TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular

JULY 7, 1928

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Beginning

SUNSET HOUSE

By

George Marsh

The

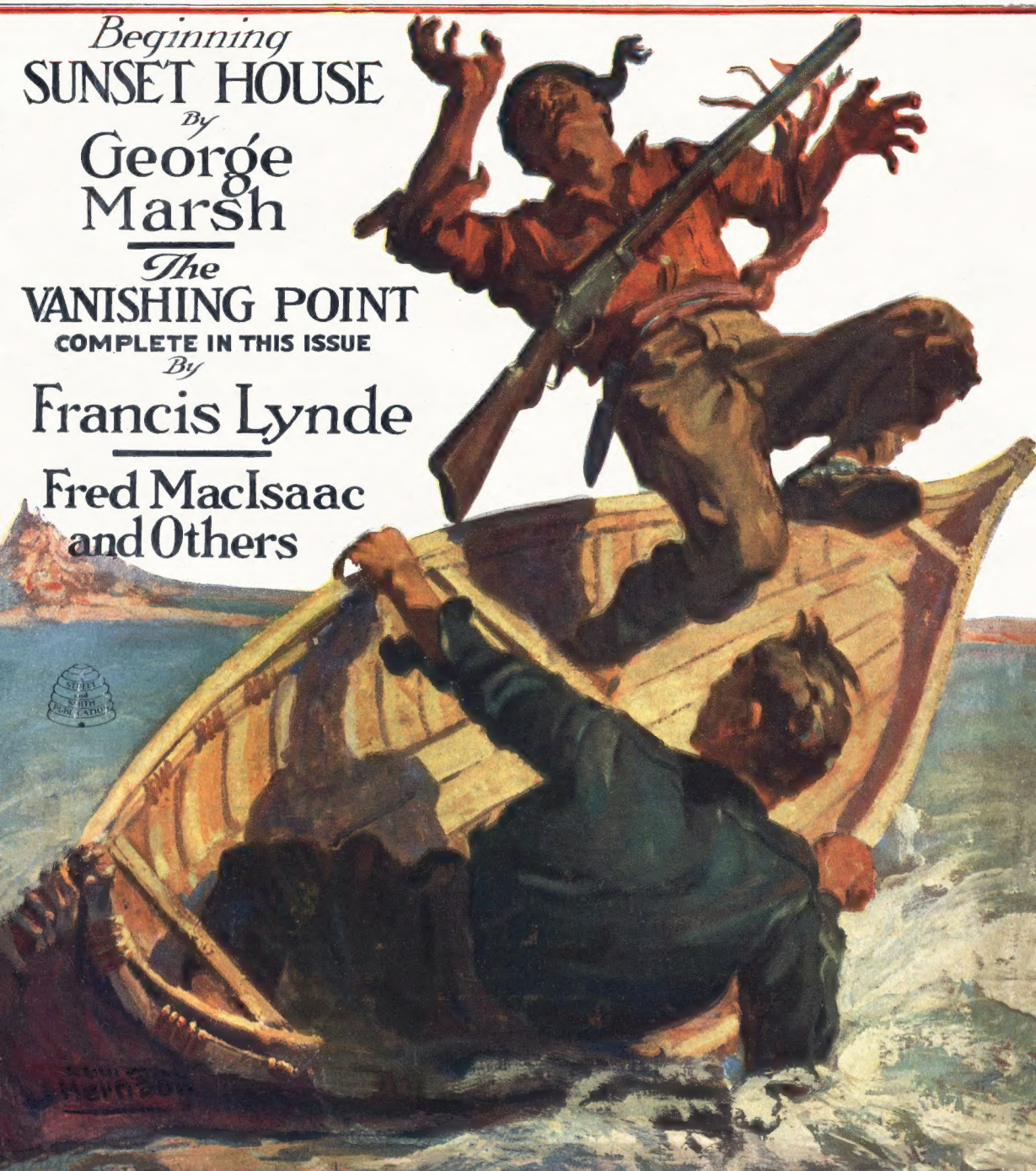
VANISHING POINT

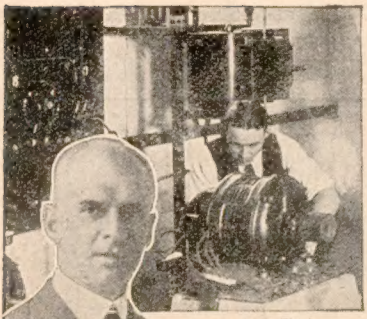
COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

By

Francis Lynde

Fred MacIsaac and Others





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Volume XCII Number 4

The Popular

TWICE-A-MONTH

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CONTENTS FOR JULY 7, 1928

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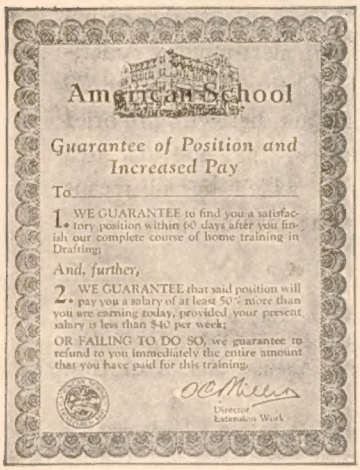

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GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

HE was the world's greatest electrical engineer. As familiar to him as his own bedroom were the dark ways of higher mathematics. He could, with the touch of a switch, hurl thunderbolts across the laboratory. To him from all quarters came the most distinguished men of science to sit at his feet and hail him as master.

He was Charles Proteus Steinmetz, chief engineer for the General Electric Company, and by all odds the most distinguished scientist of America. One might think that nothing but the most abstruse works would be found upon his reading table. And yet, as a matter of fact, the mighty Steinmetz in his moments of relaxation turned for escape to the writings of those who have stories to tell of the Great West, of detectives, of mystery, of romance on the high seas. With the utmost eagerness, this master mind would plunge into the midst of a yarn of high adventure, and nothing could distract his attention until the story reached its thrilling finish.

To-day, all across the country, executives in high places, leaders among the ranks of professional men, college presidents and college undergraduates alike, find the escape from life which Steinmetz found in the reading of good fiction.

For fiction gives the mind its needed vacation, the imagination its longed-for release. And whoever writes or distributes fiction in America is performing a priceless service for millions of his fellow countrymen.

Down in the heart of Greenwich Village in old New York one of the oldest and best established publishing concerns in the country brings the delights of fiction to millions of alert-minded Americans. This is Chelsea House, at 79 Seventh Avenue, and herewith are brief glances at some of the latest Chelsea House offerings, which by all means should be on your reading table.

THE QUICK-DRAW KID; a Western Story, by George Gilbert. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

If you have ever sat before a lunch counter in a wagon, or small hash house, and watched the man behind the bar perform his mystic incantations with coffee urns, gas burners and frying pans, you may have realized that a peculiar sort of genius is required for the swift service of a bunch of hungry men around noontime. Such genius was possessed in so outstanding a manner by a tow-headed kid behind the counter of an establishment in a mid-West city that it attracted the attention of a group of cowmen, come to town to sell their cattle. They were the men of the Box-9 Range. And after they had seen him work a bit they pronounced him "a machine-gun food slinger." And as Box 9 certainly needed such an expert, the cow-punchers proceeded to kidnap the lad and set him down in the midst of as colorful a Western ranch as has appeared in fiction for many years. How he converted his speed at drawing coffee into

Continued on 2nd page following

Halitosis may get you discharged

Employers prefer fastidious people . . . halitoxics not wanted

MORE and more, employers insist on having about them people who are fastidious. Sooner or later, those with halitosis are "let out."

The true reason for discharge, however, is usually hidden under such phrases as "Inefficient," "You can do better elsewhere," "We need a more experienced person," etc.

Realize these facts about halitosis. That, due to modern habits, it is much more prevalent than is suspected. That it is a definite liability in friendships, affections and business. That you can have it and not know it.

The one means of being sure that you are free from it is to rinse the mouth systematically with Listerine. Every morning. Every night. And between times when necessary, especially before meeting others. Keep a bottle handy in home and office for this purpose.

Listerine ends halitosis instantly. Being antiseptic, it strikes at its commonest cause —fermentation in the oral cavity. Then, being a powerful deodorant, it destroys the odors themselves.

If you have any doubt of Listerine's powerful deodorant properties, make this test: Rub a slice of onion on your hand. Then apply Listerine clear. Immediately, every trace of onion odor is gone.

With these facts before you, make up your mind to keep yourself on the safe, polite and popular side by using Listerine. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

Have you tried the new Listerine Shaving Cream?

Cools your skin while you shave and keeps it cool afterward. An outstanding shaving cream in every respect.

LISTERINE

The safe antiseptic

GOOD READING—*Continued*

speed at drawing guns, and the adventures that befell him out there, make as diverting and swift-paced a Western story as you have ever set your eyes on.

THE TUNNEL TO DOOM; a Detective Story, by Roy W. Hinds. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

A sudden crackle of revolver shots. Down the main street of the small sawmill town in the lumber region of the Northwest men were running. Out of the doors of the bank reeled a bandit, to fall dead on the street. Other holdup men jumped into a battered automobile and sped away. Away to the remote forest, where, unless one knows his woodlore, one is lost.

No one in town could identify the dead man. As to the other bandits, there was no clew save the fact that one of them had across one eye a black patch, held in place by adhesive tape. Acting on this slenderest of clews, husky Jim Persons, a newcomer in town, and more or less of a drifter generally, went with the man he suspected as camp boss for an oddly assorted collection of lumberjacks. And there came into a thrilling series of adventure. The big kick in this story comes when Persons discovers the weird death trap where the bandits slew their victims. But there are kicks aplenty scattered throughout all the story, and the whole yarn is a sure cure for ennui.

THE "GOLDEN DOLPHIN"; an Adventure Story, by Joseph Montague. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

As a rule, Mr. Montague devotes his abundant story-telling talents to Western yarns. This time, however, he shows his versatility by giving us a glorious romance of land-and-sea action. The curtain rises on an antique shop in a quiet New England town. The sign of the shop read:

"THE GOLDEN DOLPHIN

ANTIQUES

K. Whiting, Proprietor."

And there was in the shop window a very beautiful model of a ship which also bore the

Continued on second page following

GOOD READING—*Continued*

name of *Golden Dolphin.* This it was that caught the eye of Jim Lyman, a sturdy sailorman wandering aimlessly about town, ready for any adventure that might come his way. Soon Jim discovered that K. Whiting was a very easy-to-look-at young lady, deeply immersed in problems connected with the loss of the ship, the model of which stood in her window. The *Golden Dolphin* had been her father's vessel, and the story went that it was stranded somewhere in the Southern Pacific. Jim volunteered to go in search of the lost ship, and soon found himself breast-high in romance. Through all the long call from the drowsy New England village to the tropical islands in the south, you follow Jim's adventures with breathless interest. For Mr. Montague has written a story in a thousand, and has put on canvas a memorable bit of word painting.

"LOOKOUT" LARAMIE; a Western Story, by Paul Bailey. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

It was a sorry moment for Bar Z Ranch when "Lookout" Laramie was accused of horse stealing by its owner. For out West you don't call a man a horse thief lightly. And so shaken was Laramie by the charge, that he went outlaw with a vengeance, resolved to "get" Madison, the ranch owner. As events turned out, however, the getting process was a most involved and exciting one. You will follow it through the galloping pages of this book, sometimes with bewilderment, sometimes with deep surprise, but always with the keenest interest, which only this sort of masterful writing is able to evoke on the part of its readers.

"Don't make a monkey of yourself"

cried Bob as I sat down at the piano

I was spending my vacation with Bob when I met his cousin, Helen. It was love at first sight with me. But unfortunately she didn't seem to feel the same way about it.

"You've got nothing to worry about," Bob insisted when I told him my tale of woe. "Just leave it to me. All you need is a little publicity . . . ."

The very next day he announced that he'd just had a long talk with Helen.

"Boy! What I didn't tell her about you!" he exulted. "Believe me, I boosted your stock sky high!"

"What did you tell her?"

"Well, she's crazy about music. So I conveniently forgot that you can't play a note, and told her you are *an accomplished pianist!*"

"But Bob . . ."

"Not another word! I've got you sitting pretty, now. If you're asked to play—just say that you've sprained your wrist."

That very night we were all invited to the Carews' party. On the way over, I sensed a big difference in Helen—a difference that made my heart beat fast with a new hope.

* * * * *

I Am Asked to Play the Piano

A little later in the evening we were all gathered around the piano, listening to the rather indifferent performance of one of the guests.

"I've heard so much about your talent!" cried Helen. "Won't you play something for us?"

"Yes!" "Yes!" "Please!" came from all sides.

With a smile I bowed low . . . and replied that *it would be a pleasure!*

Bob's grin changed to amazement. Calmly ignoring his frantic signals I walked over to the piano. Quick as a flash he followed me.

"For the love of Pete get away from that piano," he whispered excitedly, "don't make a monkey of yourself. If Helen ever hears you play she'll think everything else I told her is bunk, too!"

Turning to the guests, Bob announced, "Perhaps we should wait until some other time. His wrist was slightly sprained in tennis this afternoon, and . . ."

"Oh, that's nothing!" I broke in, and without any further hesitation, I began the first notes of Irving Berlin's famous "Russian Lullaby"! The tantalizing, irresistible strains seemed to throw a spell over the guests. I forgot Bob's astonishment—forgot the glow of admiration in Helen's eyes. On and on I played—losing myself in my music—until thunderous applause shook the room.

That brought me to myself with a start. For the rest of the evening I was the lion of the party.

Bob could hardly restrain his curiosity until we were safely home.

"Why didn't you tell me you knew how to play? When did you learn?"

"You never asked whether I knew how to play," I countered.

"Of course not! Last summer you didn't know one note from another—how was I to guess you'd blossomed into an accomplished pianist overnight?"

"Not overnight, exactly!" I smiled. "Although it almost seemed that way! Remember that Free Demonstration Lesson in music I sent for last summer? Well, when it came and I saw how easy it was to learn without a teacher I sent for the complete course. It's great! Why, almost before I knew it, I was playing simple tunes! I can play *anything* now . . ."

"So you really *are* an 'accomplished' pianist! The joke's on me, all right!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say 'accomplished'," I laughed. "But enough of a pianist to get a lot more fun out of life than I used to!"

* * * * *

The above story is typical. You, too, can learn to play your favorite instrument by this remarkable "at home" method. You don't have to know the slightest thing about music. First you are *told* what to do—then a picture *shows* you how to do it—then you do it yourself and *hear* it. No private teacher could make it any clearer.

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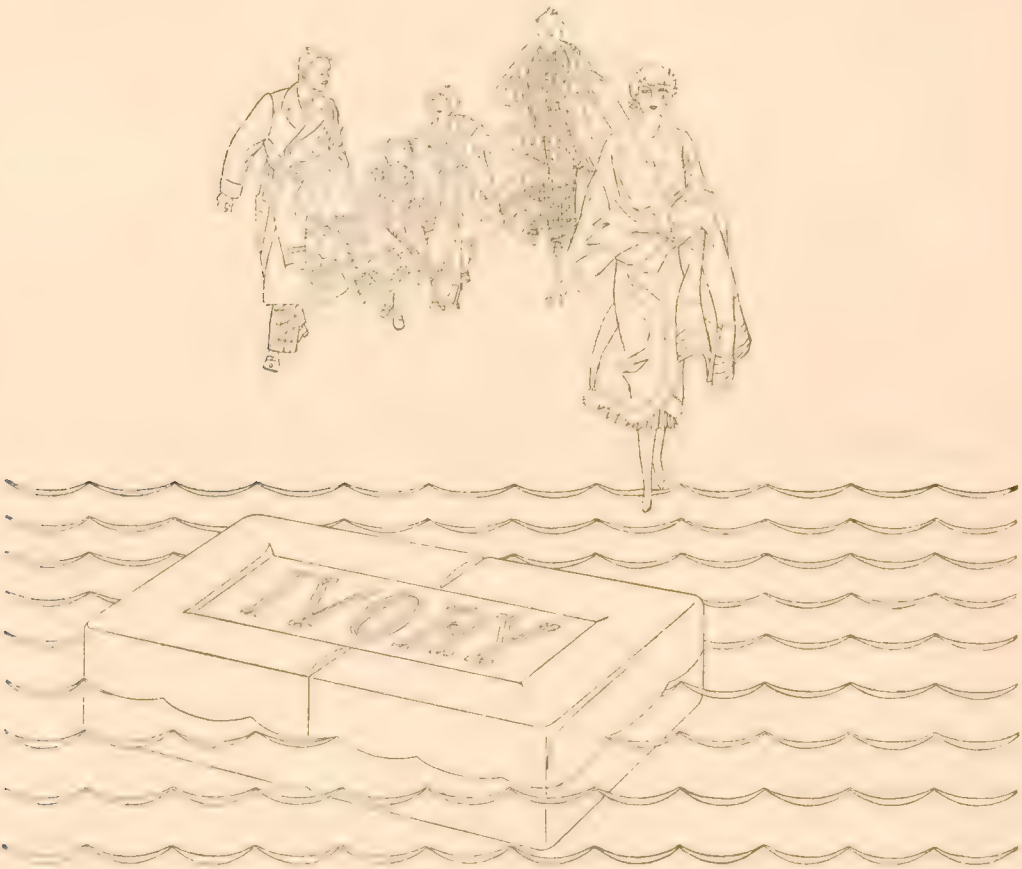


"WE'RE GOING FOR A BATH"

Here's a lot of people walking, and the artist says they're talking—they've already told him secretly, "We're going for a bath."

He says they seem so hopeful they will find tubs floating-soapful that he dares not give them *sinker*-soap because he fears their wrath.

So, dancing on their bath horizon, *there's* a sight to rest their eyes on! Now they'll change their bathrobes for an Ivory lather coat!

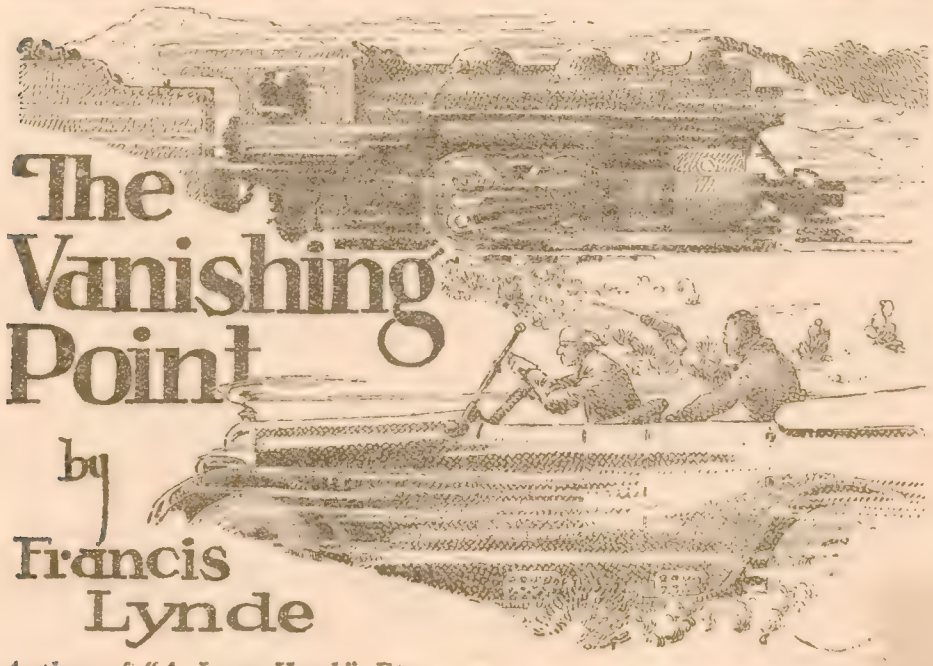
They'll have no more of bluish soap, of green or scarlet-huish soap—these *creamy* cakes alone will do, and every one will *float!*

Ivory is really the nicest soap to bathe with that's ever been made. Not only does it float right where you can see it and reach it, drop it when you will; but it quickly gives a lovely, creamy lather which cleanses thoroughly and then rinses off instantly.

KIND TO EVERYTHING IT TOUCHES

THE POPULAR

VOL. XCII JULY 7, 1928 No. 4



The Vanishing Point

by Francis Lynde

Author of "A Lone Hand," Etc.

Think of the disastrous result if an engineer on a train were to look for the signals at a dangerous curve, and they were not there! Vanished! Not stolen or removed—but rendered *invisible!* Wouldn't that be a great idea for a story? Well, here is the story—a splendid mystery about a Western railroad.

A COMPLETE NOVEL

CHAPTER I.

PHANTASMAGORIC!

PEOPLE frequently tell me that I'd forgot my head and go off and leave it some time if it weren't securely fastened on, and perhaps the gibe isn't wholly unjustified: though Marcia, dear girl, stoutly asserts that it is. She says I am neither thoughtless nor particularly forgetful—at least, not more so than most men; that I merely have the habit of concentrating upon the important thing of the moment, disregarding the unimportant ones. Which saying of hers may be taken for what it is worth. Marcia has the kind of friendly loyalty that goes with straight-

shooting brown eyes and hair that shows copper tints in the sunlight, and she has always cherished a militant sympathy for the under dog—any under dog, that is.

Just the same, it was forgetfulness, pure and simple, and not concentration, which led up to an experience destined to usher in a series of events of vital importance to any number of people. And with the events a fairly infernal mystery.

The place was the campus of Western Tech, and the time an evening a few weeks prior to commencement. Maltby and I, doing postgraduate work in railroad engineering, had the night shift in a nonstop dynamometer test upon a new mountain-climbing locomotive—Western Tech being equipped with a locomotive-testing plant. After we had relieved the day men I remembered that I had left my slide rule in the Electro-Chemical laboratory, where I had been working during the afternoon; and, asking Maltby to take the instrument readings by himself for a few minutes, I went to recover my mechanical calculator.

Naturally, I hadn't any intention of pulling off a sleuthing stunt when I ran up the steps of the Electro-Chemical building, which was showing lighted windows only in the laboratory wing. But for foot ease on the night job I was wearing tennis shoes. Hence, I guess I didn't make any great amount of noise climbing the stairs and passing along the upper corridor. Anyway, the single occupant of the laboratory, a man working at the bench at the far end of the room, didn't hear me, for he did not look around as I entered.

Though his back was turned, I recognized the bench worker. His name was Varnell, and for a month or more he had been a campus mystery. From the little we had learned about him, he figured as an outsider who had obtained permission to do some experimental research work in the university laboratories. He had been given the freedom of the laboratories, and we had remarked that he always did his work in them alone, at night, and behind locked doors; though on this one occasion he seemed to have neglected the lock precaution.

The slight air of mystery surrounding this man, together with the fact that, quite evidently, he hadn't heard me come in, made me hesitate a moment before making my presence known. He had a contrivance of some sort of the bench—I couldn't see what it was because he stood in the way—and he appeared to be adjusting it.

While I looked, he reached for the switch controlling the ceiling lights and the laboratory went black. In the darkness I saw a cone of bluish-green light, so dim as to be almost invisible, projecting itself to the right along the bench toward a familiar object—a small ice-making machine with which a group of students had been experimenting during the afternoon.

Watching the progress of the faintly visible light beam, which seemed to originate in whatever apparatus it was that Varnell's figure was concealing, I saw it reach out like a ghostly tentacle toward the little refrigerating plant. For an instant it illuminated the motor and copper coils and condensing compressor; then, as if an invisible broom had suddenly swept it away, the ice-making machine disappeared, leaving the place it had occupied on the bench as bare as the back of an ungloved hand!

As I rubbed my eyes and stared, trying to tell myself that, of course, this was only a clever optical illusion, Varnell switched the ceiling circuit on again. At the flooding of the room with light from the powerful lamps overhead the bluish-green ray or emanation, or whatever it was, could no longer be distinguished. But the marvel remained.

The small ice-making machine was still invisible; it was gone as completely as if it had never existed.

While one might have counted ten, Varnell stood motionless. Then I saw his hand go out toward the thing on the bench. There was sound like the click of an electric switch, and at that the little refrigerating machine leaped into view as suddenly and mysteriously as it had vanished a few moments earlier.

Without stopping to realize just why I did it, I stepped back into the corridor, closing the door softly behind me; and upon making a second entrance I took care to let it be noisy. Varnell was startled, and he showed it. As I entered he was hastily adjusting an oilcloth typewriter cover over something on the bench.

"Oh—hello, Manning," he said gruffly. "I didn't know you had a key."

"I haven't," I replied. "The door wasn't locked. Did you think it was?"

"Meant to lock it," he growled. "Don't care to have a bunch of undergrads nosing around when I'm at work. Wouldn't have made any difference tonight, though; I was only doing a bit of repair work on my typewriter. What are you after?"

"My slide rule. I left it here somewhere this afternoon."

That was all that was said. I found the slide rule and ducked out, leaving him leaning against the bench, fingering his brown, pointed beard trimmed like a doctor's, his eyes, or so I fancied, watching my every movement. As I recrossed the campus, the full effect of what I had just seen began to get in its work. What devil's invention was it that Varnell had so hastily concealed under the typewriter cover when I made my second entrance? Had he, accidentally or purposefully, hit upon some hitherto undiscovered principle in light-wave research?

Later on, in an interval when we weren't checking steam pressures or tabulating horse powers delivered by the big freight puller on the testing pit, I asked Maltby what he knew about Varnell.

"Nothing more than the campus gossip," was his answer. "They say he is a research man for one of the big automotive companies, doing some special work here that he couldn't do in the company laboratory. Why do you ask?"

"I'm just wondering. Ever strike you that there is something a bit mysterious about him?"

Maltby laughed. "Not particularly mysterious, no; just grouchy—like a fellow who doesn't 'belong' and knows he doesn't. Did you run up against him in Electro-Chemical?"

"Yes; he was there, tinkering his typewriter, so he said. Which was a rather clumsy lie."

"What makes you think he lied about it?"

"I don't think; I *know*," I said. Then I described the singular thing I had seen, and explained how I came to witness it.

"Rats!" Maltby snorted. "Calls that research work, does he? Qualifying to do parlor magic stunts! Couldn't see how it was worked, could you?"

"No. He had an apparatus of some sort—which was covered up when I went in the second time; he'd blanketed it with a typewriter cover."

"But you didn't take the disappearing act seriously?"

"No; I guess not. Though it did impress me a bit, at the time."

Maltby chuckled and said something about the old superstitions handed on to us by our Stone Age ancestors dying hard. Then:

"You've washed the mystery out of it by this time, haven't you?"

"I'm not so sure that I have," I admitted.

"It's simple enough. The 'apparatus' he didn't want you to see was probably

only intended to add atmosphere. So was the switching-off of the lights. An arrangement of adjustable mirrors would easily account for the disappearance of the ice machine. The trick is old enough to be gray bearded."

It was time to take another series of readings on the locomotive performance, and Varnell and his doings faded out of the picture. But he stepped into it again a week later when I was smoking an after-dinner pipe with Mackenzie, the Electro-Chemical head, on the porch of the Tau Beta house. We had been speaking of the later discoveries in applied science; the strides that had been made in the development of the radio, television and the like, and Mackenzie had said something about the way in which people of to-day accept, as matters of course, scientific and mechanical marvels which would have been classed as the wildest of impossibilities a few decades in the past.

"Yes," I agreed, "nobody nowadays dares to say that anything is impossible. For a few minutes one night last week this fellow Varnell, who has been tinkering around in the various laboratories, had me on the run in what seemed to be an entirely new field."

"How was that?" Mackenzie asked; and I told him, adding that, for the moment, at least, the cleverness of the thing had made me overlook the fact that it was only a bit of parlor magic.

The professor smoked in silence for a time before he said musingly:

"The neutralizing ray—the ray which will render a given object incapable of reflecting the light which conveys its image to the eye—has often been sought, and it may some time be discovered; but hardly by a Varnell, you'd say. What do you know of the man?"

"Nothing definite; nothing at all more than the campus talk."

Another little interval of silence; and then:

"I understand he has left us; gone back to wherever it was he came from. A rather singular individual, I thought. He brought letters purporting to be from one of the great automotive plants, and they were apparently accepted without question. His habit of working nights in the laboratories and locking himself in made me a trifle curious; and, as I chanced to have a friend on the research staff of the plant from which he professed to come, I wrote my friend a note of inquiry."

"Well?" I prompted, after a longish pause that seemed as if it were going to put an end to the matter.

"My friend's reply came this morning. It seems that no one answering Varnell's description, or bearing his name, has ever been connected with the staff of which he claimed to be a member." Another pause, and then: "Which argues that we have been imposed upon; that Varnell's references were forgeries."

"In that case, oughtn't something to be done about it?" I asked.

"I have been considering," said Mackenzie, with characteristic Scottish canniness. "So far as we know, apart from offering forged credentials, the man has done no harm beyond using the laboratories, probably to perfect some sleight-of-hand tricks that he means to palm off upon vaudeville audiences. It is hardly a police matter for the university."

"Here, I decided, was a sufficient solution of whatever mystery there might have been, and once more Varnell and his doings retreated into the limbo of things forgetable. But a little later an occurrence was to bob up to bring him and the singular thing I had witnessed in the Electro-Chemical laboratory back with a shock. Leaving Mackenzie to smoke a second pipe of his favorite mixture, I went around into the next street to see if Doctor Denton's front porch was unoccupied—the doctor being Marcia's father.

The porch was empty, as I hoped it might be—and feared it wouldn't be, since Marcia seldom lacked some sappy undergraduate to sit the evening out with her. But when Mrs. Denton answered my ring, I was told that Marcia had gone around the block to a neighbor's. Would I wait? She'd probably be back in a few minutes. Thanking the good lady for the implied invitation, I planted myself in a porch chair commanding a view of the sidewalk in both directions, meaning to intercept Marcia as she was returning and forestall other possible callers by asking her to take a stroll with me around the campus.

For a time nothing happened. The street was one of the quietest in the residence district of a quiet college town, and there was little passing. In front of the house diagonally across on the right—which, as I noted, was all dark, as if the occupants had gone out somewhere—an automobile was parked, and, from my point of view, the car seemed to be empty. The nearest street light was on the corner above, and though it cast long shadows of the sidewalk-edging trees and the shrubbery on the house lawns, it was sufficiently strong to illuminate the roadway and walks.

In due time I saw Marcia approaching on the opposite side of the street. The night was warm and she was bareheaded; I could see her small well-shaped head with its boyish bob, and the little competent swing of her shoulders as she walked. A moment later she passed out of my sight behind the parked auto, and I laid my pipe aside and got up to go and meet her.

When I got as far as the gate it struck me that she was taking a long time to pass the parked car, and the presumable reason for it nicked my Irish nerve. Some one of the sappy youngsters I was planning to forestall had beaten me to it and was trying to persuade her to take a spin with him in his car. "No, you don't—not this time!" I gritted, apostrophizing the car sporter; and a moment later I was crossing the street to try what a little counterpersuasion might accomplish.

Just before I reached the car, the motor purred and it rolled away, leaving me standing at the curb like a villain foiled. I saw, or thought I saw, how it was: the sappy one had seen me coming and had taken time by the forelock. Not a little chagrined at being so neatly sidetracked, I recrossed the street and let myself in at the doctor's gate to get the pipe I had left on the porch railing. As I stepped upon the porch I had my little start of shocked surprise. For there, sitting in the chair I had lately been occupying, and looking as if she were waiting for me, was Marcia.

CHAPTER II.

"SHROUDED IN MYSTERY."

BEFORE I could speak she was laughing at me and saying: "Since you'd left your pipe, I was pretty sure you'd come back."

"Say!—how did you get here?" I demanded.

"On my two little feet, of course. Don't say you didn't see me!"

"But I didn't. Where were you?"

"I was crossing the street at the same time you were, only I was coming straight across and you were going diagonally. I thought you were hurrying to catch somebody in that auto."

"You thought right. I was sitting here on the porch and saw you just before you passed behind the auto, and when you didn't come in sight again I concluded that one of your little undergrad playboys was asking you to take a spin with him. I couldn't stand for that—in the circumstances—so I was chasing to head him off."

"You say I didn't come in sight? But I did! I didn't stop at the auto, and I don't know whose car it was—or is.

I can't understand why you didn't see me. I saw you plainly enough."

"Maybe I was blind," I answered rather lamely.

She laughed again.

"Haven't I always said you have a single-track mind—what the French call the *idée fixé?* All you could see at the moment was somebody about to take me away in the auto—which you say you couldn't stand for, in the circumstances. What are the circumstances?"

"Just that I came around to tell you good-by. I'm leaving to-morrow."

"Leaving?" she echoed. "I thought you and Tommy Maltby were to stay until after commencement."

"We meant to. But we have an offer of a job and we can't afford to turn it down. I've told you we've been running some tests on a locomotive built for a road out West—the E. B. & P. It is the first of an order of ten of the same class, the order to be completed if the type comes up to specifications—does the work. Tommy and I have made the laboratory tests here, and now the railroad people ask us to make a series of road tests in actual service. As I say, we couldn't afford to turn the offer down."

"The E. B. & P.," she said half musingly. "Would that by any chance be the Eagle Butte & Pacific?"

"It would, indeed. Why do you ask?"

"This is a funny world, Eric, dear. Are you and Tommy leaving on the morning train?"

"We are."

"What would you say if I should tell you that I am going along with you?"

"What? You don't mean that!"

"But I do. Aunt Sarah's asthma is troubling her again, and Doctor Daddy thinks she ought to try the high altitudes—or should I say the dry altitudes? And, just as that has been decided upon, along comes Captain Lansing Weatherford, vice president of the E. B. & P., stopping off to spend a day with Dean Randall. And here the funny coincidences begin. Years ago Doctor Daddy used to be the Weatherford family physician up in the Michigan pineries. Besides being the vice president of a railroad, Captain Lansing owns a dude ranch somewhere back in the mountains; and when we tell him what we're going to do with Aunt Sarah —— But I'm sure you've guessed the rest of it."

I nodded. "He opens his heart and home—otherwise the dude ranch—to your aunt and makes her his honored guest. But where do you come in?"

"At the front door, if you please! I'm to go along as nurse-in-ordinary, don't you see? And not only that; we are both to be his guests on the trip in his private car, the *Tyrian,* which is to be taken on the Limited in the morning."

"Um," said I, "the undergrads will miss you."

"Are you trying to tell me that I'm a college widow?"

"No, I'm only trying to keep from bursting into tears because I'm not included in the private-car invitation."

"You've met Captain Weatherford, haven't you?"

"No. It seems that he asked Dean Randall to recommend a couple of postgrads in railroad engineering to go out and make the road tests on the big Mountain type, and the dean picked on Tommy and me. Where is this dude ranch you speak of? Is it on the E. B. & P.?"

"No; it is some distance back from the railroad, he told us, in the Juniper foothills. Caliente is the station for it."

"Calien-tay," I corrected. "Don't you know that all the vowels are pronounced in the Spanish?"

But she merely made a face at me for this. "Where will you and Tommy be?" she asked.

"At Eagle Butte for our headquar-

ters, I suppose. That is where the general office and shops are."

"Then we shan't see much of you. The captain said the ranch was sixty miles from Eagle Butte, and ten miles from the railroad."

"Don't comfort yourself too severely with that thought," I said. "I've been known to travel more than sixty miles for a sight of something that I wanted to see."

"How energetic!" she gibed. "And then: "If you should ever get as far as the Circle D—that's the ranch, you know—I'm sure Aunt Sarah will be delighted to see somebody from home."

In all this chatter I had held my end up as well as I could, but it was entirely without prejudice to an undercurrent of speculation about the queer thing that had happened just before I had found Marcia sitting on the porch.

She had said that she was crossing the street at the same time that I was crossing in the opposite direction. She had seen me. Why hadn't I seen her? All that business about the one-track mind and the fixed idea might satisfy her, but I would have sworn that I was the only human being loose in the street when I had crossed to the auto. And yet she had said, in effect, that the only reason we hadn't met face to face was because we were crossing at different angles.

When it came time to say good-by, we didn't say it—since we were both to be on the same train in the morning. But when she went to the gate with me I said:

"I suppose you'll high-hat Tommy and me on the road—you as a guest in the private car and hobnobbing with the vice president of a railroad."

She wrinkled her nose at me.

"In that case, perhaps we'd better say good-by, after all. Just for that, you may kiss me, Eric, dear."

I did it, of course, and it was just about as soul-satisfying as kissing a waxwork manikin of the kind you see in the show windows of the ready-to-wear shops. Marcia could be warm hearted enough when she felt like it, but when she didn't, she could make a man wonder whether he had really kissed a girl, or had been slapped in the face with a cold dead fish.

The next morning Maltby and I were a trifle late getting down to the station, and in the hustle of ticket buying and baggage checking we saw nothing of Marcia or Aunt Sarah; had time only to swing aboard our Pullman before the train pulled down to back in on the station spur track and couple to a handsome brass-railed business car—otherwise, Captain Weatherford's traveling hotel. After we were settled in our section, Maltby went back to the club car to smoke and I opened the morning paper that I had picked up on the way to the station.

It was on the local page of the newspaper that I found an item with a block-type heading. Some time between eight and nine o'clock the previous evening, Dean Randall's house in Beech Street had been burglarized while the family was absent at a college entertainment, and the affair—in the language of the newspaper reporter who had written it up—was "shrouded in mystery." So far as could be determined, no robbery had been committed; only one room—the one occupied by the dean's guest, Captain Lansing Weatherford—had been ransacked, and that only as to the guest's personal belongings. There was no clew to the identity of the burglar or burglars, save that the neighbors saw an auto parked before the Randall house for some little time in the evening between the hours named.

Quite naturally, the reading of this item gave me a small shock. Dean Randall's was the house diagonally across from Marcia's home, and the auto seen by the neighbors was the one I had tried to intercept, and behind which Marcia

had disappeared—to reappear for me only after I had returned to find her sitting on the porch of her father's house. While I was trying to find the connection, if any, between Marcia's disappearance—for me—and the raid upon the dean's guest room, a good-looking young fellow came down the aisle to stop at our section and thrust out his hand.

"Mr. Manning?" he said; and when I nodded and took the proffered hand, he sat down in the opposite seat and introduced himself.

"My name's Dorman—Billy, for short—and I'm Captain Weatherford's secretary. I've just been hobnobbing with Mr. Maltby in the club car, and he told me I'd find you here. Thought I'd horn in and get acquainted, since you and Mr. Maltby are going to be with us in the 'wild and woolly.'"

"Temporarily," I qualified. Then, natural curiosity coming to the front: "I was just reading the newspaper account of what happened at Dean Randall's last night, and I'm interested because I was one of the 'neighbors' who saw the auto. Did the captain lose anything?"

My new-found acquaintance smiled.

"You're beating me to it," he said. "Miss Denton—she and her aunt are our guests in the *Tyrian*—has been telling us that you and she both saw the auto, and I thought you might be able to tell us more than she was able to. Can you?"

"Sorry, but I don't think I can. Miss Marcia saw all that I did, and a bit more. You see, she passed the auto while it was standing in front of the dean's."

"So she has just told us. And she also mentioned one other circumstance upon which we thought you might be able to throw some light—about your not seeing her when she passed you in crossing the street."

I saw no reason why I shouldn't give the straight facts to this frank, pleasant-faced young man who stood next to Captain Weatherford, so I told him briefly just what had occurred.

"Something decidedly queer about that, don't you think?" he commented. "And it ties in with another thing that wears the same pair of shoes—which is the reason why I've taken the liberty of butting in on you. Our car was entered last night and the captain's desk was rifled."

"You don't tell me!" I exclaimed. "Any clews?"

"Not what you'd call clews. I was sleeping in the car, and the porter was supposed to be on watch. 'Pip' is a pretty reliable darky, but he may have been asleep—probably was."

"And the breaking and entering didn't waken you?"

He was silent for a moment; was looking aside and seemed to be watching the Indiana cornfields as they whirled in circling procession past the car windows. When he spoke again it was to say:

"I'm a confirmed tobacco addict, Mr. Manning. Shall we go to the smoking compartment where I can light up?"

I went with him to the little den at the forward end of the car which served the double purpose of the men's wash room and smoking room, and he seemed relieved to find it unoccupied.

"I did want to smoke," he said, as we sat together on the leather-upholstered seat, "but the real reason for the shift was the man sitting in the section next to yours. I fancied he was cocking an ear in our direction."

I had noticed the man he referred to—a man wearing tinted glasses in tortoise-shell frames big enough to figure as aviation goggles, and with a soft, felt traveling hat pulled down as if to protect further a pair of weak eyes. In the passing glance I had given him, so much of his face as wasn't hidden by the drooping hat brim and the goggles

had seemed vaguely familiar, but the impression vanished almost as soon as it was made.

"You were asking if the breaking and entering didn't waken me," Dorman went on, after he had got his pipe going. "If I could answer that with a plain 'Yes' or 'No' I'd be easier in my mind. There are four staterooms in the *Tyrian,* and I was sleeping in one of the two next to the open compartment which takes up about half of the car. What I'm going to tell you was either a dream, or else it wasn't. I'm a pretty sound sleeper; got that way in the service overseas, where you caught your forty winks wherever and whenever you could."

"I know," I agreed. "Had a bit of that, myself."

"Some time in the night I was awakened, or dreamed I was awakened, by a noise in the open compartment. The night was warm and I had gone to sleep with the door of my room open, and from my berth I could look straight into the main room. There was only one small electric left turned on, so the big room was only faintly lighted. The most prominent object in my line of view was, or should have been, Captain Weatherford's desk. Am I making it clear?"

"Perfectly."

"All right; here's where the thing begins to figure as a crazy dream. I should have seen the desk—and I didn't see it; it wasn't there. I sort of half remember realizing that it was a dream, and turning over to go to sleep again. But when I got up this morning, I found that the captain's desk had been ransacked. I'm telling you this because Miss Denton told us of your experience last evening. You weren't dreaming when you passed her without seeing her in crossing the street, were you?"

"Not in the least," I denied. And then: "I can match you. Last night wasn't the first time for me." And at this I told him what I had seen in the Electro-Chemical laboratory a week earlier, winding up with: "I've been calling it a bit of parlor magic, but now I'm not so sure about it. Perhaps what I saw in the university laboratory, and what you thought you dreamed last night, are two pups in the same litter."

"You say this man Varnell is a crook?"

"No, I didn't say that. What I said was that he had handed in forged credentials."

"Which is a distinction without a difference," Dorman returned with a grin. "What became of him?"

"I don't know. He disappeared—for us—some few days ago."

"You're a scientific person, and I'm not. Is the thing you're hinting at—a contrivance that will make a solid object invisible—a mechanical possibility?"

"I don't know that, either. But he is a cold man nowadays who will say that anything in the way of a mechanical marvel is impossible. Was anything stolen from Captain Weatherford's desk?"

"That is another twist in the mystery. I'm a pretty methodical cuss—learned that in the army, too, where I was the captain's orderly—and the captain and I went over the contents of the desk with a fine-tooth comb, as you might say. There is nothing missing but a typewritten list of the E. B. & P. stockholders and bondholders."

"What would anybody want with that?" I asked. Then I thought better of it and said: "You needn't tell me; it's none of my business."

He looked me square in the eyes and said:

"You are on the E. B. & P. pay roll, aren't you?"

"Temporarily, as I have said."

"All right; I believe you are a square shooter, and we want you and your buddy, Maltby, on our side. Are you with us?"

I smiled at his boyish directness.

"You can rest assured that I shan't bite the hand that feeds me. And I can answer for Tom Maltby, as well."

"Good! You shall have the layout. Two years ago the E. B. & P. was a kite without a tail, two streaks of rust and a right of way; bankrupt and in the hands of a receiver whose appointees were letting it go to the dogs—for a purpose. Get the picture?"

"As far as it goes, yes. What was the purpose of the disloyal appointees?"

"It wasn't avowed, of course, but it was plain enough. Most of them were graduates of the T-C. O., which wanted to acquire the E. B. & P. franchises—meaning to make the kite without a tail a part of a through extension to the south. Buy it in for a song, you know, and have that much of their extension ready made. At that time the captain was running the Circle D Ranch; he was gassed in the war, and when the New York doctors said he must have an outdoor life in the dry altitudes, his father, the Honorable Peter, bought the Circle D for him and told him to go to it and get well. Give me the high sign if I'm getting too prolix and so on."

"You're not; I'm interested."

"The captain got well pretty soon and began to hanker for something bigger than a dude cattle ranch to play with. The Honorable Peter and some of his friends were bondholders in the E. B. & P. When the sheriff's sale came along under the receivership, they slipped in ahead of the T-C. O., bought the road, reorganized it, put the captain in as first vice president and general manager, and authorized him to go on and build it south to a connection with the P. S.-W. over the Moquetas and through Eden Valley. There was a whale of a fight. Perhaps you heard about it."

I nodded. "I saw what was printed in the newspapers. The Eden Valley cattlemen tried to block the game, didn't they? Didn't want the valley opened to homesteaders?"

"That was what the public was led to believe. But the ranchmen were only pawns in the game, with the T-C. O. making the moves. We won out and got the extension through, and that was that. Then the big Transcontinental line went to work to bore from within. The E. B. & P. became a paying proposition, and they wanted it. For the past year a bunch of unknowns in New York have been buying our stock, a bit here and another there. After a while they got some memberships on the board and began to bring pressure to bear on the captain. Whenever there was a vacancy on his staff—and that happened pretty frequently because the T-C. O. and other big lines were persistently hiring our officials away from us—the captain would find himself virtually obliged to take on somebody he didn't know, some stranger from the East. The captain was obliged because, with the constantly shifting stock ownership, he didn't know how far he could go if he should rear up and read the riot act to the New Yorkers."

"And that is the situation now?" I asked.

"It is. The New Yorkers, aided and abetted by some of their strikers on our official staff, are turning heaven and earth over to discredit the captain's administration. The captain is a fighter from the word 'go,' and if he could get anything definite on the conspirators, he'd sure send some of them to the pen and blow the conspiracy sky high. But so far we haven't been able to get a shred of evidence that would stand in the courts. We've just been to New York to try to find out how far the 'boring from within' has gone. That's why we had the list of stockholders—which was the only thing that was stolen last night. Does that answer your question of a few minutes ago?"

"Fairly well," I said. "Somebody

wanted to know how much you had learned in New York. Here's hoping that the captain knocks 'em cold."

Dorman got up to go.

"I'm scamping my job. The captain will be wanting to write some letters to be mailed in Chicago. I suppose I don't need to say that all this loose-tongued talk of mine won't stand broadcasting?" He grinned as he said it.

"Don't worry. We'll be loyal to our salt—Maltby and I. If there is anything we can do to help——"

"As it happens, there is. You and your buddy have been making tests on this big new freight puller we've bought, haven't you?"

"We have."

"Is it up to specifications? Will it do the work?"

"The block tests were perfectly satisfactory, in all respects."

"Good! We need ten of those engines to cut the costs in the mountain haul over the Moquetas. Grider, our superintendent of motive power—he's one of the New York appointees—says we don't need 'em, and that if we do, we shouldn't have bought Baldwins. It will be up to you and Mr. Maltby to back the captain's judgment when you make the road tests. That's another reason why I've been putting you next." And with that he left me.

Naturally, after this frank talk on the part of Captain Weatherford's secretary, I had plenty to think about, and I smoked another pipe before I returned to our section in the body of the car. When I did so, I found the adjoining section, the one that had been occupied by the man with the goggle spectacles, empty; not only of the man himself, but also of all his numerous pieces of hand baggage. Since the train had made no stops, I asked the porter what had become of my neighbor.

"Done moved up into the Chicago local car, yessuh. Tol' the conductor he had some friends up there and he wanted to be with um," the negro replied.

And with that answer I had to be satisfied.

CHAPTER III.

STORM RUMBLINGS.

BECAUSE there are a number of routes from Chicago to the Missouri River, we lost the *Tyrian* at the Lake Michigan metropolis, and didn't see it again until we were twelve hours west of Denver, with our P. S-W. flyer halting at Moraine to drop off our through sleeper for Eagle Butte over the E. B. & P.

Since we were to make road tests with the new Mountain type, Maltby and I were sitting up to see as much as we could of the Weatherford road before we turned in, and this was how we came to see the captain's private car coupled in with our own sleeper at the rear of the waiting E. B. & P. night express.

What we might have seen from the windows of the Pullman probably wouldn't have amounted to much; but on the station platform at Moraine we ran across Billy Dorman dropping out of the vestibule of the private car to file some telegrams for his chief. He took us forward to the big Pacific type and gave us an introduction in character as official experts to Chris Christiesen, the engineer, a huge viking in blue denim who was making his last-minute oiling round of the Pacific type.

"Aye bane glad to mit you yentlemen," said Chris, and we were waved up to seats on the fireman's side of the cab.

What we saw before we became too sleepy to see anything was, first, a fine piece of engineering as the extension wound its way through a series of canyons, around nicely compensated curves and up a succession of grades to a pass over the Little Moquetas. Down the northern grades the gigantic Swede at

the throttle whisked his train at time-saving speed to a broad upland valley lying stark in the moonlight—a level expanse dotted with ranches and sheltered at a wide distance on either hand by forested mountain ranges. "Eden Valley?" was Maltby's query shouted at the fireman; and the husky young shovel artist nodded an affirmative.

We had an hour or more of the valley before a water-tank stop gave us a chance to say good night to the two enginemen and drop off to go back to our Pullman. As we were getting ready to turn in, Maltby said:

"No wonder the Weatherfords wanted to stretch their railroad into this valley. From what we've seen, it seems to justify its name. Wouldn't mind owning a few acres of it, myself."

This was somewhere about midnight; but the morning had another story to tell.

When we ran up the window shades at sunrise, the train had climbed and crossed the main range of the Moquetas and was rocketing northward over a desertlike expanse, with mountains in the dim distance to the eastward and others much nearer at hand on the west.

"The Junipers, I take it," Maltby said—meaning the nearer mountains—while we were taking a basin bath and shaving. "Wonder if we've passed the captain's ranch station?"

I said I thought not—hoped not, anyway; and Maltby made a grinning mask of his lathered face.

"Want to kiss the little girl good-by before she disappears, do you? It stands you in hand. With the ranch ten miles off the railroad you won't have a chance to see her very often in the busy days to come, what? When is the wedding to be?"

I wished very heartily that I could tell him, but since I couldn't, I let the joshing question go without an answer.

I was barely presentable, and Maltby wasn't even that far along, when the train slowed to a stop at a desert siding marked by a cattle-loading corral and a single building, a diminutive station and telegraph office. At the platform a touring car and a small truck were waiting; and when I made the porter let me out of the vestibule, Captain Weatherford was coming up from the private car in the rear with his two guests.

It was my first sight of the captain, and he looked the fighting man, all right—a square-shouldered, well-set-up athlete, with the smiling eyes of a joyous scrapper, but with a jaw that would take the edge off the smile for any antagonist foolish enough to mistake him for an easy mark. He had Aunt Sarah on his arm and was leading her to the auto, and that gave me a chance to cut in on Marcia.

"'Lo, Eric," she said. "Speaking of high hats and the exclusivenesses, where have you been all the time?"

I hastened to explain that the route over which our passes had read had made us lose the *Tyrian* at Chicago; that we had just caught up with it again at Moraine, late the previous evening.

"As if I didn't know," she gurgled, giving me the laugh again. "Are you and Tommy Maltby coming over to the ranch with us?"

"You've got us wrong; we're not dudes, we're workingmen. Will you stick at the ranch all summer? Or will you get up to Eagle Butte now and then?"

"Who knows? I'm sure I don't." Then to the captain, who had handed Aunt Sarah into the waiting auto: "We've had a perfectly lovely time, Captain Weatherford, but you've spoiled us. We'll never be satisfied to travel in a common, everyday Pullman again. Shall we see you at the ranch any time?"

The captain smiled. "Since Mrs. Weatherford is summering at the Circle D, it is very likely you'll see me as often

as you care to. You must make yourselves entirely at home at the ranch. I have wired Mrs. Weatherford that you are coming, and I am sure she will try to make you comfortable."

I seemed to be out of it and I moved away. The baggageman was tumbling the women's trunks out of his car, and as I swung up to the steps of the Pullman the train began to move. The ranch auto was backing for a turn and Marcia was waving to somebody; but whether it was to the captain or to me, I couldn't tell.

Two hours later the train pulled through the yards and up to the headquarters-building station which served as the Eagle Butte terminal, and Dorman came to go with us and get us located. To reach the business streets we had to cross a gridironing of tracks, with another headquarters-station building on the town side of the big yard, and Dorman said:

"Our friends, the enemy; otherwise the T-C. O. division wickiup where they load the bombs for us."

"Not open warfare, is it?" I inquired.

"Oh, no; nothing like that. A decade or so in the past you might have seen something of that sort, but not nowadays. We exchange business with them and greet one another cordially when we meet; but if Bloodgood—he's their division head—could see a good chance to cut our throats, he'd do it without turning a hair."

"Nice, gentle sort of savage to have for your next-door neighbor," grinned Maltby. And then: "Eric's been telling me about your little war. We'll probably not be with you very long, but while we're here you know you can count on us for anything we can do to tease the enemy."

"Thanks," said Billy Dorman; "that listens fine!" And within the next few minutes he had installed us comfortably in a hotel which seemed far too luxurious and modern for the size and importance of a town which, so far as we could see, owed its existence principally to the fact that it was the division point of one railroad and the terminus of another.

As he was about to leave us, Dorman said:

"Your business will be chiefly with the motive-power department, naturally, and after you're rested up from the trip you can report to Grider, superintendent of motive power. He has been wired that you were coming."

I remembered our introductory talk in the Westboro-Chicago Pullman.

"This Mr. Grider is one of the unwelcome New York appointees, isn't he?"

"Just that, and he'll probably give you the icy shoulder. But the captain is still the big boss, and Grider will have to let you do your do with the new fourteen wheeler—which he says we don't need."

When we reported at the headquarters building, which we did as soon as we had changed to working clothes, we found that Dorman hadn't overstated the fact as to our welcome in the office of the superintendent of motive power, Grider, a surly looking man driver, apparently having a contemptuous opinion of college men in general and of mechanical engineering postgraduates in particular.

"Uh-huh," he grunted, when we introduced ourselves; "the captain wired me. What do you think you can find out about this new 'hog'—more than we can find out for ourselves?"

"Perhaps nothing at all," I hastened to say—before Maltby could cut in with something as insulting as Grider's question. "But Captain Weatherford has employed us to make the road tests, and——"

"All right," he broke in crustily; "the hog is here, waiting for you. You'll find it in the back shop. Tell Bagley, the master mechanic, who you are, and

he'll give you a gang to fit it for the road." Then, with a mean look out of his cold eyes: "Who are you working for—the railroad company, or the builders?"

Again I answered quickly, to keep Maltby from upsetting the fat in the fire, as I made sure he was ready to do.

"We are employed by the company, of course. We have nothing to do with the Baldwin Locomotive Works."

"Hah!" he said. And the way he said it made it sound very much as if he had said: "You're a damned liar." And that was that.

"Hell," Maltby remarked as we were crossing the tracks to the shops, "speaking of hogs, there is one with both feet in the trough. If the captain has many more like Grider on his staff, it's easy to see what he's up against."

In the master mechanic's office we found a very different proposition. Bagley was a small man, with a quick, decisive manner, but with good nature written all over his rather homely face. And before we had talked with him many minutes we found that he knew his job from the ground up.

"The new engine is on the erecting pit," he told us. "We would have coupled it up, but Mr. Grider said he had a wire from Captain Weatherford, and we were to let the engine alone until you came along. If you'll come into the shops I'll give you some men and you can start them in. I hope the big brute does the work. We're losing business right along for the lack of heavy freight pullers; though Mr. Grider thinks we could get along without 'em if we'd work a little harder with what we have."

That was the beginning of our contact with Bagley, and it left us with a better taste in our mouths. And the taste remained after we had spent the day working with and directing the shop gang assigned to us. As Maltby put it that evening as we sat down to dinner in the hotel, it seemed evident that whatever disloyalty there might be among the E. B. & P. officials and department heads, the rank and file swore by Captain Weatherword to a man.

"Just the same, there's thunder on the left," Maltby added. "If you put your ear to the ground you can hear it plainly enough. Or, for that matter, you can feel it in the air." Then, as he attacked the outworks of the excellent dinner: "My prophetic soul is warning me to keep an eye on Friend Grider. It whispers that he's going to take a swipe at us—you and me, Eric—when he gets a chance."

And I had a feeling that way, myself.

CHAPTER IV.

CONSPIRACY!

AFTER dinner Maltby suggested a movie for pastime, and when I said I'd had hard labor enough for one day, he went alone, leaving me to draw up a comfortable sleepy-hollow chair in front of a window commanding a view of the street, the railroad plaza and the T-C. O. station and yard; to plant myself therein and to fill and light my pipe.

I had been taking it easy, with the stir and life of the lobby shut off by the high back and deeply recessed seat of my chair just enough to make it companionable without being intrusive, for some little time, when a T-C. O. passenger train pulled in from the East. In a few minutes the Eagle Butte contingent of travelers from it began to come stringing along past my window to the lobby entrance, among them a figure that seemed vaguely familiar to me—a tall fellow, clean shaven, and wearing a pair of oversized spectacles in black frames.

When the new arrivals filed in and crossed to the registry desk, I got up to have another look at the spectacled man, and as I did so, the memory card index

shoved up the identifying memoranda He was unmistakably the begoggled person who had been sitting in the section next to Maltby's and mine in the train leaving Westboro three days earlier; the one Billy Dorman had suspected of cocking a listening ear, and who had had himself transferred to another car after Dorman and I had retreated to the smoking compartment.

Moved more by curiosity than by anything else, I waited until after the man had registered and disappeared in the direction of the elevators, and then strolled over to the desk to ask the clerk what, if anything, he knew about the guest who had last registered.

"Not a thing in the world; never saw him before," was the answer. "Signs his name 'Vanderpool,' from New York. Do you know him?"

I said I didn't; and, returning to my deep-seated chair at the window, fell to musing a bit over the curious coincidences that occasionally happen along. Here was a man, whom I had last seen on a train more than a thousand miles away, turning up in Eagle Butte within a few hours of my own arrival. Of course, there was no reason why he shouldn't; but it seemed as if there were a thousand chances to one that he wouldn't.

Past this, another small matter bobbed up with a question mark attached. Why did this man's face suggest a memory antedating my seeing of it in the Westboro-Chicago sleeper? It had done so, and it was doing it again. The more I thought of it, the more the conviction grew upon me that he was not wholly the stranger he seemed to be; and yet I couldn't place him anywhere back of that other chance meeting three days in the past.

While I was still puzzling over the suggestion of familiarity which refused to materialize into anything definite, the street light in front of the hotel showed me two men coming diagonally across the plaza from the direction of the E. B. & P. terminal. As they came nearer I saw that one of them was the grouchy superintendent of motive power, Grider, and the other a big man who looked as though he might be anything from a promoter of wildcat oil prospects to a politician out of a job.

A moment or two later, the two pushed through the revolving doors and came over toward the alcove where I was sitting. Inasmuch as I raised up to look at them as they came in, I supposed, naturally, that they must have seen me. But the first words that I heard, as they drew up a couple of chairs somewhere behind me, made it evident that they hadn't seen me; that they believed the high-backed lounging chair near them was unoccupied.

"This is as good a place as any," Grider said, as they seated themselves. "If anybody butts in on us here, we can go up to my room. You were starting to tell me your plan of campaign. I don't want to know it, or know anything about it. If your foot slips and I'm called into court, I'm going in with an ironclad alibi. Do you get that?"

"Of course; that's understood," said the other man. "All we ask is a free hand. I've got my men on the ground —the last one, and he's the king-pin, came in on the T-C. O. this evening— and we're ready for business. Give us a couple of weeks or so, and I'll promise you you can buy what stock you need at your own price."

"All right; go to it. But, as I say, I don't want to know anything about what you're doing, or your methods. And I'm telling you again that if you get caught out, you'll have to stand on your own feet. Onderdonk wires me that you haven't the scratch of a pen to show that you are not working a stock-jobbing scheme of your own, so, if you make a miscue, you'll get no backing from our bunch."

"Don't worry about the miscues.

We're not exactly apprentices at a job of this kind, and we shan't ask for any backing; all we'll ask will be a bit of inside information now and then. And that's what I'm after just now. Who are these two young fellows that Weatherford has brought in here with him from the East?"

At this, you can bet I was listening so hard that I could have heard a pin drop, and I crammed a finger into the bowl of my pipe to put the fire out, for fear the smoke of it should betray my presence.

"They are a couple of white-collar college mechanics brought here to show us that the new Baldwin Mountain type is just what we need for the Moqueta grades," Grider explained with heavy sarcasm in his tone.

"You are sure of that, are you?" questioned the other man.

"Why shouldn't I be? Do you know anything about 'em?"

"No; I haven't seen them, so far. But Weatherford is no fool. I wouldn't put it beyond him to run in a couple of fly 'specials' on us if it occurred to him. Is this engine testing a usual thing on railroads?"

"By so-called experts, you mean?" Not exactly. But I have taken the stand that we don't need these ten heavy freight pullers, and Weatherford is out to prove that we do. As I said in the office a little while ago, it's up to you to show that I'm right and Weatherford is wrong."

"Good enough. In that case, the show opens to-night. We can fix the two white collars, and maybe substantiate your claim to be a good judge of motive-power requirements, in one and the same gesture. Which reminds me: don't forget to let me have those duplicate keys you spoke of."

"They are in my room; we'll go up and get 'em," said Grider.

As they moved away I nearly broke my neck trying to get a fair sight of the confident plotter who was going to make monkeys of Maltby and me—this without taking the chance of either of the two looking back and discovering me—but it was no good. All I got was a view of his broad back as he crossed to the elevators with Grider, and I was sharply disappointed. The brief glimpses I had had of his face as he was approaching the hotel and following Grider through the revolving doors were so unsatisfactory that I couldn't be at all sure I'd recognize him when, or if, I should see him again.

Hoping that the precious pair would presently come down in one of the elevators, I bought a paper at the news stand and posted myself near the elevator alcove, meaning to use the spread newspaper as a mask if the need should arise. While I waited, I had a good chance to measure up the bigness of the plot that the overheard talk had partly revealed. Though the revealment was incomplete and lacking in details, it was plain that an organized assault was about to be made upon the Weatherford management with a view to breaking down the price of the stock; that Grider was the representative of the New York conspirators on the ground; and that the man with whom he had talked was the directing head of some sort of a trouble-making organization whose methods wouldn't bear the light of day.

After I had waited long enough to make it practically certain that Grider's visitor had departed without using the elevators, I tried to determine what I ought to do; whether I should go at once in search of Captain Weatherford, or let things rock along until later on.

Holding the alternatives in suspense, I went to the desk and asked if the captain had rooms in the hotel. The answer was that he had, but that he wasn't in them; that he had left Eagle Butte late in the afternoon to drive to his ranch sixty miles away in the Juniper foothills.

Since a report to the captain had to be delayed, I began to cast about for some other way of getting into action. At that, the unknown man's assertion that something was on the cards for the night, and his asking for certain duplicate keys, started me off on a new line—a line pointing to his promise to do up Maltby and me, and to demonstrate the correctness of Grider's attitude in regard to the purchase of the new Baldwins. I looked up at the lobby clock. Maltby had evidently found a movie; in which case he wouldn't be back for another hour or so. That put the action part of it squarely up to me, and I left the hotel to take a roundabout course which would bring me to the E. B. & P. yards and shops without crossing the T-C. O. gridironing of tracks opposite the plaza.

When I reached the E. B. & P. yard the off-shift crew was making up a night freight, and I had to watch my chance to dodge between the strings of cars. Once across the tracks, I found myself in the vicinity of the master mechanic's office, which was in an "L" built out from the main shop. The office was dark, and so was the shop, though when I looked through one of the windows I saw the watchman's lantern, as he went in and out of the machinery bays, making his round.

Since the repair equipment included a car shop and a paint shop, as well as the main machine shop, I concluded that the watchman would probably arrange his round so as to spend about an equal length of time in each of the buildings; and this conlusion verified itself when he didn't show up again in the main shop for something like forty minutes after he had left it.

During this waiting interval I had kept my place at the window, which was directly opposite the erecting pit over which the new freight puller was standing, and more than once during the forty minutes I had been tempted to go back to the hotel and call it a day. But the temptation wasn't quite strong enough to get results; and after the flickering light of the watchman's lantern had disappeared for a second time, I determined to stick it out for another forty minutes.

I had scarcely made up my mind to this before I heard the footsteps of a number of men coming across the yards and stumbling over the rails. The nearest masthead electric was some distance down the sorting yard, and the window at which I was posted was in a shadow cast by a string of box cars standing on the nearest track.

Flattening myself in the shadow I saw three men make their way to the door of the master mechanic's office, and one of them turned a flash light upon the lock so that he could see to insert a key. As he did so, he muttered:

"You're sure you saw the watchman go north, Brumby?"

And the answer came promptly:

"Dead sure; not more'n five minutes ago. He's in the car shop now."

At that, the three disappeared inside, and now I had no desire to quit and go back to the hotel. In a minute or so there were more developments: the three men were in the big shop, and enough light from the distant masthead electric shone through the top sash of the dusty window to let me distinguish them as they stood beside the new engine. Next, I saw the beam of the flash light begin to play around, and two of the dim figures handed themselves down into the pit under the engine, while the third man held the light for them.

What the two men in the pit did took them fully half an hour. Of course, I couldn't see what it was, but that it was sabotage of some sort was plainly evident. A few minutes before the watchman might be expected to return, the two scrambled out of the pit, there was a clatter as of tools being thrown

aside, and the three retreated as they had come—through the master mechanic's office.

At the click of the relocked outer door I sprang up to follow them, hoping to get near enough to be able to swear to their identities in court. But here the perversity of inanimate things got in the way. The switching crew was shoving up a cut-out of cars, and the three men darted through just ahead of the moving string an instant before the coupling crash came. Hence, I was forced to take a chance of being run over by scrambling under one of the cars in the breathless interval before the switching engine began to back out with the coupled section.

The duck-under delayed me for a few seconds, and when I was once more on my feet and giving chase, the three men were across the yard tracks and climbing into a waiting auto, to be driven rapidly away up the street leading to the town.

Chagrined over the failure of my first attempt to put a spoke in the wheel of these conspirators who were out to make it hard for the Weatherford management—and, incidentally, for Maltby and me—I returned to the hotel, where I found that Maltby had come in during my absence and had gone to his room. When I followed, I saw that his transom was dark, so I didn't disturb him.

At breakfast the next morning I told him what I had seen through the backshop window, and how I had fumbled the ball afterward.

"So!" he commented. "It seems that somebody has invented a new industry—wrecking railroads to order. Wouldn't it jar you to see a member of the captain's official staff calling in an organized gang of destructionists? What did they do to the Mountain type?"

"I don't know—couldn't see. But we'll find out presently."

As it came about, that prophecy wasn't fulfilled. Beginning the working day at the shops, the first thing we did was to crawl under the engine and make what we thought was a thorough inspection of the running gear. So far as could be determined there was nothing to show for the half hour two of the three men had spent in the pit.

"Well," said Maltby, when we had to give it up as an unsolved puzzle, "sure you weren't dreaming last night, Eric?"

"Nothing like it!" I retorted. "She's crippled in some way, you can bet on that. We'll find out when we get her steamed up."

An hour later we had the big freight puller hauled out, placed on a roundhouse pit, and put fire in her. While the steam pressure was mounting we went over her again, inch by inch, and still found nothing wrong; and again Maltby joshed me about having walked in my sleep.

"You'll see," I maintained. "It will show up, sooner or later."

But again I seemed to be a false prophet. With steam up, we ran the engine upon the turntable, took it to a long siding in the lower yard and ran it back and forth for an hour or more to limber it up; and still nothing untoward developed. In the afternoon we did more of the limbering; got the train dispatcher's authority to use a few miles of the main line between trains, and put the big machine through its paces on a longer runway than the yard track afforded. And still we couldn't discover what disabling thing, if any, had been done to it.

That evening after dinner Maltby went up to the mezzanine to write some letters, leaving me to smoke in the lobby. As I was filling a second pipe, Billy Dorman came in and, seeing me, came over to ask how the new engine was performing. I told him we couldn't tell much about it until it was put in service, and then asked him how long Captain

Weatherford would be away. At his saying that he didn't know, I told him what I had overheard and seen the previous night, and asked if he didn't think the captain ought to be put in possession of the facts at once.

"You are right," he acceded quickly. "We have a private-line phone to the ranch, and I'll go over to the office and call him up after a bit. Did you get a fair sight at the man who was with Grider?"

I had to confess that I'd fallen down there.

"Was he one of the three who went to the shops?"

"I had no means of knowing."

"What did they do to the new engine?"

"I can't tell you that, either. Maltby and I have had it out all day, and we haven't been able to find anything wrong with it, thus far."

He was silent for a time. Then he said:

"A nice state of affairs, isn't it?—with a member of the captain's own official family knifing him in the back."

"Can't Grider be fired?"

He shook his head slowly.

"He's a son-in-law of one of the new directors. Unless we could get evidence stout enough to haul him into court on a criminal charge, our hands are tied."

"I'm an outsider," I offered. "I'll willingly testify to what I overheard right here in this hotel last evening."

Again he shook his head.

"Not enough, I'm afraid; not definite enough, I mean. They'd swear you down."

"I guess you're right, at that," I admitted, adding: "The captain and his associates are not going to take this thing lying down, are they?"

"Not by a jugful. But the captain won't fire until he is sure of making a killing. If only they don't get us first; that's all I'm afraid of. I think I'll go now and call up the ranch. You'll keep your eyes open?"

"It's the surest thing you know," I said; and at that he left me.

CHAPTER V.

FISTS AGAINST BLACKJACKS.

DORMAN had been gone for an hour or more when Maltby came down to mail his letters. While I was telling him about the talk I'd had with the captain's right-hand man, Billy blew in again to say:

"The new Mountain type is bulletined to go out to-night on No. 13. Had you heard about it?"

We said we hadn't; and he went on:

"I saw the notice on the board in the dispatcher's room a few minutes ago and I asked who had ordered the new engine into service. The answer was that the order had come from Grider's office."

"Just so," I nodded. Then, to Maltby: "How about it, Tommy? Does she go on her first road trip without us?"

"Not by a jugful—in the circumstances!" he snapped. "That would be too easy. How about the enginemen who are taking her out, Billy? Who are they? Where do they stand in this drive to do the captain up? Can you tell us that?"

"Bat McGraw's name is up as engineer; and his fireman is Bert Lester. The rank and file is loyal, as a whole, but if there are any exceptions, I'd say McGraw might be one of them."

"And Lester?"

"Bert is straight; used to be a line rider on the captain's ranch. But he won't have anything to do with making the report on the engine's performance."

"Naturally. When is No. 13 due to leave?"

"At nine thirty; half an hour, yet."

"All right," Maltby said. "We'll wait a bit, and if we are not invited to go along, we'll invite ourselves."

Dorman nodded. "Hoped you'd feel that way. When I saw that McGraw was up for the run, I went back to the office and made these out." He handed each of us an employee's time pass, indorsed across the face: "Good on all trains and engines." "I thought maybe Pat might say he didn't know you and stall about letting you ride with him."

The passes were good, as far as they went, but they didn't give us anything more than riding authority. I called Dorman's attention to this.

"I know," he replied, "but it's the best I can do in the captain's absence. It's McGraw's run; his engine and his train. If he doesn't want you to do any of the handling, he'll be within his rights."

After Dorman left us we waited for maybe fifteen minutes of the half hour, but no call boy came to summon us. Maltby pocketed his watch.

"No use waiting any longer, Eric; they're leaving us out of it—purposely. Let's go."

Leaving the hotel we took the short cut to the E. B. & P. yards across the gridironing of tracks in the T-C. O. yard. As we were entering the "Y" connecting the two railroad systems for transferring purposes, I saw a T-C. O. switchman swinging his lantern in a circle, and wondered why he was doing it, since there was no switching crew or engine in sight. Looking back to see if he might be signaling to some one at a distance, I saw an auto start out of the shadow cast by the T-C. O. station building and disappear in the direction of the railroad street crossing to the westward.

Coming presently to the E. B. & P. yard we found that here, too, there was a cessation of the night industries. The switch engine was lying up on the freight-house spur track, and on one of the long sidlings there was a caboose-tagged string of boxes, gondolas, flats and oil tanks—the make-up of No. 13. At the head of the string the light of a distant masthead electric showed us the Mountain type coupled in, ready for the start.

It was shortly after we had passed the switch shanty where the night crew was waiting, apparently, for No. 13 to clear the yard, that we had our notice to quit. As we came opposite the lower end of the freight house, the drumming of the motor, followed by a shrill screeching of auto brakes, cut into the silence and three men darted around the end of the building and rushed us.

For a brief minute or so the battle thus precipitated was an excellent imitation of a Donnybrook Fair; fists and footwork against blackjacks, or sand bags, with the advantage of a total surprise on the side of the sandbaggers. Maltby took the brunt of it. Standing six feet in his socks, and built accordingly, he had held the boxing championship in the Tech in his undergraduate days; and before I could do much more than to sidestep the fellow who was trying to knock me in the head, Tommy had laid out one of the others, and was giving the third an exhibition of fine ring points that could end only in one way.

At this, a fourth man, materializing from nowhere, as it seemed to me, jumped in, swinging something that looked like a short bar of iron.

"Look out, Tommy!" I yelled; and Maltby made a boxer's side swerve in time to miss the sweep of the iron bludgeon. While the fellow in front of me was trying to get in another crack at me with his clubbing weapon, shouts and a clatter of running footsteps made me spring aside and spin around to face what I supposed was a fresh attack from the rear. Instead, it was the night crew from the switch shanty sprinting in to our rescue.

Of course, that changed the complexion of things immediately. Maltby dodged a second sweep of the iron bar, countering with a left hook that smacked on the bar swinger's jaw like the slap of a wet towel, and about the same time I pulled a French *savate* trick on another, getting a foot into his bread basket. By this time the yard men were closing in and that ended it, with the four highbinders breaking away to duck to cover among the cars in the yard.

"Thim dommed hobos!" the yard foreman was panting. "They'd be scraggin' ye right here in the opin yar-rd, would they?" Then to Maltby: "'Tis a swate wallop ye'd be carryin' in that left o' yours, me lad. The smack of ut was like a wet plank fallin' in the mud. 'Tis layin' for No. 13 they was, waitin' to swing it when she pulls out, and they tuk ye f'r railroad specials pathrollin' the yar'rd."

"We *are* specials, though not exactly the kind you mean," said Maltby. "We're out here making tests on the new Mountain type for Captain Weatherford. Thanks for your cut-in. The odds were against us until you lent a welcome hand. Come on, Eric, or we'll be left."

As we hurried on to reach the forward end of the train and the engine, I had my own idea touching the identity and purpose of the sandbaggers, and it didn't quite jibe with the yard foreman's. I was remembering the man in the T-C. O. yard making lantern signals to nobody in sight, and the auto leaping out of the shadows to race for the railroad crossing. Also, I recalled the screech of auto brakes which we had heard on the other side of the freight house a fraction of a minute before we were set upon. The sandbaggers were not hobos—at least, not in the foreman's meaning of the word. They were strong-arm artists under orders to see to it that we didn't get a chance to go out with the new freight puller.

Reaching the engine, we found McGraw making a circuit of the big machine with his flare torch and oil can. Maltby, nursing skinned knuckles as a result of the late scrap, didn't mince matters.

"We are hired to make the road tests on this engine and we are going over the division with you," he shot out at McGraw.

"The hell you are!" was the growling retort. "Who says so?"

"This is what says it," Maltby snapped back, showing his employee's pass with the "Good on all trains and engines" indorsement.

McGraw examined the card by the light of the smoking torch.

"All right, if that's the order," he returned sourly. "But we'll get it straight off the bat. You don't monkey with this hog, not while I'm runnin' it. I'm boss o' this end of the train. Snap into it if you're goin' along. We'll be pullin' in a minute."

With this crabbed welcome we climbed to the cab, and there I tried a bit of diplomacy with the ex-cowboy-fireman.

"We are two of the captain's men, Lester," I said. "McGraw doesn't want us on here. How about you?"

"Anything the captain says goes with me," returned the young husky, his grin showing a mouthful of handsome teeth. And he told us to make ourselves at home on his side of the cab.

In due course McGraw came aboard, scowling like the villain in a play, and leaned out of the cab window to take the starting signal. When it was given he took some of his ill nature out on the new engine, jumping it half off the trails with a jerk at the throttle and taking the slack of the long train with a snap which must have tried every drawbar in the string.

"You see," I said to Maltby, when

the deafening clamor of the exhaust gave me leave. "It's framed. If there is anything he can do to show this engine up for a false alarm, it's going to be done."

That saying of mine proved to be more than a prediction; it was a prophecy. Postulating as experts in railroad engineering, Maltby and I had ridden and driven quite a number of locomotives on test runs, but never before had we seen a new machine bullied and baited as the Mountain type was by McGraw that night. Not once in the eighty-mile run across the desert to the foothills of the Moquetas did he give the engine a chance to show what it could do under decent handling, and long before the grades where the real test would begin were reached, an ominous racking and thumping was telling us that the crippling thing—whatever it was—that had been done to the running gear two nights earlier was at last showing up.

McGraw, cursing the new machine for a junk heap, paid no attention to the ominous symptoms except to swear at them, and at the Lobo stop for water he didn't even take the trouble to get off to look for the cause or causes. But while Lester was filling the tank, Maltby and I dropped off on our side. The smell of overheated oil told us that the engine was running hot, and a few groping touches of the ends of the driving axles located the seat of the trouble in the main bearings. At this discovery Maltby did a bit of low-voiced swearing on his own account.

"Loose driver boxes," he said. "That is what those beggars did to her two nights ago, and it's showing up, now that she has a load hitched to her. Here's hoping she holds out till we get over the mountains. That damned McGraw doesn't seem to care whether she does or not."

At the clang of the upthrown tank spout we mounted again to our seat on Lester's box and the laboring run was resumed. Within the next fifteen minutes we were hitting the Moqueta grades and the big engine was straining and racking like a horse with the blind staggers. Again McGraw cursed and swore, yanking at the throttle until Lester's fire was broken up and practically ruined by the tearing exhaust blasts and the steam pressure began to run down. Maltby was furious, and it was all I could do to keep him from mixing it with McGraw. Of course, that would only have made matters worse. As McGraw had taken pains to tell us, we were only passengers and unwelcome intruders.

As we both agreed, it was only the failing steam pressure, slowing the speed to little more than a crawl on the steepest of the grades, that kept the crippled machine on the rails in the long climb to Lobo Pass; and on the descent to the locomotive division station of Elco in Eden Valley, on which gravity would have given us more speed than we could use, I think it was only McGraw's regard for his own skin that made him keep the downhill flight from becoming a runaway. As it was, I know that I, for one, was mighty glad when the station lights at Elco swung into view at the foot of the final grade.

At the station McGraw got off without a word to us and went in to make his "lost-time" report, which doubtless gave the new engine the blackest of black eyes, and after that we saw no more of him. Waiting until the valley-division engine had taken the train on to the southward, Maltby and I crossed to the roundhouse where the Mountain type had been taken by the hostler, told the night foreman who we were, and borrowed a couple of suits of overclothes. While we were getting ready for business, young Lester came over and asked if he might butt in.

"Sure you may," I told him. Then I asked what had become of McGraw.

"Gone over to the boardin' house to bunk down, mad as a wet hen. Swears he'll never pull throttle on this here hog again, not if he has to quit his job."

"But you don't feel that way, do you?" I said.

"Not any; but I'm sort o' curious to know what ails her."

"All right; come down in the pit with us and we'll show you," Maltby said; and when we had crawled under the engine with a torch for a light, the crippling thing that had been done to the engine was quickly located. The wedges which are designed to take up the wear between the driving boxes and the jaws of the frame, and which are adjustable up or down by means of a bolt and nuts at the bottom, had been slightly loosened on all eight of the main bearings, allowing them to rack back and forth under the push and pull of the pistons. It was a skillful job of sabotage; one which would not "kill" the engine outright, and which would not be discoverable until the machine was working under a load.

"My gosh!" Lester exploded. "Did they send an engine out o' the factory in any such shape as this?"

"They did not," said Maltby shortly. Then: "Get the wrenches, Bert, and we'll do a patch job of adjustment that will hold us until we can get back to Eagle Butte and the proper tools."

We did the best we could with the appliances at hand, and, when the job was done, went over to the trainmen's boarding house to catch up on our lost sleep. While we were undressing, Maltby said:

"Now we know why the captain brought us out here. He knew what was likely to happen if the Baldwin should be turned over to somebody Grider would pick for the try-out. The engine would fall down on the job—as she has—and that would be another nail in the coffin of the present management."

"That's it," I acquiesced. "And to make a sure thing of it to-night, we were not to be allowed to go along; not if we had to be waylaid and knocked out to stop us."

Maltby had taken off one shoe, and now he dropped the other on the floor.

"Huh? You mean that those sandbaggers weren't just ordinary bums, mad because they took us for railroad cops out to keep them from stealing a ride?"

I told him what I had seen: the man signaling in the T-C. O. yard, and the auto racing for the freight-house crossing, and asked him if he hadn't heard the squeal of the auto brakes just before we were attacked.

"I do remember, now that you mention it," he said. Then: "The scoundrels! There's one thing about it, Eric, my son. From this time on I'm in for the duration of the war. We'll get these highbinders in a hole before we quit, or I'll eat my hat! Call me when it's time to turn out: I'm dead to the world until the whistle blows. Good night."

CHAPTER VI.

BEDEVILINGS.

HAVING left no order for a morning call with the boarding-house keeper, we slept late; so late that the noon meal had to answer for a missed breakfast. Crossing the tracks to the roundhouse after we had eaten, we found Lester mounting guard in the cab of the Mountain type.

"Hello!" said Maltby. "Have you been here all day?"

"I'm livin' here," said Lester with his easy grin. "Didn't know but what somebody might bust in and try some more o' the same."

"Where is McGraw?" I asked.

"Foreman was tellin' me a while back that he deadheaded into Eagle Butte on No. 2."

Maltby smiled. "Gone in to tell 'em

that the new engine's a frost, eh?" Then to me: "Let's go over to the station and do a bit of wiring, Eric."

Showing our passes to the operator at the station, we were accorded the use of the wires, and the "G. S." call was answered, as we hoped it might be, by Billy Dorman.

"Glad to hear from you," was the greeting that came clicking through the sounder. Then: "New engine reported disabled. What about it?"

Maltby, who was manipulating the key, replied briefly to the effect that the report was like that of Mark Twain's death—slightly exaggerated; that Lester was still with us, and we were ready to bring the Mountain type in—with a train, if so desired.

"Hold the wire," came from Dorman. And after a little interval: "Captain Weatherford is here and tells me to say that you will receive orders in regular course for train No. 12, leaving Elco at seven ten p. m. Lester can pilot for you. Congratulations."

This left us with the afternoon on our hands, and we put in the time going once more over the big engine's driver installation. It was impossible to adjust the eight axle bearings with exact accuracy, with only the equipment of a division station roundhouse; but we were at least able to assure ourselves that the Mountain type wouldn't pound itself to death on the home run to Eagle Butte.

Shortly after the early supper our orders came through, and we got the big engine out and ready for its second trial trip. Train No. 12 came in from Moraine promptly on time; and at seven ten we took the conductor's high sign and pulled out, with Maltby taking the first shift as engineer. To the drumming of the exhaust and the shrill song of the open cylinder cocks we hit the first of the Moqueta grades—with eleven more loads than any of the regular "jacks" had been pulling over the mountain—and at the Lobo Pass summit we had bettered the time-card schedule by seven minutes on the ascent —which, so Lester told us, was a record.

Maltby turned the right-hand seat over to me at the summit, and, with Lester at my elbow to give me the needful pointers as to the grades and curves on the coasting descent, I dropped the long string of freight wagons down the mountain on the brakes. Maltby, watch in hand, timed the flight by checking the backward-flitting telegraph poles as we swung around the nicely compensated curves.

It was after we were off the mountain proper and on the easier grades in the foothills that the curious thing happened. Lester, who was still piloting for me, said:

"Round the next curve there's a gravel-pit track—no lamp on the switch standard. Look out for it!"

Accordingly, as we swung the curve, I checked the speed a bit and looked for an unlighted switch standard—looked and didn't see any.

"Where is it?" I yelped at Lester, and he leaned across me to peer out ahead.

"Gosh!" he broke out. "It's gone—there's the pit track, but I don't see the switch!"

Neither did I; nor could I see the points of the switch rails to determine whether or not they were set for the main line—this though the beam of the electric headlight was now falling directly upon the place where they ought to be. With a shout of warning to Maltby and the brakeman, I flung myself upon throttle, brakes and the sand lever, and the next instant came the swerve aside which told me we had left the main track and were shooting into the siding. The switch had been left open.

The gravel track wasn't very long, and for a few breathless seconds it was an open question whether or not the

heavy train could be brought to a stop before its momentum would shove us and itself off the end rails and into the gravel pit. But, luckily, the train brakes and the driver jams held and the stop was made when we were within less than the engine's length short of a derailing plunge. While the wheels were still grinding, Barlow, the conductor, came running over the tops of the cars.

"What the hell!" he ripped out as he slid down over the coal in the bunker. "Sufferin' cats! was all four of you blind? Didn't you see that switch was open?"

I told him I hadn't been able to see it, and Lester and the head brakeman backed me up. Barlow, sharing in some measure the practical trainman's contempt for the college-bred product, blew off a bit, which was his privilege; but since there was no damage done, he was presently persuaded to be thankful rather than wrathful. With the rear brakeman to flag for us we backed to the main line, and I was hanging out of the open cab window when the engine clanked over the switch. It was an old-fashioned installation; two diamond-shaped targets on an actuating lever set to stand vertical when the switch was closed, and at an angle when —as now—the switch was open.

"It sure gets me!" Lester remarked, as the train came to a stand and the head brakeman got off to set the switch. "I reckon I've passed that switch a hundred times, and half o' them in the night, and it never done a dodge-out on me before." Then: "What's that noise?"

Above the steam song of the standing locomotive rose the rapid-fire exhaust of an auto, and off to the left through the pines we saw the beam of the car's headlights.

"Is there a road over there?" I asked.

"Sure," said Lester; "the main north-and-south road over Lobo Pass and into Eden Valley."

Thirty minutes later, when we stopped at Lobo Junction to take water, the head brakeman got off to stretch his legs, and with Lester filling the tank, Maltby and I were left alone in the cab.

"What was the matter with your eyes back there, Eric?" he asked. "Or was it that you didn't know just where to look?"

"Lester knew where to look, and so did the brakeman," I countered. "And they are in the same boat with me."

"Queer," he commented. "What's the answer?"

"I'd feel a lot better if I knew," was all I could say.

Notwithstanding the delay at the gravel pit, the new engine, chiefly under Maltby's handling, made her time into Eagle Butte; and after seeing her housed and telling the night foreman at the roundhouse to keep an eye on her, we went to the hotel and turned in.

Early the next morning we hunted up Bagley, the master mechanic, and merely telling him that we wanted to make a few adjustments, asked him to have the Mountain type placed once more over the erection pit in the back shop, which he did.

Here, with better appliances and good help, a forenoon's work put the big freight puller once more in roadworthy shape. When the job was completed, we reported to Captain Weatherford in his office in the headquarters building, briefing for him our experiences of the night of the outward run, and telling him about the sabotage we had discovered.

"Those men who attacked you in the yard—you could not identify any of them if you were to see them again?" he asked.

We both said that we thought it unlikely; that the nearest masthead-yard light was some distance away.

He was silent for a moment, and then:

"Dorman tells me that he has given

you some idea of the situation on the E. B. & P. at the present time; and what you, Mr. Manning, overheard in the lobby of the hotel the other night brings the situation up to date. An organized effort is being made to discredit the present management, to the end that such weak-kneed stockholders as we may have will lose confidence and throw their holdings on the market. I don't want you two gentlemen to think that we are taking all this lying down."

We assured him that we didn't think so, and he went on:

"In a situation of this kind it is difficult to get evidence of conspiracy—evidence that will stand in a court of law; and it is this evidence that we must have before we can strike back successfully. Thus far the conspirators have been careful not to show their hand save in perfectly lawful ways—hammering our stock on the Exchange and circulating rumors calculated to 'bear' the market. What you, Mr. Manning, overheard on the night of your arrival is the first really incriminating thing we have been able to get hold of; and at that, the talk to which you listened was incriminating only by inference,—an inference which is sufficiently convincing to us, but which wouldn't go far toward convincing a jury."

"Quite so," I said. "I couldn't even identify one of the two talkers if I should see him again. Unless and until you can catch these highbinders in some criminal act——"

"That's it," he broke in. "Dorman tells me you are with us. If you will keep your eyes open—— We have specials on the job, but so far, their abilities, if they have any, haven't impressed me very greatly."

After this there was a little talk about the new engine's performance, and the captain said:

"I see Barlow reports that you found an open switch last night in the Moqueta foothills."

"Yes," I said; adding, to put the blame where it belonged: "I was running at the time and I didn't see the switch or the standard."

"Why didn't you see it? It was on your side."

"That is something I can't explain. Lester was piloting for me, and he had just told me that there was a gravel track and a switch ahead. I was looking for it, and so was Lester, and neither of us saw it."

"How about you, Mr. Maltby?"

Maltby shook his head. "I wasn't looking out; I was timing the run. But the head brakeman was looking, and he didn't see it. He was on the left-hand side of the engine, but he insisted that he had seen the switch on many occasions before from the fireman's box."

"You examined the switch afterward? Was it locked open?"

"Barlow and the brakeman said it was," I replied.

A far-away look came into the captain's eyes and he said soberly:

"Rather singular, isn't it? The more so because, you see, that gravel track hasn't been used for many months." Then, after a bit more talk in which he complimented me, in a way that made me blush, for my quick work in stopping the train before there was a wreck, he let us go.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TERROR BY NIGHT.

FOR the next few days, the Mountain type was put on a regular run—this time with an engineer who promptly fell in love with the big, powerful engine. Maltby and I went up and down the division, doing what we had been hired to do; taking indicator diagrams, making fuel and water tests to determine the engine's economies, checking up on its pulling power and, in off hours, writing out detailed reports of its performance for the captain's information.

During this working period, an interval in which I had a feeling that I couldn't shake off—a sort of premonition that we were living on the edge of a volcano which was likely to let go at any minute—nothing happened. Then, all at once, the terror began.

First, John Wishart, one of the oldest and steadiest of the passenger engineers, slammed his train, the night southbound express, into a string of loaded ore cars at Lobo Junction, where he was taking the siding for the northbound fast mail, and both he and his fireman swore that the sidetrack was empty when they headed into it; which, of course, was absurd.

Two nights later the mail itself went headlong into a gravel pit just below Elco, butting into the bank at the end of the pit track so hard that the wrecking crane had to be sent to pull the imbedded engine out. Here there was a double mystery. Both the engineer and the fireman of the mail stoutly affirmed that they were on the lookout and hadn't seen that the switch was open until they were right upon it.

The other half of the mystery turned up later. When the switch was inspected after the smash it was found to be set for the main line, as it should have been. And yet the mail had taken the wrong turn.

Less than twenty-four hours after the mail crash there was a costly wreck on the Moqueta grades. The place was a side cutting on the mountain, with a steep upward slope on one hand and a gravity dump of a couple of hundred feet in depth on the other. A freight train coasting down the mountain left the track in the side cutting and there was a piling up of three fourths of the cars at the bottom of the dump in a wreck that left little of the equipment or its lading worth salvaging.

Investigation proved that the derailment had been caused by a boulder which had fallen upon the track, and the two enginemen, as well as the head brakeman who was riding on the engine, all told the same story; that the obstruction hadn't been seen in time to make a stop, this though the accident occurred on one of the few straight pieces of track in the mountain grades.

Most naturally, these more or less mysterious accidents, coming, as they did, in swift succession, had their due and inevitable psychological effect. When everybody is keyed up and looking for trouble, conditions are ripe for more of the same.

On the second evening after the wreck in the Moquetas had been cleaned up Maltby and I were working in the small office room assigned to us in the Eagle Butte headquarters, tabulating the results for which the day's run on the new engine had given us the data. The summer evening was warm, and when I went to open the corridor door for better ventilation, I saw a group of clerks and trainmen apparently besieging the door of the dispatcher's room a little way down the corridor. I called to Maltby.

"What is it?" he asked, as he came to stand beside me. And when he saw the jam at the door of the wire office, he said: "More hell to pay, I suppose. Let's go see what it is, this time. A few seconds later we, too, were shouldering our way into the railed-off space in the dispatcher's room.

The drama which was enacting itself beyond the counter railing was ominously tragic. Bending over the train table, Captain Weatherford was rattling the key insistently in a call that was not given in the time-card list. At one of the telephones Dorman was making frantic efforts to put a long-distance call through to somewhere—without success. At the private-line railroad phone the car-record operator had the wrecking boss on the wire and was telling him to get the wrecking train out and to hold it for orders; and at the other city

phone Bollard, the trainmaster, was talking to the company surgeon, asking him to call out all the doctors and nurses he could reach, to be assembled, as quickly as possible, at the headquarters building.

This was all portentous and unnerving enough; but the tragedy centered itself in the figure of a man slumped in a chair, with his arms hanging down in the attitude of one who had been suddenly stricken; his face, ghastly, drawn and distorted like the face of a victim of the rack who has died in convulsive agony. This man was Mark Bradford, the off-trick dispatcher whose place the captain had taken at the train table.

"What is it, Brent?" Maltby whispered to a trainman who stood near us.

"No. 3 is off time, and Bradford has let it get past the last wire station where he could give it a 'meet' with the fast mail. The two trains are due to try to pass on a single track within the next fifteen or twenty minutes."

"Whereabouts?"

"Somewhere along about Crowell's —the timber siding on Squaw Mountain. The siding ain't a card stop for either train."

Maltby whispered again to ask what the captain was trying to do.

"He's tryin' to raise the timber camp at Crowell's. There's a cut-in on one o' the wires, with a loop up to the camp, and the timekeeper is a sort of plug operator, so they say. It's only a chance that he'd be within hearin' of his call."

"Could he do anything if he should get the word?" I asked.

"Might; but it's a good half mile from the camp down to the sidin'."

Bollard had done his part in summoning the doctors, and he now spoke.

"I guess it ain't any use," we heard him say in low tones. "Benson, at the timber camp, hardly knows enough about the wires to recognize his own call when he hears it. The doctors and nurses will be down in a few minutes, and I suppose we may as well begin to clear for the relief special and the wreck wagons."

As quietly as this was said, the words and their import evidently reached the man slumped in a chair at the opposite side of the room. As if he had been brought to life by a galvanic shock he straightened up, whipped out his pocketknife and made a futile attempt to draw the blade across his throat—futile only because Billy Dorman, standing within arm's reach at the telephone, promptly flung himself upon the would-be suicide.

Bradford fought like a madman when Dorman, with Bollard to help, took the knife away from him. In the midst of the struggle the captain's voice cut in:

"Quiet him, if you have to hit him over the head! I've got Crowell's."

In a silence which the clicking of the instruments seemed only to intensify those of us who could read Morse heard what passed between the captain and the timekeeper at the timber camp. "Get this quick. Run to siding and flag trains in both directions. Hurry," was the message that clicked through the key under the captain's hand, and I think nobody in the room drew breath until the answer came stuttering back in the "writing" of an unskilled operator: "O. K. I'm gone."

After this there was an interval of suspense that was truly terrible. Allowing six or seven minutes for Benson's downhill race to the sidetrack, it would take him at least an equal length of time to turn the switch lights to red at both ends of the timber siding. Then, before he could communicate with Eagle Butte again, he would have to go back to the instrument in his shack at the mountain camp.

It was Bollard's half-whispered word to the captain that relieved the frightful tension—a little.

"It happens that Keller and his line-

men are on No. 3, going over to run a third wire from Elco to Moraine. Keller will cut in with his portable set at Crowell's—if he gets there alive."

Fortunately for an entire railroad division in touch with the wires, and holding its breath in anticipation of a collision that would break all the disaster records, Bollard's prediction was presently verified. Ten leaden-winged, nerve-racking minutes after the time when we all knew that the two fast trains must have met somewhere, the sounder on the train-sheet table began tapping out the dispatcher's call. The captain answered and closed the circuit, and the tapping began again. It was Keller, on the line at Crowell's with his cut-in instruments. Both trains were at the timber siding, and a collision had been averted only by quick work on the part of young Benson.

There was a sigh of relief that was almost a sob to run through the group of which Maltby and I were a part, as the good news was passed from lip to ear. The captain called Dorman to the train-sheet table, telling him to straighten out the tangle—the paralysis of all business on the division caused by the threatened catastrophe—and sent the car-record man out to summon the relief dispatcher. Maltby turned to me.

"Nothing particularly mysterious about this one, at least," he said. "That's one comfort."

"It is," I agreed; and then I lost him. In the dispersal of the group of anxious listeners and watchers he got out of the room ahead of me; and when I stepped into the corridor I was confronted by Marcia and the handsome young woman who, some days earlier, had been pointed out to me at a stop of the new engine at Caliente as Mrs. Lansing Weatherford.

Before I could say anything the captain's wife pushed on into the dispatcher's room, but Marcia stopped to question me feverishly.

"What is it, Eric?" she gasped. "What's happened, this time?"

"Nothing, thank God," I said. "Two passenger trains were due to come together, but the captain's quick wit saved them."

"It was dreadful!" she said. "Mrs. Weatherford and I have been visiting at the army post, and we were waiting at the hotel for the captain to come for us. He is going to Madregosa in his business car, and he will take us as far as Caliente, where the ranch auto will meet us. We heard people in the hotel talking about a terrible accident that had happened, or was about to happen, on the E. B. & P. and we hurried over here at once."

"Well, fortunately, as I've said, there wasn't an accident. Will you come over to our room—Maltby's and mine—and say hello to Tommy while you wait for Mrs. Weatherford?"

"No; I want to talk to you, Eric. I was hoping I'd find you at the hotel, but the clerk said you and Tommy had gone out after dinner. I've something to tell you that will make you sit up. The captain's private-car train is standing down at the platform ready to go out. Let's go down and take possession of the *Tyrian*. Captain Lansing and Harry will come when they are ready. We have nothing to go back to the hotel for."

Mystified a bit, I led her away. As we walked away I saw her look over her shoulder and give a little start.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Nothing, now," she replied quickly. "I'll tell you later. Let's hurry."

CHAPTER VIII.

WAYS THAT ARE DARK.

WHEN we reached the platform we found that the captain's business car and its engine had been moved to a siding some distance away in the yard—doubtless to make room for the doc-

tors' special which was just backing in, and which, happily, wasn't needed. Since there hadn't been time, as yet, to countermand the call for help, the doctors and nurses were already arriving in taxis and autos, and I led Marcia out of the platform confusion and across to the *Tyrian*.

Boarding the business car, we found it unoccupied; even the porter was nowhere to be seen. I noticed also that there was nobody in the cab of the engine. This infraction of the rule that engines under steam are not to be left unattended was easily accounted for. News of the threatened disaster had been like a fire alarm to make everybody rush to the center of excitement.

"The captain will have something to say to the porter for leaving the car open this way and unguarded," I said, as I placed one of the wicker lounging chairs for Marcia and got another for myself. Then: "What was it you wanted to tell me?"

"You tell me something first, Eric—about this disaster that wasn't a disaster," she countered; and when I did it, her commenting question hit me like a slap in the face.

"This dispatcher person—Bradford; was he bribed?"

"Good heavens, no!" I exclaimed. "Haven't I just said that he tried to kill himself when it seemed that nothing could be done?"

"Yes; but——"

"I know what you are going to say. But there is nothing mysterious about it—this time," I said, repeating what Maltby had said to me. "With all the trouble we've been having, everybody is rattled, keyed up and on edge, and looking for more of the same. That's enough to account for Bradford's slip. What makes you think he might have been bribed to let a couple of fast passenger trains come together, with Heaven only knows what murderous loss of life?"

"You needn't try to hush-hush me," she returned a bit snippily. "Harry Weatherford—her name is Harriet, but everybody calls her Harry—has told me all about it; how Big Business, or somebody, is trying to get the captain's railroad away from him. If you and Tommy Maltby don't know what is going on, you ought to."

"Possibly we do know. But where does that get us? Tommy and I are willing to help all we can, but all we know about the situation is the little that Billy Dorman has told us: that a struggle for control is going on in the New York stock market."

"Doesn't that cover it all? What do people do when they want to buy cheaply? Don't they do everything they can think of to make other people anxious to sell? And won't a lot of people be hurrying to sell when they find the railroad going all to pieces under its present management?"

"Where did you learn so much about high finance?" I asked; and she looked at me as if I had made a remark that had insulted her.

"I think a lot of you, Eric, dear, but there are times when you make me furious with your early-Victorian notions about women!" she snapped. "Why shouldn't I know something about business? I wasn't born just yesterday; I'm living in to-day, the same as you are. Come out of it!"

"I'm out," I laughed. "Tell me what's on your mind."

"I shall. Do you remember a man named Varnell who had permission to do some research work in the university laboratories a few weeks ago?"

"I do. What about him?"

"There is quite a lot about him. In the first place, he came to Westboro under false pretenses. Doctor Mackenzie told us that much."

"All right. What else?"

"He claimed to be doing research work for some automobile factory, but

he wasn't. The thing he was working on had nothing to do with automobiles."

"How do you know it didn't?"

"Do you happen to remember a little sophomore named Jimmy Haswell?" she inquired innocently.

"Do I remember him? Didn't I find him sitting it out with you on your porch about nine times out of ten when I called upon you?" I retorted.

"Oh, it wasn't always Jimmy," she returned casually; "there were others. But never mind. Jimmy's a dear; and, since he is going in for journalism, he cultivates a nose for news. He was curious about the doings of the Varnell man, and one night he shadowed him and saw that the thing he was working on wasn't automobilish at all. It had something to do with optical illusion; Jimmy couldn't tell just what, only that it was very mysterious."

"A machine or contrivance that would make things vanish? Was that it?"

"Something like that, yes. How did you know?"

"I found out the same way Jimmy did—only not purposely. I stumbled in upon Varnell one evening when he thought he had the laboratory door locked—and hadn't."

"What did you see?" she demanded quickly.

"Something that made me sit up for the moment; until I realized that it was only a bit of juggling. He made, or seemed to make, a thing on the laboratory bench disappear and reappear at will."

"Ah!" she said. "Now we can go on. Do you remember what happened the last evening we were together in Westboro—the evening before we left for the West—how you said you didn't see me when I was crossing the street?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, the Varnell man was in the auto that was standing before Dean Randall's house. He had some sort of a box on his knees; I saw it and him as I passed and thought he was trying to take a picture of the house, and I wondered how it could be done—with no more light than there was at the time. Does that tell you anything?"

"It tells me something that is pretty hard to believe. Do you mean he had his magic machine, and turned it upon you as you crossed the street?"

"Maybe—just maybe, of course. You said you didn't see me, you know. Hasn't something of the same sort happened in each one of the accidents on the railroad? Harry Weatherford says it has. She says each time the men have missed seeing something they ought to have seen."

"Let's try to keep our feet on the ground, if we can," I said. "Maybe I am responsible for these attacks of temporary blindness. It hit me first."

"I know. Mrs. Weatherford said you failed to see a switch or something at some sidetrack in the mountains."

"I did. And two other men on the engine who were looking for it failed to see it. The story got out, of course, and went all up and down the line; and that is why I saw I may be responsible—by setting the pace for others who didn't see things, or thought they didn't."

"Don't be stupid, Eric, dear! There is no need to put the back load upon poor old overworked psychology that way."

"Why isn't there?"

"Because this Varnell person is here, now, in Eagle Butte!"

"What!" I ejaculated. "Are you sure of that?"

"I am," she returned quite coolly. "I saw him in the hotel just before Harry Weatherford and I came down here. He has shaved off his beard and wears huge, tinted tortoise-shell glasses, and he is registered under another name; but he is the same man we knew in Westboro as Varnell. You needn't look so incredulous. I know what I am talking about."

It wasn't incredulity that she saw in my face; it was an expression of the emotions stirred up by a sudden riffling of the memory leaves. She was as right as rain! Hadn't I seen the man she described—once on the train leaving Westboro, and again, three days later, turning up here in Eagle Butte to register as "H. Vanderpool"? I had, indeed.

"I'm not doubting you at all," I hastened to say. "I've seen the man you mean, only, I'm ashamed to say, I didn't recognize him. I——"

I broke off in deference to a sudden look of shocked surprise that came into the straight-shooting brown eyes. As we sat in the open compartment of the car, she was facing toward the rear, and she seemed to be staring over my shoulder at the door which, as the night was warm, was standing open.

"What is it?" I asked quickly, as she put her hands to her eyes.

"A—a man—there at the door!" she stammered; and at the word I got up and went to investigate. There was nobody in sight when I stepped out upon the railed-in observation platform. Over at the station the taxis and autos which had brought the doctors and nurses were driving away; but that was all.

"Tell me just what you saw," I said as I went back to her.

"I'm wondering now if I saw anything," she replied, with a twisted little smile. "But just as you spoke I thought I saw a man standing almost in the doorway—a big man in a checked suit and wearing a traveling cap. It lasted only a fraction of a second; before I could wink, the doorway was empty, just as it was the tiny fraction of a second before."

"All this mystery talk has got on your nerves?" I suggested.

"Maybe. But we were talking about this Varnell person. After I saw him in the hotel mezzanine, I went down to the lobby and asked the clerk who he was. He said he was a Mr. Vanderpool, from New York. It was just then that Mrs. Weatherford came running to tell me that there was another accident, and we rushed off down here. Then I saw him again. He was in that crowd of men in the station corridor when we started to go to the stairway—you and I."

"Say!" I exclaimed. "That's something different! Did he see you in the hotel?"

"I suppose he did, if he looked at me. We met almost face to face."

"Then I am glad you are going back to the ranch. You must stay there, and you mustn't tell anybody, not even Mrs. Weatherford, what you've just been telling me. I happen to know that there is a bunch of conspirators here, trying to down the captain, and most likely Varnell is one of them. He knows you have recognized him; he followed you down here from the hotel. If he even suspects that you could give him away——"

She laughed. "Are you really trying to scare me, Eric? I'm not afraid."

"Perhaps you are not; but I am afraid for you. I've had a taste of the quality of these thugs who are trying to do the captain in, and——"

"Tell me," she said. "All I know is what the captain has told his wife, and that wasn't very much—— Why, where are we going—without the Weatherfords?"

The query was a natural one, for her. While she was speaking, the business car began to move down the siding.

"It is nothing," I said. "They are merely going to shift us around to the station platform."

That is what I said, and it was what I thought until I realized that the speed was increasing, and that the one-car train was rapidly approaching the lower end of the yard. Even then I didn't fully sense what was happening until we shot past the yard limits shanty and

out upon the main line at thirty or thirty-five miles an hour.

But then I knew and jumped for the emergency brake cord. Our talk had been overheard, and we were being taken out of the picture!

CHAPTER IX.

ROUGH STUFF.

THE jump for the emergency-brake cord didn't get me anything. The cord had been cut, and it came away loose in my hands. Being unfamiliar with the layout of the business car, it took me a few seconds to find the wash room and the bleeder valve to which the cord had been connected, and when I found the valve it was only to discover that the stem had been bent so it wouldn't operate.

Failing there, I chased into the front vestibule. Looking forward I saw two men in the engine cab—one hunched upon the engineer's seat with his hand on the throttle lever; the other handling the fireman's scoop, which he dropped to spin around as if he had sensed my presence in the vestibule. Instantly there was a flash and a sharp report. I didn't know where the bullet struck, but that was negligible. The shot was an intimation of what I'd get if I should climb over the tender and try to start anything in the cab, so I hurried back through the car to see what could be done at the rear end of things.

On the railed-in observation platform, to which Marcia followed me, there was the usual air-brake installation. Inasmuch as railroad business cars are ordinarily placed at the rear of a train, they are provided with a rear-end brake control—a pipe brought up from the train air line under the car to the handrail of the platform, terminating in a stopcock and a whistle—the whistle for signaling when the train is backing. To set the brakes it is only needful to open the stopcock, letting the air escape from the train line. This I tried to do; but here, again, the obstructionists had been busy. A tap with a hammer on the plug, or a twist with a wrench at the bottom nut, will render any stopcock immovable; and though Marcia and I together put our united strength upon it, there was nothing doing.

While we were tugging and twisting at the stopcock, the train was kicking the miles to the rear at racing speed and the lights of Eagle Butte had disapperaed to the northward. In desperation I swung over the railing and, with a precarious foothold on the coupler head of the drawbar, sought to reach the air hose looped in its hook. This was the last resort, and when it failed, I climbed back to the platform and both of us, baffled, retreated to the interior of the car.

"It was beautifully quick work, wasn't it?" Marcia commented, as coolly as if the theft of the special were merely an incident in the day's work. "I wasn't just dreaming when I thought I saw somebody on the platform. There *was* somebody; he'd been there from the beginning and he probably heard everything we said. He ought to have been in plain sight from where I was sitting all the time, but he wasn't—which is one more little mystery to go along with the others. What are they going to do to us, Eric?"

"I don't know; stop our mouths, I guess, in whatever way seems easiest. I suppose the plot to do the captain up is about ready to climax, and the plotters are not going to stand for any interference."

"But they can't take us very far in a runaway train, can they? Won't this special of the captain's be missed right away?"

"Before long, of course; and something will be done to stop it—if the wires haven't been cut. But, even so, we won't be out of the woods. Those

men on the engine are armed. One of them shot at me when I was out front."

"Can't we jump off and get away?"

"Not at any such speed as we are making now. But they can't run far without orders. We'll watch for our chance and take it when it comes. I wonder if the captain's desk is locked?"

The desk was locked, but I contrived to open it with the blade of my pocket-knife. The right-hand drawer held what I hoped it might—a loaded automatic.

"This evens things up a bit," I offered. "I hate to be shot at without being able to shoot back. Now I'll go up ahead again and see if I can't persuade these train stealers to quit."

"No, no! Please don't do that!" she begged. "They'll see you when you open the door and you won't have a chance in the world!"

"Trust me for that. You sit on the floor, so if a bullet comes through, you'll be out of the way."

"They'll kill you!" she insisted. And then, quite calmly: "If they do, I shan't want to live any longer, Eric."

If I had needed a fighting word, here it was.

"Don't you worry a minute about me," I told her. "Just get down behind the desk where you'll be safe." And I hastened forward to get action.

With due caution I slipped into the forward vestibule and raised myself to look over the tender. There was now only one man in the cab—the one on the engineer's box. Before I could place the other—the one who had taken a shot at me—the train ground to a sudden jolting stop and I heard a crunching of footsteps in the gravel ballast, as of some one racing on ahead of the engine.

If I had only realized it quickly enough, this was our chance—to drop off while the train was at a stand. But while I hesitated, the wheels began to turn again, and, pistol in hand, I started to climb upon the tender—this because I couldn't quite work myself up to the point of shooting the man at the throttle in the back, and without warning. Almost immediately there was another brake-grinding stop, and at this repetition of the chance for escape I sprang back into the vestibule and dashed through the narrow corridor to get Marcia.

As I reached the open compartment I again heard the sprinting footsteps, and a second time the train started with a jerk, the speed accelerating so quickly that by the time I had helped Marcia to her feet, had run with her to the rear platform and had lifted the trap covering the steps, a swing-off with any promise of unbroken bones was out of the question.

It was a backward glance that told me what the two stops and the crunching footsteps had meant. We had left the main line and were on a branch track; and the stops had been made to let the fireman drop off, set the switch, and reset it after we had passed over it. For the second time we sought the interior of the car, retreating from the shower of cinders pouring over the umbrella roof of the platform.

"Where are we now?" Marcia asked, realizing from the unevenness of the track that we had left the well-ballasted main line.

It was a mere happen-so that I was able to answer her intelligently. In passing back and forth over the division with the new Mountain type, I had noted this spur track pointing away toward the mountains, and, asking one of the enginemen what it was, had been told it was a branch to what was now an abandoned mining camp in the Junipers some few miles away; that there was no train service over it, and hadn't been for a number of years.

"Which means that, for a time, at least, nobody will know where to look for this stolen train; that we are lost

to the world for the time being," I added. "For that matter, nobody will know that we disappeared with the train unless—which is most unlikely—somebody in the Eagle Butte yards happened to see us when we got aboard."

"Never mind," she said. "We are still alive, and we've still got each other. That is the most that matters, isn't it?"

Having dropped the captain's pistol into my pocket when I picked her up to run with her to the door, I had both hands free, and the fact that we were being rushed off to nobody knew what desperate adventure was cutting a mighty small figure when I took her in my arms and said:

"Does your saying that mean all it seems to mean, Marcia, girl?"

"You know it does, Eric. There has never been anybody else—even if you did call me a college widow. If you hadn't been as blind as a bat——"

The interruption was a harsh command to, "Hold the clinch! Hold it just as you are!" and we looked up to see one of the two men from the engine cab—the one who had taken a shot at me—steadying himself against the lurching of the car over the rough track with a hand on the captain's desk and covering us with a pistol in the other hand. And the scoundrel was grinning his appreciation of the situation he had surprised.

Sharp as the crisis was, Marcia's sense of humor did not desert her.

"What a pity he hasn't a movie camera," she whispered. And then: "Does it embarrass you horribly, Eric, dear?"

Embarrassment wasn't quite the word. I was so mad that I couldn't see straight. It is one thing to hold the girl of your heart in your arms as a precious privilege, and another to be obliged to go on holding her, on pain of being shot, or getting her shot, if you let go. It took just about half a minute of the enforced pose to turn me fairly berserk. The roar of confining cliff walls was telling me that the train had entered a mountain canyon, and the presence of the grinning pistol pointer was readily accounted for. We were nearing our destination, whatever it might be, and he had come back into the car to see to it that we didn't escape when the final stop should be made. With my lips at Marcia's ear, I whispered:

"Will you do exactly as I tell you to?" And at her prompt, "Yes," I went on: "When I let you go, duck down behind the chair and stay there. Do you understand?"

"Yes; but he'll kill you."

"I'll try not to give him the chance. Are you ready?"

I could feel her tensing herself for the backward leap.

"I'm ready when you are," she breathed softly. And then: "Perhaps, if you were to kiss me, it might——"

I guess maybe it did. As our lips met, the man with the gun gave a snorting guffaw, and before he could pull his face straight I had him, with the gun-grasping hand bent backward in a bone-cracking twist—an attack that left him, for the fraction of a split second, defenseless and with his face unguarded. I put all I had into the right uppercut that caught him fairly on the point of the jaw, hoping that the jolt might shock him into letting go of his weapon. To my surprise, it did more. As I swung to let him have it again, he rocked on his heels, his knees sagged, and he went down as if I had hit him with an ax.

It had been my intention, if I should succeed in getting the better of him, to lock him in one of the staterooms, but there was no time for that. As I stooped to pick up the dropped pistol, there was a short double blast from the locomotive whistle and the speed was checked. That meant that we were arriving somewhere, and there was no time to be lost. Spinning around, I

pulled Marcia to her feet and we ran for the rear door. On the platform I opened the gate in the railing and lifted the floor trap to give access to the steps.

"Can you make it?" I asked anxiously, as the train slowed still more.

Her answer was to run down the steps, face herself in the direction the car was moving, and swing off handily; and the next moment we were standing together at the trackside watching the tail lights of the *Tyrian* as they withdrew around a curve and came to a stand.

As nearly as we could make out in the starlight, we were in a bowllike basin in the mountains, a depression surrounded by wooded heights. Below the railroad embankment a quick-water stream splashed and gurgled over the boulders in its bed. On the other side of the stream, and opposite the place where the train had stopped, a collection of buildings was dimly visible, and in one of these there were lighted windows. As we looked, a door in the lighted building was opened and a bunch of men came out to cross to the standing train.

Marcia slipped an arm under mine.

"They are going after us—which shows that they got word somehow that we were coming," she said. "Which way shall we run?"

I was debating that question with myself. So far as we knew at the moment, there was only one way out of this mountain trap, and that was by following the railroad track. But over the crossties we could make but little speed, and we would be quickly overtaken if they should back the train to search for us. Nevertheless, I suggested it to Marcia as the only expedient I could think of.

"No," she objected promptly. "Now that we are here, let's see it through. The one place they won't look for us is over in that camp, or whatever it is."

"You are right," I agreed; and we scrambled down the embankment, sought and found a wading place in the stream, and made a quick detour which led us across a wagon road and around to the group of buildings, which we approached from the rear. Before we reached the buildings the business car's lights showed us a group of men coming out to stand on the rear platform of the *Tyrian,* flashing an electric torch. Then two of them dropped off and were lost to view as the car and engine began to back slowly down the grade. They were doubtless confident that they would be able to pick us up somewhere along the track.

Not knowing how many inhabitants of the camp had been left behind, we approached the collection of log buildings cautiously. Reconnoitering some of the outlying structures, we found them empty, roofless and in all stages of dilapidation. Only the largest, the one with the lighted windows, appeared to be habitable, and it, too, seemed to be deserted, though there was a big sport-model touring car drawn up before it.

"If you will stay back here, I'll go and see if they have left anybody behind," I suggested. But Marcia wouldn't have it that way.

"I have just as much curiosity as you have," she retorted; so we crept up to a spying window together.

What we saw when we peeped over the sill of a window in the less brightly lighted end of the building, was a long room which had evidently served as the commissary of the isolated mining camp. Strangely enough, it seemed to be still a storehouse of some sort. There was a ranking of packing cases in the end nearest our window; containers of a size and shape familiar enough everywhere and in the open before the passage of the Volstead act, but now shyly hiding themselves from all but the initiated.

"A bootlegging headquarters," I

whispered. "There must be a road in here from the other State."

"And is that the bootlegger himself, sitting up there at the other end of the room?" Marcia asked.

I looked, and had to look again before I could quite credit the evidence of my own senses. For the big man sitting half hidden by what had once been the counter of the commissary store, tilting easily in his chair and smoking a cigar, was Grider, the E. B. & P. superintendent of motive power.

CHAPTER X.

A RACE FINISHED AND ONE BEGUN.

"HE may be a bootlegger," I said in answer to Marcia's query, "but he is also something a lot worse—a traitor to his salt. He is the captain's superintendent of motive power—a member of his official family."

"And who is the other man?" she asked.

I hadn't seen any other man, but that was because the counter structure was concealing him from my point of view. When I shifted a bit so that I could see him, the recollection machinery clicked into gear. He was the man who had accompanied Grider to the hotel in Eagle Butte, in the evening when I had overheard too little of the plot to be able to go into court and swear that there was a plot.

"These are the two men who are pulling the strings in this business of smashing the Weatherford management," I said. Then: "That is probably Grider's auto around in front. If it isn't locked, we might grab it off and with a bit of luck make a get-away. Or shall we try first to find out what brings these two boss plotters here to-night?"

Again she said, quite as coolly as Maltby would have said it, "Now that we are here, let's see it through," and at that we shifted to a window nearer the other end of the building where I pried up the sash the needful inch or two with my pocketknife.

"It's just as I'm telling you, Bonnard," were the first words that came to our ears, and they were Grider's. "You are raising altogether too much hell. We're not out to commit wholesale murder, as I've told you more than once. If that collision had come off to-night——"

"That was no skin off of us," the other man countered gruffly. "We didn't frame it with your half-witted dispatcher."

"Maybe not; but your heavy-handed work is responsible for the general demoralization that made Bradford lose his head. You are pushing it too hard—overdoing it. We don't want to inherit a railroad with a lot of its equipment smashed and the rank and file all shot to pieces!"

"You said you wanted action, and you're getting it. And it's getting your New York people what they are after, isn't it, scaring some of the die-hards into hurrying to get rid of their E. B. & P. stock?"

"That part of it is all right, if you don't work the rabbit's foot too hard. You let Weatherford and his crowd once get it into their heads that they're being framed, and you'll hear something drop. Take this business of copping off Weatherford's train, and Manning, and the girl, to-night—that's the main thing that brought me out here on the run when I heard of it. You ought to know you can't pull anything like that and get away with it."

"Weatherford may have his train back; we don't want it. But we had to have the man and the girl. That was a dead open and shut. They know too much."

"Too much about what?"

There was silence while the man called Bonnard was relighting his cigar. Then:

"You said, in the beginning, that you

didn't want to know anything about our methods, Grider."

"Damn your methods! I want to know why you are fool enough to think that you can kidnap Manning and the girl without raising the very devil!"

"Keep your shirt on!" was the brusque retort. "Our bargain with you was that you were to give us a free hand, and, on our part, we were to give you results. You're getting the results. As for the college mechanic and the girl, we've only done what we had to do. They won't be hurt, unless they bring it on themselves; but they are going to be kept where they can't set the grass afire until after we are through. That goes as it lies."

"Make it plainer, if you can."

"It was a piece of the devil's own luck. The girl was in a position to give Weatherford a pointer that would have let the cat out of the bag, right! And she passed the tip along to the college chap when they were together in Weatherford's car. I'll admit that swiping the train, with them on board, was a trifle raw, but we had to nip the thing in the bud, quick, and we did it."

"Partly, you mean. They've got away from you, after all."

"They won't get far. Brumby will pick 'em up and bring 'em in. They'd have to walk the track; wouldn't know any other way to get out of here."

There was another little interval of silence; then Grider began again:

"It's a hell of a mix-up, Bonnard, and I don't like it. You've taken a nod for a wink, and the chances are that the whole deal will blow up with a racket that will be heard all the way to the Atlantic coast. It's time to call a halt and let the air clear. Pull the pin on these 'demonstrations' of yours, until we see what comes of this equipment-and-body-snatching trick of yours tonight."

"Weatherford's special will be taken back to the main line before morning. As I've said, we have no use for it. But about the man and the girl: You heard what Brumby said when we went out to the car. Most likely nobody at the Eagle Butte terminal saw them get aboard of the special. So far as Weatherford or anybody else knows, Weatherford's car was empty when Brumby and Gatlin snatched it out of the Eagle Butte yards."

"Have it that way, if you like," was Grider's reply. "But I can tell you this much: Lansing Weatherford is nobody's fool. If he gets onto your game—well, in that case I shouldn't care to be in your shoes, Bonnard."

At this, the other man struck back smartly.

"Your shoes are just the same as mine, Grider; make no mistake about that. If the house falls down, you'll be under the timbers with the rest of us."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say—if you want to bring it to a show-down. State's evidence is what it's called, I believe. When you gave me that cold deal about keeping your own feet out of the mud, I fixed it so we could swear you down in court—three to one, if need be. There's mighty little you've said or done that can't be shown up if the occasion demands it. So that's that. As to stopping the 'demonstrations,' as you call them, short off, you're a few minutes too late. There is one staged for tonight."

Grider's tilted chair righted itself with a crash.

"What's that? Good Lord! Didn't you have any better sense than to pull one off right on top of this near-collision of No. 3 and the mail?"

"You forget that we didn't know anything about the near-collision. As I have said, that was your dispatcher's show—not ours."

"But where is it? What is it, this time?"

"It will figure as another miscue on the part of your trainmen, and it will show how the E. B. & P. continues to fall down under the Weatherford management. The time is midnight, or thereabouts, and the place a gravel track in the Moqueta foothills. You can name the train for yourself."

Grider was on his feet and pulling out his watch.

"It's got to be stopped, Bonnard!" he rapped out. "How many of your strikers are in this? And can you reach them by wire if I get you to a telegraph office in my car?"

"There are only two of them, and they are out of reach of the wires. They are driving from Eagle Butte, and if they kept their schedule, they left at about the same time you did."

"Get a move!" Grider bellowed, struggling into his overcoat. "You're in for a long, hard ride! No, you needn't try to kick out. Hurry, man!"

It was just then that Marcia drew me away from the window.

"The train!" she said. "It's coming back!"

While we had been listening to the talk in the commissary, the back part of my brain had been busy with the notion of stealing Grider's auto when the time for more action should come. But the auto was on the other side of the building, and now it was too late. As the train pulled up to the end of track a hundred yards distant, four men jumped off to hasten across to the commissary. Keeping the lighted building between us and the approaching men, we beat a hasty retreat to the nearest of the shacks and took refuge in it.

"What now?" Marcia questioned eagerly, as we halted in the shack's doorway.

It was a moment for a bit of quick thinking. The four men were doubtless telling Grider and Bonnard of their failure to find us. In another minute or so the boss train wrecker and Grider would be starting on their long race to the distant Moqueta foothills; a race which might get them to the hills in time to save the threatened train—or it might not. What was to be done? What could we do?

There was one possible answer to these vital questions. The one-car train was standing where it had been stopped at the track end, and it was deserted for the moment. Could we reach it before we should be overtaken? An instant's weighing and measuring of the chances tipped the scale. "Give me your hand!" I whispered; and together we ran, giving the commissary as wide a berth as we could without too greatly increasing the distance we would have to cover.

Thanks to the darkness, we were within a short sprint of the train before the report of a pistol and the simultaneous whine of a bullet overhead told us that we were discovered. With an arm around Marcia, I put the remaining few yards behind us in just about nothing, flat, and at the engine steps I fairly threw my running mate up into the gangway. By this time the pursuit was in full cry, and as I scrambled up after Marcia, another misdirected pistol bullet shattered a cab window.

Fortunately for us, the train was standing upon a slight grade, and at the release of the air brake it began to drift backward. But before I could do more than to snatch the reversing lever into the back gear and give a jerk at the throttle, one of the pursuers reached the engine steps.

A cry from Marcia warned me. The man had thrown himself into the gangway and was clutching at Marcia to drag her out of the cab. I could have shot him from where I stood on the running step, but the fact that I had a pistol in each coat pocket didn't once occur to me in the excitement of the moment. Grabbing the iron slice bar used for breaking up the fire, I shoved

it under the fellow as he hung, half recumbent, in the gangway, and his panicky yell as a prying lift of the bar heaved him overboard rose shrilly above the drumming of the wheels and the rapid-fire of the exhaust.

Instantly I was back at the throttle and the brake. The canyon grade was steeper than I had realized, and the speed we were now making over the crooked and long-neglected track was a bid for disaster. Moreover, as we were backing, with the business car in the lead, I couldn't see where we were going or what we were coming to. Under such conditions I had to swallow my heart half a dozen times before we got out of the mountain gorge and shot away on the desert level. At the cessation of the dizzying plunges around the canyon curves, during which she had had to cling to whatever she could lay hold of to keep her feet, Marcia called out to ask if she shouldn't take the fireman's place.

"Too heavy work for you," I objected. "Climb up on that other seat and keep a lookout. They may try to chase us with the auto."

That gave her something to do while I was firing and looking to the water in the boiler; and when I reached across her feet to put on the left-hand injector, her warning cry, and my glimpse of a pair of auto headlights, came at the same instant.

At first, I thought this pursuit by the auto couldn't amount to much, but I was speedily undeceived. There was no road visible beside the track, but the dry, hard desert level, with no obstructions worse than a thin scattering of stunted sagebrush, presented no obstacle to a well-built car racing in any direction over it. Leaning out of the cab window on my side, I could see the oncoming head lamps; was made aware, also, of the grim fact that the flying car was steadily overtaking us.

On a good track, and with the train right end to, so that I might have had the look ahead, we could have given them a run for their money; but as it was, every additional inching open of the throttle threatened derailment and a wreck. In a few minutes the auto had gained upon us so that I could no longer see the headlights from my side of the cab, and I shouted across to Marcia, telling her to get down on the deck. Instead, she staggered over to stand beside me.

"I saw them plainly as they came into the beam of the engine headlight," she told me. "There are only two of them in the car. The back seat is empty." Then: "Can't we go any faster?"

I shook my head. "Not backing—and over this bad track. As it is, we're taking hideous chances."

"Then they'll overtake us in a few minutes. What will they do then?"

The answer was a crack like the snapping of a dry twig, and a bullet tore into the cab roof. A glance out of the left-hand gangway showed us the beam of the car's headlights keeping even pace with us. Again the pistol cracked, futilely, of course, since the car was so much lower than the engine. But if they should gain a few feet more so they could shoot through the gangway between the engine and the tender. Again I begged Marcia to squat down on the deck on the fireman's side so she would be out of range, and this time she obeyed me.

For some time the one-sided, running fight was kept up, some of the shots coming through the cab windows on the left-hand side, but upon such a high angle as to be harmless. If I had dared to take my hands from throttle and brake I might have got back at these desperate villains who were doing their best to murder us. But my immediate job was to keep going, and to keep the business car and engine on the track if I could. Surely, I thought, the desert, level as it was, would sooner or later in-

terpose some obstacle which would make it impossible for the auto to cling almost within arm's reach of us, as it was doing.

But that time was not yet. Out of the tail of my eye I could see the double beam of the headlights creeping ahead inch by inch. Unless the hoped-for obstacle should bob up within the next few minutes, the gunman in the car would be able to get a line on me through the left-hand gangway, and that would mean that I'd have to let the flying train take its chance of staying on the rails, and shoot it out with him.

I was fumbling in my coat pocket for the captain's automatic when the unexpected climax came. In the lunging and surging of the train over the rough track the coal scoop had slid down off the coal in the bunker and was rattling and dancing around on the floor of the cab. As I looked I saw Marcia catch up the shovel, thrust it into the coal pile and pitch it and its lading out of the gangway upon the upcreeping auto.

There was a crash of breaking glass and a wild yell, and the menacing light beams shot backward as though the gear shift had been suddenly shoved into the reverse. When I leaned out of the window to look back, the auto seemed to have stopped; at any rate, we were leaving it behind so rapidly that it was soon out of sight. Coincident with the disappearance of the auto our backing train began to shrill around a curve, and a double line of telegraph poles signaled our approach to the main line. Shutting off the steam and applying the brakes, I wondered what I should do next, having no key wherewith to unlock the switch. Luckily, I didn't have to do anything. As our train came to a stand on the branch another one-car train came racing down the main line to bring up opposite us.

It was Captain Weatherford and the trainmaster, Bollard, out looking for the stolen special. Explanations followed and it was inspiring to see the captain's army training come to the front as he snapped into action.

"That's what I've been waiting for," he said, when we had hastily recounted our adventures, "something we could get our teeth into." Then to Bollard: "Let me have Burke and his fireman and I'll go on and round these killers up. You can take Miss Marcia and Manning back to Eagle Butte, unless" —turning to us—"you two would rather go on to Caliente and stop off for the ranch. There will be a car there to meet you."

Marcia, finding that the captain's wife was still in Eagle Butte, elected to go back with Bollard; and I told the captain I'd go on with him—all the way. In the circumstances, the leave-takings were cut mighty short. I put Marcia on Bollard's car, and in his care, and the two single-car trains sped apart in opposite directions—Bollard's backing away to the north and ours heading southward. I looked at my watch. It was five minutes past ten, and we had something over sixty miles to go.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VANISHING POINT.

IT was a keen pleasure to see the captain snap into it. At the first night telegraph station we came to, a few miles south of our starting point, we halted long enough to let him get in a bit of rapid-fire telephoning. That done, we raced southward again, and as we sat together in the business car he questioned me more closely about our seeings and hearings—Marcia's and mine—at the abandoned mining camp, which he named for me as "Auraria."

"It has been intimated that there was a booze cache out there, and I'm not surprised to know that it belongs to 'Bat' Bonnard," he said. "He is well known to be the 'Big Ike' of the bootleggers in

this section, but the dry people have never been able to hang anything definite on him. I don't care so much for him and his hired troublemakers; they'll get theirs in the shake-down. Grider is the man I want. You say Bonnard threatened to turn State's evidence if he got caught out. Do you think he meant it?"

"I think so," I ventured. "But in case he doesn't, Miss Denton and I will very willingly go into court for you."

"Thanks; that's mighty white of you. If we can once get a vise nip on Grider, we can push the fight to the men higher up, and a number of gentlemen in New York and elsewhere will most likely find it convenient to visit foreign countries for a time."

At this I went a bit deeper into the mystery matter, telling him about the man Varnell and what Marcia and I had seen and thought we knew—which was the reason for our abduction. He heard me through, but I could see that he was tolerantly incredulous, as he had a good right to be.

"That is pretty hard to believe," was his comment. "As you know, a discovery like the one you speak of would be worth a swollen fortune to the man who made it. He wouldn't be obliged to turn criminal for wages."

I admitted this, and then asked if he had seen anything of Maltby before he left Eagle Butte. He said he had; that Maltby had been inquiring if anybody knew what had become of me.

"Of course, we didn't know that you and Miss Denton had been kidnaped in the stolen special," he explained; "though Maltby did suggest that that might be the case."

While he was speaking, the train came to a stop at Caliente, and two of the Circle D cow-punchers came aboard, both of them armed; one a tall, loose-jointed, mournful-looking chap named to me as "Long Tom" Jower, and the other introduced as "Curly" Wester. I guessed at once that this was the answer to one of the captain's telephone calls from the station up the line. He told them something of what was to the fore, adding that they might take it easy until the time came for action. Whereat they went to spread themselves upon the lounge at the rear of the compartment to roll smokes.

As we sped on I asked the captain if we had any legal authority, and he nodded, saying:

"That is why I phoned for Jower and Curly. They are both deputies and special officers for the railroad." Then he asked me how much of a start Grider and Bonnard had had. I said I couldn't tell, because I didn't know how much damage Marcia had done to them or to their car when she had heaved the shovelful of coal—and the shovel—at them.

"A right nervy thing for the little girl to do," was his comment on the shovel heaving. "Mrs. Weatherford has quite fallen in love with her," he added.

"So have I," I grinned.

"Any chance for you?" he smiled back.

"I didn't believe there was until tonight." And from that, I went on to tell him how the fellow Gatlin had caught us just before the stolen special had reached its destination at the abandoned mining camp.

He laughed heartily at the situation as I described it, and I didn't blame him. Then he said:

"I can match you, Manning. Harry—Mrs. Weatherford—is just such another. Only I think if it had been us instead of you two, she would have sneaked the automatic out of my pocket and taken a crack at the holdup."

"Oh, see here; I can't give you any odds on that," I countered. "I imagine the only reason Marcia didn't do that very thing was because it didn't occur to her soon enough." Then: "By the way, I still have your automatic." And

I gave it to him, saying that I had the one I had picked up when Gatlin got his knock-out. Then I asked him what train it was that Bonnard had planned to ditch.

"No. 17. It is due at the gravel pit in the hills about twelve."

"Think we can make it before that time?"

He looked at his watch and nodded.

"Burke is a good runner, and he knows what is wanted. However, there won't be any 'assisted' accident this time. No. 17's crew has been warned."

Irrespective of what he might know, the man who had taken my late place at the throttle of the special-train engine wasn't letting any grass grow under the wheels; and it was also evident that we had been given "regardless" orders, for everything was sidetracked for us. At Lobo, the junction where a branch led off to the mining towns in Madregosa Gulch, we stopped barely long enough to take a tank of water before we shot on into the Moqueta foothills.

Though I had been over the main line on the new Mountain type quite a number of times, I was not yet familiar enough with it to know just where we were when we slowed to a stop.

The captain sprang up and signed to Jower and Wester.

"This is the place where we make a short cut," he said to me; and we all got off and hiked up ahead. As we were passing the engine, the captain spoke to the engineer who was hanging out of his cab window.

"Back down quietly, Burke, and take the siding at Walker's Switch. Wait there until No. 17 passes, and then pull on up to the gravel pit," was the order he gave; and as we went on, the one-car train slipped away down the grade, disappearing, for us, around the first curve.

Though, as I have said, I didn't know just where we were, the captain did. He led off to the right around a small wooded hill, and a few minutes of tramping brought us to the highway leading over Lobo Pass to Eden Valley —a road, which, as I knew, paralleled the E. B. & P. grade a good part of the way over the range. After holding to the road for about half a mile, the captain halted us.

"We take to the woods here," he said, "single file and cat-footed. When we reach the railroad right of way there will be a switch just ahead, and we'll take cover and see what happens."

Falling into line again, we went winding in and out among the trees beside the road, the soft carpeting of pine needles underfoot making our march as silent as that of a procession of ghosts. It was the end of an unprecedented dry spell, even for the rainless altitudes, and the air was pungent with the pitchy fragrance of the sun-baked pines and firs. Within the last hour a gibbons moon had risen, so there was light enough to enable us to pick our way.

A couple of hundred yards from where we had taken to the wood, we came upon an auto parked in a grove beside the road. It was a single-seated roadster, with the motor dead and the lights turned off. At first I thought it was empty—I was still thinking so when the captain sprang upon the running board and lashed out at a slumped figure in the driving seat. Before any of us could cut in, he had opened the door and was dragging a half-stunned sleeper out of the car.

"Fix him," was the order given to Jower and Wester; and by the time the stunned man was awakening they had him hog-tied and gagged and were dragging him up under the trees to wait for whatever was awaiting him, the captain saying that we could pick him up later.

A little farther along we bore to the left again and soon came to the railroad track at a point where I quickly

got my bearings. We were just below the gravel-pit spur where I had so nearly ditched the through freight on the night when Maltby and I were making our first trial run with the Mountain type. The captain flashed an electric torch upon the dial of his watch.

"Time enough, but not much to spare," he said; and then we crossed to the far side of the gravel track and made a cautious advance along a steep and thickly wooded hillside toward the switch at the upper end of the spur, in due time reaching a point from which the filtered light of the half moon showed us the switch stand. To my surprise, and to the captain's as well, I guess, the switch hadn't been tampered with. It was properly set for the main line.

For the moment I felt a little like the excitable citizen who has turned in a fire alarm when there was no fire. The silent surroundings, with nothing disturbed and no moving object in sight, made me wonder if I had brought the captain and his men on a fool's errand. But after a minute or so the air began to vibrate with the unmistakable hum of an auto driven at speed, and at that I felt a little less like a false alarm. If it were Grider's car, and not merely some late-at-night autoist driving over to Eden Valley—— We'd know shortly. If the drumming motor noise should stop——

It did stop presently and the stillness that succeeded was fairly deafening. I found myself trying to estimate from my memory of it the distance from the nearest point on the highway up to the railroad, and the length of time it would take to traverse it on foot. While we waited, all four of us, tense and expectant, I bent down a branch of the small fir under which we were crouching—a low-hanging branch which was obstructing my view up the track. As I did this I saw a thing that made me grasp the captain's arm and whisper:

"Look, quick! Do you see it?"

A little more than halfway to the switch a small gulch, thickly groved with sapling conifers, cut into the hillside. Out of the mouth of this gulch a beam of bluish-green light, faintly discernible under the pale moonbeams, was reaching out diagonally toward the railroad track. As we watched it the faint ray or emanation enveloped the switch standard, dimly illuminating it for a brief instant. Then, as if it had been touched by the finger of some mysterious agent of annihilation, the solid-iron standard and target lever faded before our eyes—dissolved into nothingness and was gone!

"Say! by all the gods, Manning, you were right!" the captain gritted, and he was breathing hard. "Now for the next act in the play!"

It came promptly. At the disappearance of the switch standard a man stepped out of the tree shadows at the mouth of the little gulch and went quickly across to the junction of the two lines of rails. As he came to the switch, or, as it seemed to us, to the place where the switch had been and now was not, he, too, faded into indistinctness and was blotted out.

Almost at once we heard the grating of a key in a rusted lock and the clank of the switch lever as it was pulled over in its quadrant, and we knew that the trap was set. With the switch-shifting mechanism invisible, the enginemen on the coming train, the rumbling of which could now be heard in the up-mountain distance, would have nothing to warn them until they should swing far enough around the curve of approach to see the rail points under the beam of their headlight. And then, under ordinary conditions, it would be too late to make the safety stop.

In a couple of heartbeats the trapper materialized for us, reappearing to retreat quickly to the small gulch out of which he had come, where we again lost

sight of him. Wester would have gone after him, but the captain said: "No—wait; there's more to follow. We know where to find that one when we want him."

It was only a minute or so after the preparation of the trap and the retreat of the man who had set it when we heard footsteps at our right, and two men came stumbling over the crossties of the gravel track, breathing heavily as though they had been running. At a point nearly opposite the thicket in which we were concealed they stopped.

"Where in hell is that switch stand?" came the demand in a voice that at least two of us recognized as Grider's.

The other man gave a low laugh.

"I told you it was too late, didn't I? The switch is gone. Don't you see it has?" Then: "We'd better get off this track. The freight will be diving in here in another minute or two."

For a brief instant Grider hesitated, as if what poor shreds and patches of common humanity there were in him were urging him to run ahead and try to flag the downcoming train, which could now be heard shrilling around the curves at no great distance on the grades above. Then he turned aside, making the decision which put him squarely in the same class with the criminals he had employed. All four of us heard him quite distinctly when he said:

"I don't know what your strikers have done to that switch, but let it go for this one more time. Only don't pull any more of these 'accidents' until I tell you to. You're getting me in too deep!"

"Ah!" came in the sneering voice of the other man. "All you care for is your own hide, eh? You don't care a damn if these fellows that are coming get piled up under their engine in the gravel pit?"

"That's their lookout. If they haven't sense enough to jump and save their necks when they find themselves on the wrong track—— Let's get over on our own side of things. We'd better make a quick run for the car and get away from here."

But if this chief of all unhanged scoundrels had meant to dodge a climax, which he had every reason to believe would result in the loss of one or more human lives, he had lingered too long. As the pair started to cross to the main-line track and the wood beyond, the freight train for which the trap had been set swung around the curve of approach. But instead of rushing on to wreck itself in the gravel pit, it came to a brake-shrilling stop a little distance short of the still-invisible switch stand, and its headlight playing full upon the two who were hastening to duck to cover.

At this, things came to a focus with a bang. As Wester and Jower sprang up to go after Bonnard and Grider, Wester's foot caught in a tree root and he went rolling down the steep hillside to land almost at the feet of the two who were standing momentarily dazed by the glare of the stopped engine's headlight.

As I heard the captain say to me, "Come on—let's get the miracle worker!" I saw a thrilling tableau struck out by the locomotive spotlight. Grider, knowing now that he had been caught red handed, and willing to save himself by a cold-blooded murder, whipped a pistol from his coat pocket and threw it down upon Wester. But Long Tom Jower's trigger squeeze was the quicker, and at the roar of his .45, Grider's aimed weapon flew from his hand; and as I ran to overtake the captain, I saw Jower covering the two conspirators while Wester handcuffed them.

It took us, the captain and I, but a few seconds to run to the mouth of the little gulch, but before we got there the mysteriously effaced switch stand had snapped into visibility again, and a

whiff of pungent smoke was blowing down to us from the mouth of the small ravine. An instant farther along a tongue of yellow flame leaped up and two or three of the small trees in the gulch went up with a flash and a roar to herald the beginning of a forest fire. The worker of miracles was escaping up the gulch and he had set the fire to cut off pursuit.

By this time the two enginemen and head brakeman of the freight were running down the track, followed by the other members of the crew; and with these to help we tried to stop the progress of the fire before it should gain sufficient headway to spread to the nearby mountains. Breaking living branches from the trees, we were successful in beating the flames back at the gulch edges and confining them to the steep little ravine; but within these limits the conflagration roared like a mighty furnace, leaving a blackened and smoking gulf behind it as it swept up the gorge.

After it became apparent that the fire would burn itself out in the gulch, the captain released the freight crew, telling the conductor and engineer to proceed with their train. Just then Wester came up, having left Jower guarding the two prisoners; and as we stood on the brink of the gorge the light of the burning trees below us showed us a most gruesome sight. Varnell—if that were his real name—had signed his own death warrant in lighting the fire at the gulch mouth. He had doubtless thought to escape up the ravine ahead of the blaze, but, as we could now see plainly, there was no exit from the place at its upper end; the gulch was a mere deep pocket in the hill with sides too steep to be climbed. On a bed of scorched leaves and smoking tree trunks that would probably burn for hours we saw the blackened body of a man, and beside it what we took to be the remains of the miracle-working thing with which he had tried to escape.

"He's out of it; and his secret, whatever it was, has gone with him," said the captain soberly; and even as he spoke, a dead tree, with the fire burning fiercely at its rotted base, fell with a crash and a shower of sparks to blot out the gruesome sight and add itself to the victim's funeral pyre.

For a little time the three of us stood looking down into the fiery gulf. Then, as a mellow whistle blast announced the upcoming of Burke with the business-car special, the captain broke the spell of silence which had fallen upon us:

"The play's over and we may as well go. It will be a long while before anybody can go down there and come back alive, and by that time there will be nothing left of him or his devil's invention." And so we made our way down to the track and to the place where the special was halted and Jower was riding herd on the two who mattered most in the captain's fight to keep his railroad from falling into the hands of the enemy.

It was when we were about to board the car that my part in the weird adventures of the night, inconsequent as it had been, ended abruptly: In the shuffle at the car steps Jower, chaperoning Grider, was just ahead of me. Suddenly the big superintendent of motive power jerked himself free and whirled upon me.

"Damn you!" he grated. "I owe this to you and that girl of yours!" And before I could dodge he swung his manacled hands like a flail, and with a fleeting impression that the business car had tumbled over on me, I went out.

When I came back to earth it was broad daylight and I found myself lying, with a bandaged head, in bed, with Maltby sitting beside me.

"Well, old scout," he grinned, "you are not going to make a die of it, after all, as we were afraid you might. Feeling pretty groggy?"

"I feel as if I had a bushel basket for a head," I replied weakly. "What hit me?"

"Grider smacked you with his handcuffs in a pretty tender spot. The doctors thought for a while that there was a skull fracture."

"When was all this?" I demanded.

"Three days ago."

"Huh!" I grunted. "Grider said I owed him something; but now he owes me. No matter how long I may live, I'll always be three days shy of what belongs to me. What's been happening since I went off the deep end? Anything special?"

"Plenty. Grider is in the jail infirmary with an infected hand, got when Jower had to shoot to keep him from killing Curly Wester; and there are counts enough in his indictment to keep the lawyers talking through an entire court session. Bonnard turned State's evidence in the conspiracy case, as he threatened to, but he and his rum runners will have to face the music for bootlegging."

"How about the captain and his fight to keep his railroad?"

"The drive on the stock blew up with a loud noise when the news of Grider's arrest and indictment got to New York, and there was a flurry on the Exchange that ran the price up to where nobody could afford to play with it, with the Weatherford interests on top and the conspirators holding the bag."

"And Varnell, or Vanderpool, or whatever his name was?" I queried.

Maltby shook his head. "Nothing left but a few calcined bones." Then: "The captain has told me what you all saw, or thought you saw, at the gravel-track switch. Are you sure all four of you were not hypnotized?"

"Still a bit incredulous, are you?" I said. "All right; let it go. If you won't accept the testimony of the four of us who were together, and the three men on No. 17's engine, you're hopeless. You've only our word for it. The fire wiped out the proof and the secret of it. Where's Marcia?"

At this he grinned again.

"I thought you'd get around to her after a while. She has been right here with you, losing sleep, for three days and nights. A couple of hours ago I made her go and lie down. Want me to go after her?"

"If you wake her I'll kill you when I get up," I told him. And then: "I suppose we are through here on the E. B. & P., now that the storm has blown over?"

"You've got another guess coming," he returned, with a third and much broader grin. "The captain was lacking a superintendent of motive power, and he said there was room, also, for an efficiency engineer in the same department. He added that we might settle it between ourselves as to which would be which. I told him——"

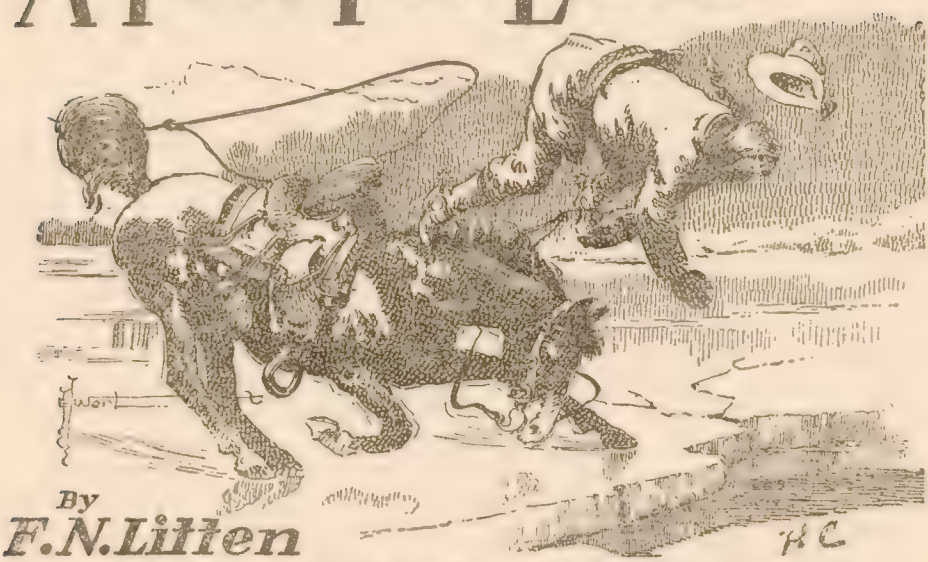
What it was that Tommy told the captain I don't know to this good day, for just then the door opened and my dear girl, looking as if she'd lost sleep for a week instead of three days, came to shoo him away; and—— Well, if you'll remember, I said, at the first dash out of the box, that Marcia had her compassionate leanings, and now, if never before, I was figuring handsomely as the under dog.

"Oh, you poor, poor dear!" she said softly, as she came to sit on the edge of the bed. "I——"

But what more she said, and did, needn't be set down here.

The secret service, Manhattan, the high seas, and a cool young woman who knew what to do after murders—all these are features of "The Gray-Eyed Adviser," Howard Fielding's fascinating, full-length, mystery ***story in next week's issue.***

A Fool For Luck



By
F. N. Litten

Author of "A Miner's Candlestick," Etc.

The story of the hardest of hard-boiled eggs, the meanest of the mean, and how Fate overtook him.

A COMPLETE STORY

OUTSIDE the log ranch house of the Falling Arrow, snow crystals clicked against the frost-etched windows, the wind flapped and bucketed in the stone chimney with the sharp crack of sailcloth, and the hands of the round nickel clock had moved past the midnight hour.

Henry Gorman, the cook, swept his cards up from the table top.

"The outfit couldn't buck the blizzard, Tom. They'll hole up in Cardston till she blows out, I reckon. Stock is bound to drift bad; couldn't no rider head 'em in this gale.

"Tom, boy, don't ye know that straw-plaited web won't hold no weight?"

His son, yellow haired, a pathetic dulness in his blue eyes, looked up, smiled uncertainly. He had finished his patient stringing of a bear-paw snowshoe, using straw which he had plaited, ingenious in its weave, and almost like buckskin to the casual eye. He tried the tautness of the web, and stood up to hang it on the wall beside his saddle. A big fellow—strong, lithe-muscled, but his face the cloudy mirror of a crippled mind.

As he rose, the clatter of the wind died down, and in the momentary stillness something struck against the kitchen door, and a voice, muffled by a quick renewal of the storm, cried:

"Open up!"

The cook's eyes flickered in surprise. He crossed to the door, lifted the wooden bar, and opened. A smother of stinging white funneled in; the lamp flame dipped and smoked. A man entered, slammed the door shut quickly, and drew back against it. Shaking

from his fur cap a powdery cloud of snow, he looked about him and in a harsh voice asked:

"You here alone? Where's Ed an' the outfit?" He gave the cook a brief unfriendly glance and opening his blanket coat disclosed the black butt of a holstered .45.

Old Henry moved back nervously.

"They been gone since Tuesday, Ward. Ridin' line—all of 'em—in the south pasture. Stayed up, thinkin' they'd be in to-night, but the storm must 'a' turned 'em back."

The other's black eyes roved about the room. He caught sight of Tom standing by the chimney; stared at him, and the boy returned a vacuous, puzzled frown.

"Who's the sappy kid?"

Old Gorman flinched as though the man had struck him with a quirt.

"He's my boy, Ward. You never seed him. No, he ain't right. Horse fell on him 'n' the stirrup hurt his head, two years ago. He's been with my sister down in Kalispel." His face brightened. "Doc Miner says he kin be cured. We're goin' up to Calgary nex' week. He ain't mean, don't need to be skeered——"

The man opposite him smiled—if you could call it that. There was everything of evil and but little mirth in it. He drew off his mittens, threw them on the floor; his hand fell with meaning on his gun butt. Then he said:

"Don't worry none, old man, 'bout me bein' scared."

Tom slipped across the room, his head lopped curiously to one side.

"Le'see yore six-gun, mister." He reached out his long arm, childishly insistent.

Ward, frowning, drew his Colt, and suddenly, with vicious swing, brought the eight-inch barrel down across the boy's extended hand. Tom sprang back, gasped, and tears of pain welled up in his cloudy eyes.

Gorman started forward, but Ward turned the pistol's muzzle, warning him.

"That wa'n't no man's action!" cried the old man, anger overshadowing the fear in which he held the other. "You've busted the boy's hand! He didn't mean no harm——"

Ward laughed harshly.

"Learn him not to make a play like that ag'in. Crazy or not, nothing on two legs can take my gun." His face sobered; he turned threateningly. "Rustle some grub, cook—and pronto, or I'll give you a lead button for your vest. I ain't grazed since yesterday."

He sat down by the table, fingering the scattered cards, his cold eyes glittering vindictively. Tom had retreated to the stool by the stone chimney, and when Ward eyed him, shrank back like a whipped dog, terrified.

In front of the cookstove, Gorman stirred the fire, added fresh birch splinters that burned with oily smoke. He called the boy; and Tom, with a fearful glance at Ward, sidled to the kitchen. His hand was puffy, swollen; and Gorman filled a basin from the reservoir, bathing the hand with awkward gentleness.

"He's a bad man, Tommy; don't you cross him," he whispered, thumbing at Ward's back. "Cattle rustler; a wire-and-plier artist. Savvy?"

The chair scraped.

"Comin' with that grub?"

"Grub pile!" called the cook tremulously, and dragged a simmering pot across the hot lids. He filled a dish with beef-bones stew, heaped cold sour-dough biscuits on a tin plate, and carried both in to Ward.

"Coffee."

"It's comin' up."

Ward grunted. "I heard you give yore half-wit kid my pedigree. That's all right, cooky; it ain't the half. I'll tell you somethin'. Sat'day we was circlin' the hills round McLeod with a little bunch of beef cows—drifters,

they was. Me an' Dor' Hendee and his brother, Al, ridin' point and flank. A few mile south o' town we met up with a damn brand inspector comin' from the C. N. pens. He got cur'ous about vents an' bills o' sale, and somehow Al's, or mebbe my, gun went off, and he sloughed. Bad, that was. Couldn't leave him. Traveling slow as he was, some posse'd sure ride sign on us. So we roped his carcass to the saddle, tied my slicker atop, brung him with the cavvy, figgerin' to drop him through an air hole in the river. Then this storm blows up an' we got scattered.

"I dropped off the cut bank above a piece and my hoss broke his forelegs. I always was lucky, though. I seen yore light." He gave a soundless laugh and, picking up a beef rib in his fingers, tore the meat from it with greedy haste. "Where's that coffee?"

The cook, his eyes showing white with fear and wonder at the sinister confession Ward had strangely volunteered, hurried again to the kitchen, filled a cup with steaming coffee, and returned.

The rustler blew against the cup to cool it, then set it down reflectively.

"This here Alberta country's goin' to be hotter'n yore coffee if they find that brand inspector." He looked up at Gorman. "Any saddle stock in the corral?"

"Nothin' you could ride."

"Whatcha mean?"

"Tom's cayuse, Foxtail, is there; but he's bad. Won't let no one but the kid throw a saddle on him."

The outlaw rose and, walking to the window, scraped the frost off with his clasp knife. Snow still beat against the pane and, looking out, he could see only a dazzling swirl of myriad crystals against blackness. He resumed his seat, and bent once more above his meal. Hearing the name of Foxtail mentioned, Tom had moved up to the doorway. He pointed at Ward's back and, forgetful of his recent punishment, mocked:

"Can't ride Foxtail—can't ride Foxtail—can't ride Foxtail!"

"Hush you' noise, Tom," said Gorman anxiously.

But the boy fended off his father with his long arms, and the chant went on.

Ward seemed not to hear it. Then suddenly he half rose, whirled round, and again his clubbed gun arched forward. It struck Tom's forehead with a fleshy thud.

"Can't r-ride Fox——" The boy's voice ceased, the vacant blue eyes fluttered, and he slid down on the doorsill.

"Them night-herder's songs gits tiresome." The rustler slipped back into his chair. "Where's the sugar, cook? 'N' don't pick up no scatter gun to drill me from behind."

But Gorman had knelt down on his creaking knees and, holding his son's head against his greasy apron, croaked piteously, imploringly:

"Tommy! Tommy! Ye ain't——"

The boy's jaw dropped slack and Henry bent down so close that the blood trickle from the white forehead stained his grizzled face. He straightened up, lowered Tom gently to the rough floor. His hands were shaking.

"Ye killed him. My kid's dead." The voice seemed far away. "No, I ain't got no weapon; but I'm goin' to tear yore black heart——"

Ward kicked his chair free; the hammer of his Colt clicked.

"Gorman, I got five loads says you're wrong."

But Henry Gorman had passed beyond the borderland of fear. His face was iron. Slowly he advanced, and the rustler backed around the table, awed by the death threat in the grim eyes that steadily drew nearer.

"Stand, you fool! He ain't——"

Gorman paused, his head weaved to

and fro, as a rattler weaves before his strike. The wind and the storm noises died; only the clock ticked loudly on the chimney shelf. The cook's eyes glittered. He sprang, and Ward felt tearing fingers rip his face. Thrusting the Colt forward until the muzzle met and scraped on cloth, he pressed the trigger.

The burst of sound dinned about him; smoke draped itself in gray, plumy streamers through the room, choking sweet. And "Trigger" Ward, relieved, spun the cylinder, replaced the empty shell, holstered the gun with callous gesture.

Old Henry lay face down beside his son, one hand caught beneath him; the other, outflung, touched as in a last caress, the boy's tangled yellow hair.

The rustler drew back by the table, hesitated, then sat down. He stared moodily at the food, pushed it away. His glance flicked across the body of the cook.

"Fool," he muttered, A pause. "I gotta hit the trail." Again he looked out through the window. It seemed that the snow was thinning. He strode quickly to the door. The storm had slackened. Even now the moon, rimmed with frosty haze, showed faintly, but the air cut like a knife. Out on the river flats of the St. Mary's, a wolf sobbed drearily.

He slammed the door, shutting out the night and its chill of sight and sound. By the kitchen door hung a cracked mirror. Before it he cleaned the blood from the deep tear along his cheek. Returning to the table, stepping carelessly across Tom's body in the doorway, he emptied the remaining biscuits in the pockets of his blanket coat and fastened it. One of his mittens lay half under Gorman's body, and as Ward jerked it free, Gorman gasped —his eyes opened suddenly.

"Pay attention, cook," said Ward. "Let me tell you this: Keep yore lip buttoned. Ye don't know who it was horned in at this ranch to-night. We've lost the stock and they'll drift back. The brand inspector can't be backtrailed to us. I was a fool to spill this, but if it gets out I'll know where to find you. Ye ain't seen me work yet."

He jammed his beaver down and tied the flaps, slipped on the mittens, and crossed to remove the saddle from its peg. The snowshoes by the chimney made him pause. Speculatively, he eyed them, then took them down, tied the thongs together, and hung the webs upon his back. With a last glance about him, he stepped out across the yard, leaving the door ajar, swinging, banging in the wind.

Tunneled in the straw stack at a corner of the square corral of peeled birch was Tom's horse, Foxtail. In the faint, hazy light only the ewe neck and ugly head were recognizable. The rustler waited, debating with himself the wisdom of his course. The soft, dry snow on the level was above his knees. In swale and coulee, the wind, he knew, would have piled it deep enough to bury horse and rider.

Still, even a cautiously ridden trail along the rims and table-land meant faster travel than to follow the meandering river on the webs. Old Ed Bayliss and the Falling Arrow Riders would be home by daybreak, if the storm held off. That would mean pursuit. Reversing his decision, he made his way back to the log house, where the saddle hung.

Light from the windows made blue-white patches on the snow. The door had swung to—latched by the wind, no doubt. He grasped the knob, pressed his shoulder hard against the panel. It held. Frowning with surprise, he drew back and again thrust himself against it. But the door held fast.

For a moment he reflected, then ran to the window. With the ash frame of the snowshoe he shattered a frost-

opaqued pane, and looked within. The room was empty. If, in the shadow of the rock chimney near by, a figure tensed, he did not see it. Knocking out a second pane, he freed the catch and tried to raise the lower sash. It stuck, frozen tight. With his mittened hand, he tore out molding and glass until his body could pass through the wrecked sash, and climbed in.

Something sang with a sharp *whirr!* —crashed down sickeningly upon his head. He sprawled on all fours, a million stars burst in sequence. But the furry, unplucked beaver cap broke the vicious blow. Scuttling back, he squatted, hands on floor, and looked up, dizzy with pain.

Above him, the shaft of a heavy branding iron swinging in a descending arc, stood Tom, yellow hair blood-plastered on his forehead, eyes hungry for revenge. Desperately Ward threw himself aside, and the iron die whizzed by his ear, but struck his shoulder—snapped the collar bone. He sprang forward, twitched to free the coat snaps and reach his holster.

But the boy ran in and, locking his arms about Ward, bent his body backward until the rustler felt his spine would snap. His left arm hung helpless, but with the other he pried at the coat fastenings, frantic with rage and fear. The coat broke open, he drove his elbow doggedly against Tom's chest, reached down and gripped the Colt butt with thumb and finger.

Then the uprooting, awful pressure of the bone-crushing hug toppled him over backward; he felt his shoulders strike the table at his rear. He summoned all his strength in a last tremendous effort. With a splintering crash the table overturned. He felt the boy's shoulder thud against the floor beneath him.

But though he was uppermost, the awful pressure of those arms laced about him never slacked. He could not free his gun. His ribs caved in, compressed as a draw string puckers up a bag. The air left his lungs; he wheezed; black spots danced before his eyes. He heard old Henry's voice far away, distant, like a faint echo:

"Ye got him, boy!"

The room was fading. If he could only reach the trigger. The fierce grip about him shifted for a tighter hold and in the instant's slack he gained the short span—felt his thumb caress the hammer. Wildly, as consciousness slipped from him, he pulled the flange back and, nosing up the weapon, let the hammer fall.

The roar and shock of the heavy gun, cushioned by their bodies, seemed at first the only answer to his final effort. Then a sting of fire ran down his thigh. Mixed with the acrid powder smoke came the odor of cloth burning. The boy freed his waist, gripped suddenly with his uninjured hand Ward's wrist above the pistol. Sucking air into his lungs in ravenous drafts, the rustler felt strength return again.

He sprang back, the fingers biting his wrist like pinchers. The smoldering fabric at his hip, fanned into flame by the quick movement, seared the flesh. With strength distended by his horror of the licking tongues of flame, he spun around fiercely, bending the fingers backward. The hand snapped, its clutch released, and he whirled sprawling—free.

But as he fell, he whipped the pistol from its sheath; and at its harsh explosion, Tom crawled for concealment behind the broken table top. Ward beat out his flaming clothing, and stood waiting.

The rustler knew that he had won. But the price this half-wit boy had made him pay! He bared his teeth with venomous hate. His sagging shoulder —the blood that oozed through the split fur of his cap—the stinging torment of his fire-seared thigh. He flipped the

empties from his Colt, loaded the weapon carefully.

"Come out," he commanded. He caught in the tail of his eye a movement in the kitchen by the wood box. The cook had dragged himself up to the threshold.

"You done enough," he muttered. "Let the kid be."

Ward's face was a mirror of dark hate. He choked.

"Come out, yuh damn——"

Tom threw the table aside and stood up. His eyes, the cloudy windows through which he had looked out on the world, were changed. He was strangely transformed. The rustler saw, and momentarily the torrent of his blind rage was checked by wonder. But the sting of pain recalled him to his malign purpose.

"Ye wasn't dead, then," he said, poison in his voice. "Bad luck fer ye. Pick up them webs; pull out the lacin's —all of 'em."

He watched while Tom unstrung the shoe. Then, pointing with his pistol, he said:

"Hog-tie yore kid, old man. And do a job. I'm ridin' sign on ye."

The cook, groaning with the pain of his broken hip, obeyed; and Ward made him throw a double wrap about the boy's wrists and ankles.

"Draw that wood box close," Ward said.

He prodded Henry with the Colt, and slowly the old man inched the box with its load of birch sticks to the doorway. The rustler looked about him.

"The coal oil—where ye keep it?"

An inkling of his pitiless, inhuman purpose reached the cook. He fell shaking with dread.

"My God! You wouldn't——"

The rustler smiled cruelly. His gaze, burning with a savage, unrelenting hate, swept downward.

"The cabin's due to smoke. This kid fixed it so I can't travel. I stay—take my chances to shoot it out with old Ed and his riders. But you two makes the odds too heavy. Besides, I talked too much. So—say yore prayers, old man."

He stepped into the kitchen, teeth clenched, wincing at the pain the movement brought. Returning with the can of kerosene, he set it down, piled firewood against the partition of the kitchen, sprinkled it with oil. Leisurely he tore a strip from the burned lining of his coat and, righting the overturned chair, sat down to fashion a rude sling.

Henry Gorman dragged his body toward him. His voice husky, quavering, began:

"Ward, you ain't goin' to leave Tom inside?"

"Tom and you, too," replied the rustler, eying him with sardonic ruthlessness.

"Don't matter noways 'bout me, Ward; but Tom, he's——"

"Locoed or not, the scrubby maverick nigh ruint me. He's run agin' my rope fer the last time."

Fear bit deep into the old man's wrinkled face; his eyes were piteous, imploring.

"Ward——"

The rustler looked up angrily.

"Damn ye! Hush yore bawlin'!"

His leg swung, his heavy shoe pac struck with jarring thud the face that looked up beseechingly. Henry Gorman gasped, and his body fell back, limp, across his son's.

But the outlaw gave scant attention to the punishment dealt out. Cursing bitterly, he drew the charred clothing from his thigh.

"I ought not lash out sudden that a way," he muttered. "Gives this singed laig hell. Hog lard'll help it some, I reckon." He limped toward the kitchen; then stopped, struck by a thought. His expression slowly changed.

"That's the story! No shootin', just plain talk. Ed can't go behind this

brand." He touched his fire-blackened garments. "Tried to cut Gorman and his kid out o' the fire and throw 'em over into safe ground; got nigh burned up doin' it. Better wait till daybreak, though, 'fore I touch it off. Where's that damn clock?"

At early dawn above the white-drifted river meadow, a gray, loper wolf halted on the cut bank's rim and sniffed at a black smoke column mounting from the ranch house below. A tongue of hungry red corkscrewed upward through the smoke. The wolf's muzzle lowered; he resumed his tireless gallop.

And over the far horizon came a group of horsemen, trotting steadily, the deep snow scattering like a dust cloud in their wake. Ed Bayliss shook his head, pointing to a faint coral that tinged the southern sky.

"Ain't no northern lights at daybreak, Jesse; that's fire. Hope it ain't out straw stack." He spurred on hurriedly.

Above the steep-descending cut-bank wall, he pulled up, shouted a strident summons to the trailing riders, and urging his pony out upon the frozen crust, plunged off into the deep snow of the slope. Quirt to flank, the cowmen followed. Their horses floundered. The smothering drift reflected from its surface the red glow of the flaming ranch house.

Quivering with terror as they reached the level bottom, the ponies snorted, pitched. Rawhide and spur, the shouts and cursing of the men, failed to drive them closer to the crackling, hissing devils that reached out greedy, scarlet tentacles, and belched smoky breath from every blackened window frame.

"Bucket line! String out to the tank!" shouted Bayliss.

The men slid from their mounts and scattered to corral and to the frozen stock tank by the windmill pump. The ranch-house roof above the kitchen fell in with a crash. Sparks, burning embers, showered skyward. A huge smoke column funneled up.

Suddenly Bayliss, lifting a hand ax to break the icy surface of the tank, swung about.

"Jesse! Where's Henry and the kid?"

The foreman stared at the fire-trellised walls. About the house appeared a ring of blackened ground stripped of its snow covering by the furnacelike heat.

"That's an awful way to die," he said solemnly, turning to the stockman. "The pore kid started it, most likely."

The ranchman nodded.

"I'm goin' close up. They's a chance we might find 'em near the door. She's sure a goner. Boys, watch them straw stacks!"

He started toward the ranch house, shielding hs face with outstretched hand. Jesse Williams, picking up a water bucket, followed. Twenty paces, then his coat began to steam. Waves of parching heat rolled back from the building. Through smoking window frames the streamers of flames seethed, white-hot. Sparks crackled, eddied about them in suffocating swirls. A brand struck and smoldered on Bayliss' shoulder. The foreman knocked it clear.

"Ed, come back!" he called hoarsely. "Ain't *no* human kin live in that hell pocket." He felt his skin draw as a flame sheet sucked the moisture from it. "Come back!" he called again, in panic.

Then, he forgot his fear. Toward them, across the black, ember-dotted ground, a man was crawling. His smoke-stained coat flapped open. Hs cap, singed of its fur covering, showed the puckered beaver hide beneath. One arm hung limp and a great patch of cloth burned away about the thigh exposed an area of raw, blistered skin.

The two cried out, and lifting him,

carried the man beyond the circle of searing heat, and laid him gently on the snow.

"It's Ward," said Williams. He looked up at Bayliss questioningly, curious.

The rustler moved.

"Tried to bring 'em out," he muttered weakly. "Must 'a' got me——" he coughed.

The rancher gazed at him, puzzled, too. His expression shaded from hard condemnation into doubt.

"Henry and the boy—you went in that hell to save 'em?"

Ward struggled to sit up, and Williams threw an arm about him.

"Yeh, I trailed in afoot at midnight. My hoss went off the rim, bustin' my shoulder. Old Henry let me bed down by the cookstove. Next I knew, the fire was roarin'. Done my best to find 'em. Smoke like to strangled me." He moved and groaned.

Bayliss nodded; his face softened.

"Sit steady. We'll fix you up a pallet in the corral lean-to." He hesitated, looked away. "Ward, we dasn't call a doctor out from town. The redcoats is trailin' you. Last night a hoss drifted into Cardston with a corpse lashed to the saddle. The Mounties knowed the man—from up McLeod way. Yore slicker, Ward, was coverin' the body."

"A damn lie!" cried the rustler strongly. "I been huntin' strays along the St. Mary's this three days!"

Bayliss started in surprise at the vehement denial.

"Don't make no difference, Ward," he said quietly. "You tried to bring out pore Tom and Henry, an' we ain't the law. Ef you could ride—— But that busted shoulder——"

"Loan me a cayuse, Ed," broke in the other. "I know I ain't got no standin'. It's my play to ride. I been careless with my runnin' iron, times back, but I swear I ain't mixed up in this killin'. I'll make shift to set a saddle." Contrite, pleading, his hoarse voice went on: "I ain't been to McLeod since winter. Loan me a hoss, Bayliss." He drew himself up stiffly, his face strained, white, beneath the soot streaks.

The rancher looked back at the house. Suddenly the wall collapsed, and greedily, flame darts, like sinuous serpents, glided over it, a scintillating burst of sparks scattered hissing on the snow. He shook his head.

"Gone. Pore Henry! Jest finished layin' by enough to send Tom up to Calgary. Waitin' fer us to come in, so he could go. Doc thought they was a bone pressin' on the brain. A right clever hand with a rope, Tom used to be 'fore he got hurt. Hate to think that——"

His words were never finished. A chorus of harsh cries, the strange coyote yips of delight with which the cowboy shows his joy, profane ejaculations broke from the riders by the straw stack. Some one called loudly:

"Bayliss! Oh, Ed! Lookahere! Come a-runnin'!"

He obeyed, starting in a clumsy, hard-heeled trot for the corral. The foreman's eyes were wide.

"Why—why—hell! It's——"

Came the sound of a clicking hammer. Williams spun around. The shining barrel of a Colt looked up at him, and Ward's voice with a chill of steel, said:

"Loosen yore gun belt, Williams, an' let her fall. Yo're heeled; I felt it when ye lifted me."

The holstered gun and trailing belt dropped on the snow.

"Now, ketch me up a hoss. Keep close—between me and them waddies." He pointed to the stack.

A few of the cowmen knelt beside a figure bedded in the straw. The rest were gathered milling about some one whom their bodies shielded; clamoring with high-pitched voices. At the quick

approach of Bayliss, the circle opened. His loud exclamation carried back to Williams:

"Tom! By the Lord! Tom, it ain't you!"

The rustler cursed softly.

"Hell'll be let loose on this here meadow in about a minute." He prodded Williams. "That gray looks sound. Hustle!"

The foreman caught a trailing bridle rein. Ward, knifed at each step by the torture of his dragging shoulder, stumbled after, tripping in the snow.

"Give me a leg up!" he panted.

He threw a hasty glance behind. The men were scattering. Some one shouted:

"Get down, Jesse!"

A Winchester barked sharp, and like a humming top, a slug sang overhead. The rustler bent flat in the saddle, sheathed his gun, jerked free the quirt. His arm raised, descended in a vicious lash across the horse's belly. Like a flash the gray crouched, sprang into a dead run, and headed for the red-willow thickets on the river bank.

Bullets tore by Ward, singing a dread threnody of death. He saw them strike ahead and scatter little spurts of powdery snow. His shoulder throbbed with sickening pain in rhythm to the pony's pounding hoofs. Black, malignant hate was his for Bayliss, for the men whose lead churned up the snow about him; above all for the half-wit boy with yellow-matted hair, who, through the crooking of Fate's mocking finger, had been spared to bring his plans to ruin.

He bent to urge his mount to greater speed. If he could cross the river, in the broken draws and coolees of the east bank, he might yet elude them. The sting of the bitter wind brought moisture to his eyes. It congealed on his lashes—an opaque, blinding frost. He brushed his hand across his face and turned.

The scattering group of horsemen was converging on his trail. A white smoke of tossed snow crystals half concealed them. Ahead the feathery-outlined willows beckoned. Keenly he appraised the distance. He would win—unless the swift St. Mary's had torn free the ice that chained it. Again he swung around in the saddle. His lips twisted back in fury; a fiercer light of hate burned in the desperate eyes.

For, out from the group of riders, had emerged a boy. Ward saw the yellow hair lie flat in the wind as the ewe-necked, rangy black beneath him skimmed—a soaring eagle on the level snow—eating up the gap between him and Ward's gray. But the thickets closed in. The rustler ducked as the snow-loaded branches whipped about him. The drifts mounted to the saddle flap. He urged the stanch gray on with hissing quirt, breaking and floundering madly through low brush that choked the flats.

The river bank. He halted. Behind came the black horse, his stride unchecked among the stunted willows. Frost-brittle branches bent and snapped. Ward scanned the river. The rough ice hummocks almost spanned it. Only a narrow ribbon of black tumbling water that a child could leap. He lashed the gray and, with quivering flanks, the pony moved reluctantly out on the ice.

At the gap he stopped. The rustler turned him back to face the bank; and, as the black horse burst from the thickets, drew his Colt and cocked it. But Tom only tossed his yellow hair, and under him the black stopped cautiously, sure-footed, upon the wind-swept ice.

"Easy, Fox; we got him," said the boy, soft-voiced.

The rustler cursed. His vision blurred in anger.

"You damn half-wit!" he cried, choked with the virulence of his hate. "You've played yore string o' luck out! This ends it!"

With the words, his pistol roared, and crashing echoes traveled down the river bank. The screen of gray smoke, lifting, showed Tom upright in the saddle—coming on! Again Ward fired and, peering through the rifts of gray, saw the boy bend over as though struck. With an exultant hoarse shout, he fired again.

But suddenly there came the hum of whirling sisal. He started, for above the gray-blue vapor the wide, snaky circle of a lariat weaved. With a wild cry he fired again and, wheeling his mount, laid on a desperate quirt. The pony flinched, sawed back against the bit, and reared. A hiss of the descending rope. The gray horse quivered. His eyes rolled white and he came down, stiff in freshened terror. But as his forefeet struck the ice, he slipped, beat a wild tattoo, and suddenly fell to his knees, springing the rustler from the saddle into the dark strip of open water.

Ward cried out wildly—once; then the black, sullen river clutched him to herself. Downstream in the swift white foam something flashed by the eddies—disappeared. The rope, settling on horn and cantle, dragged the gray horse backward from the brink.

Tom dismounted and, stepping to the frightened pony, gentled him with quiet touch. Foxtail, jealous of the gray's share in his master's thought, trotted up, nipped at him with an angry squeal.

The boy thrust him back and led the way to shore. Riders burst out from the willow thickets; carbines flashed from saddle scabbards.

"Where's Ward?" cried Bayliss.

Tom pointed solemnly. "The gray pitched him off."

Bayliss' eyes followed to where the mad river torrent frothed against the rocks. He turned back frowning.

"Too easy. He should 'a' had to suffer, after what he done to you, Tom—and Henry. Rustler's luck!"

The cook's kid looked up quickly:

"Luck? That made him pick them straw thongs from the web to tie me; that made his pistol barrel hit so's it set things goin' right inside my head? The luck was ridin' double with *me,* Mr. Ed. It takes a *fool* for luck."

Watch for other stories by F. N. Litten.

CONSECRATED TO THEIR WORK

AT the time when the newspapers were full of the achievement of Michael J. Meehan in cleaning up $15,000,000 in the stock market, Doctor Alexander Wetmore of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington was telling the appropriations committee of the House of Representatives about a class of men who care nothing for money. He referred to the scientists who, working for the government on the poorest sort of pay, are content to spend their whole lives that way, so long as they can pursue their studies and experiments. They are modern Argonauts forever seeking the Golden Fleece of new knowledge.

"Most of these men engaged in scientific work," Doctor Wetmore said, "have little conception of luxury in living. What they are after is a comfortable living and to be unworried by worldly matters, so they may devote their entire attention to research work. There was a gentleman in my office yesterday who comes from another institution, a professor in college, who told me he was just back from Sumatra, where he had been for a year on half pay, and that he had mortgaged his salary for the coming year in order to get there and study the plants."

Sunset House

By George Marsh

Author of "Breed of the Wolf,"

Beginning a rapid-fire, colorful story of remote Canadian fascinating girl. The tonic tang of the North woods

CHAPTER I.

CANOES IN ANGRY WATER.

"SMOKE, old chum, there's something adrift out there to the south." Ears pricked, the massive black-and-white husky raised slant eyes to the speaker, while his heavy coat and plume of a curved tail fluttered in the driving wind which beat across the great lake.

Shading his eyes with a brown hand, Jim Stuart watched a distant object, which regularly disappeared, to lift again on the white crests of the running seas.

"Acts like a filled canoe, Smoke. I'm going to get the glasses."

Stuart left the shore, where the breaking seas, driven across ten miles of open lake by the southwest gale, pounded, edging the beach with foam. Crossing the clearing, where the grass grew thickly among the stumps, to the group of whitewashed log buildings of the little fur post, he entered the trade house.

"Looks like a capsized canoe out there, Omar," Stuart said to the broad-backed figure seated cross-legged on the floor, shaping with a drawknife a slab of birch into a paddle.

The half-breed lifted a swart, square face, seamed with lines, his mouth widening to a grin, as he said: "Waal, w'at you do? Dis cano' come from Nor'-wes' Companee; eet ees good t'ing, eh?"

"You're too bitter, Omar," said the factor of Sunset House. "We can't let men drown before our eyes, even if they are from LeBlond's. Anyway, I couldn't make out any one hanging to her. She may have drifted away empty. I'll take a look with the glasses."

Stuart took his service binoculars from the case where they hung on a

In Four Parts
Part I

"A Question of Loyalty," Etc.

trading posts, the men who run them, and an altogether and of strong men fighting for their hearts' desire.

moose-horn gun rack and joined the dog, which waited for him at the door. Crossing the clearing to the shore, he focused the glasses on the wind-harried lake. As he found the drifting object he sought, his lips moved in a muttered: "Man hanging to that boat! How long can he last?"

Jim started on a run for the trade house. "Come on, Omar! There's some one with that filled canoe. He's drifted miles. Probably half drowned already, the way they're rolling over him!"

The stolid half-breed dropped knife and paddle and, taking the glasses from his chief, stepped outside.

"There, about two miles offshore!" said Jim, pointing to the submerged canoe.

Slowly the black head of Omar nodded. "Boy wid dat cano'," he said. "He get long ride—from LeBlond's."

"Come on! We'll take the Peterboro!"

The lined face of the half-breed stiffened in a black frown. "We fill, too, out dere! Tough job—put de cano' into dat wind!"

Stuart laughed as he started for the shore, followed reluctantly by his man. "What! The best canoeman I ever had—afraid of that water?" he taunted. "You sure hate that LeBlond outfit! But we'll show this fellow some paddling!"

Turning over the Peterboro on the beach, the two men waded with her into the surf and, leaping in, drove the craft into the rolling combers which broke on her bow. Beside them plunged the excited husky. "Back, Smoke! Back!" shouted Jim, and the great dog returned to the beach, where he yelped out his chagrin.

Out into the welter of wind-driven

seas went the plunging canoe. Free of the shore, the kneeling stern man eased the nose of the canoe off the wind, quartering into the breaking crests of the seas, in a long reach. For a mile, the dogged *churn-swish, churn-swish* of maple blades fought the fury of the southwester. In silence half-breed and white man pitted back and shoulder and arm against the blind violence which whipped their faces with spray, seeking to sweep them back to the boulders of the shore, where leaping waves burst into cascades of foam.

On they went for a space, then swung toward the submerged boat. It was grinding toil for the men who drove the plunging canoe into a wind which cut the foaming tops from the combers. They were quartering into seas threatening to fill the boat; fighting for every yard. The canoes were within short rifle shot of each other when Jim saw the dark head beside the submerged craft move, as if to signal the approaching boat.

"He's all right!" panted Stuart. "He'll hang on! A boy!"

Rails awash, the filled canoe bore down on the laboring Peterboro. As the rescuing boat worked closer, a huge comber mounded over the wallowing craft, burying the dark head beside it. Jim dug desperately with his paddle, fearful of what the lifting boat would reveal. But as the canoe rose he saw the head still there, with the arms circling a thwart.

"Good boy!" muttered the bowman.

Closer crept the Peterboro. Again the boat was drowned in a ridge of black water, topped with foam. Then, as the dark head appeared, the eyes of the toiling bowman widened in amazement.

"A girl!" His paddle tore at the water. "A girl! Game to the marrow —the way she hangs to that boat!"

Over his shoulder he shouted: "It's a girl!"

It was dangerous work, edging the Peterboro alongside a filled boat yawing in that sea. But Omar Boisvert was a magician with a paddle, and did not hesitate. As they reached the canoe the half-drowned girl turned a face gray from exhaustion and the drenching of the seas, and her blue lips moved.

While Omar fought to hold his bow into the wind against the drag of the yawing canoe, Stuart worked desperately to get the limp body of the girl into the boat without rolling them under a lifting sea. At last she was in the Peterboro, and, as a ridge of water broke at the bow, they cleared the boat and headed for Sunset House.

"A white girl—from LeBlond's! Short hair, whipcord knickers—who can she be?" wondered Jim as his stiff arms drove his paddle. He glanced over his shoulder at the huddled figure of his drenched passenger, covered by his coat.

"Cold?" he shouted to the shivering girl. "Get down out of the wind!"

She nodded, with a gallant attempt at a smile, as he encouraged: "Only a few minutes now!"

"Wet as a beaver," he thought. "She's plucky, all right. Must be half frozen in this wind; but there's nothing to do but run for it. We'll soon reach the beach, and Omar's wife'll dry her out. Game enough to grin between shivers. And what teeth!"

But two miles of running "white horses" separated the canoe, yawing in the following sea, from the post, and the kneeling bowman had his work cut out.

At length, leaping into the shoal water, Stuart eased the boat in to the beach at the post; then lifted the girl, blue with cold, from the boat.

"Can you walk?" he asked, conscious of the thickness of her drenched, crow-black hair. "Take my arm."

The girl's stiff legs, numb from exposure to water and wind, moved un-

certainly. With a shrug she raised black eyes to the man who supported her, wondering if he dared pick her up and run to the warm kitchen of Omar's cabin. "I make you—much trouble," she replied through chattering teeth. "You take me—out of—that wet lake. Now you must—dry me."

They laughed together as the lean young fur trader supported the shivering girl who wore his coat, while moisture from her hair stood in beads on her heavy brows and lashes.

At the door of her cabin the amazed Marthe, wife of Omar, met them with wide and disapproving eyes. Jim Stuart with a short-haired girl wearing a man's coat, a man's trousers, a man's high-laced boots! A costume for women unknown in Kiwedin.

"W'at—w'at you do, Meester Jeem?" she feebly gasped, overwhelmed with embarrassment.

"She's been in the lake, Marthe," explained Stuart. "She upset and drifted across from LeBlond's. Needs hot soup and a fire—*quick!* I'll rustle dry clothes for you, Miss—Miss——"

With a flash of white teeth the girl laughed: "Oh, didn't you guess? I'm Aurore LeBlond!"

Jim Stuart was startled. The blood showed in his tanned cheeks as he replied: "No, I didn't know." Then he said: "Marthe will take care of you, Miss LeBlond. Get those wet clothes off and dry out. My cook will have some supper for you shortly."

LeBlond's daughter, at Sunset House! Impossible to get her back across that lake until the wind died. What a situation! What would LeBlond, his rival and enemy, do? He'd saved the life of LeBlond's girl. It was a huge joke on the free-trader. Now what would he do?

As the girl followed the Ojibwa woman into the log house, she turned in the doorway and called to Stuart: "*Merci, monsieur.* Oh, very many thanks for saving me from a watery grave!" With a laugh, she disappeared.

"Well, Omar, she's surely a cool one! Half frozen in those clammy clothes, she stops to make fun of our breaking our backs to reach her before she let go that canoe. Gratitude, eh? And nerve."

"Ah-hah!" grunted the half-breed. "Louis LeBlon', he ees lak dat. He don't care for nobodee. How you get her home?"

"Get her back—against this wind? She'll have to stay until it drops."

With a grunt Omar stopped in his tracks, his face black with disapproval. "You know w'at dat mean?"

"I know. He'll make a fuss, no doubt; but there's no help for it. She can sleep in my quarters with old Sarah. I'll stay with you."

"We tak her back by de shore, now, w'en she dry out and eat," insisted Omar.

"Now? Alongshore—in a canoe? If we didn't smash the boat on the rocks, it would take us most of the night," objected Stuart.

"Ah-hah! But eet weel be bettair. We breeng her back to LeBlon' een de morn' an' we have troubl'. You don' know dat feller."

"No, I don't suppose I do, Omar. But I know that he's putting us out of business, and that will mean all our work here is lost. No, I don't know LeBlond; but he'll know *me* before I quit."

CHAPTER II.

WHEN RIVALS MEET.

THE squat Sarah, the Scotch-Ojibwa who presided over Jim Stuart's kitchen, was in a ferment of irritation, as she bustled about her stove. The daughter of the hated free-trader, LeBlond, whose influence with the Indians and ability as a fur man was threatening the very existence of Sunset House and the future of "Meester Jeem" Stu-

art, was shortly to test her cooking. She had seen the canoe land and watched Stuart, followed by Omar, lead what she imagined was a half-drowned boy to the cabin. Then, to her astonishment and wrath, Stuart had appeared to announce that this girl in men's clothes, this shameless daughter of his rival across the lake, was to be fed.

With her fire well started and the kettles on, the outraged Sarah had lost no time in shuffling over to the rear entrance of Omar's cabin for a whispered council of war with the equally indignant Marthe. Yes, it was true what Sarah had seen. Short hair and men's breeches! No Ojibwa woman would bring shame to her sex by shearing her hair, and as for the *gibodiegwasson*—the breeches? Marthe's rolling eyes and hunched shoulders eloquently portrayed her thoughts. But then, some white women are mad!

Yes, Marthe informed Sarah, her swart face sobered with the gravity of the news, this girl of LeBlond's was now calmly seated by the stove in a calico slip and the underwear Stuart had brought her from the trade house, waiting for her clothes to dry. She was going to put them on again—wear them, to eat with Stuart. Sit at his table in those breeches of a man! She would put a spell upon him, the shameless one!

With much wagging of dark, braided heads the women parted.

Jim Stuart's knock at the door of Omar's cabin brought the reply:

"Coming!"

Shortly the door opened and the daughter of the man who was rapidly driving him out of the fur trade at Mitawangagama — Ojibwa for the "Lake of the Sand Beaches"—stood in dry woolen blouse caught at the neck by a scarf of crimson silk, and whipcords, on her stockinged feet a pair of the begrudging Marthe's beaded moccasins.

"You're warm again—no chill?" he asked, poignantly aware of the picture she made in the frame of the door.

"Yes, my heroic rescuer," she replied archly. "And now, Monsieur Sourface, that I'm warm and dry again and look less like a drowned fish. do you not like me better?"

The fluttering of her black hair in the wind, the allure of her thick-lashed eyes, the clean lines of her figure, held the appraising sweep of Stuart's gaze, as she posed, hands on hips, free of all self-consciousness, watching him in frank amusement.

"But you do not answer me!" she said impatiently.

"No, Miss LeBlond," he replied in mock gravity, "I think I prefer you as a drowned fish. You were then more respectful to your heroic rescuer."

"But my hair was plastered with water and my eyes red!' she objected vehemently. "See it now—how it waves when it's dry!" And she ran her fingers through the crow-black plumes of her wind-tossed locks.

"Yes, it's very—nice!" he replied, aghast at her amazing candor, as he walked beside her toward his quarters. So this was the new girl, the younger generation!

"Very nice?" she countered, with a toss of the head. "In Winnipeg, they call it beautiful!"

"I'm sure they do," he said absentmindedly, his eyes measuring sky and wind-whipped lake, his face suddenly grave with the thought of Omar's warning: "We breeng her back to Louis LeBlond een de morn' an' we have troubl'."

But how could they paddle her back to-night, against that wind, he asked himself. Then he heard the girl at his side say:

"You are not polite to your guest, Mr. Stuart. I have said twice that,

since you have shaved, you are quite good looking."

Stuart's lean face reddened. What would she say next? He had not been "outside"—down to the railroad and civilization—since his discharge from the army on his return from France. But in the stray papers and magazines which had reached him in the hinterlands of Kiwedin he had read of the manners and dress of the younger generation. The frankness of this "specimen," however, was startling.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Now, you haven't told me how you happened to paddle that canoe out from your shore past the lee of the islands. You see what a risk you took?"

"Sorry you're good looking?' she teased. "What a modesty! Oh, I was tired of listening to that fool, Paul Paradis," she explained; "and it wasn't rough inside the islands. But, outside, before I knew it the wind caught me, and I couldn't turn back. You know the rest."

"You had a close shave, Miss LeBlond," he said quietly, wondering at her seeming lack of gratitude for the battle two men had made with wind and sea for her life.

She turned impulsively, placing a hand on his arm, as her face sobered.

"You don't have to tell me that," she said, and the raillery left her brilliant eyes. "I died out there, to-day. I knew I couldn't hang on much longer. Then I saw you coming!"

He looked suspiciously at her dark face. Was she acting again? But the straight gaze which met his betokened sincerity.

"I thought you didn't know," he said lamely.

"Didn't know?" she cried almost savagely. "You think me a fool?" Then, swiftly, her mood changed. "Ah, I will now make amends to my heroic deliverer from the raging waters of Mita —Mitawangagama—is that right?—the Lake of the Sand Beaches!" She laughed. "Sir, you have rescued a water-logged maid from the fishes! She will never forget your bravery—or your surprise at her whipcords! She thanks you with all the heart she has—left!" Aurore LeBlond bowed grotesquely, until her hair touched the long grass of the clearing.

He watched her in silence, with a quizzical smile, puzzled, wondering, half charmed, partly repelled.

"Let's see what Sarah has got for us," he suggested. "I'm hungry, aren't you?"

"Starved! She won't poison me, will she? Marthe's eyes snapped fire when she saw me in these." The girl lifted a shapely leg and curled her toes in the smoke-tanned moccasin, far too generous in size for her foot.

"You did startle them—in those," he laughed. "You rather startled me; I haven't been in Winnipeg since the war."

"You poor man!"

"No, I've lived in Winnipeg—and prefer this. Hello, Smoke!'

Bursting from the spruce at the edge of the clearing, where he had been hunting rabbits, Smoke loped up to the man and girl approaching the dog stockade built of spruce slabs, surrounding Jim's quarters and his vegetable garden. Smoke barked a joyful welcome.

"What a handsome dog!" she cried. "Why, he's much larger than any of father's! Where did you get him?"

"He's a Hudson Strait Ungava," said Jim proudly, rubbing the erect ears of the massive head. "He's always glad to see me. Aren't you, old scout?"

The hairy throat of Smoke rumbled a reply as he reared and placed his great forepaws on Jim's chest.

"He's a raving beauty! Why did you name him Smoke?"

"When he was a small pup, he was almost entirely black, except his nose and feet."

"The darling! Will he let me touch him? Most of father's won't."

"Smoke, this is a friend of mine," said Jim, rolling the great black-and-white head from side to side. Dropping the husky to his forefeet, he commanded: "Shake hands with her!"

With a red grin which bared his formidable tusks, the Ungava raised a hairy paw, which the girl took.

"Smoke," she said, with a laugh, as the dog's slant eyes watched his master's face, "you're not polite; you don't look at the lady when you shake hands."

"Like his master, he's embarrassed by beautiful ladies," said Jim, as they left the dog at the gate of the stockade and entered the house.

"Is that why you prefer this life to Winnipeg—because of your shyness of the ladies? But you'll be lonely when this beautiful lady goes," she challenged.

Here, indeed, was no false modesty.

"What makes you think so?" he teased.

"Oh, every one is! How nice and comfortable you are here!" she went on, her eyes moving from the chairs built of spruce and birch in the round, the caribou and bearskin rugs, to walls bare except for moose-horn gun rack and two shelves of books.

He reddened under his tan. "You're laughing at my humble quarters. They're not much like your father's place, are they?"

Ignoring his remark, she faced him with: "Why do you men hate each other? Can't you trade with the Indians without fighting?"

Stuart laughed at her frankness. "We haven't exactly got to fighting yet; but I admit he's making it pretty rough for me."

They sat down at the table, and the square-built Sarah appeared, her copper skin red from cooking, a large pink bow bobbing bravely from her dusky braids. With a withering look at Jim's guest from her small eyes, she deposited a dish of steaming caribou stew, to be followed by broiled whitefish, hot biscuit, tea, and wild strawberries.

"Dear me, but I'm hungry!" exclaimed the girl, as the outraged and inquisitive Ojibwa woman, hands on hips, boldly scrutinized her, from bobbed hair to whipcord knickers—to gain a better view of which the cook coolly stepped back and circled her chair. "Marthe gave me some broth; but I'm famished, and this stew smells so good."

Then, aware of the exhaustive inspection from the rear by the fascinated and shocked Sarah, the girl rose and turned to the gasping cook.

"Would you like to see my knickers?" she asked, wheeling on her toes. "You don't wear them, do you? You'd find them very comfortable."

Choking with confusion, the overwhelmed Sarah fled to the kitchen, while Stuart shook with laughter.

"You're too much for Sarah. She was certainly hypnotized by your *gibodiegwasson.*"

"My what?"

"Your *gibodiegwasson,* your pan—whipcords!"

"*Mon Dieu!* Are they as awful as that?" she cried, overcome by the Ojibwa equivalent. "What did you call them—*gibodi*—what? No wonder Marthe and Sarah are shocked! Think of a woman wearing anything with such a name! *Gibodi——*" She broke into shouts of laughter, while he watched the rich color flame in neck and face, the flash of white teeth, the dark eyes fill with the tears of her merriment.

"*Gibo——*" Aurore LeBlond rocked slowly back and forth in her chair.

"*Gibodiegwasson,*" he repeated.

"*Gibo-di-egwasson!*" she faltered breathlessly. "*Gibos,* for short! Wait till they hear that in Winnipeg! They'll never wear 'em again!"

Stuart regarded his guest with un-

concealed curiosity. Buried in the hinterlands since the war, he had had no contact with the new girl. But now, it appeared, he was being offered a rare opportunity for the study of the species.

"There won't be much left of me when Sarah and Marthe get their heads together; but you're not really shocked, Monsieur Stuart? With us, all women wear them for sport."

"No, indeed, I'm not shocked," he laughed, his eyes shifting from her dusky head to the well-shaped hand busy with her fork. "We saw lots of them in France. But I'm wondering just how your being here will strike your father."

She looked up quizzically, teacup suspended in air. "You think my father will be ungrateful to you for pulling me out of the lake?"

"He's trying to drive me out of the trade here." He rose and went to a window opening on the lake, where the wind was cutting off the foaming tops of the gray combers. "It's going to blow all night, Miss LeBlond, and I don't see how we can get you home."

Her eyes followed him to where he stood, back toward her. From his moccasined feet her appraising gaze lifted to the generous spread of shoulder, the bronzed neck above the collar of his woolen shirt, the crisp brown hair.

"So you're worried over what Marthe and Sarah will think if you can't rid yourself of your guest, Mr. Stuart?" she suggested, with a humorous curl of a full red lip.

He turned to meet her amused eyes. "I'm wondering how your father will take it. How will he like it when he learns that you've been here?"

She shrugged. "My father adores his unworthy daughter. He will love you for what you did this afternoon. The poor man must think I'm in the lake now. He'll be insane with worry! Poor dad!"

Stuart scowled with impatience. "Are you never serious, Miss Aurore LeBlond? You may ignore the facts, but he won't. You French are careful—of appearances. If I thought I could get you safely over there to-night, we'd start now."

The blood drove into her olive skin. "It's you who seem careful of appearances. You—you are bored with your guest, Monsieur Stuart. Let us go then!" She rose stiffly, her face flaming with outraged vanity.

But he ignored the challenge. "A boat wouldn't live out there now."

"Then I shall go by shore."

With hands on hips he smiled indulgently at the indignant girl who confronted him. "Do you realize how far it is through the bush?"

"No; and I don't care, so long as I leave this place where I seem unwelcome."

"Well, it's a good twenty miles, and it'll be dark in an hour. Have you ever traveled in the bush at night. Have you any idea of the danger?"

Ignoring the question, she contemplated Marthe's beaded moccasins as she curled and uncurled her toes in their capacious interiors. Then her black eyes lifted to the man who watched her, ill at ease, as her face lit in an amused smile.

"Have you really been so bored, Mr. Stuart?"

He laughed in relief at her change of mood. "Do you think I have? Is it likely that a man marooned up here in the bush would be bored with Miss Aurore LeBlond?"

"That's rather half-hearted, isn't it? Can't you do better?"

"Yes, I can do much better," he teased, "but I don't think it's good for you."

"You think I'm vain?"

"I know you are."

She nodded as she moved about the room. "That's true. I am. Father's made a fool of me, and——"

They turned at a knock on the outside door of the house.

"Come in!" called Stuart.

Omar's broad face thrust through the doorway of the living room.

"You spik wid me?" he asked of Stuart, with a sidelong glance at the girl.

Nodding, Stuart turned to the girl with, "You'll excuse me?" and left the room.

"What you do wid her?" demanded the half-breed, as the two walked to the rear of the building, out of the wind.

"What can we do, Omar? We can't push a canoe across the lake into those seas, and we can't take her through the bush—the swamp at the outlet. She's got to stay until the wind drops."

"You don' know Louis LeBlon'," muttered Boisvert ominously. "Eef she stay here dis night it mean troubl' for you and me."

"I know he'll not like it, but you think he won't show any gratitude for saving her life?"

"Eet mean troubl' for you and me," repeated the other stolidly.

"All right, let it come then!" angrily answered the trader. "A little more won't hurt us. We can't get her home to-night in that seventeen-foot Peterboro, and we can't put her out in the bush, can we? She's got to stay here. If he wants to make trouble, let it come!"

Stuart left the half-breed and entered the house. "Miss LeBlond," he said, "there's no trail alongshore, and there's a swamp at the outlet where you'd be eaten alive by mosquitoes. To start with our small canoe means filling in a mile or two!"

She studied him with sober face; then, thick brows knotted in a mock frown, she demanded: "You're not trying to deceive a defenseless woman, whom Fate has thrown into your hands? Oh, sir, somewhere in your black heart there must linger a trace of pity, of honor. Spare my tender youth!"

With a muttered exclamation of irritation, he turned to the window and gazed out where the running seas grayed in the fading twilight.

"Well, anyway, whether you're a villain or not," she continued, "I don't intend to swamp in that lake in the dark and get wet again. *Oh-h-h!* It was cold! It makes me shiver to think of it. And besides"—her eyes flashed with amusement—"suppose my what-you-call-'ems—my *gibo-dieg-wasson*—shrank? What should I do?"

The man at the window remained motionless, but his averted face turned a vivid red in his attempt to suppress his laughter.

In secret satisfaction she watched his shaking shoulders, then said: "I like your back, Monsieur Stuart, but I think I prefer your face."

He swung on her with a smile of surrender. She was incorrigible, this daughter of LeBlond.

"They knew you took a canoe?"

"Yes, but they may think I landed on an island and couldn't get back. By the way, do you happen to have such a thing as a cigarette? Mine were soaked."

"Yes, such as they are. But you'll find them pretty poor."

"Now," she said, when he had given her a light and filled his pipe, "tell me something about yourself."

"There's not much to interest a lady from Winnipeg."

"Try me. You came here three years ago to start a post for the Hudson's Bay Company. I know that much. Father was here first, for his Northwest Trading Company, and, naturally, didn't like it."

"Yes, that's right." Now that the matter was settled and Aurore LeBlond was to stay at Sunset House, the curious trader thrust aside the responsibility assumed by her presence, and reveled in the picture she made as she smoked in his chair.

"I've heard so many terrible things

about you," she went on, "that I've been gasping to learn just how much of a liar Paul Paradis was."

"So Paradis has been blackening my reputation, has he?"

"Blackening is mild to what he's told me about the factor at Sunset House. You came from God's Lake, didn't you? Well, it seems you left a very dark and mysterious past up there, Mr. Stuart, according to Paul."

"Oh, very! I'm really a terrible man, Miss LeBlond. Hadn't we better have Sarah in here as chaperon?"

She laughed as she shook her head. "From what I've seen of Sarah, I'd wager she's on guard now, waiting to rescue you from the woman with the *gibo-diegwassons*. No, Paul Paradis didn't impress me. He made you too black. Father is quite different. He intends to beat you; but he's sorry for you—sent here by your people on a forlorn hope. He says you're too good a man to sacrifice up here."

Stuart's features hardened. Forlorn hope, was it? LeBlond was a bit previous.

"This Paradis—did he tell you anything of his own past?"

"Oh, trust Paul for that! Most romantic and mysterious—if one were to believe him. Why, what do you know about him?"

An enigmatic smile was Stuart's reply.

"You do know something, eh? Well, I'm sure father does, too. But the man is a wonder with the Indians. That excuses a lot."

"When did you leave Winnipeg?" Stuart changed the subject.

"In June. It took me three weeks to get here; but it was wonderful, that trip."

"You like it—the wilderness?"

"I love it. You may think it strange for such a frivolous person to enjoy it up here; but I do. Of course, I'd tire of it after a while."

"You go back in the autumn?"

Lifting her chin, she slowly exhaled a cloud of smoke, her half-shut eyes on the spruce poles of the ceiling, tilted head baring the round throat in its loose flannel collar caught by its scarf of crimson silk. Wonderingly the man studied her, so manifestly at ease in the house of a stranger, her father's rival for the trade of the district.

"Yes," she answered, after a space, "he seems bound to marry me off in Winnipeg, you know. And Paradis worries him, with his mooning around ever since I came. Imagine!" she laughed. "That monkey, Paul Paradis!"

"He's quite beautiful," objected Stuart. "I met him at Medicine Stone Lake, last November. His little mustache, and his red sash and embroidered leggings, surely ought to impress the ladies."

Without turning her tilted head, she flashed at him a sidelong look from under her long lashes. "He seems to hate you. What have you done to him?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," protested Stuart, "except to knock him down when he tried to hog the trail."

The girl straightened in her chair, her vivid face alight with interest. "What! You dared do that—to the great Paul Paradis?" she demanded.

"There was no trouble," drawled Stuart. "It was nothing. He stayed down."

"Ah! That explains a great deal. I knew there was something besides trade rivalry between you"

"What did he tell you, Miss Aurore?"

"He told me you had had trouble on a trail—that he has been compelled to choke you."

"If you ask 'Black Jules' Renault, your father's head *voyageur*, he might tell you that Paradis has a poor memory."

"Oh, when I saw you, to-day, I knew it! Paradis choke—*you!*" Her dark eyes lingered significantly on the wide

shoulders, the corded column of his neck, the evident power in the brown hand which held his pipe. "But why waste time on other people when we are so interesting, ourselves?"

Her frankness was exhilarating. Imagine Mary Christie, he thought, so far forgetting her sense of the proprieties! Mary Christie, with whom Stuart through the evening had been contrasting this raven-haired daughter of his rival. He could see Mary's blond eyebrows lift in scorn of the sheared hair and the whipcord jeans, of Aurore LeBlond's unembarrassed acceptance of the situation which made her his guest, of her complete candor.

"Lead on, Miss Aurore."

So she led on, while he listened, amused, startled, now charmed, now puzzled, by the direct thinking and amazing sophistication of this graduate of a convent school in Winnipeg. Jim was amazed at her self-possession.

Of her mother she retained no clear memory, but her childhood years in her father's trading posts in the North she still recalled. Then came school and long intervals of months of silence from the man who was buried in the forests. Now, her education completed, she was living life to the full—tasting its thrills, exploring its byways, testing whatever of interest it had to give.

"Little as this country can offer to a young woman curious of life," he observed, "it managed to provide you with one first-class thrill this afternoon."

"Two!" she corrected, her eyes suddenly grave with sincerity. "I was both drowned to-day—and saved!"

"You mean you were saved from drowning."

She leaned toward him.

"No; I learned what it is to despair, and I learned what it means to have life given back to me." The eyes of the girl misted. In the intensity of her feeling her lower lip trembled. "You did that—gave me back my life! I did not thank you—made light of it. But I do thank you now!"

His face flushed; his gray eyes shifted uneasily under the poignancy of her dark gaze.

"It was easy enough—nothing," he avoided. "We were lucky to see you, that's all."

She shook her head. "I saw how you had to fight to reach me." Then, with a shrug, she shed her gravity as one sheds a coat "Now do tell me about yourself, Mr. Jeem Stuart."

But Stuart did not dwell long on his early life in Hudson Bay posts with the father who had died at God's Lake. Avoiding the girl's live interest in his three years with the Canadian Expeditionary Forces, he talked of the coming of the Hudson's Bay Company to the Lake of the San Beaches, and the building of Sunset House.

"Sunset House! Who gave it that name?" she asked.

"I plead guilty," he said. "We had such a succession of painted skies the week we finished the buildings that it seemed appropriate."

"Sunset House!" she repeated softly, as though to herself. "Lovely!"

"It sounds rather like a forlorn hope, doesn't it? I heard that your father thought it a great joke—said I knew what I was doing when I named it: it wouldn't last any longer than the setting sun."

"I don't think father knows you very well," she said with conviction.

Their talk was checked by a knock on the outside door.

"What is it, Omar?" demanded the trader, with some irritation, for his evening with the daughter of his rival was proving most agreeable.

"Come outside; I show you some-t'ing."

Leaving his guest, Stuart went out into the wind with the half-breed.

"Look!" And Omar pointed through the murk up the lake shore.

"I don't see anything," said the trader impatiently.

"You wait—— Dere! You see now?"

On a point, far up the shore, like fireflies in the dusk, a light flashed—then another.

"Dey hunt for her," added the half-breed significantly.

"Yes; we must let them know she's here," agreed Stuart. "Take a lantern and see if you can signal them. I don't like to build a fire in this wind. It's pretty dry."

Returning to his quarters, Stuart announced: "They've crossed the lake to search the north shore for you. We can see their lights."

"Poor dad! He must be frantic," she said soberly. Then her lip curled in a faint smile. "It's early, yet. Too bad to spoil our nice talk, isn't it?"

"It is," he agreed; "but think of your poor father."

"Oh, I do! I love him, you know. He's all I've got."

"Well, it'll be some time before Omar attracts their attention. All my men are up the lake with the freight canoes, and my small Peterboro would fill to-night. Your father must have crossed in a big boat. There's nothing to do but wait for him."

"Then I can have another cigarette and we can talk until they come."

Was she strangely callous, he wondered, or totally without nerves, that she could calmly curl herself in a chair and smoke while her desperate father and his men hunted a rocky shore, white with surf, for her canoe and drowned body? Most women would have paced the clearing outside in a frenzy of excitement.

With mingled amazement and curiosity he watched her remove the cigarette from her mouth with fingers which betrayed no sign of nerves, and exhale a cloud of smoke. In all likelihood this vivid creaure, who for a few hours had shared the hospitality of Sunset House, would never again cross his path. In the autumn she would return to the world outside, and, in the meantime, in spite of LeBlond's gratitude, the rivalry between the trading posts and the open hostility between the company servants would prevent Stuart's seeing her.

"Let me see," she was saying. "I'm to be here six-seven weeks more. How am I to endure that Paradis all that time?"

"You might get your father to send him to Fort Hope," he suggested.

"That's a good idea! I'll do it." Then her black brows drew together as she added suggestively: "But you know, Mr. Jeem Stuart, I'm going to be lonely for some one to talk to."

"So am I, Miss Aurore LeBlond."

"Well, the answer is obvious. We'll talk to each other."

He shook his head. "I can't come to your father's place. There'd be war. You'll have to swamp again in the lake," he suggested with a grin.

"What? Wait that long? The wind might not blow for days."

The evident sincerity of the girl stirred his curiosity. "You've enjoyed your stay at Sunset House?"

"I've had a wonderful time! Between you and Marthe and Sarah, it's been a real party."

"Marthe and Sarah?"

"Oh, I don't want to spoil you."

Omar's dark face, following a call outside, appeared at the door.

"Dey build fire wen dey see my lantern. I t'ink a boat follow de shore, now."

Omar glanced darkly at the daughter of the man he hated. She returned his look with a cool indifference.

"Let's go and see," she suggested.

With the wash of the surf on the boulders of the shore and the drive of the wind through the neighboring forest in their ears, they stood on the beach, peering into the black night.

Shortly, a light blinked through the murk.

"It's a lantern—in a canoe," explained Stuart. "They're coming for you."

He felt her hand on his arm, felt her wind-blown hair on his face, as he bent to hear what she said. His blood stirred at her touch. Then the blanket, shielding Omar's lantern from the wind, dropped, lighting their shadowy figures.

"When will they get here?" she called through her cupped hands.

"Soon, now."

"Let's go back and talk until they come!"

So the two returned to the house, while the sullen Omar waited on the beach.

"You know that little island—I think it's the one farthest to the east—with all the rocks and boulders on the shore?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You remember that split rock which stands partly in the water? Well, if you were to look behind that rock, some day, you might find a note from a very-much-bored person—that is, if you cared to go there and look."

Stuart thrilled at the thought of what her words implied. She wanted to see him again, wanted to talk to him. Then the hopelessness of the situation, the sheer recklessness of attempting to meet the daughter of LeBlond secretly, forced itself upon him. Omar, stanch old Omar, would know and would not understand. Then there was LeBlond. A pretty mess! Still——

"You mean you would paddle there, some day—alone?" Stuart asked, wondering what manner of girl this was who so lightly put her trust in a stranger.

"Perhaps I should so far forget myself," she replied archly, "if I found an answer to my note."

"Try me!" he urged, reckless of the outcome in his desire to see again this girl so vividly alive, so baffling to his curiosity.

Her dark eyes flashed the challenge: "You will be bored, too?"

"How can I help being bored—after to-day?"

"You're improving." A red lip curled in satisfaction. "A little more training and you'll be——"

The yelping of dogs and the sound of voices outside, above the beat of the wind, stopped her.

"Here they are! He's coming—dear old dad!'

Stuart stepped to the door to meet the man who had, the winter before, down on the railroad at Wabigoon, boasted openly that two years would see the end of Sunset House.

"Aurore, my girl? She is here?" The agitated LeBlond, delirious with joy at the news given him at the shore by Omar, pushed past the man who opened the door. "Aurore, my child! *Ma chèrie!*"

"Dad! *Mon pauvre père!* Good old dad!"

As the trader took his daughter in his arms, in a swift glance Jim Stuart's curious eyes measured the rival he had never seen. LeBlond was little taller than the girl; but the set of the iron-gray head on the square shoulders, the bold nose and chin of the dark profile, suggested the force and daring which his reputation had given him. Closing the door behind him, Stuart remained outside with the two men who had followed LeBlond to the house. In the blackness the Hudson's Bay man could not see the faces of the blurred shapes beside him. Then the door opened and LeBlond called them inside.

With a voice hoarse with feeling, he said, with a slight trace of accent: "Mr. Stuart, my daughter says she owes her life to you and your man."

As they faced him, the striking resemblance in feature and expression between father and daughter impressed

the man who entered the room, followed by Renault and Paradis. The girl who had hung to the canoe while the seas drove over her, then laughed as she shook with cold, was the true daughter of Louis LeBlond.

"Luckily, we happened to see her," deprecated Stuart.

"Yes, but she tells me that her strength was gone—she had already given up, when she saw you." LeBlond impulsively grasped the hand of the man who studied him. "We are rivals in business. It cannot be helped. But what you have done for my child I will not forget. We have hunted for her since the afternoon. I have been half crazy. You will understand."

In a corner of the room the slim Paradis, dark as a half-breed, talked excitedly to the thickset Renault, across whose swart face a knife slash had left a livid scar.

"It was nothing," replied Stuart. "I happened to see her canoe. That was all. You owe me nothing, sir." As he spoke, Paradis left Renault and whispered in LeBlond's ear."

"My house is at your disposal," continued Stuart. "Will you and your daughter stay here to-night?" The eyes of the speaker hardened as he went on. "The gentleman who is whispering to you, and Renault, here, are welcome to sleep in the trade house. You can't cross the lake against this wind."

The somewhat small but regular features of Paradis darkened in a scowl at the thrust, but he continued his whispering. Slowly a look of doubt, of perplexity, crept into LeBlond's eyes; but, with a gesture of irritation, he waved aside the insistent Paradis. Turning, he spoke rapidly in French to his daughter, who replied vehemently, her courageous black eyes flashing in anger as she faced her father.

"Mr. Stuart," said the patently embarrassed LeBlond, "you—ah—found her in the afternoon?"

"Yes." In a flash Stuart sensed what was coming—what Paradis had been whispering.

"And you let us hunt the lake through six hours of daylight—hunt for her, thinking she was drowned?" LeBlond spoke more in regret than in anger.

"Why didn't you send word?" added Paradis with a sneer.

"Father!" The blood rose to Aurore LeBlond's temples. "Are you crazy? Do you know what you're saying? Is this your gratitude?" The eyes of the girl flamed with indignation. "Mr. Stuart wanted to take me home, but I wouldn't go. There was only the small canoe here, and I was afraid—afraid of that lake. And this is your thanks to him! Oh, I'm ashamed of you—ashamed of you all!"

The enraged factor of Sunset House was near the end of his self-control as he faced LeBlond.

"You see fit to quibble over my actions to-day," he said. "I've nothing to explain. You found out what the lake was out there, when you crossed with the wind in your big canoe. My large boats are bringing up my stuff, and I'm alone with one man. I don't like your insinuations!" With difficulty Jim restrained himself. "You can't take your daughter back to-night; and I offered you my quarters—such as they are. But, as for this whispering assistant of yours, I take back my offer. He can't stay here!" The speaker's voice snapped like a brittle stick. "You understand English, don't you, Paradis?"

The room went silent. In the glance of the girl as she watched Jim's eyes blacken with anger, was amusement and approval.

With a swift movement the enraged Paradis jerked his hand back to his belt; but the squat Renault's fingers gripped his arm. Then a movement at the window behind the two men drew Jim's attention. Two narrowed eyes in a seamed face were pressed against the

pane. Beside the face a hand gripped the action of a rifle. The watchdog, Omar, was on guard. The knife of Paradis would never have left its sheath.

The working features of LeBlond reflected his warring emotions. This man who had saved his daughter had also flagrantly affronted his friend. For a space his sense of gratitude and his loyalty to Paradis strove for mastery as he looked into the cold eyes which challenged his. Then he found his voice.

"You have insulted us, here, in your own house!" he burst out. "We want no hospitality from you." Then, as if ashamed, he said hurriedly: "Oh, I'm grateful—I know what I owe you. But we'll bid you good night. Come, Aurore!"

His answer from the girl was contemptuous laughter. "Oh, you men are so funnee—so funnee!" she cried. "So ridiculous! Because Mr. Stuart knocks down our Paul Paradis, and Paul fills your ears with a fool idea of word not being sent ten miles against that wind and sea, you forget that I'd be down there with the fish to-night if it hadn't been for Omar and Mr. Stuart. *Pah!* You men are all fools!"

She was serious now, scornful, her gaze overawing her father's uneasy eyes. In frank admiration Stuart watched her as she waited for LeBlond's reply.

"I thank you for what you did for her," said LeBlond, at length, turning defeated from the accusing eyes of his daughter. "Come, Aurore!"

Paradis and Renault sullenly left the room, while the trader waited at the door for the girl, who had not moved.

"So you think, because of the hurt feelings of your pretty Paul, I'll spend the night in front of a fire, with my back against a tree?" she replied. "Well, I will not!"

Over the bold features of LeBlond crept an expression of helplessness, of impotence. It was patent to Stuart that this trader, whose energy and determination were bywords in the fur trade, was not the master of the girl who now faced him.

"I shall accept Mr. Stuart's offered hospitality," she continued. "As for you, *mon père,* you can stay and help old Sarah, the cook, guard the sacred honor of your precious daughter, or you can leave her to Sarah and go and sit by your fire. *I* stay here. Do you understand English, Monsieur LeBlond?"

In the end, LeBlond and his daughter passed the night in the quarters of Stuart, while the indignant Sarah tossed through sleepless hours, outraged by the thought that the roof above her should shelter the enemy who had boasted that the wolves should soon howl in the deserted clearing of Sunset House.

CHAPTER III.

UNDERHAND TRADING.

SIX years before, when the boat brigade of the Northwest Trading Company, in command of one of the partners, Louis LeBlond, had passed through Lake Expanse on the trail to Mitawangagama, the Ojibwas, who were camped at Pelican Portage on their way south to the spring trade with the Hudson's Bay Company, had been greatly excited. Turning into the camp, LeBlond's head *voyageur,* Black Jules Renault, had announced in their native tongue that a trading station was to be built on the great Lake of the Sand Beaches, two hundred miles north. Never again need they take the long trail south to Lake Expanse, but in the next long snows would find a warm welcome, a New Year's feast, and the best of trade goods ready for exchange for their fur at the new post.

In three years LeBlond had made serious inroads into the trade of the old company. He had gone to the Indians in the heart of a rich fur country. He no longer could be ignored.

They must follow and find him for the trade. But, on the word of hard-headed Andrew Christie, of Lake Expanse, inspector of a territory larger than an eastern State, the man who could now wrest a share of the trade from the firmly intrenched LeBlond would need a particularly long head, boundless nerve, and the tenacity of the beaver. Such a man, Christie told his superiors, in conclave at Winnipeg, he believed was now at God's Lake in western Kiwedin—a young man with a fine war record and a local reputation for ability and judgment in dealing with the Indians.

In two months a mail canoe brought Jim Stuart orders from Winnipeg to report to Christie at Lake Expanse. A month later, with Omar Boisvert and a gang of men, Stuart had cleared the forest and was peeling the logs for the building of Sunset House. The following years had been for Stuart a well-nigh hopeless struggle for a foothold in the trade, for his rival possessed the Frenchman's uncanny talent for handling the Indians, backed by an experience of thirty years.

As he lay on his bunk in the trade house, after leaving Aurore LeBlond and her father in possession of his quarters, Jim Stuart's thoughts traversed the hours since midafternoon. To the man who, since the war, had been marooned in the forests of Kiwedin—Ojibwa for the "Birthplace of the North Wind"—the coming of this vivid creature, swept into his life by the accident of wind and sea, had been like the burst of a shell on a black night. To the picture of a dark head beside a submerged canoe which the seas buried as they drove past, his memory joined the dripping figure of a shivering girl, standing in Marthe's doorway, dismissing the adventure as a joke.

Then her cool indifference to the scandalized Ojibwas! He had read that they were like that—these present-day girls. He chuckled at the memory of how she rose from the table to display her whipcords, to the consternation of the inquisitive Sarah. No false modesty there! In fact, he admitted, modesty did not appear to enter into the picture. And how she did seize on *gibodiegwasson!* It certainly was an insult to the well-cut knickers which set off her shapely legs—that name!

But what a crime it was to cut hair like that! It must have rippled to her waist. Then he laughed aloud as he remembered the disgust in the blue eyes of Mary Christie, daughter of the inspector at Lake Expanse, when he once asked her when she intended to bob her hair. No, Mary wouldn't cut her hair or shorten her skirts, either. Lake Expanse fashions were somewhat behind the times, and—as Mary was the only white girl on the great lake—would remain so.

Of course, the astute LeBlond was set on marrying his daughter off well in Winnipeg. Strange she'd escaped so long, with those dangerous black eyes and that magnetism. It was magnetism; no doubt about that. The man on the bunk in the trade house sucked in a deep breath at the memory of his struggle to get the half-drowned girl into the canoe—the dead weight of her in his straining arms.

But strong as was the appeal of this dark daughter of Louis LeBlond to the eyes and senses of the man who had not seen three comely white women in as many years, she was, he realized, only a spoiled child—vain, headstrong, the pampered darling of a lonely father.

Then his thoughts shifted to the loyal, capable girl at Lake Expanse, who ministered with head and hands to the well-being and comfort of his chief, Andrew Christie, and who, except for five years' schooling in Scotland, had spent her life, without complaint, immured in the Northern forests. He pictured her frank disdain of the dress

and manners of the girl who slept over in his quarters, her outraged sense of propriety at the direct thought and speech of this self-possessed daughter of the free-trader. She wouldn't understand this girl, would condemn her on sight as overbold, light, unwomanly.

But no one who had seen Aurore LeBlond grimly refusing to be swept from her grip on that canoe, as the seas buried her, could doubt the metal of her courage. She had proven that. Whatever else she might lack, it was not a valiant heart. And it was masterful the way she overawed her father, forced him to stay at Sunset House. Then he found himself comparing the blond comeliness of the decorous daughter of Andrew Christie with the dark loveliness of Aurore LeBlond.

The following morning Stuart walked with his guest to the beach, where LeBlond had preceded them to his waiting canoe.

"I really think you about won Sarah over, when you patted her shoulder and put that silk scarf around her neck," Stuart said.

"Poor old soul, she almost burst, didn't she?"

"I know Sarah pretty well," he laughed, "and the way that grin slowly widened across her red face when you gave her the scarf and shook her hand makes me think she's forgiven you your *gibodiegwasson.* Though, of course, she wouldn't admit it."

"She thinks me insane, probably."

"She didn't know what to think."

Then, as they approached the shore, she said hurriedly: "The split rock on the shore of the last of the islands —look there in a few days; you might find something. Good-by, Mr. Jeem Stuart." She gave him her hand.

"Good-by, Miss Gibodiegwasson."

When LeBlond stepped into his big freight canoe he said to Stuart: "I thank you again for what you have done. Your people have seen fit to send you here to take the trade from me. Between the Northwest and the Hudson's Bay there can be no quarter. But to you, yourself, I owe much. Some day I may be able to repay."

As the factor of Sunset House watched the departing Peterboro nose an ever-widening ripple out across the still lake, which now mirrored the hills —for the wind had dropped in the night to a flat calm—a voice at his side roused him from his thoughts.

"We got a beeg job ahead, dis summer."

Stuart looked into the grave face of Omar. "We have, Omar; but I wish I knew where to begin. They heard at Lake Expanse that LeBlond got thirty thousand dollars' worth of fur from Pipestone Lake and the Sturgeon River country alone, this year. We didn't get a pelt—not one hunter from that country!"

"I hear, last night, somet'ing about dat."

"You did? How d'yuh mean—heard?"

"De men wid de cano' talk w'ile LeBlond go to de house for de girl."

"What did they say?"

"Eet was so dark dey did not know I was dere. De wind blow so hard I hear onlee little. Dey talk about Jingwak."

"Jingwak, the medicine man at Pipestone Lake?"

"Ah-ha. You know how he got all de hunter to trade wid LeBlond—not one come to Sunset House?"

"No, but I'd like to," said the interested Stuart. For never had a dog team or a canoe from the Pipestone Lake and Sturgeon River country come to trade at Sunset House, in the three years of its existence. These northern Ojibwas from a rich fur country had avoided the little post as if it harbored the plague.

"Waal, Jingwak tell all dem peopl'

dat dis place ees full of devil. I find dis out, for one of dat crew had fear to stay on de beach."

Slowly the blood filled the bronzed face of the man who listened.

"So they are bribing the medicine men, the conjurers, are they, to keep the trade from Sunset House?"

It was clever of LeBlond; for the Pipestone Ojibwas, who came two hundred miles south to trade, were a wild, superstitious lot, easily influenced by a medicine man—a shaman.

"W'at you t'ink of dat?" demanded the half-breed. "I tell you we got good job ahead, dis summer, w'en we get de trade stuff up from Lak' Expanse."

"Omar, we've got to get some of that Pipestone and Sturgeon River trade. We can't live on what we get from the rest of the country. What're we going to do?"

The swart Boisvert rose from his squatting position. He was not tall, but his Scotch and French blood had united with the Ojibwa to create a rare example of nature's skill in the building of human thew and muscle; for in his compact one hundred and eighty pounds Omar carried power and stamina which had been a byword among the *voyageurs* of western Kiwedin. Deliberately reaching to the rear, the half-breed drew his skinning knife and, lifting a foot, stropped the blade slowly on his moccasin.

"Dere ees one t'ing we can do wid M'sieu' Jingwak," he said significantly.

"You old wolf," laughed Stuart. "I believe, if I said the word, you'd hunt him down and stick that in him."

Because of his devotion to the elder Stuart, and to the son lately returned from the war across the big water, Omar had, three years before, left the God's Lake country to follow Jim's fortunes on the upper Albany; and his small eyes met his chief's cryptically as he said: "Dere are manee way to ketch a fox."

"Yes, and we must find one to beat this Jingwak. But we can't hurt him, you know. There are laws in this country."

"Law? Umph!" grunted Omar. Then his broad face puckered into a network of wrinkles as his wide mouth stretched in a stiff smile and the small eyes snapped. "All right! I go see dis Jingwak an' tell him he mak' beeg mistake; dere ees no devil here."

"Meaning that you're crazy to get those bear paws of yours on his neck and shake the teeth out of him."

"Waal, we got do somet'ing ver' queek!"

"We have, Omar," admitted Stuart. "If I'm licked here, I might as well look for a new job. The company'll never forgive me. Christie knows what the job is here, but he's not satisfied with the small trade this year."

With an impulsive movement Boisvert grasped the hand of the younger man. "We not t'rough yet! Dis summer we go to Pipestone Lake."

CHAPTER IV.

HOW MAKWA LOST HIS EARS.

TWO days later, with the freight boats from Lake Expanse carrying the next year's supplies and trade goods for the little post, came Esau Otchig, whose shoulders had rounded and whose lean face had become creased in the service of the company. Old Esau was a full-blooded Ojibwa. He had served thirty years with Stuart's father and now followed the fortunes of the son. To the Indian, when the supplies were unloaded and the empty freighters had started back on the trail south, Omar related what he had overheard on the beach—how the hunters from the Pipestone country had been kept from trading at Sunset House by the taboo of the shaman, Jingwak.

His wrinkled face as bare of expression as if carved from wood, the

old Indian sucked on his pipe as Omar told his story. For a space Esau was silent, his slitlike eyes on a moccasin; then a gnarled hand removed the pipe while his seamed features faded behind a cloud of smoke.

"Ah-hah!" he muttered, at length. "So dis Jingwak put de devil into Sunset House. Waal, we put de devil into Jingwak."

"Good!" agreed Stuart. "But how?"

Esau's beady eyes met the widening grin of Omar as he answered: "Omar evair tell you w'at happen to Makwa, de beeg shaman at Wolf Rivière, manee long snow back?"

Stuart shook his head. "No. What happened?"

Esau was not to be hurried. Calmly cutting a pipeful from a plug of company niggerhead, he refilled his pipe and lighted it before replying.

"Dis Makwa," he said, "he t'ink he mak' de beeg medecine. He come an' say to de ole man at Wolf Rivière, 'You geeve Makwa, de shaman, flour, tea, trade good, an' you get all 'Jibwa fur. You not geeve Makwa dis, an' free-trader, he get de fur.'"

"What did the Hudson's Bay man say to that?"

The old Indian's eyes snapped with humor. "He don' spik noding; he sen' for Esau."

"What'd you do, Esau?"

Esau puffed for a space, his eyes on his moccasin; then he said: "Makwa, de beeg shaman, mak' medecine no more."

Stuart leaned forward curiously. "You chased him out of the country?"

The old man shook his head. Stuart turned to Omar, who chuckled: "Esau nevaire tell, but Makwa come to Wolf Rivière to trade next tam widout hees ear."

"What! Without his ears?"

"Ah-hah! He no good for shaman after he loose hees ear."

"You mean they were cut off?"

Omar nodded. "Widout dem he was no good to mak' de medecine."

Stuart glanced doubtfully at the sphinxlike Esau, who avoided his look behind the screen of smoke.

"Do you intend to cut off Jingwak's ears, Esau?" he laughed. "That will be some job! They're a wild lot up there in the Pipestone country; they might cut off yours—or worse."

The lean face of the old Ojibwa shaped a cryptic smile as he rose with a grunt and went out to visit the gill nets below the post.

"Do you believe the old rascal actually cut off the medicine man's ears?" Stuart demanded.

"No one know. Esau nevaire tell."

"But the shaman, you say, lost his magic with his ears?"

"Ah-hah! All de 'Jibwa laugh at heem aftair dat."

"Well, I'll say that's a great yarn, anyway. But what do you suppose Esau meant when he said he'd put the devil into Jingwak?"

The half-breed shrugged. "I don' know. De fader of Esau was a shaman, a sorcerer. Esau, mebbe, got frien' among de devil."

His supplies and trade goods properly checked and stowed away against the coming of the Ojibwas for the Christmas trade, Stuart prepared to follow the freight canoes, with his fur from the spring trade, down to Lake Expanse, the headquarters of the district. There he would listen, in silence, while his chief, Andrew Christie, talked deep into the night of the failure of Sunset House to obtain its share of the trade.

Again, as he had in January, when he brought down the fur from the Christmas trade by dog team, he would explain the situation which confronted the struggling little post, opposed by the astute LeBlond and his able assistants. But the stubborn Christie

would shake his gray head and dwell on the disappointment and chagrin which had been his over Stuart's failure. From all the young company men he knew, he had recommended for this important job Jim Stuart, son of the famous James Stuart who for decades had held the trade of the God's Lake country against all comers.

With endless reiteration the stiff-necked inspector would dwell on the cost of building the post and its small yearly returns in fur, while Jim, raging inwardly, endured in silence. And, from the increasing stiffness in the manner of his chief, the discouraged Stuart knew that the end of Sunset House would mean the end of his advancement in the company's service. For a failure is a failure. The fact that he had been chosen to lead a forlorn hope, that Sunset House was doomed from the beginning, would be forgotten. He would have had his chance. If he stayed with the Hudson Bay, they would send him somewhere as assistant to a luckier man.

But the journey to Lake Expanse would consume a fortnight, and the thought of what might await him behind a certain split rock on an island ten miles across the unruffled surface of Mitawangagama led him to postpone his start with Omar.

CHAPTER V.

A RIFLE ON THE HEART.

THE spell of the Northern summer was on—cloudless sky, the dusky, spruce green of the ridges, the cool depths of the translucent lake—as Jim paddled alongshore toward the sturgeon set lines at the outlet, to deceive the sharp eyes which followed his departure from the post. The stem of the light birch-bark nosed a soft ripple along the sleeping shores. To the south the islands hung as if suspended in the clear air.

As his dripping paddle flashed in the sun, from the greenery of a mirrored ridge a doré rose. His golden scales flamed as he turned in air and fell, to start a circle of ever-widening ripples from the broken surface. Far to the south a moose was leisurely crossing from mainland to island. Overhead on lazy wings drifted two Northern ravens, while high in the heavens a dark spot marked where an eagle calmly surveyed a thousand square miles of lake-splashed forest.

One calm night in June, during the spring trade, he had overheard an old squaw on the shore, gazing at its liquid mirror shot with points of light, call it Anagami—the "Lake of Stars." Jim's eyes followed the black timber of the shore, lifting to the shoulders of the ridges, until far in the west it faded into blue haze. Seventy miles of this, he thought bitterly, with lake trout and sturgeon, doré and whitefish for the mere setting of net or line, with moose and caribou and fur in the back country. And in two or three years LeBlond would have it for his own.

Then, with a savage lunge, his paddle tore the water to foam. Across the lake they laughed at the name, Sunset House, did they? So they held the whole Pipestone and Sturgeon River trade by bribing a sorcerer! Well, as Omar said, there were ways of handling a shaman. LeBlond and his men, Paradis and Black Jules, would learn something before the snow fell about the taming of medicine men. Esau was an old hand at that game. He and Omar should have their wish. They should go to the summer camps of the Pipestone Lake Indians—carry the war into the enemies' country. Jim Stuart's future as a fur man was at stake. He'd played fair, but now all rules were off and henceforth there'd be no quarter.

Then his anger cooled as he thought

of the girl whose message he was paddling ten miles to look for at the split rock. A reckless game, this, he admitted. Some day she'd be seen and followed. They might even be caught! Then what? He laughed aloud at the thought. Well, she was worth it—this bewildering daughter of LeBlond. He remembered, with a deep drawing in of the breath, the weight of her in his arms as he took her from the lake, the touch of her hair on his face.

It was midforenoon when the birchbark of Jim Stuart approached the split rock on the stony beach of the island. Stepping from the canoe, Jim's eager eyes searched the bushes behind the rock for the telltale white of the note which she had promised to leave. Then, lying under a small stone, he saw to his surprise a folded sheet, ruled, as if torn from a small notebook. It did not seem like her—this soiled scrap of paper at his feet. Puzzled, he picked it up and read:

This is your first and last warning. Louis LeBlond will see that there are no more love notes here for you. The next time you come for a letter you'll get lead.

The note was written in pencil in an immature hand, and was unsigned.

"Paradis!"

He had followed her canoe at a distance and, finding her note, had left this. And now LeBlond would not allow her out of his sight, would watch her as a lynx watches a rabbit. Jim Stuart had seen the last of the girl who had filled the living room at Sunset House with laughter—whose departure had left him lonely, vaguely restless, puzzled with himself.

Nice dog in the manger, this Paradis! The head man of LeBlond had only run true to form in spying on the girl who laughed at him.

"Get lead, eh, if I come again?" the angered Stuart rasped aloud. "If I could meet Monsieur Paradis here, I'd come to-morrow!"

"Weel to-day do?" From the thick spruce in his rear a voice wheeled Jim in his tracks, as Paradis appeared in the brush back of the canoe, carrying a gun. A few quick steps toward the shore gave LeBlond's man a view of the inside of the canoe. It was empty. Stuart was unarmed. Then, with evident satisfaction, Paradis leered at the man who watched him.

"Well, Monsieur Stuart, here ees Paradis!" he taunted. "You have your weesh. What weel the writer of love notes do about eet?"

"You're a pretty specimen of a man, Paradis," said Jim coolly, refusing to take the situation seriously. "You swing a gun on me, then ask me what I intend to do. Drop that gun and come down here on the beach, if you're not afraid, and I'll show you what I'll do about it."

"Ah, he boasts!" Paradis grinned in derision.

"Well, there's only one way to call a bluff," drawled Jim, studying the bloodshot eyes and flushed face of the man he had knocked off the trail at the Medicine Stone portage and insulted at Sunset House. "You hold the cards. It's your play."

"Yes, it ees my play." As Paradis bent with laughter, Jim edged a yard nearer. "But I have not made up my mind weder to shoot you for de insult you give me, or take you to Louis LeBlond and let you taste de sting of Black Jules' dog whip."

At the fantastic threat the hard-thinking Stuart grinned in derision. But the situation was not humorous. Was this wild-eyed Paradis, fingering the trigger of his rifle, fifteen feet away, unbalanced over the girl—or drunk? Either condition was equally dangerous with that gun.

"Shoot me, eh?" Jim scoffed, sliding a moccasin a foot nearer the man who covered him. "You'd hang, if my man, Omar, didn't get you first;

and they'd run the Northwest Trading Company out of the bush." Then an idea flashed through his active brain as the inflamed eyes of Paradis glared at him. "Take me to LeBlond. It's his daughter. Let him settle it."

"I settle my own affair." The face of Paradis was distorted with passion. Slowly he brought the rifle to his shoulder.

Stuart's heart started with a leap. The man was crazed! He would shoot! With a desperate bound Jim strained to reach the madman—to deflect his aim—but he fell, sprawled in low brush far short of his goal, as Paradis backed away, his gun still covering his enemy.

"Ah!" chuckled the other. "That was worth de blow in de face at Medicine Stone—to see you jump like a frog."

Jim got to his feet, his eyes on the grimacing face behind the rifle barrel. The mad Paradis was playing with him as a fox plays with a wood mouse. But how long would it last? He must get closer—risk being hit, to get that gun. But how?

Lowering the rifle, Paradis said with a chuckle: "Now that I have made you jump, I weel make a leetle hole through your heart, Monsieur Jeem Stuart." Then he raised the rifle and took deliberate aim.

The leveled gun was yards away, with low bush between. It was hopeless. If he rushed, Paradis couldn't miss him. Then, sucking in a deep breath, Jim deliberately folded his arms over his chest, and, taking a desperate chance, challenged:

"All right, I'm ready! Now—right through the heart!"

For a space the black tube covered Jim's chest. His eyes did not waver; but the tensed forearms on his ribs rose and fell with the pounding of his heart.

"Your arm is een de way. De shot weel not be a clean one," muttered Paradis, his finger slowly curling on the trigger.

Jim Stuart's straight gaze held the contorted face behind the black tube sighted on his laboring heart, but doubt chilled him. Had he misjudged his man? Did Paradis, after all, intend to murder him? Slowly, under the strain, the sweat broke from his forehead. Better to take the chances of a rush than to be shot like a spy against a wall. Then, as Jim stiffened for a headlong leap, with a laugh Paradis dropped his gun butt.

"Now we go an' see Louis LeBlond."

Jim let the breath out of his lungs. It had seemed minutes while he looked into that gun muzzle. It had taken all the nerve he had. But it had worked—that trick. Or was Paradis merely baiting him? His fingers bit into the hard palms of his hands with his desire to reach his leering enemy.

"Get into your boat," ordered Paradis. "Take de stern and paddle. If you move, I shoot you for sure!"

Jim did as he was told. Facing him, with the gun in his hands, Paradis squatted in the bow of the boat, and they started along the shallows of the shore.

"You think you are luckee I deed not shoot you, Monsieur Stuart of de Hudson's Bay. But when Louis LeBlond hear you come to meet hees daughter, den you weesh I shoot. Dat beeg dog whip of Jules'—— Ah! I can hear it seeng now. *Crack!* she go on your back!"

The threats of Paradis fell on deaf ears. Jim was not worrying over LeBlond. But he did not relish the humiliation of being brought into the post by the unbalanced Paradis. He pictured the mirth in the eyes of Aurore LeBlond. But as for the jealous and demented Paradis, he almost pitied him. There would be no mercy when she learned how he had spied upon

her movements. And LeBlond? She'd laugh at him, as she did that night at Sunset House.

Beyond the island of the split rock, across a half mile of quiet water, lay another and larger one. As Jim paddled leisurely, ignoring the abuse of the man squatted in the bow, holding the rifle, he wondered whether this strait was visible from LeBlond's place on the mainland.

"Does your majesty desire to pass between the islands?" he broke in on the muttering of Paradis.

"Yes, turn een here," answered the other.

"How far is it?"

"You've been sneaking round dese island for de last t'ree days; you ought to know," sneered the man in the bow.

"But I don't. I've never passed inside the islands—always followed the north shore." And, leaving the island, Jim pushed the canoe briskly out into the deep water of the strait.

"You didn't tell me how far your place is from here," Stuart persisted, with a guileless smile, as the water began to boil behind his paddle.

"T'ree-four mile. Not far. Don't hurry. Louis LeBlond, he weel soon enough teach you to come sneaking round de south shore for de love lettair." Paradis laughed uproariously.

Then, as the man in the bow lurched forward and jerked himself to an upright position, Jim suddenly realized that he was not mad, but drunk.

On his knees, Stuart rapidly drove the light birch-bark out into the strait with his brisk stroke. To the south the timbered shore of the mainland lay unbroken by the post clearing. From LeBlond's the canoe could not be seen!

Then the maple paddle lunged at the water. It returned on the recover for a new stroke, but the hands which grasped it dropped it and seized the gunwales of the boat. With a lurch of his heavy body, Jim rolled the light canoe over as he plunged into the lake.

As the speeding canoe capsized, with a cry the surprised Paradis slid headlong into the water as his rifle exploded. Rising beyond reach of the boat, for an instant he beat the water desperately, then sank. As he rose again to the surface, coughing from swallowed water, Stuart gripped his collar to push the floundering Paradis to the boat; but, frantic with fear, the drowning man flung himself at Jim's neck.

Holding the struggling Paradis away with a stiff left arm, Jim sucked in a deep breath and sank beneath the surface; then, as he rose, struck the gasping man fiercely in the face. The fingers which clutched Stuart's shirt relaxed, and he pushed the half-conscious trader toward the boat, which was floating bottom up.

"Now can you hear that dog whip sing?" he laughed. But the man Jim held beside the overturned canoe was too busy coughing up water to hear—too frightened to answer.

After much exertion Jim got the limp Paradis across the bottom of the overturned boat, recovered his floating paddle—which he wedged under the stern—and started the slow ordeal of pushing the canoe to the shore.

"You're a clever man with the Indians, Paradis; but there're some tricks you don't know," taunted Jim, as he swam beside the boat. "Look out! You'll roll into the lake if you move!" he warned, as the dazed passenger lifted a livid face to the man in the water.

At last they reached the shore, and, wading to the beach with the man who had ambushed him, Jim dropped him none too tenderly. Then, freeing his boat of water, he turned to Paradis, who was slowly recovering from his immersion.

"Now what are you going to tell

LeBlond, when you can walk and are able to find your hidden boat?" he asked of the hiccuping Paradis.

Paradis weakly shook his head.

"You deserve a good North-country beating, my friend, for throwing that gun on me. You might have pulled that trigger. But for spying on Miss Aurore as you did you deserve—— I'll take this."

Stuart suddenly bent over the shivering Paradis, who shrank from the blow he anticipated, and jerked a knife from its sheath on the other's belt.

"Yes," Jim went on, "you deserve getting this between your ribs for following her out here, and I'm goin' to let you have it."

With a black scowl Jim drew back the skinning knife and thrust savagely at the helpless man at his feet. The mottled face of Paradis went white, as he shrank from the blow. But the shining blade stopped inches from his ribs.

"How d'yuh like that, my brave beauty? Not so nice when the other man has the whip hand, eh?"

"Don't! Don't!" whimpered the man on the beach, too weak to move. "I onlee play wid you—I nevaire shoot!"

"Well, the least I can do is to cut a birch whip and give you what you promised I'd get."

But Stuart had had enough of this head man of LeBlond's. The yellowness of spirit of the one who, an hour before, had held a rifle on his heart, disgusted him. And across the lake Omar was waiting.

"Just remember one thing, Paradis," he said, "when you lie about what happened this morning: I didn't let you drown when I had good reason to. From now on, between you and me there'll be war. You've started to put me out of business—you and LeBlond—but before you're through you'll know you've been in a fight. Now go back and tell them a cock-and-bull yarn about what happened to you!"

Turning from the surprised Paradis, Jim stepped into his boat and started for Sunset House. As he passed the split rock, he suddenly swung the canoe with a sweep of his paddle and started furiously back up the shore. Her note? Paradise must have it in his pocket. It could be dried and read.

But when Jim reached the strip of beach where he had left his man, it was empty.

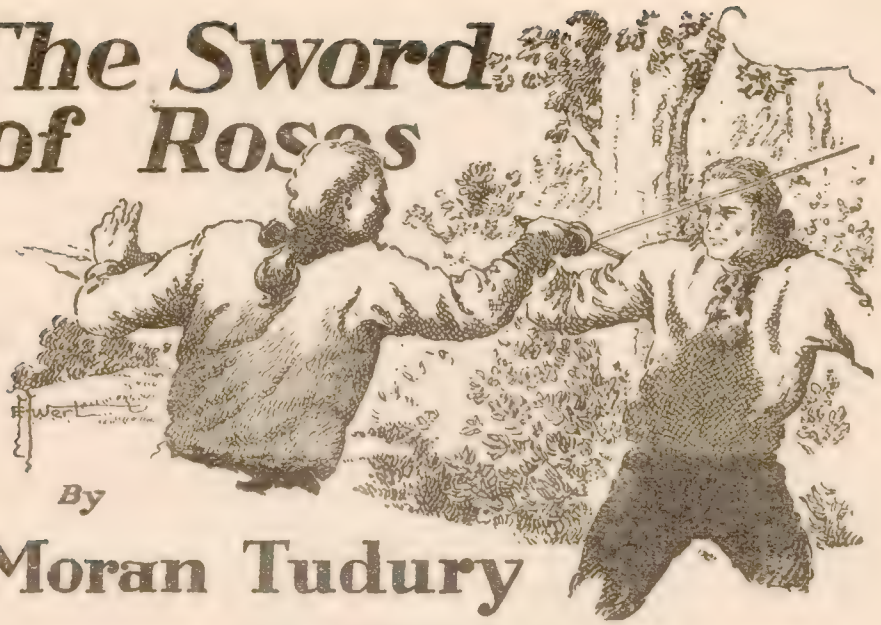
To be continued next week.

ONCE AN EMPIRE, ALWAYS AN EMPIRE

WHEN it comes to putting volumes of history and vastness of territory into a few words, Congressman Joseph J. Mansfield of the Lone Star State is the Prince of Punch and the Pooh-Bah of Brevity. In a speech on the floor of the House of Representatives he wrought the double-barreled miracle thus:

"Texas has paid allegiance to the Bourbons and the Bonapartes, the Hapsburgs and the Montezumas. It has several times been a kingdom, twice an empire, and six times a republic. It has now reached its goal as a king of empires in the greatest republic the world has ever known."

The Sword of Roses



By

Moran Tudury

Author of "The Hero," Etc.

Rodman Harker, disapprovingly known to his fellow Virginians as a "sword-fighter," used his best sword in a quarrel only once.

A COMPLETE STORY

THERE was no malice in the heart of young Rodman Harker that morning that he crossed swords with Beekham, the Williamsburg barrister. There was even a little sadness in his soul as he stripped off his satin coat and waistcoat and, sword in hand, saluted the fellow who had insulted him in a drunken brawl. Young Rodman Harker's whole being seemed to protest at this incongruous use of a brilliant spring morning. But his lips, thin and straight, and his eyes, sharp and keen, showed none of his feelings.

Before him, heavy-eyed and sleepy-looking, was Beekham, the barrister. It required no mental agility to see that already he regretted the drunken impulse that had made him fling a handful of cards into Rodman Harker's face. But there was no backing out now, for the entire Virginia County would know of it within a few hours; and the traditional behavior on the field of honor had been well indicated by English governors.

Rodman Harker's friend stood behind him; and, behind Beekham, the barrister, stood another gentleman. The official placed himself just between. The cartel had been drawn up and inspected. Somewhere out of sight, an embarrassed doctor waited, not to make his appearance until the duel was ended. In these decorous days of 1785, with the tumult of the Revolution behind them, you could never tell what might happen. And it were better that Doctor Parsons would be in a position to testify that he had never laid eyes upon the victor.

"Are you prepared, gentlemen?" the referee asked sharply.

Beekham said "Yes" in a jumpy, unhappy fashion. And Rodman Harker nodded his head thoughtfully.

For one moment their swords went up, parallel with the silk blouses of the two principals, in salute. Then they took position: legs spread, with the right bent forward and the left behind and straightened, the left hand balanced carefully above. One instant, and Rodman Harker was aware only of the sweet smell of the dogwood and wild violets. And then their blades met. From the very start, Harker knew from the feel of his antagonist's wrist that he was nervous, uncertain. He thrust, parried, and thrust again; and he felt ill-concealed excitement run down the length of the barrister's blade. But he bided his time, wishing to throw himself open to no tricks.

Behind them the two seconds were whispering.

"My man will pink yours in a twinkling," Harker's second said cheerfully. "And then we can get home to breakfast. On my soul, I'm hungry!"

The second of Beekham, yawning, shook his head. "The bally thing would never have come off, if that Harker wasn't such a hot-head. Loves to use his sticker, doesn't he? No wonder the whole county talks!"

And that was exactly the situation. It was what had made Rodman Harker, among other reasons, unanxious for the duel. It had made him hesitant even though he had been offered an affront no man could decently pass up. But even past his reluctance to fight had been the desire to do nothing more to add to a reputation that was already well scarred.

"A sword fighter!" was what Williamsburg and Roanoke pronounced coldly. "Enough to make old Colonel Harker turn in his grave! A taproom bully and blusterer!"

And even though Harker knew it was a verdict strengthened by the malice of the victims he had made, he was unhappy. Not for himself alone, but for what his mother would have said, had she been living. So he thanked Heaven on those chill mornings that found him afield, that she did not know—that she slept the untroubled sleep of the just in the little churchyard at Bruton Parish cross.

He seemed to see, this morning, as he felt his sword against that of a blundering, sweating barrister, other things beside the moist, flushed face of the desperate Beekham. He seemed to look past, for a moment, to the deeds, better done, of other Harkers. He could almost see, there in the misty light of early morning, those great portraits that looked down at him from the pleasant house in Canton Hundred—the faces of gallant gentlemen who had done better deeds; of Harry Harker, who had drawn a sword for Scotch Mary; of his own father, who had drawn the same sword against tall, red-coated infantrymen at Valley Forge. There were other Harkers, too, and they had wielded, as had those two, the Sword of Roses.

But this morning that slender, sturdy steely blade was not in Harker hands; and Rodman was glad he had left it home in its case.

"It wouldn't look so well," he thought, bobbing backward as he parried busily, "used against a punch-swilling barrister this morning."

But the thing stuck in his mind—always did; especially when he was called out to fight. The remembrance of the whisperers of Williamsburg and their verdict: "A sword fighter—a dueling bully!" That quiet little headboard in the yard of Bruton Parish Church—that and the gallant sword that lay under glass at Canton Hundred. For a minute he thought hotly:

"Damme, if I handle a sword well,

it's no fault of mine! And if these swine call me out, what the deuce am I to do?" And then he swept it all from his mind as he put his attention sternly to the task at hand.

There was the plump body of Beekham, the barrister, almost shrieking for a pink under the ribs. There he was, hot and perspiring, suddenly no longer the fellow of last night. At that moment, with his life in his hand, he seemed not at all the man who, swimming with arrack punch, had gathered his cards together in one sweep and flung them full into Rodman Harker's face. "Somethin' devilish queer here!" he had cried, his wild eyes on Harker's winnings.

Everybody had risen to his feet in a twinkling. And Rodman, himself, was standing there, flushed but icily cold as he said softly: "You're a swine, naturally, Beekham. Shouldn't soil my hands on you, but——"

"Damme, sir!" the reeling barrister roared. "My friend will wait on yours to-night!"

There had been a rush of soothing, hurried voices. A crowd pushed Beekham into a corner and tried to talk to him, while a couple of men turned their placating efforts to Rodman himself. But he merely shrugged.

"I was wrong, naturally, to sit at table with the fellow, in the first place. But he's asked for it."

"Christopher!" somebody broke in. "You'll get no honor or glory out of fighting that baby, Harker!"

And that, thinking about it now, was what made him maddest of all. He had wanted neither glory nor honor duels—had asked only for a peaceful evening at cards. But without egotism, he knew the idea: It had almost become a fad to brag of an encounter with Rodman Harker; and Beekham was no better than the rest. But the thing had been done; drunk and roaring, the barrister refused to withdraw his remark. And that was why they were here this morning.

For a moment Rodman Harker seemed to recollect the previous night, when, home at last, he was left wondering. He had gone to the glass case and lifted gently out a well-remembered sword.

"It's my honor, of course," he had told himself, musing beneath the weird flicker of the tall yellow tapers. "And the Sword of Roses was used for that sort of thing, once upon a time." It had been, undoubtedly; well he recalled the family legend of a queen who had dropped a bouquet of roses down its upright blade. But then the bleary-eyed face of Beekham, the barrister, came up before him; and suddenly, tightening his lips, he replaced the sword in its case. "Not exactly honor, either," he decided grimly, and went slowly up to bed.

Now, thrusting and parrying almost idly with the frightened lawyer before him, he was gladder than ever that he had left the Sword of Roses to its hallowed legends. He was almost smiling as he forced his man back, step by step, and beheld the beads of sweat upon Beekham's brow. The fellow, his courage gone with his strength, was foamy about the lips, and a rat's fear stood up in his eyes. His hand was trembling as he blurted out:

"Do me, whyn't you? You can do it now!"

There was a murmur of protest from the seconds. It was against the code for one of the principals to open his lips.

But Rodman Harker nodded deprecatingly to them and said gently:

"He's done, gentlemen. I'll pink him in a hurry!"

He saw the panic in Beekham's face —sickened at the sight of it, bit his lip. He sensed, also, the gathering tension in the bearing of the men who looked on. Well, the fellow had in-

sulted him, hadn't he? He'd brought it all on himself.

"Serves him right, if I run him through now," Harker muttered.

Thrust and parry, thrust and parry; slowly he beat the other blade back. Deftly he swung his wrist in the short arc of play; cunningly he insinuated the blade inside the other's guard. A minute—no sound of anything but the tearing breaths of the doomed swordsman. And then Harker's point went in.

"Touch!" cried some one behind them.

Harker lowered his weapon. He knew just what manner of touch it was, and he tossed his sword aside almost in disgust, as he walked away. He was aware of the voices behind him.

"Only a scratch!" Beekham's second yelled in surprise. "On the hand—and barely blood, at that!"

There was a murmur, and Harker's own second assisted him into his things. "Beekham's ashamed as he can be, Rodman," he said hurriedly. "Says you might have run him through the body and yet were satisfied simply to touch him——" The look of displeasure on the other's face stopped him.

"I'm a little sick," Harker muttered. "Such a nasty business, I mean."

Then he hurried off to where his mare was waiting, the boy at the stirrup. As he started to climb into the saddle he caught sight of the good Doctor Parsons hastening up.

"No hurry," Rodman yelled at him. "All he needs is a bit of sticking plaster."

Doctor Parsons protested: "You shouldn't have let me see you, sir! If I'm called to testify, I'll have to admit ——" he gulped. "Damned improper!"

"Fiddlesticks!" Harker muttered to himself, giving the mare its head. He had spent a whole morning adding, against his will, bad odor to an already indifferent reputation. How Williamsburg would talk about him now—dueling with the great lawyer, Beekham. He spat in disgust; and suddenly, as he thought how near he had come to making use of an old, hallowed sword, he winced.

"The Sword of Roses," he told himself slowly. "For such a business as this!" He shook his head. "Some day, perhaps, but on the field of honor." He was still frowning as he turned homeward.

Now the spring morning that left the barrister Beekham with merely a scratch on his right hand instead of a sword thrust through his fat body should have left him with a lesson well learned. He should, in brief, have piloted for himself thereafter an exceedingly well-ordered course.

But, while he had undoubtedly had his fill of sword play, he had not yet learned his entire lesson, and his mind, exactly three days after his duel with Rodman Harker, was tolerably busy. He inspected horseflesh, his narrow little pig eyes batting up and down thoughtfully, and he discussed heat records for the county. And as he laid his plans, and fly after fly fell into his web, he was chuckling. But most of all did he laugh when one day he came unexpectedly to the person of young Howard Cameron.

"Beef—prime and rare," he told himself, chuckling, rubbing his hands comfortably together. And as he dropped little hints to the young man who sat opposite him in the Dominion Arms, he saw that things indeed went well.

"A horse runs one way, d' ye see?" said Lawyer Beekham. "And this one —this High-fly—will run but once. She's too fast for these county nags. But once is enough, for those who know."

The weak mouth of the good-looking boy before him twitched nervously. "It may be that I could raise a few pounds——"

"As many as you please," Beekham said briskly. "Monday High-fly goes through her heats. And the other un will never breast her."

That was all; but it was enough to bring a bright, eager light in the boy's eyes.

Thus, twice within three days, the barrister Beekham had elevated himself to the ranks of his betters—once in a duel and now, this last time, in a horse race. And in the latter he seemed headed for infinitely greater success. For young Howard Cameron, with his high forehead and impetuous mouth, was easy plucking. He was what they called a young blade—the high-bred sort who would fight with a sword or bet on a horse or a cock fight, with equal ardor—even if, in the latter case, the means were lacking.

And, in Howard Cameron's case, they were. For everybody in Williamsburg knew that Lucy Cameron and her brother Howard were not only orphans, but—that which was even more lamentable—in straitened circumstances. A father who had lost a family fortune at cards had passed on a gamester's blood to his son. Williamsburg saw it in a young girl's simple clothes and a run-down plantation, burned out as much by human dissipation as the fire in too-continual tobacco planting. There, in Williamsburg, they talked almost as much about young Howard Cameron's gambling as they did about Rodman Harker's dueling.

When Howard Cameron left Beekham, he carried home with him the tale of a horse that couldn't lose and money to be made for the taking of a chance. His sister saw it in his face the minute he stepped into the house, and her blue eyes were suddenly frightened.

"You've been gambling again, Howard," she said softly. She was a slim, thin little figure whose pride had hardened the young face, and whose fears for her brother had straightened what should have been a full, fresh mouth. Still, Williamsburg liked to see Lucy Cameron on the streets, lifting her long skirts out of the dirt. Sometimes they even forgot a younger brother with a weak, impetuous mouth, when they saw her instead.

But Howard Cameron at this moment was hardly, himself, pleased at sight of her.

"I'm no baby," he said with all the harshness of twenty-one. "If I choose to play like a gentleman——"

"But you haven't the money of one," the girl said quickly.

He raised his chin haughtily. "Don't be too certain of that, Lucy. I've quite a little money of my own, remember——"

"But you wouldn't touch that, Howard!" she interrupted in terror. "Mother left it to see you through the university. You haven't forgotten——" There was a choking horror in her throat.

But the boy merely raised a sullen head and went quickly up the long curve of the well staircase. Down below, her limp hands resting on the soft, smooth tip-and-turn table, Lucy Cameron stood dazedly. She had forgiven much in her brother—cards; even a couple of duels that luckily ended without serious consequences. She realized, even as people said, that Howard Cameron had inherited a gambling weakness from his father.

But she knew, also, that somewhere in the youngster was a little spark of something finer. She had seen it come out sometimes when she played for him on the harpsichord. She felt quite safe, then, and sure of him. But now he was thinking of gambling again; she could see that much. And the

mention of the money that his mother had bequeathed him for the express purpose of taking a lawyer's degree at the university——

Suddenly she was aware of a wave of sickness passing over her. "The only thing we've got to keep before us," she told herself dully. "The thing that would make him good and true. We were going to do things with the house——"

Her mind ran onto the little improvements they were going to make on the run-down plantation after Howard Cameron was a successful lawyer and prosperous. Like Rodman Harker on a spring morning in a field, she thought of her mother. She seemed, as he had done, to feel the need of holding fast to an ideal, of standing true to a trust. As Rodman Harker also had done, she felt disgust. But she also felt desperation and panic welling up inside of her.

Dully she listened, that night at dinner, as the blockhead of a boy babbled on: "Mr. Beekham knows the horse—that it can't lose. Betting on him, himself—giving me a chance to double my money. When I win, we won't have to wait until I become a rich lawyer, Lucy; we'll be able to fix the old place up now." And all the time the slim girl, with the trembling lips, heard him through a haze, saw him through a mist of tears.

Once she seemed to hear the word "honor"—as Rodman Harker had. And that night when she crept between the four great posts of the old Chippendale bedstead, there was a deep determination in her heart. "Some way, somehow," Lucy Cameron told herself, "I'll save him from himself, the young idiot!" But she fell asleep trying to solve the way.

The first time Rodman Harker met Lucy Cameron—it was the fourth night after his row with Beekham—he knew at last to what extremes Williamsburg had gone to give him a hard name. He saw it in a young girl's blue eyes—the faintest suggestion of horror. But there was a wondering light there, also, as the girl gazed upon the tall, slender man with his hair tied in a simple ribbon behind, his plum-colored coat and breeches as unostentatious. But, unaware of her second reaction, Harker merely grinned sadly. He nodded casually toward the crowded ballroom.

"Don't tell me you think I'm as bad as they do," he begged unhappily. And he saw, from the sudden rise of color in her pale cheeks, that he had really guessed her thoughts.

"I didn't——" she began; and then she stopped. If she had been an ordinary young woman, she would have stopped right there. But lately Lucy Cameron's trouble with her younger brother had made her look things in the eye. "What I mean," she went on quietly, "is that you don't seem much like the Rodman Harker I've always heard about."

Something in the man's ordinarily cold eyes warmed. He bent lower. "Couldn't we walk a bit somewhere?" He smiled as he spoke.

She got up obediently, and they strolled into the music room. Behind them an orchestra of violins was tuning up in the little gallery; ladies swung the long fans through a mist of powder; portly gentlemen argued in loud voices about the French loan and General Washington. But Rodman resolutely closed the door behind them, aware that the girl had gone to the harpsichord and was running her thin, quick fingers over the keys like the flight of white doves.

She played "The Ladies' Frolick," for him, and "Hob in the Well." She looked up to murmur apologetically, "They're old songs," but the man, standing with his arms folded, leaning

against the instrument, scarcely heard her. Once, indeed, he looked up as her soft voice sang:

"A rose for you, my dear,
I bring it filled with dew;
Give it but for you,
A love of yesteryear——"

For one minute, there beneath the quiet yellow flood of the candles, Rodman Harker seemed to see himself, see them both, in a queer light of detachment. He saw himself, the last shred of a dying age—a day that had seen Virginia at a riotous peak when young men fought with the sword, or even the small sword, and visiting Creoles even with the machete. It had been an age of silks and satins, with coaches decorated with cupids, negro boys running to open carriage doors. All at once he felt lonely, seemed to see why Williamsburg, drawing away from the old traditions, labeled him a bully and a taproom fighter. Something in his uneasiness attracted the girl, and she raised her wrists from the keyboard.

"There's something on your mind," she pronounced distinctly. "You have some kind of trouble——"

Rodman Harker laughed quietly. "We all have them. Even you, now, I'll bet——" And a minute later, as her face suddenly went white, he halted, stammering apologies. "I didn't know——"

"It doesn't matter," she began uncertainly, but her eyes were filled with tears. For a minute she looked away, and then, as his voice said gently, "If I could help——" she turned back to him.

There was almost an air of defiance in her bearing now. "Perhaps you could help," she said, nerving herself to it. "After all, I do know what Williamsburg says of you—what the whole county says. But you're a man, and you ought to be familiar with this sort of thing." And the next minute she was pouring out her whole miserable little story—of the money left by a dead mother to make her boy a gentleman, and of Howard Cameron, who was going to wager on a horse which couldn't lose.

When she had finished, Harker nodded thoughtfully. "It does beat the devil how the young uns will cut up," he commented slowly. "He's been in a couple of duels, too, hasn't he—like I have?" He was smiling; but the girl was not.

"Gambling and duels," she said, shuddering. "Twice I've prayed when he went off with my father's sword. It's a silly pride with him—and he uses a sword very badly. Some day he may be hurt. It would kill me, because in spite of everything, he's really decent. All he needs is a lesson; and now he's going to get it—by losing everything he has in the world."

For a little while they were silent. Then Harker said: "Of course, Beekham will fleece him. I know the horse High-fly. He'll never win Monday. I've watched Beekham before, and I know his game. He'll get a lot of idiots to back High-fly until the odds are with him; then he'll bet on the other horse—and High-fly will lose. Beekham will see to that, all right; High-fly is *his* horse." He shook his head.

The girl was staring wide-eyed at his words. "If there was something I could do to save Howard—one little thing!" Then she gazed wistfully at her folded hands.

Harker looked quietly down at her. "I owe Beekham something," he told her with a grin. "Once he dragged me into a duel; and, you see, I hate that sort of thing, no matter what people say."

"But I had thought——" she began; then she halted. And suddenly, looking into his frank brown eyes, she thought she saw the truth. It brought a rush of color to her cheeks. And

she listened eagerly while he told her of his own little troubles, about the Sword of Roses and everything. When he had finished, she was radiant.

"I've always heard of you," she said softly. "You've always seemed like a sort of Dick Turpin to me; I never did quite believe all the terrible things people said of you. And now I know I was right."

He said, "Thank you," simply; and he was waiting as the girl turned toward him again—gazed at him with a strange light in her eyes. She recovered her poise quickly; but in that instant Rodman Harker had seen something he had never seen before in a woman's eyes. And he reached over and touched her hand gently.

"Perhaps I can help—about your brother, I mean," he said slowly.

"If you only could——" She was almost whispering now. But suddenly, as she drew her hand away, she faced him bravely. "And with yourself, too—about the fighting, I mean. I don't know just what has happened to-night; but——"

"I understand," the man answered so softly that she scarcely heard the words. "I won't forget."

"Promise?" Lucy Cameron said, looking full into his eyes.

Something seemed to leap up inside of Rodman Harker, but he restrained himself to merely press her hand faintly. "I do," he replied. "I'll never touch a man with my sword again."

From somewhere came the busy flutter of the violins, and he led the girl back to the ballroom floor. But Rodman Harker's mind, for the moment, was elsewhere—on the solving of Lucy Cameron's problem, on Howard Cameron about to throw away his life's prospects, on the barrister, Beekham. And, oddly enough, his mind left the three subjects to wander speculatively to a fourth—the Sword of Roses.

The news, the day before the race between High-fly and Minette, that Rodman Harker was to fight another duel, raised Williamsburg in an uproar. It was not so much that Harker was fighting himself again as it was the identity of his opponent. It was that which took the whole town by the ears. That night people forgot the horse race on the morrow, forgot everything except the duel. And as its significance spread over the community, people were shaking their heads.

"It'll be nothing less than murder!" they protested; and that is exactly what it seemed.

The thing had happened earlier in the evening, when the Dominion Arms was filled to overflowing with men. But it had happened so unexpectedly that even the men who were playing cards with young Howard Cameron scarcely realized what was taking place. "Like a lightning flash," they confessed afterward.

One minute, and young Howard Cameron sat playing cards at a table in the center of the taproom. And, to be honest about it, the boy was behaving himself very well. Playing his cards thoughtfully, drawing now and again on his long clay pipe, he seemed the very picture of inoffensiveness. But that was not the impression he conveyed a moment later.

For, suddenly, looking up, the crowd saw that Rodman Harker had come in, bending over here and there to speak with other players. And almost deliberately he seemed to wander toward the table where young Howard Cameron was playing. Certainly he seemed deliberate as he abruptly brushed against the youngster's elbow and knocked the cards from his hand. But Harker was all unconcern as he passed on.

Howard Cameron, startled, cursed softly, bending to pick up the fallen cards. And, casting a disgruntled

glance at the man who had caused the mishap, he called:

"Damned careless of you, Harker; you might have apologized!"

Like a flash the other man turned. There was a cold look in his eyes.

"A man apologizes only to a man," he said evenly. "You've no business here, anyhow." And he started to pass on.

But Howard Cameron needed no incentive from the startled countenances of the other players at his table. He rose immediately to his feet and, crossing over, spun his aggressor around. "Your manners are frightful!" he snapped. "Now I insist upon an apology." And he slapped his fingertips suddenly across Rodman Harker's face.

Instantly every man in the place was on his feet, all eyes turned upon the two figures in the middle of the floor. Then everybody heard Rodman Harker say with paniful clearness:

"You've asked for it, haven't you? I will wait for you at Shepherd's Meadow to-morrow morning." He bowed, yawned, and strolled out, leaving a babble of voices behind him.

Now it was not until two hours later that Lucy Cameron had the news. It was dark by the time that, pale and trembling, she covered her head with a hood and hurried through the streets until she came to an old house in Canton Hundred. But at her first knock, Rodman Harker himself was at the door. And when she refused his invitation to come in, he walked out on the moonlit veranda.

"How could you?" the girl began scornfully. "And after you said you'd help me!" He felt her scorn like a living thing. "You even promised me you'd never touch another man with your sword. And the next I hear of you is that you're to fight with my own brother!"

He was silent, his face white even in the moonlight, his chin sunk on his chest. Once he started to speak, but he checked himself. "Perhaps you don't understand," he began at last. "Perhaps——"

"I understand perfectly!" she said sharply. "You're just what people have always said you were—a cheap sword fighter. You're like a mad dog ——" Her voice trailed impotently away. "I've come to ask you," she began again, when she had recovered, "not to fight my brother. I've told you he doesn't know how to use a sword. And if anything happens to him——"

"It's quite impossible," Harker said stiffly. "After that blow he gave me before all those people——" He halted, and once again there came over his face a look of pain. But he faced her doggedly, and at last the girl saw it was useless.

She turned away, but her voice reached him like the stab of a fierce knife. "If anything happens to him, it'll kill me," she said brokenly, "and I'll loathe you to my last breath."

"Lucy——" he began, and then he checked himself again.

She was gone at last; and when he stood alone in the moonlight, Rodman Harker's face was a study. "Poor child," he whispered. Then he roused himself, went indoors and stood before a glass case. And very gently he drew out an old sword. "Once," he murmured softly, "I thought I'd never use this. But now it looks as if I might—in an affair of honor." He ran his fingers caressingly, almost reverently, over the strong, clean blade. His face held a queer smile.

They were a queer, silent company that rolled out to Shepherd's Meadow that morning in the public stage. On one side of the coach sat Rodman Harker and his friend; on the other sat young Howard Cameron and his own second. Despite the proprieties of the

occasion, Harker seemed inclined to conversation, talking cheerfully. But there was no friendliness in young Cameron's dogged gaze; his thoughts were over his mind like a heavy shadow.

In the youngster's coat pocket were notes to the amount of five hundred pounds—all that his mother had left him with which to begin a well-ordered career. And by ten o'clock, if he lived through his duel with the composed figure opposite, he would be at the race course, wagering it all on High-fly. For himself, young Howard Cameron felt sulky and ill-used. In deciding to bet his patrimony on a horse race, he did not feel he was committing a breach of honor. Soothed by Beekham's assurances, he saw only an opportunity to get in on a good thing—to double his money, perhaps buy some little fineries for Lucy, and invest the rest wisely.

"But what can you do with a woman?" he thought crossly, squirming under the jolting of the coach. "She doesn't understand; she can't know as much about these things as a man does." And his young face was overcast.

The duel, he realized, was a damned, awkward thing. It might be that by the time the next stage—the nine thirty-one—arrived, he would no longer be able to put in an appearance at the race course. That was the whole thing in a nutshell.

"I've got to finish with this Harker by the time that next stage passes Shepherd's Meadow," he told himself. "If I don't catch that coach, I'll never reach the course in time to lay my money."

He suppressed a groan, knowing full well that he was to cross swords with a master. He wished, all at once, that he had placed his money in town. It would have been difficult; but then Lucy would have had his winnings, at any rate. So thought young Howard Cameron, puzzling over his little pseudotragedy.

But he was roused by a movement from Rodman Harker. The man suddenly stood up, stuck his head out of the window of the coach and bawled up to the driver: "I must get out a bit!" Then he turned to the other occupants. "I must beg your indulgence for a few minutes. Go on, and I'll join you directly." Then he got out of the coach, and they saw him disappear into a clump of woodland.

"Queer!" muttered Howard Cameron's second. "Not quite a proper thing to do at this time. But we'll wait for him at the meadow." Then the stage rattled on, twenty minutes later depositing three men at Shepherd's Meadow, and disappeared down the road.

Minute after minute passed, and Howard Cameron, glancing at his watch, saw already that the hands pointed to eight thirty. Restlessly he paced back and forth under the trees, aware that his second had laid out his sword, and that Harker's man was idly smoking his pipe by a fence rail. The inaction fretted the youngster; he chafed visibly. But there was still an hour before the race-course coach passed by, and, if he came through the duel all right, he could make the track in time to lay his wager on High-fly. Still, time dragged on. He began to swear to himself. His second called impatiently to Harker's friend:

"I can't have my man kept this way, like a waiting servant, Blair!" The second's tone was sharp. "The whole thing is damned improper, upon my soul!"

The other was apologetic. "Can't understand what Mr. Harker was up to. I must throw myself upon your generosity." He bowed politely.

And then, finally, at exactly nine o'clock, Rodman Harker turned a cor-

ner of the road and came up. He was distressed, humble. "I ask your pardon for my delay," he said regretfully; "but it was unavoidable." Hastily he cast off coat and waistcoat and waited in his silk blouse and breeches. In his hand was a long, shining blade; and as his second saw it, he whistled.

"The Sword of Roses!" he exclaimed softly.

And Rodman Harker, for his second's ears alone, murmured: "I have never used it before, but somehow I felt that this day needed it." There was a queer glint in his eyes; and it made the other man wonder.

So, once again, Rodman Harker stood in a sunlit field with a sword in his right hand. Once again he raised it in salute, taking his position, held a long blade to an opponent. It seemed to him, that morning, that there were gallant ghosts behind him under the warm spring sun—that other Harkers, who had done good deeds, had their eyes upon him. For one fleeting instant he seemed to hear his promise to a young girl: "I'll never touch a man with my sword again"; for one moment the same girl's scornful cry: "You're just what people have always said you were—a cheap sword fighter! You're like a mad dog——"

And then the voice seemed to trail away in the sunshine, and Rodman Harker was left with a serene soul. For in his hands, at last, was the sword of his fathers, and for once he knew he was using it as they had used it—even if Lucy Cameron couldn't understand. It seemed like an eager, live thing in his grasp, and it met young Howard Cameron's blade briskly.

From the very beginning, Rodman Harker knew that his work was cut out for him—that in handling Howard Cameron he would have his hands full. For the boy, despite his crudeness and inexperienced wristwork, was as strong as a young bull. And he was stubborn and determined as he fought his fight, foot by foot. They thrust, parried, thrust again, and still Cameron held his weapon steady and confident. Behind the younger man's sword play was more than mere sense of self-preservation. His mind, in fact, was upon that public coach which would pass the meadow at nine thirty and which offered him his last chance to reach the race course in time to lay his money.

It made him vigorous, aggressive; and for a time Rodman Harker, for all his skill, was put to it to fend him off. But always Harker fought like a master, and there was something about the feel of the sword in his hands that brought out the best in him. Forward, backward, one, two—over and over, Rodman Harker went through his pace. Fiercely Cameron shot his lunges, eager and greedy; but all the while gallantly the older man rode out the storm. He was fencing as he had never fenced before, bringing into play everything that he had ever learned in a long line of such encounters. It seemed as if Fate had trained Rodman Harker in such tricks for this one fight alone; and stiffly he held his own.

Once it seemed, indeed, as if the very force of the youngster's onrushes—his mere brute strength—would beat its way past Rodman Harker's guard. And on such occasions the boy's eyes were wild with excitement, and his sword was relentlessly seeking the other man. But then Harker was there, thrusting, parrying, working back and forth, bending and straightening his legs, lunging with all he had. Time and again he beat off the fury of Howard Cameron's attack. It seemed scarcely possible that the thing could go on, so terrific was the pace; but on it went, the younger man thrusting in wild fury, the older meeting each wrist turn with the cool mechanics of a veteran.

Once it seemed to Mr. Blair, Har-

ker's second, that something queer was happening. And as the conviction stole over him, his eyes suddenly narrowed strangely. "Odd," he was muttering to himself. "It can't be possible." He fastened his eyes more closely upon those two quick figures that went forward and back with the mad rhythm of puppets on a string.

Howard Cameron had spent his rushes now, and all at once there were beads of agonized sweat on his brow, and his breath came in tearing, panting gulps. Terror had come into his young eyes; they watched Rodman Harker like a trapped sparrow waiting the strike of a coiled snake. But all the while, smoothly as a dancing master at work, Rodman Harker thrust, parried, spun his sword point and went his cool, calculating way. Once, indeed, it seemed as if he would hit his mark as he loosed a sudden rush of thrusts, driving his opponent back a half dozen feet. Then he had slackened, as if from effort, and Howard Cameron gathered himself in hand.

Somewhere down the road the race-course coach was thundering on, and it must have been in young Howard Cameron's mind. But no longer was it his main concern, or the desire to catch it his sole determination. Because now, in the spring sunshine, he was looking into the jaws of death; and it seemed to beckon to him in the endless, relentless stabbing of a point of steel. He was almost hypnotized by that steady jabbing and thrusting that seemed, over and over, to reach hungrily out for his body; he was in a clammy panic at the chill light in the eyes that looked down the long blade.

"Jerusalem!" Mr. Blair muttered, wiping his brow in a gesture of nervousness. And Howard Cameron's second was white to his lips.

Now it seemed at last that the moment had come for Rodman Harker to strike. Mr. Blair, who had attended his friend upon other occasions, appeared to sense the approach of the psychological instant. Harker had wearied his opponent, met his whirlwind rushes, spent him with a faultless defense. And now the time has arrived for the master to take his victim. The impressionable Mr. Blair found himself suddenly aware of a feeling of nausea; he had the unnerving sensation of a man being compelled to look upon a slaughter. He knew now why men called Rodman Harker the sword fighter; why Williamsburg had shuddered over his name. For behind the suave face, the cool hand, was the relentlessness of death itself—and Mr. Blair shivered even in the sunshine.

For a minute Rodman Harker, his face as expressionless as a mask, drove his man back, step by step. Then, all at once there seemed a strained attitude in his bearing, as if he were listening for something. And at last he appeared to be rewarded, for up the road the race-course coach came thundering, to halt, then go on again. But young Howard Cameron looked not to the highway now, rested his mind upon nothing except the destiny he read in a merciless steel point. There came a sudden rush upon the part of Rodman Harker, a beating movement that drove Cameron almost to his knees—then something happened.

Abruptly Rodman Harker's sword caught that of his opponent just before the hilt, and with a sudden twist sent it spinning through the air. Cameron's second made a rush for it, already conscious that it was bent and useless, and Howard Cameron, unarmed, stood before a waiting sword.

Rodman Harker raised his sword, lowered it with an expressionless face. There was a dreadful look of terror in Howard Cameron's eyes. And then Rodman Harker had sighed softly, dropped his point to the ground. For a minute he stood silent, no sound cut-

ting the quietude of the meadow except the far-off thunder of the disappearing coach on its way to the race course. Then the victor pressed his hilt gently and whispered something. Once again his eyes sought out the cloud of dust down the road that removed Howard Cameron's last chance to reach the race course in time to lay his wager. Then a strange smile crept over Harker's face.

"The Sword of Roses," he whispered softly. He held it out to the startled Mr. Blair. "Here, take it, sir; it's done the thing!"

Then he walked very slowly away, aware that somebody was cursing in astonishment, and that young Howard Cameron was sobbing quietly.

It was dark within the quiet white house of Canton Hundred when Rodman Harker stood thoughtfully before a glass case, gazing down on the sword that lay inside. It was so dark that he scarcely realized that somewhere a negro servant was on his way to answer a timid knock at the door. It was so dark, in fact, that had he not been just in the act of lighting a taper a minute later, he would never have seen Lucy Cameron at all. But, as it was, he did see her; and he started back in surprise as she came into the wavering yellow radius of the candle.

"I had to come," the girl began hurriedly. "I had to tell you that I knew now why you did it."

He bowed gravely. "It was an old sword, my dear; and, you see, I have never used it to a good purpose before."

"I couldn't have known," she said, reddening. "I couldn't have known that it was your way of saving Howard from himself. But I know now; and I know, too, that it was the only thing in the world that kept him from reaching the race course in time to lose his money. He knows it now, all right. Later, he's coming to take your hand."

Rodman Harker laughed softly. "Fiddlesticks!" he said quietly. "He knows now that High-fly lost—that's the main thing. And Beekham lost your brother's five hundred pounds. There's reward enough in that for everybody." He paused to look down in the little corsage of white roses pinned to her waist.

"And you did keep your promise," the girl went on, flushing. "Because you didn't touch him with your sword. But I couldn't have known that, either, could I?" She watched him gently lift the glass case and draw out the old sword.

"Of course not," he told her solemnly. "And I didn't dare tell you. If I had, you might have refused to let me risk my worthless neck in a fight in which I was only going to fight halfway. At least, I flattered myself to that extent." He smiled queerly in the yellow glow of the candle, aware that she was very close at his side. He held the sword up gravely. "Once, my child, a queen covered that sword with roses. It meant a great deal to a dead and buried Harker, I fancy."

Then, suddenly, she had unpinned the corsage of white roses from her waist. In one hand she held the little bouquet; with the other, she began, very seriously, to pluck white rose petals, sticking them one by one upon the strong point of the steel blade. "Look," she said, smiling at last, "there are *still* roses."

And the man, covering her hand with his own, said softly: "And this time it means just as much to another Harker—even if he isn't dead and buried." He bent over gently, and in the sudden stir in the air, the candle flickered dangerously. And there was no sound then but its cheerful flutter.

Another story by Moran Tudury will appear in an early issue.

By
Will Beale

When the Gods Go Mad

Author of "Seeds of Glory," Etc.

A thoroughly hard-boiled sea captain and a little Chinese girl whose spirit was sorely tried between East and West.

A COMPLETE STORY

SHANG-HA-I! And gnarled beliefs that are older than suns, and shrill passions of the blood that yet yield to gods made from dust, and dank seepage from tradition that strangles even—love.

And the Bund, and the river, and the Café Chang Yung; with the first scene set for the staging of all.

As lord of a high "eating-house," Chang Yung was all artist. He catered to appetites of the body, nor disregarded appetites of the soul.

In Chang's place was wealth; in Chang's place was mystery; chiefly in Chang's place was beauty, although lying frozen in tradition mysterious and unrevealed—like a ceremonial dancer—dead—in masque. The grills and chests of teakwood wore their marvelous carving as though mute from the passing of ages. Red lacquer gleamed here and there, like scarlet heart's blood fused upon ivory. There was an impressive wealth of Ming; and a lightening touch in scrolls and lanterns.

Almost always, pandering to a certain type of American, or perhaps French, entertainment, there was hidden but palpable incense, stirring stuff which seized upon one where the eye left off.

For the rest, Chang's place yielded wonderful food.

At a table by an idol sat Beede Larkin, captain of the tramp *Neponset,* out of New England, U. S. A. Dark, powerful, overly secure for China, he smashed every tradition about him. He was dressed in the manner of a man who might have been uncertain as to

just what would be required of him in a place like Chang Yung's, and so had met convention ponderously—in heavy blue clothes, almost a uniform. Many watched the man, covertly.

At a table near the door a party of three, shipping-office men from the Bund, were just now listening to the fourth, who happened to be the *Neponset's* mate. The mate was drinking. And he was saying, evidently of the man Larkin:

"Yes, he exercises about the same attraction as a black panther in a cage, and he's about as human inside. We happen to hail from the same section, and I know. His father is a saintly little old Methodist minister. Larkin has always been rotten to him. And a girl in our town, Sharon Day, the finest woman God ever made, has been waiting a lifetime for Larkin to come to. He's been rottener still to her."

The mate glanced furtively across to the man by the idol.

"This is his first trip to Shanghai," he went on. "The last day or so before we made port I couldn't help watching him. From his record on our own coast, Maine, there are particular reasons why he might steer clear of Shanghai forever—that is, if he ever had any fears, which isn't likely, or any religions or superstitions, which couldn't be possible."

The mate raised his *mee tsu,* strong rice gin, and drank with gusto.

"Perhaps I'm talking too much, but—— A young man eight or ten years ago, he was making a big dollar smuggling Chinamen in from Canada by landing them on the Maine coast. On one occasion he was negotiating a bunch of five or six, these originally out of Shanghai, and the immigration men got wind of it." The mate stopped dead. His eyes went shut. "Knowing officers to be planted all along shore and with a revenue cutter at his heels, Larkin coolly ran in behind an island and disposed of his cargo by the simple expedient of anchoring the whole outfit to the bottom—with a rock from the ballast around the neck of each."

"My Lord!" one of his hearers cried.

"Story was that some got away. At any rate, one of the bunch seemed to have a son among the anchored. In China, as you know, sons come before everything, and this father broke away and went berserk. A boatman told long after that he got Larkin in one hand with a knife—one finger *is* gone—and in return Larkin shot part of his face away. The boatman swore that this man *did* get away."

Something had happened. Swift silence settled in the place. A new beauty, a living, piercing beauty of life, of youth, of vivid color, had drifted in among the tables: the "singsong" girls of the craftsman, Chang Yung. Brilliant as tiny spurts of flame among the ancient symbols of China, they fled about in little, quivering flights, humming-bird creatures in vermilion, and sapphire, and beautiful jade; and one, a fragile little ivory-skinned creature of great child's eyes and carmine lips, was in petal white.

This one, Shui Sen—Small White Lily—flitted about uncertainly, poising, darting. The other girls had alighted beside men—here, there, everywhere. Small White Lily alone fared free. And for her there was the table of the mate and men, or there was the stolid, detached Beede Larkin under the unimpassioned Kwan Yin, Goddess of Mercy. And to Beede Larkin drifted little Shui Sen like a tiny, white flame.

At his table by the door the mate groaned concernedly. "Poor little wretch! Larkin's had one of his hell-spells for two days."

From here on the story is little Shui Sen's. The mate passes, his party passes, as do all the precepts of far-off America and worlds equally new. From

here the story is Shui Sen's and Beede Larkin's and—one other's. And it is a story told in Shanghai from the Shanghai Club to the Russian quarter, far along the Yangtze and in the islands of the sea, with occasional seepage into, even, America.

Shui Sen crept close to the big unyielding figure of the man in the blue clothes, her eyes deep with uneasy fear, her little body shivering ceaselessly. She cuddled close, as Chang Yung paid her to do, lisping tremulously a little song of limpid throat notes and sibilant labials to the sugary twanging of her *sam yen*.

Slowly, Larkin's eyes went almost shut. He was knowing something very new. He was knowing, first of all, a scent of lilies, coming from a living warmth near his side. Then that trembling warmth seemed stealing all through him, seemed melting things of unmoved fixity in him, calm and lifelong, by its very helplessness.

Beede Larkin had suffered the approaches of many women: creatures of devious knowledge, of great confidence; toy-women; and great amazons from the hinterlands of the social order. But never before had he known this timorous approach, this trustful helplessness. It appealed to deep-buried springs among the rocks of the man's nature, limpid rills of sweetness, of chivalry, which lie at the roots of every man's soul. True, about these springs prowled impulses predatory and rapacious, but these he drove back.

And very soon, without turning his head or missing a whiff of his cigar, he slipped one big blue-clad arm about the tiny nestling creature, pressed close—and, strangely, felt all her tremor cease.

And now Shui Sen became suddenly the *artiste*. Aside from her employer's Shanghai dollars, she wanted to please in her own right. Like a quaint little thrush she sang, and at her song now many a table about them turned gleefully rapturous. She sang, all innocently enough, in a strange little English:

"There are eyes of gray, there are eyes of brown;
But, oh, you black-an'-blu-u-ues!"

Before the broadside of delighted glances, the instant applause, Larkin's face burned a dull red. But his stolid glance never wavered, and his arm remained.

"Where learn song?" he asked, after a moment.

"At party, French Concession. Shui Sen sing. Nice Amellican boy say, 'Jass-it-up-kid!' and teach Shui Sen eyes song. He say velly nice song!"

Larkin grunted. He wanted, oddly enough, to wring that nice Amellican boy's neck. To cover his lack of appreciation, he indicated with his free hand one of the near-by black scrolls printed in red, the strange, dusky scroll-red that might have been the lifeblood of all the wisdoms.

"What say on scrolls?" he asked, in clumsy subterfuge.

He felt the little body stiffen in interest. The dark, child's eyes came up to his, wonderingly.

"Say nice things—allee same Mister Confucius. "Say," she pronounced slowly, reverently, " 'One great duty all chillen to honor parent.' Say, 'Velly nice tleasure of heaven ready for one-piece good son, one-piece good daughter.' Say, 'Who wrongs my father I would not live in same heaven with him.' "

In Larkin's mind, as she recited, had flashed a picture moving and somber, holding naught of Chang Yung's, naught of Shui Sen, naught, even, of China. It was a vision of a little white-haired man, propounding the pure truths of life in a lean little wooden church at the side of a rocky road. The vision corroded; and Larkin flashed at it venomously with a flick of his will

and wiped it out. It was by far more worth while to savor all these new sensations now rife through him.

Marching on through all his body, from the little creature snuggled in the hollow of his arm, moved a warmth and a glow that burned on persistently through flesh and bone and pulse and brain; on, it seemed, straight to the region of his heart. And the prowling creatures of his senses stood aloof, peering askance. Larkin scratched a match and summoned China anew.

Again and again Shui Sen sang her quaint little scraps of Chinese lore, until at length one of Chang Yung's boys spoke to her gutturally in Chinese. And in a moment Shui Sen was leaving Larkin's table—wistfully, it seemed—and another boy was at Larkin's elbow, obsequiously humble, with the bill for his dinner.

As Larkin prepared to go, he fastened strangely burning eyes on the uncertain little songstress.

"Don't forget me," he commanded. "For I'll be coming back."

She looked up at him smilingly, a little child-woman of wistful appeal. And in Larkin, at that moment, the rapacious creatures leaped. With a great, powerful movement he swept the little creature up to stand on the table, and all the room saw his arms go round the slim little body.

It was all but a flash. Straight, Chang Yung himself and one of his men were at Larkin's side obsequiously protesting that the singsong girls of Chang Yung's were not for client's whim or barter, but were jewels of inordinate virtue, et cetera, and that such displays had no place in the life of China.

Larkin's face became deeply red; confused, perchance, but far from humble.

"Then I'm going to teach China a few tricks at life she's never learned!" he cried. And with one big arm he flung both men aside.

It was a brave American pronouncement. But above his head the Goddess of Mercy might have frowned.

Now the shop of Pang Fu, seller of herbs—Pang Fu, who was the father of Shui Sen—was located in the Street of Everlasting Peace, jammed in tight between a dealer in brasses and a purveyor of *chow*. It was a good little shop, run by a "boy"—for reasons. Pang himself was rarely seen of men. And although you could not trace it, there seemed an odd Occidental touch about the shop, as though at some time its proprietor might have glimpsed the New World, at least long enough to have marked modern methods. An upper story was the domain of Shui Sen, and out back was a courtyard—a high-walled little place, clean and sweet among teeming courtyards of every sanitary temperament.

Here, among its mattings, its plants, its great jars of stored ginger and pickled turnips, one found, almost always, Pang Fu. And when one looked upon Pang Fu, then the courtyard and shop, in fact every conscious impression save a deep, bruising feel of China, passed on out. For Pang Fu's face might have been the face of the God of Torture. Full half of it appeared to have been shot away. There was but one practical eye.

And so we have hemmed-in courtyard, God of Torture, and a tiny singing bird in a cage against the wall.

Shui Sen came out of the house. It was toward the end of the day and sounds of busy activity had been stealing constantly out into the courtyard from the open doorway. Shui Sen was entertaining Captain Beede Larkin.

"The feast is ready, O my father," the girl said deferentially to the man smoking beneath the wall. "Come and see."

Pang Fu's one practical eye came up to the face of Shui Sen, a jewel of

smoldering strangeness. It held odd facets of emotion; tenderness seemed struggling with apprehension—aye, with something deeper still, something born of China. For behold his daughter, as was sometimes permitted a singsong girl, was making feast, for an American, and in his house. And while he had not forbidden Shui Sen, there were things in Pang's life that cried out at thought of Americans.

Inside, the little room back of the shop was unwontedly gay. There was a regular table, set for two, American style. There were flowers, blossoming shrubs of spring, and many white lilies. There were lanterns and scrolls and much that was China; but there were also cups with handles, a supremely Yankee smoking set, and across one wall a large blue-and-white pennant that veritably shouted "Yale"! This last was a gift of distinction to Shui Sen from a young and bibulous American at a more-or-less-diplomatic party on an American ship.

Pang Fu turned upon his daughter a face holding somber lights among its grim wreckage.

"In all this, be not led adrift from the claims of thy people, O Shui Sen. Life is at a strange time in China. The young of China are beginning to scorn the traditions of their fathers, and are reaching out greedily for the new and garish in the world. But when it comes to mingling the thing of race, the gods —the gods go mad!"

Perhaps something of that same groping for the new stirred in the breast of Shui Sen. She ventured daringly, modernly:

"But the gods know naught of what the Americans call *'love,'* O my father!" She tried to smile.

"Before this *'love'* of the Americans, before all things of life, comes filial duty." He quoted: "'A child must forgo every other duty, even to government and self, to first yield duty to his parents.' Such is China, O Shui Sen. Have you forgotten?"

The lanterns and the joss and the scrolls seemed reverent in the silence, but the blue pennant of Yale rippled across the wall flippantly, like an easy, disrespectful laugh.

Some one entered the front shop. Pang Fu glided out into the rear shadows like a phantom.

Yong, the boy, was ushering in Beede Larkin. Shui Sen stood by the table, still and white, but her heart was working an odd design of her emotions. In three weeks the man had seen her much. His constant presence rocked the racial things within her; his great clumsy tenderness melted her.

Larkin carried a bundle. One moment his eyes took in the flowers, the smoking set, grappled with that laconic pennant of blue. Then, with a man's brusque carelessness that masks softer sentiment, he said: "Here, kid," and passed her the bundle.

Shui Sen removed gossamer wrappings with the peering eagerness of a child.

"Ah-h-h—h!" she cried in keenest rapture.

A robe was Larkin's offering—a robe that was gold embroidery where it wasn't white satin, with here and there a crimson petal like drops of blood.

Shui Sen stood, a rapt little goddess of ecstasy, holding yet an odd apprehension. A white robe was her country's funeral robe, but this she was certain Larkin would not know.

"For Shui Sen?" she queried.

And Beede answered, "For Shui Sen."

The girl's eyes upon his face, now, stabbed deep into things well underneath the surface in Larkin. He evaded them. He turned to the table.

"Do we eat?" he asked almost gruffly.

And now Shui Sen was all the little hostess. She clapped her hands sharply and gave to Yong, the boy, the order

for dinner in her purest pidgin—for was she not a hostess American, giving one-piece dinner to her American lord?

Of that dinner the Street of Everlasting Peace learned later, when the story of little Shui Sen and the big American, related in grave undertones, began its travels.

The boy Yong brought in soup—not the piquant soup of strange inflections evolved of China, but soup made from smoked pork and dried peas, such as might have been served in a New England tavern, U. S. A.

True, the next course—fish—was sweet-pickled *willo* fish, for not in all Shanghai could Yong find any fish truly American. But then came a beefsteak—unheard-of in a Chinese home—an opulent, juicy beefsteak. And the meal ended with an apple pie such as was served in the Boston Eating House on the Bund. Apple pie, no less.

The food, with pungent wine, sated Beede Larkin, in a way; and, in a way, lifted appetite, all appetite, to a notch still higher. It seemed now that the little toy-creature opposite was the one thing of a lifetime desired beyond all else, and the one thing he felt vaguely he might not take. His blood moved faster. Here, in this house, he felt sunk, bound hand and foot, in China. And, overstrong from the wine, he wanted to wrench himself free, wanted to smash into China, destructively, and upon it work his will.

With a swift movement he grasped the girl's wrist. "Come over here!" In it was a humility, and a repulsive grossness.

But she resisted. And there was a sort of hurt regret in her eyes.

"No can do," she pleaded gently. "Shui Sen not singsong girl now." She essayed a little smile. "Shui Sen Mast' Cappin's—how you say?—hostess."

"Does that matter?"—surlily.

"Yes. Besides"—the eyes in his were now the eyes of an earnest woman—"Shui Sen much wantchee *like* Amellican man."

Here, Yong the boy stole in like a shadow to busy himself about the dishes, and Larkin sat back.

Within, his blood was simmering.

He sat watching the little child-woman sipping tea from a tiny bowl. And suddenly tenderness soothed him like a loving hand. Inside, she was his very slave, and he knew it. And, looking at her, a great pang of unutterable hunger tore through Larkin, stabbing hot like an undulating creese.

"Listen here, little girl!" he began abruptly. "Master Cappin go soon down Gong Chow, catchee one-piece Mellican vessel take to Boston. Master Cappin wantchee Shui Sen go longside—Gong Chow."

Shui Sen stared at him from out great eyes in which vague pain was growing—the shadow of looming farewell.

"No can do, master." The woman now overshadowed the child in the delicate face.

"But listen here!" Larkin's earnestness annihilated pidgin. "I'm leaving China, do you understand? I'll never see you again. And you've got me, somehow! I—I want you!" His hand had gone across the table and clutched hers again hungrily.

Shui Sen's eyes were devouring his rugged face longingly. She a child of China lavishing every adoration upon the altar of strange gods. Suddenly she withdrew her hand and left the table. She picked up her *sam yen* and began to sing. And now no eating-house song this. The girl now was a mime, a little oracle of big things holding a certain tragic fire.

Perhaps it was then that Beede Larkin first became conscious of China, conscious of the fact that he was coping with it. The feeling disturbed him.

"What say in song?" he demanded, when she stopped.

"Shui Sen sing stoly of Mo Lan——" And through the inadequacy of the girl's pidgin Larkin saw it—one of the background traditions of old China, setting forth the eternal duty of a child to a parent. Mo Lan was the daughter of an old-time general, to whom came an imperial order to put down a rebellion in his own province. The general was now too old for warfare, and his sons too young. "So Mo Lan put on father's uniform, win much great battle, and all gods velly pleased——"

A strange interruption! From the doorway behind Larkin had come a quick, low sound, like a gasp of keenest agony. Glancing swiftly, Shui Sen saw her father's face leave Larkin's and vanish outward. In another moment, Yong, the boy, was beside Larkin offering his hat obsequiously. And a bit confused at what he considered custom, Larkin rose to go.

"I want you to think over what I have said about Gong Chow," he said to Shui Sen. "I'm coming back to-morrow."

Larkin went out.

And two minutes later the gods of China had drawn very close to the little Shui Sen, had drawn very close and were plundering her soul. Her father, Pang Fu, had entered the room, and Pang Fu's horrible relic of a face seemed now the God of Torture in very truth, its usually impassive mien a volcano of ignited emotions.

"I have told you of old, my daughter," he began, "how years ago in America one man destroyed the house of Pang Fu and wrecked his life." He pointed with a shaking finger. "He who has left us is the man!"

"Ah-h—hh!" a soaring little uplift of sharpest misery from the little white creature against the wall. *"Ah-h—hh!"* again, in a shriller pitch and with a whimpering note upon it. And that was all.

Pang Fu spoke on, and somewhere in its shattered ruin his face held a great dignity, a fatalism, a profound acknowledgment of the justice that comes to all men who trust and wait. And it was then that the gods of China drew close to the small Shui Sen, hemming her about so that there was no escape, until she saw herself a helpless instrument in their hands. And at length she knew her father to be saying:

"I heard you sing of Mo Lan, my daughter. Pang Fu himself has no sons. Shui Sen must be his son and lift the debt upon his life. In this hour the gods have decreed it. And woe to the one who makes mock of the gods!"

Through all that night, in her little apartment over the shop, Shui Sen wrestled with destiny, with revelation, with *life*. Early had she made overtures to Kwan Yin, Goddess of Mercy. She had placed a lotus bloom before the little shrine in the corner, and she had burned incense sticks—three, for very especial luck—and she had prostrated herself long and pleaded:

"O most sweet and gracious Kwan Yin, give heed to Shui Sen, who has become of one heart with a man the gods would have her to destroy." And so, all night.

At the coming of dawn she crept down to the courtyard. Her father smoked in the shadows. He had been there all night. Like a pale little ghost Shui Sen stood before him.

"Shuit Sen is ready, O my father." And at Pang Fu's grunt of acquiescence she went on, with strange questionings: "The city of Gong Chow, is it not on the river Foo Tsu?"

"Ai. Where Foo Tsu makes the sea."

"And besides the journey down coast by sea may not one come to Gong Chow also by canal—in a house boat, perchance?"

"Yes, my daughter. And then one comes out on the river inland, back from the city."

There was deep silence. Then, "And is it not time for the great tidal bore that comes in upon the Foo Tsu in the spring?" asked Shui Shen.

Fu reckoned silently. "At the full of this moon, two days. But why such questions, my daughter?"

"That later, my father, when I have come for your help." Shui Sen was gone, back to her Goddess of Mercy.

Before he had shaved, that morning, Beede Larkin received a message. The boy Yong stood humbly before him.

"Missee Shui Sen send honorable compliment. Will go Gong Chow longside Master Cappin. For Master Cappin Shui Sen catchee one-piece house boat, one-piece cook, two coolie all leddy go to-mollow by daybreak down canal. Master Cappin be ready?"

Oh, glorious lay the moon upon the face of China! A great, golden searcher, it wrested hill and flat and jagged waterway from far-fleeing distances. Relentlessly it dragged forth time marks from the secret places of the night: towering pagoda and age-beaten gateway. Dim gray temples it marked in the dusky hills, their tiled roofs gleaming dully. Near the coast it marked forth a narrow, steep-walled river opening in from off the sea—marked it and brooded upon it speculatively. It marked a quaint little house boat on that narrow, golden river—and love therein.

Beede Larkin stood by the rail on the upper deck staring curiously about him in the mellow light that seemed bright as day. A while back they had glided out from a canal into the smooth stretches of a river that was to take them down to Gong Chow on the coast—a back-door entrance, as it were. With nightfall the river had run on into a country somewhat broken and uneven; and now, with the coast but a mile or more ahead, the river was a dim defile of mystery running between steep, wooded hills mounting inaccessibly on either side.

The day to Beede Larkin would always stand forth, supremely detached. In the semidarkness of early morning they had set out, disentangling themselves from the Shanghai shipping with such skill as he had never thought possible. In charge of the boat, as No. 1 boy, was the boy Yong, of Shui Sen's house; and he in turn had with him a pair of coolies to help manage the boat, and another, more skillful, to run the gasoline engine.

Day broke upon them like the opening of a brilliant celestial flower. At breakfast Shui Sen had been a veritable little vestal of heart's delight. Her face had been painted a little too white, Larkin thought, until later he discovered that it had not been painted at all. And the boy Yong seemed ever in evidence, like a slipping shadow. But the service had been perfect.

All day the canal had been a silver ribbon of interest, with its sampans and endless tows, its rice fields smeared with the patchy green of new rice shoots, its villages like the haunts of marsh fowl.

All day, by turns, had Larkin been the man of great tenderness and the potential destroyer. And in the night ahead——

Something happened. A stir, as of mighty life, seemed to come in the night about the man by the rail. It might have been a passing vertigo from oversmoking, but it had seemed to Larkin that the entire house boat had swayed upward for a slow instant, as though lifted on mighty rising wings.

Strange!

Larkin moved forward and glanced down. Ah, these damned chinks! They were no longer moving about down below, and he recalled now having been conscious that the engine had been stopped for some time. The house boat

was still headed downstream, apparently anchored out astern.

Strange!

Something touched his arm. He turned and all strangeness vanished. Shui Sen, a little vision of celestial radiance, stood a-shimmer in the moonlight. She had come forth from the deck house arrayed in the glittering marvel of Larkin's robe. Its sumptuous golden dragon seemed clashing sturdily with the moonlight, its crimson petals drifting in little flurries like drabbles of blood from the dragon's claws.

In a mad unleashing of every restraint Beede snatched at the girl hungrily. A tense moment she lay in his arms, white and mute, and suffering now his caresses uncontested. Then the stillness, heavy, awesome, stole in even upon the captain's fervor and he loosened Shui Sen.

He indicated the river. "Why are we stopped?"

The little creature gazed up at him with great solemn eyes, and it struck Larkin that he had never seen her so deathly white. Her lips stung, sharply red, upon the whiteness. In the moonlight she was weirdly beautiful.

"No go farther to-night," she said softly.

"But why? We must be nearly out upon the coast." Larkin passed to the rail and glanced down upon the deserted-looking craft. "Where boy?" he asked. "Where coolie?"

Shui Sen had not moved. "Boy go ashore. Coolie go ashore—in boat."

"But what took them ashore?"

Very still the little figure stood. "No. 1 boy, coolie boy, come back blime bye." She faked her reply of the emptiness of her ingenuity and Larkin knew it. And she was afraid. Larkin knew that also.

"Yes. But I don't like this," he responded. "I'm going to see what's doing. This gorge isn't a very cheerful place to spend the night."

A couple of strides and he was halted. Shui Sen had dropped before him, a glittering little pillar of silk and gold, and was clutching his knees, her face buried. One single, amazing moment and her face was turned back to the one towering above it. "Oh, Mast' Cappin, Shui Sen send all boy away. Shui Sen want be longside cappin-man—for be alone with cappin-man—for make love!" No matter what other emotions lived in the big dark eyes, love now outstripped all.

And Larkin caught her up in his arms, a trailing richness of silk and gold. And his mounting impulses of a moment ago came back. And he forgot all else.

But a veering mood possessed the girl. As the man's face came down to hers, she shook herself free violently and struggled down. A swift, uncertain moment, and, like a child eager to please: "Wantchee Shui Sen sing?" she queried.

Larkin lit a cigar with agitated fingers and watched. The little songstress was infinitely touching in the moonlight. In her stoic face and dramatic pose lay the moving pathos of a little child engaged in simulating tragedy.

Larkin couldn't stand it. "What say?" he demanded abruptly.

She hesitated. Then, as though awakening, she said: "Shui Sen sings of Mo Lan, the daughter of a gen——"

"Yes. I know. But don't—not to-night. Do something—oh, cheerfuller—happier"—confusedly.

She cast aside the *sam yen,* came to the man and kissed him tenderly and caressed his face. Then, although her eyes seemed all a-glitter as with strange tears: "All light! Shui Sen dance! Shui Sen jazz-it-up-kid!" she announced.

And Shui Sen danced. And the mind of her onlooker sensed great things living on that deck—in the moonlight. In the frail child's body

seemed to be fused the life-yearnings of all humanity. There were staid posturing and sharp handclaps of old China; there were swift turns, an occasional pirouette, bright steps of modern dance halls. All the races of the world seemed dancing wantonly in Shui Sen in that hour, as though all life and youth and love were defying oblivion.

Again Larkin leaped to attention. Again had come that sensation of vast giddiness, now terrifically real. The house boat *did* soar upward loftily; the mighty, lifting wings had taken on vast strength. And glancing sharply over the side Larkin watched a great smooth progress, like a single satiny wave, go sweeping mightily up the river in the moonlight.

He strode past the little dancer of a moment ago huddled white against the rail, and leaped down the companionway to the lower deck. He was encountering something new to him, and that he should look to the status of his craft was as instinctive as breath. He bent over the bows to estimate the water. And, unmistakably now, he sensed the close presence of China, weird, eternally alien; the eyes of the house boat, built into all Chinese craft so as to see the way, were covered as against disaster. The thing chilled him.

Lightly he ran aft. The anchor was immovable. And the hawser was of wire cable interminably spliced to its ringbolt. He made for the little engine, hoping to break out the anchor. A swift inspection showed him that the engine was neatly dismantled, the cylinder head removed—gone.

A moment he stared about, at the moon-silvered river, at the unscalable walls of rock on either side, at the helpless, tethered house boat.

And then he was back on the upper deck. The small singsong girl from the Street of Everlasting Peace stood motionless, a shrinking lily in a calyx of gold.

"What's doing?" Beede Larkin demanded, icily cold.

And in a moment a quivering little voice made reply: "China's doing, and the father of Shui Sen, and—and one great piecee love!"

"What do you mean? Tell me, quick!"

He glanced suddenly away, listening intently. From far down river in the direction of the coast came a roaring scarce louder than the roaring of the blood in one's ears—a sound like the incessant plundering of surf. About the pair the night was quick with mystery —with dread.

Larkin wheeled. "Speak! Quick!" he cried out. "What *is* all this?" And he gestured with a three-fingered hand.

"All is lis: We all live allee same like we are taught to live, Mast' Cappin and Shui Sen. China teach evely li'l' boy, li'l' girl, w'en born, to honor and obey parent. So Mo Lan' daughter great general; so Shui Sen, daughter Pang Fu. No lil' baby escape China. All gods say, 'So do!'"

The dark eyes stole up to Larkin's own, filled with things deeper than mere life.

"And now, Shui Sen goin' hurt Mast' Cappin velly bad." A swift intake of breath. "Shui Sen's father go Amellica long go with only son, for make business in Amellica, so bime-bye he send get wife and li'l' Shui Sen." Straight and deadly direct ran the tale. "And Mast' Cappin let young son drown, and shoot Father Pang Fu, and Pang Fu say, and China say, 'Shui Sen must make duty and revenge parent before Shui Sen can love.'" A halt here while swimming moisture came in the little oracle's eyes. "Shui Sen make duty as China gods say, but—ah! gods never knew—*love!*"

The black, brooding face of the man shot about. From down river that roaring in the night was rushing up toward the house boat in uproar appall-

ing. And from close beside him on a still little voice came revelation:

"Tidal wave of River Foo Tsu!"

Larkin leaped into the deck house. He had never noted the scarcity of all things movable. He ripped into every concealment. Not a single life preserver! Not a stick for a life raft!

He raced on deck—and stood stilled in the one profound instant of all existence. Up that watercourse in the delicate sheeny moonlight death came stalking—broadly, superbly, burdened with great terror. Came a wide, towering wall of water moving majestically and free, a laconic green wall of satiny progress, devouring in its course a myriad reflected stars, dismembering the moon into distorted smears, curling and hissing along its uppermost crest!

Even in that moment Larkin knew himself filled with the girl, and the wonder of it pierced through his homage to death. She was gone. He rushed about. He shouted her name.

In a hidden corner Shui Sen was standing with the sole life preserver, that had been prepared for her herself, slung about her body. The cries reached her and she ripped the thing off. One timid instant she delayed, traitorous before her gods. Then swiftly she crossed herself, as she knew girls had been taught in one of the missions, and she prayed:

"Oh, most honorable Christian God, Shui Sen makes herself most polite before Thee and humbly begs Thee to exonerate her for what she does to all the gods of China."

She sprang forth. The bore had burst on outreaching rocks below and was tearing along upon them in hell unspeakable. The girl hurled the life preserver at the frantic man.

"Shui Sen get another!" she lied, and darted back.

She stood in concealment watching him put it on.

She was standing there when the house boat stood on end.

Dawn.

Larkin crawled back into life via a long drag from the river's edge. He left a trail in the mud like the passing of a worm.

Later, he began searching the shore. He came upon Shui Sen farther out upon the point where the house boat had exploded into foolish wreckage. Great things lived in her face—oh, lovelier than the mind of man could fathom! Such as it was, she had done her duty to life, and she had *loved*—truly. But perhaps it was the sight of one little bare foot that broke down the man's high heart—he had never seen a little child's foot bare before. Anyhow, then, he knew—a great many things.

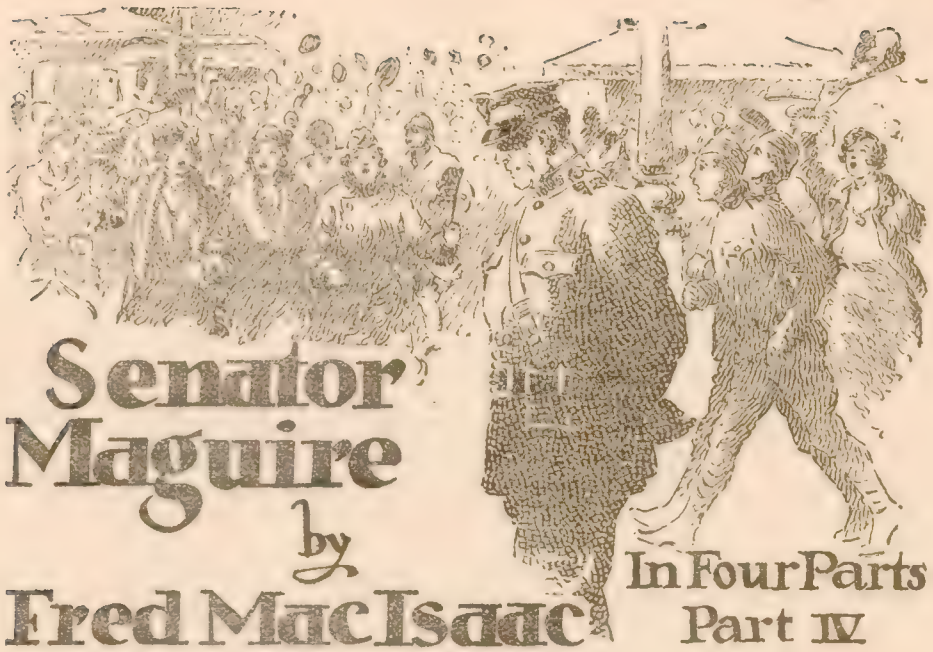
Two days later, in a temple village down the river, Beede Larkin managed wonderful rites for Shui Sen; with many lovely gifts and flowers, many prayer papers, much hopefulness and beauty. And in that village with Shui Sen he left much that had been Beede Larkin.

Then he came on down to Gong Chow. And the first thing he did was to write a letter. It was addressed to the Reverend Ezekiel Larkin, Babylon, Maine, U. S. A., and it read:

DEAR FATHER: I am coming home to see you. I know now I have never learned life. Will you help me? And I know now I have never learned love. Will you ask Sharon to help me? Respectfully,

BEEDE.

Will Beale will contribute another story soon.



Senator Maguire

by

Fred MacIsaac

In Four Parts

Part IV

Author of "The Golden Leaf," Etc.

Paris, when the Armistice was signed. Hilarious pandemonium! And one dejected figure, Colonel Maguire. But he was not to remain so for long, because the Future waited for him smilingly, ready to crown him with laurel.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TEMPTATION OF ST. ANTHONY.

LATER in the day he found a square envelope in his letter box addressed in an attractive feminine hand. It thrilled him—though he did not know why—and he carried it to his room before he opened it. The contents surprised and thrilled him more. They were as follows:

DEAR MR. MAGUIRE: I have heard that you have come to Washington as a member of the new Congress, and I would like to see and talk with you again. Won't you drop in to-morrow afternoon about five, or next afternoon at the same time? I have such pleasant memories of Benton.

FRANCES FAUSETT NASH.

Her address was a fashionable apartment hotel. Johnny read the courteous, informal note several times. So she remembered him. Even though she was married, she had not forgotten and wanted to see him again.

Should he go? She was a married woman, and he was in love with her. Since Johnny had had slight social experience, the orthodox Ward One views of matrimony controlled him. When a girl married she said good-by to her men friends forever. If they called on her they would be apt to be ejected by a jealous husband. Still, he had never been more than a slight acquaintance of Frances Fausett's, and there would probably be a lot of people there—an afternoon tea or something of the sort.

It would be silly to refuse to go, it might offend her, and her kindness in inviting him was so obvious. Of course he would go—but he hoped he would not have to meet her husband. The

man whom Frances Fausett loved—no, Johnny did not want to meet him and have to be polite to him.

The remainder of that day and the next were very long; the talk in the House seemed interminable and utterly useless, the jokes in the cloakroom inane. He got away from the capital early and made the most careful toilet of his career. He had always hated a high hat and he compromised on a soft, gray one; but he wore a cutaway coat, and gloves, and when he entered the hotel and asked to be announced to Mrs. Nash, he was as well dressed and rather better looking than most afternoon tea guests.

A colored maid admitted him to the apartment. Frances was sitting beside an open fire in a charmingly furnished room—alone. She rose and gave him her rare smile. She seemed quite unchanged—the exquisite and stately girl of his recollection with an added beauty so far as he could see.

"Congressman Maguire," she said rather archly, "it is an honor to have a statesman enter my lowly home."

"Come, now," he laughed. "I've been here long enough to find out that congressmen don't mean any more to your Washington folks than common councilmen in Benton. It certainly was fine of you to ask me. I heard you were married, and I did hope you were going to be very happy. I can tell by looking at you that you are."

"Sit down, Johnny," she smiled, and then caught herself up. "I called you Johnny, for the first time. It's because everybody did in Benton; and now that I am a married woman I feel privileged."

"I loved to hear it from you," he uttered. "For the first time it sounds like a nice name. I hope you will not stop calling me Johnny."

"It depends on how you behave," she said lightly. "Now I want you to tell me all about Benton. I've seen Harold, but not since my marriage. And Helen has promised to visit me for a few weeks this spring. How do you like being in the House of Representatives?"

"Like a boy who has been sent back to school. The speaker is the teacher and the rest of us have to be good children. I felt like a great man when I took the train from Benton, but I am a pygmy now like all the rest of them."

"There are a few score men in the House and Senate who are tremenously powerful," she explained. "If you stay long enough you are sure to be one of them, because you have a way with you. But in the meantime you are a schoolboy, as you say."

"Wasn't it a bit sudden, your marriage? I saw nothing about an engagement and then I read a wedding notice."

"You wouldn't be apt to see anything about me in the Benton papers. I wonder they carried the wedding announcement."

"They didn't," he confessed, coloring. "You see, I subscribed to a Washington paper after you left, and I used to read the social notes, so I knew somewhat of what you were doing."

Her eyes were soft as she gazed at him. "Poor boy," she was thinking, "he must have cared a lot for me." Aloud she said:

"It was sudden. I had not known my husband long and he rather carried me off my feet. We became engaged and married in a few days."

"I would not have supposed you could be carried off your feet," he said gravely. To himself he was saying: "Why didn't I try to make love to her? Perhaps I might have succeeded." Curiously enough, Frances was thinking exactly the same thing. It was her turn to color as she answered him:

"You can't tell what any woman will do. But let's not talk about my husband."

"Am I to meet Mr. Nash this afternoon?"

"Not this time. He is in New York on business. I'm going to give you some tea."

Johnny had a feeling that it was rather wrong to be calling on Frances when her husband was away; but he was so happy just to see her and hear her speak, to watch her graceful gestures as she received the tea things from her maid and poured for him in a tiny cup, that he stifled that feeling and gave himself up to the pleasure of the moment.

"It's the first time I have given you tea. Do you take lemon or sugar?"

"Either—both—I don't know."

She laughed lightly.

"Then I'll prescribe for you: one lump of sugar and a thin slice of lemon floating on top. Come get it."

He rose, crossed the room, took the cup and saucer with beating heart, returned to his chair and balanced them clumsily on his knee.

"So you don't think a young married woman should receive men friends in the absence of her husband," she said shrewdly.

He blushed furiously.

"Why—what—how did you know what I was thinking?"

"My dear Johnny, you are so obvious. Please don't be alarmed. It is not our custom in Washington to enter a harem when we marry. I expect to go to dinner and theater with my friends when my husband is not about, and he expects me to. On the other hand, I do not object to his having the same liberty."

"Then what's the use of being married if you can take an interest in any other man, or if he can be interested in any other woman?"

"That is a question which has often been discussed and never settled. In our set, husband and wife return from their honeymoon ready and rather eager to resume their friendly relations with the men and women they know."

"I don't know but it's a good idea," he admitted. "Most of the married couples I am acquainted with never talk to people of the opposite sex, but they get terribly bored with each other."

"Certainly. If my husband should return and find you having tea alone with me, you don't imagine he would be in the least jealous?"

"If I were your husband and I found you talking with another man, I should be insanely jealous, I am afraid."

"Then it's a very good thing I never married you," she said. She caught his eye as she said it, looked at him bravely for a second and then dropped her eyes. She felt herself flushing and grew angry because she could not control herself better. The truth was that Frances was afraid of Johnny, or, rather, afraid of herself with him; that was why she had fled from Benton. And now that she was a married woman of several months' standing, she had felt that she could allow herself the pleasure of seeing him, now and then, without harm.

"I think if you loved me enough to marry me, you would be satisfied with my exclusive society," he affirmed.

"But I didn't, my dear, so I am privileged to enjoy all my friends."

"That is my good fortune."

"And if you are a nice boy and drop in often, you'll meet a lot of attractive girl friends of mine."

"I am not interested in girls."

"They will be interested in you. Really, you are much too fine a man, too good looking and too prosperous to be a bachelor. I must make a match for you."

He looked distressed.

"Please don't talk like that."

She rose and crossed the room to him.

"All right, Johnny, I won't. And do you know, since I have seen you again, I am sorry I left Benton when I did. You must go now. I have a dinner engagement and must dress."

"Good-by," he said simply, rising and holding out his hand.

"Not good-by, but au revoir. You are going to take me to dinner and theater often during the winter, I hope."

"It's good-by, Mrs. Nash."

Frances looked hurt. Her eyes fluttered, the lines of her pretty mouth drooped.

"If you say so. But why?"

"You know why. You may be able to amuse yourself with me, but you must know how I feel about you, have felt since the first time I met you. I couldn't be meeting you casually, escorting you about, without doing something that would make you hate me. I don't understand your way of living. If a man loves a woman he either marries her, or he keeps away from her if she marries some one else. There is no middle ground."

She gave him her hand.

"I'm sorry. I was selfish. If you feel differently at any time, come back to see me. Good-by."

He turned to go. She followed him to the door.

"Johnny," she said, with velvet softness, "Johnny, you may kiss me, just once."

The boy turned to her, gazed into her great glowing eyes and seemed to eat her beautiful, flowerlike face. Then he choked a sob.

"Frances, I can't kiss you! Why did you marry this fellow if you liked me enough for that?"

He opened the door and fled. She leaned against the portal, weak and shaken. Then she smiled faintly and with a final sort of gesture she threw a kiss toward the closed door.

Why had she married Gerald Nash when she was so interested in Johnny Maguire? Because Gerald was one of her own sort, a charming and agreeable fellow, a constant attendant, thoughtful and considerate. As his wife she would have as good social position as she enjoyed before. She liked him and felt they would be good comrades. But she had not loved him really, and now he was beginning to bore her.

When she married she had known that she could have loved Johnny Maguire if she had let herself go. She was not sure that she could resist him if he followed her to Washington and came as a persistent suitor. But she had a sophisticated head; she feared that she would deeply regret a marriage with a ward boss after a few months of what might be real happiness. Better a lifetime of tranquillity among her own sort. So she had engaged herself to Gerald Nash and married him in two weeks that she should not change her mind.

Having her cake, she had wanted to eat it, too. She felt that she might still see Johnny Maguire, but she had not counted upon his stubbornness and old-fashionedness.

Frances returned to her drawing-room, stumbled over a footstool and gave it a very vicious kick. She hurt her shin and uttered an exclamation. Then she dropped into a chair and wept —because she had hurt her shin.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WAR!

THE war had excluded almost everything else as a topic of conversation in Washington and among Johnny's fellows in Congress. There was a strong party, which included both Democrats and Republicans, which was determined that America must join the Allies. They were outnumbered in Congress by those who wished to stay out as long as possible, and there was a small but obstreperous group who were so pacific that nothing would induce them to agree to a declaration of war, no insult so glaring as to awaken their resentment. Johnny belonged in the middle camp. He felt it was America's business to protect herself and maintain her neutrality. He was clear-sighted enough

to see that a declaration of war would be useless unless we sent an army abroad to aid the Allies, and he did not want to see American soldiers cross the ocean.

The president had broken off diplomatic relations on February 3rd, which was all the executive had a right to do. Congress had that to face. But between ruptured diplomatic relations and war, and between a declaration of war and the dispatching of a fighting force across the Atlantic, was a wide gap. Johnny hoped fervently that the enemy would see the light and rescind their absurd order to the American flag to get off the ocean except under certain prescribed conditions. Congress was full of men who expected friendly relations to be resumed.

And in case war should be declared, he could not see what this country could do. It had a tiny army and an infinitesimal merchant marine. It couldn't strike a blow, and the Allies were between the hostile country and her desire to do us damage. There were many congressmen who voted to declare war when the fatal step was taken on April 6, 1917, under the delusion that it was a moral gesture which would have no effect upon the country at large.

They were soon undeceived. Allied missions were already in the country, ready now to admit the full horror of their situation. Their backs were against the wall, they were bled white; that they could withstand another great offensive was doubtful, and they knew that an enemy drive was coming within the next six months which would be more powerful than anything they had yet been obliged to meet.

They wanted credits, munitions and food supplies from us, but most of all they had to have men, millions of men. Otherwise France would collapse, the British would have to take their army back upon the soil of England, the enemy would invade and conquer England and then descend upon the United States, bursting with prosperity as she was and as defenseless as she was rich, and collect from America all the losses of the entire war on all fronts.

The day war was declared Maguire wired his military services to the governor of his State, and also offered his resignation as a congressman. He was immediately called into conference with the secretary of war and asked to keep his seat until he could vote for the bill for compulsory military training, which was expected to be bitterly fought both in the House and Senate.

It had been decided by the government to raise a great draft army, train it in the United States for a year and then sent it aboard to put the quietus to the hostile army. But the Allies had to have soldiers at once. So it was determined to send the regular army across as soon as possible, muster the entire national guard and ship it to Europe in advance of the draft army.

Johnny remembered the question of the Ward Wonner upon the night when he had organized the guard company—whether it was likely that the national guard would be sent abroad to fight England's battle, and his reply that it was against the State constitution to send militia outside the State boundaries. He had, unwittingly, deceived that man and many others into joining the guard. It was up to him to protect their rights, and it was his bounden duty to go abroad with his company if it was ordered across the sea.

He made a hasty trip to Benton, to see the governor. That statesman grasped him by the hand.

"Congressman Maguire, I am going to appoint you a colonel in the organized State troops."

"But, governor, I don't know anything about commanding a regiment. I have barely learned how to handle a company."

"Your company is the best drilled

in the State, congressman. Many of our majors and colonels are superannuated, and they will have to be retired. You will learn how to drill a regiment; you are already a born commander. Do you know that I shall have to appoint scores of captains and lieutenants who don't know anything about soldiering? If you have good sergeants in your company, they will be captains."

"It's going to be a fine outfit to fight the enemy's shock troops."

The governor shrugged his shoulders. "It's all we have."

"How about the State constitution prohibiting sending them abroad?"

"We've got around that. The entire national guard will be mustered out and reformed into United States regiments. Men yellow enough to refuse to enter the national army will be excused, of course, but the draft will probably get them anyway."

"It isn't a case of being yellow. I believe that any man with a wife and children or aged parents depending upon him should be discharged without any reflection upon his courage. It will be a rotten shame if poor fellows are sent to the front, leaving dependents to starve."

"Such men should not go, of course," admitted the governor. "Now, congressman, my appointments in the State troops are subject to revision and annulment by the war department when the guard is taken over, and it is possible you will lose your colonelcy."

"I hope I do. I am not competent."

"I am afraid there will be more incompetent colonels than you in this army." The governor smiled rather sadly as he spoke. How right he was was shown by after events. "We are calling out the guard for special encampment next week. Will you be ready?"

"I am holding my seat in Congress only to vote on compulsory military service. I think I shall be through in Washington by the first of May. In the meantime, I am at your service."

"The best service you can do the State is to go back to Benton and explain the situation to the guardsmen there."

As far as his own company was concerned, Johnny settled the question of fitness to serve personally. He knew every man of them. He made out a list of eighteen names, and notified the owners that under no circumstances would he permit them to go into the reorganized guard. Some of these protested vehemently. One of them was forty years old, had a wife, four children, and no money in the bank.

"They'll call me a coward if I quit, Johnny," he declared.

"You'd be a bigger coward if you stuck and let your family starve to death just because of what people say. You are not quitting, you are getting fired, and don't forget it. Refer any knockers to me."

The vote on compulsory military service in Congress came on April 29th. Johnny held up the hands of the administration and then ceased to be a law maker and became a soldier. The day he left Washington there came an unsigned note, which he read but did not answer. He carried it in his breast pocket all through the war. Whenever he was downcast and hopeless, he read it until it was worn almost illegible. It was short, only a score of words or so. It read:

> What a man you are, Johnny Maguire. I had forgotten my prayers, but I'll pray every night for your safety until the war is over.

He did not see her, had not seen her since the day he had refused her kiss. He did not answer her letter because he knew she expected no answer—and he would not have known how to express himself, his heart was so full.

So he went to camp. Washington demoted him to lieutenant colonel of the

regiment and appointed as colonel a former regular-army first lieutenant. He was very glad because, study as he would, he knew how utterly unfitted he was to lead a regiment to battle.

The new colonel was not too competent, but he was infinitely better qualified than any guardsman with his weekly drill and his annual fortnight of camp life.

As the months in camp went by, Johnny became a good soldier, hard working, considerate, tireless, conscientious. There were all too few instructors, far too many officers who did not know what they were about. But they learned to march, to shoot, to withstand privation, to handle a rifle with a bayonet on the end of it. He saw young recruits sicken at the thought of what the bayonet was for, and he grew sick himself as he heard the regular-army sergeants tell how to jab it into the dummies.

It was nothing like national-guard encampments with their parades and ceremonies. The swords went early into the discard, and the officers worked with the bayonet and rifle like the men. They dug trenches and wallowed in mud; they fought sham battles that were real as far as discomfort and squalor were concerned.

Washington and the halls of Congress became a faint memory. Johnny could not forget Benton, however, because most of the regiment came from his home and it was very hard for the men to salute and call him Colonel Maguire instead of Johnny.

There was an era of good feeling in Benton, as he found when he went home for a day now and then to see his mother. The Big Three and the reform organizations were working harmoniously in war relief. Both organizations coöperated in helping out the compulsory-service officials.

It had been feared that the draft would be bitterly resisted in the tough wards, but they found more slackers and evaders in the silk-stocking districts. All the folks in Ward One wished to know was that the law was being equitably enforced, that people with money were not slipping through loopholes while poor men were being driven into the army.

The hardship of the draft was most severely felt, of course, in the poor wards. The young men were making good money for the first time in their lives, for every line of business was flourishing. They were beginning to put cash in the bank, and to get ahead. And suddenly they were taken away from their good jobs and put in suits of khaki for thirty dollars per month.

Harold Onslow was not a slacker, but he had gotten fat and acquired flat feet. He was rejected by the draft committee who found that he had a heart murmur, and bad eyesight as well as poor pedal extremities, and he was not yet thirty-one years old. Rather disheartened, he remained to conduct the legal affairs of the firm, and he busied himself, for the first time, in war relief work.

CHAPTER XXX.

DISGRACE.

THIS is not a story of the war—it is still too recent for that, and thousands of young officers are living who went through such experiences as Johnny Maguire's.

The Benton Regiment went over with one of the first national-guard divisions. It burrowed in muddy trenches, it marched and countermarched under rainy skies and over horrible roads. It felt the shock of bombardment in the front line and the more terrible sensation of aërial bombardment at the rest camps. The colonel of the regiment was withdrawn for staff work, and Johnny Maguire led them through their travail.

Johnny saw his men die of disease

because of inadequate medical supplies. He saw them slaughtered in useless attacks ordered by a staff which forgot they were human and sacrificed them for tactical advantages as a chess player sacrifices pawns. They went hungry because the service of supplies was incompetent. He grew wan and heartsick and his nerves were almost completely worn out. He obeyed orders which he knew were issued by men who did not understand conditions. He listened to complaints, which were impossible for him to right. He suffered like any private and like a good father whose children are perishing. He was typical of many line officers during that terrible year of 1918.

The regular army had little sympathy for the national-guard regiments and none for their officers. One after another he saw the State officers give way to rapidly promoted regulars, some of them less competent than those they supplanted.

There was a school for officers at Blois, and by midsummer it was full of majors, colonels and even generals who had been taken from their commands on changes of incompetency.

During those last weeks in the Argonne, when the resistance of the enemy augmented with every yard of ground gained, it happened that the Benton regiment, after seven days of terrific fighting, during which it never failed to gain the objective assigned to it, encountered a hostile force which gave not an inch, and at the close of the day the outfit slept on the ground from which it had set forth in the morning.

In the night came an order removing Colonel Maguire from his command for "inactivity in the face of the enemy," an inactivity which had contained some of the hardest fighting of the war. Headquarters made no allowances for the savagery of opposition; a colonel or a general who failed to gain his ground had to give way to one who would not fail. Johnny realized the injustice of it, but he was too good a soldier to disobey orders; so he packed his kit bag and prepared to move.

But the regiment heard the news and resented the disgrace of their beloved colonel. A growl went up at the far end of the line and increased to a roar which the officers could not quell, and it seemed as if the glorious career of the Benton regiment was to end in mutiny. The soldiers gathered in a mob and howled down the brigadier general who came upon the scene. Rash young officers declared they would form a square around him and defy the whole army to take him from them. They jeered and hissed the regular-army colonel who had come to take command.

For the first time since he had gone to war it was necessary for Johnny to make a stump speech—a real stump speech, for he mounted on a stump.

"Boys," he said, "we are soldiers, and soldiers have to do what they are told. I have been removed from command of this regiment for inaction in the face of the enemy. I have been ordered to report at headquarters. I will obey my orders and my last order to you is to obey yours. The war seems to be nearly over. Don't mar your splendid record by insubordination. If you wish to please me, you will give your new colonel the same splendid support you have always given me. We shall soon be going home, all of us, and we don't want to go home in disgrace. So let's be good sports as well as good soldiers to the very end."

They cheered him for fifteen minutes, and when he mounted a shabby and ramshackle flivver and rode toward the rear, they cheered until he was out of sight. But the mutiny had been quelled and the new colonel had no trouble in assuming command.

Colonel Maguire reported to division headquarters, hung around for a day or two and was ordered to report to

temporary headquarters in Paris. He had been a year in France and had never seen Paris; his short leaves had been passed in towns not far behind the lines.

The day he arrived there the armistice was signed. No longer in fear of air raids, the great city was blazing with light. The French were in a delirium of joy; they were dancing in the streets, singing and drinking in all the cafés. The war orders for restaurants had not been rescinded, but they were generally ignored. While food was scarce as ever, there had never been a shortage of wines and liquors—and who wishes to eat when he can drink?

The French capital was full of officers and soldiers of France, Britain, and America, fraternizing as they had never done before. And there were thousands of American, English, and French girls in the city who had been connected with war work in one way or another—nurses, telephone girls, ambulance drivers, clerks, religious workers—who were sharing in the jubilation.

Taxicabs were tearing through the streets filled with uniformed men and women shouting and singing. Complete strangers were dashing up and down the boulevards arm in arm. The frenzy of Armistice Day had passed, but the jollification had not ceased.

Into this noisy paradise came Johnny Maguire, a figure of gloom and despair. A broken officer, under a dark cloud, he was in no mood for rejoicing. He had learned only a few simple phrases of French, for where his regiment had been, there had been little use for any tongue but English. He found his way to headquarters by asking American officers whom he encountered, and by following directions from street to street.

An insolent and foppish lieutenant received him and, because it was late in the afternoon, told him to report at noon next day for orders. They were a curious contrast—the dapper, faultlessly attired young officer and the battle-weary colonel in his stained and worn uniform. Johnny was not smiling that day. He was as thin as a rail, his eyes were bloodshot, his face wan, and there was gray in his thick hair above the temples and in front of the ears.

Dismissed from headquarters, he wandered about until he found a hotel which agreed to give him a small room. Then he threw himself on his bed and slept for four or five hours heavily and dreamlessly.

He awoke about nine in the evening, refreshed and in better spirits. With great difficulty he secured a bath, shaved, changed linen, brushed his uniform and polished his shoes.

Through the closed French windows came the cries of the crowds in the street, the tooting of auto horns, shrill laughter of women, shouts of men. He heard snatches of war songs, bars of "Over There" in raucous voices, and the irresistible "Madelon."

Paris was calling to him and he felt more like making a response. Anyway, he needed a dinner and he decided to seek some little café, buy newspapers, and see if he could learn any news of home.

At a kiosk he purchased several papers, printed in English, and went into the rear of the café where he found an empty table in front of a comfortable cushioned wall bench. Here he settled, ordered a good dinner, and opened his newspapers. One of these was a Paris edition of an American journal. A heading on the front page caught his eye.

POLITICAL COLONEL CHARGED WITH WHITE FEATHER

Colonel John Maguire of the —th Regiment is expected in Paris to-day to answer serious charges. He is alleged to have refused to lead his regiment in an assault against an enemy position on receipt of orders from the general of his division.

Maguire is a type of political officer who has made the work of a general staff so

difficult. He was made a colonel while a member of Congress. Though quite without military experience, he managed to hold his post through influence despite obvious incompetency which culminated in insubordination. It is said that Maguire was a ward heeler in his youth, a bartender, and served a term in prison. It is of such national-guard officers that the general staff has been endeavoring to rid the army.

That was all, but it was enough. Nothing about his solid year of hard fighting, leading a regiment which was always fit, never beaten and which had captured twice its strength in prisoners. If he had been a grossly incompetent officer, why had he been permitted to serve so long? They accused him of cowardice, after all he had experienced of battle.

There had been two dark moments in his life—when he was sent to Atlanta prison, and when Lucy Webster made her charge—but this was the blackest of all. He knew that this story had already been cabled to the United States, that it was blazoned in the home papers. His mother would see it. Probably Frances Nash would see it.

This was the reward of his long years of upward struggle. For fifteen years, to satisfy his ambition, he had turned away from the things most men loved. He had worked sixteen hours a day, he had been honest and decent and God-fearing. He had done his duty where he saw it. He had served his country, as well as he could, in whatever capacity he happened to be filling. Hating war, knowing something of its horrors, he had plunged into it when he could easily have evaded service. He had loved a woman, only one woman, and she had turned from him. He had been allowed to reach a high place, from which he was to be kicked ignominiously. He was finished, now and forever. What was the use of it all?

Automatically he had eaten the dinner set before him. He had gulped a few mouthfuls of the weak red wine. Now he sat looking stolidly ahead of him, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, thinking bitter thoughts.

At least, the boys in the regiment knew what he had done. They had no illusions about war, and no admiration for the ruthless tactics by which they had been sacrificed so ruthlessly. Had he given the word, they would have chased away the relief colonel and died to the last man for their colonel. After all, he had been true to himself, his conscience was clean, there was nothing for which to reproach himself. Nobody who had served with him would believe him a coward. For the rest of them, they could go to hell.

The café was full of merry, laughing people. Now he noticed that three American officers sat at the next table to him—two captains and a lieutenant. They had a quart of champagne on the table and two quarts more in a silver pail beside the leg of the table nearest to him. One of them was telling a story. He was a tall, careless, merry devil with a twinkle in his gray eyes. Despite himself, Johnny could not help listening to his story.

"I was about a mile and a half behind the lines. It was about two in the morning and I was so tired I couldn't walk another step. So I looked around for a nice, deep shell hole and found one beside the road. So I just curled myself up there and went to sleep. The enemy was dropping a shell my way now and then, but I didn't mind anything, the way I felt. It must have been about six in the morning when I woke up. I heard the tramp of men marching down the road from the direction of the front. Some outfit coming out, I thought, but I peered over the rim of the shell hole and took a look. You can imagine my surprise when I saw they were enemy soldiers. What the deuce were they doing behind our lines?

"I took a second look and saw they were prisoners because they had no

rifles. There was a slew of them; I counted them by fours and saw there were at least eighty. And our fellows had only taken their rifles away from them because their belts were full of hand grenades and they all had their bayonets. Careless as hell. They could have raised the devil with our lines if they had charged them from the rear, with what they had in their clothes.

"They went by me, marching stolidly as though they were dog tired. And at the rear I saw a big prisoner about six feet tall, carrying a rifle. No guard visible. And then behind the big chap comes a little doughboy, whistling, with his hands in his pockets.

"This was too much. I jumped out of my hole and shouted: 'Halt!'

"The 'parade' stopped at once. The doughboy took a look at me and saluted.

"'Where's the guard of these men?' I demanded.

"'I'm him, sir,' says the doughboy.

"'Where's your rifle?'

"'Aw, why the hell should I carry it? I made this big guy carry it.'"

There was a shriek of laughter, which Johnny could not help from joining. As the officer told his tale he was irresistibly comic.

"Johnson," said one of his friends, "you are without exception the most perfectly equipped and superbly finished liar the world has ever known."

"It's gospel truth," protested the narrator, with a grin which belied him. "I can prove it by the colonel there. Colonel, you heard my story. Isn't it the absolute truth?"

"Absolutely," said Maguire, with a twinkle.

"Ah, come now, sir," said the lieutenant. "How do you know?"

"I was the doughboy," declared Johnny.

The story-teller gave a whoop of joy, and sprang over to the colonel's table.

"A man after my own heart!" he exclaimed, pumping Johnny's hand. "Say, colonel, you look lonely. Come on over and join us. We've got a lot of money and we're out for a real good time. What's the use of glooming in a corner? There'll never be another Paris and never be another war. Boys, a glass of wine with the colonel!"

Johnny could not resist them. He took the glass of champagne and drained it. Then he moved over to their table. Johnson with his bubbling humor, Woods and O'Connor, the other officers, appealed to him as his own sort. He threw off his mask of despair and entered into their spirit. The wine warmed and cheered him. Despite his year in France, Johnny had stuck pretty well to his old ideas of temperance. Usually he drank *vin ordinaire* and mineral water, nothing stronger.

But he was fed up with his orderly, temperate life. These boys got all the fun, he got all the misery. He took another and another glass with them, and when the bottles were empty it was Johnny who ordered some more.

"This is a cheap, badly managed restaurant," declared Johnson finally. "A gang of swell fellers like us should be in a swell place. Let's vamose, boys, and find better quarters."

The four arose and sang a song of farewell. Nobody paid any attention to them. Half a dozen other songs were going on at the same time in different corners of the café.

They found a taxicab and rode back and forth along the boulevards. They stopped in several places and drank more champagne. They ate more. They mixed their wine with brandies and cordials. Johnny laughed louder, sang more and shouted more furiously than any of them. Unaccustomed to strong drink, he was a little drunker than the others.

And somehow their party augmented. Ladies were with them. Where they came from and why Johnny did not know. He liked their bright eyes and

red lips always laughing and showing perfect rows of teeth.

They went on, hour after hour, increasing their numbers. There seemed to be a dozen women and as many officers. Things were very bright and very blurred for Johnny. He rode in a rosy cloud pierced by laughter like streaks of lightning. He had a dim recollection of disagreeable persons who seemed to be opposing them, he seemed to be fighting with his fists as in the early days in Ward One, and then all was serene and pleasant again. He felt like a deity, but he was moving in a golden mist. The features of the women disappeared, he no longer recognized the officers; all he knew was he was sailing through space and enjoying unutterable bliss. And finally he seemed to be blowing up just as a child blows up a balloon. "Pretty soon I shall burst," he told himself, and sure enough he did—blew into a score of pieces and became nothing. Oblivion.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL.

IT was late the next morning when Johnny awoke. He opened his eyes with a sense of well-being. Despite his revelry he did not have a headache. Perhaps such a complete overturn of his principles and his practices, in the extreme nervous condition under which he had been suffering, was beneficial to him. He knew he had been shockingly, disgracefully intoxicated the night before, that he had lost consciousness, that he had no recollection of how he had returned to his hotel—but, somehow, he was not ashamed. He smiled to think of the good time he had experienced, a kind of good time that he had never had before.

He was extremely comfortable, his bed was soft and pleasant, he did not want to move. He luxuriated in its softness after months of sleeping on the ground or in bad-smelling straw. He hoped he would never have to leave it. It was a pleasant room, too; he had not admired it particularly when he had taken it yesterday afternoon. But it was large and the sun was streaming through two big French windows, beautifully adorned with silken curtains. He did not remember the curtains, either. Nor that graceful white dressing table, nor the big cedar chest. And his fingers touched a delicate, soft silk coverlet. That had not been on his bed.

It all seemed so different; perhaps it was part of the intoxication, an aftermath. In that case it was not so bad to have been drunk. He had always visualized the morning after as a drab period of aching remorse. He felt no remorse. The ceiling of the room was quite ornate, and the walls were white and gold. He remembered distinctly that the walls of his room were a shabby red. It was not his room; decidedly it was not his room. Then where was he if he was not at his hotel? Had the boys taken him home with them? Then their quarters were a great improvement upon his own.

He raised himself on his elbow. He was lying on a great double bed, in a beautiful square chamber, daintily furnished but almost feminine in its appointments. What was that on the dressing table? A woman's toilet set! And he saw garments in a closet the door of which was open; they were bright-colored female things. Heavens above, he was in a woman's room!

He sank back with a groan. He had not gone back to his hotel, nor had the other officers taken him home with them. He was in some woman's apartment. What woman? Who was she? Where had he met her? When?

He remembered that there had been women in the recent party; he recalled blurred female faces and shrill laughs. But this most attractive residence—how could that be explained?

And where the devil was she? The toilet articles were of gold. Why had she left him and them unguarded? Well, while she was absent he would have an opportunity to escape. He did not want to see her, he would be ashamed to look her in the face, to look any decent woman in the face. What would Frances think of him if she ever knew? And his mother? So that was what drink did to a man. He threw off the bedclothes, and realized he had slept in his shirt and underclothes. He got to his feet and found his legs a bit unsteady, but his head was clear. There was a bitter taste in his mouth. He was expected at headquarters. Well, he would be there. Glancing at his watch he saw that it was ten thirty a. m. He had no means of knowing how long he had been asleep, and he began to dress in haste. There was a chance he might get away before any one returned.

It did not take Johnny long to dress; many night alarms had taught him facility. But when he bent over to pull on his boots, dizziness attacked him and he performed the operation with difficulty.

He found a bathroom opening off the chamber—a rare thing in a Paris apartment or hotel of the sort this must be. He plunged his head under the faucet and the cool water was delightful. Then he took a beautiful embroidered towel and stared in stupefaction at the marking on it. It said "Hotel Ritz."

He must be in a room at the Ritz where fabulous prices were charged. Very strange. As he completed his ablutions there came a polite knock at the door of the chamber. It gave him a shiver of fright, this man who had faced a solid year of bombardment, and had led his men into enemy trenches and bared his breast to cold steel. The woman had come back.

"Come in," he quavered. The door opened and a waiter with a tray entered.

"Your breakfast, monsieur," the man said, and deftly spread out on a table a glass of orange juice, two boiled eggs, and a pot of steaming coffee. Johnny had not known he was hungry; now he was ravenous. Whoever had sent him the breakfast, and no matter what there was to pay, he must have it. So he seated himself at the table, dismissed the waiter with a wave of the hand and began to eat.

The meal was as delicious as it looked and he ate all of it. Completely refreshed, banished the last traces of his unsteadiness, he pushed back his chair.

Who was the unseen benefactress? It must be a woman. Why did she hide herself? No matter who she was, it would be ungracious for him to retreat without showing in some way his appreciation.

And then there came another knock, this time at a door at the far side of the room. It would be his hostess. Well he was in for it, he thought, as he called out a cheerful: "Come in."

The door opened slowly. There was a woman there and she stood in the doorway. He looked at her and it seemed as though the room began to whirl around him. A hallucination, for he thought he was looking at Frances Fausett Nash.

"May I come in?" asked a sweet, almost shy voice. It was her voice. He brushed his hands across his eyes, and steadied himself by grasping one of of the four posts of the big bed.

Impossible, unbelievable, not to be considered for a second, but it was Frances Fausett Nash. She wore a rose-colored negligee, her hair was loosely bound about her head. Her cheeks were flushed but her eyes were dancing. She advanced a few steps into the room.

"I hope you slept well, Johnny," she said softly.

"Frances Fausett," he muttered. "Oh, my Lord!"

He sank into a chair and buried his head in his hands. He was ashamed, deeply, completely, indescribably ashamed. That emotion overshadowed surprise, perplexity, embarrassment, curiosity. What she was doing in Paris? Why was she in this apartment? These things were nothing beside the awful fact that she had found Johnny Maguire, who had slipped from the straight path only once in his life, in the apartment of a strange woman, recovering from a drunken revelry.

She glided over to him and laid her hand on his hair.

"Haven't you anything to say to me, Johnny Maguire, after all this time?"

He looked up at her with the eyes of a wounded dog.

"Oh, Frances!" he groaned; and then the fighting colonel began to weep like a child.

Her lips had been twitching to smile, but now her expressive face mirrored concern.

"I didn't know that men cried," she said.

"Why must I always meet you when I am whipped and humiliated?" he exclaimed. "The prison, Lucy Webster, and now this!"

"But I think it is very nice here. What's the matter with it? The Ritz is the best hotel in Europe."

"I don't know how I got here, nor with whom. I was drunk last night—disgracefully, bestially drunk. I must have come here with a woman, and I don't know who she is."

"You came here with me," said Frances calmly. "This is my apartment. I'm sorry you don't like it."

He looked at her so blankly that she hid her embarrassment with a nervous laugh.

"It's all right, Johnny, really it is. I just rescued you, and, as nobody knew where you lived, I brought you home with me."

And now realization and joy began to gleam through his distress. Frances had come like an angel from heaven. It was terrible that she should know how he had fallen, but she had not left him by the wayside. She had taken him into her home and cared for him, though he had been disgustingly intoxicated. What humanity, what charity, what generosity!

Most women would have turned up their noses at a hog like himself. She had stooped to drag him out of the mire.

He looked at her in dumb devotion.

"I am terribly humiliated and ashamed. But, oh, how grateful I am!"

"Don't be, Johnny. After what you have been through in the trenches, you had a right to get drunk. I don't blame you at all."

She had seated herself and looked at him with an infinite friendliness in her eyes.

"You know," she said, "I am rather glad you got drunk and I found you that way. It proves you are really human, and I had doubted it. I didn't know that your kind of men existed in the world any more; certainly I had every reason for doubting it."

"How did you find me? I suppose I ought to know."

"Well, you came into a restaurant with several other officers and three or four women. They were all intoxicated. You were quiet but dazed. I knew it when you looked across the café and did not recognize me. I was with some friends who were celebrating, but more quietly than you had been. I knew you were in Paris because I had read an outrageous item about you in an English paper. So I walked across the restaurant and claimed you. I think I said I was your wife."

"What?" he exclaimed, springing to his feet.

She waved her hand at him airily.

"Sit down, Johnny," she said. "You see, it was the only thing to do. I

wanted to get you out of that mess. Those women would fight like terriers for their choice. But the word 'wife' scares them. And the officers, drunk as they were, were gentlemen. I took you by the arm and led you out of the place. You did not know who I was; I don't think you were conscious, though you could walk. My friends got you into a taxicab and we brought you here. They carried you upstairs to this chamber and laid you on the bed. Then I sent them home."

"And you stayed in the same apartment with me all night?"

She colored a little.

"I had to. Nowhere else to go. Besides, I did not know but what you might wake up very ill."

"Frances, you are an angel from heaven. All my life I'll be grateful to you. I didn't know another woman breathed as good as my mother, but you are."

"I'm not an angel," she replied a little tartly. "I'm just human. Somebody had to take care of you when you were like that, and I happened to be the only one who knew you."

"But this is terrible! I'm afraid I have compromised you frightfully. What will your friends say?"

"People aren't so conventional as they used to be. My friends won't say anything. But I'm afraid you have compromised me, Johnny."

"My Lord, I am heartbroken! I'll get away as quickly as I can and I'll be eternally grateful."

"Grateful!" she exclaimed. Her eyes were hot with anger. "I don't want your gratitude. I want—I don't know what I want."

Johnny looked grieved and puzzled.

"If you're so grateful I'll tell you what you do," she said, coming forward and grasping his coat lapel with two fingers of her right hand.

"Anything. Everything," he breathed.

"Kiss me. You refused my kiss last time we met. Kiss me now, Johnny." Her arm went around his neck, she pulled down his head. He placed two burning lips upon her sweet red ones. It was heavenly for a moment; then he pulled away.

"Your husband!" he gasped. "I'd forgotten, Frances! Forgive me."

"I made you kiss me," she triumphed. "When you left me more than a year ago I knew I would make you do it some day. You did it."

"But your husband, Frances, your husband."

"Bother my husband!" she exclaimed. "Go to your headquarters now, but come back and dine with me."

"You haven't told me how you came here, nor what has happened in the last year or anything. Where is your husband?"

She threw him a kiss.

"Don't let Pershing himself keep you from coming back to dinner at seven o'clock. I'll tell you everything then."

He had to be satisfied and he went away, the happiest man in Paris—almost. Frances loved him; there could be no question about it. What she had done for him the night before proved it, and now she had made him kiss her. If she had forgotten her husband and he had forgotten him for a moment, neither could be blamed. They would be circumspect in the future, but nothing could eradicate the joy of that moment.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THOSE WHO LOVE.

IT was a wonderful thing that Frances did not mind his lapse of the night before. She had said that after what he had gone through in the trenches, he was justified in getting drunk. And she had read the attack on him in the newspaper and declared that it was despicable. Therefore, she had not believed it.

What a beautiful day it was, and

what a gorgeous city was Paris—and the war was over and there would be no more killing. Somehow he reached headquarters, though it was astonishing that he had not been run over by a score or so of French taxi drivers. In the mood in which he happened to be, the treatment to be accorded him at headquarters was a trivial matter. Yesterday he had been a figure of gloom when he appeared in the outer office. To-day he burst in with a jauntiness which astonished the lieutenant who was again on duty.

"You don't seem to appreciate the seriousness of your situation, Colonel Maguire."

"You should worry about that," retorted the young lover. "What's the news?"

"Colonel Brown wishes to talk with you. Be seated a moment until I notify him."

An orderly was ready to conduct him into the presence of a starchy, grizzled staff colonel who greeted him grumpily, but who could not entirely resent Johnny's cheerfulness.

"You're in a fine mess," he growled. "You go to Blois with other incompetent officers for falling down on your job."

Johnny laughed at him.

"Colonel, the war is over," he said. "I've stood a year of the ruthless rule of this man's army. I obeyed orders and did my duty. I threw my poor soldiers against a stone wall that day, and it was the business of the general commanding to know it was an impregnable position. I was removed to make place for a regular-army colonel, and I have no doubt he failed to push over the stone wall, for he was still where I left him when I arrived in Paris. My removal was unjustified and I propose to get my regiment back."

"You—you—you——" stammered the indignant colonel.

"Snap out of it, colonel," Johnny chuckled. "The war is over and the staff will be so busy defending itself for its blunders that it win't want me barking at its heels."

"You go to Blois, just the same," growled the colonel.

"No doubt, but I won't stay there. I spent one solid year in the face of the enemy with never a day's leave of absence. I captured twice the strength of my regiment in prisoners, and I don't have to worry about the country's judgment of my conduct. When I resume my seat in Congress, my first act will be to discover why so many national-guard officers, who were good enough to lead their men while the war was on, are now discovered to be incompetent, while others are promoted to their jobs. Oh, I'll get my regiment back."

Colonel Brown became calm.

"In your case," he said, "I don't mind telling you that a mistake seems to have been made. Your major general has already protested against your removal and reported that he wanted to take the enemy position in front of your regiment by a flank attack, but that a frontal attack was ordered. Colonel Graham, who succeeded you, had no better luck than you. So, while you will have to go to Blois, I wouldn't be surprised if you got your regiment back."

Johnny smiled.

"Just pass the word along that I'll make fur fly if I don't."

"We took a few regulars out of the line as well as national guardsmen," said Colonel Brown. "You can talk it over with them at Blois."

"When do I start?"

"At once."

"Could you make it to-morrow? I have a most important engagement to-night."

"I'll make out the order for you to-morrow. Shake hands, old man."

The grizzled regular and the young national guardsman shook hands

warmly. Then Johnny left the office, shooting a good-natured smile at the stiff lieutenant who had expected to see him crawl out, a broken man.

The hope of getting his regiment back was like a tonic, though his marvelous reunion with Frances had already stimulated him so that he needed nothing else. If only Frances were single, how wonderful things would be from now on; but she was a married woman and theirs was a hopeless love. It would perhaps be better if he did not return to the Ritz for dinner. But she had practically ordered his return, and, Lord knows, he wanted to see her again. If she was willing to risk trouble with her husband just to have dinner with him, should he be ungallant enough to refuse to share that risk?

He wondered about Paris through the endless hour of the afternoon. He met many acquaintances who wished him to join them at a bar or in a café, but he had had enough of liquor. He never wanted to feel again that curious exaltation that much wine gives. He had known what it was to be completely intoxicated, dead to the world! Once was enough for him.

After an eternity came six o'clock. His engagement was at seven but he could wait no longer.

He went to the Ritz and found his way through its devious corridors and its multitude of brilliant tea and cocktail drinkers, to the desk in the office and sent up his name to Mrs. Nash.

"She says you are to ascend immediately."

Johnny followed the bell boy, cursed under his breath the slowness of the French elevator, and finally alighted upon the fourth floor from which he had descended in the morning. He tapped at her door and she opened it herself.

It was a different Frances from the glowing creature of the morning. She was already dressed in an exquisite evening gown which displayed dazzling white shoulders, arms and neck. She had a jeweled thing in her hair; she looked regal, but her eyes were shy, almost timid.

"I hoped you would come early," she said, extending a slender hand which he grasped tightly in his big, calloused palm. "Dinner is ordered for seven, but I can give you a cocktail and you may talk to me while we are waiting."

He followed her silently and sat opposite her in a big blue-velvet chair, while she perched on the edge of a beautiful period divan.

"What are you thinking, Johnny?" she asked. "That I am a very wicked woman?"

"Whatever you think is right, I think is right," he declared eating her with his eyes.

"All day I was wondering how you would feel about that kiss, whether it would shock you and make you think I was worthless, after all."

"It was the finest, loveliest, most beautiful thing that ever happened to me," he pronounced firmly.

She threw him a thrilling smile but continued:

"You were worrying about my husband, weren't you?"

"Some. But I have decided that you must get a divorce; you could not kiss me like that and love him."

"But I would be a divorced woman, Johnny. You know you do not admire divorced women."

"I suppose I have seemed narrow-minded, provincial, bigoted, to you, but I don't care if you were five times divorced. I want you for my wife."

Frances crossed and sat on the arm of his chair.

"I won't tease you any more, dear. I am a widow."

Johnny gazed at her incredulously. "A widow?"

"I suppose I don't act like one," she sighed. "But it is true. My husband

died eight months ago, on the British front, in the March offensive."

"I am sorry. He must have been a brave man."

"He was a brave man, but he was not a good husband. I made a great mistake when I married him. I did not love him, and he did not know what love really was. Had he not gone to the front I would have divorced him."

"Then you are free!" he exclaimed, fully appreciating now the marvel of it.

"Yes, I suppose I am."

"Then you are going to marry me."

"Am I?" Her eyes flirted with him. But Johnny did not understand flirtation.

"Why—er—won't you? Don't you love me, after all?"

She rose and boxed his right ear lightly.

"You big goose," she smiled, "can't you manage a proposal which a widow lady could reasonably consider?"

Johnny dropped on one knee and took her hand in both of his.

"Frances, will you do me the honor of being my wife?"

"Very formal, but not enough power in it."

He rose, shamefaced and puzzled.

"What do you want me to do?"

She spread her two arms wide and approached. Her eyes invited. Johnny's eyes were opened at last.

He grasped her in a bear hug which almost broke her ribs, but she loved the pain of it. She smiled up bravely at him and dared his kiss. When it came it lasted until she was ready to faint. He released her finally and she stood looking at him with something of pride in her eyes.

"Colonel Maguire," she said formally, "I believe with training you will make a good lover. I think I shall accept your proposal."

"When are you going to marry me?"

"At your service, sir."

"It takes time in France, darn it, and I'm ordered to Blois to-morrow."

"Oh, tell me. What have the brutes done to you?"

"Oh, they have to make a show of discipline, but they have, to all intents, agreed to give me back my regiment. I've got to go to Blois, though, for a few days or a few weeks."

"I am so glad. Now let's be sensible—and dinner is ready."

In fact, the waiters were knocking at the door. Like an already married couple, Frances and Johnny sat opposite each other at the dainty dinner table and partook of delicious dishes. Frances' little foot found his big one and rested upon his instep. She had kicked off her slipper. And they talked of things of great interest to them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONFESSION.

"YOU have always had the most amazing effect on me, Johnny," she confessed. "The day I first saw you behind that book-covered table in the prison library, you gave me a thrill. I loved the sound of your voice when I talked to you, and I thought about you all the way back to Washington. I was so sorry for you.

"Then I sort of forgot you for a while, but every now and then I would remember how you looked—so proud and yet so unhappy. Finally I couldn't stand it any longer, so I decided to go to Benton to find you, since you had no intention of looking me up in Washington. I didn't know anybody there, but I looked through the Blue Book and found the Onslows. It happened I had gone to school with Helen, so I renewed the acquaintance."

"You mean you came just to find me?" he exclaimed, unable to credit such an admission. "But you never looked me up, and we met by accident."

"It was no accident. I used to walk

the streets and wander through the hotels, looking for you. That day in the Central I stood for five minutes, trying to appear casual but determined to catch your eye."

"How wonderful!"

"Well, I got sort of a revulsion of feeling when you told me all about yourself. You know I am a snob by education and breeding. I was disgusted when I found you had been a bartender and you loved all those low people. I felt I never could brook your associates, that you belonged to a type that would be impossible for a person like myself. Oh, I was very 'sensible.' I determined that I would get right away from Benton and dismiss you forever from my thoughts."

"I'm sure I don't blame you."

"That night at the dance I was wild for you when we waltzed. The old-fashioned waltz, Johnny, what a beautiful dance it was! They don't do it any more. But my head was still ruling me. I was cold to you and escaped to Washington next day.

"When I got back I plunged into all sorts of social things and tried not to think about you, but I couldn't stop. I told myself to be reasonable, but reason hasn't much to do with love. Finally I married just to be free of the fear that I might take a train for Benton some day, rush into your office, and tell you that I loved you."

He tried to interrupt her, but she was enjoying her confession and motioned to him to be still.

"And then you came to Washington. I had a terrible struggle with myself before I gave in and wrote you to come to see me. I tried to vamp you, Johnny, but you wouldn't be vamped. I never knew there were men like you who set their principles above their hearts. You taught me a lot of things—things that I had never learned before.

"When you went away from Washington to camp, I hoped you would come to say good-by, but when you didn't I wrote you a note."

"I have it," he said. He thrust his hand into his breast pocket. It was black with dirt, but it was her note. She gave a little cry of joy and precipitated herself across the table. There was a kiss, a quick embrace, a laughing struggle while she tried to possess herself of the note; but he was too strong for her—it went back into the pocket.

"So you carried it all through the war. How you must have loved me, Johnny."

"You said it," he declared grimly.

"Just about that time I found that my husband was in love with an Englishwoman of my acquaintance. I was in no mood to be complaisant. I told him I would start a suit for divorce at once, but he informed me that he was going home to fight and begged me not to make a scandal. So I let him go without a qualm. You see, I could not have loved him.

"When I heard you had gone to France, I pulled wires until I got appointed a member of some silly charity committee with headquarters here, and I came to the Ritz. I've been waiting for you to come to Paris for six months, Johnny. When I heard my husband had been killed I was sorry for him, of course, but glad for myself because it left me free for you if you still wanted me."

"'If I wanted you,'" he intoned.

She threw him a kiss.

"When I saw you last night," she continued, "I pounced on you like a hawk. I would have murdered those women if they had tried to keep you from me."

He drew a long breath. "It's all too marvelous. I feel as if I were having a gorgeous dream and that pretty soon I'll wake in a dirty dugout with rats crawling over me. But you must remember, Frances, that all the things you did not like when I lunched with

you in Benton are still true. I am an ex-convict, ex-bartender, ex-ward boss, and discharged colonel."

She laughed lightly. "What do I care? What does anything matter when one loves? I'm going to adore your family and friends, your slum dwellers, your politics. As it says in the Bible, 'Your people will be my people. Your God my God.'"

His brow was furrowed with thought.

"Things are going to be very different when I go home. Politics will be different. You see, the abolition of the saloon will do away with old-time methods of politics and old-fashioned politicians. And the suffrage for women will change things. I don't think votes for women will make politics better, but they will make it different.

"I am a long way from Benton and Ward One, and I've been away more than a year; it seems an eternity. Political deals seem so futile and insignificant. I don't suppose things will ever be the same again. I would like to go back to Congress, which means that you will live in Washington most of the year. And I shall never desert the ward —but it may have found a new leader since I have been gone."

"That's likely," she sniffed. "Imagine them ever deserting you!"

"One can't tell. I think I can manage to get elected to Congress as long as I want to stay there. The city organization would always support me for Congress to keep me out of the city. And then, Harold writes me that our law firm is prospering amazingly. You know, he was in love with you, Frances. I wonder what he will think when I bring you home as my bride."

"He'll make the best of it; probably he is in love with somebody else by this time. Harold is nice but nothing to get excited about from a girl's standpoint."

Johnny laughed at that.

"I'll have to retire, more or less, from ward politics because they used to take up all my evenings. And of course I shall want to spend them with you."

"Try to escape me," she smiled. "I expect I am going to be very trying, Johnny. I'll want you near me always. It just breaks my heart that you have to go back to duty to-morrow. Couldn't you desert or something?"

"Now that the war is over, I think they will relax the rules about officers' wives. Probably we can be married here in Paris in a few weeks, and then, if the regiment happens to go along with the army of occupation, you can come along with us."

"That would be joyous!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands.

And so they talked and the hours slipped away. Evening passed and then it was midnight, and one o'clock and two o'clock. A dozen times they parted, these lovers who had met after so many years, and each time they rushed into each other's embrace.

"Good night, this time," he laughed.

"You will come to see me in the morning, early?"

"Without fail."

"I don't care how early. Six o'clock, seven o'clock. If I'm asleep I'll get right up."

"I don't believe I'll sleep to-night— I'm too happy," he exulted. "You know, Frances, it's worth going along for years, doing what you think is the right thing, no matter how hard conditions may seem, for at the end of the road happiness may be waiting ready to reward you for everything you've done. Good night, my sweetheart."

"Good night, handsome lover," she murmured. Another lingering embrace, and this time they parted.

Next day Johnny went to Blois, the only happy man in a camp of officers who had been tried in the balance and found wanting, all of them breathing indignation, smarting under what they considered injustice. The incompetent

man is usually the last to admit it, but some of these officers were victims of petty malice, red tape and the errors of superiors.

The armistice changed the attitude of the general staff toward many of these officers. Johnny Maguire was not the only one who received back his former command.

There were national-guard and training-camp officers in Blois who had been proven to be hopelessly unfit to lead men, and these were quietly let out of the army as rapidly as possible. There were others who had excellent records marred only by a single slip-up, and the desire was to be lenient with them. And there were several majors and colonels who proved before examining boards that their removals had been the result of error, and these were restored and allowed to join the triumphal march into the conquered country.

No charges against Colonel Maguire were pressed, and after a few weeks of loitering in camp he was sent back to his regiment, where his reception can be imagined.

These weeks did him much good. Relieved of his nervous strain, contented in his mind because of his understanding with Frances, he regained his weight and youth, though he could not remove the gray hairs which a year of battle and privation had brought into his thick brown locks.

He had been surprised to learn that the death in battle of two brothers of Gerard Nash had made Frances' husband heir to a baronetcy, and that she had been entitled to call herself Lady Nash when Gerald, atoning by his bravery for his vapid, wasteful life, had also fallen under enemy bullets.

This title, of course, she would yield when she became Mrs. Colonel Johnny Maguire. And, though her father had died, there was much maternal opposition when her mother, back in Washington, learned that her aristocratic daughter proposed to marry an Irish politician, no matter how fine his personality, nor how wonderful a war record he possessed.

Frances no longer had any doubts about the wisdom of her choice. She had married once as a result of the dictates of her head; now she yielded without qualms to the instructions of her heart.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TRIUMPH!

MRS. MORTIMER FENTON had been scheming very hard and as a result she held in her hand the reward of her efforts. She was very jubilant and she went to the foot of the stairs and called:

"Alice, come right down here this minute."

"Oh, mother, what's the trouble now?"

"You come down and find out."

Alice grumbled a little, tossed aside the book she had been reading, thrust her feet into slippers, lifted herself from the couch in her boudoir, and slowly descended the stairs. She was a large, rather redundant young woman, with a wealth of tousled yellow hair piled upon her head. She had a blue-silk kimono wrapped around her and she covered her mouth with a bejeweled hand as she yawned.

"You are always disturbing me about something," she complained. "What's the trouble now?"

"I've got them," said her mother triumphantly.

"What, the invitations?" The young woman's eyes brightened. "I never thought you'd manage it."

"Well, I did. You know how crazy I've been to see the inside of that house. They say she decorated and furnished it herself, and that it's more beautiful than anything the best decorator in the country could do. And the invitations are as scarce as hens' teeth; Mrs.

Brown said she hadn't been invited herself, and Mrs. Williams was afraid to ask for anybody else, because she was lucky to have been included as it was."

"Do you think he will be there?"

"Mrs. Williams says that he has promised to come, though he hates teas as a general thing. Won't it be wonderful!"

"Just think of meeting a United States senator!"

"Oh, I don't care anything about him. She's the daughter of an ambassador and the most exclusive person in Washington, and before she married him she was the wife of a British nobleman. Won't your father be delighted? You know, we have really arrived socially to get invitations to this affair. Only the élite of Benton will be there. At last we are among the elect!"

"In view of the fact that we've spent fifteen years trying to scrape acquaintance with somebody on the inside, I suppose you may consider this a triumph," said Alice, rather bitterly. "But it's come a bit too late for me."

"Why?"

"I'm an old maid; nobody will ever marry me. I'm losing my looks and getting fat. All the men I liked you said were not good enough for me, and those you liked didn't like me. The trouble with us, mother, is that we never had money enough to associate with the very rich, and the fact that father was in trade kept the best people from paying any attenton to us. We've been hanging around on the fringe of society all these years, and the way you have pushed and pulled, made people disgusted with us. It would have been better if we never moved away from the old house and if we stuck to the kind of people we used to know. It's better to be a big frog in a small puddle than a little frog in a big one."

"Why, you ungrateful child! Everything I've done has been for you."

"A lot of good you've done me. You sent me to a fashionable school where the girls were too stuck up to be friends with me. Then I went to college and you wouldn't let me be friends with the girls I liked. I never made the societies and I graduated without any acquaintances who would have done something for me."

"I'm sure we gave you every advantage."

"You dragged me to Paris and to Florence, where we sat around in second-class hotels and never met anybody but a lot of impoverished old tabbies. I tell you, mother, we didn't have enough money to do things right, and the way we did do things was of no value. You spent all father's income and more, and what has it got us? Nothing."

"I'm sure you are the best-looking girl in Benton to-day; and your prospects are better than ever, now that we have got into society."

"We'll go to this tea, and we won't know anybody, and we'll hang around on the outskirts and come home without having been invited by anybody to call on them. I'll tell you frankly, mother, if it wasn't to get a peek at him I wouldn't go a step."

"Who is he, I'd like to know?"

"Nobody but a United States senator, and a war hero, and the husband of the most beautiful and most aristocratic woman who ever came to Benton."

"That's true."

"I'll tell you who he might have been, if you want to know."

"Who?"

"My husband instead of hers. He used to be crazy about me. He helped with my lessons in school, he used to walk home with me, he was always hanging around the yard wanting to play with me. He was wild about me in those days."

"Well, of all the notions——"

"And what did you do? You drove

him away, you slapped his face, you called him a dirty little ragamuffin. You moved to another part of the city and I never saw him again."

"As if I was to know that that snip of a grocery boy would grow up to be a great man."

"If you hadn't been a snob, you wouldn't have been mean to him."

"You were only fourteen years old," protested Mrs. Fenton, weakly.

"That's nothing. Half the love affairs of history began like that. Look at *Juliet;* she was only fourteen. Look at all the people we know that married childhood playmates."

"Well, anyway," declared Mrs. Fenton, changing the subject wisely, "we're invited to the tea and we'll have to get some clothes."

Alice became interested at once in the question of clothes and the unfortunate subject was closed.

The mooted tea had caused much interest in Benton. It was the first large affair that Mrs. Senator Maguire had given in her new home on the River Boulevard. The house was one of the finest in the State, thoroughly modern, and, as Mrs. Fenton had said, had been furnished and decorated by Mrs. Maguire.

Very few people in Benton had met Mrs. Maguire, as yet. After her romantic marriage to the colonel, which took place abroad, she had returned with him to Benton, but, aside from the Onslows, she had not seen anybody. She and her husband seemed perfectly content to remain aloof, and they spent half the year in Washington where she resumed her place in Washington society.

Colonel Maguire had come home to find himself more popular than he had ever been in the past. Although he had been restored to his regiment after a couple of weeks in the classification camp, the reason for his removal had not been hidden from Benton. Too many members of the regiment had written the facts home, and many of their letters had escaped the censorship.

When he came back and marched through the streets at the head of his troops, the city went into a frenzy of delight. Any hope that the politicians might have had of weakening his hold on his district during his long absence, were lost as they observed the adulation of the multitude.

The two women nearest to him were most affected by this state of affairs. Old Mrs. Maguire was in a continuous ecstasy. Young Mrs. Maguire was equally delirious. If Johnny's mother had been a bit worried about the attitude of the fine lady he was bringing home as his wife, she laid her alarm aside when she met Frances. The brilliant and beautiful girl, gorgeous in her furs, and the timid old Irishwoman, with her black bonnet and queerly made black-silk dress, had one love in common—Johnny.

Mrs. Maguire had seen the look in her eye when she came into the old home on the arm of her soldier-husband, and her fear that some designing woman had roped in her boy vanished forever. She knew true love when she saw it. And when Frances saw the sweet, wrinkled, adoring old face which Johnny was kissing so rapturously, she loved it, too. So they walked into each other's arms and Frances called her "Mother."

They sat side by side on the reviewing stand and watched the steel-hatted warriors go by, and when Johnny rode past they squeezed each other's hands and wept on each other's shoulder in recognition of their common love.

It happened shortly afterward that one of the senators from the State died, and the governor made a perfect appointment when he named Johnny Maguire to fill the vacant office.

Many years before Johnny had asked his mother not to move from Ward

One, that his political future depended upon remaining a resident.

Where he lived was no longer important; the old home was far too small and perhaps too humble to serve Frances. Besides, his mother insisted that the young couple live by themselves in a home of their own. So they toured the city in his new car and Frances picked out a site in the most aristocratic and expensive quarter.

"I'm making a good income," he told her, with a smile, "but, large as it is, I doubt if it would stand a location of this kind."

"It's like you never to inquire," she told him fondly. "But I happen to have a lot of money in my own right. My father left me more than a million when he died last year. So don't you think I ought to be allowed to spend a little of it?"

"I knew you were well-enough fixed," he replied, "but I never dreamed that I had married a millionairess. All right, darling, you can spend your money on a home on the River Drive, or any other way you desire."

So the new house rose on the Drive, the finest ever seen in Benton, and the furnishings came from all over the world. No wonder the women were crazy to see the inside of it.

Now it was ready. There had been a few small dinner parties, but Frances, at the solicitation of Helen Onslow, had decided to give one big tea. Johnny had been instructed to put in an appearance and had consented cheerfully, as he always did when Frances wished something.

In the course of the affair he was presented to Mrs. Mortimer Fenton and Miss Alice Fenton. Johnny had met a lot of people and names did not mean very much to him. He looked at them without recognition.

He gazed into Alice Fenton's plump and pretty face politely and uninterestedly.

"Surely, you remember me, senator," she said. "I used to go to school with you."

"Indeed! I am glad to see you again."

"You must remember Alice Fenton," she said desperately. "You walked home with me often from school and played in our yard."

And then he remembered her. Alice Fenton, his boyhood sweetheart! And Mrs. Fenton who had cuffed him on the ear and called him a little ragamuffin. That was the eager old lady beyond. Why, it was on that day, and as a result of that slap, that he had decided to make something of himself. So this big, plumb, blond girl was Alice Fenton, and this little old lady the furious mother who had driven him away. All he was and everything that had happened to him had come as a result of that incident.

Supposing she had been kind to him. Supposing he had grown up and married Alice Fenton. It would have been terrible. Then he never would have had Frances.

"Of course I remember you," he declared heartily. "So you are Alice Fenton. We must have a reunion. Come over here and talk with me. And Mrs. Fenton, isn't it wonderful after all those years?"

The two women thrilled with pride. In front of this gathering of the élite of Benton the senator had distinguished them, had taken them to one side for a chat. Why, it was a triumph!

It was. Johnny and Alice indulged in animated reminiscences and laughed so heartily that people turned to look at them.

Frances, bored with the affair and her eyes always following her husband when he was in sight, saw him in a far corner, apparently enjoying himself with a striking if rather plump blond girl, and had a slight twinge of jealousy. But she smiled it away at once. If he

was amusing himself at such an affair, she was glad.

After the party was over and they were alone, she asked him most casually:

"Who was that pretty girl with whom you were having such a good time talking?"

"Oh, just a girl I once knew in grammar school. I hadn't seen her for fifteen years or more and I'd forgotten there was such a person in the world. We were exchanging childhood reminiscences."

She squeezed his arm. "Supposing you had married her instead of me?"

"Oh, my Lord!" he exclaimed. "What a terrible idea!"

"I don't know. She seemed rather nice."

He sat down beside her, put one arm around her and took her hand in his.

"Frances," he said, "I wish you would be kind to Miss Fenton. I had no thought of her for years, had forgotten what she looked like, but I am not so sure that she is not responsible for our happiness and my success in life, such as it is.

"What is it that takes one man in a million out of the muck of humanity and enables him to force his way against all obstacles to the top of the heap?"

"That's easy in your case. It was extraordinary ability and great determination."

He laughed.

"A boulder will lie on a mountainside for a thousand years, then roll with irresistible force down into the valley, destroying everything in its path. There are thousands of men as able and as strong as I, who never make anything of themselves. Like the boulder, something had to put me in motion. I think there is always some powerful purpose, some tremendous incentive which forces men out of their predestined orbit.

"In my case it was a desire to make a mean and purse-proud woman regret that she had humiliated me, and it was this girl's mother who was my impetus to get an education and amount to something. She ordered me off her grounds and forbade Alice to associate with me because I was a slum child.

"Alice was going to be a lady and I seemed destined to be a carpenter or a plumber. So that I should be as well educated as Alice Fenton, I plugged away at night school for a couple of years. By that time I forgot all about poor Alice, but I was in motion and kept going."

He smiled whimsically. "To-day came the marvelous moment of which I dreamed when I was a half-starved, ragged kid of fourteen. I stood before Mrs. Fenton and Alice and they were overwhelmed at my magnificence. Unfortunately, I had forgotten all about them, and when I remembered I didn't get the slightest kick out of the situation. Isn't it disgusting?"

Frances' eyes sparkled with anger.

"It's utter nonsense. You were as bound to rise as a cork released at the bottom of a pool. If I had known that old woman had been mean to you, she never would have poked her nose into my house."

Johnny laughed engagingly.

"Spitfire! Listen, darling; Alice was a sweet child and now looks like an unhappy, discontented woman. Now you're going to rule the roost in Benton socially. Please take her up and try to do something for her."

Frances smiled fondly and released the hand he was holding so that she could run her fingers through his hair.

"That's like you, Johnny. Well, I will do something for her. I'll get her invitations and, as quickly as I can, I'll marry her off. I don't want her around you."

"You don't think——" he began, hurt in his eyes.

"Of course not, idiot, but just the

same—— Let's see. Harold ought to get married, and this girl, if she dieted and somebody picked her clothes for her——" She looked speculative, and Johnny laughed loudly.

This story you have read is not the biography of Senator Maguire, soon to be published. It is what the writer, who was a novelist as well as a biographer, gathered from Johnny, his mother, his wife, Harold Onslow, and other friends of the great man, and what he constructed from the data that he acquired, as novelists are wont to do. Of course, the very personal stuff will all be out of the manuscript when it is rewritten and it will deal with great seriousness with the legislative achievements of Senator Maguire in the ten years which have passed since the war ended. So, if you want to know about the middle-aged Johnny Maguire, you must buy the big book.

THE END.

Watch for another superb story by Fred MacIsaac, appearing soon.

JESSE JONES, THE BIG GO-GETTER

WHEN the Democratic delegates met in Houston, Texas, on June 26th, to name their presidential candidate, a national political convention will be held in a temporary building put up for that specific purpose for the first time in the past thirty-two years. The last time such a hall housed politicians was in June, 1896, when the Republicans nominated William H. McKinley in St. Louis. The last time the Democrats met in a temporary structure was in June, 1892, when Grover Cleveland was made the standard bearer in Chicago. Gentlemen who believe in signs and prophetic events may argue that, because both McKinley and Cleveland were elected after getting their nominations in such structures, the Houston nominee can be expected to have all the luck on his side.

The most interesting man connected with the Houston meeting is Jesse H. Jones, the millionaire who secured the convention for the Texas city. He did it, thanks to his generosity and his tremendous personal popularity among the Democratic National Committeemen. He had no press agent for Houston. He organized no campaign to carry his point. He stood quietly by while other cities clamored for selection. Then, when the time came for the committee to decide, the tall, suave, silver-haired Mr. Jones told "the boys" that he wanted the meet for his home town, that Houston would put up a building for the convention, and that the people of Houston would contribute $200,000 to the campaign fund.

What this meant was that Jesse H. Jones would give most of the $100,000 to build the hall and most of the $200,000 donation to the party's campaign expenses. And Jesse Jones is the boy who can foot the big bill with a smile. He owns the principal hotel and the big newspaper in Houston, not to mention a lot of other valuable property in the town. He is the leading banker there. He owns big office buildings in Houston and New York City; and he would walk stoop-shouldered if he carried around all his stock in insurance, investment, and various corporations.

Having collected all this wealth, he proposes to enjoy it, and he knows of no better way to get pleasure out of it than by bringing distinction to his home town. That's why he smiles delightedly at the prospect of spending about a quarter of a million dollars for the privilege of making Houston a convention city.

The Heirs of Sometime Sam

by

Robert V. Carr

Author of "Letters of a Cowboy to His Pard," Etc.

A tale of two fine old Westerners who did not care for worlds of money—and of other men who did.

A COMPLETE STORY

"SOMETIME SAM" was a devotee of Luck. To that sly, tricky godlet, he offered the rarest incense of his heart's blossom: Hope's eternal fresh spring bloom. To the smirker and mocker, through fifty years of rains, storms, and winds, he chanted the refrain of the prospector's litany: "Some time, somewhere I'll strike it."

In his long, long search for desert gold, he dug thousands of holes, tramped thousands of miles, suffered thousands of disappointments. Yet he was never entirely crushed; always could he muster up an offering to Luck. He seemed immune to decay; men spoke of him as they would of some landmark of the wastes. "Old Sometime," they said, "has always been out there on the desert."

Occasionally Luck, in teasing mood, tossed a chunk of rich float in his path, or, now and then, permitted him to sell a group of claims. Once a sale netted him a thousand dollars. That money he made last him over a decade.

No gregariousness tormented the ancient wanderer of the wastes. To him, woman was a trap; partners a nuisance; cities and towns as stifling as crowded sheep pens.

He and his burros fitted their environment like the fauna of the waterless land over which they plodded. Instinctively they avoided stepping on that deadly little assassin, the horned rattlesnake, who, in his nocturnal wanderings, often neglects to agitate his tiny castanets. On the darkest night, they could march through a forest of cholla

cactus and never once pick up a thorny ball or blunder into a barb-set branch. When those hellish twins, Heat and Delirium, stalked the glaring wastes, he and his burros could survive on a daily water ration a desert tyro would gulp down in an hour.

A medium-sized man, the wasteland wanderer, with quick gray eyes and a bronzed, jutting nose that parted his tobacco-stained mustache as a ship's prow parts a wave. His beard, shortened and haggled with dull scissors, was a dirty gray; his hair a snow-white thatch. When unoccupied by pipe or quid, his pursed lips gave vent to a continuous, monotonous whistle, keyed to a dry whisper.

Sam was old. "Somewhere in the eighties," he might admit, when pressed; "danged if I know perzactly." Aye, Sam was old, and all he possessed was old. His burros were old and as wise as sin. His brass kettle had been a part of his equipment for over a quarter of a century. His muzzle-loading shotgun, its stock bound with copper wire, was in its twenty-fifth year. His Henry rifle had left the factory nearly three decades ago. To all his relics he gave constant attention and loving and meticulous care.

A slow, methodical putterer, old Sam, occupying himself with a multitude of tiny details, wearing away the long days with what he called "little chores." He lacked cleanliness, but with his relics he accomplished wonders. Seldom did he mislay anything; he could pack his burros in the dark.

He slept in his rags and tatters, never bathed and seldom washed his face; yet, until lately, he had never known a day of illness. Now he was troubled with a dry cough, shortness of breath, spells of faintness, and a recurrent pain in his left arm. No more could he lay his head on the desert's breast and drop into deep, restful, dreamless sleep. Propped up by his pack saddles, or resting his back against some rock or arroyo wall, he slept only fitfully.

"Guess it's the heart," he told his burros. "Maybe smokin' too much. Have to cut down."

But his other organs, remarkably sound, relieved the failing heart of much of its burden. Then, too, he possessed an innate toughness that enable him to hold his disability static for long periods.

He was not given to brooding or gloomy forebodings, but now he was vaguely conscious of a dark premonition that whispered funereally of the conclusion of his wanderings. Perhaps he would not always be a desert fixture; there was an end to all things.

With that somber thought came a distaste for the desert and a longing for a home camp by some foaming mountain stream.

"Would be fine," he murmured dreamily, as one visioning a paradise, "to git up in the mountains—like when a boy. Trees and streams—trees and streams—green grass and springs. Might take a splash, if I found a good swimmin' hole. Maybe git up there by and by. But I'll take another look around; bound to strike it some time."

When at last Luck seemingly relented and led him to a vast deposit of gold-splotched ore, Sam indulged in no wild gymnastics, no mad shouts of exultation. Calmly he surveyed the exposure that told him he had found a Golconda.

"Well, boys," he remarked quietly to his burros, "here's what we've been tryin' to find fer quite a spell. There she is, rich as mud. Help yourselves."

But his long-eared friends displayed no excitement; they could not eat gold. What they wanted was a big feed of barley.

Often had he dreamed of finding just such a great lode, thick-sown with blobs of rusty gold, fantastic stringers, dull-gleaming nuggets; often had he visioned himself "stompin'" his old hat, and

yelling: "I've found it! The world is mine!" Now, his wildest dream a reality, he only leaned heavily on his shovel, his mind in the cold grip of sorrowful futility. "Too old," he mourned, "too old!"

To banish momentarily the midnight of his despair, he evoked the spirit of his youth. At his call, it rose from the past's dark depths, straight-limbed, bright-eyed, radiant as the morning star.

"This would tickle you," he mused, with an indulgent smile. "Wonder what you'd do with it?"

"Work it!" cried Youth. "I'd find a way to get tons and tons of that rich stuff to the railroad."

"Then what would you do, say, after you had the ore goin' in a steady stream to the railroad, and was a rich man?"

"I'd travel like a king to far places," Youth shouted. "I'd have gay companions, rich food, rare wines, private cars, a yacht, whole hotel floors, all that money could buy! For my pleasure, I'd turn the world upside down!"

"Maybe you would, young feller, but after you'd done all that, then what? Maybe it wouldn't work as you figger. Maybe, with all the eatin' and drinkin' and skylarkin', your stomach would give out, and you'd be in bed, on a cracker and a glass o' milk. Maybe all your gay companions would be jes' fair-weather friends. Then, don't fergit, all the time you'd be gittin' older." Like the tolling of a funeral knell, he repeated: "Older—older—older."

"What, then, if you're so wise, would you do?" Youth sneered faintly. "With plenty of money, what would you do?"

"I'd take it quietly, young feller," Sam replied, with paternal patience. "There's a heap o' things I've learned you've yet to find out. First thing, I'd git me some good licker; need a little snort now and then to put fire in my blood. Then some first-class terbacker, both smokin' and chawin'. Next, I'd git some old-fashioned woman to make me a real apple pie—rich and deep and wide, with, say, a quart of real cream to drench it." He smacked withered lips.

"Yes, siree, you crazy young scamp," he went on, "real, gen-u-wine cream from a spring house! Recollect, you thievin' devil, how you used to lap it up? I-gosh, weren't it good! And last of all, green pasture for the jacks, and a rocker on the porch of a mountain cabin fer me. Must be by a stream; one of them kind I can hear a-talkin' and a-laughin' to itself day and night. None of your standin' the world on its ear fer me; jes' enough fer comfort."

The shining figure became wan and ghostly. Slowly it faded into the dark depths.

"Good-by," sighed Sam. "You'd never understand me, anyway. Your wants ain't mine, ner your ways. We're strangers, you and me."

Yes, he'd settle down in the mountains. Snug cabin by some singy-songy stream. That was it—singy-songy stream. He whispered the double-jointed adjective several times, mentally savoring its slight running-water mimicry. He'd have everything comfortable up there: fireplace, cellar, spring house, garden, a cow, some chickens; and—happy thought!—a fishpond. How pleasant to look down into the depths of a clear pool and see a big trout lazily waving his fins!

The strike? Indifferently he stared at the chunk of gold-seamed ore in his grimy, gnarled hand. Under his feet were hundreds of tons of just such rich stuff. For half a century he had searched for it; but, now that he had found it, some inscrutable power had sapped exultation dry, reduced the green immortelles of victory to withered husks.

"Twenty-thirty year ago," he mused aloud, "I'd gone crazy over this; but now—too old—too old—too old. Huntin' fer it was what kept me goin'; the

fun's in the dreamin' and the hopin'. But when you find it, somehow you don't care.

"Won't bother about workin' it," he went on, confiding his plans to the silent, indifferent desert. "Come down and git a little once in a while. Don't need ner want much. Won't start no stampede, to bring fightin', killin', lyin'—hell itself. Cover my trail—keep it quiet—say nothin'—take along enough to do fer a spell."

He glanced up at the far peaks, shimmering in the clear air.

"Enough to do me fer a spell up there." He let the specimen slip from his fingers. "Yea, that's what I'll do: take along some to mortar and pan when I git to runnin' water. Won't have to take much; rich, rich it is—rich as a widder's smile. A mother lode, if ever there was one."

The great deposit was in a high basin, in a vast labyrinth of sharp-shouldered, barren hills and steep-walled, tortuous canyons. Sam, looking for a short cut to a spring, in the depths of the hills, had found the only entrance to the great hollow—a fracture in a wall of solid rock above the rim, barely wide enough to admit a packed burro. Thus, from the treasure cup no rich float to betray to some sharp-eyed prospector the existence of the lode.

From the hills the land sloped down to Hell's Kettle, a great, sandy sink, crescent-shaped, and, in places, within a few hundred feet of sea level. On the crest of the far slope above the convex side of the sink was Last Chance Spring. Between that oasis and the distant peaks ran a low range of volcanic hills, then a long stretch of rolling country, and lastly, the precipitous foothills of the great range.

Between Last Chance Spring and the foothills were hidden springs and seeps —tiny green islands in a vast strait of aridness. Sam knew every one of those springs and seeps; but, since hot weather had not yet laid its withering spell on the lonely land, there was no pressing need for forethought concerning water. In the moderate temperature, he and his burros required only occasional swallows.

Hell's Kettle gave little hint of the inferno the sun of summer would make of its sandy wastes. It was fairly carpeted with the flowers of the desert's evanescent spring; fugacious blooms so tiny a man's hand might shade a dozen varieties. On the sunward side of the sand dunes, the verbena exhaled its delicate perfume, and the desert primrose, pure and immaculate, raised its lovely face to the balmy air's light caress.

For old Sam, it was a long march to Last Chance Spring; and for his burros, too, with several little sacks of the precious ore added to the packs none too light for their old backs.

A giant Joshua tree stood in royal loneliness near the spring. When he saw the familiar black shape looming above the gleaming green glories of the little oasis, his eyes brightened and he made a clumsy effort to quicken step.

Methodically he unpacked and picketed the burros. Then, presently, his old shotgun bellowed.

" 'Rabbit stew,' she says," he chuckled triumphantly.

Deftly he skinned the cottontail. With some onions and salt pork for flavor, it was soon simmering over a little fire. Flapjacks and coffee completed his menu.

After the meal, he whittled some shavings from a dry, black plug, rubbed them in his horny palm, filled his pipe, and lighted it with a blazing twig.

A hawk winnowed past, veering off a few feet from the head of the ruminating smoker. For a moment, he glimpsed the cold, implacable malignancy of the bird's eye.

"A killer," he remarked aloud; "a bad un. Want none o' that; jes' a place

to rest by runnin' water—and—and peace."

Moonrise. On the face of the golden globe, dark smudges—finger marks of the great lamplighter. The shadow of the lone Joshua tree, an intricate *cheval-de-frise*. Some winged haunter of the night reiterates a doomful note. A coyote shatters the silence with sudden crazy clamor. In the illimitable monochrome, the oasis is a fragment of black velvet; the fire, a flaming ruby; the old man, an elf's doll.

Sometime Sam was not thirsty, yet he visioned himself luxuriating, like a gamboling otter, in the foam and smother of a waterfall. What was the mysterious power, he asked himself, that had made him a wanderer of the arid wastes, when he could have easily established a comfortable camp by some mountain stream?

Only a few men knew the desert, he answered slowly, fumbling for what he conceived to be truth. Of that select company, he was an honored member. Any soft fool could survive by a mountain stream; but it required rawhide toughness, endless patience, and eternal vigilance to survive in the harsh, unyielding desert. Where one's land is, there are his fresh tracks. In the vast sweep of barrenness, he had enjoyed undisputed, unquestioned superiority. A man stays where he is king.

But, now, he vaguely realized, he was afflicted with a psychic desiccation. Those long, lonely years in the desert how somehow withered his spirit, until now it was reduced to the juicelessness of a greasewood stick. He could not plainly see the causes of his spiritual dehydration; but the sight of running water, he fondly imagined, would vivify his dry old soul with a bloomy renaissance.

His back against the Joshua, he slept fitfully until midnight; then rose somewhat painfully and broke camp. The forlorn little procession passed through moonlit fields of flowers from which rose wave after wave of perfume. Intoxicated by the sweet odors, the ancient burros, after the manner of their kind, essayed some clumsy cavorting.

"Old fools!" Sam reproved sternly. "Have some sense! What would you think o' me, if I tried to fool myself into thinkin' I was twenty?"

As the altitude increased, so did the spells of faintness, but his innate toughness gave the old plodder strength to trail onward and upward—a tortoise pace, but at last he reached Lazy Man's Creek, a hurrying mountain stream that sang the song his spirit craved. For several hours he rested on its grassy bank, staring fascinatedly at its crystal flood. Then he thought of the ore, and began talking to himself. Not entirely a foolish habit. If a man talks only to himself, there is none to betray his confidence.

"Looks like people lived around here. Better bury the stuff afore I meet somebody. Gotta keep mum; mustn't let anybody know."

He swayed slightly as he worked. The little sacks of ore seemed intolerable burdens, his shovel loaded with lead.

"Dizzy ag'in," he muttered.

Shaking and trembling, he scattered dry sticks and brush over the treasure cache, and resumed his slow march up the canyon.

Big Dave Greenwood, unlike many frontier bachelors, was a relentless foe of dirt and disorder. His comfortably furnished and commodious cabin was as spick and span as the kitchen of any old-time Dutch housewife.

Fifty years young, for him no morning mood of grunting, befrazzled, gummy-eyed stupidity. Clean and freshly shaved, fairly radiating good cheer, he was the personification of wholesomeness, as he flipped golden-brown cakes, made from corn of his own raising and grinding, or turned

rashers of bacon, cured to a delectable flavor in his own smokehouse.

With the assistance of Hank Blinker, an unobtrusive, methodical old man, who had been with him for years, he combined ranching with placer mining. A big garden, an apple orchard, cows, hogs, chickens, and turkeys, gave him a fare not enjoyed by his closest neighbors—Bill Dimby, Ike Downville, Sim Meeker, and Jack Mundy—save through his generosity or when they threw their feet under his table. The four slapdash, slovenly prospectors might have lived as he lived had they not lacked his skill and patience, his foresight and ability to plan wisely, his careful and persistent industry.

His virtues, however, brought severe penalties. The four borrowed his sharp tools, and either failed to return them or brought them back dull and rusty. Too lazy to cultivate gardens or to keep cows and chickens, they depended on him for fresh vegetables, milk and eggs, with no thought of return. They took every advantage of his generosity and good nature, while secretly resenting his ability to give.

His library filled one side of his big living room. He leaned to scientific and fact books, though he had a keen appreciation of poetry and philosophy. Illiterates all, the four were slyly contemptuous of his knowledge.

"Thinks he knows it all," was Sim Meeker's secret thought.

"I could learn what he knows," Ike Downville boasted to himself, "if I wanted to put my mind to it."

"I'm not like Dave," Bill Dimby bouqueted himself; "I don't need a cabinful of books to tell me what to do. I got some sense of my own."

"When I read," Jack Mundy remarked to himself, "I want something interestin'—a story with fightin' and wimmin' in it, instead of the tiresome stuff Dave loads up with."

But when they wanted a well-cooked meal, they were careful to arrive at Dave's cabin on exact schedule. When puzzled by some problem in mining or geology, they carried their dumb heads to Dave. Did one of them meet with accident or misfortune, Dave was the first man he called on for help and sympathy.

The big-hearted prospector was in front of his cabin, feeding brown sugar to his saddle horse, Pard, when Sometime Sam, with his burros straggling behind him, staggered into view. He hurried down the trail, and received the exhausted old man in his mighty arms.

"A hard pull," gasped Sam. "Like to never made it."

"Just rest yourself," advised Dave, his deep voice resonant with sympathy; "I'll take care of you."

He lifted the old man in his arms, as though he were a baby, and carried him into the cabin. An easy-chair, a hot whisky toddy, and a bowl of steaming chicken broth, made the world look brighter to Sometime Sam.

"Now, old-timer," smiled Dave, "a good, long rest will help you forget your troubles."

"You're kind to me," old Sam said softly; and looked about him contentedly. "Got a great place here, friend. Been dreamin' of something like this fer a long time."

"You're welcome to what I've got," Dave gently assured him, "for as long as you care to stay."

He proceeded to undress his patient. When he had him propped up in bed and covered with warm blankets, with a hot iron at his feet, he stepped back and surveyed him benignly.

"This is heaven to me," Sam sighed happily, his eyes warm with gratitude. "Pine wood smells good—everything sweet and fresh. I'm much in your debt, pard; but I'll pay back—some way; I'll pay back."

In the mind of the capable and faithful Dave was no thought of the burden

the exhausted old man might eventually become. No selfish calculation of how long his liberty might be restricted by the requirements of a helpless invalid darkened his cheerful, whole-hearted generosity.

For the slowly failing old desert rat, he prepared tasty, nourishing broths and light custards. He bathed him, shaved him, ministered to his every need. During the long evenings, he read to him. At night, he was up at intervals to ascertain if his patient was resting comfortably. And always was he cheerful and good-natured.

Sam liked to be near the stream; hear its soft, unending song; rest his eyes, long set in the desert squint, on its foam and sunlit ripples. Dave padded a big homemade chair with blankets and set it on the grassy bank. There the feeble ancient meditated during the cool afternoons.

"Purty," he would wheeze—"purty water. Knows something—that water. Dodges down out o' sight when it hits the desert."

Bill Dimby brought some venison.

"Give him some wild meat, Dave," he suggested, with assumed gruffness. "Nothin' like wild meat to brace up an old cuss."

Sam, confessing his desert dream of apple pie, Dave made him one. It was a foot across and an inch and a half deep. He cut a huge quarter, sprinkled it liberally with sugar, and drenched it with pure cream. But old Sam ate only a morsel. A mountain of gold would not have enabled him to enjoy that luscious cream-drenched wedge of apple pie. Luck grinned sardonically.

At Dave's request, Ike Downville, bottle-nosed and button-eyed, but with the voice of an angel, sang for the ancient dreamer by the stream—"Annie Laurie," "Darling Nelly Gray," "Home, Sweet Home," and "The Old Oaken Bucket." The old, sweet, heartbreak songs flowed from the throat of the dull-faced little prospector like divine melody from the lips of some heathen idol. The golden tones soothed Sometime Sam. He closed his eyes and smiled appreciatively. "Like moonlight fallin' on the water," he murmured.

Considering the harmonious operation of Dave's many virtues, in the deepening twilight of his meditations, Sam caught glimpses of a few of the true causes of his spiritual desiccation. While Dave had been watering his mind and soul with knowledge and varied interests, Sam had let his go dry, until they had become gray and leafless. While Dave was receiving fresh and vitalizing thoughts, Sam had wasted years by lonely camp fires in far desert places, mulling over dead memories. Dave had lived; Sam had merely existed.

To many men, the failing of the vital forces brings drooling senility; but to Sometime Sam it brought saintliness. His voice became as thin as the tinkle of silver, his body scarcely a mummy's weight, but he saw only the light of life. In time, all the shadows faded—regret, suspicion, cynicism, and worldly desire—leaving mind and soul bathed in the white light of childish innocence.

In none of Dave's neighbors did Sam discern evil; to him, they were all good. As for Dave, Sam had long since raised him to the rank of a ministering angel. His nurse and comforter was the personification of all that was true and good.

Unable to perceive evil, yet remembering his find and its location, he planned to make Dave and the other prospectors his heirs. He would make them all rich and independent. They would always be as they were now: a company of loyal pards, honest, unselfish, trusting and loving one another. With the gold they would do much good; they would help the less fortunate, still the widow's moan, dry the orphan's tear, lend a hand to struggling youth.

But faint memories of the lusts of men, whispering to him warningly, made him delay announcing his plan. They were good men; yet, wasn't there something about gold that brought trouble? He would wait—wait a little longer.

The months passed, and still Sometime Sam lingered.

One quiet evening, when Dave's neighbors had lighted their pipes, after enjoying one of his excellent meals, Sam suddenly demanded a cup of coffee. Dave, demurring a little, gave him a half cup of the stimulant.

"Wait till she takes hold," the old sufferer choked out.

Silently they waited, indulging him in what they considered a sick man's whim.

"Boys," he began, "you've been kind to me. Be gone in a little while—want to show my feelin' fer what you've done fer me. Goin' to make you all rich—every one o' you."

Between gasps, he told them of the hidden samples, described the trail to his find, the seeps and springs along the route.

Yet, as he finished, the faint memories of the lusts of men once more rose to trouble him.

"Be square with one another," he beseeched them. "Don't let the gold bring hate and killin'. Do good——"

"You've talked enough, Sam," Dave gently checked. "Time you were getting some sleep." Then, to the visiting quartet: "Sorry, boys, but I'll have to adjourn the meeting."

But the four were already on their feet, their eyes glittering and hard. As they strained their fickle memories to record accurately the old desert rat's description of the route to the fabulous bonanza, in the heart of each cold selfishness snarled: "Take all—every foot of the rich ground—every ounce of the gold!"

A moment of tense silence, and then Bill Dimby picked up Dave's lantern.

Sam had sunk quickly into a doze. He did not see his heirs rush from the cabin, nor hear Dave half humorously remark, after they were gone: "I suppose I'll have to go after my lantern; Bill never brings anything back."

At first the four prospectors walked swiftly; but, when the trail widened, animated by the same sordid impulse, they shamelessly broke into a run.

When they uncovered the samples and saw the gold gleaming dully in the lantern light, they were like famished wolves after a taste of blood. They got in each other's way, their eyes took on a baleful shine, they fumbled the rich stuff. They had been kind to Sam, but the gold possessed the power to drive them to madness. Each one clawed and scrambled to secure the richest chunks. Then it dawned on them that the samples were only samples; that down in the desert was the deposit from which tons and tons of equally rich ore might be taken. The first man to reach the find of Sometime Sam would be a millionaire. They rushed back to the cabin, and wildly called Dave forth.

But the sight of the gold-splotched ore failed to excite that calm-hearted, cool-minded philosopher.

"You boys," he said quietly, easily reading their secret, poisonous thoughts, "can do as you please; but I'll stay home and care for Sam."

"Yes," agreed Bill Dimby jerkily, "that's the thing to do." He was backing away. "You're handy that way. We'll go take a look; maybe he only found a pocket. If we find it, we'll declare you in."

They did not wait until dawn to stampede. Gold lust had transformed them into creatures in whom no noble thought survived. Each was resolved to take possession of Sam's find at any cost. He alone would seize the treasure; he would share it with no man; he would, if necessary, kill to hold it.

The desert silence closed over Bill Dimby and Ike Downville as they vanished, adding another mystery to its secret hoard.

Jack Mundy overtook Sim Meeker at Last Chance Spring. Trail wisdom had not guided them to the seeps and springs along the route. Luck had humored them in their madness—temporarily.

Ordinarily adverse to leaving their pleasant mountain runways, they had only a nodding acquaintance with the desert. Each had galloped forth, imagining a forward trail pleasing to his conceit. He was Luck's favorite. For him a quick dash to Sam's strike and a triumphant return to the cool mountains.

But the heat and glare of midsummer had dispelled their rainbow visions. And the sight of Hell's Kettle, a sizzling trough far below them, had not prompted rosy dreams. Long, terrible miles before them, and not one drop of water, save what they might carry from that well-named fountain, Last Chance Spring.

Meeker had descended into the hot desolation without a canteen. This was not unusual, for there is no limit to human stupidity, as the records of death from thirst testify. Not through any forethought but because it happened to be within easy reach, Mundy had included a big canteen in his hastily assembled equipment.

Meeker's advantage was in the possession of Tricky, an offspring of a broncho stallion and a burro he had bought from a desert rat. She had inherited the spirit and speed of her father and the endurance and adaptability of her mother. Unlike Mundy's broncho, Easy, now near to exhaustion, she could endure a high degree of heat, required little water, and would crop the bitter desert shrubs. Already she was recuperated and full-fed, while the horse sagged disconsolately.

For a time they made a pretense of friendliness, but at last a glowering, ominous silence fell between them. In their averted eyes were recurrent glints of cold flame. Held by the heat in the giant Joshua's shade, they brooded somberly.

"I'll take the canteen and Tricky," each savagely promised the beast snarling within him. "I'll cross the Kettle in the cool of the night. None but me shall leave this place. None but me."

Inwardly tensing themselves for the inevitable struggle, they labored under a terrible strain. Fear's manacles held them close together; a ghastly intimacy, like condemned prisoners on their way to execution.

Slowly they approached the point of murderous action; then, suddenly, their taut nerves snapped. With mad-dog snarls, they closed in a desperate grapple.

Meeker slipped his knife into Mundy's vitals. Mundy's left hand closed on the naked blade, held it. His fingers cut to the bone, he kneed his opponent back, and jerked his gun clear of the holster. The six-shooter exploded within two inches of Meeker's abdomen. He half turned, and then slapped the earth as though struck by a thunderbolt. He was dead in a few minutes.

Mundy lingered until midnight. Before he died, he managed to release Tricky and Easy.

Sunrise. A coyote shrilly yapping certain welcome news to his fellow scavengers, and a buzzard descending in lazy spirals.

With the thought that the gentle old man would have chosen such a resting place, Dave buried Sometime Sam on a rocky promontory overlooking the ever-singing stream. With the blanketed shape in the deep hole, he interred the gold-splotched samples, the meager camp and trail equipment, the old shotgun and the ancient Henry rifle.

Indifferent to many tribal customs, he did not mark the grave. No tombstone could delay the return of dust to dust. Nor did he notify the remote county authorities. Strongly individualistic, he was much adverse to what he termed "legal monkey-doodle business." A coroner could not restore life.

Before the passing of the old desert rat, Dave had noted the return of Easy and Tricky, and surmised the fate of their owners. But he entertained no thought of attempting the rescue of the stampeders. He would not desert helpless old Sam for the sake of men who had deliberately set their feet on the trail of death.

"They were wiser than their riders," was his comment, as he watched the two animals splashing in the shallows of the stream; "they knew their limitations."

When balmy fall smiled on the land of greasewood and cactus, and Hell's Kettle no longer seethed and bubbled, he leisurely descended into the desert. His memory, keen and exact, had retained in proper sequence every word of Sam's description of the route to the find. At Last Chance Spring, he identified what remained of the two victims of their own madness. His shovel soon restored the little oasis to its pristine purity.

He made camp near the entrance to the basin, and walked down to the exposures and blow-outs of the great lode. He prospected until he tired of handling rich stuff. A wagonload would bring what would be a fortune to the average man. And his knowledge of formations told him that here was no showy vein, to peter out with depth, but a hidden mountain of free-milling ore that would produce hundreds of millions of dollars.

He could put up discovery notices, take possession, and begin hauling the ore to the railroad. In a short time, he could have a string of tough mules, with tougher drivers, hauling his wagons loaded with the rich stuff. Then a branch railroad and a roaring town. Money would pour in on him in an endless flood; he would soon be a multimillionaire. But what would he do with it—the golden flood?

Gentle old Sam, with a vision of some huge Santa Claus scattering gold among a poverty-stricken multitude, had beseeched: "Do good." A childish viewpoint.

What was good? Wasn't it just a matter of viewpoint? And wasn't the viewpoint shaped by inherited mental and physical virtues and weaknesses, environment, and the customs and passions of the particular tribe to which one belonged?

Would not the wolf regard a free swing at a flock of sheep as the greatest good one could do him? But what was good for the wolf no amount of money could make good for the sheep. Do good unto a wolf and every sheep in the world would blat: "Injustice!"

Would not the sheep regard giving them green, well-watered pastures as the greatest good one could do them? But what was good for sheep no amount of money could make good for cattle. Loudly the horned crowd would complain:

"Behold, you have done us a great injustice by helping the foul sheep. We cannot graze where sheep have cropped the grass to the roots and left their sickening odor. Injustice! And you call it doing good! *Ba-a-aw!*"

Power, yes; but not actually Dave Greenwood's. Outwardly the world would kotow to him; but its sincere obeisance would be to the gold—the gold temporarily in his possession.

Stripped of the liberty of obscurity, he would become the slave of gold. It would impose on him certain rigid rules of conduct, certain conventionalities from which there would be no escape. The world's spotlight would be turned on him, his every move criticized.

Egotism deluded some men into believing that by the use of money they could work a change in the world. But had any human being by any method ever worked any change in the world? Didn't the world, when it got ready to change, do so under its own impulse and power? What mortal could prove that the idea of change was not merely one of man's many illusions?

Could one human being, either by reward or punishment, work an actual change in the nature of another human being? Had the enjoyment of his well-cooked food, his clean and comfortable cabin, and the conveniences his hand had wrought, lessened the inefficiency and slovenliness of the four men, who, scourged by crazy avarice, had ridden blindly to destruction?

Vast wealth would set envy and hatred on his trail. Like starving buzzards, countless beggars would descend on him. He would have to hire lawyers to guard his money, and private detectives to guard him. Of every man who approached him, he would have a secret suspicion—the cancerous thought that back of every protestation of friendship lurked some dark, mercenary motive.

Yet there were shrill inner voices urging him to "cash in."

"What sane man," cried the impatient chorus, "who would not grab this and work it to the limit! You're an idiot, Dave Greenwood, even to hesitate. Think of the luxuries it would bring you! You would not have to lift your hand; you would have only to give orders. Think of the satisfaction of knowing that even while you slept every minute was adding to your wealth. If you do not grab this, some other man will ultimately stumble onto it, and for him it will pour forth its golden flood. If you are alive then, you will bitterly regret your silly philosophizing. Only a fool would turn away from this. Take it!"

He had health, comfort, and security, a peaceful heart and a calm mind. He had the ability to enjoy life's simple things—things free of the germ of their own destruction, free of penalties. Why, then, invite the incubus of wealth to set its claws in his soul and hagride it to the grave? Why not remain happy and free?

"I'll let you keep it," he told the desert, and turned toward his ponies.

Watch for other stories by Robert V. Carr.

HEREAFTER POPULAR MAGAZINE will be published twice a month, instead of weekly.

This change will make it possible for the publishers to give you better stories, than under a weekly frequency of issue. Two weeks give us time to make a better magazine in the case of THE POPULAR.

We have decided to publish long, complete novels in each number of THE POPULAR. These will make their appearance shortly and, we promise you, will be up to THE POPULAR standard, so far as interest and literary excellence are concerned.

Therefore, the next number of THE POPULAR to be published, after the copy you now hold in your hand, will make its appearance on the news stands on Friday, July 20th, and then, on the 7th and 20th of each month thereafter.

Note the dates and be sure to tell your news dealer to put you down for a copy of the better POPULAR.

The price will remain the same. *Fifteen cents* the copy in the United States; twenty cents in Canada. All news dealers sell THE POPULAR.

A Chat With You

HAVE you ever been on a modern ocean liner? If you have, you will remember the odd sensation of being suspended, as it were, out in space, as if the boat were an independent little planet, traveling in some solar orbit. The same idea occurred, too, when another liner passed yours at dead of night; there was the impression of a fantastic comet—a cluster of warm lights surging by and off again into darkness, trailing a turbulent white wake, like ectoplasm.

Once aboard the steamship and out of sight of land, it is as if you had left the earth behind and had become a citizen of some Utopian city-star. Everything about you is different from the sights of the workaday world on *terra firma*. Huge red-and-black funnels, long deck promenades, rows of portholes, great curving staircases, elaborately decorated saloons, lifeboats swung on white davits—these are some of the thousand and one unfamiliar but strikingly interesting things that stir your imagination.

* * * *

COLUMBUS, when he was a boy, used to hang around the docks in Genoa and watch the merchant vessels returning from India, laden with silks and spices. An enchanted aura seemed to hover over them and their crews, for had they not ventured to far, strange, exotic lands? Even to-day, when we read of those times, we sigh for them. The past always seems more brightly colored than the present. But we may be sure that right at this moment, other lads, other men, are gazing with beating hearts at vast steamships backing out of long docks. Who can resist that adventurous call? Is it any wonder that a ship makes such an ideal setting for a story? And remember this—the liners of 1928 are just as full of dramatic possibilities as were the frigates and galleons of our forefathers.

* * * *

AT a guess, what kind of story do you suppose would fit in most admirably with the atmosphere of a liner? Probably there is no limit, but certainly no more colorful background could be chosen for a mystery tale, for instance. Such a story would present a tense situation, for to commit a crime on a ship would be nothing short of foolhardy, since there is no escape except into the water, two miles deep! In the complete novel which will lead off the next issue of THE POPULAR, not one, but a number of devilish crimes are committed thus. Just how they were done makes "The Gray-eyed Adviser," by Howard Fielding, one of the best mystery stories of the year.

* * * *

AFTER your voyage with the novel, you will find yourself on land, with Will McMorrow to greet you. His short story is laid in a great city, and he will prove to you that life under the pounding elevated trains and among the scooting vehicles can be as absorbingly thrilling as that on the sea, or the far frontiers. A good story is worth

reading whether it happens on a ship, in a city, or among the Yellowstone rangers.

* * * *

AND speaking of the rangers, an author who has lived among them and knows them will be one of the features of that next issue. He is Frederic F. Van de Water, and you will like his short story, we think.

You see, on this trip we have reached the West. Now we go north into Canada, in "Sunset House," by George Marsh. His serial will make you think that you are in the heart of the deepest forests. You can start reading it in the present issue, by the way.

* * * *

OTHER writers who will help to make the coming number a corker are Larry Barretto, F. N. Litten and C. Blackburn Miller. Each has a distinct personality, and each can write a powerful story. To give you good stories that please you and will remain among your agreeable memories—that is what we try to do. Your letters help us to select; keep on writing in.

THE POPULAR

In the Next Issue, July 20, 1928

The Gray-Eyed Adviser	HOWARD FIELDING
All Is Not Gold——	WILL McMORROW
The Amalekite Smiter	FREDERIC F. VAN DE WATER
Confidence	LARRY BARRETTO
Scrapped Man Power	F. N. LITTEN
Sunset House A Four-part Story—Part II	GEORGE MARSH
The Canyon Trail	C. BLACKBURN MILLER
A Chat With You	THE EDITOR

And Other Stories By Favorite Writers

Customs Inspector—"Got anything very valuable in this trunk? . . ."
The Traveler—"I should say so . . . a whole carton of Chesterfields!"

THEY'RE MILD
***and yet* THEY SATISFY**