine arts, botany, and sculpture, but it would have been better if she had taken a short course in the Effect of the Beef Stew Upon the Human Form.

"She's kind of slender," I mused, and the waiter admitted it.

"She's the thinnest female in California," he remarked, "and this State has 'em so thin that after they eat their motto candies you can read 'I Love You' for five minutes."

As I said, I paid no particular attention to Annabelle, except to serve her with a plate of thin soup and some crackers, although I wondered why she didn't eat more. If I looked like her, I would have eaten more, no matter who wins the war.

I decided that she was a brainy, æsthetic creature, all soul and mentality, with no thoughts for sordid things like pork chops and Spanish stew, and about that time who comes bustling into the picture but Inny Gunnish!

"Who is that girl?" he asked me.

"Her name is Annabelle Doty. She's a student."

"What ails her?"

"Nothing I know of, except that she's the least mite thin."

"She sure is some haggard," Inny rejoined, looking across the room at Annabelle as she arose, paid her slight check, and wandered on out.

Inny asked me other questions about the linear lady, but I didn't give much thought to them at the time. There

didn't seem to me to be any danger of sentimental notions over such a girlish gazelle as Annabelle was.

Later on I realized that you've got to think about even the most ridiculous things, because the next time I saw Inny he was wearing a serious look.

"I'm transferred," he announced.

"Where and why?" I asked.

"The Old Man put me over here with you," he continued, looking at me with a guileful eye. And, sure enough, he went to work in the female section of Pettibone's restaurant. Annabelle Doty appeared at her accustomed hour, and Inny waited on her. Furthermore, he passed the time of day with her in a polite and genteel manner, and she responded. At intermission time I spoke to him.

"Why this interest in our bony friend?" I asked him.

"She's having some very tough luck," he replied, but he acted as though he didn't want to talk much.

When he walked away he was wearing his sad and melancholy look, and nothing more happened until next feeding time. Once again Inny entered into discourse with Annabelle, and once again she replied, looking up at him with a grateful gaze in her blue eye. This sort of thing went on meal after meal. Sometimes Annabelle's girl friend would sit at her table, and Inny also talked with that person. One night, lounging on the edge of my bed and ironing a necktie on the oil stove, Inny unbosomed to me.

"Maybe you noticed I've been talking to Annabelle Doty?" he asked me.

"I noticed it all right," I answered. "You must be hard up for some one to spill language on."

"And I have also been talking about Annabelle to that other dame with the blue hat. Something ought to be done, and I think we might do it."

"What?" I asked.

"Well, to begin with, Annabelle Doty is in love with a man over in Casa Grande, which is the next station up the road. His name is Oscar Davis, and he runs the Casa Grande Livery

Stable. That's Annabelle's home town, and she's loved this Davis for years."

"That's a lot of bad luck to happen to one man," I remarked. "Where does this sad affair bust into our home life?"

"Well, I sort of have a notion that Annabelle suffers in silence. You know, she's pretty thin. More than likely, her love affair is eating at her heart."

"If her heart is built like the rest of her, that ain't enough eating to worry about. I still don't see where we crash in upon the scene."

"I hear from this other girl that Davis was all excited once about Annabelle. But love passed out of his life, and greed entered. Annabelle thought he was going to marry her, and it did look that way, the girl told me. He don't appreciate the real depth of her affection, and so I thought we might do somebody a good turn."

"Meaning that you want me to seethe in on a totally foreign love affair. That's exactly like sticking your hand into a thrashing machine to see if it's really full of sharp knives. You can count me out with one motion of the arm."

"I don't want to go over there alone, because it would look funny," Inny continued.

"It might not *be* funny," I retorted. "Suppose this Davis was quick-tempered and wore brass-topped boots?"

But Inny went right on obstinately:

"We could have a long, friendly talk with this man and tell him about Annabelle sitting here day after day, wasting away over her lost love. We could show him that this sterling creature has kept as true to him as the needle to the pole."

Well, to haul it up short and show you why the gate is never rusty on the Home for the Unhinged, I let the misguided galoot lure me into a promise to go with him when he went. I said I would accompany him and help him in his long, friendly chat with Oscar Davis, and we dedicated the coming Sunday morning to this noble purpose. I did this, feeling at the time that my better judgment was not among us.

We took the Sunday morning train, and moved upon Casa Grande in a body, and one of the first things we saw when we alighted was Davis' livery and feed stables. Casa Grande is very small and compact, and we had no trouble in locating Mr. Davis. He was sitting on a tool chest in the rear of his livery, putting sweet oil on a set of harness, and when we came in he regarded us with a look. Outside the villagers were coming home from church, and a Sabbath calm rested upon that fair community.

"Are you Oscar Davis?" Inny demanded, walking up and standing before the man.

"I am," he replied. "What do you want?"

He spoke coldly. There was nothing radiant or hearty about his greeting, and he didn't ask us how we were. Inny began to tell him what he wanted, and I took opportunity to study the man who had broken Annabelle's heart. He was a stoutish person of about thirty, very dark and robust, and there was a confident gleam in his eye. The more I looked at him the more I felt that Inny and I were stepping off some place in the dark.

"You know a girl named Annabelle Doty, don't you?" Inny inquired.

"I do," said the man.

"As I understand it, there were tender relations between you and her at one time?"

"You understand that, do you?" inquired Mr. Davis, putting down the harness and looking at Inny with fresh interest. "A regular little understander, aren't you?"

"I have learned," Inny said coolly, "that at one time it looked like marriage between you and Annabelle, and that subsequently you chilled off. What we're here for, without her knowledge, of course, is to show you that you're making a grave mistake. There ain't a finer girl in the world. It is rarely that a man is lucky enough to be offered affection like hers. I know it would make her happy if you asked her to marry you, and that's why we came over, Mr. Davis."

"You did, did you?" smiled the livery man. "You came over to ask me to ask Annabelle to marry me. And that makes a new world's record right here. I've heard of such cases before, but never met them."

"I'm trying to do you a friendly act," said Inny.

"And now I'm going to do you a friendly act," answered Mr. Davis. "I won't say much more to you, but if you will take that other half-witted ma'moset and get out of here, you will make the future easy for all of us."

Up to this point I had taken no part in the conversation. It was all Inny's funeral. But now I felt impelled to seep into the proceedings.

"Looks like we made a mistake, after all," I said to Inny. "It sure would be a shame to let Annabelle marry herself off to the uncouth and cindery-looking horse chambermaid we see before us. There's a crimal look about him that I noticed first off."

As I recall it, that is all I said, though I may have added other remarks which now escape me. But whatever I said was enough, plenty, and sufficient. Mr. Davis turned around just once and held up his hand, and, without a word being spoken, four large, hairy young men in the livery business came on what appeared to be the run.

There was no time for escape, and that is why I remained in the path of disaster. Mr. Davis took command, and Inny and I concluded our long, friendly talk by fighting for our lives, and if you want my humble and experienced tip, never get into a fight in a livery stable, because livery workers, once roused, are blood brothers to the man-eating tiger of the Nile.

III.

We escorted our wounds and abrasions back to Guthrie, and resumed work as soon as possible, and after that, nothing much happened, except that I loathed Inny and felt sore on the general subject of Annabelle Doty. Inny showed that he was ashamed of himself for getting me punched up and

thus things drifted on. He maintained a steady interest in Annabelle. I used to watch them together, and Annabelle seemed to grow even thinner, which sounds impossible, seeing she was already as thin as a herringbone. It wasn't long before Inny's natural restlessness brought its own reward.

"You want to know something about Annabelle Doty?" he asked me one evening, while I was fixing a bit of fresh court-plaster to my nose.

"If I tell you I want to know any more about that woman, don't you believe me," I replied without enthusiasm. "Maybe you're thinking of having a long, friendly chat with some other pal of hers?"

"Not at all," he retorted, hurt by my bitterness. "Do you know the reason that girl is so blamed thin?"

"Sure I do; a general lack of meat surrounding, adhering, and sticking to the bones."

"Exactly. And what causes that lack? The poor child hasn't any money. She's working her way through the university, and meantime she's educating her younger brothers, who are in a St. Joe orphan asylum. She's having hard lines."

"She *has* hard lines," I said sourly. "They're all hard to look at. Maybe you want me to leap over to St. Joe and adopt the orphan brothers."

"I don't want you to do anything," he returned, "but it's pretty tough luck for a young girl. I'm going to do something about it."

He did, too. I watched him at work, and it's a good thing that Jabez Pettibone wasn't gifted with similar eyesight, because right about then the Pettibone Restaurant began to lose money. Inny mapped out a course of action, which consisted wholly of food, and he went joyously about the job of fattening up Annabelle Doty.

Every time she breezed into Pettibone's, which was twice a day, Inny waited on her tenderly, and while she continued to order a dime's worth she didn't get what she ordered. She began to face real provender, the same

being everything Inny could drag out of the kitchen.

Annabelle used to come in and take her place, and Inny would move upon the kitchen with a determined air and a large tray. When he returned, the tray would be full of food, all neatly covered with a cloth to save Jabez pain. In a way, it was interesting to watch Inny fattening up the fair one, and the truth is Annabelle liked the treatment and responded to it.

Her cheeks began to fill out, and you could look at her neck without hurting your eye. Her tickets continued to read twenty cents, and sometimes, when she had been surrounded by a sea of glutens and proteids, Inny would lose his nerve; so he would add a half dollar to Annabelle's check and pay the difference out of his own. Between them, Inny and Jabez were paying for Annabelle's luxurious meals and she grew plump.

In addition to caring for the girl's gastronomic affairs, Inny was spending his income in still another way.

"You can't expect a girl to have the right appetite unless she gets fresh air," he argued with me.

"Naturally not," I agreed. "You might try standing her in a draft."

"No, but she needs air," he continued, "and I'm going to see that she gets it."

"You'll have to drop this full-food exposition pretty quick," I told him. "The United States government writes me that we'll be forest rangers soon, and to get ready for work."

"I'll be ready when the job is," said Inny in his careless manner, and he went away to see old man Thacker.

IV.

The town of Guthrie boasted of some things, but not of George Thacker, who operated the livery stables. George was seventy years old, and so was his youngest horse. He rented alleged vehicles and equines to the college students who desired to go buggy dashing now and then, and Inny negotiated with the ancient man. Not having enough regular currency to hire a horse and

carriage, Inny was forced to mortgage the future. Anyhow, he made a deal with Thacker, and presently you could see him driving Annabelle along the mountain roads, where she could gather up the needed atmosphere.

And Annabelle became jollier and plumper daily, and during meals she laughed at Inny's amusing discourse. Between much food and the buggy riding, Miss Doty was rapidly assuming the general contour of a human being.

Well, you can't feed a lady day after day, and protect her with the tender care of a young mother without growing attached to her. I've always worried when Inny showed signs of getting sentimental, and while Annabelle Doty wouldn't ensnare a man at the beginning of the enterprise, she was now changing from a lean and hungry spectacle to a chubby, plumpish damsel.

One Saturday morning I received some news that keeled me straight over. In the mail was this letter from the national forest-reserve commission:

MR. JOE COLEMAN.

DEAR SIR: I regret to state that we have canceled your engagement as forest ranger. This was found necessary, owing to your having concealed the fact that you are a married man. The department has found that you were married in Wauseon, Ohio, in 1909, and have a wife and two daughters.

I read it in stunned amazement, because I was not married in nineteen hundred and nine, and I have no wife and daughters. After my mind resumed its regular throbbings I sat on the edge of my bed and tried to figure out what kind of a shinny game our government was trying to play on an honest citizen.

It slowly dawned on me. In Wauseon, my home town, there was another Joe Coleman, and a worthless scamp he was. I laughed heartily. It was a joke on the commission. The board had simply mixed me up with the other Joe Coleman.

Then I ceased from ribald mirth, because the joke wasn't on the commission, after all. Six months would probably flutter away before I could untangle the mess. I cursed freely, and

looked down on the street, where I observed Inny Gunnish on his way home from the post office. He was carrying a letter and reading it with signs of interest.

"Well," I growled when he came in, "I've had some fine news this morning. Here's a letter from the forest-reserve people telling me I can't have my ranger job because."

"Because what?" Inny asked.

"Because I'm a married man! Ain't that good? The board must keep a lot of intelligent investigators, eh? It'll take me months to explain that I'm not the Joe Coleman with the wife. You remember that stiff?"

"I do," Inny said, looking thoughtfully out of the window, "and now I understand my letter. I got one, too, from the forest-reserve board."

"You have?" I asked, surprised.

"Yes," he continued, still looking fixedly out of the window, "and it says here as how I'm to start to work at once. It goes on to state that owing to their appointing only one ranger, instead of two, as they expected to on the first of the month, they'll have to wait till they find another suitable candidate. Meantime, I'm to go on the job at double salary."

"Say," I said, laughing in a relieved way, "that's good luck. You're going on at double pay. Fine! I'll kick right along with you. I'll wire the government and explain about this Joe Coleman, and you split your pay with me until later. Of course it'll be all right when the board finds it has made a mistake."

"There's only one trouble," Inny said, still refusing to look me in the eye.

"Trouble?" I repeated. "What is it?"

"I can't take the job."

"You can't what?" I yelled.

"I can't accept this position," he said, picking at the curtain tassel.

"Why not?"

"Something has arose," said Inny.

"Well, spill it!" I roared. "What has arose?"

"Not much," said Inny, "except that I'm going to be married, and that disqualifies me."

"Married!" I shrieked, sliding off the bed. "Who to?"

"Annabelle Doty," Inny replied, going through what would be blushing in a sensible man.

I looked up at him, and tried to remain calm.

"And this," I quavered, "this is what I get for stringing along like a loyal partner. You're going to hurl me down and marry a milk-fed, butter-fattened proteid consumer!"

"Enough!" Inny commanded. "Speak no ill of that girl. You don't know what love is, Joe, and that's why you put jobs above the sacred passion."

"You're marrying a food destroyer, and nothing else," I howled, "and you're leaving me flat. How are you going to buy grub for that female without a job?"

"That is arranged for. Jabez Pettibone has staked me to a new job and the apartment over the restaurant. He wants a steady, married man for floor manager. I'm sorry for you, Joe, but you don't understand what love means to a man."

They set their wedding for the sixteenth of the month, and Inny wrote to the forest-reserve board, resigning from the job he had never accepted. Two other rangers were appointed. Inny borrowed a small sum from Jabez and furbished himself for the wedding, and I decided to linger on painfully in Guthrie until the ceremony was over. Then I would hike back East, where I wouldn't miss Inny so much. Meantime, having no heart for anything, I gave up my job with Jabez, and mooned around town.

The sixteenth came on Wednesday, and on Tuesday afternoon I began packing up. I was down on my knees in our room, wondering why I always had such hard luck, when I heard the sound of something coming upstairs, and Inny burst upon me. His eyes were standing out ahead of him. His face was red, his hair ruffled, and his temperature high.

"Who's dead?" I inquired.

"Annabelle's married!" he gasped.

"Married!" I repeated. "Who'd she marry?"

"She went up to Casa Grande this morning to say good-by to her aunt, and here's the telegram."

He handed me the wire, which read:

Oscar and I were married at noon. Sorry. He is the only man I could ever really love.

ANNABELLE.

"Well, wouldn't that cook you?" I asked in amazement, reading it again to be sure.

"And he refused to marry her once," Inny wailed bitterly. "We went over there and asked him to, and he refused and chased us out. And now, after I go and fatten her up and make her beautiful and fall in love with her, the sucker takes another look, and bang goes my wedding."

I looked at Inny, moaning there on my bed, and began to grin. Who wouldn't? You take a scrawny dame, fatten her up nicely, and the other guy finds she's his pie and there goes your blushing bride. So I grinned some more, but in order to do it without the loss of life I sauntered downstairs, leaving Inny to his sorrow.

Buck Swayne met me, having just returned from Casa Grande. He'd been at the wedding.

"Tough on Inny," said Buck, grinning.

"How about me?" I asked. "Think of them government jobs! They're gone, and all through plumping up a female. So where are we?"

I didn't return to our room for a while, and when I did I found something. For the first time in his career Inny was pickled, and pickled clear up to the hatband. You couldn't blame him at that, because he was fond of the girl. Also you couldn't walk him, which I tried to do. He had taken his wedding trousseau by the hand and traded it at the corner store for two bottles of rare old tiger bite, and not much remained when I got home.

He was in favor of hurrying over to Casa Grande and murdering Oscar Davis before he could get away, but I

voted for a freight train East as soon as my weaker companion could travel.

I kept the poor galoot in the house, and removed the rum, and at daybreak next morning he returned to his normal mind, though suffering some pain. We started inconspicuously out of Guthrie, carrying our bags. Coming down Main Street, early as it was, we encountered poor old Mr. Thacker, the livery baron.

"Goin' away?" he demanded in surprise. "There's a bill due me for horse hire."

Inny stared at him, and merely gargled in reply.

"We are going away," I admitted. "Any little bills will have to remain unpaid. We've had enough bad luck."

"All right," squeaked Mr. Thacker, waving a paper at Inny, "but I'll report this to Oscar Davis, and he'll jail you."

I looked at the old ruin in perplexity.

"Oscar Davis?" I asked. "What's he got to do with Inny's livery bill for horse hire?"

"Don't you know that Oscar Davis owns the Guthrie livery?" demanded the vicious old man. "I'm only his agent."

Inny was staring at George Thacker and throbbing like one of these transparent fish in an aquarium.

"So," he said in a voice rendered calm by suffering. "So I have been paying all my wages and then some more to Oscar Davis, bless his little soul! Well, now, ain't that amusing? Come on along, Joe, before I hammer this frail old yap to death in the public roadway."

We went on down the street toward the freight yards. And if you hear anybody explaining that the saddest event in history was the Massacre of the Infants, you tell them where they're wrong.

As we climbed into the coal car, Inny said:

"When we get this new job, let's not work in a restaurant."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because," said Inny, "I don't think I could stand it. I'll never feel exactly the same about food again."

Lion for Bait

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "A Fourfold Game," "Garland: Ranger Service," Etc.

Browning and Maeterlinck breed a riot in the highbrow circles of Mendon, Texas, and Colonel Buck Leonard, ex-Ranger, comes to the rescue with a trained lion

LITERATURE, politics, and draw poker do not necessarily make such an incongruous combination as might seem at first thought. They have these things in common: They are all entertaining. Much profit may be, and sometimes is, gained from each. And there are times when any of them can be taken with almost fatal seriousness.

Colonel Buck Leonard, bank president, real-estate operator, ex-cattleman, and ex-Texas Ranger, held the deck of cards on his left palm, the thumb of his right hand ready to begin the distribution for the draw, and looked inquiringly toward Doc Milliken, who had opened the pot. The others in the game were the usual coterie that gathered almost nightly in Doc Milliken's office. Jim Sweetland and the city marshal had both signified their intention of drawing cards in this particular hand, and each had contributed the necessary brown chip for the privilege.

"Cards, gentlemen, if any such there be in our midst!" called Buck cheerily.

"Three cards, mostly eights," said Sweetland.

"Three here—mostly anything to help these openers," remarked Doc Milliken. The city marshal, beyond him, who had been playing in extraordinarily bad luck, dejectedly called for one, looked at it, and instantly threw it and the remainder of his hand into the discards with petulance and profanity.

Buck dealt himself two very swiftly, very unostentatiously. He did not announce the number. One observing from the side lines, as it were, might

have reasonably opined that he would be perfectly satisfied not to have the others notice his draw. He tossed the pack aside, shuffled the two cards into the three he had saved, and, without looking at the completed hand, waited with smiling interest for Milliken to bet.

The doctor carefully surveyed all five of his cards. He fingered his chips and then seemed struck by an omission. "I didn't get your draw," he remarked to Buck. "How many did the dealer take?"

Leonard hesitated a tenth of a second; again one might have said he regretted this publicity. Then he replied: "Two. I've got a set of very small threes, if you insist on knowin' without payin' for it."

"Check a white chip," said Milliken promptly.

"That bein' the case, I'll have to tilt it——" Buck hesitated, considered, stacked up in front of him five brown chips, added five more, then took off three and pushed the remainder to the center of the table. "I'll put it up just seven dollars. Not five—I kin get more. Not ten—Doc wouldn't call ten. But the mystic seven. Queer how that number seven is regarded as a lucky number in hist'ry, ain't it? Seven candlesticks, seven days in the week, seven What's-their-names of Greece, seven sleepers, seven——"

"Seven times seventy-seven words!" interrupted Sweetland, gently tossing his hand away. "All right; I'm hypnotized; why continue? A seven-dollar raise would drive me even without the

conversation; I didn't get a thing on the draw."

"You cause me to consider deeply," said Doc Milliken, his eyes on Buck's face, which was grinning the poker grin that meant just exactly nothing. "It frames up to me something like this: On general principles you're an old liar. Maybe you didn't mean me to notice how many cards you took, and maybe you didn't mean to hesitate when I asked you, and maybe you told the truth when you said you had a little set of three, but the chances are at least even the other way, and prob'ly a little more so. Therefore here's seven dollars. I'll prove how honest I think you are by showing mine first—a pair of twelves and ab-so-lute-ly nothing else."

He spread his hand face up—two queens and three entirely irrelevant cards.

"That's good!" grinned Buck, a little sheepishly. "You called a pair of nines."

"And the groans of the dead and dying could be heard for many blocks," quoted Sweetland, preparing to deal.

"Cheer up, Buck!" put in Carroll Emery, from across the table. "Rotten as you played it, you done your best!" He addressed Doc Milliken with mock seriousness: "Good player, ol' Buck! Good ol' bluffer! Always gets away with it! Me, I'm sorry to see poor ol' Buck get caught at it that-a-way. I don't think!"

"I'd rather have a million dollars than your disposition," remarked Buck.

"The great trouble with poor old Buck," Doc Milliken replied gravely to Emery, as Sweetland began the next deal, "is that he had a fever when he was a chee-ild and he don't pick up things. He's never been able to learn that you can sometimes lie to old liars, but you can't kid old bluffers."

Colonel Leonard sat in his private office in the Mendon State Bank, at about three o'clock the following afternoon, when Doctor Milliken came in, closed the door, and silently passed Buck a cigar. Buck saw there was something more than sociability in this

visit, and waited without comment while the doctor tossed his hat on a table, lighted a fresh cigar himself, and solemnly eased himself into a chair.

Doctor Milliken lost no time in coming to his point.

"Luther Hardy and Gus Dallinger are in a row," he said.

Buck received this information with the gravity it deserved, for Luther Hardy was mayor of Mendon, and Augustus G. Dallinger was county judge. A quarrel between them could not but be injurious. Such a quarrel, at this moment, Colonel Leonard did not need to be told, might prove not only embarrassing from a party sense, but distinctly harmful to the community.

"What kind of a row?" he asked. "What about?"

"You can search me! I haven't happened to see either of them for two or three days until about an hour ago, when I went to the courthouse to file a couple of death certificates, and I naturally dropped into the judge's office to say 'Howdy!' We talked along about this and that for a few minutes, and then he says he supposes I ought to know that he's decided he can't support Luther for mayor this coming spring. I ask him what for, and he says it's purely a personal matter and that he has nothing special to say against the mayor, but he thinks it's time there was a change. Then he goes into his shell like an armadillo. Now, what d'ya know about that?"

"Not a thing," said Buck literally. "How's the mayor feel? Have you seen him?"

"No, and I thought I hadn't better. You got him to run, you know, in the beginning. Hadn't you better tackle him, he being a director in this bank and all? Besides, he's so darn hard to talk to."

"Maybe so. Somethin' personal, eh? Now I wonder what the blazes those two have got to fightin' about. They never been close friends, especially, but they always been friendly enough—if you get the difference."

"Go to it!" said Doctor Milliken, rising. "We've got to try to make it up,

whatever it is. A fight this election might mean all kinds of bad medicine. For one thing, there's the bond issue for new streets."

"And that health survey you was wantin' to get made."

"And the new high school. Next year is going to be a mighty important year for Mendon, but if there's any fight in our own crowd those other fellows are going to be able to hog-tie every plan we put forward. We had too much trouble getting that gang of old mossbacks licked to take any chances on their coming back, and you bet your life they're waiting to come back, first chance they get. They're talking that old stuff about 'this town was good enough for our daddies without all these expensive, newfangled fads' just as bad as they ever were."

"Shore; you don't have to tell me," said Buck. "Well, I'll try to get at Luther right away, this evenin'. We need to hurry."

The mayor, who, outside of official office hours, occupied a room in the principal brick building on the main street, on the door of which was lettered, "L. Hardy, Stockman," was in that office when Buck arrived, fifteen minutes later.

He was a very tall, very broad, very leathery-faced man of fifty-five, who wore a black coat and a black broad-brimmed hat most of the time, had his hair cut as often as his wife could make him, and lived a lonely life because he never had been a very good mixer, anyway, and hadn't been allowed to mix at all since he had been married. He was sitting alone in a straight chair, tilted back against the wall, smoking gloomily.

He brought the chair down onto all its legs as the door opened, and tilted it back again when he identified his visitor.

"'Lo, Luther!" said Buck.

"'Lo, Buck!" said the mayor.

"Say, Luther," asked Buck, without preamble, "have you and Gus Dallinger had some kind of a ruckus?"

The mayor removed his cigar, looked it over carefully, and put it back in his mouth.

"Well," he said, after a minute, hesitatingly, "we ain't exactly on the best o' terms."

"What's the matter?"

"Little personal matter."

Hardy did not seem disposed to go into further details. Buck declared himself frankly:

"Look here, Luther! I want to help smooth things out before they get any further. If we ain't careful, maybe Gus won't be with you for mayor this comin' spring."

Another pause.

"I ain't for him, either."

"But why?"

"Little personal matter."

The conference gave every sign of having reached its end. Mayor Hardy smoked cheerlessly, his eyes on the opposite wall.

"I ain't aimin' to meddle in what ain't my business," Buck said, "but, good Lawd! you kin see what a position it places us all in. Kain't you tell me a little more about it? Man to man, Luther, I think you ought to."

The mayor considered this.

"Talked rough about me," he said.

"Talked rough about you? Why, say, Luther! I never heard of Gus Dallinger talkin' rough about anybody, outside some prisoner when he used to be State's attorney. Ain't there some mistake? Are you sure he said it? What started it? Had you had any words with him about anything?"

"Not much."

"What was it about? Politics?"

"Nope. Personal."

"But what could you two have to quarrel about personally? Come on! Let's have it, won't you, Luther?"

Hardy's eyes went back to the wall again, and he sighed.

"Wife," he said.

"Whose wife? Great Cæsar, man! You don't mean, as old as you and Gus are, that——"

"No," interrupted Hardy, with instant animation, which faded as soon as he had spoken the word. "Just some advice I give him about his wife. Good advice. And he got mad about it."

"Here! Straighten this out for me.

What advice did you give him, and how come you to do it? And what did he say? And kain't it be fixed up? Go ahead and loosen up, Luther. Just between ourselves."

"Well," the mayor said uncomfortably, "it kain't be fixed, because he told lke Berg I was—somethin'."

"What?"

The mayor looked embarrassed.

"Ol' woman," he said, after a brief hesitation. "And he didn't have no call to. What I said was for his wife's good. I just asked him, friendly like, if he wouldn't ask his wife to kinda apologize to my wife for something his wife said, last Tuesday, that my wife —"

"Hold on!" interrupted Buck. "This is gettin' out of my sabe. No ol' bach like me's got any business sittin' into this game. I pass! I would sort of like to know what he said when you asked him, though."

"That's what's funny about it," the mayor replied, with almost a show of interest. "He told me, when I done went to him, that he hadn't no doubt it was all an accident, and he'd speak to Miz Dallinger about it and he guessed it'd be all right. And the next I knew, Ike Berg he comes mentionin' that Judge Dallinger says I'm an ol' woman, and then when I meet the judge on the street the next time he don't see me a-tall. And my wife says that——"

"Luther," interrupted Buck hurriedly, looking at his watch, "there's a man over in my office waitin' for me right this minute. I gotta run. Say! Do me a favor, will you? Don't mention this to anybody until—well, until you hear Dallinger has said something. Will you?"

The mayor thought this over.

"All right," he agreed. "But I ain't goin' to support him for reëlection. There kain't no man call me that, Buck. If I wasn't a peaceable man, and these were a little earlier times, I'd——"

"Shore! But not now. Adios, Luther. See you again in a day or two."

From the bank he reached Doctor Milliken promptly by telephone.

"Say, doc!" he called into the transmitter. "I've got a little line on that thing we were talkin' about, but I kain't tell it—got it in confidence, you understand. Listen! You go see that party you ran into at the courthouse—get me?—and make him promise not to mention the matter to anybody else until he hears the other feller has. Think you kin do it?"

"I can try."

"See you later," said Buck. "Right now I gotta do a little work. I ain't even opened the evenin' mail."

Among the letters that lay on his desk, as he turned from the telephone, was one bearing the impressive embossed insignia of a famous New York financial institution, at whose head is Mr. Thomas Vanderhoven Vanderpool, adviser and administrator of hundreds of millions. Buck opened this letter first, because he and Mr. Vanderpool were very good friends, the famous banker having spent more than one vacation hunting with him in Salado County.

The letter was purely personal. It read:

COLONEL BUCKLEY J. LEONARD, *State Bank, Mendon, Texas.*

DEAR COLONEL: I want you to be sure to get acquainted with a very good friend of mine, Professor John Wadsworth Kent, who left here last evening for San Antonio, and hence will be there by the time you receive this, at whichever of the big hotels he can get the best accommodations.

Kent was in my class at Yale, and we have been close friends ever since.

Although he happens to be one of the most famous authorities on literature, and his writings are standard textbooks in most of the universities, don't let that cause you to misjudge him before you see him. As a matter of fact, he is one of the best fellows I ever knew; a regular human being.

He and I were at a little dinner, not long ago, given by a rather well-known lion hunter here in New York—the lion hunter's husband is such a good fellow that neither of us wanted to decline—and when the ladies had left the table and we were all talking, one of these long-haired boys addressed Kent in a deep, soulful voice.

"Professor," he said to Kent, "I've been thinking to-day of the great epigrams of great writers; the great axioms of conduct that, if every one would follow them, would

make all the world better, nobler, and brighter. What do *you* think is the greatest of them all, Professor Kent?"

Kent gives him the east and west, as the boys say, and replies: "The most useful one, in many respects, is Elbert Hubbard's 'Rule Six.'" "Dear me!" says the long-haired boy blankly. "I'm afraid I'm not familiar with it. What is the quotation?" "Hubbard's 'Rule Six,'" says Kent, "is 'Don't take yourself too damn' seriously.'"

I've told you this little story just to give you a line on Kent. You'll like him, and he'll like you. He is a highbrow, all right, but he is all human. Meet him and ask him what he'll have, and get acquainted. If he happens to come to Mendon, invite him to sit in with the boys over at the doctor's office. He can't play well enough to win from you cutthroats, I imagine, but he isn't exactly an amateur at the game—and, if he loses, he can afford it.

My very best regards to Doctor Milliken and all the others of my old friends. Again this year I missed the deer shooting. Next season let's hope for better luck. Very sincerely yours,
T. V. VANDERPOOL.

Buck went through the remainder of his mail, dictated a few brief letters to his stenographer, waited to sign them, and then went home. At the supper table he brought up the matter that had been in the back of his mind ever since midafternoon.

"Say, Dolly," he asked his widowed sister. "You know all about the society and near-society tantrums in this town. What's the ruckus between Miz Judge Dallinger and Miz Luther Hardy?"

"Literature," replied his sister laconically.

"Huh? What do they know about literature?"

"That's it," Mrs. Page explained. "Have you just heard about it?"

"You never told me."

"Do I ever gossip—much?"

"No, Dolly, you don't—much." They both laughed, possessing sympathetic understanding. "But this particular piece of gossip I reckon I ought to know about. Don't mention it, please, but this scrap has got extended to Gus and Luther."

"Well, some of the women have been talking of organizing a literary society—something outside the Woman's Club. Both Mrs. Dallinger and Mrs. Hardy go in for literature, you know, and each

of them is entirely positive she is the literary leader of the community."

"Where do you come in on that, sis?"

"Oh, I don't come in; that's all right, I don't want to. I'm not literary."

"Why, Dolly! At college you——"

"Yes, but there's a new heaven and a new earth, Buck. I have old-fashioned ideas. I even think Shakespeare hasn't been improved upon for dramatic expression, and that nobody has written any better poetic imagery or deeper philosophy than can be found in the Bible, irrespective of its value as a religious book. No. I wouldn't do, even if I wanted to get into the thing—and I don't. Mrs. Dallinger and Mrs. Hardy do. They want to organize a reading club. They each want to be president, general manager, and chief critic of it. It hasn't started yet," she added cheerfully. "And there have been not less than two fights already."

"What's going to be the name of it?"

"That was fight number one. Mrs. Hardy wanted to call it the Browning Club, and Mrs. Dallinger said it ought to be the Maeterlinck Club, and——"

"Why didn't they compromise and call it the Brownlink Club?"

Mrs. Page ignored this persiflage.

"Well, there was a little flare-up at that meeting, and the other women didn't want to take sides, and they postponed naming the club, or even organizing it, for the time being. Afterward, Mrs. Dallinger and Mrs. Hardy got to telling their friends what each of them thought of the other's knowledge of literature, and things came to a head when they both happened to meet, last Tuesday, down at the Woman's Club. I heard *that*. It was after the meeting, and the members were standing around talking, and Mrs. Hardy said to Mrs. Dallinger, in her most society voice: 'Come see me some time.' And Mrs. Dallinger said, in *her* best society manner: 'I'll try, but I'm *so* busy; I hardly find time nowadays to even call on the people I'm fond of.'"

"Where did she get that 'fond of?'"

"I don't know. Out of the same book she got the whole cutting speech

from, I suppose. Just imagine Mary Dallinger using that kind of language!"

"I kain't."

"Well, that is all there was to it."

"Oh, no, it wasn't—not by a long shot. I'll tell *you* something about the ensuin' battles of this cruel war. Miz Hardy she went home and tore Luther up about it, and said Miz Dallinger was an ol' cat and ought to be made to apologize, and he had got to do it. Nobody told me the exact lines the conversation took—and I've got the whole thing on the quiet, anyway—but I don't have to be a mind reader to get it. Luther he did as he was told—like he always does. He asked Gus Dallinger to ask Miz Dallinger to apologize."

"He *did!*"

"He shore walked in where angels would have expected to stumble. And Gus, not knowin' anything about it except that his Lizzie wouldn't insult anybody, he says that'll be all right and goes home to make her the proposition. Then she tells Gus that Luther is some-thin' or other—a henpecked ol' fool, for a guess—and gives him what-for for buttin' in, and Gus gets sore on Luther, and Luther hears about it and gets sore on Gus, and—— Say, Dolly, it'll raise merry blazes with this town if somebody kain't stop that scrap. Just take one thing! What do you s'pose will happen to your new high school if we should have a wide-open fight Election Day and that other gang should get in?"

Mrs. Page, being a practical woman of much sense, wasted no time in words, but thought deeply.

Buck spoke again, after a minute: "If those women could be patched up, Gus and Luther would come around all right, wouldn't they?"

"They would if 'those women' instructed 'em to," his sister replied with finality. "There isn't any doubt about who is the head of either of those households. But who can patch up a quarrel as nasty as that?"

"If you could go to 'em and——"

"No use, buddie. I couldn't. I don't know any woman in town that could, either. Since those two went in for

literature, their minds are on a plane above this simple little city, anyway. They spell Literature with a capital, and we other poor folks——"

"I wonder!" Buck exclaimed. Then suddenly: "Where's Billy?"

"He was in the garage just before supper; I had him out this afternoon. He said something about running downtown to-night to get some gas. Why?"

"I want him. I'm goin' to San 'Ntonio first thing in the mawnin' in the big car. I gotta get some advice."

"Now who in San Antonio can advise you about—or maybe you're off on some other subject."

"No, it's the same one. I didn't think to tell you I had a letter to-day from Tom Vanderpool. There's a friend of his come to San 'Ntonio he wants me to look up. Say! What's a lion hunter? In society, I mean. What's Vanderpool mean when he writes something about a New York woman that's a lion hunter?"

"She's a woman who invites famous people to her dinners or parties, and shines a little with their reflected light. People that have succeeded and got their names in the papers have to dodge her."

"I see. Well, this chap Vanderpool knows is a lion. Maybe you've heard of him. He's Professor Kent. John Something Kent. I left the letter on my desk."

"John Wadsworth Kent certainly *is* a lion."

"That's it—'Wadsworth!' Well, I'm goin' up and say 'Welcome to our fair and imperial commonwealth!' to him first thing in the mawnin'. And, speakin' of this other thing—you're friendly with both Miz Dallinger and Miz Hardy, ain't you?"

"Not enough to suggest to them——"

"Friendly enough to make either of 'em a pleasant little call and tell her how she could cover herself with glory—if you knew she could—ain't you?"

"Why, I suppose—— What scheme have you got in that head of yours now?"

"No scheme, Dolly. No scheme," said Buck soothingly. "I'm just grop-

in' darkly in a cloud of weird imaginative possibilities. Let's go in the parlor and have some music. Put on that record of six voices——"

At four o'clock the following afternoon, Buck Leonard and Professor Kent sat in the grillroom at the professor's hotel, where they had been since luncheon time. Tom Vanderpool had been right; each of them did enjoy the other's company. They had exhausted a number of subjects and still had a great many to look forward to. Buck, musing the evening before while the phonograph played, had about decided the thought that had suddenly come to him at the mention of capital-L Literature and lion hunters was not inspiration, but madness. Now, as he began to get really acquainted with this handsome, genial, frank-eyed, gray-haired philosopher, the idea did not seem quite so mad, after all.

He ordered a waiter to bring another, and launched into a new vein.

He told Professor Kent the story of Mrs. Dallinger and Mrs. Hardy, and of the reactions their quarrel had had on the judge and the mayor, and of the things that might happen detrimental to the flourishing city of Mendon if some way could not be found to make peace between the rival leaders of the would-be literary set. He told it well. Professor Kent chuckled heartily at Buck's quaint description of the disputants and their dispute. He became serious and listened sympathetically as Buck reviewed briefly the battle Mendon had gone through, three years before, to push aside the "mossbacks" and change from a careless, unclean, shiftless frontier town to a city with ideas and ideals.

Buck hesitated when he had finished the tale. When he resumed, it was with some reluctance.

"I'm almost on the point of askin' you to do me a favor—the first time we meet. I need some advice, anyway. I see—or I think I see—how maybe this thing could be straightened out, and—— If Tom Vanderpool didn't say you was a regular human bein', and if I didn't see that for myself, I

wouldn't ask you. But if it was Vanderpool I wouldn't hesitate, so perhaps——"

Professor Kent's mental processes were trained and swift. "I almost see it already," he said. "Put it into words. Of course I'll do it, if I can."

Thus encouraged, Buck rapidly sketched a plan. Kent nodded, put in a word here and there, finally threw back his head and laughed.

"Judging from my experience with the species, it ought to be a quite simple thing to accomplish. Certainly I'll do it, and you'll be under no obligation at all. I'll enjoy it. Then, after it is done, I very much want to meet some of your friends Vanderpool has told me about—Doctor Milliken and Sweetland and the rest. I expect it may prove costly, from what Tom said, but I'll try to play well enough not to bore you."

"This is shorely mighty fine of you," said Buck gratefully, "and——"

"Not another word! Didn't you hear me say I'm going to enjoy it myself? Now tell me, please. You've given me a pretty good idea of Mrs. Dallinger—she's the Maeterlinck person, isn't she?—and the other lady, Mrs. Hardy, is the Browning booster. This is going to be interesting."

Pursuant to program, and moved by tactful suggestions from Mrs. Page, whose opinion, as president of the Woman's Club, had weight with both even if she did not measure up to their literary standards, Mrs. Dallinger and Mrs. Hardy each wrote John Wadsworth Kent, Litt. D., a most carefully composed note, asking if she could interview him at his convenience at San Antonio, with a view to asking his valued advice regarding certain matters having to do with the progress of culture in Mendon. Each said she would take up very little of his time; each thanked him cordially in advance.

He replied to Mrs. Dallinger that he would be honored if she would call upon him at his hotel on the following Tuesday, at two. His letter to Mrs. Hardy was similar, except that it named

four o'clock as the hour for the interview.

When the bellboy found him with Mrs. Dallinger's card, he came at once in person and escorted her to a seat in the corner of the long lobby. His appearance was distinguished, his poise superb, his manner the acme of dignified courtesy. The lady was awed. She plunged into her errand rather breathlessly. Her remarks—in which she departed very little from the speech she had prepared and committed—led up to the request, whose audacity she assured him she appreciated, that he would come to Mendon and address the first meeting of their new literary club, naming any "honorarium" he desired, which it would give her deep pleasure to pay.

He shook his head smilingly at the mention of a fee. "No, dear lady," he said. "Not that."

Mrs. Dallinger had read that phrase "dear lady" somewhere. She had always wondered if any one ever really said it.

She was going to add to her entreaties, thinking he had it in mind to decline her invitation entirely, when he went on:

"It might be arranged—perhaps—under some circumstances. There is a certain duty one owes to others, is there not? Yes, I think it would be very pleasant to come to your little city and speak at the first meeting of a club that unites all the women of Mendon whose minds turn toward profitable reading. In fact, you are not the first lady who has honored me with this invitation. I had almost decided, before you came, to accede to the charming request made by your Mrs.—Mrs.—ah, yes, I have it—Mrs. Hardy. You and she, I take it, represent the same movement."

At the name of the mayor's wife Mrs. Dallinger flushed, then paled.

"Er—why—er—professor, I'm sorry, but all the people of Mendon who discuss literature are not in entire—er—harmony. There are some who have—shall I say little understanding of the

subject? If you were to look into the matter, you would——"

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Kent, startled. "I couldn't think of visiting your city at all unless the literary women were united in wanting me. No, no. If you and Mrs.—er—Hardy, and the friends of both of you, are quite unanimous in wanting me, I might—yes, I will go so far as to say I would—run over to your city and give you an afternoon. Otherwise—no, Mrs. Dallinger, you mustn't ask me."

The judge's wife, thus thrown on the defensive, blurted out the truth. "I just can't do it, professor. Mrs. Hardy and I—I'm sorry to say it, and I wish it hadn't happened; honestly I do—aren't on entirely good terms."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" The great man showed genuine concern. "Too bad! Too bad! Is the—er—disagreement between you two one that cannot be bridged?"

"I don't know."

"Have you a Woman's Club in Mendon?"

"Yes."

"You and Mrs.—er—Hardy both belong, I presume?" Mrs. Dallinger nodded.

"The president of your Woman's Club—perhaps she is a friend of each of you."

"Yes. She's Mrs. Dorothy Page."

"Who knows? If you were to go to her and talk the matter over frankly, perhaps she would arrange a meeting between you and Mrs. Hardy, at which neither of you would have to make the first advances, and your misunderstandings could be removed and everything placed in perfect harmony."

She was on the point of agreeing when she foresaw an obstacle.

"I was thinking of having this meeting for organization at my house, and——"

"I understand," he interrupted brightly. "And you see that under the circumstances it would be better to hold it at the building or headquarters of your Woman's Club, and to ask this Mrs. Page to preside. A beautiful

thought, Mrs. Dallinger! A generous thought! I quite agree with you."

"The officers——" Mrs. Dallinger began weakly, but was again interrupted:

"You will be deeply interested to know the custom that is being followed in not a few similar organizations throughout the country. Instead of electing only a president, whose duties frequently embrace all the authority in the club, these societies are electing a president and a director general. The president is the social arbiter of the club, as it were. The director general selects the courses of reading and the programs. Each is practically supreme in her own department. Such a club really has two heads, each equal to the other in standing. Is it not a pleasant idea?"

"Why, yes. Yes, I guess it is. But ——" Professor Kent waited, smiling tolerantly. "What are you to do when a woman's ideas of—of real literature are *weak*? Why, she says——"

Kent broke in, the expression on his face beatific.

"What is it Maeterlinck says? You love Maeterlinck, I hope. 'Men's weaknesses are often necessary to the purposes of life.' Could anything be more beautiful?"

Mrs. Dallinger surrendered unconditionally. "I'll run back in my car and call on Mrs. Page this evening," she said. "Can I understand, if we ask you to come about a week from now, that——"

"For the culture of Mendon, and the united women of that community, I am yours to command," he said.

Mrs. Hardy came at four. Her reception, in the same corner of the same lobby, included the same distinguished appearance, the same superb poise, the same manner that was the acme of dignified courtesy. Mrs. Hardy also was awed and a little breathless.

She plunged into her errand, strong in the conviction that she must hasten and not take up too much of the great man's time.

"It is very kind of you," he said gracefully, when she paused for breath, "to add your courteous invitation to

the other. It is indeed delightful to know that you ladies in Mendon are so united in the desire to advance culture."

Then he told her of Mrs. Dallinger's call.

"If Mrs. Dallinger said she was speaking for all the ladies of Mendon ——" she began, but got no farther.

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Hardy! You don't mean to tell me there is any schism among the cultured women of your community! Oh, that is too bad! Dear me! And I had so anticipated the visit!"

"Don't change your mind, professor." Mrs. Hardy's voice was almost tearful. "The ladies whom I represent include, I assure you, the women that are bent on improving themselves, those who are striving to understand, to see the big things, the noble things——"

"The better things! I feel sure of it. And yet—unless there were some way of getting all the women to unite, I really should have to go at Mrs.—er—Dallinger's invitation, wouldn't I?"

Mrs. Hardy became speechless.

"As an entire outsider, may I not make a suggestion?" the professor said winningly. "Couldn't you arrange the matter—I feel certain *you* could arrange anything in your city that you really set out to arrange—so that *all* the ladies could come together for this first meeting of your club? Mrs. Dallinger suggested her home as the meeting place, but perhaps you could secure the building or the rooms of the Woman's Club, if you have one."

"The president is one of my best friends. I'll see her first thing in the morning."

"That is fine! And perhaps she could arrange it so that you and Mrs. Dallinger would unite in inviting me."

Mrs. Hardy suddenly recalled the subject of the first dispute, and determined to seek authoritative indorsement.

"We did not entirely agree as to the name for the club, and——"

"Now that is very kind of you, Mrs. Hardy, very kind indeed. Thank you. Shall we say the Mendon Reading

Club? That is so simple. So complete. So inclusive. So—er—noncontroversial. And I take it for granted you and Mrs. Dallinger will be the president and director general."

"What's a director general?"

"Pardon me. The custom has probably slipped your mind. She plans all the programs; the president has charge of the social duties. Such a delightful division of authority; neither higher than the other. Yes, I am sure you and Mrs.—"

Mrs. Hardy came up for the last time.

"Professor Kent," she said, with trembling seriousness, "perhaps I ought not to consult with you, a stranger, about such a matter, but really I must. You can do so much good by your advice at this first meeting. Mrs. Dallinger is a very prominent woman in our town, and all that, but in literature— Really, professor, she is positively *unsound*. That would be all right if she were truly desirous of improving herself, if she were willing to listen to what others say who know more——"

Kent interrupted her, his countenance lighted by an inward glow:

"What is it Browning says? You love Browning, I hope. 'I judge people by what they might be—not are, or will be.' Could anything be more beautiful?"

The mayor's wife ceased struggling and sank.

"If things could be arranged——" she said.

"I'm sure they can. Energy and desire and tact always win."

As Carroll Emery dealt the cards, three evenings later, in Doc Milliken's office, the doctor turned to Buck.

"I been so busy stacking up these amateurs' chips, as they insisted on losing 'em to me, this evening, that I didn't think to mention it, but I saw Gus Dallinger and another friend of ours walking up toward home together to-night, thick as a couple of thieves. What's the answer?"

"Never mind the conundrum, Buck," said Emery. "What are you doin'?"

"Openin' it," said Buck promptly, skimming his cards. "For a dollar. What are the rest of you-all doin'?"

"I'm raising it five, if you're talking to me," said Doc Milliken.

Sweetland and Emery dropped out. The city marshal saw the raise, and Buck also paid an extra five dollars to draw.

"One card," called the doctor. "Two," said the marshal. "I'll be entirely honest," remarked Buck, and took three.

"Five li'l' brown chips, representin' five hard-earned dollars," announced Buck, and tossed them in. Milliken promptly raised the pot ten dollars. The city marshal studied his hand, addressed the company fluently on the theoretical value of three small ones at such a moment, and passed.

Buck, grinning his poker grin, inspected the stack of chips in front of the doctor, which was almost as tall as his own.

"Filled your little bittie straight, did you?" he said. "How much you got there in front of you?"

Doctor Milliken, having counted his chips, announced that the total was exactly thirty dollars.

"I'll have to tap you!" remarked Buck, still laughing, and pushed in forty, the largest bet he could make under table-stake rules. Doc Milliken considered Buck, the pot, and his hand. "Pass!" he growled, and threw away his cards. "You opened; I'll see 'em, anyway."

"There they are to look at. As pretty a pair of jacks as you ever did see!" chortled Buck.

"And nothin' else!" exclaimed the city marshal. "Them as has gits!"

"May I live to see one of my family vote the Republican ticket," cried Doc Milliken, "if I didn't ditch two pairs—aces up!"

"The answer to that," Buck said gayly, as he drew the pot toward him, "—oh, yes, and it's the answer to the question you just asked, too, doc—is that, while it is hard to lie to old liars and get away with it, you *kin* kid old bluffers—frequent."

A Chat With You

SOMEWHERE, some place, there has been written or will be written the story that is your story. We don't mean that the story is about you. It need have nothing to do with the events and circumstances that form the outside and visible part of your life. It is your story, however, because you recognize it at once; it seems as if it had been written for you. It speaks for you and tells you your own thoughts more or less, describes the things you are interested in, gives the atmosphere you would like to surround yourself with, expresses for you impulses and thoughts and feelings that you know well enough but find it impossible to put into words.



WE are all inarticulate in the larger sense. It is hard for us to express in words our bigger emotions and desires. We need a spokesman. That is what the writer is for. If he expresses only his own thoughts, he is nothing. No writer can do our thinking for us. What we ask of him is to express for us the things we feel and think. The American spirit is something made up of the thoughts and feelings of thousands of unknown people who have little or nothing to say for themselves, but who gladly welcome any one who can give them expression. All greatness in the last analysis resolves itself to this—that the great man is one

who has found a way to express the inarticulate feelings of the multitude. It is true in all realms of thought and action. Cæsar and Napoleon were but the concrete types of an imperial spirit that burned in the whole race. Darwin and Edison gave articulate form to the scientific thought of their times. Thousands had a vague grasp of the principle of evolution, of the possibilities of electricity, and were struggling vaguely for expression when the leaders gave it to them. As an individual, Rockefeller is not so different from other men. What makes him a sort of human monument is the fact that he made real and definite the aspiration toward organization and efficiency that has been America's gift to the industrial and commercial world. Lincoln himself was a great and living expression and embodiment of the thoughts and feeling of thousands of Americans who could vote and fight, perhaps, but who needed Lincoln to put their thoughts into words for them. Life hems us in on many sides. The bigger the idea or feeling, the harder it is for us to put it in words that seem to mean anything. We need people to tell us our own thoughts and our own stories.



NO chronicle of heroism has ever thrilled you unless you have something of the hero in yourself. How many times have you declared, with

A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.

Paul Jones, that you had just begun to fight, or faced the firing squad with Nathan Hale! Every one has within him the spirit to play various parts in life besides the one fate has apparently chosen for him. To awaken that spirit, to arouse generous emotions, to help us remember the scope and majesty of the human mind and spirit, to confirm in us the knowledge that the life is more than meat and the body more than raiment—that is what stories are really for.



THE people who are working to make **THE POPULAR** are telling you your own story as you would have it, not once, but many times. Holman Day's novel, "The Dictator," in the present number, presents a drama that is being played to some extent and in some form in every State in the union. We know it is a story written for you. It makes its appeal to certain qualities of honesty, of unassuming courage and ability, of stalwart Americanism sure to awaken an answering thrill. The novel by James B. Hendryx in the next issue, "Flat Gold," is no less certain in its appeal. If you have never once felt like leaving the cities behind and taking the bleak North trail, we don't know you as well as we think we do.



THE **POPULAR** ought to be, and, indeed, we believe that it is, something more than a fortnightly collection of stories. We have tried to give it the atmosphere you like. We would like to have it so that when you turned back the covers you might feel that you were entering the sort of country you like to

live in, and meeting the sort of people—good, bad, and indifferent—you would like to work with or fight with or be amused by or interested in. We don't want to take you to an unreal place, but out into a broader, wider sort of life. If you are tired we don't want to lull you into a stupor, but awaken you to that keener, wider interest in life that is the surest antidote for weariness and lassitude.



WE get many letters about the magazine from writers. We are glad to get them, for writers are generally good and always generous judges of the work of other authors. What we especially prize, however, are the letters from those who are so busy doing things of various sorts that they have little time to write, and who find in **THE POPULAR** some expression of their thought and spirit. If you happen to be one of these, remember that not only is the magazine made for you, but that you yourself have a good deal to do with the making of it. It represents as nearly as we can make it the sort of magazine that you would make. No one story or set of stories can create personality for a magazine. Personality depends on something much deeper. Every publication has its own atmosphere, its own peculiar quality. We hope it isn't for this sort of story or that that you read **THE POPULAR**, but for its general atmosphere. We hope most earnestly that you like its personality—for, so far as it is in our knowledge and power to faithfully reflect it, it is your own.

The King of Sports

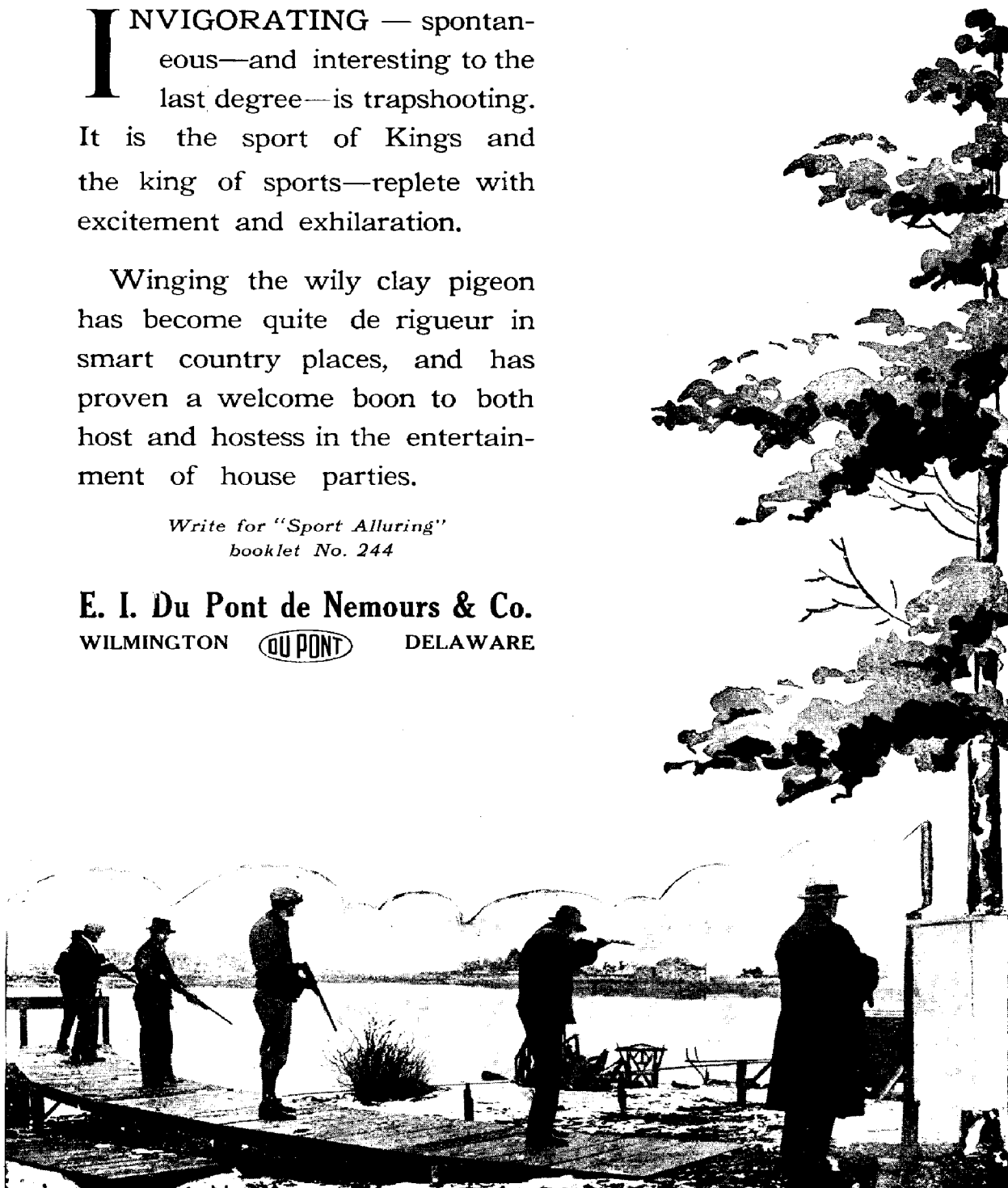
I NVIGORATING — spontaneous—and interesting to the last degree—is trapshooting. It is the sport of Kings and the king of sports—replete with excitement and exhilaration.

Winging the wily clay pigeon has become quite de rigueur in smart country places, and has proven a welcome boon to both host and hostess in the entertainment of house parties.

*Write for "Sport Alluring"
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Field, Trap and Target

LEFT-HANDED TRAPSHOTS.

HAS it ever occurred to you that "southpaw" trapshooters are a very scarce commodity? They are.

Scarce is about the mildest term that could be used in this connection. There are upward of 600,000 trapshooters in this fair land, and out of that number we have not been able to unearth 100 who blaze away at the inanimate targets from the left side.

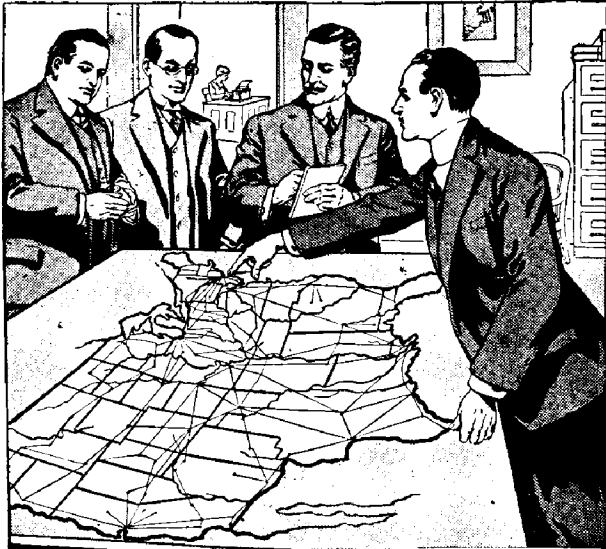
Noting the scarcity of "southpaws" at the traps in the most important tournaments, we began a search for the shooter using his left hand in unison with his eye. We asked some of the best shots in the country if they could tell us a few of the "portsiders" of the traps, and very few of them were of any assistance.

Trapshooters pay little or no attention to each other at the traps, and we learned that very few of them knew how their best pal shot. There are many men who do everything with one exception with their left hand. The exception is trapshooting. There are a number of major-league baseball players who throw with their left arm or hit from the left side of the plate, but in every instance these men shoot from the right side.

Therefore "southpaw" trapshooters are as scarce as hens' teeth or the proverbial snowball in July. But what few left-handers we have are good ones. Neaf Apgar, of New York, president of the Westy Hogans, and one of the best-known professionals, began as a right-hand shot, and switched to the left. Results from the right side did not please him—therefore the change in position. It was just the opposite with Lester German, the Aberdeen, Maryland, professional. He shot from the left side before switching to the right. The change didn't hurt Lester, either.

William H. Heer, a professional of Guthrie, Oklahoma, and one of the best shots that ever stepped to the firing line, is a "southpaw." He was the high average professional in 1910 and in 1913. He broke 1,955 out of 2,000 targets in 1910, for an average of .9775; and in 1913 he broke 5,206 out of 5,350, for an average of .9750. His 1910 mark was best professional average until Homer Clark shattered 98 per cent in 1916.

Among the "southpaws" we have two former Grand American Handicap winners,



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and two other won State championships in 1916. The Grand American Handicap winners are R. R. Barber, a professional of Minneapolis, and L. B. Clarke, vice president of the Hibernian Bank, of Chicago. Mr. Barber, in 1905, won the G. A. H., at Indianapolis, breaking 99 targets from 16 yards. Mr. Clarke won in Chicago, in 1915, breaking 96 targets from 18 yards, and 20 straight in the shoot-off. The State champions are W. A. Weidebusch, of West Virginia, and John F. Austin, of Louisiana. The fact that these men won State championships is concrete evidence that they are excellent trapshoots. Another "southpaw" is no less a person than Frank Gotch, the wrestling champion. Gotch isn't as good a trapshot as he is a wrestler, but he is a good shot, at that.

As far as numbers go, the "southpaws" do not show up very strong, but when it comes to "bustin'" the clays, they're right there with the quality.



TRAPSHOOTING UNDER MUNICIPAL AUSPICES.

NEVER has there been such a general indorsement of any line of sport as has been accorded trapshooting in the past two years.

The campaign to educate Americans to handle firearms has been universal, and in quite a number of cities men of affairs have petitioned the park commissioners to set apart a tract for trapshooting purposes.

Spokane, Washington, has been given credit for having the first municipal trap, but such is not the case. The first trap to be installed under municipal supervision was in Nichols Park, Jacksonville, Illinois, about twelve years ago. But this was so long ago that present-day writers are not expected to remember.

In Lincoln Park, Chicago, there are a number of traps that are open to the public every day, except Sunday. Omaha, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Kansas City, and Cleveland all have public traps.

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, has a municipal rifle range, and the city council has been asked to add traps for the scatter-gun enthusiasts. So has the Scranton, Pennsylvania, city fathers.

New York City park commissioners some time ago voted twenty acres of ground in Van Cortlandt Park for trapshooting, leaving the erection of club houses, traps, et cetera, to the shooters.



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"Jerry, is it a go? Not a sight of me for a year and then the sky's my limit!"



Would You?

By Fannie Hurst

We are spending five thousand dollars this month to tell you that the greatest short story of the year has been written by Fannie Hurst and is in the May Metropolitan. "Would You?" is a gripping tragedy of New York life in which a woman's love and the "get on" ambition of a great city blend in a pathetic sacrifice.

The heroine is a modern Ruth, who in her own way and in her own time lives out the beautiful promise of her prototype, "Whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God shall be my God."

In the same Metropolitan, is a great baseball story, "Bingles and Black Magic," by Hugh Fullerton, and a Leroy Scott Detective Clifford story. Also the love

story of the girl who wanted to go in the movies by Josselyn Gerrish.

The facts of life are well faced, too! William Hard, back after six months in London for the Metropolitan, has an enlightening article on "England at War."

A commanding contribution is an article by Lord Northcliffe. He compares lawyer-governed America with group-governed England much to our disadvantage. There is another instalment of the "Adventures and Letters of Richard Harding Davis," which has been the literary event of the year.

Theodore Roosevelt, who writes exclusively for the Metropolitan, spent a busy day in the Municipal Court of Philadelphia where some practical Christianity is taking the place of ponderous Blackstone. What he saw and what he thinks of the work done, the Colonel sets down in an able piece of reporting, warm with the human touch that is the Colonel's when he writes of good intentions and common sense mixing successfully.

Cold type is a difficult medium in which to picture this big, throbbing, live magazine, brimful of entertainment and information, waiting for you at the next newsstand you pass.

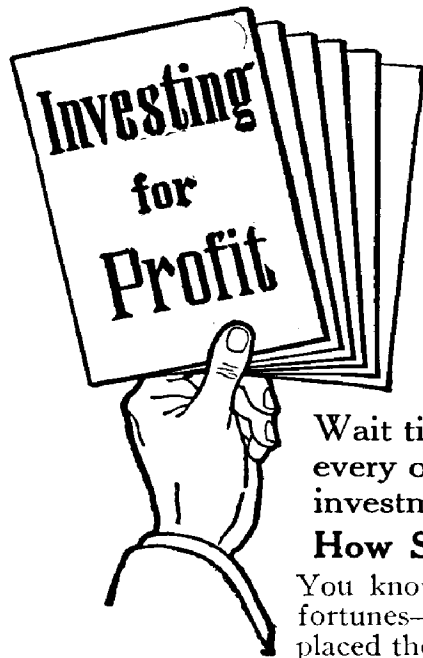
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You know and I know that small investors have made large fortunes—men who, guided by judgment and courage, have placed their funds direct into creative enterprises at their inception and thus reaped **full benefit** of the earning power of money. Today opportunity on bended knee is entreating the small investor to accept her favors—and those who heed the insistent call are achieving fortunes.

My magazine explains the rules by which small investors have made wise and profitable investments—how \$100 grows into \$2,200—the actual possibility of intelligent investment.

Learn the REAL EARNING POWER of Your Money

The real earning power of your money is not the paltry 3% to 5% paid by banks or by corporations that have their future **behind** instead of in **front** of them. “Investing for Profit” reveals the enormous profits financiers make and shows how one can make the same profit—it demonstrates the **real** earning power of your money—the knowledge that financiers hide from the masses—it explains **HOW** small investors are making big fortunes and **WHY** they are made.

This and other valuable financial information is yours—it is free six months for the asking.

How to Determine the Value of Different Investments

There are thousands of salaried people today who have a small sum laid aside or who can invest a small amount each month—but who realize that they do not know how to determine the value of the different classes of investments that are offered to them daily. This condition has created a demand for a publication or institution whose express object is to help direct and guide the small investor. “Investing for Profit” is the result of a pressing need, and should be worth tens—perhaps thousands of dollars to you.

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“Investing for Profit” is for the man who intends to invest any money, however small, or who can save \$5 or more per month—but who has not yet learned the art of investing for profit. Read what Russell Sage, one of the most successful financiers of his day, said in regard to investments: “There is a common fallacy that, while for legal advice we go to lawyers, and for medical advice we go to physicians, and for the construction of a great work to engineers—financing is everybody's business. As a matter of fact, it is the most profound and complicated of them all.”

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