HUMOR - MYSTERY

Short Stories

15 Cents April

See "THE END OF THE TRAIL"
By Arthur Preston Hankins, In This Issue
A Complete Novel "THE SKYROCKET"
By H C Witwer

A TRILOGY OF SHORT STORIES

H. C. WITWER

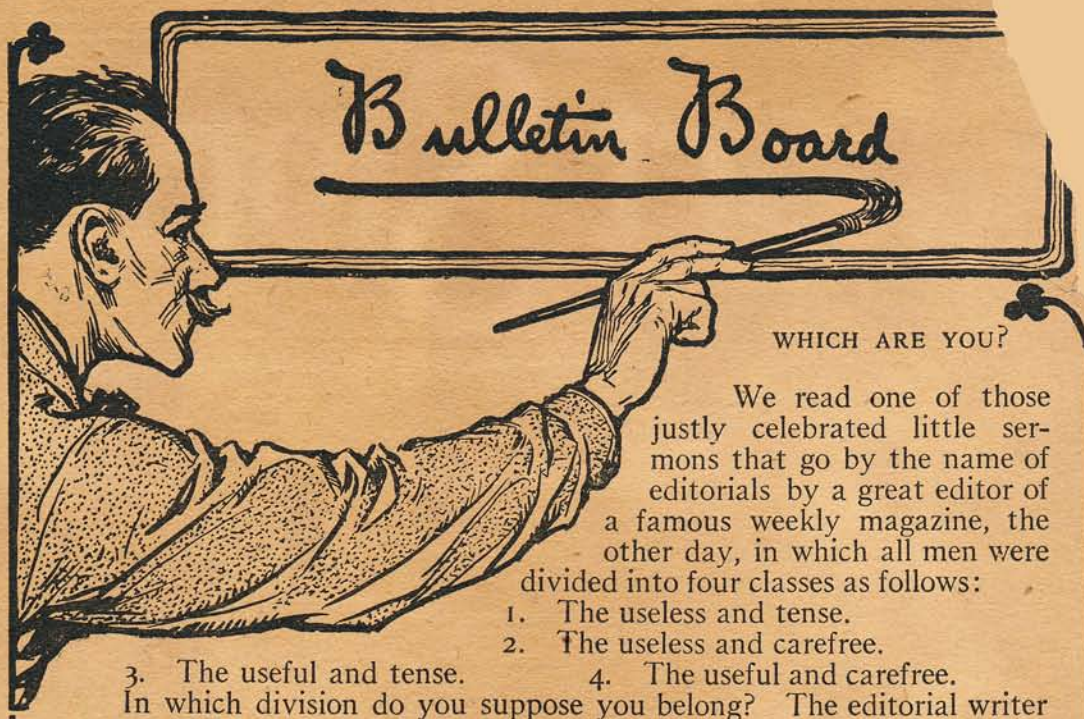
Mr. Witwer's complete novel "The Skyrocket" heads this number of SHORT STORIES. "Sinister Dick," a short story by the same author will be published in the May number of the magazine.

WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

Invalided home from "somewhere in France," we here see Mr. Hodgson at rest after commanding a battery of artillery. His sea stories are features of SHORT STORIES from time to time.

C. WELLS NIEMAN

Every reader of the magazine is familiar with Mr. Nieman's delightful stories of the Midway Oil Fields. His "The Inherited Animal" in this issue and "A Piece of Wrapping Paper" in May will keep you smiling.



WHICH ARE YOU?

We read one of those justly celebrated little sermons that go by the name of editorials by a great editor of a famous weekly magazine, the other day, in which all men were divided into four classes as follows:

1. The useless and tense.
2. The useless and carefree.
3. The useful and tense.
4. The useful and carefree.

In which division do you suppose you belong? The editorial writer expressed his preference in the inverse order in which the classes are set down.

We all of us number among our friends representatives of each division. And what a dull old world it would be if it were not so!

There's division Number Two. What a host of good fellows, carefree, happy companions, we all know, and yet in the stern requirements of this world they will do very little that is materially worth while—other than add to its "bloomin' *joie de vie.*" Don't expect these souls to accept the responsibilities in the manner you do. From their ranks are recruited the songsters, the troubadours, the laugh makers—and alas, the failures. All too often their irresponsibility is its own reward.

Casting aside the matter of personal preference, there is of course no doubt that the Fourth class is the smallest, for from it are recruited the world's greatest men of action—the men who can shoulder the heaviest responsibilities and still cast off its cares. Indeed the man or woman is rare indeed who is blessed with a sense of humor that lasts him in time of stress. Such a one is destined for higher places for

"The thing worth while
Is to go on with a smile
When everything goes dead wrong."

MODERN LIFE

Such a division of humanity is a most significant comment upon the effect of modern American life. Nervous tension is here recognized at once as the greatest factor for accomplishment and the most deadly enemy man can have. It is nervous tension uncontrolled which makes the neuraesthenics and nervous tension controlled which makes the great men. Don't let it get you. Relax. Seek, assume, shoulder responsibilities like a man, but keep them under su[illegible]ection.

A man summ[illegible] th[illegible]hole thing up to me the other day when he said:

Americans are driven by their jobs. The Englishmen drive their jobs."

We won't go into the matter of whether he was right or wrong, or relative effectiveness here. The point is, drive your job, so you can drive ahead of it, and not be crushed under it.

H. C. WITWER

In this issue we have the pleasure of introducing our readers to a writer new to the pages of SHORT STORIES and one whose work stands out for its strong individuality, its quick action, and frank, free, open-hearted Americanism. This writer is H. C. Witwer, whose photograph is reproduced in the advertisement elsewhere in this issue.

You will read Mr. Witwer's novel, "The Skyrocket" and judge for yourself its merits. We feel that it is a story which will appeal to every reader of this magazine. Mr. Witwer's life has fitted him especially for writing stories of just this type. His youth, his enthusiasm, and his exuberance have driven him at one time and another from clerical work to the selling of portable bathtubs, from advance agent for a three-ring circus to press agent for theatres and prizefighters, and during one period of stress he was like John Masefield, a mixer of drinks. Witwer, though, mixed a different kind of drinks, than did the great English poet Mr. Masefield, for Witwer was a dispenser of the great American ice cream soda. All these things were interludes in the serious business of life, for Mr. Witwer is a newspaper man, at the present time, connected with one of the great New York dailies, has spent most of the years of his majority as a reporter and actually put in a couple of years editing a little Florida weekly. It was from that experience he got the idea for his story "The Skyrocket."

SOME LETTERS

Much as we value all the letters we receive from readers, we must confess that there is a certain type of reader whose letters we always study very carefully. That type of reader is the man who is selling magazines, and he has more opportunity to study the likes and dislikes of the magazine reading public than any one else. In the course of a long letter from a man who has spent many years in the business side of magazine distribution, appeared the following paragraph with reference to SHORT STORIES. Do you agree with him? Personally we do not incline to serials, although we do have something of a failing for two part stories. Here's the paragraph referred to in his letter:

> I am a tremendous believer in the circulation building power of novelettes, complete novels and especially of serials in *big* installments, running through, say, four issues. I believe the combination would be a great help to SHORT STORIES.
>
> Wishing you the compliments of the season and increasing prosperity for your magazine, I am
>
> Sincerely yours,
>
> ST. S.

Evidently our readers were just as surprised as we were when Edward Mott Woolley dropped into fiction. A genuine captain of industry, in writing Mr. Woolley has let fiction severely alone. In our February issue we published a remarkable detective story by him, however, in regard to which

(*Continued on page 160*)

Short Stories

APRIL, 1916

Contents

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION PRICE, PAYABLE IN ADVANCE

Postpaid in United States, and to all Possessions of the United States, and Mexico	$1.50
Postpaid throughout Canada	1.90
Postpaid to all Foreign Countries	2.25

Entered at Garden City Post Office as second-class mail matter. Issued monthly by Doubleday, Page & Co., for The Short Stories Co., Ltd., Garden City, Long Island.
George G. Bell, President Albert H. Jennings, Treasurer Doubleday, Page & Co., General Managers

Short Stories

The Skyrocket

A Novel by

H·C·Witwer

Chapter I

THE FUSE IS LIGHTED

UNDER the blinding glare of the high-powered calcium lights, the two panting, half-naked men stepped warily around each other in the limited space of the twenty-four foot ring. The referee, shirt-sleeved, perspiring, kept pace with them at a safe distance; a frenzied, for the moment bestial, thousand or so of Adam's descendants rent the smoke-choked air with coarse, deep-throated encouragement, advice and rough but trenchant wit.

The contrast between the two fighters was typical of the prize ring. The one, young, clean-cut, almost handsome, lithe-muscled and pink-cheeked, his swift feints and counters baffling the eye. The other, a throw back from the cave men, squat, thick-jowled, ungraceful, trailing his lighter opponent with ponderous movements of arms and legs. It was boxer and fighter, science against brawn.

On the defensive after six gruelling rounds, his breath fighting its way to the open from his heaving chest, the boxer wearily retreated to a neutral corner. The other followed relentlessly, taking the jarring straight lefts and stinging jabs with guttural gasps. A warning yell from the boxer's admirers, a roof-splitting pandemonium from the fighter's followers, and then a huge hairy arm shot out, the dull impact as it found its mark lost in the din. The boxer's knees sagged, he reeled drunkenly, his arms mechanically dropping to protect his stomach.

"Knock him out, Horgan! Shoot it! Knock him out!"

The crowd leaped from the chairs, waving hats and canes, and screaming incoherently. From his box Algernon Stevens-Pitt joyously whacked Louie The Dip on the shoulder.

Horgan obliged. The boxer dropped in a crumpled heap to the canvas. In the parlance of the ring he was "out cold."

Back in the dressing room, Tommy Crandall, ex-newspaper man and now on his way to be ex-prizefighter, stared gloomily at the ceiling as his handlers unwound the bandages from his weary hands. He heard their rough, consoling comments abstract-

edly—his swimming brain was slowly fitting itself back to its normal niche and he was waiting for the appearance of Dan Bagley, his manager. The suspense was brief for the door of the dressing room was suddenly flung open and Bagley stood on the threshold, a rotund, jovial-faced, sleek example of the bromide, "Appearances are ofttimes deceiving." A casual glance at Bagley's merry face and you were convinced that here was good naturedness personified. The person who played Santa Claus at Christmas time, who gave the crippled newsboy the dollar bill, who was the willing prey of the charity collectors. But Bagley was known among his associates as "The Fox"—that was the kindest name they called him. It had been said that he could give the late J. P. Morgan cards and spades and beat him roundly at any deal involving dollars and cents, that he wouldn't give a blind man a copper without taking four out of the cup and that he never backed a loser in his life.

It was this last that Crandall was thinking of when Bagley entered the room and stood regarding him with a fat black cigar stuck at a truculent angle in his mouth. Bagley wasted little time in coming to the nature of his visit. His first word was to the handlers.

"Outside for yours!" he grunted.

They obeyed the command with commendable alacrity and Crandall and his manager were alone. Bagley laboriously sat down on a backless chair in the corner of the room. He drew a roll of bills from his pocket and handed it to Crandall with a great show of ceremony. Crandall took the money and tucked it carelessly in a pocket of his trousers, continuing the lacing of his shoes. Bagley abruptly removed the cigar from his mouth and considered the end of it pensively.

"Tommy," he began, clearing his throat vigorously, "I guess you and me are through after to-night! You better go back to the newspaper game or some other graft where you can use your head instead of your hands. I can't afford to carry no deadheads on my staff and when you let a tramp like Horgan stop you—you don't belong, get me? You carry your best stuff between your hat and your collar—it ought to be between your shoulder and your hand. Why this guy hit you with everything bu bucket to-night!" he grunted disgust "Say, you should 'a' heard what them ne paper guys said!" He rose, chewing on cigar. "Well, I'm sorry, but it's for th good of us both. You'll find five hundre dollars in that roll I slipped you; that'll kee the dogs away until you plant yourse somewheres. So long!" And he was gone

For a good five minutes after Bagley lef the dressing room, Crandall contemplat the floor. It was only when the special policeman, attached to the club, put his head in the door and inquired as to whether there was glue on the chair, that Crandall pulled himself together, finished dressing and left the building.

The street was all but deserted when Crandall reached the open. He gratefully inhaled the cold night air in deep draughts as he stood undecided outside the arena. Well, he was done at last! Two months ago the mention of his name aroused animated discussion wherever sporting men foregathered. It was a rare day that at least half a column of his exploits in the squared circle did not find its way into the newspapers. He had steadily forged his way to a point so near the coveted laurels that he could have almost reached out a muscular arm and touched the honors awaiting him. His swift rise had earned him the sobriquet of "The Skyrocket." And then —What was it? His nerve? He sneered at the unoffending lamp post. Why he had given some of them twenty-five pounds and whipped them. His skill? Hardly. He had a decision over the runner up for the title. But to-night was but a repetition of his last few fights and now Horgan, at best a good second rater, had knocked him out in seven rounds! He shuddered involuntarily.

Crandall took the roll of bills from his pocket and looked at it quizzically. He would have one rip-roaring session and then—well, he'd take that up later. No more rigorous training, banned cigarettes and guarded diet—he was free! His time and pleasure were his own, not Bagley's. The contemplation braced him like a stimulant; his head was erect and his shoulders well back as he strode briskly down the street.

s first port of call was McDermott's
. He was no stranger there. When
brawny form pushed through the swing-
g doors the bartender who saw him first
ached for the seltzer siphon and filled the
alls, basking in the reflected glory of serv-
ng the coming champion. Crandall's
trongest tipple in those days was a lemon
and seltzer and he smiled grimly as he pushed through the doors this time in anticipation of the sensation his order for whisky straight would provoke.

And then it was that Fate, glancing down at Crandall from the maze of human destinies, flicked the wheel of fortune so that the little ball would roll in the lucky pocket. Mayhap it was because Fate, being feminine, admired the boyish cleft to Crandall's firm chin or perhaps it was because the more fortunate are given a second try if they fumble the first chance. At any rate, it was Jimmy Lane, sporting writer of the *Press,* who was selected as Fate's ambassador to Crandall's court of misfortune.

Lane, from his table in the rear, grasped the significance of Crandall's entrance with quick intuition and with a hasty apology to his party, he rose and came toward him. Crandall, leaning over the bar, had given his order when Lane slapped him on the back.

"Hello there, Tommy!" he said cheerfully.

"Hello, Jimmy; what are you drinking?" Crandall responded with forced gayety.

"Me? I'll have a little ginger ale. Say! you're not going to drink that, are you?" He pointed to the whisky bottle in front of Crandall.

"Oh, no!" Crandall retorted. "I'm going to use it for a mouth wash. They tell me it's very sanitary!" He poured a stiff drink. "Well, here's——"

"Wait a minute, old man!" Lane grasped his uplifted arm with the privilege of long friendship. "Put that down and let me tell you something—No, not a temperance essay," catching the other's sneer, "just leave it there a minute."

Crandall slowly replaced the untasted drink with a growling:

"Well, what is it?"

"Say, Tommy," Lane began, "listen—I saw the fight to-night—I know how you feel. I met Bagley afterward and he told me about the other, too. He's a rat! Don't let him get your nerve. But don't start fighting that stuff until you hear my proposition. Then if you want to cut loose, I'll help you!"

Crandall stared down at Lane for a moment, tapping nervously on the polished bar with his fingers.

"What's the scheme?" he asked finally.

"Come on in the back here." Lane tugged at his coat. "This is deep stuff; can't let it be overheard." He winked humorously, "Come on! I'll tell you all about it!"

Mildly protesting, Crandall allowed himself to be led to the rear of the café, and arriving at the table indicated by Lane, he sat down with his back to the entrance, half screened from the curious. Lane called a hovering waiter and ordered a pint of Apolinaris to Crandall's audible disgust.

"Say!" he said abruptly, turning to Lane, "you were always a sharp on psychology and stuff like that: why are these dubs trimming me?"

"That's just exactly what I'm here to tell you!" exclaimed Lane. "Not only that, I'm going to prove my reason to you. Do you know who's responsible for the 'fox pass,' as we say at the club, that you made to-night? Kid Imagination! Title holder at all weights!"

Crandall's look of interest was unfeigned.

"I'll elucidate," continued Lane. "You get in the ring with one of these second raters and before the bell rings for the first round, you've got him licked! Kid Imagination sketches him for you, stretched cold on the canvas. You hear the crowd yelling for you and all the rest of it. Bang! goes the bell. You leap to your feet and start jabbing this fellow. Kid Imagination is sparring for time! The other fellow maybe gets a lucky punch over and it shakes you up. Kid Imagination is getting set for the sleep producer! While you're dancing around the ring keeping this other fellow off, your brain is forming this: 'That last wallop was a peach! It shook me up—one of those on the chin would take me off my feet—two of them would knock me out. I've heard of fighters being killed with a wallop like that over the heart. I'd better

be careful!' That's the way old Kid Imagination slips over *his* wallop! You got your ring training at school and you told me you had a year at college! Training for a fighter—never!"

"How about the other fellow?" Crandall asked with half amused interest. "Doesn't your theory work both ways?"

"No!" Lane slapped his hand on the table. "Take a man like Horgan, for instance. Do you know what he thinks when he's in the ring? I'll tell you. He doesn't think! When you sting him he's come back at you before his slow moving brain has had time to form pictures—and it couldn't form any if it had! Those fellows have been beaten to a pulp so often that their body is dulled to pain. Their training for the ring has been gotten on the lots, in the hell holes of the East Side, where a finish fight is a day's incident and the only thing to remember is that the man who goes down loses! *You* know that if you hit the other fellow enough times and get away from his counters, you'll get the referee's decision. *He* knows that if he hits you once in the right place the referee won't need to give a decision!"

Crandall reached for the Appolinaris.

"There may be something in that, Jimmy," he said slowly.

"Of course there's something in it!" cried Lane, banging the table with his fist. "Why do you suppose the police force is composed chiefly of aliens who have been here only long enough to get citizenship papers and whose chief assets are heft and brawn? I'll tell you. I walk along the street in some disreputable part of the town. I hear a yell from a darkened doorway. I say to myself, 'I'd like to help that fellow, but that place is dark and there may be a man with a knife, or is it a gang of gunmen—or——' I go away from there! All right. Now one of these cops comes along. *He* hears the same yell under the same conditions. Does *he* stop and temporize on his possible fate if he interferes? He does not; he draws his nightstick and plunges in! Why? Is he made of sterner stuff than I? Not a bit of it! He has one asset I have not—a negative one—the lack of imagination! If *he* stopped to think and could think—he wouldn't go in either!"

"Well, that's all very interesting, Jim remarked Crandall, after a pause, "b fail to see where it will get me anyth now."

"Wait!" Lane leaned over impressivel "if I tip you off to a sure thing will yo promise me to stay out of the ring unti you've given it a whirl?"

"What is it?" Crandall's query was listless; the mention of the word "ring" had brought him back from a contemplation of Lane's theory to the stern and immediate present.

"You were a pretty fair newspaper man before you got into this infernal fight game," Lane began seriously; "I can get you a man's size job away from New York that will pay you a good salary and give you a chance to make good with a capital G. I *will* get you this job if you'll promise to leave the booze alone and follow directions."

"I've come to that stage already, have I?" said Crandall, half angrily. "If I'm a good boy and so forth——"

"Not at all, not at all!" Lane hastened to interrupt, "I'm offering you a chance that you would have leaped at a year ago. I know fifty good men who would snap at it now. It's your game—working with your head instead of your hands! Why not give it a whirl, anyway? If you don't like it, come back and put the gloves on again. This job will take you to the open country and you can keep in active training all the time."

"Where is this place?" Crandall asked with a show of returning interest.

"In Florida—on the edge of the Everglades. But I want to know if you'll take a chance with these people before I go any further."

Crandall regarded his empty glass as if reading his horoscope in the curved crystal.

"I'll take one if they will," he said finally.

"Good!" Lane enthusiastically grasped his hand. "Here!" He searched his pockets and pulled forth a card. "Go up and see this fellow to-morrow morning at ten. Tell him I sent you. I'll write him a letter to-night and he'll have read it when you get there. He wants a good man badly."

Lane leaned back as if the matter were now settled and he rubbed his hands together with a satisfied air. Crandall filled

s glass with the mineral water, turning a sarcastic smile on Lane.

"I think," he said, "it might be a good idea to tell me now whether I have agreed to enter a plan to dynamite the Woolworth Building or whether the scheme is merely to assassinate the President. Not that I have any squeamish scruples, only I would like to know, if you'll pardon my unnatural curiosity, what this job is."

Lane laughed and pulled his chair closer to the table.

"Calm yourself, Tommy," he said. "This man I'm sending you to see to-morrow is at the head of a big land company. He's an ex-United States Senator, by the way. His company has bought a large tract of land down in Florida—a sort of pine forest, I believe it was. Well, they've cleared away the pines and cut the ground up into lots. In something like a month, I believe, after their literature flooded the mails, a colony has sprung up which they hope to develop into a regular sized hustling town. They've planted a newspaper there also—it has a circulation all over the country and acts as the medium or silent salesman, that brings people down there. They want a live one to run the paper, which is without a pilot now. There you are!"

"Sounds like a come-on scheme to me," Crandall said, looking fixedly at Lane.

"You're crazy!" Lane retorted indignantly. "Why this man," he pointed to the card in Crandall's hand, "is a philanthropist; he's given thousands to charity! His idea is to make this place a colony for invalids all over the country — people who haven't money enough to go to sanitariums and fancy health resorts. He sells them these lots at an absurdly low figure—makes them buy so they won't feel objects of charity. Why, man, he's worked on this scheme for years!"

"Well," said Crandall, rising, "I'll go up in the morning and see him. Thanks for the tip, Jimmy."

They parted at the door.

Chapter II

THE TURNING POINT

Crandall's descent in the squared circle had been matched only by his rise. They were more than rapid, they were breath taking. It had begun a year ago, when he was a reporter on the *Press*. As a newspaper man Crandall, while he may not have reached the spectacular heights he attained in the ring, was well thought of by his city editor. His tremendous bulk had swept him past many a guardian of the Big Men's gates, and once inside, Crandall knew how to capture the elusive interview and bear it to the local room for the first edition. He was jogging along at forty dollars a week until Griggs, his city editor, had selected him to call on Kid O'Neill, the middleweight champion, and put the Kid's exploits and ambitions into a column for the red-blooded readers of the *Press*.

He had handled his assignment well, but that was only a minor detail. He made a favorable impression with the Kid's handlers, and Bagley, his manager, had viewed him with joy. He became, thereafter, a frequent visitor to the Kid's quarters and in a brief space the inevitable happened. Bagley proved inordinately adept at weighing a niggardly forty dollars a week against a possible $10,000 a fight. Crandall, being young and human, succumbed.

The sporting writers hailed his first appearance as a fighter with unmeasured delight. First, because he stopped his man in a round and second because he was something of a rarity in his profession. He used perfect English and dressed like a gentleman; many a special "story" with Crandall, "The Adonis of the Prize Ring," was passed by a jaded Sunday editor for a long time following that night. Under the skillful tutelage of Bagley, Crandall went along knocking out third then second-raters with monotonous regularity. Then came his descent—the climax of which was reached when Bagley, disgusted with his favorite's poor showing in several disastrous bouts with second-raters, had cut him adrift.

Success had brought carelessness with it. The rigorous training grew irksome to Crandall, who longed for the free and easy life of the reporter, and he had climbed into the ring one night with a small but dangerous roll of fat, the bane of all athletes, showing over the edge of his trunks. His opponent, an unsung graduate from the

pork and beans ranks, had gained fame on that occasion by giving Crandall an unmerciful beating and all but knocking him out. Crandall's desire to save his features and his inability to finish his battle-scarred opponent had cost him dearly. For the first time in his whirlwind career he had emerged from the ring a gory, battered loser. That was the beginning. Crandall was no coward, but he refused to take the reckless chances with his next opponents that had endeared him to followers of the game in the past. He gave more attention to the art of defence than the knack of attack. His powers as a drawing card soon waned, because votaries of the manly art cannot get the requisite thrill from an exhibition of science, though they protest to the contrary, that comes with the smashing blows and gory exchanges that follow when fighters meet.

It lacked but a few minutes to ten the next morning when Crandall presented his card at the offices of the Osceola Land Company and, consulting the card Lane had given him, asked for George H. Hermance, general manager. As the office boy, with an admiring glance at his bulk, stepped into the inner office with his card, Crandall experienced a sudden thrill and became conscious that his hands were at least four sizes too large and that he should have worn his gray morning suit. Inwardly he heartily sympathized with St. Anthony because a direct descendant of the temptresses of that pious man was sitting less than three feet away, studying his mammoth form with frank interest. Despite his effort to control his fascinated eyes, they persisted in glueing themselves on the girl, who appeared totally unembarrassed by his gaze which she returned with interest, appraising him coolly from head to toe. It was the office boy who brought him back to earth.

"Say! can't ya hear?" The boy tugged at his coat. "Do you wanna see the boss or don't ya?" he snorted indignantly.

The girl laughed, evidently enjoying his discomfiture as Crandall hurriedly stumbled after the boy into the general manager's office.

Hermance, ex-United States Senator, head of the Osceola and other companies, and prey of the Sherman law, was hard the ideal type of philanthropist, physically Crandall thought he looked as Bagley, his erstwhile manager, would have looked, had he been a product of Wall Street instead of Third Avenue. He had the same rotund form—but his face resembled the hawk more than the dove and his cold gray eyes peered out at the world from the shelter of brows that overhung with the rugged appearance of mountain crags. He looked up quickly from a handful of correspondence as Crandall entered.

"You Mr. Crandall?" he shot out abruptly.

"Yes, sir," Crandall answered, standing at his desk.

"Know anything about Florida?"

"Well, a little," Crandall began, "I——"

"No matter—here's a chance for you to increase your knowledge and possibly your prospects," broke in Hermance, with an impatient wave of his hand. He reached into a pigoeonhole of the desk and pulled out a letter. "I have your—er—pedigree here," he said. "Lane tell you what the job is?"

"He sketched it," Crandall answered, adopting the other's manner.

Hermance amiably allowed a grunt to escape him.

"I want a man to run a paper there—boom town—growing fast; plant is there now, ready for business; town's called Ocean Breeze now, get a better name later Fifty dollars a week. Yes or no?"

"Yes!" Crandall's answer came on top of the other's last word.

"Good!" ejaculated Hermance, plainly pleased at Crandall's ready acceptance "Hope you always think as quickly as that All right!" He wrote hurriedly on a pad and tore off a strip of paper. "Here's an order for some money; go find my cashier; boy will show you. You'll get a letter of instructions from me when you arrive—principal thing now is to get there. I've known Lane's father for forty years, so I'm gambling on you from his son's tip." He rose and held out a flabby hand. "Hope you make good," he finished, surveying Crandall keenly. "You look like a fighter!"

"There's some difference of opinion about that!" smiled Crandall, shaking the

ner's hand. "Good-bye, Mr. Hermance, nd thank you!"

Crandall stepped into the outer office, glancing around expectantly, but the vision who had enthralled him at his entrance was gone and he found himself half wondering whether he had really observed her or not. He called to the boy and asked to be directed to the cashier's office and as the youth obligingly led the way, he stopped him and bent down to his ear.

"Who was the lady who was sitting here a moment ago?" he asked the mystified youngster.

"Heh? Oh, search me. She was some queen, eh?" the boy smiled knowingly. "Say! Ain't you Tommy Crandall, the fighter?" he asked abruptly.

Crandall, ashamed of his own curiosity, glanced fearsomely at the door to the general manager's office.

"No! Certainly not!" he said. "Where did you say I could find the cashier?"

"Come on, I'll show you." The boy turned disappointedly, shooting covert glances over his shoulder at Crandall until the latter was ushered in the cashier's office.

A half hour later Crandall left the offices of the Osceola Land Company with one hundred dollars added to the roll he already carried, and a bundle of many colored literature setting forth the delights of Florida in general and Ocean Breeze in particular, under his arm. His first thought was to inform Lane of his good fortune, which he did by telephone, the delighted Jimmy promising to meet him at the railroad station at nine that night.

After giving some consideration to the subject over his lunch, Crandall decided that for various good reasons it would be better not to eliminate the fond farewells to Lane. There were few others that mattered. So he hurried to his quarters, spent an hour or two in packing and checking his suit case at the station, spent the remainder of the afternoon at a vaudeville show.

Lane was at the depot to bid him goodbye that night and the two sat in the smoking car of the Florida Limited and talked of many things until the conductor's warning shout.

CHAPTER III

THE START OF THE FLIGHT

CRANDALL stood on the ramshackle platform and gazed at the battered sign over the station. With some difficulty he made out the letters spelled "Ocean Breeze." As far as he could see, the place was absolutely deserted save for himself, and he shivered as the cold, biting rain drove him to the shelter of the waiting room doorway. Tired and depressed after the long dusty ride in the train, he had been dumped off here in the midst of a furious rain storm. All he could observe when he dared a ducking and stood at the edge of the platform, was a long wide strip of sand, churned up here and there by the downpour, cold and inhospitable looking. Occasionally, a fringe of palmetto broke the drab outlook and the muddy, flapping objects swaying with the wind he perceived to be tents. When the haze lifted for a moment, he saw at rare intervals a one-story frame house, evidently thrown up hurriedly, with no regard to beauty and little to stability. He thought of his comfortable quarters in New York and sighed deeply. The bunch were probably settling for the afternoon session at McDermott's about this time. Maybe Bagley had repented his hastiness and was hunting for him frantically. At the thought of the ponderous Bagley hunting frantically for anything he chuckled involuntarily and found his spirits reviving somewhat; so he walked the length of the platform and pressed against the door to the inner regions.

He found himself in a long, narrow compartment, piled high with freight of sundry description. Two little spaces, walled off from the rest of the room, greeted his eye. Over one scrawled in chalk he read, "Waiting Room, White." Over the other, "Waiting Room, Colored." As he turned, musing over the distinction, a third compartment met his gaze. It differed from the others in that it had a little wire-framed opening in the front. A pair of enormous feet clad in congress gaiters protruded from the aperture, completely blocking off the view inside. The owner of the heroic pedal extremities gave no sign that he had observed Crandall's entrance and Crandall guessed

that owing to the wind and rain beating down on the tin-roofed top of the station like a battery of machine guns, his presence was unnoticed. He strode forward until he stood in front of the little window.

"You seem to be having plenty of both ocean and breeze here to-day," he said pleasantly, addressing the feet.

The effect was instantaneous. The feet came down from the window with a bang and the owner stood up. He was a match for Crandall in height but not bulk, his long tapering body surmounted by a peaked and bony face. What seemed to be a fixed expression of suspicion rested on his features.

"How did *you* git in here?" he inquired drawlingly, after a comprehensive survey of the dripping Crandall.

Crandall laughed, shaking the water from his cap.

"Via the well-known Southern Railway," he answered, "though it is not their fault. Is this the usual weather down here?"

"Did you all git in here on eighty-five?" persisted the other.

"I got in here on that last train," answered Crandall, nettled at the examination. "You didn't think I was blown in on the storm, did you? Do you know where I can find quarters around here?"

"If I knowed where you all could find quarters, I'd be lookin' for 'em myself," the other rejoined unsmilingly; "I can't tell you whereabouts you can find quarters, or halves, or dimes, or anything else 'round about here. 'Bout the onliest thing you all will find, and you won't have to hunt for it, is pneumonia and malaria!"

"Well, you're a cheerful host, you are!" Crandall laughed in spite of himself. "But say! I'm soaking wet—isn't there a boarding house or a hotel or something like that here?"

"What you all fixin' to do down here?" answered the other, seating himself comfortably.

"Look here, you infernal idiot!" Crandall exclaimed angrily, "I'm not going to answer any more questions, get that? I want to get somewhere and change my clothes——"

The other seemed not at all disturbed by his outburst. He pondered solemnly a moment, balancing back on his chair.

"W-e-ll," he said finally, "I reckon you can find a place to sleep at Mrs. Sai. worth's. She was tellin' me this mornii she had a empty room there, but that's . right smart stretch from here. Ain't nobody comin' in here no more to-day. You can open that there grip sack you got and change your duds right here."

After a moment's hesitation, Crandall accepted the suggestion and retiring to a corner of the room, hurriedly divested himself of his dripping clothing. He flung open his suit case, thanking his stars for the good sense that had made him pack an old suit of clothes where it was now available. His trunk had been hurled off the train and was standing on the platform in the rain. At the thought, he turned to the other.

"Say! My trunk is out there on the platform; will you help me get it inside?"

""Oh that's what that is." The man got up lazily from the chair. "Why I thought that was a deadhead belongin' to the agent that I'd been looking for. I just stick my hand out this little hole here on stormy days," he illustrated his meaning, "get my invoices without stirrin' from this little ole chair. I guess that's the reason I didn't see you all get off 85."

Crandall made no rejoinder but finished his dressing. The other noted his brawny chest and rippling back and shoulder muscles with unconcealed admiration.

"You all set up like a prize fighter, Mister," he blurted suddenly.

Crandall grinned, buttoning his collar.

"Well, I hope you won't hold that against me," he said. "What's your name? Mine's Crandall."

"Crandall, Crandall," repeated the other. "Never heard that one before. Where do you all come from?"

"New York," answered Crandall.

"Hmph!" the other grunted. "Le's see, that's away up north, ain't it? I been as far north as Vicksburg once, but I never have got to that New York place——"

"Yes, but what's your name?" Crandall interrupted.

"Me? Oh, I'm Thad Newell, first assistant to the agent here—got first call on the job, too!"

"Well, I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Newell," Crandall said, holding out his hand.

"Much obliged!" returned the other sol-

nly, grasping it with his own. "Only just ll me plain Thad. We don't call nobody Mister round here, 'ceptin' we're mad at em."

"All right, Thad," Crandall assured him, "I'll try and remember that. Better call me Tommy then, too."

"Speakin' 'bout these yere prize fighters," went on Newell, "we got a no good houn' down here that allows he's some shakes at that sport. That's Sam Bass. Sam's just a poor, worthless cracker as far as mos' everything is concerned, 'ceptin' one thing —that's fightin'. Sam's a regular whang dingus at that and if you rub him the wrong way, he'll most closely do you up!"

"I'll watch out for Sam, then," Crandall replied. "But tell me something about this place—what's the present population?"

"We got 'bout a thousand here now," Newell answered, speculatively. "They head for this little ole town from all over the United States and they're comin' in every day. This was the most no account day in quite a spell—you bein' the onliest one to git yere on 85. Some northern land company's runnin' things and so far things seem all right. But there's a heap sight more real estate agents here than they ought to be. Seems like they come down yere to be sure enough citizens and after the first day they just naturally become real estate agents. Sign painter does more business than any one else in the town."

"How is order maintained in a place like this?" asked Crandall. "Must be pretty wild, isn't it?"

"Nope, it's tame enough," Newell answered thoughtfully. "They ain't nobody gettin' killed 'ceptin' by the fever maybe, or somethin', and you all can leave your hams and fixins' out at night and find them there in the mornin', without some of these here niggers gets 'em. There's mostly old folks and sick ones here and they don't make much trouble. That no account Sam Bass gets rampagious now and again, but we got a pretty good sheriff over in Kissimmee and he looks after things."

"Has this northern land company got an office here?" Crandall inquired, on the verge of telling Newell his business there.

"They got a little ole wooden shack down by the lake," Newell replied, frowning ludicrously, "which houses two of the pertest young snips I ever run across, a couple of these here writin' machines and a lot of fool books about Ocean Breeze. These here pair of grampuses registers sales of lots half the day and the other half they stand around yere tellin' each other what a terrible no account ol hole Ocean Breeze is alongside of New York!"

Crandall thought over this information in silence for a moment and then his ear detecting a let up in the steady downpour, he walked to the little window and looked out. A terrific gust of wind swept by the station, rocking it dangerously, and as Crandall looked he saw a long frame building almost on a line with his vision, careen crazily over and topple to the ground with a mighty crash. Attracted by the noise, Newell stepped quickly to his side.

"Hmph! Another one gone!" he commented, viewing the ruins, "These here northerners better get that concrete down yere right soon or there won't be none of their offices left."

"What was that place?" Crandall asked idly, staring at the pile of lumber and broken glass.

"That? Oh that was the newspaper office!" Newell answered contemptuously.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST CLASH

THE rebuilding of the *Tribune* office was a slow and laborious job but Crandall at length completed it to his satisfaction. Tarpaulins flung over the press and the type cases had saved them from a total loss and going out to the lumber camp a mile from the town, Crandall had engaged a motley collection of laborers to help him with the task. He wrote a long letter to Hermance, detailing his experiences and the partial loss of the building. A wire in return had instructed him to have a temporary structure built at once, pending the arrival of the concrete for the permanent home of the *Tribune*. During the reconstruction process, Crandall engaged an old Negro known only as "Jim," who had become so attached to him in a week that a dog would seem faithless by comparison. Jim constituted himself as self-appointed bodyguard to Crandall and

it was with difficulty that the latter could go any place without the faithful Jim jogging along within easy hailing distance in the rear.

The newspaper force consisted of three girl compositors, who required one hour between them to set a "stick" of type, one "devil," by name Dudie Wallace, who made his first name a mockery by his dress and whose ability to sleep standing up was his only one, and one general all-around printer, which to the initiated tells it all, Dave Harkness. Harkness was in Crandall's estimation, the most skilled craftsman he had ever known. He fairly radiated efficiency. Like all geniuses he had a weakness—his particular one being an infatuation for John Barleycorn. That in itself would have been bad, but Harkness was never known to exceed his capacity on any but one day—the day the *Tribune* went to press.

Crandall's first visit to the Osceola Land Company's official agency had not been pleasant. The day after the printing office had blown down he had gone there to get acquainted with his business associates as suggested in the letter of instructions Hermance had sent him from New York. He found the office occupied by two youths attired in gorgeous raiment and smoking cheap cigarettes. They received him with a cold respectfulness, induced by his bulk. He learned that one was Harold Gordon Stillman, nephew of Hermance and his official representative at Ocean Breeze. The other languidly permitted himself to be introduced as Arthur Butts-Blythe of Newport and New York, friend of the mighty Harold and an apparent under secretary of the firm's. His request for information was answered by airy waves of beautifully manicured hands to the little piles of literature describing the alleged delights of Ocean Breeze, strewn about the office. Crandall spent little time there, then or thereafter.

Finding that most of the colonists were living in tents, pending the arrival of lumber to construct their homes, Crandall engaged board at the largest and most pretentious of the frame structures already erected, the Villa Lorraine. The Villa Lorraine was like the "Grand Palace Hotel," which has a branch in every small town throughout the West. It looked as little l its name as possible. It was a low-lyin frame building, one story high, with win dows placed at the more favorable junctures. A laudable attempt at a piazza ran around it in front and rear with an opening in the front for entrance. The villa was under the able management of Laura and Bella Havens, who had come all the way from Montana to enjoy the life-giving air of Florida as set forth in the company's literature, and incidentally to increase their fortunes by feeding the populace.

The majority of the younger element of the town, attracted by the romance of the two girls' venture boarded at the villa. Some of the older ones came, too, attracted by the savory odors of their kitchen. It was an odd enough company that sat down at the long pine board tables each meal time. Besides many of the lumber camp employees, there was Wills, an anaemic clerk, who had journeyed from Boston to regain something he never had to lose; Ainsworth, a foreman at the lumber camp, who had an inordinate appetite for hominy, (grits, he called it); Mr. Simms, a veteran of the civil war, obsessed with the fear that the fact would be forgotten despite his G. A. R. medals; Olin Vincent, a young merchant; and the redoubtable Sam Bass.

Crandall, with the assistance of the faithful and ever present Jim, had built himself sleeping quarters in the newspaper office, by constructing a sort of loft over the press. It enabled him to stay up late at night in an effort to master the intricacies of getting out the *Tribune* every Friday and was equally conducive to early rising.

After the first two weeks in his new habitat, he found that he had gained a few pounds around the waist line that in former days would have been dangerous, and that there were hotter places than Broadway in mid-August. But aside from this, his mode of living had suffered slight change. It was hard getting accustomed to the interminable stretches of sand, palm and palmetto; and the food at the Villa Lorraine, while clean and undoubtedly wholesome, had the drawback of eternal sameness. The predominating motive of each meal was "grits." He also discovered that by burning a weird smelling punk at night he could persuade

e of the multitudinous flying insects to ıain at a respectful distance from his cot.

Crandall paid frequent visits to the now nore genial Thad Newell at the railroad station and the two were on the verge of becoming fast friends when an incident occurred that took them over the verge, and .astingly cemented the friendship. Crandall, hurrying to the station one morning of press day, in expectation of the arrival of a new "chase," came upon Dave Harkness and Sam Bass sprawled under a pine tree in the sand; their arms were lovingly twined about each other's neck, and it required no practiced eye to see that both were exceedingly under the influence of something stronger than the boiling Florida sun. Crandall stopped and stared at the pair with anger kindling in his eyes. He had prided himself that he had got Harkness to a point of loyalty to the paper and himself where he would forego the cheering cup until after press day, at least; this much Harkness had sworn with many strange oaths, only the night before.

"Get up, Dave!" Crandall sharply commanded Harkness, glowering at the pair.

Harkness with drunken truculence, flourished an empty whisky flask.

"Ain't goin' to move!" he retorted belligerently, looking at Crandall with watery eyes. "I ain't nobody's slave. I'm Dave Harkness, best little ole printer in seven states and nine counties! I ain't goin' to let no Northern squirt come down here an' hustle me around, no sir!"

Bass chuckled a sneering approval.

"That's pourin' it into him, Dave!" he said, with a defiant appraisal of Crandall. "Some people gettin' pretty slick around yere, tryin' to tell us crackers what to do. Can't tell a cracker nothin'. A cracker's his own boss. You all best keep goin' where you're bound!"

He arose with some difficulty, leering at Crandall.

Crandall noticed that two or three idlers had drawn near and that Thad Newell was standing by the station steps, beckoning to him warningly. The train was whistling for the station. He pushed impatiently at Bass and as the latter stumbled to one side, stooped over and dragged the protesting Harkness to his feet.

"Come on now, Dave!" he commanded, shaking him. "Here's the train; you've got to help me with this chase. I want you to see if it's the one we ordered—we've got to go to press this afternoon, too——"

He felt a heavy arm on his shoulder.

"Take your hands offen him!" Bass, seemingly miraculously sober, drawled the words out insolently.

"I don't want to have any trouble with you, Bass," Crandall said quietly enough, although his muscles were twitching and his face had paled slightly, "but I warn you to keep out of this—if you don't you'll get hurt."

He shook off the other's arm and stooped over Harkness who had slumped back again in the sand.

The clanging rattle of the old wood-burning train pulling into the station drowned Newell's warning yell, yet from instinctive caution, Crandall veered his body to one side. His act broke the force of Bass's wild swing but the power of the glancing blow upset his balance and sent him sprawling in the sand.

Bass's triumphant chuckle was chorused by the fringe of idlers, now swelled by the first of the detraining passengers. It was not alone the attack, but the laugh that followed that tore the restraining clutch from Crandall's seething emotions. He leaped quickly to his feet, buttoning his light coat tightly as he rose so that his arms would be unimpeded. The scattering spectators had now become a fair-sized mob, drawn by the potent magnet of give and take combat. Half a score of teamsters en route to the station had lost interest in the commercial pursuit at the prospect of the fight and stood straining eagerly over the press, from the vantage of their wagon tops. Crandall dashed their fond hopes, however, although the dashing amply repaid many. Once more, Tommy Crandall, candidate for the heavyweight title, he faced Bass on his toes and moving his head a fraction of an inch escaped a bone-crushing swing. As Bass, carried forward by the futile effort, stumbled past him, Crandall stepped in and brought his right up in a beautiful uppercut that lifted Bass an inch from the ground. He fell forward on his face in the sand—inert.

The crowd at first failed to realize that

the fight was over, so swiftly had it come to an end, and amid the confused babble as they milled forward to view the prostrate Bass, Crandall slipped through the press, which made a respectful way for him as he shouldered his way along and continued to the station. Newell came forward to meet him, slapping him heartily on the shoulder.

"That's the bestest thing I seen in ten years!" he declared with the first and only show of enthusiasm Crandall had ever seen him display. "If that there houn' makes a face at me any more I'll most closely 'tend to him. That cracker talked so much 'bout what he could do I thought he was a fightin' fool! Now I see it can be done. He'd best keep quiet when he's around me!"

Crandall's laughing rejoinder died on the tip of his tongue. Looking past Newell he had seen something that sent the blood tingling through his body with a sensation he had known but once before. That was in the New York office of Hermance, before he had been engaged to come to Ocean Breeze. He knew the other was saying something, saw the curious look on his face—and he strode forward so swiftly that he almost brushed the indignant Newell off his feet. He did not stop until he was facing the reason of his quick coming breath, the girl who had laughed at him in Hermance's office.

She was talking to the conductor of the train when he had first espied her and now she stood in front of him with dawning recognition in her eyes. He doffed his cap and catching the quick glint of annoyance at his fascinated stare, addressed her.

"I—I beg your pardon—I thought I had seen you before—I mean I *knew* I had seen you—I—I——"

Floundering hopelessly, he fumbled in the pockets of his coat and produced a note book and lead pencil. The girl watched him, tightening her lips to restrain the smile.

"I'm the editor of the newspaper here," Crandall went on hurriedly, "and part of my—er—duties is to interview the new arrivals. Eh—what do you think of Ocean Breeze?"

"I see you inculcate your editorials with your fists," the girl laughed merrily, breaking the tension—for Crandall at least. "Was that a rival journalist or merely a rebellious subscriber?"

"That was neither," responded Crandall, recovering his poise slowly. "That was accident! May I have your name?" He indicated his note book with a great show of business-like indifference, "I am not presuming—it is quite regular," he added.

The girl waved over his shoulder and Crandall turning, annoyed at the interruption, saw Laura Havens of the Villa Lorraine, approaching with a welcoming smile on her face. He stepped aside as the girl made to pass him.

"Oh, you might say," she said mischievously, "that Miss Janet Doe arrived from New York this morning and thinks Ocean Breeze is perfectly beautiful. She is especially impressed by the conclusive editorials in the—Bugle, I suppose it is—and the genial editor's method of impressing them on his subscribers!"

Crandall took a half step forward, hoping that his boarding mistress would introduce him. But the hope was dispelled when both turned their backs on him and started for the villa, conversing animatedly. So he consoled himself with the thought that he would necessarily meet her at lunch and he suddenly decided he was extraordinarily hungry.

He rejoined Newell, who was laboriously checking off freight from a handful of invoices.

"That there printin' thing you all was lookin' for has come," vouchsafed the latter, glancing up. "You all didn't waste no time shinin' up to that new citizen—did you? Well, she is certainly some whang dingus for looks!"

"You bet she is!" Crandall rejoined feelingly.

"Yep," Newell went on checking up his invoices, "and I'm satisfied there's goin' to be some lively doin's in this little old town from now on!"

"Why now?" asked Crandall.

"Well," Newell answered thoughtfully, "She's goin' to look just as good to all these here young Romeos as she did to you all!"

CHAPTER V

A CLOSE CALL

WHEN Crandall entered the dining room of the Villa Lorraine, he found the girl in-

ed at the head of the table listening to graphic account of the battle of Gettysburg as fought by Mr. Simms with the assistance of the contending armies. Although visibly annoyed by the interruption, Mr. Simms had the grace to introduce him—which he did very ceremoniously as "our young and enterprising editor." The girl arose and bowed politely and if she hadn't turned that radiant smile on him, Crandall might have caught her name as Mr. Simms mumbled it, but after murmuring an inane commonplace he took his seat at the table and it was not until he had consumed two helpings of hominy, which he heartily detested, and caught the indignant glances from his fellow boarders at his sudden display of gluttony, that he recovered his composure. Timing himself so as to rise before the others, he made for the kitchen and learned from the sympathetic Laura that the latest addition to the attractions of Ocean Breeze was Miss Dorothy Stevenson of New York, an old schoolmate of the Havens girls. She was there on an indefinite vist as the guest of the Villa Lorraine. Upon asking more complete information, Crandall found that Laura's loquaciousness grew less marked so he took the hint and desisted.

Returning to the dining room Crandall made several ineffectual attempts to draw the girl into conversation, but finally he gave it up for the time and went back to the printing office.

With the assistance of "Dudie" and his girl compositors he managed to get the paper to press about eight that night, after which he detailed "Dudie" to the task of rounding up the erratic Harkness; then, worn out by the day's exertions, he climbed up to his improvised bedroom and flung himself as he was upon the cot. He fell asleep almost immediately.

When Crandall awoke and consulted his watch he found it was past midnight. He rose and lit the lantern hung on a nail at the head of the cot and started a leisurely disrobing. A sound, as of stealthy footsteps downstairs startled him momentarily and then he smiled, remembering that Jim, his man Friday, slept on the floor below beside the press. He called down for reassurance and in a moment got a ruffled reply, so extinguishing the lantern he crawled back into his cot.

Sleep this time was not easy. He tossed about while a hazy procession of intoxicated printers, bewildering girls and truculent Sam Bass's paraded before him. Twice he sat up and rearranged the coverings—the last time he distinctly heard the walking underneath again.

He sat up suddenly on the edge of the cot. Of course it was only Jim—but why was he walking about so long? Maybe——

"What's the matter Jim?" he called down abruptly.

There was no response and the noise below was instantly stopped. Crandall, feeling a vague uneasiness, arose from the cot and lit the lantern again. His automatic, the only weapon about the office, was downstairs in the drawer of his desk. Despite his growing fears he saw humorous possibilities in the idea of burglars. There was nothing of value in the entire building but his watch and a few coins. He had deposited almost his entire capital in the Ocean Breeze National Bank on the day of his arrival. He recalled Jimmy Lane's illustration of "Kid Imagination" and pulled himself together half angrily. Still, he mused, as he held the lantern so that the faint rays would play on the opening into his bedroom. Why hadn't Jim answered his call? He stepped over to the edge of the loft and as he did so he involuntarily uttered a sharp exclamation. A hand appeared at the top of the ladder leading to the floor below. It was not Jim's hand—it was white. A head quickly followed and Crandall needed no second glance to identify the owner—it was Sam Bass.

Crandall set down the lantern.

"Well?" he inquired, bracing himself for the expected attack.

Bass leered up at him balancing himself on the ladder. The alcoholic odor from his breath was almost overpowering.

"You all had your turn this mornin'. I'm fixin' to have mine now!" he said, standing free of the ladder in the little box-like space. "You're mighty smart with your hands with a man that don't know nothin' 'bout them little tricks like you do. Well, let's see what kind of a man you all is now!"

With a quick movement he drew a heavy bladed hunting knife from his pocket.

"You see if you can knock me down before I can get to you; if you do, you can do what you like. If you don't, I'm sure goin' to cut you some!"

"You are certainly a fine citizen, Bass!" said Crandall, sparring for time. "Is this your idea of fair play?"

"I ain't fixin' to argy with you!" Bass retorted. "You know how to use your hands and I know how to use this—that's all!"

Crandall measured the distance between the two with a quick eye.

"Do you think," he began, "that if you should cut me up some as you say, that you'd escape a jail term?"

"I ain't goin' to think!" Bass moved forward. "Don't talk no more; get ready! They won't know who 'twas got cut when I get workin' with this yere knife!"

Crandall vaulted behind the bed and stood in the cramped space hoping to evade the other's first rush and wrest the weapon from his grasp. But at this moment came an unexpected interruption.

"You all ain't goin' to do no cuttin', Mr. Bass, because if you git to foolin' aroun' with that knife, I'm jes' naturally goin' to let this here gun go off, an' I got it set right at you!"

Both men turned and faced the venerable Jim who stood at the top of the ladder with Crandall's automatic tightly clenched in both hands. His voice faltered and his arms trembled, but there was no mistaking the desperate earnestness in his face.

Recognizing him, Bass sneered impatiently.

"You best go away from here, nigger!" he said, with a contemptuous glance at the gun; "I'll beat your head off when I get through here!"

"Yes, sir, boss—I knows you will," Jim's voice was pathetically gloomy, "but you ain't goin' to cut Mr. Crandall up none; no sir!"

Jim advanced another step up the ladder as he spoke and as he did, Crandall, thinking quickly, yelled, "Don't shoot, Jim!"

Bass, caught off his guard as Crandall had anticipated, involuntarily turned his head and when he turned back quickly, scenting the ruse, the point of his jaw collided with a terrific right swing, sho ward with all the force of Crandall's mi shoulders. Bass slithered back through opening in the floor, crashed into Jim a both fell clattering down to the floor belo carrying the ladder with them to the groun

Crandall stepped quickly to the openin and vaulted down unhesitatingly. He sa in the uncertain light, Jim still clutching the automatic, lying stunned at the foot of the ladder. Bass was rising to his feet, supporting himself along the wall. It was to him that Crandall first gave his attention. He sprang over to him and grasped him roughly by the shoulder, swinging him around easily, despite his size.

"Bass," he said, "you're pretty well used up or I would give you the best beating of your life. If I ever see you around this office again I'll give you a lacing you'll never forget! Now get out of here, you near bad man, before I change my mind and wallop you for luck!"

Bass stood uncertainly for a moment, rubbing his chin. He looked up, glaring evilly, but what he saw in Crandall's tense features swiftly decided him and he turned without a word and vaulted out the open window through which he had entered the office.

Crandall stood watching him, breathing hard, the realization of his close call coming to him slowly. He wondered what would have happened had he been sleeping when Bass entered his bedroom. He angrily threw off the nervous shudder and stooped over Jim, raising him carefully to a sitting posture. A cursory examination sufficed to show that no bones were broken; the old Negro was suffering mostly from the shock of the fall and the reaction from his temerity. Going to the water barrel outside, Crandall returned with a glass of the liquid which he sprinkled over Jim's face. The latter opened his eyes and made a weak effort to get to his feet, subsiding under Crandall's soothing efforts to restrain him.

"You all didn't get cut none, did you boss?" he inquired anxiously.

"No, Jim, thanks to you; it's all right now," Crandall answered.

"Whar's that scoundrel beast, Sam Bass?" asked Jim.

"Oh, he's gone Jim," said Crandall,

›ing to readjust the ladder. "That was ty close though, wasn't it?"

It was for sure," agreed Jim, getting to s feet and rubbing his limbs ruefully. I'm sure glad that Sam didn't start to work ith his knife, 'cause then I'd had to *hit* him ‹ith this yere gun!"

Crandall took the pistol from Jim and examined it idly—then he uttered an exclamation and opened the chamber. It was innocent of anything resembling a bullet.

"Did you know this thing wasn't loaded?" Crandall asked, turning abruptly to Jim.

"Yes sir, boss—I knowed it—but Sam Bass didn't!" answered Jim, showing his teeth in a broad grin.

Crandall reached out and took Jim's gnarled ebony hand in his own.

"I won't forget that, Jim!" he said. "If Sam Bass had your nerve he'd have killed me!"

Chapter VI

"Kid Imagination" Loses

The Ocean Breeze *Tribune* as gotten out by Crandall and his staff might not have been a thing of beauty, but it was a joy forever to the colonists—and Crandall. Its six pages contained the hopes, joys, sorrows—and advertising of the community. Editorially, it was as open as the town itself, espousing no party or cause but devoting itself solely to the advantages of Ocean Breeze over the other towns and cities in the universe. On several occasions while industriously writing of the singular freedom from mosquitos and other similar pests that obtained in Ocean Breeze, Crandall would stop in the making of a perfect paragraph to kill a dozen or so of the little insects off the very paper he was writing on. Local news occupied the front page—startling items such as the fact that Ebenezer H. Green, a recent arrival from Tulsa, Oklahoma, had acquired twenty pounds and a new lease on life by a five weeks' stay in the colony, or that plans for the new post office were under way. Friday of each week was the day the *Tribune* was scheduled to burst forth in print. When Crandall got the paper out on Saturday night of that week he congratulated himself and his staff. The *Tribune* was not inevitable, but usual.

A few days after Crandall had discouraged Bass from further attacks on his person, Miss Stevenson paid an unannounced visit to the *Tribune* office. At the time of her call, Crandall was flat upon his broad back in the pit under the press, assisting Harkness, the super-printer, in an effort to determine why the rollers refused to roll. Getting down under a printing press differs but slightly from reclining in the road under an automobile, the difference being that the indoor pastime will permit one to accumulate more grime in a given time than the other. When Crandall arose and entered the little office in the front of the building, he was admirably disguised from head to foot with a generous coating of printer's ink. He essayed flight when he espied his visitor, but the effort was futile and the girl laughed frankly at the ludicrous expression of embarrassment on his face.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed, "you must have been having a dreadful time in your editorial sanctum this morning. The result of *that* effort must surely be worth reading!"

"I hope you will excuse my appearance ——" began Crandall awkwardly; then—"If you'll wait just a minute!"

He fled precipitately to the water barrel in the rear of the building, grabbing a piece of soap and a towel from its place on the window sill as he ran. He plunged his head into the water and lathered himself vigorously, following this up with a hasty drying with the towel—then he dashed back to the office, panting but shiningly clean. The girl was sitting at the typewriter, tapping idly at the keys. She glanced up at his entrance and smiled approval of his hasty toilet.

"Do you know," she remarked suddenly, "I'd give a great deal if I could be so plunged into some work that I'd get just as grimy and generally workmanlike looking as you were just then."

Crandall was struck with a wild thought.

"Well," he said walking over to her, "I'd give a great deal to have a staff in my office here with those same ideas or ideals of work! I am shy at present, one office organization. Now if you could only operate a typewriter and wanted to—and thought *that* one was all right and——"

The girl jumped to her feet, clapping her hands.

"Done!" she exclaimed. "When can I commence?"

"Now!" Crandall almost shouted. "Take this letter right away!"

The girl entering gaily into the spirit of the thing, unhesitatingly seated herself at the typewriter. She seized a piece of paper and inserted it in the machine, then turned, her head poised inquiringly.

"Ahem!" Crandall cleared his throat importantly, "Mr. George X. Doe, Ocean Breeze, Florida. Got that?"

He paced up and down the room, passing his hands over his hair as though in the throes of dictating a message of most serious moment.

"Dear Sir," he went on, " if you do not pay your subscription to the *Tribune* at once——"

He halted and stroked his chin gravely.

"Yes, yes, go on!" cried the girl.

"If you do not pay your subscription at once," Crandall repeated sternly, "we will send you the paper for another year!" he finished laughingly.

"Oh, now really," the girl rebuked him, "It's not as bad as that. I've seen a copy of it and thought it splendid."

"Thanks!" rejoined Crandall. "I hope they think so in the New York office. But wait until you see the next issue. It's going to be a hummer," he added enthusiastically.

"I can scarcely wait until it comes from the press," she assured him. "Well, any more correspondence to-day?"

"Yes," answered Crandall, "one more letter. Take this. Mr. George H. Hermance, New York, N. Y. Got it? Dear Sir, I sent you a letter last night in which I foolishly intimated I was losing my infatuation for Ocean Breeze. Kindly hurl said letter away and put it down to the Florida sun. I will stay on the job here as long as my office force stays with me!"

The girl flushed, meeting his ardent gaze. She pulled the paper nervously around the roller and then slowly pushed back her chair and started to arise.

"You're not casting off your job already are you?" he began reproachfully, and then suddenly he shot out hoarsely "Don't move!"

The swift change in his tone, the sharp command, startled the girl so that for instant she remained sitting stiffly in chair. She turned her head, facing h. and what she saw in his white tense fac stifled the exclamation on her lips. H stood staring as if held by a hypnotic spel at her hair. The terror in his eyes, hi drawn mouth, was unmistakable. Littl beads of moisture were formi g on his forehead. With a half embarrassed gesture, the girl's hands rose to her hair.

The act roused Crandall from his stupor. He sprang forward and dashed her arm roughly down, unheeding her frightened gasp. The thing he was looking at was moving, squirming horribly in an effort to right itself. It was a scorpion—of a species peculiar to certain sections of the Southland, the natives know it as a "grampus." It had fallen from the damp timbers overhead and lodged in the girl's hair—and now it was moving nearer her quivering flesh. At the lumber camp one day Crandall had seen one of the poisonous things crawl on the bare leg of a negro turpentine mixer. The latter, terror stricken, had slapped at the thing. It gripped the victim's flesh with its pincher like claws and swung forward swiftly its curling "tail," carrying the venom. The negro carried the mark of that encounter to his last day.

Crandall now stood over the girl who seemed as stricken by his actions as he was by her danger. Lane's phantasy, "Kid Imagination," squared off and threw down the gauntlet as he waited. He swore inwardly at the qualm that gripped him at the memory of the negro's fate. It had not been pleasant—he could not restrain the shudder. He knew that if he touched the squirming, hideous thing——

Dimly he realized that instant action was necessary as the scorpion was propelling itself slowly but steadily over the girl's hair —soon it would reach her face. The sight of her crouching, trembling form, maddened him and the quick coming emotion fought off his fear. He snatched up a ruler from his desk and laid one end on the girl's hair directly in the path of the scorpion. It consumed possibly the fraction of a second in reaching the wooden strip, but Crandall died many lingering deaths as it came slowly on its course. Once it reached the rule it

som have little more than two inches to rei to reach his hand.

ie scorpion came to the edge of the rule, rd invitingly forward, touched it tentavely with a feeler, hesitated, then raised elf on the smooth wood. The instant its athsome body left the girl's hair, Crandall opped the rule to the floor and ground it under his heel.

The girl sprang up, white and shaken. Crandall faced her with a wan smile. She followed his glance to the floor and shuddered, covering her face with her hands. Crandall's laugh was strained as he dug his nails into his hands in an effort to grip his shaking nerves.

"Of course, the thing might not have harmed you," he began with forced jocularity, "but it didn't look at all becoming in your hair. As a matter of fact, I resented the intimacy——"

The girl interrupted, turning on him suddenly with a swift intake of breath.

"Please don't jest about it," she murmured, "If I had known—I would have died of fright—I——"

She walked over to the window and stood staring out. Crandall thought he had never seen anything as beautiful as the picture she made framed against the rough pine boards, her face flushing with the returning color, her hands pressed to her breast, the horror slowly fading out of her eyes. He seized a broom, and with one sweep cleared the floor of the Thing. The girl walked slowly to the doorway.

"I think I'll go up to the Villa," she spoke tremulously. "I don't feel quite up to—to working any more just now." She made a brave attempt to smile.

"Of course," Crandall agreed hastily. He caught his hat from a peg over the desk. "Let me walk up with you."

Chapter VII

The House by the Lake

A week after the arrival of the girl in Ocean Breeze, the capacity of the Villa Lorraine was strained by the addition of two new boarders. They were no less personages than Harold Gordon Stillman and Arthur Butts-Blythe, official representatives of the Osceola Land Company at Ocean Breeze. They informed the covertly contemptuous Havens girls in a patronizing manner that they were drawn to the Villa by the tempting and savory odors from the kitchen, but it was quickly and audibly observed by their fellow boarders that they devoted more attention to Miss Stevenson than they did to the viands placed before them on the table.

Within three days after their advent they rose to the heights of escorting her on short explorations to the lake and elsewhere. Crandall viewed this at first with tolerant amusement, but soon this gave way to an entirely different emotion, for the girl's avoidance of him appeared studied, while she seemed to have fallen an easy victim to the blandishments of the gorgeous youths from the company's office. The trio became inseparable. Twice they were gone all day on a hunting trip.

Crandall felt his sudden isolation keenly and the jocular consolation served to him by his fellow boarders did much to increase the feeling. He was at a loss to understand the girl's apparent aversion to him—as sudden as it was patent. She had never returned to the *Tribune* office since her first visit; indeed, after that time he found it difficult to engage her in conversation.

It was not long before they reached the stage where a cool, impersonal nod in passing was their only intercourse.

Before, Crandall had flattered himself on his progress. There had been opportune meetings, not confined to the Villa, exchanges of each other's ideals and ambitions, and he had found her a sympathetic and understanding audience when he related his rise and fall in the prize ring. He had looked forward daily to this with an unmeasured pleasure, which grew until it became a necessary part of his existence in Ocean Breeze.

Deprived of this now, he gave himself wholly to the perfecting of the *Tribune*. He added many features from time to time—among them the ancient, but beloved, controversies between readers on the editorial page, the "Questions and Answers," and occasionally he printed bits of alleged poetry contributed by his subscribers. In many ways he helped himself into the good graces of the colonists, who did not hesitate

to tell him so and twice he received commendatory letters from the New York office. He discharged Harkness, his Bacchanalian printer, finding it futile to pit himself against the latter's appetite for whisky and his readiness to indulge it. In his place he obtained a printer from Jacksonville, who while not as versatile a craftsman as his predecessor, was more inclined to prohibition.

He discovered that the fervor with which he threw himself into the work of making the *Tribune* a newspaper lifted the gloom that had hung about him for the greater part of the time since he had left New York. The deep-dyed indigo that comes with failure—that persists despite the most heroic efforts to cast it off. John Barleycorn may help keep it away for spasmodic intervals, but it returns and clings. Crandall fought it with its natural enemy—work.

He improved his sleeping quarters at the office by stringing a hammock on the porch. He soon became hardened to the mosquitos and other pests that infest the soft southern climes, and found the open-air sleeping a big improvement over the box-like compartment he had previously constructed in the office. He had little or no time to ruminate over his failure in the prize ring. His waking hours were occupied with planning new features for the paper or improvements for the town itself. He rose at five every morning, jogged the two miles to the lake, took an invigorating plunge, and returning to the Villa, would eat an astounding breakfast before flinging himself heartily into the day's work.

His letters back to Lane in New York changed rapidly from gloomy epistles to cheery, optimistic pages of his achievements in Ocean Breeze and his plans for further conquests.

It was one intolerably hot night that Crandall, after hours of tossing in the hammock, found sleep impossible and conceived the idea of a cooling plunge in the lake. Although it was past midnight he rose and donned such garments as he thought he could least dispense with, took a towel from his locker and started for the great pool of stagnant water on the edge of the town. As he strode along he pondered over his future and the *Tribune's*. His thought kept centering on the girl despite his efforts to [illegible]dall, them elsewhere. That afternoon, in [illegible]an pany with the ever present Stillman [illegible]n- Butts-Blythe, she had passed the *Tribune* [illegible]f fice laughing merrily at what Crandall wa bitterly sure was some inane quip of o[illegible]. of her escorts. Later, he had learned fro[illegible] one of the Havens girls, that they had gon[illegible] to Randall's Island, a strip of sand marooned in the center of the lake, on a berry picking expedition. She had given him a wave of her hand as she passed the office and, although at that moment he was telling himself that she was quite ordinary after all, he rushed to the window and raised his cap, the color rising to his face. And when he turned back to his desk his hands were trembling.

In order to reach the lake it was necessary to pass the little wooden shack housing the two representatives of the Osceola Land Company, and Crandall noted with some surprise that a light was shining brightly from one of the windows. He glanced around, preparing to make a detour of the place, when the sound of loud and angry voices was borne to him on the night air. It was a quite human curiosity that made him strain his ears for some enlightening sound.

Drawing near the shack, he heard Stillman's voice rising excitedly and caught the girl's name coupled with words that made him move closer to the house and stand behind a giant pine that partially screened him from observation.

"You broke your word—you have no word!" came Stillman's voice, thick with anger. "You swore you'd stay here at the office. I thought you were a gentleman, but you're a low cad!"

Crandall waited the sound of the blow—but there was none. Instead came the suave, sneering voice of Butts-Blythe.

"It is most amusing to me when a relative of the biggest crook in our fair country has the assurance to insult one who is his physical, mental and social superior."

"You dirty liar!" Stillman's voice rose to a shrill shriek, "How dare you say my uncle is a crook! He's too good——"

"Be still!" The other's tone was still unexcited. "Your breeding is getting the best of you. I repeat your uncle is a crook and

en these poor devils he's brought down re find it, God help us! There are a great iany, you know, who will make a fight of it when they are thrown off their land, when they find that Hermance, the great philanthropist is simply a glorified confidence man. Why you poor fool, if the United States Government ever gets suspicious of this Arcadia here, he'll go to Atlanta so quick it will make your hair curl!"

"You ungrateful dog!" broke in Stillman hotly, "After all we've done for you, too! I suppose you'll turn blackmailer next——"

"Wait!" interrupted Butts-Blythe. His voice had suddenly changed. Crandall listened eagerly, marvelled at his powers of dissembling. "Let us stop this at once; we two are foolish to quarrel. No more about your respected uncle; after all it's no concern of mine. I'll stick to the original bargain. Your idea is obsolete, almost antediluvian, but I'll do it. In the morning, we'll ask the fair lady to decide and if I lose I'll pack up and leave. I'll expect you to do the same if I am the victor."

A confused mumbling followed and though Crandall strained every nerve to hear, he could make nothing coherent out of the indistinct dialogue. Hearing footsteps coming toward the door of the shack, he retraced his steps to the open road and started back quickly to the *Tribune* office. His heart beat quickly, his brain was a surging whirlpool of tumultuous thoughts. One thing stood clearly out of the maze. That was his first instinctive impression of Hermance when he had stepped into his office in New York, seeking the editorship of the *Tribune*.

He was a crook!

Chapter VIII

The Island in the Lake

At six the next morning, Crandall, swollen-eyed and weary, had mapped out a plan of which the basic idea was to get to the bottom of the fraud without arousing the suspicion of Hermance or his two underlings from whom he had gotten confirmation of the smouldering flame of doubt. A doubt he had carried with him since his first meeting with Hermance in New York. He wrote a long letter to Jimmy Lane in which he instructed his friend to lay the facts before the managing editor of the *Press*, Lane's paper, so that the denouement could be covered by his old paper in advance of its rivals. Crandall's first and longest newspaper job had been with the *Press*. It was a large measure of loyalty that made him anxious that it should score a "beat" on the news. And big news it would be! Crandall's eyes sparkled at the very thought of the sensation the exposure would create.

With glorious optimism of youth and health he had no doubt that he would swiftly get to the bottom of the mystery. Then he would notify the Federal authorities and spring his sensation in the *Tribune* while the *Press* was enlightening the world in New York.

The ethics of the thing were not easily dismissed. He was an employee of Hermance; would it be fair play to burrow under him and expose his benefactor? It troubled him for a long time. To resign his position and remain in Ocean Breeze would cut off his income, and possibly arouse enough suspicion to hurt the success of his undertaking. Then he thought of many of the victims of Hermance's greed. Some had spent their all in getting to Ocean Breeze and buying a place to make their homes. Widows, veterans of the Civil War, invalids, and others, few of whom were financially able to investigate the altruism of Hermance for themselves. In the vernacular they simply "followed the crowd."

At length he decided to proceed with his investigation of the fraud, if fraud there was, and lay its future course by its developments.

When he had finished his letter to Lane, an idea that had been slowly growing on him from the night before, struck him with such renewed force that he could no longer resist it. He knew Lane to possess an uncanny perception and his ability to get the "inside stuff" on big stories had made him stand out from the average reporter like a diamond amongst glass. It was a rare week that the *Press* failed to put over a "beat" through the enterprise of Jimmy Lane. The city editor had once summed up his ability when he turned to the makeup man and said:

"I'd give my right eye to have that fellow

Lane on the local staff. He's a wonder. Why that bird could go out and discover what kind of rubber David used in the sling that killed Goliath!"

It is quite certain that Lane would have made a "stab" at it, as he would say, if he had been given just such an assignment.

Crandall reasoned that Lane could get at the bottom of the muddle if anyone could. Likewise, he knew Hermance—and there Crandall found himself stumped again. Lane's father and Hermance were chums at college; would some idea of loyalty prevent Jimmy from helping too? He eliminated that thought swiftly. Once Jimmy knew that Hermance, snug and secure in his luxurious offices, was sending poor, helpless invalids to a strange country mulcting them of their little hoards, accumulated at the cost of many of life's necessities—he knew what his friend Jimmy Lane would do!

Not wanting to rewrite his long letter, he added a postcript in which he demanded that Lane explain the circumstances to his managing editor and get time off to come to Ocean Breeze and help him solve the riddle. He knew that Lane's love of adventure would win half the battle.

Crandall ransacked every cranny of the printing office in a hunt for something that might serve as a possible clue upon which to base his preliminary investigation, but the hunt was fruitless and he gave it up, convinced that the only possible place he would get a start toward striking the heart of the fraud was at the company's office. To go there and attempt a cross examination of either Stillman or Butts-Blythe, he decided, would be as foolish as it would probably be futile. To go there during their absence and search the place would be taking a long chance, that if discovered might lead to his arrest.

He went mechanically about the work of gathering material for the next issue of the *Tribune* for the balance of the morning and at noon he was no nearer a solution as to where to start the hunt than he was the night before.

It was somewhat later than the usual lunch hour when Crandall took his place at the table at the Villa Lorraine, observing as he did so that neither Miss Stevenson nor her inevitable escorts were present. La Havens, brushing crumbs from the clo watched him curiously as she passed h place and then coming around the table sh stood beside him, polishing a salt shaker industriously with a napkin.

"Our friends are surely giving folks here something to talk about," she remarked irrelevantly.

Crandall raised his eyebrows interrogatively.

"Oh you know what I mean," went on Laura, with a short laugh, "Miss Stevenson and her trained bodyguards." She made no effort to hide her contempt.

Crandall assumed an elaborate air of unconcern and reached for the butter dish. But he made no answer.

"I dislike to criticise anyone," went on Laura, evidently nettled at his lack of interest, "but if we girls did anything like that they'd run us out of town—to save its morals." She sniffed disdainfully, setting down the salt shaker with a bang. "Makes a lot of difference though if your clothes are home made or turned out in New York and whether you take a twenty-eight or thirty-four bust!"

"I'm afraid I don't catch your drift," laughed Crandall, amused at her vehemence.

"Well, you must be extra stupid to-day then," retorted Laura, "you may tell *me* that but that tight line around your mouth says something else. I wasn't brought up on a cow ranch for nothing! I mightn't know women, but I know men. You know blame well you're just sitting there eating your heart out. That's why you're trying to appear so unconcerned at what I'm telling you, while all the time you're putting that spoonful of grits in your shirt pocket instead of your mouth!"

Crandall, caught fairly, started a stammering rejoinder.

"Oh hush!" Laura interrupted, her manner softening. "I know! You mightn't think so, but I've had 'em say they couldn't live without me, too." She laughed jerkily. "That was before my hands got so red and I lost my shape bending over the kitchen stove and the wash tubs. But that's neither here nor there; that charmer of yours left here at five o'clock this morning with them other two fools, for Randall's Island. They

e there all day yesterday, too—berry king!"

The nasty inflection on the last words ·ought an angry flush to Crandall's face in pite of himself and facing Laura he held ıp a warning hand. She merely shrugged her shoulders and went on brushing off the table.

Crandall finished his meal in silence and returned at once to the *Tribune* office.

Laura would have been quite satisfied if she had seen his face as he sat at his desk, thinking of the information she had imparted to him with his dinner. He thought Miss Stevenson unconventional, but her pronounced liking for the callow, pompous youths was beyond him. At first he told himself cynically it was the old story—money. This he discarded as unworthy of his growing adoration of the girl. He had been unable to fathom her coolness toward him since the pair had come to board at the Villa but now he determined he would take a hand and sit in this game too. His jaw set hard as he assured himself he would fling his six feet of brawn and muscle into the lists against her two gallants and stand or fall on his merits.

Work for the balance of the afternoon was impossible. He had been up all the night before and now Nature began to collect her due. He could scarce keep his eyes open though his brain was active enough. After some deliberation he decided to obtain the loan of Thad Newell's boat and cruise about the lake. It was insufferably hot and the cooling breezes there would refresh him. He would be where interruption would be almost impossible and he could think and plan undisturbed. Accordingly he repaired to the railroad station and secured the desired permission from Thad.

Newell's motor boat was exactly the kind of craft one would expect Thad to own. It was a converted dory which Thad had laboriously made into a gasoline propelled craft by the expedient of putting an engine, formerly the vitals of a motorcycle, in it. Thad had bought the motorcycle, he had once explained to Crandall, in a rash moment. When it arrived at Ocean Breeze he soon discovered that it would not give the Florida sand even a respectable battle. It simply laid down and refused to "mote." Thad ripped out the metal parts of it and used all but a few bolts and screws in the construction of his motorboat. It was an unhandsome thing when completed, but there was nothing on the lake that could approach it for speed.

After cruising aimlessly about the lake for an hour or more, Crandall succumbed to the overpowering desire to visit Randall's Island. The last argument he used on himself with telling effect was that *he* had not seen Miss Stevenson and her escorts leave on their expedition, they would not know he knew they were there, and it would not seem deliberate, therefore, if he did meet them.

Fifteen minutes later he was wading to the verdant shore of the island, dragging the painter of his boat. This he fastened to a tree stump, recognizing the pretentious craft he found moored at the same spot as Stillman's.

Rolling down his trousers which he had fastened about his knees to escape a wetting as he waded to the shore, he stood uncertainly at the edge of the thick brush that all but covered the island. He had no wish to come upon the party at once. He sat down on the improvised moorage and rolled a cigarette. The stillness about him was almost unearthly, it was singularly depressing. A lone hawk flew overhead, its weird, shrill cry adding to Crandall's moodiness. The little island, isolated in the great lake of still water, seemed to be the edge of the world of humans. A strange feeling of uneasiness, an impending something, fell upon Crandall. The absolute quiet, the calm of the glass-like sheet of water irritated him. He repressed a strong desire to kick it, stir it up and make it seem as if some other thing about the place was living and moving besides himself. He rose nervously, picked up a stone and threw it idly into the lake. The splash echoed and reechoed sullenly, sending great widening ripples toward him. Impatiently he flicked away the half-smoked cigarette; the place was getting on his nerves. As he turned toward the brush a woman's scream—a terrible, piercing note of horror awoke the stillness, the familiar ring in the voice that uttered it, sending him crashing through the brush in its direction.

CHAPTER IX

THE PASSING OF BUTTS-BLYTHE

THE denouement was not just what Crandall's fears had prepared him for. He found the girl backed up against a tree, her face so white that its pallor startled him; she seemed graven from marble rather than flesh and blood. Stillman crouched a few feet away from her, his eyes distended, his breath coming in sobbing gasps. He held a shining something in his trembling hand and there was a faint smell of powder in the air. There was no sign of the other—Butts-Blythe.

At sight of Crandall, the girl took a quick step toward him and then as swiftly retraced it. The movement caused Crandall's mouth to harden and he turned away from her abruptly to the cowering Stillman.

"What's the trouble?" he asked sharply.

Stillman, after an ineffectual effort to force words through his quavering throat, pointed suddenly to the brush beside Crandall. Glancing down, the latter saw a protruding foot. He stooped over swiftly and pulled forth the body of Butts-Blythe. He knelt beside it, laying his hand over the heart, although at first sight he felt the action to be needless. Butts-Blythe was quite dead.

When Crandall stood up, the girl had partially recovered her composure, although she seemed fighting off the breakdown only by a supreme effort. Stillman stared at the body as if fascinated, his face working convulsively.

"How did it happen?" Crandall asked evenly.

"He—I shot him!" Stillman jerked out. "It was a terrible accident—Miss Stevenson will bear me out." He turned appealingly to the girl, who nodded almost imperceptibly, her eyes away from Crandall.

Stillman looked from one to the other, his terror was pitiable.

"I had a new automatic," he went on, the words now coming quickly enough; "I just got it from New York. We were shooting at that tree—taking turns." He pointed to the body, his voice rising hysterically. "He went over to pin a card on the tree. It—it—went off!"

He stopped, exhausted by his emotion.

"Let's see the gun," said Crandall etly, after a pause; "I heard no report."

"It has a silencer on it," explained Stillman, handing over the ugly looking weapon.

Crandall examined it for a moment, then thrust it in his pocket.

"Is—is he dead?" gasped Stillman, tugging at his sleeve.

"Yes," answered Crandall, facing him, "and this will be a pretty serious business, I'm afraid."

It was on the tip of his tongue to add that he had heard the quarrel of the night before, but something kept back the words. He turned to the girl, addressing her coldly, though his arms ached to embrace her as she stood trembling, braced against the tree, bravely fighting the faintness that was creeping over her. He fought down the desire to soothe her and steeled his resolve.

"Is that the way it happened?" he called to her.

She nodded her head slowly.

"I—I suppose it was." The reply was barely audible, but Stillman heard it.

"You don't suppose I deliberately killed him, do you?" he cried, stepping to Crandall's side.

Crandall turned on him swiftly and stared full into the other's wavering eyes. Stillman stirred uncomfortably and then averted his face.

"Let's get back to Ocean Breeze," said Crandall, breaking the silence. He turned to the girl again.

"It will not be very pleasant for you riding back with—this," he said, indicating the body with a quick gesture. "Suppose we go back first and notify the proper authorities to come for the body?"

The girl seemed grateful at the suggestion and Crandall felt amply repaid by the glance she shot him under her moist lashes. With Crandall trailing, the three made their way back to the beach in silence.

The journey back to Ocean Breeze was made in Stillman's boat, the other being towed. Stillman sat in the stern, steering the craft. He gazed out over the lake, seemingly unconscious of the presence of the other two. The girl sat in the bow, in front of Crandall. The only word spoken on the trip across was when they made the stringpiece at Ocean Breeze. As Stillman

limbed out of the boat, he turned to Crandall.

"Will you notify the proper people here? I'll wire—to New York."

"Certainly," answered Crandall. He did not resent the sudden sympathetic note that Stillman's drawn face struck in him. He did not look the slayer at that moment. He was little more than a boy, yet he had aged years since Crandall had seen him a day or so before.

Crandall voiced an idea that struck him as the three walked along the pier toward the town.

"They will probably—hold you for a time, Stillman," he said abruptly, "and I will also be detained, I suppose. Unfortunately," he turned to the girl, "it has become known that you three started out together this morning and they will probably question you—the authorities, you know—but they will not detain you, I am sure." He finished with a confidence he was far from feeling.

At the end of the stringpiece, Crandall saw Thad Newell coming toward them down the road. He approached the trio, staring curiously at their set faces but not seeming to sense the tragedy.

"Here's a telegram for you all," he called to Crandall, waving the yellow envelope. Crandall took it, thanking him, and tore it open as he walked along. The message was brief; it read:

Tom Crandall,
Ocean Breeze, Fla.
Get me tent. Coming to pay you visit.
Be there Saturday 5.15.

LANE.

His letter to Lane would reach him, then, on the day he contemplated leaving New York.

CHAPTER X

ENTER JIMMY LANE

THE coroner's inquest into the death of Butts-Blythe was held at Kissimmee, the county seat, and afterward the body was shipped back to New York. As Crandall had expected, Stillman and himself were held for the grand jury. Crandall was charged with being a material witness, despite his protestations and the testimony of the girl that he had not seen the actual shooting.

The girl was paroled in the custody of her counsel, while the charge against Stillman was murder. Miss Stevenson's account of the shooting was similar to Stillman's except for one detail. She swore that her back was turned when Stillman fired. That detail was enough for the jury of farmers and planters, who were immediately antagonized by the sight of Stillman's silk hosiery and patent leather shoes, and his Northern accent confirmed all their suspicions.

When the time came to hear Crandall's motion to be admitted to bail, pending action by the grand jury, he discovered two things. First, that the soft spoken, sleepy-eyed lawyer he had engaged had more than earned his retainer, and second, that his efforts to build up the *Tribune* and Ocean Breeze had not gone for naught. From the president of the First National Bank of Ocean Breeze to the postmaster, dozens of the colony's influential citizens came over to the court house and attested their readiness to go his surety and on record as to his character. The old county judge adjusted his glasses and surveying the imposing array of witnesses before him cast off the shackles of "it-never-was-done-before" and fixed Crandall's bail at ten thousand dollars. The county prosecutor's opposition to the move was perfunctorily brief.

Lane arrived in Ocean Breeze the same afternoon that Crandall was released from the county jail at Kissimmee. Crandall took him immediately to the *Tribune* office and went over his experiences in detail from the time he had got his first inkling that the great colonizing scheme at Ocean Breeze might put Hermance, its sponsor, in jail, up to the time of Lane's arrival. At the first mention of fraud, Lane's face wore an expression of indulgent attention, but as Crandall proceeded to the quarrel he had overheard at the company's office down by the lake and the subsequent killing of Butts-Blythe, his friend's tense interest was unassumed.

"Well, there you are!" Crandall concluded. "You have the scenario—what do you think of it all?"

Lane was silent for a moment.

"Tommy," he began at length, "it is hard

for me to believe that Hermance, my father's friend, is a crook. That Hermance the financier could be one, I have no doubt —you see what I mean? He and my father, you know, were chums at college, and later, business associates. My dad died when I was quite young, so that I have only a hazy recollection of the latter part. He left nothing at his death, as far as I have been able to ascertain, but his blessing. But I know that while my mother lived she would not permit Hermance to help us in any way. I remember I always thought that strange, but it might have been her woman's intuition. Now I am wondering if Hermance did not have something to do with our poverty.

"I wouldn't be surprised," asserted Crandall, "after this!"

"Well, we'll soon see!" declared Lane, slapping the desk with his hand. "Do you think Stillman killed this Butts-Blythe deliberately?"

"I don't know," confessed Crandall; "the motive is there."

"But why did this girl support his story of an accident?" persisted Lane.

"She didn't support it," corrected Crandall; "she said she didn't see it."

Lane snorted incredulously.

"I'd certainly like to see this goddess," he said impetuously, "I——"

Crandall was quick to ward off what he read in Lane's mobile features.

"All right, Jimmy," he broke in, "don't say it. Let's get down to cases on this thing—where do we start?"

"I'll start by sending a wire to my revered managing editor," was Lane's answer; "I'll try and sketch some of this in a night letter and do it so the entire world won't find it out. I'll mail him a more complete synopsis later in the evening. Wait until I get that off my chest and I'll tell you a little plan I have just worked out."

At this moment came an unexpected interruption in the form of the old colored man, Jim—Crandall's man Friday. He entered the office, cap in hand, casting a suspicious glance at Lane. Stammering an apology he was about to leave when Crandall called to him:

"What is it, Jim? Don't be afraid. Here, Jim, this is Mr. Lane, my best friend. Lane this is the Jim I wrote you about." Lane slapped the old Negro heartily on the back his eyes sparkling.

"I've heard all about you, Jim," he said, "and I'm glad to see you in the flesh."

"Yes, sir, boss," answered Jim, his seamed face beaming with pleasure. "I's sure glad to see any of Massa Crandall's friends—*yes,* sir."

He stood teetering from one foot to another, his face wreathed in smiles.

"Did you want to see me for something, Jim?" asked Crandall.

"Oh, surely, boss!" Jim ejaculated, "I like to forgot it! There's a young lady outside there and she wants to see you."

Crandall leaped instantly to his feet, as did Lane, the latter looking about hastily for a place to retreat.

"Send her in at once, Jim!" commanded Crandall. "Here, stay here, Lane. If my guess is correct, I want to see your face when you look at the most beautiful girl —ssh!——"

Miss Stevenson hesitatingly entered the office and glanced about her. She came forward eagerly when she saw Crandall, and then stopped, flushing slightly, that her action had been observed by another. For Lane had been half screened by the open door and now he too came forward in some embarrassment, though his eyes disclosed the fact that Crandall's description of their visitor was conservative, if anything. Crandall broke the strained pause.

"I hope you will forgive me, Miss Stevenson, for keeping you waiting," he said apologetically, "but Jim took so long to announce you——"

His smile was irresistible as he motioned Lane forward.

"This is Mr. Lane of New York; we were together for a time on the staff of the *Press* —Miss Stevenson, Jimmy."

Lane returned the girl's bow and then before either of the others could speak he strode to the open door.

"Just at the moment you came," he said easily, addressing the girl, "I was about to send a most important telegram—in fact I had reached the other door, thinking it the one to the street—or road, I should say," he smiled at both of them. "I'll just run along now before the operator goes home,

you'll pardon me. I'm mighty pleased to ve met you, Miss Stevenson."

He bowed again and was gone.

The girl appeared to frown slightly at Lane's hasty departure and she flashed a keen, half-inquiring glance at Crandall who met it unwaveringly. He pulled forth his ramshackle desk chair.

She declined the proffered seat with a gesture and walked over to the desk.

"I do not want to hold up the progress of the *Tribune* for any longer than I can help," she began. Crandall thought her jocularity sounded strained. "I want you to know that I am glad that you came out of that—that—muddle all right. That is," she corrected herself confusedly, "I am glad they did not keep you in jail."

She stopped and Crandall, entranced by her nearness, said nothing until she cleared her throat embarrassedly; then without taking his eyes from her face, said, awkwardly:

"Don't mention it—I—I—mean thanks!"

They both laughed then and the girl moved toward the door.

"There is one other thing," she said, her hand on the knob, "I want to apologize for my rudeness since—since the last time I was here. There is a reason for it," she continued earnestly, "which I cannot explain now. I don't want to sound mysterious, but I just can't say any more at the present moment." She blushed deliciously. "It has been very trying, I assure you. I don't know what you will think of me for coming here to tell you this or for having it to tell, but I want you to know that I value your friendship and," she opened the door, "I think you've made the *Tribune* just splendid!"

Crandall stepped forward eagerly, but she was gone.

He flung himself bewildered down in his chair. There was then a reason for her coolness. When Lane discreetly knocked on the door a few minutes later, and getting no response, entered the office, he found Crandall seated at his desk muttering, "I value your friendship highly" over and over, with a different inflection of his voice at each repetition.

"What's that?" he asked amazedly.

"Eh? Oh, hello Jimmy, how are you? I mean did you send your wire all right?" Crandall jumped up startled.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" asked Lane suspiciously. "Have you slipped off the wagon or—Oh!" he stopped suddenly and smiled broadly, "I got it now." He shook a warning finger. "None of that until we get to the bottom of this tangle. I will say, though, Tommy, that she is considerable girl! But say, I sent the wire and made it good and strong. Now it's up to us to make good on what I wired Barnes."

"It will be some story if we put it over, won't it?" breathed Crandall, staring pensively at the ceiling.

"You said it!" was Lane's laconic comment. "Some story is right!"

Chapter XI

The Riddle

Upon returning to the *Tribune* office next morning after breakfast at the Villa Crandall and Lane again went into consultation, in which many ways and means of getting to the bottom of Hermance's scheme were discovered, discussed and discarded, in order. Finally Lane said earnestly:

"There is only one way to get started on this thing, Tommy, and that is to comb the office where this Stillman held forth, from top to bottom. As long as he is away it should be comparatively easy, particularly as you are the only accredited representative of the company here now. Somewhere in that office, among the ledgers and other what not, records of sales, for instance, there must be a tangible something that will give us a hint."

"Well," Crandall admitted, "I guess you are right. I've looked at this thing from every possible angle. I don't know where the crookedness is, but I do know it exists—partly from my impression of Hermance when I saw him in New York and partly from what I heard that night at the lake. On the other hand, the people who have bought lots here from the company, all seem satisfied, except in a few isolated cases of chronic grumblers. They have not been charged exorbitant rates for their few acres of sand—on the contrary, it appears to be absurdly cheap. Now what's the answer?"

"That's what we're here to find out!" re-

turned Lane. "We've got to know," he added, grimacing. "Why if this should turn out to be a bloomer I'd lose my job!"

"Yes," laughed Crandall, "and if it don't, I'll lose mine!"

"Well, don't let's have any post mortems now," rejoined Lane, "I'll stay here and you go down to the company's office and turn things upside down. Don't hurry, take your time. If you don't find what we're after to-day, we've got to-morrow, you know."

Crandall rose and after instructing Lane as to what disposition to make of possible callers during his absence, he set off at a brisk pace for the little shack by the lake. Passing the railroad station, he waved a greeting to Thad Newell, who was sitting in the same position in which Crandall had first found him: feet propped up on the little counter of the telegraph office window, he puffed prodigious clouds of evil-smelling smoke from a venerable pipe, his broad brimmed straw hat tipped forward, successfully covering his face and his hands crossed over his sparse middle, a picture of lazy content raised to the *nth* power.

A group of idlers, young and old, held forth as usual beside the water tank. Crandall had tried futilely several times to induce some of them to go to work, for in the fast-growing town there were many vacancies for both skilled and unskilled labor. It got on his nerves to see them, for the most part strong and healthy, dawdling about the railroad station from early morning until late at night, doing nothing in a place where organized and earnest effort were needed to make the coming city a reality. Their evil thoughts, showing in their coarse quips and covetous glances, were an insult to passing women by day while at night they made sleep impossible with their discordant "quartet" singing of sentimental ballads.

An odd job now and then earned a meal, another a sleeping place. One or two had buzzard-like, swooped down on a colonist's cast off tent.

To Crandall, they were a swarm of flies in the ointment of his glowing hopes for Ocean Breeze. Every unfinished dwelling was an eyesore to him, every last brick or log laid on a new one gave him a personal feeling of satisfaction. He was rapidly becoming a figure of importance in the community. His opinion was sought on many matters pertaining to its development by the more progressive merchants who had constituted themselves a temporary board of trade, pending the great event—the incorporation of the town. Crandall thought grimly as he glanced contemptuously at the gang in passing, that when that event took place they would become either workers or exiles.

Sam Bass was a prominent figure in the crowd, although his estate had fallen somewhat since Crandall's easy victory over him in their first encounter. Since the night he had invaded the *Tribune* office, he gave no further evidence of open hostility and Crandall had long since dismissed him from serious consideration.

As Crandall neared the office of the company he marked that on the little, wooden step in front, a long cadaverous individual was sitting, munching away on a huge mouthful of tobacco, while in one hand he jangled a bunch of keys, with a curious air of proprietorship. A sawed off shotgun was standing against the side of the house within arm's reach.

Crandall, standing before the man, recognized him as one of the sheriff's deputies that had been pointed out to him on several occasions in the town. He was something of a local character and was known as 'Gator Joe, from his marvellous feats as a hunter of the alligator.

"Hello!" Crandall greeted him pleasantly, "I'm the editor of the *Tribune*. Remember me? I want to go inside for a few minutes and look over some of the company's books. I'm the official representative here now, I guess."

'Gator Joe stared at Crandall as though he were some new species of alligator. He looked at him and through him. Then he shifted the tobacco in his mouth, missed a crawling beetle by a hair's breath and impassively contemplated the heavens.

"Can't get in yere," he announced, dispassionately.

Crandall, already annoyed at the inspection, controlled his rising anger with difficulty.

"I'm afraid you don't recognize me," he said quietly, "I have to get some very im-

rtant papers in that office—you can come with me if you like."

'Gator Joe, the adamant, never shifted his position or gaze.

"I don't forgit you like you say," he drawled, "but you all can't get in yere!"

"Why not?" demanded Crandall.

"There ain't no reason why I got to tell you," began the other, in the same calm, unruffled voice, "but I will. Sheriff Elkins tole me to come over yere and set by this little ole shack until sundown. Come sundown, Jed Lawson's comin' over yere to sit in my place. Durin' and while all this yeres goin' on they ain't nobody allowed to git in yere. I ain't no good at riddle and I don't know why 'tis the sheriff's so powerfut set on keepin' you all out, all I know I've done tole you, 'ceptin' they ain't nobody goin' to git in yere, you all can rely on that!"

Having delivered himself of one of the longest speeches he ever made in his life, 'Gator Joe shifted his seat and pulling out a huge jack knife, started whittling lazily at a branch he picked from the ground beside him.

This new turn of affairs mystified Crandall and he stood silently considering it. He finally arrived at the conclusion that Hermance had ordered the guard at the office, now that Stillman was away. This went to convince him beyond all doubt that there was a fraud. Why, he reasoned, if everything was all right, should Hermance bar him from the office? Why, instead had he not written him to look after things in the absence of his representatives?

Knowing that argument with 'Gator Joe would be useless, he hurriedly retraced his steps to the *Tribune* office, to acquaint Lane with the new development. As he walked up the steps of the office, Jim, the old negro came running around the side of the building.

"Mister Lane done gone to Kissimmee," he called to Crandall. "About five minutes after you went away he comes runnin' out of the office. Dr. Pope was passin' in his automobile and Mister Lane yells out to him. Then he runs over and they talks for a minute and the fust thing you know Mister Lane gets in this yere automobile of Dr. Pope's and they goes off together. I never did see nothin' go away from here so fast before, no sir!"

"But didn't he leave any word for me?" asked Crandall, impatiently.

"No sir, boss," answered the old negro, "he never said nothin' to me at all."

Crandall stepped inside the office and walked quickly to his desk. In a conspicuous place he found a scrap of paper on which was scribbled:

> Doing a little investigating on my own hook. Going over to work on this Stillman and see if I can make him come through. I figure that by the time you get back from the office I will be all cleaned up over here.
>
> It was signed with Lane's initials.

Crandall sat down wearily, somewhat irritated that Lane should rush off in this fashion without any previous intimation that he had any plan in mind. He glanced at his watch; it was just a half hour since he had left Lane in the *Tribune* office. Kissimmee was about twenty minutes away by automobile; undoubtedly it would be a great deal less at the speed Jim said Dr. Pope's car was traveling. He devoted ten minutes to checking up the advertising bills, then threw them down in disgust, finding it impossible to add a column of three figures in his present state of mind. He sat back, drumming on the desk with a pencil—the two and two he was trying to put together had nothing to do with the *Tribune's* advertising bills.

A small urchin stuck his head in the door timidly, holding out a yellow envelope in a grimy hand.

"Got something for me, son?" inquired Crandall.

The boy nodded vigorously and came inside. Crandall gave him a coin and took the envelope, his pulses quickening as he saw it was a telegram. From Hermance, he thought, ripping it open.

He read the few words almost at a glance—then he spread it out on the desk and read it again, carefully and aloud:

Tom Crandall
Tribune Office
Ocean Breeze
Come at once it's all over.
Lane.

CHAPTER XII

A WILD RIDE

CRANDALL studied his watch reflectively. Lane must have sent him the wire almost as soon as he had arrived in Kissimmee. Also, he reasoned, Jim's description of the speed at which the auto was traveling had not been exaggerated. He pushed open the door into the pressroom and called to the old negro, who was helping Williams, his new printer, oil the press.

"Jim," he said, "where can I get an auto to take me to Kissimmee?"

Jim removed his hat and passed his hand over his head reflectively.

"Well, boss," he answered, doubtfully, "the onliest one I knows 'bout now would be Mister Barbour's. There's only 'bout two of them things 'round yere, and I guess——"

But Crandall had seized his hat and was gone.

Barbour was the proprietor of the drug store, a leader in the board of trade movement and a great admirer of the *Tribune*. Crandall knew that if he could but find him at the store the car would be placed at his disposal without question. There were but two trains in or out of Ocean Breeze daily. One at seven in the morning and the other about the same hour at night, so that Crandall's only chance of obeying Lane's injunction rested with Barbour.

He hurried to the drug store and found Barbour in his weird smelling laboratory, compiling a prescription for the venerable Mr. Simms, who sat waiting in the store devouring a huge plate of ice cream with audible enjoyment. Crandall returned his cheery greeting as he passed through to the rear of the store.

He briefly outlined the situation to Barbour, without telling him the reason of his eagerness to reach Kissimmee within the hour. The druggist weighed out the powder he was mixing with slow and aggravating nicety. He clucked his tongue several times, nodded to Crandall perfunctorily and checked off an item on the prescription before him, then turned and drawled humorously:

"If I get to puttin' too much of that there strychnine in there it might be fatal to that old comrade. What's that you all w tellin' me?"

Crandall, on edge as the precious tin flitted by, repeated his request for Barbour' auto. He had wasted fifteen minutes already he thought, fuming inwardly, when every moment was valuable. Lane's note left much to speculation but "Come at once!" from Jimmy Lane meant action—of that Crandall was sure.

"I sure would like to let you take that old car," said Barbour when Lane had finished. "There's only one thing that's going to stop me from doing it, too."

"What's that?" asked the dismayed Crandall.

A dry chuckle ecaped Barbour.

"The ole fool thing's busted!" he answered, "I hitched the motor up to my ice cream freezer this morning—that ole fool Cal Turner told me I'd save a lot of time by so doing. I saved a lot of time, right enough, but, boy, I wasted enough Grade A cream to set me back for a week. I threw that there old engine over on the high speed and I never have seen so much loose ice cream since or before. That there old milk and eggs and cream shot around here something scandalous! I just naturally ruined my clothes before I got it where it would stop. That litle ole engine is in such a condition now that it never will run no automobile anymore!"

The doleful grimace with which Barbour uttered the last would have amused Crandall had the situation been less serious, but thought of the waiting Lane quickly dispelled any humor he might have seen in his present plight.

"Have you any idea how I can get to Kissimmee before that last train to-night?" he asked Barbour anxiously.

The other reflected a moment as he mixed the prescription in the mortar.

"Can't you get a horse?" he demanded suddenly.

This was one means of locomotion that had entirely escaped Crandall. Perhaps because he had never bestrode one in his life. But that fact did not deter him now from grasping eagerly at the opportunity to do so.

"I never thought of that!" he exclaimed, "Where can I get one, do you know?"

"I'll let you take old Jess," responded the ther. Jess will take you to Kissimmee or 'ampa or any place you want to go, and she'll fetch you there so quick you'll think she just stood here and they brought the place over!"

He appraised Crandall's huge form with a swift glance.

"You all can ride, I reckon?" he asked.

"Eh? Oh sure!" Crandall responded readily, having no doubt that riding a horse was like riding a motorcycle or learning the intricacies of bridge. The mere fact that one had never accomplished it was no reason why it should be a difficult feat. So many others did it so well.

"All right," said Barbour. "Wait until I get Comrade Simms fixed up and I'll bring Jess around."

Crandall knew that to attempt to hurry Barbour was a feat on a par with trying to stop the water over Niagara Falls, so he was obliged to curb his impatience and await the latter's pleasure. He walked out of the little back room and pushed through the door into the front of the store. As the door swung outward it hit Mr. Simms with such vigor that the old veteran would have toppled over had it not been for Crandall's steadying arm. Even as he apologized profusely, it struck Crandall as odd that the other should be in that stooping posture at the door as he opened it and Simms, evidently sensing as much from Crandall's expression, shook his fist angrily in the general direction of the prescription room.

"I've been waiting here for half an hour for that infernal poison that fellow is mixing me," he said to Crandall. "What's he doing in there? Fixin' to kill me?"

Crandall smiled at the old man's testiness and temporarily forgot his suspicions. He sat down by the soda fountain, drumming nervously on the counter with his fingers. Finally, after what seemed ages to him, Barbour came out with the prescription, and Simms grumblingly paid for it and departed. Barbour beckoned to Crandall and led him to a sort of barn in the rear of the store, which served as a garage for the automobile and a stable for the redoubtable Jess. The horse, a spirited animal, was led out and saddled and Crandall experienced some slight qualms as Jess reared skittishly during the process. Taking a last precautionary hitch on the saddle girth, Barbour stood with his hand on the bridle, while Jess snorted and pawed the ground.

"All you got to do," he called to Crandall, "is to point this little ole rabbit for Kissimmee, once you get to the plank road. Then just hang on tight, because she'll sure make you pull leather before you get there!"

Crandall had not the faintest idea what "pulling leather" meant, but he gave what he flattered himself was a knowing nod although his misgivings increased by the spectacle of the prancing Jess, fighting to get away from Barbour's restraining hand. However, it was too late to withdraw now, he decided, so he approached the animal warily, until catching Barbour's curious glance, he halted uncertainly.

"You surely ain't fixin' to mount from that side are you?"

Barbour's voice rose incredulously.

"Well——" Crandall began.

Barbour chuckled loudly.

"Jess would bounce you so high you never would come down!" he assured Crandall. "Go around the other side and git up —I won't be able to hold her much longer!"

Crandall, with many an inward pang, stepped boldly enough to the side indicated by Barbour and thrust a foot into the dangling stirrup. Jess at once attempted to balance on her hind legs and Crandall experienced a sinking feeling in the region of his stomach. Although the unexpected lurch nearly threw him to the ground, he managed by some good fortune to retain his balance and his groping foot found the other stirrup. He sat up stiffly and Barbour stood away from the animal's head, eyeing him strangely. Crandall leaned over the sweating mane with elaborate unconcern.

"Which is the shortest way to Kissimmee?" he asked.

If Barbour answered his question, Crandall did not hear him. The next five minutes though, were branded indelibly on his memory. The thrill he had often experienced in the prize ring, when the hoarse, deafening roars of the blood-crazed mob sang around him as he set his muscles for the knockout, were as nothing to those packed in that short space of time. Only

one who has sat a runaway horse could share experiences with Crandall.

As he had bent over the animal's neck toward Barbour, a fluttering leaf, tossed by a sudden breeze, had lit for a moment upon his hand as he flicked it off impatiently it struck fairly the distended eye of the nervous Jess.

A wild leap, a warning yell from Barbour as he went sprawling and then began the terrible, fearsome dash through the narrow road that lay out of the town to the broad highway to Kissimmee. Startled pedestrians fled for safety and watched from vantage points the mad flight. Crandall, white-faced, fear gripping his heart, hung to the saddle horn like grim death and stared straight ahead. The cutting wind, mingled with the cries of those who escaped the flying hoofs by a hair's breadth, sang past him in a confused roar. A fallen tree loomed up before him—he closed his eyes and held his breath—a deep gully, made by the heavy rains, showed suddenly ahead in the sand—a faltering slump as they sank in the depression, a crazy stumble—and the heart-breaking pace went on unchecked.

A dozen times during the next five minutes, Crandall and death came face to face, but each time he beat the turn of the wheel. It was a good four miles to Kissimmee over the Plank Road. Of its general direction Crandall had only a vague idea, but the horse, even in its crazed flight, kept true to the course it knew and for two miles the speed was unslackened. The ears were stretched back until they were level with the sweating mane and the flying foam from the distended lips was born back and flecked Crandall's face as he leaned forward in the saddle. He fought hard for the mastery, but even with his immense strength his efforts were puny and futile. His touch held no familiarity to the flying Jess; he could not make her deviate a notch from her chosen path.

Half way to Kissimmee, the railroad tracks crossed the road and as Crandall spied the crossing, coming swiftly around the bend in the road he gave earnest thanks that there were but two trains along it daily —both hours away. His one fear now was that the horse would stumble over the raised rails and with this thought in mind, he threw all his straining muscle into tug on the bridle. He was rewarded by almost imperceptible slackening of speed and he redoubled his efforts, finally bringing the wary animal to a trot within a few feet of the crossing.

Utterly exhausted, he leaned back in the saddle for the first time since the dash began. His entire body was covered with a clammy perspiration, his eyes were sore and bloodshot. He loosened his collar from around his cracking throat and gingerly rubbed his smarting skin. Reaching a careful hand for his watch he looked at the dial and then held it, incredulously to his ear. It was just a few seconds under five minutes since he left Barbour's store.

The balance of the trip to Kissimmee was consumed at a jog trot. After half a mile, Crandall almost wished the mare would resume its former speed. With every movement of the animal he was tossed back and forth in the hard saddle until he was forced to stand upright in the stirrups. At length the outbuildings of Kissimmee hove into view and within a few minutes Crandall slid stiffly from the saddle in front of the post office. When he stood upright he ached in every bone and muscle and there were blisters forming in the palms of his hands from his grips on the bridle. He tied the halter to a hitching post and limped over to the court house. Lane was coming down the steps as he approached and ran forward to meet him.

"Well, what do you know?" Crandall called eagerly, before his friend could speak.

Lane made a gesture of disappointment.

"The thing fell through, Tommy," he said. "He won't say a word; on the other hand, he swears he knows nothing of any scheme on the part of Hermance or any one else. I worked on him until a moment ago —tried everything under the sun, but it was of no use. That Stillman boy is the original stand-patter. All I succeeded in doing was to tip him off that we were on to his uncle, so I suppose he'll burn the wires to New York now."

He surveyed Crandall curiously.

"Say!" he exclaimed, "you look as if you'd been through the mill—what——"

"I have!" interrupted Crandall, feel-

"But why did you wire me to come at once?"

"Heh?" Lane looked at him puzzledly. "I didn't send for you! You're crazy! I sent you a note in the office."

"I know," Crandall broke in impatiently, "but how about this?"

He pulled the telegram from his pocket and thrust it in Lane's eager hand. His friend tore the message from the envelope and read it aloud, amazement spreading over his face.

"This is great stuff!" he ejaculated. "This cinches it; you have the right idea, Tommy: there's some big doings due to happen to our friend Hermance, you can gamble your life on that! Of course I never sent this, but I'm going to find out who did right now! Come on!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE VANISHING TELEGRAM

THE bewildered Crandall followed Lane to the railroad station, where they made at once for the telegraph office. The operator was engaged in filing some official despatches and the two were forced to wait some few minutes before the guardian of the key gave them his attention. Lane took the initiative, spreading the telegram out on the counter.

"This wire was sent from here to this gentleman, Mr. Crandall, editor of the Ocean Breeze *Tribune*," he began, "by some one who passed themselves off as me. Have you, by any chance, the original message?"

The operator picked up the telegram, eyeing both Lane and the scrap of yellow paper with impartial suspicion.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "it's absolutely against my orders to do any such thing, but I'll dig around here some and see if I can find that there message. I remember the fellow that sent it all right, because there ain't many wires sent from this little old place for one thing, and for another, I never did see that same fellow around here before. He sure don't belong here, that I know."

"What did he look like?" asked Crandall, eagerly.

The operator reflected.

"He was about your size," he said after a moment, turning to Lane. "He had a blue suit on and wore a cap and—but he ought to be pretty easy to find, bein' a stranger around here and all that. You fellows go over and see Sheriff Elkins; he'll get him for you in no time."

"We'll do that," Lane assured him, "but how about the original message?"

The operator reached for a spindle file at the far end of the counter and pawed slowly over the papers fastened on it. He gave a sudden snort of satisfaction and slipped a piece of paper off the file.

"Here she is," he said.

In the act of passing it over to Lane, he stopped and stared at it with a puzzled expression. Then he pawed rapidly over the remaining papers on the file, his jaw dropping in amazement. Crandall, unable to restrain his curiosity, reached over with a quick movement and snatched the paper from his hand. It was a regulation telegraph blank, with the accent on the last word, for beyond a couple of lead pencil markings, the piece of paper was absolutely blank.

"What do you call this?" cried Lane, peering over Crandall's shoulder at the paper.

The operator was frenziedly sorting out the other papers on the file.

"Look at that!" he almost shouted. He tore the blank from Crandall's hand and waved it excitedly. "There's my check on it, see? 'Thirty cents, paid, rush.' See, that's my writing! That's the blank that fellow wrote his message on."

"But there's nothing on it!" cried Crandall.

"You've made a mistake; look at the others," suggested Lane.

"That's the one, I tell you!' declared the operator positively; "all these others are accounted for."

"Let's see it again," commanded Lane. He picked up the blank and held it up to the light. The strong sunlight reflected through the yellow paper disclosed a faint blurring here and there on the printed lines.

"I have it now!" exclaimed Lane suddenly. "Believe me, Tommy, we are fighting a classy bunch; there are no crude workers on Hermance's staff!"

"What's the answer?" demanded Crandall.

"Don't you get it?" answered Lane, holding up the paper. "It's easy. The fellow that wrote this used that so-called sympathetic ink; the stuff is so volatile it simply vanishes a short time after you put it on paper."

The operator stared dumbfoundedly at Lane. Crandall whistled softly between his teeth.

"Isn't there anything that will bring that writing out?" he asked suddenly.

"I'm going to try one experiment now," was Lane's answer as he drew a match from his pocket. "Let's see how heat will affect it."

He lit the match and held it at a safe distance from the paper, yet near enough for the heat to penetrate. The three watched eagerly, but even though the flame scorched the paper, there was no sign of legible writing on its surface.

"Well," Lane threw away the match disgustedly, "that won't do it. Maybe an acid will." He turned to the operator: "As long as this thing is no good to you this way, will you let me take it and see if I can bring the writing back?"

The operator scratched his head meditatively, eyeing the paper as if fascinated by it.

"Go ahead," he said finally, with evident reluctance, "but I'll look for you to bring it back here to-morrow. I'll let you try your hand on it until then."

Lane thrust the telegram in his pocket and he and Crandall left the station.

They had hardly passed through the door when the operator seemed to come suddenly out of his trance. He straightened up swiftly, stuck two fingers in the corner of his mouth and emitted an ear-piercing whistle. It startled both Lane and Crandall and an old lady who was selecting folders from the rack, so that they all jumped simultaneously. The operator waved a beckoning hand to Crandall, who ran forward expectantly.

"I like to forgot something very important!" was the operator's greeting. "You're the editor of that there newspaper in Ocean Breeze, ain't you?"

"Yes," answered Crandall; "what is it?"

The operator grinned sheepishly.

"Ivy Lawson and Pearl Cook are g to give a little fudge party down to th house this evenin'," he said confidenti "Will you put a little somethin' in yc paper about it, seein' as how I let you tak that telegram and everything?"

Crandall took a firm grip on his temper, which had been sorely tried during the past hour.

"Oh, sure!" he said, the disappointment showing in his tone. "Is that all you wanted to tell me?"

"That all?" answered the operator, frowning indignantly. "That's enough, ain't it? This here's goin' to be some affair, let me tell you, and if you don't want to put it in your paper, I guess I can get it in the Kissimmee *Gazette*."

"Oh, I'll print it, all right!" Crandall assured him, not wishing to antagonize what might prove a valuable ally. "Be sure to send me all the details," he added.

"I'll do that little thing," answered the operator, mollified.

Crandall rejoined Lane, who was waiting with ill-concealed impatience. He laughed heartily when Crandall explained why the operator had called him back. For want of a better place, the two sat down on a bench on the station platform. Lane glanced at his watch.

"I guess the best thing we can do now," he said, "is to wait for the train to Ocean Breeze. Now the question before the meeting is: Why should any one be so anxious to get you away from the *Tribune* office this afternoon, that they would send you a fake wire?"

"Give it up!" was Crandall's rejoinder. "I forgot to tell you," he added, "that there is a guard around the company's office and I was refused admittance there this morning—which reminds me I want to go over to the sheriff's office and get that very point cleared up." He jumped up. "How about telling the sheriff about that telegram while we're there?"

"Well, we'll go over and see what he looks like, anyhow," said Lane, rising. "What's this about the guard at the company's office?"

As they walked over to the court house, Crandall recounted his verbal clash with

or Joe. Lane listened with interest and n Crandall had finished he said:

"This fellow Stillman has probably tipped m off in New York that you or some one wise to the game, whatever it is, and they are taking no chances while he is away from the office. I suppose they'll send a man down here soon to take charge. You haven't heard a word from Hermance, I suppose?"

"Nothing," answered Crandall, "unless there is a letter over there now."

They found the sheriff's office apparently deserted. Repeated poundings on the door brought no response and Crandall called out to a man who was passing on the opposite side of the road:

"Sheriff around anywhere?"

The man crossed over to them.

"He went over to Ocean Breeze with some deputies a little while ago," he said. "They're having some big doin's over there about now, I reckon!" he smiled grimly. "I'd have gone myself but my old woman is sick and I got to stay around yere. 'Most everybody else is there though!"

Crandall had marked that the town seemed strangely deserted, but in the stress of the moments following his arrival he had not associated anything unusual with it.

"What's the trouble over there, do you know?" he inquired anxiously.

"I ain't just got the right of it yet," answered the man, "but I hear a nigger has gone to cuttin' up over there and then hid out in the woods—they'll get him though!" he finished.

"That's funny!" Crandall turned to Lane. "I came over from there a little while ago and everything was all right then. That's all you know about it, eh?"

"That's all!" rejoined the other.

The sound of pounding hoofs came down the road and soon a man riding hard came into view.

"Here comes Herb Fletcher!" exclaimed the native. "He'll know what it's all about. The sheriff sent for him and I guess he's on his way there now."

The newcomer answered his hail by pulling up suddenly as he breasted the trio, and the other called out:

"What's the fuss over to Ocean Breeze, Herb?"

"Oh, got a bad nigger, that's all!" responded the other, leaning down to tighten his saddle girth. "That ole fool nigger that's always hangin' around the printin' office over there has gone and cut somebody and got away clean. We'll get him though. Hope I don't miss it," he added regretfully. "I had to get me a new saddle—reckon it will be all over when I get there!"

He spurred the pony and was off.

Crandall, who had been listening dazedly, yelled after him but the rider was lost in a swirl of dust and sand. He turned on Lane swiftly.

"That's old Jim they mean, Lane!" he cried. "They'll kill him if we don't get over there. Hurry up; we've got to do something. Don't stand there looking at me! They're crazy! Jim wouldn't hurt a fly. Come on!"

He tugged frantically at the astonished Lane.

"What can we do?" began Lane mildly; "the sheriff will only arrest him, won't he?"

Before Crandall could answer, the other man who had been watching him curiously, broke in with a dry chuckle:

"We don't make no habit of arrestin' bad niggers down yere," he said. "Can't put 'em in jail with a white man and there ain't no other place for 'em. Don't worry, the boys will look after him!"

"You hear!" cried Crandall to Lane. "They'll lynch that poor old fellow before he has a chance to prove anything! He wasn't afraid to risk his old black body to help me, and I'm not going to let him go now, without making a try at it anyhow!"

His eyes were blazing with the old fighting fury, and despite what Lane regarded as his foolhardiness, he felt a thrill of admiration as he looked at him. The other man was also staring at Crandall in astonishment and it was he who broke the pause.

"Boss," he said, addressing Crandall, "you best not bother about that nigger, because it sure won't do him no good and you'll only do yourself harm! There's a right smart bunch of the boys after that nigger and when they get him they ain't goin' to listen to nobody——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Crandall hotly, "about a hundred of them, armed, against one poor old frightened nigger."

He turned to Lane. "I came over here on a horse; I'm going back on it now. You wait for the train and I'll meet you at the *Tribune* office."

He ran for the post office, where he had left Barbour's mare.

"Come here!" Lane shouted after him. He sprinted along at Crandall's side, tugging at his coat in an effort to stop him.

"Have you gone insane?" he shouted in Crandall's ear, as the latter shook him off. "You'll never have a chance with that bunch! Let this thing go; you can't help it. Maybe the nigger did cut some one; how do you know? If anything happens to you we'll never get to the bottom of this tangle!" he jerked out breathlessly.

"Don't miss that train," Crandall answered him, slowing down to a brisk walk as they neared the post office, "I'll be there waiting for you and we don't want to lose any more time than we can help."

"But listen!" cried Lane, frantically, "you——"

Crandall gingerly approached Jess, boosted himself up somehow and grasped the bridle.

"Look out, Jimmy!" he yelled, "This horse is some quick breaker, as they say!" He was actually smiling, thought the astounded Lane.

"If I don't hit any trees, I ought to be in Ocean Breeze inside of fifteen minutes!"

He kicked the animal smartly in the ribs and Lane jumped aside in the nick of time.

"He'll be there in *five* minutes!" murmured Lane, gazing after the swirling cloud of dust.

Chapter XIV

The Lynching

It was at the railroad crossing, half way to Ocean Breeze, that Crandall, perched precariously on the flying Jess, first heard the clattering hoofs and cries in the distance. There came, too, muffled reports of shots. He threw all his two hundred pounds of bone and muscle into a mighty tug, and the mare faltered, then halted with an abruptness that all but threw Crandall over her head. Down the road before him came a swiftly moving blur; the blur became a horse and rider and behind him came other blurs. There were staccato reports, and little puffs of white smoke flo briefly in the intervening air.

The quarry hung low over the horse neck as it swept nearer the crossing. T contour of the rider became distinct, ar Crandall saw it was the old negro, Jim. He knew that it would be almost impossible for the rider to check his mount's speed before the crossing was reached. As they came clattering on, Crandall held his breath, sensing the inevitable. An hour before he had been experiencing much the same sensation as must be upon the fugitive now as he saw the rails before him.

The horse, as fear crazed as its rider, fairly shot its foam flecked body over the intervening space. The first rail was cleared safely. A flying hoof caught in the second and then—Crandall shuddered as horse and rider crashed to the ground, rolling over and over before they lay still, almost at the feet of Crandall's whinnying mare.

Crandall quickly dismounted, stooping over the tangle as the pursuers came clattering up. The horse, recovering from the shock was trying frantically to make its feet, but a dangling leg prevented it. It had rolled over the body underneath, which lay grotesquely sprawled as it had fallen. He heard the mob, riding up and noisily dismounting—their hard breathing and mingled oaths came to him confusedly. The late arrivals were pushing forward around him, eager to be in at the death. His presence seemed almost ignored as they crowded around, pushing, jostling each other in an effort to view the still body on the ground. He saw that there were about thirty of them—the gang of idlers from the railroad station being well represented. The composite expression on their sweaty faces, filled with the lust to kill would have made the artist who could have caught it on a canvass. Sam Bass, his arm crudely bandaged, shoved his way through the press, until seeing Crandall, he stopped at a respectful distance and contented himself with a muttered oath.

Not so another of the gang, who prodded the prostrate body with his foot.

"Dead, is he?" he looked up at Crandall.

Crandall caught his disappointment and shouldered him contemptuously aside.

'Keep your feet off him!" he shot out. Where's the sheriff?'

There was an ominous silence—the more distinct from the noisy babel before. he man Crandall had shouldered made a ruculent move forward and Crandall braced himself with something akin to pleasure, waiting the expected attack. But there came an interruption from another quarter. Someone pushed from the rear, through the crowd and stood between Crandall and the other.

"Got the nigger, eh?" There was an authoritative ring in his voice. "Who shot him?"

"He struck the railroad crossing and fell," explained Crandall. "Are you the sheriff?"

"Yep!" answered the other.

There was an impatient murmur from the crowd as the prostrate body began showing signs of life. The dickering irritated them. This was not what they had ridden like mad for two miles for. They pressed forward, anxious for the real sport to begin.

"This man is badly hurt," said Crandall, reading their faces. "Can't we rush him back to Ocean Breeze and get him a doctor before you lock him up?"

A chorus of hearty guffaws greeted him, bringing an angry flush to his face. The sheriff stared at him open-mouthed.

"Say!" he snorted, "that's a bad nigger; he's cut a white man. Who are you, anyway?"

"Oh, who I am doesn't matter," Crandall answered coolly enough, "I'm the editor of the paper at Ocean Breeze—most of these men know me. This negro is an employee of mine; I'll be personally responsible for him."

He stooped down as he spoke and raised Jim to a sitting posture. The old negro slowly opened his eyes with a long drawn out groan. There was a nasty cut over one eye, and blood was trickling from a bullet wound in his shoulder. At sight of the mob surrounding him, he made a frantic effort to regain his feet and failing, clung terror-stricken to Crandall's leg, pain and fear struggling for mastery in his face.

"Help me, boss!—help me!" he begged piteously.

The sheriff stepped over to him and grasped him roughly by the arm.

"Come on, nigger!" he commanded. "We done had enough trouble with you for one day."

He stopped suddenly, looking over at the fallen horse which, neighing pitifully, was still making spasmodic efforts to regain its feet.

"By Caesar!" he exclaimed, "A horse thief, too, eh? That's Fred Hightower's gray!" He shook Jim roughly, regardless of his wounds, "You sure are a no account nigger! That there was one of the best saddle horses in this yere county!" He drew his revolver as he spoke and taking careful aim fired. The horse gave a convulsive jump and then lay still.

"That poor little gray's been sufferin' all this time while we been foolin' with you!" He shook Jim again. "If Fred knew that he'd surely be mad at me."

He turned to the crowd.

"Hightower's gray!" he said angrily, indicating the dead horse with the butt of his gun.

There was a threatening murmur from the others and one or two made a move toward the sheriff and his captive. Crandall, who had said nothing, stood close to the old negro, ready to ward off the blows he expected would come. He saw that the men would wait little longer for their prey. Most of them had been drinking heavily and the chase while it lasted had been hot and hard; their impatience was growing momentarily. What had looked like promising sport was in danger of being spoiled. There was a new concerted movement toward the sheriff.

"Now, boys," began the latter mildly, "let's take this easy and regular. Come here, you Bass!"

Sam Bass came forward to the edge of the crowd, leering evilly at Crandall.

"That the nigger that cut you?" inquired the sheriff.

Bass loosed a foul oath and swung his fist at the cowering Jim.

"That's identification, ain't it?" the sheriff chuckled, turning to Crandall. Not waiting for an answer, he led his horse forward by the bridle and jerked Jim brutally to his feet.

"Get up there, nigger!" he commanded.

Jim cast an appealing glance at Crandall

and essayed painfully to climb into the saddle.

"Oh, go on—git up!" shouted the sheriff testily, slapping the old negro resoundingly on his bent back.

The crowd yelled its unmeasured approval. It was the blow that snapped the restraint that Crandall had held on himself—his studied coolness fell away from him abruptly. He advanced swiftly to the sheriff's side, unmindful of the fact that he was an alien and alone, that he was not only opposed to men—he was entering the lists against the primitive desire to kill.

"That man is badly hurt!" he shot out, his voice quivering with half-suppressed rage. "He can scarcely stand; he is half dead now from pure fright. If you hit him again I'll give you a lacing you'll never forget, and I can do it before your fellow curs can pull me off."

Crandall had never witnessed such a curious battle of emotions as took place on the sheriff's face; white rage fell before an ochre streak that ran somewhere in his body. He made a quick movement with his gun, but Crandall stood his ground, towering over him, his left arm ready and aching to send over the blow. The crowd pressed and jostled around them, but strangely enough there was no movement toward him. Jim slumped against the side of the horse, half conscious. The sheriff reading the tense expression on Crandall's face, his huge bulk poised lightly on the balls of his feet, mumbled under his breath and dropped his hands to his sides.

Crandall felt more disappointed than exultant at his victory.

"I got a good notion to take you in, too," began the sheriff in a half whine, "you better keep out of this!"

He turned again to Jim.

"Get up!" he commanded again.

This time Jim crawled somehow on the back of the horse. On the instant, something whizzed through the air and settled around his shoulders. The something resolved itself into a long twisting coil of rope and, pulled taut, it held Jim securely. A series of hoarse, maniacal yells went up from the crowd. The sheriff stood aside and watched complacently. Crandall felt the hot blood tingling in his veins.

"Yere's the tree!" came a voice from t rear of the crowd.

Crandall bent down and spoke in the sheriff's ear, almost shouting to be heard over the pandemonium around him.

"You're not going to let them lynch him are you?"

"Say!" the sheriff turned on him, blusteringly, "What are you messin' in yere all the time for? There's twenty of them and there's one of me; I can't stop 'em, can I? If we'd let that pass over, him cuttin' Bass, them niggers at the lumber camp would turn your little ole town inside out next pay day when they liquor up! That nigger expects what's comin' to him; it's the onliest way you can teach 'em anything——"

"You're going to let them do it!" cried Crandall, unheeding.

Jim was lost in the swirl of the crowd. Crandall heard his agonized yells though, and they cut through him like a knife as he railed at his helplessness. The mob had seemingly gone stark, raving mad now as they stumbled along the road to the tree an outrider had selected. There was no human semblance to their ear-splitting yells and crazy actions. Now and then, someone carried away by the blood lust and cheap whisky with which they had been plentifully supplied—the one at birth, the other too soon after, would empty his revolver in the air.

"By Heaven!" cried Crandall, shaking his fist at the mob, "I'm ashamed of my race when I look at that scum. I'll go to the Governor of the state with this! You don't even know why that poor old negro cut Bass. You don't want to know! I'll make it my business to see that every one of that cowardly mob is punished for this!"

"If you all feel like that," returned the sheriff, "you better git back North as fast as you can. Bass says he cut him; that's good enough. Besides, if he didn't do that, he probably did somethin' else."

Straining his eyes eagerly, Crandall saw that through the widening circle of the crowd around the tree that the noose had been placed around Jim's neck. He was still astride the horse, his head touching the mane as he slumped forward unconscious in the saddle. A score of revolvers flashed in the sunlight, ready for the real sport when

negro's body swung dangling as the horse would be sent out from beneath him. Crandall ground his teeth impotently, watching for the signal that would swing Jim into eternity.

Something was coming down the road in a cloud of dust and sand—an automobile horn honked noisily. At the homely sound, a great wave of homesickness swept over Crandall. He longed fervently to be back mingling with the crowds in Times Square, drawing on the gloves while the calcium overhead stung his eyes and the thick tobacco smoke choked his lungs, back for the daily dropping in at the *Press* office, away from the bestial horde that found vociferous enjoyment in the killing of a fellow being, not in fair combat, but like a rat.

A high-powered touring car came into view. Two men were standing up in the tonneau, while a third sat at the wheel. Crandall ran forward, determined to halt the car and appeal to them for aid. But there was no need for his action. The car stopped suddenly on the fringe of the crowd. There was a wild scurrying for horses, hats fell off and were left forgotten; the man at his side was also struck by the sudden desire for flight. He ran to his horse with an oath, leaped astride it and spurred frantically. Crandall, bewildered by this new turn of affairs saw that the men in the car had jumped from the running board and were hurrying toward the tree. The horse pricked up its ears at their approach and stepped from under Jim.

Crandall reached the body almost as soon as the newcomers. One, a brawny individual, held Jim's body so the rope would be slack while another slashed at it with his knife. They laid the negro on the ground under the tree and straightening up, stared suspiciously at Crandall.

"My name is Crandall," he addressed the brawny one; "I'm the editor of the paper in Ocean Breeze and this old fellow worked for me. I was in Kissimmee when I heard those men were after him; I came up just as they caught him. I tried to get the sheriff to stop it but——"

He stopped, noting the indulgent smile on the other's face.

"The boy's have been fooling you!" his listener said, smiling good naturedly; "I'm 'bout the only sheriff around here I reckon." He threw open his vest, displaying the star pinned to his shirt. "My name is Elkins."

Crandall gasped.

"They're a great bunch," continued the other, shaking his head. "I reckon that was Ed Harkness that told you all he was me; he's done that before. Regular little trick of his."

He motioned to the body at his feet.

"Guess I'm too late—this here nigger is sure enough dead!" he said.

He turned to his companion.

"Joe—this is Mister Crandall—Joe Johnson, one of my deputies," he explained formally to Crandall who grasped the other's hand. "Joe," went on the sheriff, "jump in that there car and go after Ed Harkness—you ought to meet up with him right at the edge of Kissimmee if that there salesman told the truth about that auto. Get him and take him on to the court house. If Judge Brice is there get you some bench warrants and go after Sam Bass, Chick Hertell and Herb Rollins, them bein' all I got sight of before they scattered. Get Ferd to hitch up and come out yere right off for me and this nigger."

The sheriff squatted on the ground and drew a sack of tobacco from his pocket, offering it first to Crandall.

"Now," he said, rolling a cigarette, "if you all will tell me something about all this," he waved a hand to the negro's body, "I'll fix up some way of sendin' them boys away for a time. Not on account of this—couldn't git *no* court to do that—but I'm sure gittin' tired of that no account Ed Harkness goin' around tellin' strangers he's me!"

CHAPTER XV

THE INQUISITIVE MR. SIMMS

THE dry humor and unaffected good nature of the sheriff were irresistible to Crandall and that official in turn found something in common in Crandall's huge bulk and boyish enthusiasm. It was not strange then, that in a few minutes after their odd meeting, the two were conversing as life long friends—exchanging experiences, confiding hopes. The sheriff was especially interested in Crandall's prize ring exploits, viewing him with the admiration

of one big man for another and Crandall found he had enlisted a valuable and willing ally when he briefly outlined his suspicions of the fraud at Ocean Breeze.

"As far as that there guard on the office is concerned," said the sheriff when Crandall had broached the question, "I got an order from Judge Brice for that; you'll have to see him to get the answer. But he's a fine old man and he'll sure help you when he hears that yarn you told me. I'll put in a good word for you, too. But I'm going to find out who sent you that trick telegram; that there's right in my line!"

They parted at length, with the understanding that they were to confer again the next morning at Kissimmee, and Crandall, mounting the somewhat chastened Jess, rode back to Ocean Breeze, making directly for the *Tribune* office. He at once caught out Williams, his printer, eager for the details of the row between Sam Bass and Jim. His story was about what Crandall had expected. Bass, exceptionally intoxicated, had come to the office and finding Crandall away had launched into an uproarious dissertation upon the latter's past, present and possible future, in language couched in inexpressible filth. Jim had attempted to soothe him and make him leave quietly and Bass, seizing eagerly the longed-for opportunity, had knocked the old negro down with a swing of his ham-like fist. Unsatiated, he was kicking him brutally when Jim suddenly pulled a clasp knife from his pocket—old and rusty, it was a pitiable rather than formidable weapon. Pain-maddened, he made a feeble lunge at Bass—the blade scratched the other's arm, who reeled from the office, yelling lustily. Jim fled while the crowd was still collecting. That was all he knew about it.

Crandall then recounted the events leading up to the death of the old negro expecting an indignant outburst, but Williams took what Crandall thought the most revolting thing he had ever witnessed as a matter of course and seemed vastly more interested in the possible fate of Harkness who had impersonated the sheriff.

Crandall turned from the other disgustedly and glancing out the open window his eyes fell upon a picture that swept all the unpleasant thoughts from his mind and made his blood tingle. Miss Stevenson a old Mr. Simms were passing on the opposi side of the road. The girl was leaning o the old veteran's arm and appeared deeply interested in his earnest conversation. The old soldier, bent and gray, but still the gallant stepped unhesitatingly into a huge mud puddle that his fair companion might pass the spot unsoiled. The girl, a bewildering vision in a glove-fitting creation of white, turned to him remonstratingly, and Crandall felt the blood mounting to his temples as he drank in the beautiful lines of her exquisite figure.

It was with difficulty that he brought his thoughts back to the matter on hand, but he flung himself down at his desk and idly picked up some letters brought by Williams from the first mail. The very first one helped him throw off his lassitude even though he but glanced at the envelope. He straightened up suddenly and ripped it open expectantly. Under the letter head of the Osceola Land Company he read:

Mr. Thomas Crandall, Esq.,
Ocean Breeze, Fla.
Dear Sir:

As soon as possible after the receipt of this communication, you will report to the New York office for some important instruction that cannot be transmitted by mail.

Leave the *Tribune* in charge of your printer and bring all books and correspondence relating to the company's business with you.

It was signed in Hermance's sprawling hand.

Crandall carefully folded up the letter, put it in his coat pocket and closed down his desk. He stood in the doorway for a moment, deliberating, taking out the letter as he did so and reading it again slowly. Then, having apparently made up his mind, he strode back into the pressroom and beckoned to Williams.

"How do things look, Williams?" he asked, "Will we get away all right to-day with the paper?"

"Well," answered Williams, "If we don't break a roller or something we ought to run some of them off."

They both walked over and stood by the ancient press. Harkness had scornfully referred to it on several occasions as a junk pile and the appellation had been conclusively adequate—it was of a type that had been obsolete ten years before.

"We'll run off as many as we can to-day, anyhow," said Crandall, finally, "if she breaks down, don't worry——"

He was about to add, "We won't need it any more," but thinking better of it, he stopped and walked out of the room, leaving Williams puzzled by his cryptic, unfinished utterance.

Unable to throw off his growing nervousness, caused by his mental struggles to fathom the meaning of Hermance's letter, Crandall started for the railroad station to await the arrival of the train from Kissimmee bearing Lane. As he strode along, he turned over the situation again and again in his mind. That Hermance was crooked and that the colonists were being defrauded he had no doubt, but what the scheme was he could not grasp even the faintest inkling. Here was a fresh obstacle and added element of mystery in that Hermance had ordered him back to New York.

He greeted Thad Newell at the station perfunctorily and stood idly watching him checking up his invoices.

"Thad," he said abruptly, "who owned the land around here before the Osceola Company bought it?"

He wondered at Newell's sudden start and the keen glance he turned on him at the question. Something of his surprise must have shown in his face, for Thad hastily returned to the invoices, going over the last one before he answered.

"I reckon it belonged to the state," he said, finally. "Why?"

Whether it was Newell's tone or the words themselves, Crandall couldn't decide, but somehow he got the idea that the other was fencing; but though he stared quite frankly into the other's face, he could read nothing there.

Further discussion was cut short by the whistling of the train and Crandall went out on the platform as it labored noisily into the station. He walked along beside the cars and Lane swinging down from a step almost bowled him over. The latter seized Crandall and swung him around, relief showing in his face.

"Well, apparently you are all here!" he exclaimed, as if he had had grave doubts of finding such the case, "Did the lynching go through?"

Crandall related his experiences as they walked back to the *Tribune* office, Lane listening in interested silence to every detail.

"Some afternoon!" he ejaculated, when Crandall had finished, "Tommy, you are getting to be a regular movie hero! I——"

"What would you do about that letter from Hermance?" interrupted Crandall, anxious to rid himself of the tangle foremost in his mind.

"Oh forget that!" answered Lane quickly, "Stall him off for a few days. Why we should have this all cleaned up by the end of the week," he went on with an enthusiasm that made Crandall smile in spite of himself. "This Stillman is the fellow, if we can only get to him! It can be done, you know; no man is invulnerable to all assaults. The thing to do is to find how to get him. I knew he had gotten word to New York; that's why Hermance has called you off, I'll bet."

"Have you formed any theories as to what will be printed conspicuously on the warrant they arrest Hermance with?" asked Crandall with a jocularity he did not feel.

"Not as yet," confessed his friend, as they walked up the steps of the *Tribune* office," but I think that—Hello! what's this?"

He paused suddenly as he pushed forward the door into the office. Crandall stepped swiftly to his side, peering in the darkened room. His exclamation of astonishment was excusable for old Mr. Simms was bent over his desk in the act of forcing it with a brass rule which he had evidently picked from a box on the floor. He straightened up quickly at Lane's exclamation and faced them with a magnificent assumption of ease.

"You must have the jewels of Asia or something as valuable hidden in this pesky old desk," he remarked cooly to Crandall, "I've been trying to open it for ten minutes!"

The very unexpectedness of the words and the assurance with which they were

spoken stunned Crandall, and he stood in the doorway unable for the moment to reply. At Lane's cough he stepped into the room and still without speaking, lit the lantern. Then he turned and faced Simms.

"What were you trying to get out of my desk, Mr. Simms?" he asked sternly.

From inside came the rattle of the old press, grinding out the weekly output of the *Tribune*.

"I met that fool printer of yours up the road," began the old man without the faintest trace of embarrassment; "I was right anxious to get a copy of the *Tribune* as soon as she came from the press. You know I sent that little piece about the G. A. R. meeting in and I clean forgot to put the date in it. He told me the article was still on your desk and I come right down here to fix it up. I didn't want to be no laughing stock by having it in without no date. Well, of course you were gone when I got here and I thought to myself, Sam—if you don't get that and fix it right, it's going to get in the paper that way and——"

Crandall broke in angrily on the old man's ramblings.

"And you were breaking in my desk to get it, eh? he said sarcastically.

But his anger was lost on Simms.

"See that little piece of paper stickin' out there?" He pointed to a corner of the desk. "That looks all fired like the paper I sent in. I thought if I just raised the corner a leetle mite I could pull it out."

He stopped, looking searchingly from Crandall to Lane and, quick to catch the skepticism reflected on the features of both, he threw back his bent shoulders proudly.

"I got three bullets there," he said with dignity; he tapped his right leg lightly, "at Gettysburg, before you were born. I had my own command at Santiago—I ain't never been called a thief yet——" His indignation was so genuine, as he stood before them, with flashing eyes—old and bent, but no whiner—that Crandall felt a sudden tinge of shame creep over his anger.

"But, you know yourself, Mr. Simms," he began in a milder tone, "it looks very ——"

Williams, grimy, perspiring, stuck his head in the door.

"I think we'll get through all right this time, boss," he called to Crandall; then seeing the others he stopped.

"All right, Williams, that's fine," Crandall called back over the rattle of the press. "Oh, wait a minute. Did you notice a story about the G. A. R. meeting in the form? It should be on the front page."

"I think I did," answered Williams.

"Well, give Mr. Simms here a paper." He turned to the old veteran. "If you'll step inside, Mr. Simms, Williams will give you a paper and you can see if your notice is all right."

The old man hobbled inside after Williams without a word.

Crandall turned to Lane at the other's sneering laugh as the door closed after Simms.

"Well, what do you think?" he cried, "Hurry up—say it!"

"Why didn't you ask Williams while they were both here if he had met this old man up the road—wasn't that what he said?"

Crandall slapped the desk with his hand.

"Why didn't you remind me!" he exclaimed quickly, "I was so impressed by his injured innocence that I felt as though I were the guilty one. I know Williams hasn't been out of this office!"

He stepped over to the door.

" Here's where I clear up *this* mystery at any rate!" he said grimly.

As he feared, there was no sign of Simms when he strode into the pressroom. He climbed up on the press beside Williams.

"Were you out of the office while I was at the railroad station?" he yelled to make himself heard over the din and rattle of the rollers.

Williams turned to him indignantly.

"Me? Certainly not! Why it took me fifteen minutes to get the forms——"

"All right," Crandall cut him off, "that's all I wanted to know. Wait—where did Mr. Simms go?"

Williams pointed to the door at the rear.

Crandall nodded understandingly and climbed down. He returned to the office and found Lane pacing impatiently up and down.

"He never saw him?" inquired the latter before Crandall could speak.

Crandall nodded.

"You win," he said.

'Sure—I knew it!" declared Lane. Then
: went on briskly, "Well we're becoming
.cquainted with the whole crowd now, but
's leave the old fellow alone for the time
eing. If you make a fuss about him now,
/ou might queer the whole business. We've got to start at the beginning and the whole thing will work out naturally. Let him think he got away with it; the more secure they feel the sooner they're apt to get careless. Meanwhile, you'll simply have to get into that office at the lake and get hold of all the books and papers you can find. If we can only do something that will get them to bargain with us—we can clean up in no time."

"I'll go down there to-night!" announced Crandall suddenly. "I'm sick of this infernal mystery—people prying in my desk and sending fake telegrams and all the rest of the Bowery melodrama! I'll go down there and break in some way and get hold of something. Then if we can't do anything with what I bring back I'll go over to Kissimmee to-morrow and see what I can do with Stillman. If we fall down all around I'm going up to Washington and let the Federal authorities know what scant information we have!"

"I can't say I like the last part," said Lane, "because I think we can get to the bottom of this without calling in Uncle Sam. It certainly will make my story better if we do. However, we'll try out the other first, anyhow."

"Wait until I see what kind of a paper I have this week and we'll bustle up to the Villa for supper," said Crandall. "There's no reason why we shouldn't eat—mystery or no mystery!"

"Righto!" agreed Lane, "Hurry up!"

Crandall stepped inside and picked up a copy of the *Tribune* still damp from the "fly" in front of the press. Then he rejoined Lane and the two started for the Villa.

The dining room was deserted as it was long past the supper hour. But as they took their places at the table, Miss Stevenson passed out from the kitchen and greeting both pleasantly, went on outside. Crandall sat staring after her until Lane reminded him sarcastically that they were sleeping at the *Tribune* office and not at the Villa Lorraine. He ate sparingly, planning mentally his intended invasion of the shack by the lake that night. Not so Lane, who insisted on a second helping of rice pudding, of which he was inordinately fond. Crandall pushed his chair away from the table and stepped out the doorway to wait for Lane, when his friend firmly refused to forego his craving for the dish.

Standing within a few feet of the house, almost concealed by the shadows, he saw the girl. He drew a deep breath and wished devoutly that Lane would consume at least a dozen plates of rice pudding—or anything that would detain him inside.

The girl was gazing pensively over the semi-wilderness of sand thrown into startling relief where the moonlight caught it. She seemed quite unconscious of his nearness and Crandall gazing at her beautiful profile was loath to disturb the picture. But she defined his presence suddenly and turned with an apologetic gesture. Crandall thrust blindly for an opening.

"I am returning to New York shortly, Miss Stevenson," he began hurriedly, "and I——"

The girl stopped him with a swift gesture and came toward him.

"You are going to-morrow?"

There was an intenseness in the question, strange in itself, that startled Crandall.

"Why—no," he groped, "I hadn't thought of leaving as soon as that. Why to-morrow?' he finished inanely.

"Mr. Crandall," said the girl seriously, "unless you have already made plans—no—even if you have made plans, will you delay your trip to New York until the day after to-morrow?"

Crandall was bewildered, but there was no mistaking the earnestness of the girl; her whole attitude was tense. This was no coquettish fencing; whatever the reason, Crandall saw the girl was waiting his answer with patent anxiety.

"Of course," he answered. "I would delay it indefinitely at your bidding," he added, smiling in an effort to relieve the situation.

But there was no answering smile in the girl's features, and at that moment Lane appeared in the doorway. At his call to Crandal, whom he did not see immediately,

the girl stepped quickly past him and into the house.

Crandall turned testily to Lane, as the latter joined him.

"You came along at an infernally inopportune time, Jimmy," he said.

Lane chuckled.

"You'll have lots of time for that sort of thing after we solve Hermance," he said. "Just now, let's figure out how you're going to work this second-story act to-night!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE BOLT FROM THE BLUE

AT SOMETHING after eleven that night, Crandall, floundering around in the thick brush in the rear of the company's office at the lake decided for the fifth time within the hour that the moment to act had come. His nerves had been on the ragged edge since he had sought the cover of the shrubbery on his arrival there. The guardian of the office lay, as he had hoped, prone on the step, his shot gun flung near him on the ground, his deep snores all but drowning the whine of the innumerable mosquitoes and the rattling chorus of crickets. Had it not been for the noise issuing from the throat of the sleeper, Crandall would have thought the man dead, for a tentative stone, tossed near him had skidded off a rock, resting finally within an inch of his upturned face; the man had simply brushed a hand over his head impatiently and the snores went on unbroken.

Crandall carefully groped his way around the shack until he found a window. He exerted a slight pressure on the frame and found it locked as he anticipated and he drew from his pocket a screw driver, brought for the purpose, inserting it gingerly into the scant space between the bottom of the window and the sill. He bent on it suddenly and then——

The entire lower panel of glass fell out of the frame and dropped to the floor inside with a jangling crash. A shadow flitted about near the open window, as he watched, his heart racing. He crouched down beside the aperture waiting the discovery he expected momentarily, his muscles tense, his whole body poised for the spring.

But there came no attack—the silence was unbroken save for the uninterrupted chorus of the insects about him and the guttural snore of the guard. Crandall could not believe that the latter had not been awakened by the crash and he straightened up cautiously, feeling his way around the side of the house. He had progressed in this fashion perhaps a dozen feet, when he heard a soft thud, as of a body striking the ground near the window he had just left and he wheeled around in time to see a figure disappearing in the shrubbery. Without hesitation Crandall plunged in after it.

He stumbled blindly along, following the other's course by the swaying of the shrubbery before him. Low-hanging branches cut and scratched his face and more than once a clammy feeling shook him as he stepped and slid on slimy things underfoot. Once he flung full into a hidden gully—he saved himself by a spasmodic clutching at a firmly rooted weed. Lane's phantasy, "Kid Imagination," gave him a hard battle as he stumbled along in the darkness, but he conquered it as he had before, with the scorpion. The figure ahead appeared to be widening the distance between them despite his best efforts. He knew, though, that soon they must strike the edge of the town, there was a clearing there and—he squared his jaw grimly.

He came onto the open road suddenly and straining his eyes he made out his quarry scurrying along perhaps fifty yards ahead, half hidden by the darkness. He followed swiftly, increasing his pace, then slackening it when the fugitive flung a glance behind over his shoulder. As they neared the railroad station, Crandall described a man step from the shadows behind it and, reaching out, pull at the other's arm. There was something strangely familiar about the newcomer—so familiar that Crandall stopped almost in his tracks gasping. The two ahead were conversing in animated tones and abruptly, one turned facing him, gesticulating vehemently. The flickering light from the lamp post fell full upon their faces. Crandall staggered back against the tall pine where he had stopped, his brain reeling, his blood pounding through his veins. It was a woman he had been pursuing; it was Miss Stevenson!

Dazed, Crandall saw that her companion

Mr. Simms—not the bent and quaver-
old soldier, but a strangely erect almost
etic Mr. Simms, that bent over the
man with an air of tender proprietorship
at gripped Crandall's heart.

There was no mistaking his identity—he still wore the G. A. R. uniform, the flowing white beard, the old-fashioned spectacles—and Crandall saw as they hurried up the road from the station, that he fell back into his limping gait as if from the long perfected habit.

Crandall's first impulse after the first shock was to rush after the pair and demand an explanation; he even took a few strides forward with this intent and then halted. They could not leave town until morning and now that disclosure was certain a conference with Lane might bring better results than a hasty action of his own in his present temper. One thing was sure now, he told himself; the entire mystery would be cleared up in the next twenty-four hours. He shuddered. If Lane had seen what he had and repeated it to him, he would have knocked him down for the telling. But this he had observed with his own unbelieving eyes. A midnight rendezvous with Simms. Simms who was an impostor—playing the rôle of the old veteran, perhaps as his part in the big scheme. He had caught him at his desk but a few hours before and had been so deceived by his artistry in the part, that he had let him go—apologizing.

But it was the thought of the girl being involved that swept over Crandall, making all else mere detail. Her studied avoidance of him previous to the tragedy at Randall's Island, her cryptic remarks, her earnest request that he delay his leaving and then this——

When he flung open the door of the *Tribune* office, he found Lane dozing in the chair at his desk, but the noise of his entrance awakened the latter, who sprang up eagerly, rubbing his eyes.

"What luck?" he cried.

Crandall perched himself wearily on the side of the desk.

"Jimmy," he answered, "if this thing isn't solved by to-morrow I'll go clean off my head. When I tell you what I saw to-night, you'll think me so now!"

"Great stuff!" declared Lane, all attention, "Hurry up and get it off your chest; you'll never find a better listener!"

Crandall detailed his experiences from the time he had left the office, and the expression on Lane's face as he finished was a tribute to his descriptive powers.

"I knew it!" he ejaculated, when Crandall paused, "I knew that girl was mixed up in this somehow! If I had only gone with you as I wanted to-night. She is certainly a——"

"Please forget that part of it, will you!" Crandall shot out irritably, his nerves dangerously near the breaking point. "Never mind what you knew! What do you know now? What will we do?"

Lane smiled indulgently at his friend.

"All right old man, hold your temper. I know how you feel. You were wise not to start anything to-night. We'll spring this in the morning and we'll spring it right, believe me! You go over in the morning and get that sheriff here and we'll round this bunch up, tell what we know and demand a showdown!"

"Yes," answered Crandall sarcastically, "and suppose there is nothing to show down?"

You're crazy!" declared Lane, irritated in turn. "Even if there was nothing else the idea of that girl breaking in the office will call for some explaining, won't it?"

Crandall sighed and nodded almost reluctantly.

"That's our only card, so far," he agreed.

It was an hour later before the two turned in, but there was little sleep for Crandall, although Lane went off into a sound slumber almost immediately, as far as outward appearances were concerned. Crandall finally dozed off, but not until the first gray streaks of dawn were showing over the pines. He was aroused by Lane shaking him vigorously.

"Hurry up, it's nearly seven o'clock!" came booming into his ear. "You'll have to hurry if you're going to make that train to Kissimmee. You'd make a fine sleuth, you would!"

Crandall with a supreme effort shook off his sleepiness and fatigue. He rose and went to the water barrel, sprinkling the cold liquid on his face and shoulders in generous quantities. After a brisk rub with the towel

he felt somewhat fresher and thoughts of what the day would bring acted as an additional stimulant. He could scarcely believe that the events of the night before had actually transpired. Now in the light of the glorious morning it seemed more like a particularly vivid dream.

Lane paced around the office nervously as he dressed, holding his watch in his hand and looking from it to Crandall frequently. Williams and his aides came straggling in, the former dropping some letters on Crandall's desk. Crandall reached for his hat and stuffed the mail in his coat pocket. He paused in the doorway and turned to Lane.

"Don't make any breaks up there," he nodded in the direction of the Villa Lorraine, "until I get back—unless it can't be helped," he said significantly.

"Say," Lane retored indignatly, "what do you think I am, an amateur at this game? Hurry up, you'll miss that train!"

Crandall found that Lane's fears were well founded for as he stepped outside he heard the three sharp blasts that preceded the departure of the train for Kissimmee. It was only by brisk sprinting that he managed to fling himself on the step of the last car.

Settled in a seat, he thought of the mail and drew the letters from his pocket. A glance at the first caused him to replace the others at once. There was a well remembered twist to the "t's" and a familiar repetition of undotted "i's" that made him tear open the envelope and glance for confirmation at the signature. It was signed "Your old pal and manager, Dan Bagley."

The message from the man who had started and stopped Crandall's career as a prize fighter was brief and to the point. Bagley had discovered Crandall's whereabouts—"never mind how," he wrote, and it was the last paragraph of his letter that held Crandall's attention.

"The ten round, no decision game is great around New York now," wrote Bagley, in his almost undecipherable chirography. "I can get you as many fights as you can take. Anybody is liable to pull a bone—that's what I did when I let you out. Forget about that and come up here and gather in some of this easy dough. I'll give you a better split than I did before and we will probably roll in it in a few weeks. If are shy, let me know at once and I'll you some change."

Crandall considered this letter all t way over to Kissimmee. At first blush, was a ray of sunshine in the dark cloud that enveloped him. There would be nothing for him in Ocean Breeze when the "big showdown" as Lane phrased it, came; he would have to do something. Just what part was the girl playing? Perhaps—hang it, why couldn't he get her out of his mind and think of his own future. Let's see, now—He was practically in training and could soon get in perfect condition again for the ring—was Simms her fiancé——? Finding it impossible to run his two trains of thought on his one track mind, Crandall stuck Bagley's letter in his pocket and made one firm resolve. Whatever his erratic manager had to offer him in New York, this was the fight right here! And here he would stay until it was decided and stake his future on the result.

The train wheezed into Kissimmee and Crandall was the first to leave it. As he strode from the station a sudden thought struck and held him. Why not one more try at Stillman? Surely the effort would not be wasted. Maybe as the time for the latter's trial for the killing of Butts-Blythe drew near he would weaken and expose the scheme in an effort to enlist Crandall's aid, as one of the two persons who had first-hand knowledge of the shooting, to save his own skin.

The possibilities of the idea so impressed him, that he at once made for the county jail where Stillman had been confined. The warden readily admitted him and led him to a room attached to his own quarters. The official informing him confidentially, that this privilege had been secured through the efforts of Stillman's lawyer, who he assured Crandall, was the biggest of his profession in Jacksonville and was "standing that Yank about one hundred dollars a day."

Stillman was at breakfast when Crandall was shown into the room and he looked in vain for some evidence of prison pallor or hardship. His former rival was ruddy faced and smiling and he greeted Crandall with elaborate courtesy, motioning him to a chair.

I suppose you have come to offer me ur assistance, eh?" he inquired, smiling lf sarcastically.

Crandall thought he appeared singularly ree from the worry and strain one would associate with a man in his plight.

"I have," he answered gravely.

"Well," returned Stillman, poising his cup of coffee delicately, "I appreciate your generous offer, but I doubt if I'll need any outside aid. Matters are shaping themselves very nicely. I have a little surprise in store which I will spring at my trial." His voice trailed off as he drained his coffee. "By the way," he added, "how is the-er-charming Miss Stevenson?"

There was something in the sneering inflection that stung Crandall, so that he had a hard time restraining his anger.

"Stillman," he said, "although you are trying to give me a different impression—you are in a tight corner just now. I am not only speaking of your present predicament but one that you will find yourself in—perhaps to-night!"

"Eh?"

Stillman dropped his knife and fork and stared hard at Crandall.

"What's this?" he asked swiftly, his poise falling away from him.

Crandall, with much to gain, proceeded carefully.

"Your uncle will soon be in jail—the whole thing is out!" he replied, his eyes never leaving the others face.

"My uncle is going to jail?" Stillman almost shouted the words, "For what?"

It was hard to believe that his astonishment was feigned.

"For what he did in Ocean Breeze!" Crandall shot out, rising and coming toward Stillman, "and unless you come through—even if you beat the murder charge—you'll get twenty years for your part!"

Stillman's nonchalant air seemed to have suddenly left him. He walked to the window and stood for a moment tapping nervously on the pane. At length he turned, facing Crandall.

"You're pretty wise, old top," he began, cooly enough, "but you'll never get me to fall for anything like that! Let me tell you something I guess you don't know. About the same time George H. Hermance is put in jail, the Brooklyn Bridge will get up and walk up Broadway to Bronx Park—and as for the other, I may as well tell you now—I didn't kill Butts-Blythe!"

Crandall laughed contemptuously.

"Who did?" he inquired.

"Miss Stevenson!" shot out Stillman, resuming his seat at the table.

Crandall gasped involuntarily and Stillman laughed at his expression, but the effort was strained.

"Oh, ho!" he exclaimed,. "So you were hit, too, eh? Well, I don't blame you, not a bit——"

He buttered a slice of bread, at ease again.

"I think I have acted the gentleman," he went on, "took the-er-blame on my manly shoulders and all that sort of thing," he chuckled; "but when the fair lady neglected to pay me a visit in my lonely dungeon," he waved a hand around the room, "when she failed to make a move in my behalf, I decided to tell the true story——"

Crandall came back to earth.

"If you think you can get away with any story like that," he said moving to the door, "you must be insane. Just refresh your memory until you recall that when I came upon you that day on Randall's Island, you held the revolver in your hand—apart from that, you *told* me you shot Blythe—how will you explain those little defects?"

"I won't explain them," answered Stillman suavely, "I will merely relate the true story, which runs as follows: I started away to gather some flowers for Miss Stevenson, leaving her alone with Butts-Blythe. I hadn't proceeded more than a few feet away when I heard a shot and a woman's scream. Running back, I found Butts-Blythe where you did. Miss Stevenson was standing over him with the revolver in her hand. I took it from her just before you came running up and because of my deep regard for her I decided to shield her by confessing to the deed myself."

He paused, with a quick covert glance at Crandall.

"You will have a fine time proving that," remarked Crandall sarcastically.

"Yes," answered Stillman, "and she'll have a fine time proving otherwise—it's fifty-fifty!"

"Don't forget my testimony," Crandall reminded him.

Stillman smiled, enigmatically.

"I won't," he assured, "if you testify."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Crandall, his hand on the door knob.

"Oh nothing," replied Stillman, airily, "Not a thing."

The warden of the jail, at that moment, appeared outside the half open door. He held a yellow envelope in his hand which he extended to Stillman. Crandall, disgustedly turned to leave as the other opened the envelope and he wheeled with a word of warning that died on his lips. Stillman, his face ashen, had sunk back in his chair. He was staring at the message as if fascinated. The warden, alarmed, stepped to his side and the action roused Stillman from his apparent stupor.

"I'm all right," he muttered in a far away voice, "fainting spell. Leave us alone for five more minutes, please——"

The warden stood undecided, looking curiously from Crandall to his prisoner. Crandall nodded to him to go and somewhat reluctantly he walked to the door and passed out into the little hall.

Stillman took the paper in his hand and unsteadily tore it into minute pieces. Then he walked to the window and let them flutter away on the breeze. He closed the window carefully and faced Crandall, who was watching the byplay interestedly.

"You win!" he said weakly, "you called the turn. My uncle is going to jail."

Crandall fought hard to hide the feeling of triumphant surprise that came over him at the other's confession. He longed to press Stillman for details but he knew that a false move now might disclose to the other the frail foundation upon which his attempt to draw him out was based. As Crandall hesitated the other broke the silence.

"Come back here to-night," he said, "and I'll have something to tell you. I can't now; I'm too unstrung. I'll write it out and sign it, and you can have it then. I—you better go now——"

His voice rose hysterically.

Crandall heard the warden's footsteps and left the room, his brain whirling. He almost ran into the sheriff's office and found the latter standing at his door, looking iously up and down the road.

"Hello—just lookin' for you," was greeting. "Here's something that beat y all over yere." He pulled something fro his pocket and thrust it in Crandall's hand It was a telegram, and Crandall wondered with a vague premonition, if it would contain something that would bring him the feeling that had broken Stillman's nerve. He tore open the envelope and read:

> Hustle back as fast as you can, the showdown has occurred.
>
> LANE.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SHOWDOWN

SHERIFF ELKINS leaned over to Crandall and yelled into the latter's ear in an effort to make his words distinct over the roar of wind that surged past the flying auto.

"Makin' fifty-eight miles now—be hell if we hit somethin', eh?"

Crandall nodded, returning the sheriff's grim smile. Flying particles of sand and minute pebbles stung his face as he bent forward, tightening his grip on the sides of his seat. They took the last turn of the road on two wheels, the car rocking crazily with unslackened speed. They had only slowed down once—at the railroad crossing—and there Crandall had drawn what he was sure was the only breath that had escaped his lungs since they had sped out of Kissimmee.

As they swept into Ocean Breeze, a strange sight met their gaze. The lower part of the town was deserted; even Thad Newell was missing from the cubbyhole of a railroad station. But the *Tribune* office was hidden by the mass of humanity that surged and seethed all around it. The sheriff slowed down the car on the fringe of the crowd.

"Some ride!" he ejaculated. "Say! There's sure some fuss here, eh?"

A score of excited colonists surrounded the auto—Crandall caught a confused babel as they crowded around.

"That's one of them! Pull him out! No, that's the editor, let him alone——"

The sheriff jumped off the running board and as Crandall followed him he drew

volver from his belt, holding it ready in hand.

Open up there, fellows!" he called out his booming voice, "let's git through yere ad find out what all this fuss is about."

Recognizing him, they made a respectful path and Crandall followed, shouldering his way through the press in the sheriff's tracks. They won their way to the door of the *Tribune* office, fighting through the jam in front of the entrance. The sheriff pounded on the door with the butt of his gun and a great cry went up as those in the thick-packed inner circle of the throng, recognized the newcomers. Cautiously, inch by inch, the door was opened from the inside and the sheriff without parley inserted his foot in the slight opening and swung it outward with a mighty heave. Crandall followed him as he flung inside and banged the door shut, bolting it firmly.

It was an astonishing sight that met his eyes—a climax in itself though not a word was spoken. Crandall felt that had he studied it, he could not have assembled a stranger company than that gathered in his office.

Seated around the mailing table, which had been pulled to the center of the room, were, Lane—who jumped up eagerly at his entrance, Miss Stevenson, "Mr. Simms," Thad Newell, and three other men whom Crandall knew as representing the wealth of the town: Eldridge, president of the bank, Wilcox, the postmaster, and Graves, who was building the hotel. Framed in the doorway, eager spectators, were Williams, the printer, and the balance of Crandall's mechanical staff.

Crandall stood staring dumbly from one to the other, until the man in the G. A. R. uniform, the erstwhile Mr. Simms, rose and motioned him to take his chair.

"Sit down, Mr. Crandall," he invited pleasantly, "we were waiting for you." He turned to Elkins. "You are the sheriff, I take it? Will you be seated also? Thank you."

Crandall sat stiffly in the chair, until flashing a quick glance at the girl, he caught her reassuring gesture—so quick it escaped the others. Somehow then he felt the tension lifting. Some of the impatient, yelling crowd outside were jumping up, clinging to the window sills in an effort to view the denouement inside. Lane nodded inscrutably to him, but said nothing.

"I suppose I may as well start now." It was the once bent and quavering Mr. Simms speaking, and he accompanied the words with a meaning nod to the others.

"George H. Hermance," he went on without further preliminary, "is about this time being arraigned before a United States Judge in New York on a technical charge of grand larceny." He paused. "There are warrants out for eight other members of his corporation, which will be served to-day.

"This young woman, Mr. Morgan," here he indicated "Thad Newell," and Crandall gasped, "and myself, are employees of the Department of Justice. We have been working just two years on Mr. Hermance's scheme, which has agitated you and your energetic friend for about two weeks."

Crandall saw by their expressions, that the others had already been acquainted with these facts and were impatient for the other to continue. He leaned back dazedly in his chair as the man resumed speaking.

"The United States Government has long been interested in Mr. Hermance and his various activities," he went on. "Our attention was first called to this latest by some literature Hermance sent through the mails and by the sudden influx of tourists to Florida without regard to what, at some periods, was an unseasonable time of the year. Operatives who were assigned to the case could turn up nothing that had a suspicious look. The advertised land was here, it was all that Hermance represented it to be and the prices asked for the lots were anything but extortionate. Temporarily, we were stumped.

"But when Uncle Sam gets suspicious, he is a hard man to deceive. Morgan there, was procured a position with the railroad company as assistant to the agent here. He was the first on the job. I believe you met him when you first came here."

Crandall involuntarily shot a glance at "Newell," who returned it with a broad smile.

"Miss Darlington," continued the other, with a gesture to the girl, "was sent after a position as a stenographer in Hermance's New York office in an effort to get a line on

him through his correspondence. But some one was before us and tipped him off, so that plan failed. I came here as Mr. Simms, the colonist. As a veteran of the Civil War I think you'll admit I was something of a success." He grinned cheerfully. "Then Miss Darlington arrived, won the confidence of Stillman and the unfortunate Butts-Blythe, and through the—er—natural rivalry that developed for her favor, she grasped several important details that gave us a valuable lead.

"You were eliminated as a possible cog in Hermance's machine though," he laughed again, "through the intuition of Miss Darlington, who arrayed herself on your side with such—er—energy that we dropped you from our calculations—and as it has proved, she was right."

Crandall saw that the girl, a crimson wave flooding her face, was looking away from him, out of the window.

"Although I strongly opposed her doing so," "Mr. Simms" resumed, "Miss Darlington went to the company's office last night and obtained their books in which the land transactions here were recorded and other data. It was a perilous undertaking which we could have avoided by simply getting a court order that would have turned over to us all the effects of the company here. But that would have tipped off Hermance and given him a chance to cover up. Just such occurrences in the past are what have enabled him to laugh at Government investigations for years.

"But the disclosure of the fraud came from an unexpected source, despite our labors here. This was what solved the riddle and put Hermance in jail."

He took an envelope from his pocket and drew from it a newspaper clipping which he handed to Crandall.

"That is clipped from a paper published in Olympia, Oregon," he explained as Crandall bent his eager gaze on the crumpled piece of paper.

"Ellis Blackwell, once known as the wealthiest man in the state, died here today at the age of ninety-four," he read. Then followed a long chronology of Blackwell's career. "In a letter which Mr. Blackwell had mailed to his counsel last week, he disclosed the fact that his will was in a safe deposit box at the National Ban Portland."

That was all and Crandall looked blankly.

"An operative was sent to Portland," e plained the other, reaching for the clip ping, "and a brief consultation with Black well's lawyer brought the whole scheme to light.

"Blackwell, you know, was the owner of the pine forest here that is now Ocean Breeze. Hermance and his fellow crooks, negotiated with the old man, two years ago —when he had one foot in the grave. They paid him $500,000 for a ten-year option on the land, telling him they were forming a company which would buy it. Old Blackwell was eccentric—he was a very old man and had no kin—also it is quite some distance from Ocean Breeze, Florida, to Olympia, Oregon. When Hermance and his crowd found that old Blackwell had taken to his bed with what would undoubtedly be his last illness, they got busy. They sent one of their best persuaders to the county clerk at the town in Oregon where the sale of the option was recorded. The said persuader presented the clerk with $50,000. The next day the files in the clerk's office showed that the land here had been sold to Hermance outright—the word option being gently but firmly removed.

"Unless the clerk jumps off the train on the way back he'll contemplate life through the bars of a cell in Atlanta for some time to come. But to return to the story. Hermance sold the timber here to the turpentine company, now on the outskirts of the town. They removed it themselves and Hermance netted enough from the sale to make everything he took in later, profit.

"Figure the rest out yourself—it's easy enough. There are about 12,000 colonist here now; they have paid Hermance all the way from ten to thirty dollars an acre as the place grew. But that was a drop in the bucket to what the gang cleaned up from peddling shares in the future incorporated city. Pretty neat little scheme, eh?"

He paused and surveyed his audience. There was silence for a minute, then chairs scraped back away from the table and Lane rushed over and slapped Crandall on the back.

wired the *Press* as soon as they told Hermance was going to be pinched!" he d. "They have a man covering that and J now I'll rush this along and we'll beat .e town!"

"Fine!" said Crandall so listlessly that Lane stared at him. But he ignored his friend's indignant glance and addressed the detective.

"Will all these people be thrown off their land when the time of that option expires?" he inquired.

"Well," answered the other, dubiously, "I suppose the Government will have some way of deciding that, as old Blackwell left no kin. I think, though, it will come out all right. No disposition of the land was mentioned in the will and——"

Eldridge, the bank president, broke in:

"We will engage the best lawyers in the state," he asserted. "In fact, a deputation of the board of trade will leave for Jacksonville to-night, while another will return to Washington with the secret service men."

Willcox, the postmaster, walked to the door, opened it and faced the mob outside. He held up his hand appealingly and shortly obtained the quiet he requested. Through the open door, Crandall heard him and the sheriff saying something about "no violence" and "going to their homes—everything would be all right." Lane had rushed off to file his story to the *Press*, and he heard the others going out as he sat with bowed head trying to clear his muddled brain.

After a time he glanced up wearily and saw that the crowd was gradually dispersing. With a start, he discerned the girl, standing in a corner by the window—gazing at him with an expression he could not define.

"Pardon!" he said hastily, arising. Then: "I suppose it would surprise you if I told you that an hour ago I was so sure you were mixed up on the wrong side of this thing that I nearly went insane trying to figure out a way I could get you clear of it."

There was sudden bitterness in his tone. He saw her again, at the railroad station under the flickering lamp, arguing with "Mr. Simms."

She came slowly toward him and Crandall blurted out the words before he could check them:

"It is quite evident that Mr. Simms is not of a jealous nature!"

He regretted the childish remark the moment he uttered it, but the girl seemed to take no umbrage at his bad taste. Instead, she stared at him wonderingly for an instant—then burst into a merry laugh.

"And why should he be jealous of his sister?" she inquired.

"Sister!" cried Crandal, taking a step forward, his face lighting up.

It was Eldridge who came upon them then, and his apologetic cough going unheeded, he advanced into the room and surveyed them smilingly. The girl released herself hurriedly—crimsoning but radiant. Crandall reluctantly dropped his arms to his side. His head swam as from strong drink. He told Lane afterward that he did not know whether he was in Ocean Breeze or San Francisco, but he had a suspicion it was Heaven.

"Splendid — splendid!" said Eldridge, beaming from one to the other, "and now, while you are both so happy, I have a proposition to make Mr. Crandall. Mr. Willcox, myself, and some others, have been talking over things and we've come to the conclusion that we won't be any kind of a city when we incorporate—and we surely shall —without a newspaper, so we're going to buy the *Tribune*."

He cleared his throat impressively.

"Now if you'll stay along here as editor, we'll be right glad to have you and pay you a salary that will leave no room for complaint. What do you say?"

Crandall felt as if the room was revolving rapidly and he angrily smothered the rising lump in his throat.

"Well," he began slowly, "I——"

The girl put a hand over his mouth.

"We accept!" she told Eldridge.

THE END OF THE TRAIL

By ARTHUR PRESTON HANKINS

Author of "Bill Hadley's Burro," "Bill Hadley's Angel Unawares," etc.

HOW THE NEFARIOUS SCHEME OF A PAIR OF CLAIM JUMPERS WAS REVEALED BY THE FIXING BATH IN A LOS ANGELES "DARK ROOM" AND HOW A GIRL'S HOMESTEAD WAS SAVED AFTER A BREAK NECK RACE ACROSS THE DESERT AND A MAD TOBOGGAN RIDE DOWN A MOUNTAIN

BRINTON REINHART, photographic expert for the Speer Sporting Goods Company, emitted a short "Humph!" of surprise as his half-interested glance caught the significance of the print he had just lifted from the fixing bath.

He held the miniature of a spot in the San Bernardino Mountains which was as familiar to him as his ten-by-ten bedroom in the Premier Rooming House on Third Street. An uncontrollable longing, a depressing sense of discontent, a sigh of deepest concentration—soothing forgetfulness of present surroundings, including his work, the city acquaintances, every phase of his busy Los Angeles life.

A mountain lake held the centre of the picture. On the left and on the right brown, piñon-covered hillsides swooped down to the water level like curtains held back to expose the view beyond. Between these hills, and miles in the distance, rose a mountain peak, snow-capped and untarnished. In the foreground open sagebrush land sloped gently to the lake, with here and there a lone sentinel pine for contrast. Above all floated the white feathery clouds like tufts of down from the wing-pits of wild ducks.

The Piñon Lake country, forty miles from Old Woman Springs, the summer grazing ground of the Bar-Tilde outfit! The four walls of the little dark-room seemed closing in upon him. He seemed to be almost gasping for the scent of the pines and cedars, and the breath of the cows at evening sweet with the juice of lush salt-grass.

His eyes settled on the inscription on the lower margin. The exposure had been made with an autographic kodak, and an unmistakably feminine hand had entitled it: Termino del Rastro—Sept. 20, 1914.

"Termino del Rastro," mused Brinton Reinhart, and prodded his rusty Spanish till it gave up the translation: "End of the Trail."

His own number on the back of the print was 26. He dropped the limp strip of paper back in the fixing bath and dried his hands. A half minute's consulting of his memoranda showed him that a roll of six exposures had been sent by mail for developing and printing by a Miss Marian Mundy, of Kingville, California. Brinton knew Kingville, a little desert town perhaps twenty miles from Piñon Lake and some four thousand feet below it.

He resumed his task, eager to look upon the other five exposures of Miss Marian Mundy's roll.

Two years before Brinton Reinhart had deemed photography his life's work. Now he knew it to be a mere grub-stake pursuit. He was at that age in a young man's life when he undergoes pronounced reversals in thought, opinion and taste. He had been raised in the land which Marian Mundy had photographed. Since boyhood he had followed the care-free life of a vaquero with the Bar-Tilde outfit, the Temples, and the Flying-O, wintering the cattle on the desert, summering in the mountains. All this he had left for the city, to divert the current of his life into bigger channels.

The chance to learn photography had presented itself. He had followed this with ever brightening hope till the day when his inmost soul told him that the untrammeled stretches of mountain and desert were calling, and that he must obey. Since then his work in Los Angeles had been only a crutch to carry him back. There was a slowly growing bank account—he was saving to buy a piece of land, where he might starve,

was true, but where he would die as a ceborn son of the soil.

Another of Marian Mundy's set was now in the bath, and he lifted it dripping from the tray.

The picture showed a spur of the lake in the distance. Another portion of the gently sloping sagebrush land, dotted with junipers and piñons, occupied the foreground. Miss Marian Mundy's stylus had entitled this: The Homestead, looking South.

"Whose homestead?" muttered Brinton. "Since when? That's forest reserve. The Bar-Tilde people have paid the government to run cows over it for years."

The third exposure showed Miss Mundy herself; for on the margin was the inscription, in a small though decidedly masculine hand: Marian and Molly. On the homestead, Sept. 20, 1914.

Brinton found little difficulty in deciding betwen Marian and Molly. Molly was a long-eared, loose-lipped burro, with a slough-of-despond countenance and a trout-colored coat, supporting a neatly roped pack. Marian was—well, Brinton spent many minutes over the likeness of Marian, and many subsequent hours, too; for he made for himself not only extra prints but enlargements of her entire six.

It was perhaps the atmosphere of the pictures more than Marian Mundy's comeliness that first aroused Brinton's thirst to know her. The mountains, the burro, with her pack, the girl's rugged though neat garb—including Stetson, flannel shirt, divided skirt, riding boots, and silver spurs—the pony with its big California saddle which appeared in No. 4 of the series, the camp-wagon which occupied the background in No. 5, and the words "The Homestead," which confronted him so frequently on the margins. Marian Mundy was the human feminine essence of this life for which his heart was yearning. And of course he had pictured a mistress of the little ranch he was to buy.

A brother had accompanied her on this mountain trip. Dan Mundy, the feminine scrawl had labeled him. Brinton knew he was a brother because of the striking likeness. He deduced that the two had gone alone, because they did not appear together in a single picture.

During the lunch hour that day he dropped into a stationery store and bought a government topographical map of the quadrangle in which Piñon Lake was situated. He knew the exact spot from which No. 1 of Marian's series had been snapped. A short study of the map convinced him that she had been on Section 8, Township 2 North, Range 2 East, when photographing the lake. Now he hurried along to the Land Office, and thumbed the pages of Tract Book 8. In a short time he found that on August 15th, 1914, Marian Mundy, of Kingville, California, had filed a homestead claim on a hundred and sixty acres in Section 8.

He questioned the slim, precise young woman behind the counter as to homestead entries in the National Forest Reserve. He was crisply referred to the Act of June 11, 1906. From the legal whirlpools of which Brinton eventually contrived to hook ashore the following information: That Uncle Sam had been persuaded that a certain tract in the locality in question would be more beneficial to the public as agricultural land than as forest reserve; and that, consequently, several quarter-sections close to Piñon Lake had been placed on the homestead-entry list.

Brinton whistled softly as he left the office. Wouldn't Old Man Ramsey, of the Bar-Tilde outfit, raise Cain about this? Every new homesteader in the mountains would cut down the number of cattle the cowmen would be permitted to run in the National Forest.

Just what was Brinton Reinhart's idea in allowing his interest in Marian Mundy to grow and flourish would have been a hard question for him. He had little hope of ever consummating an acquaintance. But he did allow it to grow; and if a man can really fall in love with the likeness of a girl he has never seen in the flesh, Brinton Reinhart made a close approach to it.

He eagerly watched all rolls sent in for development, but it was not until the middle of November that he faced her name again.

This time the scenes were on the Mojave Desert. One was of the camp-wagon, with Brother Dan seated on the tongue and Marian washing dishes on a bench. Two

bronchos and the burro nibbled at the dry sage beyond the wagon. The legend on the margin was this: On the Desert, Waiting for March 15th.

The next picture was a landscape, showing the level sweep of the desert stretching to the snow-covered mountains. This was entitled: What keeps us on the Desert.

Now he understood. The brother and sister had tried to establish residence on the mountain claim in September, but had doubtless encountered an early snowstorm which had driven them out to camp on the desert till spring. They were allowed six months from the date of filing in which to establish residence. March fifteenth, then, was the day they were due. Brinton looked again at the snow-covered mountains and shook his head. It was extremely doubtful if there would be any chance of a load getting into the mountains as early as March fifteenth.

The succeeding exposures were all of the desert, showing the two in different phases of their free, picturesque life. Were they cattle people, these two? If so, what were they doing with a homestead?

No more kodak work from Marian Mundy came in. He missed the views and their legends. It had been as if the girl had written him confidential letters of their hopes and disappointments, of their longing to be on the claim and delving into the soil. He enlarged other pictures which featured the girl. There was by January quite a row of Marians adorning the walls of Room 23 in the Premier Rooming House on Third Street.

On a drizzly afternon toward the latter end of January Brinton was busily at work in the dark-room. As usual he had looked through the photographic material sent in for expert treatment for something from Marian. But her name had not appeared, and the scenes, amateurish and otherwise, were to him as so much clay to a potter, or lumber to a carpenter.

Then, almost before he was aware, he was gazing once more on Piñon Lake and the gently sloping sagebrush land.

But it was a new Piñon Lake—another slope. The magic hand of Winter had transformed the limpid blue to a glittering sheet of ice; the Old Woman had picked her geese above the spot, and the sagebus were little mountains of white, with alluri caves and tunnels underneath the lac branches which no rabbit could resist. Tl piñons and junipers were bedecked as i. they expected Santa Claus to arrive at any moment and hang glistening conceits on their boughs.

This exposure had also been made with an autographic camera, though a size larger than Marian's. At the bottom was the blunt inscription: This is It.

"This is what!" Brinton snorted half unconsciously. That was Marian Mundy's land —he resented a stranger's referring to it as "It."

Fifteen was the number on the back of the print. His memorandum connected the number 15 with the name Guy Stimson, of 1450 Higgins Drive, Los Angeles. Brinton had never heard of Guy Stimson, but there was not a thing about Guy Stimson which he didn't dislike.

The second print showed the Piñon Lake country again under the same climatic conditions. In the foreground were three men bundled to the ears, wearing snow-shoes. The blunt, unimaginative hand had labeled this one: Guy, Morse and Jay—On the Land, Jan. 26.

Number 3 was a view of the Curtainbury Road, which Brinton immediately recognized in spite of its covering of white. This road led from the desert to Piñon Lake, and was the one Marian and Dan would take when they traveled to their Termino del Rastro. The title-genius had scratched on the margin: Curtainbury Road, Jan. 26. What's the answer?

Corrugation settled on Brinton's forehead. "What's the answer?" What *was* the answer?

Number 4 proved to be a snow-covered landscape—almost identical with one of Marian's first set. Its title was baffling: Fine Place for Snowballing about Feb. 15th.

With eyes studious and faraway, Brinton dropped No. 4 back into the fixing bath and focused his attention on No. 5. But both Numbers 5 and 6 were over-exposed and total failures.

And so the book was closed.

Brinton made enlargements of Numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4. He took them home to Room

but they were not allowed the wall on ian's side. Night after night he sat , his pipe gripped between his teeth and t elevated to the dresser top, comparing, ducting, analyzing.

The autographic inscriptions stared down t him. This one, of Marian's set—"On the Desert, Waiting for March 15th"—he tried to connect with Guy Stimson's "Fine Place for Snowballing about Feb. 15th." What was this Stimson doing on Marian's homestead in the middle of winter. What did he mean by reference to February fifteenth? Claim jumper? What chance had any one to jump the claim unless Marian failed to get on it within the six months?

Strange to relate, it was not until the night of February fourteenth that he thought to count six months from August fifteenth, the date the Land Office books had recorded as Marian's filing day. September, October, November, December, January, February—six months. His feet came to the floor with a bang. There was some mistake—some misunderstanding. Marian was due to establish residence not later than February fifteenth instead of March fifteenth, as she had written on one of her pictures. On February fifteenth the claim jumpers would move onto the land, while Marian and Dan waited confidently on the desert for better roads. Or they would at least be there to witness that she had not arrived, and later would institute contest proceedings. And here it was seven o'clock of February fourteenth—with Marian a hundred and fifty miles from Los Angeles, somewhere on the bleak Mojave Desert!

In ten minutes he was at a telephone and connected with a garage.

"At what time can you get me to Kingville, over on the desert? . . . Seven hours, eh? . . . Bad roads, you say. . . . How much? . . . Twenty-five dollars? All right. I'll be at Ruggles' drug store, on Spring Street."

It was a little after midnight when the automobile left Cajon Pass, and the bleak Mojave Desert stretched before the travelers, weird by moonlight, studded with its uncannily whispering yuccas. The car sped along for mile after level mile. At ten minutes after one the driver turned to Brinton and announced Kingville.

They passed through a small cluster of dark houses toward a lone light bobbing about in the uncertain distance. It proved to be in the hands of a man attending to the birth of a wobbly-legged calf.

He did not know the Mundys by name, but mention of the camp-wagon produced results. They were directed to keep the same road for two miles and watch for the wagon and tent on the right.

At 1:25 Brinton, following these instructions, made out a white bulk beneath a spreading yucca tree. The car was stopped, and he wound his way through clumps of sage and greasewood toward it. A horse snorted at his approach. He stumbled over half a bale of hay. At the same time a light flashed through the white canvas of the tent, close to the wagon.

Brinton waited where he was. Somebody was coming from the tent.

"Hello!" came a masculine challenge. "Who is it? What's wanted?"

Brinton cleared his throat. In that instant he heartily wished himself in bed in Room 23 of the Premier Rooming House on Third Street.

"Well, well!" came the voice, closer now, unmistakably insistent.

"Are you Dan Mundy?" was Brinton's uncertain return.

"Yes—what is it?"

"I want to talk with you. I've come to—the homestead, you know. I think you are likely to be jumped."

"Who are you?"

"My name's Brinton Reinhart—from Los Angeles—you don't know me."

A noticeable pause, then—"Come on in the tent and let's look at you."

As Brinton followed Dan Mundy he noticed, even in the uncertain glow from the tent, a decided peculiarity in the man's gait. Just as the tent flap was lifted a window of the camp-wagon burst into light. The two men were scarce within the canvas, eyeing each other speculatively, when a slender figure enveloped in a man's overcoat slipped silently in behind them.

"Marian," said Dan Mundy, "this is Mr. —Reinhart, did you say?" At Brinton's nod the brother proceeded: "He's just told me somebody is trying to jump your claim, and I suppose was about to explain."

Two dark eyes flashed a question at Brinton from under a great inverted bird's nest of sleep-tousled brown hair. There was the faintest smile on the girl's lips. The bare V of throat at the lapels of the large overcoat was brown and attractive. With a hand she kept the skirts of the coat bound close about her knees.

"I heard," she said.

Then brother and sister waited wordlessly, expectant eyes bent on the disturber of their midnight rest.

Brinton began haltingly, felt that he was making poor work of it, then launched forth again. This time his efforts at lucidity seemed no better; so in desperation he brought out the small kodak pictures, which he had with him, but which he had hoped might prove unnecessary to an explanation.

The girl's lips formed a tantalizing "O" as she slowly and bewilderedly took a print from him. Brinton read the puzzlement in her eyes, and, words tumbling over one another, told of his work with the sporting goods company. Still her eyes flashed the question: Why had he kept prints of her negatives for himself? He tried to lay it to his love for and familiarity with the country she had pictured. But still the feminine within her kept asking through her eyes.

Gradually, though, the girl and her brother began to understand. The set of pictures exposed by Guy Stimson proved the logic of Brinton's statements and cleared their minds of doubt.

Now for the first time Dan Mundy seated himself. Once more Brinton detected that peculiarity of leg movement. The girl half sat on a corner of the table, one foot swinging, exposing the wrinkled ankle of a huddled-on stocking.

"But I filed September fifteenth," she maintained. "That gives us till March fifteenth." The thumb of her right hand tripped from finger to finger as her lips inaudibly named them after the months, the thumb itself wiggling defiantly for March.

"The Land Office books say August fifteenth," said Brinton.

Her eyes grew troubled. Then she sprang from the table. "Wait," she ordered, and vanished through the opening.

She was back soon with a paper. This she held close to the lamp, bending for till the loose hair tumbled about her f

"Dan," she cried, "it *is* August! Loc

While Dan obeyed she stared at Brin as if he were the author of all this mischi

"M'm-m!" Dan was mumbling.

"It's my notification of allowance," Marian explained. "It came only yesterday. They're so poky! Mr. Stafford, a neighbor, dropped it in our box last evening just as we were leaving for Winstons for dinner. Then all day to-day we were over at the Wards, clear up until dark. I had scarcely looked at it. But I filed September fifteenth. I *know* I did. Didn't I, Dan?"

"No doubt of it," her brother muttered, turning the paper this way and that as if some new light angle might change its accusing aspect.

"When you filed, did you make out the application papers?" Brinton asked her.

"No, the man who located me attended to it. I signed—that was all."

A short silence set in. Then said Brinton: "It seems to me, then, that he wrote August for September. And the mistake has gone clear through every transaction connected with the entry. It's almost unaccountable, but I suppose the Land Office clerks are as human as the rest of us."

"But surely it can be straightened out?" There was pleading in Marian's tones.

"Maybe, in time, I suppose. But it will take time. And what about the present? It's the fifteenth of February right now. How is your confidence in this man who located you?"

"Shaky," was her prompt reply. "We've learned since that he is—well, unreliable, to say the least."

"Chances are, then," mused Brinton, "that when he noticed his mistake in the months, and learned that it had been passed by the Land Office, he saw a chance to double his money. He's told somebody—Guy Stimson and that bunch—that you thought you were due in March, but were, according to the records, due in February. And he's collected another location fee to put them on. Who is he?"

"George Lee. He's——"

"I know him. From up near Old Woman Springs. And I'll tell you something more: Old Man Ramsey, of the Bar-Tilde, has a

d in this. I know the whole outfit. msey and Lee are on intimate terms. id——"

Here Dan Mundy, apparently having decided that the rays of the lamp had nothing to do with the discrepancy in dates, interrupted the two:

"You can win out, Marian, in the end. But it'll mean contest proceedings. And we don't want that. There's just one thing to do: Get up in the mountains and establish residence within the twenty-four hours. I'll follow with the outfit, and we'll manage to get in some way in spite of the snow. It'll save a lawsuit."

"You can't get in with a load," said Brinton quickly.

"We've got to, that's all. Marian can go horseback as soon as it's light and take the tent and some grub on the burro. I'll follow with the team and wagon to-morrow."

"But why should your sister go alone? Why don't you go with her, establish residence, then come back for the things?"

"Because of this," replied the brother, slapping his thigh. There was an odd flat sound. "Stick a pin into it if you want to," he laughed. "It's mighty good cork—guaranteed not to squeak or gall."

Brinton stared. "But—but——" he began.

"Oh, I can straddle a *caballo* with the best of 'em," Dan hurried to assure him. "But I'm weak on the walking proposition. I can ride with her as far as Yucca Flat, perhaps, then she'll have to leave her bronk and hike through the snow. And that's where I lie down."

"But she can't—mustn't go alone."

Dan shrugged. "Don't like it any better than you do," he said. "But——"

Brinton almost held his breath as the words came out: "I'll go with her."

Brother and sister stared at the uncomfortable photographer. A little red crept into the girl's cheeks, then vanished. She turned to Dan. "Why not?" her eyes asked, with Western disregard of all old-maid tomfoolery.

Dan laughed low and apologetically. Men, after all, are the prudes.

"I'll—I'll do my best," Brinton stumbled on defensively. "She mustn't go alone. I —I'm all right, Mr. Mundy."

Dan's fine eyes bored straight through the man of negatives for a painful moment or two. Then a smile broke on his lips. "Dog-goned if you haven't proved it!" he cried. "Go to it. And take care of her, boy, as if she were *your* sister. And—and—well, thanks."

"I will," said Brinton meekly. "Now may I write a note to send back with the machine to the store?"

At dawn Brinton, dressed in suitable clothes provided by Dan, was helping the brother in taking down the tent and collecting other articles necessary to the venture. Marian, ready for the trip, was preparing breakfast over the camp stove. The smell of cornbread, bacon, and coffee emanated from her direction and added zest to the cool desert morning.

They were off before sunrise, Marian and Brinton mounted on the bronchos, the laden burro plodding ahead. They took a bee-line through the waste of sage and greasewood toward the Curtainbury Road. The old familiar creak of saddle leather and the mincing, cow-pony trot of the pinto he was astride filled the city-sick photographer with boyish joy.

"We're from Nevada," Marian opened the conversation. "Dan has always been a cattleman. About five years ago he reached out too far. He bought land that he found he couldn't pay for, and lost it on contract. Since then we've been roaming the West, looking for homesteads. And now that we've found what we want, it seems some one is trying to beat us."

"I see why you call the land 'End of the Trail,' " he observed.

"Yes, the name fits. It's been a long, long trail."

"What can you raise up there?"

"Cattle. We've figured it all out. Dan has filed on a hundred and sixty acres where our camp is. Termino del Rastro is mine. We'll summer our cows up there, and, if necessary, winter them on Dan's place. Three hundred and twenty acres don't seem like a great deal of land for cattle raising; but our idea is to graze them only enough for exercise."

"I don't understand."

"Of course not. You're an old-time cowman. You can't think of raising cattle with-

out running them on thousands of acres of grass. Dan and I figure that the grazing days are about over.

"Listen here: Land in California is now too valuable to let acres and acres of it go to grass. You've heard of intensive farming—what about intensive beef making? It takes from three to four years to produce a marketable steer of from fourteen hundred to seventeen hundred pounds on grass, doesn't it? Well, our idea is to market this same steer when he's two and a half years old. We'll raise wheat hay for roughage on the mountain claim, and Kaffir corn for fattening on the desert. We'll feed the calves a balanced ration right from the time they are weaned. And at two and a half years of age we'll have more meat on them, and better meat, than your range steer will show as a four-year-old."

Marian's brown eyes were glowing with the enthusiasm of a convert to new ideas. Her round little head was crammed with figures and statistics. There was an answer pregnant with logic for every one of his questions. She proved to him that their three hundred and twenty acres, by scientific and intensive culture, were equal to fifteen hundred acres under the old order of things. He was converted before they had reached the foothills.

"I'd like to get a piece of land up there," he said. "I've been saving to get back to the soil for two years. I'd like nothing better than to—well, sort of go in with you folks. I love raising cattle, but thought, with the small piece of land I'd be able to swing, it was altogether out of the question."

"Not at all," she affirmed.

"I believe your theories are sound——"

"Not theories, please. They've been proved by State agricultural institutions and by the Government. This is the day of science. Waste and guesswork are things of the past."

"Are there any more homesteads not taken up in your locality?"

"There's a relinquishment joining our claim," she said. "This George Lee holds it. He wants five hundred dollars to release it."

"I've got five hundred," Brinton proudly stated. "Do you think—do you suppose—That is, how would it be, you know, for to locate—well, right alongside you folks

She looked him frankly in the eye. think it would be perfectly lovely," she sai

They had reached the Curtainbury Roa The animals were now laboring up an ever increasing grade. The air grew colder. On the cañon sides an occasional patch of snow straggled down.

Toward noon they reached Yucca Flat, a six-mile level stretch on the mountainside. Beyond this the real ascent began—up into the snow. They ate lunch, rested the stock, and were away at one o'clock.

It was nearly three when they stopped at the beginning of the steep climb. All above them was snow-clad, silent, and mysterious. The cold breath of winter crept down the mountainside and warned that no goose-fleshed tenderfoot had better brave his crystal domain.

Here they left the ponies, and, with the loaded burro ahead, started plodding up the frozen road. There would be six miles of this before they reached the summit, then two miles of the level mountain valley to Marian's claim.

"You perhaps know nothing of the old-time trail which begins a little way from here and runs over the peak straight toward your place," said Brinton. "If it were any other time of year I'd advise trying it. It would save us all of three miles. Mexican miners built it. There's an old slab cabin, where they lived, on the steep rise back of your land."

He was proceeding in this vein when they rounded a sharp turn and came suddenly upon a deserted, canvas-covered automobile at the roadside. The owners had evidently made the car negotiate every foot possible of the mountain trip, for the front wheels were against the first sheet of snow they had found covering the road.

Marian said nothing, but her eyes showed that her mind was studious. Brinton stooped and examined the tracks back of the machine.

"This car hasn't stood here an hour," he announced. "I wonder if it belongs to——"

"There!" she interrupted.

He turned to find her training a telescope up the grade. The road ahead zigzagged from right to left along the contours. On

of the shelves far above them four men ggled along afoot over the snow.

You look," she ordered breathlessly. ou've studied the pictures."

Brinton breathed a sigh of relaxed ten-ion after a long scrutiny of the antlike dots creeping up the mountain.

"It's Guy Stimson and the others," he said quietly.

The girl stared at him, consternation growing in her face. "They'll beat us in! They're three miles in the lead—within three of the top."

"Don't worry. We'll get there on the fifteenth. That's all that's required."

"But, oh, I don't want them to get there first!" she cried. "I want to be there and laugh at them when they come puffing in."

He walked ahead a little. The snow, he found, was covered with a stout crust which might support the burro, but never the greater weight of the ponies.

"We must try the trail," he told her. "If the burro doesn't slip on the crust and slide down with our outfit, we can perhaps make it."

The beginning of the trail was just ahead, and in a little they turned into it. They had not been on it five minutes when it became evident that before them lay no trifling task. The trail was disappointingly steep and had been unused so long that bushes crowded across it and held them back. The crusted snow was slippery and disparaging.

"I don't know about this," puffed Brinton. "They have only about five miles to go —two of them level. We have almost three miles of this slippery climb. It'll be a close race."

"It's our only chance," she panted back. "Make the most of it."

He wondered at her courage and endurance. It was plain to see that she labored no harder than he did.

On and on they toiled, through cañons and over stretches of immense boulders—always upward. The cold was growing intense. Only their herculean exercise kept them warm. The sun was just bidding goodnight to the range as they reached the falling slab cabin.

Below them, through the snow-covered piñon pines, they saw the ice sheet of the lake, the blanket of snow which stood for Termino del Rastro, the forest beyond. They had only a quarter of a mile to go, down a steep slope, to their journey's end.

Brinton trained the glass up the lake. At once he saw four figures coming along the shore at a tremendous speed on skis.

"My Lord! They've got skis at the mining camp!" he cried. "I hadn't thought of that. Why, we can't get there ahead of them——"

"We must. Come on!" She started running down the slope.

He felt it was hopeless, but obeyed her. His first running step on the slippery hillside jerked his feet from under him, and he skidded along on his back for several yards. In the end he collided with the girl, and she went down with a crash, breaking the crust and sinking into the feathery snow beneath.

Brinton sat up beside her and calmly remarked: "This gives me an idea."

He rose and lifted her. "Get the tent and pack-bags off the burro," he ordered, and struggled over the smooth crust back to the cabin, where he began wrenching at one of the ancient slabs.

The rusty nails broke loose with a squeak. Brinton chuckled as he noted that the upper end of the slab had been beveled to fit the roof. He tore off the rotting bark and exposed the smooth, half-round wood beneath. He dragged the slab to where Marian was struggling with the tent and bags.

"Pile 'em on!" he ordered.

She shouted her comprehension as they loaded the front end of the improvised toboggan with the outfit. Marian took the middle, Brinton the rear end.

"Belly-buster for mine!" he shouted; and the next instant the astonished burro watched them skimming down the slope.

The piñon pines and junipers were none too thinly scattered, and the clumsy sled was hard to guide. Brinton worked as never before to avert collisions. The beveled end of the slab kept it from plunging a sharp edge into the crust and throwing them. In half a minute the tremendous speed they had attained was little short of appalling.

But fortune favored the mad escapade until, almost at the bottom, Brinton, in dodging a tree, collided with a stump just thrusting a snow-capped butt from the mantle of white. The pack shot forward, over

the stump. The tent landed on top of it. Marian rose in the air and came down peacefully on top of the tent. Brinton, riding flat on his belly, skidded the length of the slab and butted the stump with his head.

Before his stunned senses were his own again Marian, unhurt, was up and crying: "It was perfectly lovely! And we win by half a mile. Up with the tent—anywhere!"

They quickly connected the jointed poles and stretched the canvas. In five minutes the tent was up, wobbly, it is true, but representing a residence. Marian, bubbling with laughter, borrowed Brinton's pencil and scrawled in large letters on the slab: "Residence established Feb. 15, 1915—Marian Mundy."

Then she and Brinton stood the slab before the tent door. She grasped his hand and pulled him into the trees some two hundred feet away. Here they waited for the claim-jumpers to arrive.

When they did, a few minutes later, and stood looking in bewilderment at the tent, the expression on their faces repaid watchers for their risk.

The four conversed; no words came Marian and Brinton. Then the quart looked carefully about. After which one o them grabbed the flap of the tottery tent ana gave it a vicious tug. Then came the girl's voice, ringing clear through the icy stillness:

"Don't destroy property, please. Trespassers will be prosecuted." She burst into laughter as the man jumped from his tracks, looked about in guilty mystification, then led the way for the party toward the lake.

The two continued to sit behind the tree, worn out, relaxing pleasurably.

"My piece is—where?" he asked presently.

She pointed east. "It joins us over there."

"The line will be invisible," he said. "Let's call the whole thing Termino del Rastro. It's the end of my trail, too."

"I think that will be perfectly lovely," she replied. "But say—why did you make those extra prints?"

His Pious Reason

Mrs. Rose Pastor Phelps-Stokes, in an address in Chicago, once said of the extravagance of the rich:

"Apologists for the rich say that their wicked extravagance—their dinners at one hundred dollars a plate, their fifty-thousand-dollar balls—do good to the poor. Well, that is ludicrous.

"That reminds me of a little boy in the country. The farm where he was staying adjoined an orphanage. There was an apple orchard behind the barn, and here, morning, noon and night, the little boy stuffed himself gluttonously with apples.

"'Jimmy,' said his mother one afternoon, 'aren't you eating rather too many apples?'

"'But I got to, ma,' the boy replied.

"'Got to! Why?' his mother asked.

"'Because the orphans need the cores,' he said, piously."

The First Patient

Young Doctor's Wife: Mary, go and tell the doctor there's a patient waiting to see him.

Maid: I wish you'd go, ma'am. He maybe wouldn't believe me.

A Study in Ancestry

Artist: There you are, sir! I've painted you a full line of ancestors, and I'll warrant you that no one will know they are not genuine. This is your father, that's your grandfather, this your great-grandfather, and——

Mr. Newrich: Hold on! Good heavens, man! You've made my great-grandfather a much younger looking man than I am.

THE BRAIN JUNGLE

By EDWARD MOTT WOOLLEY

Author of "The Man Who Disappeared," etc.

A WEALTHY WOMAN MURDERED IN HER CARRIAGE, A SISTER OF CHARITY DROWNED AS IF BY ACCIDENT, CHILDREN POISONED BY SOME MYSTERIOUS AGENT, SUCH WAS THE SITUATION WHEN FELIX HAZARD WAS CALLED INTO THE CRIME AREA OF A HITHERTO REPOSEFUL NEW ENGLAND TOWN

AFTER the fifth unaccountable murder in Litchfield the city council met in secret session and voted to retain Felix Hazard, whose reputation for detecting well-nigh inscrutable crimes was unsurpassed. Accordingly the Mayor went down to New York without informing even the Chief of Police of Litchfield, and called at the office of the Hazard Detective Agency. Here, after a wait of two hours in an anteroom, he was shown into the little private den of the wizard—the room so profusely decorated with skulls and other relics of crime. Hazard was there, seated at a flat-topped desk in a haze of blue tobacco smoke, with some red and green diagrams before him.

"Our city of Litchfield," said the Mayor, after formalities, "has until recently been unusually free from serious crime. On the first day of June the Litchfield Daily *Times* printed an editorial boasting that two years had elapsed since a homicide had been committed in our city. But that very evening, sir, an atrocious murder was done, the victim being one of our most noble women, Mrs. Agatha Blauvelt, a wealthy widow, who was waylaid in her electric runabout just after dark and strangled to death. She was driving the car herself, and was alone, having just visited the Asylum of the Innocents, a mile out of town. She had long been the chief patroness of this institution, to which she had contributed large sums of money. The apparent motive was robbery, though the murderer did not succeed in getting the widow's jewels. Evidently something happened to alarm him, for he made his escape and left the brooch and the rings untouched. Yet so rapidly and fiendishly was the crime perpetrated that the victim seems to have made scarcely a struggle—"

Hazard interrupted with a gesture. You remember that he took little interest in ordinary crimes with commonplace motives. Nor did he waste time discussing them. The world was full of sordid deeds of violence, and his lightning-like imagination had a habit of jumping to fantastic possibilities. If he found no range for such flights of involved fancy, he invariably dropped a case at the start. So now, without any change in his immobile countenance, he raised his hand and observed:

"You speak of the Asylum of the Innocents. An orphan asylum, I take it!"

"One that shelters a hundred homeless children," answered the Mayor. "An institution founded by Mrs. Blauvelt herself."

"Very good!" said Hazard. "Proceed to the second crime."

"The second crime," returned the visitor, taken aback by the other's brusqueness, bears no relation to the first, but is a separate mystery. If you will permit me, I should like to narrate the details of the first murder before proceeding——"

"The details can wait," broke in Hazard. "I have an appointment in ten minutes."

The Mayor, who had seated himself at the opposite side of the table, looked at the detective in amazement. He could not comprehend the rapid action of Hazard's agile mind, and he was inclined to resent the ungracious reception accorded him. He had some hot words on his lips, but they died away as he found the strange eyes of the other fastened upon him. There was something singularly uncanny in Hazard's unusually large and rounded orbs when they chose to frame an illuminated interrogation mark.

"Very well!" said the Mayor, curtly. "If our time is so unceremoniously short, I shall endeavor to be brief. The second

crime may possibly have been an accident, but such theory is even more unexplainable than that of murder. Two days after the death of the Widow Blauvelt, a small boy named Donaldson died in great agony after eating some candy buttercups bought at a local confectioner's—a store patronized largely by school children. Other persons were affected, but recovered. A post-mortem showed strychnine in large quantities, and the confectioner was arrested. He proved that his goods were purchased of reputable manufacturers, who, in turn, demonstrated that no strychnine was used for any purpose in their plants. Where it came from is a mystery that our police detectives have not solved——"

"Quite likely!" remarked Hazard, caustically. "The third crime?"

With the question mark again burning into his brain, the Mayor smothered his anger.

"The third crime," he retorted, "had nothing to do either with the first or second, but was an assassination committed, apparently, for revenge. One of our clergymen, the Reverend Dr. Mathewson, was shot down while entering the rear door of his church just before the hour for evening service. The murderer had concealed himself in the back vestibule, which was dark, and he escaped without being seen. Circumstances pointed strongly to a certain young man for whom the minister had refused to perform a marriage ceremony, on the ground of the applicant's ill health. This young man was arrested——"

"And discharged for lack of evidence, I take it!" said Hazard, gazing out of the window over the scenes of Broadway far below.

"The grand jury did not feel justified, owing to an alibi——" the Mayor began, but Hazard said quietly:

"Alibis are inconvenient nuisances in the detection of crime. However, I think we need not concern ourselves in that way just now. What was the reputation of the reverend gentleman? A subject for scandal?"

"On the contrary," the Mayor assured him, "no breath of such suspicion had ever been whispered against him. A more godly man never lived!"

"Ah!" muttered Hazard, with more show of interest than he had hitherto betr "And the fourth crime was——?"

The Mayor's lips curled a little, bu ready he was getting into the rapid sw of this man who sat opposite.

"We are going pretty fast," he said, "bu if you cannot grant me more than a minut to narrate each of these mysteries I sha have to be lively indeed. The fourth crime was the cowardly murder of a young girl, without a clew or a motive remaining. She was stabbed to death on the steps of her own home by a man who sprang out of the darkness, dealt the blow, and fled forthwith. The crime seems to have had not the vestige of purpose."

"Which of itself opens a wide and amazing field for speculation," answered Hazard, getting up. "In two minutes I must be in my automobile, so I ask you to proceed at once to the fifth mystery, as you call it."

"I do not follow you," acknowledged the Mayor. "But the fifth murder was this: On the seventh of July the Mother Superior of the Good Shepherd Home For the Aged was missed from the institution, and on the following day her body was found in the river below town. A post-mortem showed that she died from drowning, but at no point near Litchfield is the stream more than three feet deep. It runs through a corner of the Good Shepherd grounds, and the Mother Superior was in the habit of going down to its banks, in a heavy grove, for meditation and prayer. Here the police found evidences of a struggle but nothing was discovered that threw the slightest light on the crime. There is no doubt that she was seized and held under water until life was extinct. Why? It may have been for revenge, but for what? So far as known, the Mother Superior had not an enemy in the world. There are those in Litchfield who incline toward the theory of suicide, on the supposition that the woes of mankind, to which she had been ministering for forty years, had unbalanced her mind. But this theory appears preposterous. She never exhibited any evidence of dementia, unless you call sadness insanity and consider pity a sign of a weakened intellect."

"It may be that *pity* is one of the signs we are looking for," said Hazard, enigmatically, as he drew on his gloves.

"How so?"

The other shrugged his shoulders. Stepping to the wall, he took a stiletto from among the relics that hung there. Closing his eyes, he made a few passes with it in front of him, so that the Mayor stepped back hurriedly.

"I merely stab in the dark," observed Hazard, tossing the dagger on to his desk and smiling grimly. "When I shut my eyes I sometimes see things that may or may not exist in reality. It is the things one sees in the dark that makes the good detective. He may stab and hit nothing, but if the thing he sees is really there—Ah! mysteries have a habit of fading away!"

"You have already stabbed at something in this case?" demanded the Mayor, breathlessly. "You have seen something—in the dark?"

"A mere deduction." Hazard put on his hat and offered his hand to his caller in adieu. "A mere grotesque fancy, perhaps—who can say? It must be worked out before it is talked about. 'Silence—silence always!' is the motto under which we operate here. The imagination, my dear sir, is a wonderful thing. It can jump to any height and explore the most inaccessible mental absurdities; but if it is a good healthy imagination it will return to earth just as quickly when it finds nothing up there to seize upon. My men will visit you shortly in Litchfield. I merely repeat to you: 'Silence!' Good day, sir!"

II

A MONTH subsequent to the Mayor's visit to the metropolis, Delos Nast, one of the operatives of the Hazard Detective Agency, returned to New York from a visit to Litchfield, where other secret agents of Hazard were at work. On the night of his return he and his chief spent six hours in close communion in the skull room, high above Broadway. To both these criminal pathologists the night was pretty much the same as the day, so that dawn frequently came while they conducted their mental clinics. Hazard and Nast usually worked on the hypothesis that a study of mental processes afforded the best path to crime solution.

On the table between them there now reposed the tabulated results of some elaborate "sales researches" conducted in Litchfield and vicinity: in other words, long lists of names that were classified ostensibly into such groups as the clever sales manager lays out when he analyzes a district preparatory to a selling campaign. Outwardly, this research had been conducted in behalf of the Electrical Outfitting Company of New York, and it constituted quite a valuable assembly of facts as to the buying power of Litchfield, individually and collectively. But of course the sales information was not destined to be used; as a blind, it covered some extraordinarily interesting facts about a group of persons in Litchfield.

Nast now gathered up a big bunch of the papers, and, tying them with a string, laid them aside.

"These," he said, "are the final eliminations. The solution of the Litchfield mysteries does not lie among them, if your theory is correct, sir." Then, gathering up the remaining papers, he tapped the uppermost one with his forefinger. "Somewhere here," he added, "lies the key."

"It is your hypothesis as much as mine," returned Hazard, speaking from his customary halo of blue smoke. "It was your work on the Wabusson case that suggested the thought to me."

Nast looked across at his chief, with affectionate eyes. Hazard was his god—an idol before whom he bowed. However, dissimilar in some respects, the two men were in accord mentally; and however cold and curt Hazard could be with outsiders, he did not fail in sympathetic consideration for his favorite pupil—this keen young man whose imagination could take flights almost as high as his own.

"Yes," Nast returned; "it is my hypothesis, yet sometimes, I confess, I question its reasonableness. For the sake of its picturesqueness, at least, I should like to accept it unequivocally. It would add some interesting material to forensic medicine."

Hazard reached over to a bookcase and took down a ponderous volume.

"And yet," he said, "it would be in tune with what you already find here in this book. It would simply furnish another example of the inscrutable workings of the human intellect under abnormal and unhappy conditions. It is your privilege and mine, Nast,

to reach continually a little beyond the known realms of mental science. We are explorers in that most mysterious of all countries, the Brain Jungle. But we must not forget that however elusive are the paths that run through the jungles up in that land, they follow convolutions that have been mapped. Thus we draw on what we already know, and, by analogy, adduce suppositions."

He opened the volume and let the pages run loosely through his fingers—pages that held within their confines many of the weirdest mysteries of time. Then he closed the book sharply.

"We are working along the right line!" he said. "Every deduction tells me so. We will set the trap soon—and catch in it perhaps an arch-fiend."

Then, with a sudden change of tone, he went on:

"How many names remain, after the eliminations?"

"Six," said Nast.

Hazard took the list and studied it long, pondering the closely written notations Nast had made opposite the names. He studied and pondered so long that Trinity chimes rang two o'clock, and then three, before he put down the list and threw away the remains of his fifth cigar.

"Our move is to concentrate rather strongly on Abbot Abburton," he said.

"I had already reached the same conclusion," answered Nast.

III

Two evenings later, at the dinner hour, Delos Nast moved cautiously along in the shadow of an eight-foot brick wall that surrounded the spacious grounds of The Turrets, as the home of Abbot Abburton in Litchfield was called. Reaching a spot especially favored by the deep gloom of the trees, he sprang lightly up and caught the top ledge with his fingers. Nast was rather small but abnormally athletic, so that in a few seconds he had swung himself over and disappeared in the darkness inside.

The Abburton home was on a lonely hill in the outskirts of the most exclusive residential part of Litchfield. It was a forbidding old place, with flowers and turrets that had no apparent part in the scheme of life, except architecturally. The grounds covere five acres that were set with trees of dense foliage, many of them sempervirent and beautiful, but long neglected. Here and there a huge weeping willow reared its ghostly form and gave a graveyard aspect to the place.

Abburton himself was as gray and melancholy as the great house—a widower living alone with his servants. Of the latter he kept only three, all of them as old as himself, and as unapproachable. For thirty years he had lived thus, in growing seclusion, and although not wholly a recluse, he spent most of his time at The Turrets. He had no intimates, and only occasionally did any one call on him. Such calls as he had were usually connected with requests for contributions to charity and the church. Of late, a number of persons who solicited such funds of Abburton had met with very ungracious rebuffs, and it was gossiped that the old man's fortunes had suffered in some way.

In early life, Abburton had inherited the family property, married, and thrown open the house to the most brilliant functions ever seen in Litchfield. For a few years The Turrets was the social centre of the city, during which period a son was born; but then came disaster of the blackest sort —the death of wife and child in a runaway accident. After that, the house was never opened to any one except in the most formal way.

Some of the ruder children of Litchfield called the lonely man "Old Hawk Nose" because of his aquiline features. Older persons spoke of him sometimes as "Dante." He might indeed have been a model for Doré had he lived earlier. In youth, his sepulchral face had been relieved by the geniality of his smile, and his wit had overshadowed his Dantean physical atmosphere; but now there was no smile, and wit and he were strangers.

It was here, then, that Delos Nast found himself, creeping in the protection of hedges and shrubbery, until he gained a piazza that extended beneath the drawing-room windows. Having explored the premises on the previous evening, he now proceeded softly to the darkest end, where, with a tool of his own invention, he deftly

and the window lock through the crevice ween the sashes. A minute later, he was side.

To explore a strange house in the dark as not an agreeable task, but Nast was accustomed to doing it in the interests of justice. In the present case he had no compunction, for was he not working to dispel the nameless terror that hung over Litchfield? On his hands and knees, he crept across the immense room toward an uncertain light that shone from the corridor. Here, on reconnoitering, he found he had reasoned correctly in timing his visit; Abburton was at dinner. From the keyhole of an adjoining room Nast saw the sombre old man sitting alone in state, while an infirm and white-haired man-servant attended him.

This much determined, the detective lost no time in exploring the upper part of the house, and especially Abburton's personal apartments. Guided by his electric torch, he surveyed the bedroom and dressing-room off it, the appointments of which were, with a few striking exceptions, such as a gentleman of his refinement and station would have. The chief difference lay in the presence of a baby's bed, finished in snow-white enamel apparently quite new. Laid out upon the counterpane were the freshly laundered garments of a small child. Scattered about the rooms were other evidences of strong philoprogenitiveness, although decades had passed since the small son had slept in that crib for the last time.

Proceeding to the study farther down the upper hall, Nast cast the rays of his searchlight upon a large mahogany desk. It was locked, but he opened it with the third key he tried. The first thing that met his eyes was a small gold object, which he scrutinized closely but did not disturb. In one of the recesses of the desk he next unearthed some papers, the inscriptions upon which he copied rapidly into his note book.

He had scarcely finished this task when his alert ears caught the shuffle of footsteps on the carpeted stairs. Closing the desk, he concealed himself behind some draperies and watched Abburton switch on the light, open the desk, and take from it some of the papers. Then turning off the light, Abburton left the room.

It was a hazardous situation, but Nast followed, risking the danger of discovery. The hall was dimly lighted, anyway, and he might pass for a servant should Abburton turn unexpectedly. This he did not do, but kept straight ahead except for a jog in the corridor. Nast, at a judicious distance behind, paused a moment at this turn to avoid getting too close. Then he followed—but Abburton had disappeared. Nor could an hour's search of the premises reveal any trace of him.

IV

A WEEK later Felix Hazard, pondering some mystery in his skull room, was handed a code telegram which, on being translated, read as follows:

> I have at last discovered the secret of Abburton's nightly disappearance within his own house. Last night I gained access to his turret room through a panel door, and, in concealment, witnessed extraordinary things. I am sending full details by mail. Important to keep a close shadow on Abburton day and night. Send three more men at once and have Louise Dennison here by to-morrow afternoon. Indications are that the trap will be ready to set by to-morrow night. If Miss Dennison is willing to act, your plan is likely to work out. Diabolical things brewing anyway.
>
> NAST.

To this Hazard answered by wire, in the Agency cipher:

> Louise Dennison is game and will put our theory to the test. Run no chances but have her well guarded. If it comes to a showdown, take Abburton dead or alive.

V

JUST before dusk the next day a stylishly dressed young woman rang the gate bell of the Abburton mansion, and, to the man-servant who answered, presented a card bearing the name of Mrs. Louise Merton, special financial agent of the Society for the Extension of Religion in America. The footman gravely ushered the caller into the drawing room, requested her to be seated,

and glided out. He was quite accustomed to callers of this class, if not to social guests.

The room bore ample evidence of its erstwhile magnificence, with its immense gilded mirrors, its paneled walls, rich hangings and massive mahogany furniture; and time had scarcely dimmed the splendor of its decorations, though the air was heavy with the oppressiveness one finds in rooms long unused to sun and air. The tragedy of the Abburtons hung over it.

The caller shivered a bit, and sat for a minute watching the door where the man had disappeared. Then she arose and moved silently over to the side of the room where a massive divan stood against some draperies. Seating herself on the divan, she said in a whisper, apparently to the tapestry hangings:

" I rely on you, Nast!"

"Keep up your nerve, Louise," came the whispered answer. "The whole game is now up to you—but have your barker on tap!"

She was back in her chair a moment later, waiting for the expected development. Hazard had reasoned it all out—that Abburton, on getting her card, would come down to see her. She was inclined to be skeptical herself, but she knew that her chief had good analogies from which to reason. He was not working blindly. Abburton would come down, he had said. Perhaps it was well for her state of mind that she did not know what he was doing upstairs at that moment. However, some of Hazard's spies were up there, watching. She knew that.

She waited five or ten minutes, and found herself uneasily watching the darkening shadows of the room and wondering if the crystal chandeliers bore any possibilities of light. The day was not entirely gone outside as she could see through the chinks in the time-checked window shades; but here in the drawing room night was already at hand. The silence in the house was deep and oppressive, and she started as a gust of wind swept under the roof of the piazza. For a moment she arose, and her hand went quickly to the pocket of her coat, but she sank back, with a little laugh, upon the cushion of the chair. Had she not often braved the uncanniest of dangers in the pursuit of her calling? Then another gust r tled a window, and despite herself a chill fright swept over her. If Felix Hazar theory was true—and she well knew that l never worked on idle guesses—then wer not the horrors of this house sufficient t terrify any woman? She revolted at her profession, and felt the impulse to flee from the house, screaming. Here in the darkness, the thing might happen before even Nast, hidden near the divan, could avert it!

But it was a woman's impulse, and she conquered it. The die was cast, and she waited. Now she could not distinguish the objects in the room, though she could see the opening into the reception hall. How many doors were there in this drawing room, she wondered. Straining her eyes, she tried to discover—and suddenly sprang to her feet, for in the last vestige of light, she saw the powerful though gaunt form of a man before her. It was not the servant. She knew it was Abburton himself.

He spoke, in tones that were singularly deep and melancholy:

"You represent the Society for the Extension of Religion in America, I believe."

"I do," she replied, pulling her faculties together and keeping her right hand in her coat pocket. "The Society counts on your benevolence and generosity."

"If you choose," he said, after a moment's pause, "you may tell me about the aims of this organization."

The girl shuddered. The day before, in the skull room, Hazard had prophesied almost these very words. Abburton would utter them, he had said. And now, as she strove to see the features of the man before her she recalled the description of him given her: the beak of an eagle, a sinister mouth with a tortuous curve, and eyes that protruded slightly from their sockets and had the power to glare with the hate of a tiger. She imagined they were glaring at her now, and that the cruel fingers were clutching for a spring at her throat. With an effort, she fought off her terror and spoke calmly:

"The Society," she said, "stands for one of the noblest movements ever undertaken in the name of Christianity. It is a God-given work we are doing—a work with heaven on one side and Satan on the other.

e are fighting Satan, sir, with all the ight of goodness!"

Hazard had written out these words for ıer, and she had learned them by rote. It was quite a speech Hazard had composed for her, up there in the skull room, and she had rehearsed it to him until he was satisfied. She went through it now to the end, incongruously toying with the trigger of her automatic pistol, concealed in her pocket.

"We are fighting the devil through the underlying power of the church," she repeated at the end, as Hazard had told her to do.

He stood in silence for a few moments, when she had finished, and she could hear him breathing as if he had exercised. She imagined that his face worked in contortions, though she could not see it. Suddenly he stepped toward her, and she backed away quickly, half drawing the pistol. Whatever his impulse, he did not follow it up, but, turning, went to the side of the room. Evidently he touched an electric button for the shade of a man appeared in the doorway.

"A light!" said the master of the place. Then, to his caller: "This room is seldom used, and the fixtures are not in order."

The servant reappeared, bearing a lamp with a red shade, which he put on the table. Abburton stood where his profile was revealed and perhaps accentuated. His mouth seemed distorted momentarily, and his great oval eyes rested on the girl for a full minute before he spoke:

"You are staying in the city, I take it!"

"At the Grand Hotel."

"Very well. If on contemplation I decide to contribute to the extension of religion in America, I shall mail you a check. You have a cab waiting?"

"The distance is short; I came afoot."

"Then you will find the best path to your right as you go out of the gate. Follow the wall around the corner and proceed straight ahead. You are not afraid of the darkness?"

"I have no fear, sir. Why should one be afraid who works in the great cause I serve?"

She backed away from him and passed into the vestibule, and, as he opened the door for her, she brushed against him. It seemed to her as if a pair of demoniac eyes were burning into her back as she went down the path to the gate, and her knees were weak under her. Had she really done the thing so far and escaped?

At the gate she followed his directions, and again at the turning of the wall, passing on into the deeper shadows that lay under an overhanging willow projecting from the walled yard.

VI

No sooner was the girl out of the house than Abburton turned, and, with extraordinary agility for a man of his age, ran lightly down the corridor to the back of the house, thence descending a flight of steps to a door that led him outside. Skirting a row of lilacs that bordered the carriage drive, he made a detour to keep in the deepest shadows, and reached the wall just back of the garage. This he followed, proceeding rapidly despite the darkness, until he reached a small door in the wall. Pulling the bolt, he opened it and, crouched inside, peered out in direction from which the girl would approach. She was coming! Against the dim light of a gas lamp far up on the corner, he could see her skirts. Across the road was vacant land and clusters of trees —the night was quite dark.

He breathed now in gasps that were hideous to hear, and some metallic thing he held in his right hand beat a little tattoo on the bricks against which he huddled. She was very close now.

Abburton rose suddenly and stepped abruptly into the path, with his hand uplifted, when suddenly he uttered a cry and staggered back, blinded by the glare of some brilliant light that shot out of the darkness into his eyes. A moment later Felix Hazard was on Abburton's back and three policemen had him in their clutches. A dagger fell from his loosened fingers, and then a pistol was taken from him by the Chief of Police of Litchfield, together with all the other contents of his pockets.

"Curses upon you!" said Abburton, as they shackled him. "I am the Devil, working evil upon everything good. How dare you put bonds upon Satan himself? Release me, or my curse is upon every one of you!"

"An extraordinary case of paranoia!" said Hazard, to the men about him at the police station a little later. The paranoiac ordinarily conceives himself to be appointed of heaven to remove objectionable characters. The murderers of our Presidents have been paranoiacs who believed themselves fulfilling a high and godly duty. But here is a man who acts from the reverse motive. Sane in most respects, the monomania obsesses him that he is the ruler over Hades, and that he must fight the legions of good. This was the theory that forced itself upon me when first these crimes were brought to my notice. The victims were all arrayed against the instincts of the Devil. The first, you recall, was the widow—a philanthropist who had founded an asylum for homeless children. Here was typified Charity. The second victim was a child—standing for Innocence. The candy-poisoning was perpetrated with the idea of torturing and putting to death more than one little child who might get the dosed buttercups. This maniac had secured some of these candies, poisoned them, and smuggled them back into the containers on the counter. A simple expedient for the cunning but cruel mind of a paranoaic. Then followed the assassination of the clergyman, who was a godly man, you remember, representing Faith. Next came the murder of the young girl, who, in the lunatic's distorted vision, required removal as a type of Purity. Finally, the Mother Superior represented perhaps Pity for the woes of men and women."

From a cell below came Abburton's solemn voice, crying:

"Satan's curses upon you!"

"The logical course," Hazard went on, "was to study the people of Litchfield and, by a process of elimination, round up the possible paranoiacs, for in paranoia alone was it reasonable to look for the source of these deeds. We found six possible subjects. They were all investigated, but from the start Abburton presented the best clews. His family bereavements, over which he was brooding, had clearly upset his mind, although to the untrained observer he showed no symptom of his malady. It was only when my men gained access to his home that they unearthed positive evidence, and discovered a secret room in one of the turrets where he had a "throne of Satan" and went through mystic ceremonies : which were revealed to him the names o his prospective victims. These names he wrote in red ink on a sheet of paper, and crossed them off in black as he murdered them. When he got Louise Dennison's card he took it up to the turret room and there added her fictitious name to his fateful list before he went down to see her. The Chief of Police now has the list, taken from the person of Abburton himself."

"Along with the gold cross of the Mother Superior," added the Chief.

"It was a fearful strain to keep watch on the maniac," resumed Hazard. "There was no telling which would prove his next victim, and to arrest him without conclusive evidence might give him a chance to escape indictment and thus remain a frightful hazard to Litchfield. Paranoia is a most difficult thing to prove. So I resolved to bait him with this plea from the Society for the Extension of Religion. The widow Blauvelt, I discovered, had been to see him in behalf of her orphan asylum, on the day she was killed. The Reverend Dr. Mathewson likewise had sought funds of him for the church on that very Sunday he was shot down in the dark. Analogies, my friends! I try to reason from such analogies, for the human mind, however erratic, always comes back to certain starting points. The more you study the morbid histology of the brain, the more you see that these microscopic tissue structures in different craniums simply repeat the same general story."

"In my opinion," observed the Chief "this girl, Louise Dennison, in allowing herself to be used as a murder bait, ran a terrible risk and deserves the everlasting gratitude of Litchfield."

"The Devil's curses on the girl!" came the wailing voice from below.

"Louise Dennison fears neither man nor Satan!" said Hazard, as he lighted another cigar. "And as for our friend of the lower regions, his curse, so long a deadly menace to Litchfield, need no longer trouble you. If only he were the Devil in reality!"

"In which case," observed the Chief of Police, "Felix Hazard would find no further cause for the exercise of his weird detecting talents."

THE PRICE AND THE PUP

By HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "The Hyp and The Hop," "The Dogs of Purgatory," etc.

"HE'S A TALKIN' DAWG," INSISTED FRITZ THE BARTENDER, TO JUSTIFY THE PRICE HE HAD PAID FOR THE PUP. AND THE PROPRIETOR HAD GOOD REASON LATER TO BELIEVE THAT HE WAS

THE "Ventriloquic Marvel" turned up his collar and hugged the buildings to escape the full savagery of the autumnal downpour. He ought to have been wearing evening clothes on "Big Time" this night. A week before and that had been his lot but he had swapped it in Albany for a skinful of red liquor. He had started his spree a head-liner with full pockets. Now he lacked the price of a lodging for himself and Wonder. Wonder had no coat collar to turn up and in lieu of anything better dropped his tail as he trailed along at his master's heels. But Wonder hadn't lost his faith in the biped ahead. In his doggish estimation the Marvel was a glorious creature who would surely lead him back to the warm life-lights again, a bedraggled god taking his time in returning to Olympus.

The Marvel halted outside a saloon in a mean street and flogged his feverish mind to attention. Never before had he been reduced so low. He had drunk up and wasted every possible credit and asset, except the Wonder. His soul cringed as a new suggestion leaped at him. Sell Wonder, the pal of many trials and tribulations, the sharer of successes on Big Time? Why, one might as decently think of selling a parent or a child. No, sir! Liquor and exigence could and did impel their victims to grasp at abnormal expedients, but, thank God! the Ventriloquic Marvel would never barter the bone and blood of his only friend. And as he turned and patted the intelligent head the dog discovered heaven could be ensconced in the heart of the chilling storm.

"Don't you fret, old man. Never that," reassured the Marvel.

These words, constituting a solemn promise where everything had been taken for granted, suddenly aroused some *nth* sense in the Wonder, and he whined in a pleading note and pressed closer against his master. "We stick it out together," repeated the Marvel firmly.

The shadow of a doubt crept over the dog's mind as they worked their way deeper into the cheap neighborhood; the same shadow canopied the man's thoughts as he desperately cast about for some egress. He would call up the theatre. In reaching this decision he knew it was as hopeless an expedient as he could indulge in. Already the box office had threatened to have him arrested if he trespassed again. Still, if evil circumstances *should* force him and Wonder to part company it would be well to remember he had made a last throw against Destiny. Not that he would sacrifice Wonder —yet one must eat.

They came to another saloon, cheaper and meaner than the others. A glance through the dusty green curtains showed it was deserted except for a sleepy bartender at the lower end of the bar. Confident this was his last line of defense he extracted a nickel, his last one, and briskly entering approached the telephone and rang up the Empire. The evening sale was well under way and he knew the box office would rage and tear at the interruption. But he owed it to the dog. In fact, he felt rather virtuous in daring the managerial spleen. The Empire yelped in his left ear and with a shiver he began bluffing: "This is the Ventriloquic Marvel, talking from an uptown hotel. Just called——"

He sagged limply against the wall, unable to credit his hearing when the Box Office's curt voice cut in, saying, "Been looking for you, old man. Git to Syracuse so's to open to-morrer night. The Lulu Girls act is off and they want you to fill in. Got the wire this afternoon. It means long booking if you've finished your drunk."

"Righto!" cried the Marvel, his heart

bouncing buoyantly. "I'm straight as a string. Off the stuff for good and I'll give 'em the act of the season——"

"All right. Better wire Isein at once. Good-bye."

"Say, just a minute, old pal," begged the Marvel. "I'll have to touch your office for a little advance——"

"Hardly. Good-night!"

"Listen, Bo," frantically pleaded the Marvel, his drawn forehead oozing sweat. "A ten-spot'll git me there and I'll give you an order on the Syracuse box-office——"

"Nothin' stirring," was the metallic reply. "The old man's put the kibosh on that. No advance. Git there if you can; if you can't it's your trouble."

"Jimmy! Won't you personally let me have——"

"Not on your life!" And bang went the receiver.

Experience had taught Wonder to look for results once his master took on the mood of radical decision; and he pricked his ears expectantly. The Marvel, his soul bitter as gall, turned and eyed him gloomily. The Wonder dragged his belly on the floor and waited.

The Marvel conned the situation fast and furiously. He *must* make Syracuse. The offer was the only life-saving plank afloat on a sea of misery. With ten dollars he could rehabilitate self. Ten dollars or hell. Given passage to Syracuse and he would prove he could be trusted. There would be the legitimate booking and pleasant park work throughout the summer. In the old days he would have wired peremptorily for an advance. But the Albany lapse, the culmination of a series of backslidings, had blacklisted him from circuit to circuit. No manager would advance him a penny under any circumstances so thoroughly had he undermined his reputation. It caused his thin face to burn to know he never would have been offered this one chance had not the Lulu Girls defaulted without warning.

The dog, watching his master's change of expression, whined softly and dragging himself forward brushed his knee with supplicating paw. The Marvel averted his gaze, ashamed to meet the honest eyes, and furtively studied the bartender. A glance at the straight perpendicular formed by the big neck and the apex of the occipital allowed the Marvel, who was an authority on bar tenders, to inventory the man's intellect. This one possessed cunning sufficient to defeat requests for credit, but would be very credulous as to the impossible and distrustful of the obvious. He would clout a man who offered a gold dollar for a dime, but would give a week's pay for a dream-book on "policy."

The bartender laid aside the sporting page, yawned, and tentatively sized up the stranger. The Marvel's raiment, albeit rain-soaked and, under a strong light, sodden, still retained its ultra lines. Then again the Marvel's bearing in making notes on the back of an envelope was impressive. The bartender ambled forward.

"Beer," laconically ordered the Marvel without lifting his frowning gaze from the envelope.

He continued his memoranda after the heavy glass was shoved before him. Had the drink been the objective the battle was won, for he would have retreated in line with the window. As it was he ignored the beer and disgustedly exclaimed, "Of all the rotten luck!" Then meeting the fishy gaze of the bartender he informed, "Called to Syracuse on business on a night like this. Wouldn't that jar you!"

Thereupon happened the miracle. Wonder, catching his master's gesture below the bartender's range of vision, rose on his hind legs and opening his mouth wide, advised, "Drink up, old man."

The bartender became cataleptic, incapable of motion or speech. Then his Adam's apple worked convulsively, and he hoarsely ejaculated, "Gawd! He spoke!"

The Marvel raised his brows inquiringly, then smiled indulgently and emptied his glass. "Oh, the pup?" he laughed. "Yes, he's always butting in."

"But he *talked!*" choked the bartender, his pudgy hands gripping the edge of the bar, his small eyes fixed in a glazed focus on Wonder.

"First one you ever see of them?" carelessly asked the Marvel.

"First one?" whispered the bartender. Then shaking his head violently to dispel any hallucinations, he weakly asked, "Any more of 'em?"

forgot," yawned the Marvel. "They as plenty over here as across the r. Inside of a year they'll be common Fords."

'He spoke," stupidly reiterated the barnder, falling back against the cash reister.

"Oh, that ain't nothing," smiled the Marvel. "Parrots and crows talk. Why not dogs. Dogs is more intelligent. Simply needs the cutting of a certain muscle at the roots of the tongue. Do that and they'll pick it up in no time."

"Good! Say, can yuh make him do it ag'in?" gasped the bartender.

"It ain't a case of making," gently corrected the Marvel, glancing anxiously toward the door and fearing some one might enter before he developed the nub of his scheme. "Once that talking muscle's cut they'll gab all the time if you'd let 'em. Ain't that so, old boy?" And again the hand below the bar gave the signal.

Again the Wonder rose on his hind legs and took several mincing steps toward the dazed bartender and hoarsely requested, "Set 'em up again, barkeep."

"Betcha life!" cried the bartender, nervously drawing a foaming glass. "Say, if that don't git yuh goat! Say, I'd give five bones if the boss could only blow in. Say, that's the wonderfullest thing I ever seen."

"Oh, it ain't nothing," deprecated the Marvel. "Lots of 'em over'n England. Reckon this is one of the first over here, though. He's getting to be a nuisance as you never know when he's going to spiel."

The bartender settled his red elbows on the bar and stared long and fascinatedly at the Wonder. The latter crept to the door and whined for his master to follow. The Marvel felt his soul was naked before the uition of the dog. He turned from the ar, then halted irresolute. He was hearing he call from Syracuse. If he did not go here was the bread line, starvation and freezing. The same fate awaited the dog. Why, from a humane point alone——

"How much does a dick like that cost?" he bartender was asking.

Facing about and careful not to overplay his hand the Marvel informed, "You can make a talking dog out of any pup once you ut that muscle. Just now they're fetching a good price in England, but they didn't oughter be worth more'n twenty or twenty-five dollars. Veterinary charges five for cutting the muscle."

"Will yuh take fifteen beans for that pup?" demanded the bartender.

The Marvel frowned, the Wonder howled softly and scratched at the door. "I wouldn't think of selling if I didn't have to beat it to Syracuse," muttered the Marvel, pushing his hat back from his wet forehead. "City's no place to keep a dog in. Say; tell you what I'll do. You can have him for fifteen if you'll let me buy him back for seventeen if I return here inside a week. That gives you two bucks for taking care of him."

The Wonder lifted his voice in a long, dolorous howl. He had fared high and he had starved. But not till now had sorrow come to him. The Marvel felt his courage slipping. He could not endure the dog's beseeching gaze, and he sharply cried, "Dead dog!"

Instantly the Wonder rolled over on his side and became motionless. The bartender hurriedly counted off the purchase price from a greasy roll, fearing lest the stranger would change his mind. Clutching the money the Marvel pulled his hat low over his eyes and gingerly stepped over the rigid form. Once through the door he bowed against the storm and hastened to the car line. There was a choking sensation in his throat that no amount of drink could alleviate.

True to training the Wonder held his pose, although his tail threatened to pound the floor when his master opened the door. As the bartender grabbed him by the collar and fastened a cord to it and tied him to the bar-rail he knew the play was ended. And again his despairing cry filled the long room.

"Hi, can that noise!" commanded the bartender, surveying his property with arms akimbo. "What's yuh name?" His nerves were a-tingle as he expected to be addressed. But the Wonder rested his head between his paws and moaned faintly.

Before the bartender could continue his efforts at a conversation the side door flew open to admit the proprietor and a friend. Both were eager to complete some conversation hindered by the rain and as they re-

paired to the tiny apartment at the head of the bar the proprietor was insisting:

"I tell you, Alderman, there ain't no chance of slipping up. Caley's been selected to bring the money and he's started a souse. Buley is trailing him and 'll see he has the wad when he gits here. Just now he's at Carty's, blowing off the gang——"

"And 'll git touched for the five thou," cried the Alderman. "Why, Greenshaw, he don't stand no more show of gitting clear of Carty's with the money then a snowball——"

"With Buley on the job?" cried Greenshaw. "Forgit it! I've got the goods on Buley and have only to wag a finger and up he goes for a long dip in the stir-bin. He wouldn't throw me for a million. He's got his orders to see Caley arrives here with the dough."

"Better let Buley make the touch," mumbled the Alderman.

Greenshaw shook his head cunningly, saying, "I've got the goods on Buley, but let him git five thousand dollers in his mitt and he might go crazy. No; I'll do the operating. Warm your feet! Caley's sent to deliver the rhino for this ward to you. He comes in sluiced and finds he's lost it. He'll dope it that he was stung in Carty's. Carty gits the black eye and comes through with the coin or loses his license. You'n me split the five. The boss would never sent Caley if he'd known he was starting a souse, but—— What the devil's that!" And he poked his startled face through the curtains as the Wonder lifted his soul in a final lamentation.

"How come that dog in here, Fritz?" he growled.

"My dawg, Boss," proudly explained Fritz. Then impressively, "Say, Boss, he's a talkin' dawg. What d'yuh know 'bout that?"

"You keep away from that Three-Star and make him can that bleating," ordered Greenshaw.

"It's on the level," earnestly persisted Fritz, nervously rubbing his hands under his apron. "He's a talkin' dawg——"

"What does he talk, Fritz?" grinned the Alderman, pulling the curtain aside.

"No kiddin', Alderman. The pup talks, reg'lar spieler. Guy in here had to catch a train. See? This dawg begin ta like four of a kind. Struck me in a h See? The guy said talkin' dogs is com as fleas in England. All yuh have to dc make a dog talk is to cut a muscle in t'roat an' he spins it out jest like a parrot

Greenshaw stalked forth, followed by th amused Alderman. "Say, you mutt," h growled. " 'S'matterwitchyou? Kidding me?" And his gaze became dangerous.

But Fritz was composed and confident, and replied, "All right, all right. Yuh think I've been takin' sleepin powders, eh? Now jest watch the pup come across. Hi, doggie! Wanta drink?" The Wonder whined. "Wanta eat?" A prolonged whine that evolved into a dismal howl.

"He ain't a talker; he's a singer," roared the Alderman.

"I tell yuh the dawg can speak," passionately insisted the bartender. "He was rippin' it off to beat the band a few minutes ago. Hi, pup! Wot's yuh name?"

The Wonder settled his head between his paws and eyed the bartender sullenly.

"Take that menagerie away," growled Greenshaw. "You pinhead! A talkin' dog!"

Red of face the bartender unfastened the cord and dragged the Wonder to the back room and tied him to a table-leg. Then he laboriously aimed a kick which missed, and gritted, "Jest wait till I'm off duty an' yuh'll talk or be a dead dawg."

"Dead dawg" recalled to the Wonder's sorrowing mind the glare of the footlights, the gaping sea of pallid faces and the storm of many applauding hands, and he rolled on his back and dutifully simulated death.

"Wouldn't that git yuh goat!" wheezed the bartender, backing away, his eyes bulging. "Can't talk, eh? I'll show them bone heads jest as soon as he gits used to ' dump. Talk? Jest wait till he springs something on that pig of a Alderman."

III

With fifteen dollars of blood money burning his pocket the Marvel gained the railroad station and discovered he had passed many bars with never a thought of drinking It was miraculous. Had he felt the least inclination he knew he would have succumbed. But when a man is burying hi

t friend, after promoting the funeral, his ss appetites of the flesh are apt to take vacation. In truth, he was a wild-eyed, sheveled, haggard-faced Marvel as he examined the time-table and found the next train for Syracuse left in ten minutes.

What a king he would feel if only old Wonder were at his heels! Back on the long circuit he would keep straight and again star in Big Time. He took his place in the queue of passengers and advanced to the window. He had owned many dogs in the history of his act, but none so dependable and companionable as Wonder. He recalled their personalities as the man ahead leisurely negotiated for a ticket. He forgot humans as his lasting friendships had been confined to his four-footed companions. His weakness had alienated other friendships. Only a dog would "stand for" the things he had done.

Fox terrier and spaniel, lordly St. Bernard and poodle, collie and English bull, all true pals, lined up before his inner gaze as the man in front slowly counted his change. Disease and accidents had swept them away, all except the Wonder, prince of airedales. The Wonder was the only one he had ever *sold*.

"God!" he muttered, stepping from the line and slumping into a settee. "That was sure some rough on him. Hope that guy don't kick him round." And he visualized the bartender's brutish wrath when the Wonder should refuse to talk. "It was a case of him or both of us," he defended. "I'll do the act with a dummy till I can pick up a likely pup and teach him a few tricks."

The clanging of the gong warned him he had a scant sixty seconds. He jumped to his feet, fidgeted, then sullenly decided: "Next train 'll do just as well. No damn hurry." Gnawing his knuckles he lounged to the entrance and stared at the rain-blurred lights and pondered on how much he could afford to spend for drinks. There was a convenient bar just across the way. He knew that by this time the bartender was experimenting with the Wonder. In his ears rang frantic cries of pain and the soul-racking wail of the betrayed and abandoned.

"He was wise to what I was up to, all right," muttered the Marvel, no longer seeing the entrance to the café. "Eyes just like a woman's. Dog's eyes are more human than a human's. Damn little cuss didn't want me to go in there. He knew something was up. Next one I git 'll be a bonehead. If he'd been the collie——" But in the collie's day he was never so low down as to sell a pal. With an inarticulate cry he turned up his collar and dashed into the rain and caught a down-town car.

Trade was light in Greenshaw's that night. Through the misty glass he saw the fat-faced bartender mechanically waiting on several loungers. The dog was not in sight. An awful fear gripped his heart. Had the bartender already loosed his rage? "Damn him! He's a murderer," choked the Marvel. Then a voice inside his head calmly corrected, "No; you're the murderer."

He sprang back as though escaping from an accuser and at that moment a man lurched against him and careened into the door. Moving to the next window, which commanded the head of the bar, the Marvel beheld two men in a small curtained apartment. They were peering out at the newcomer. He dodged aside that they might not glimpse him and found himself standing in the mouth of an alley. Down this narrow way there came a low, piteous whining.

"He ain't dead yet," exulted the Marvel. And he whistled a shrill, peculiar note. Instantly a joyous clamor answered him. He waited, hoping a ragged form would bound out of the darkness and dash against him.

"Locked up in the back room," choked the Marvel.

Racing softly down the alley he came to a window which was raised a few inches. He shoved it and whistled softly. From a table in the middle of the room came an eager whining. As the table began dancing up and down he knew the Wonder was tied. He hissed a command that brought silence. The room was deserted, but beyond the swing-doors came the sound of drunken laughter and the clatter of feet. Vaulting through the window the Marvel rushed to the table and dived under it and crouched over the Wonder, who was now vibrating madly from nose to tail. A second command was necessary before the animal would quiet down and permit the Marvel to find and cut the rope.

By this time, however, retreat was blocked

by the entrance of men. There were three of them and they took a table near the open window. The Marvel, humped up over the dog, gave a signal with his finger and the animal became rigid. Cautiously peering from under the soiled tablecloth the Marvel was interested to observe one of the trio deftly extract a large roll of bank notes from the pocket of an intoxicated individual and drop it into a cuspidor.

Then the thief said, "Caley, tell the boss the ward ticket 'll be put through the very minute the coin comes down the line for the boys."

"I've got the stuff with me now," solemnly informed the victim, tapping his raincoat. "See. When it comes to delivering the rhino the boss always sends for yours truly. See? An' whaya think? He says to me, 'Don't git—touched.' Why, gen'l'men, I can tote a million scads through this dirty ward an' never lose a penny. It makes me laugh. Me, Caley, the speed-boy, gittin' *touched*. I says to the boss, 'Forgit it.' See?"

"You're the stuff," admiringly cried the Alderman. "But when I heard you was lickin' 'em up in Carty's place and that Smiling Jimmy was in the bunch I told Greenshaw here, 'Good-night to Caley's roll if he's got it with him.' "

"Good-night nothing," indignantly cried Mr. Caley. "Think I'm just in from Canandaigua? Huh! T'ell with Smiling Jimmy an' the whole rotten bunch. There's one guy they'll keep their mitts off, drunk or sober. See? I got their records. I stand in with the D. A. I'm a big chief to that gang. I can send Smiling Jimmy to Buffalo with a bale of greens an' he'll wait for me to blow in an' take 'em off his hands."

"That's straight," heartily indorsed Greenshaw. "Jimmy wouldn't dream of copping anything off'n you—as a rule. But he's planning to make a break for the Coast. So when me'n the Alderman heard you was up to Carty's with him I got a hunch he might take a chance an' frisk you."

"You did, eh?" growled Mr. Caley, sneering heavily at the saloonke per. "'I wanta tell you boobs——"

"You're hot stuff all right," nervously broke in the Alderman. "But as I've g ward meeting mebbe we'd better git d to cases and——"

"Damnation!" screamed Mr. Caley, jum ing from his chair and fumbling in h clothes. "It's gone! Stung by——"

"What?" barked Greenshaw in an ugly voice. "See here, Caley; no monkey-business!"

"They got him at Carty's," huskily cried the Alderman, his flaccid face turning a sickly yellow.

"Th' dirty skins!" shrieked Mr. Caley, showing his respect for the Sullivan law by tugging a thirty-eight bulldog from his hip pocket. "I'm going back there——"

"Simmer down!" thundered Greenshaw. "Rough stuff won't git the money back."

"T'ell with the money," choked Mr. Caley, waving the revolver. "The scuts dared make a touch off'n me! I'll bump 'em off!"

But the Marvel, having an awful fear of lethal weapons and realizing it was time he gained the alley, now entered the game. Even while Mr. Caley was finishing his homicidal threat the Marvel hissed a command. The Wonder crawled from under the table and respectfully sat up on his haunches and waved his paws at the plotters and their victim.

The grotesque spectacle struck the trio mute. The Alderman gaped stupidly. Greenshaw puffed his cheeks preliminary to a profane explosion. Mr. Caley staggered against the table and rubbed his eyes incredulously.

Then the Wonder's jaws opened and in a deep, guttural voice he informed, "The money's in the spittoon at your feet. The big gink on your left copped it and put it there."

With a crash the Alderman's chair tipped over backward. Greenshaw doubled up and glared in terror at his accuser. Over the top of the swing doors peered the dumfounded visage of the bartender. The Alderman's fall jolted Mr. Caley's nerve-force into volition. He kicked over the cuspido and pounced down on the money.

As the Marvel recalled his pet, Greenshaw began to realize the extent of his worse than failure, and with a furious roar snatched up a chair. Mr. Caley promptly

:an shooting in circles and the Alder- squeaking in terror, clawed his way :r a table. As the smoke and explosions :d the room with chaos, and the crashing furniture evidenced the mad haste of e plotters to escape, the Marvel and the Vonder gained the window and were :hrough it.

At an early hour next morning the Marvel humbly stood by the baggage-car door and waited till his friend boisterously leaped down upon him, yelping from sheer joy. As they trudged up the quiet streets the Marvel earnestly assured, "I'd rigged it to come and git you, old boy. To think you had a hunch I was double-crossing! I just had to have that mutt's fifteen beans. But I was coming back all the time." And the Wonder barked wholehearted belief and generously ignored the red tide of shame suffusing his master's face.

Certified To

A New York policeman swore to the following affidavit:

"I hereby solemnly swear that the prisoner set upon me, calling me an ass, a dolt, a scarecrow, a ragamuffin, and an idiot, all of which I certify to be true."

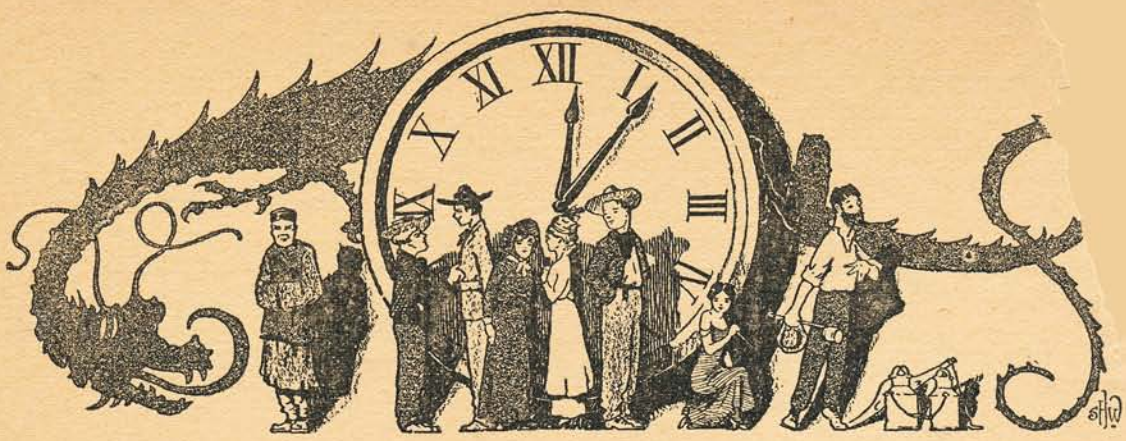
A Mechanical Engineer

At the time of the strike of the engineers on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad, a considerable number of years ago, the officials of the road dragged in every man they could find who knew anything at all about an engine to take the places of the strikers.

One man they secured was an engineer at a sawmill. All his experience in running an engine had consisted in pulling the lever and starting the log against the saw, and pulling the reverse lever when the plank was cut off, and running the platform back again so the log could be shoved over to allow the saw to take another slice. The yardman gave him an engine and told him to run : into the roundhouse. The sawmill engineer pulled a lever and the engine slid slowly into the roundhouse. When he was in he saw that something must be done, so he pulled the reverse lever. The engine promptly backed out again.

"Here!" shouted the yardman. "What are you doing, you fool? Why don't you put that engine in the roundhouse?"

"I did have her in," yelled the sawmill engineer. "Why in thunder didn't you shut the door?"



IN THE SMALL HOURS

By PERRY NEWBERRY

Part II

THE DAWN

A TALE OF OLD SAN FRANCISCO, AND OF AN EASTERN GIRL'S WILD NIGHT WHEN, THROUGH A COMBINATION OF REMARKABLE CIRCUMSTANCES SHE IS FORCED TO TAKE SHELTER IN THE UNDERGROUND PASSAGES OF CHINATOWN

SYNOPSIS OF PART I

Hope Dennison of Boston, cultured and wealthy, arrives in San Francisco at night, bound on a visit to friends in San José. In crossing on the ferry she loses overboard her purse containing all her money and railroad tickets. Three artists who see her mishap offer refuge in their studio while they seek to communicate with her friends. Arrived at the studio Garcia, one of the artists, is struck down as he enters the dark room. Rouge on the advice of the third, Donal Frazer, flees with the girl and leaves her in a café while he goes back to aid their comrade. Meanwhile, Miss Dennison becomes frightened in the café and is rescued by Dot Travis, a Salvation Army lassie, who takes her to a Chinese restaurant. A Tong war breaks out, and they take refuge in the tunnels under Chinatown only to become separated in the dark.

A PAIL of water, in which many brushes had been soaking, dashed by Donal Frazer over De Garcia's face, brought the painter out of his faint, after which his friend carried him to the couch and lighted a lamp.

"Ha! That little devil! She have done what she say many times," he groaned. "She have at last stick me with the stiletto."

A hurried examination proved that De Garcia was more frightened than hurt. Temperament, not loss of blood, was responsible for his condition, for the weapon, thrust at his breast, had glanced from a block of crayon paper in his inner pocket, making only a flesh wound. A scratch which bled freely, smarted briskly and looked ugly enough.

When Rouge came back, breathless, they bound up the wound, and Donal decided that a surgeon and the attending publicity was unnecessary. "It won't do any harm to wait and see," he said. "Probably it will be all healed over by to-morrow."

"Ah! she have killed me," moaned Garcia. "There she wait and spring out on me from the much darkness, a devil with a knife! And she stab me down—so. That is no way to hold a knife, the way she hold him. Yes, I will have to teach her how to hold the knife as we do in Guadalajara.

ust where is Rosaria?" asked Rouge,
ing the artist another glass of wine.
he leave by the fire-escape."
she thought you were dead?" asked
ge quickly.

"Most surely. I fall estabbed. I was dead for the little time. Ah, that gr-reat girl, she will think she have kill me and will weep with the sorrow."

"You bet she will—and do you know what she will do? She'll kill herself!"

De Garcia jumped from his couch. "No, no! We cannot allow her to the suecide. She the gr-reat model with the delicious form. It is foolishness of her; but she is jealous that I say 'Rosaria, you have not the face like the blonde to paint.' And she get mad and try to kill me, but she herself she must not kill. Come, my friends, we will search for the little Rose."

"Where did you leave Miss Dennison, Rouge?" Donal Frazer turned to the musician with the question. Rouge ran his fingers through his bright hair. "At the Nymphia," he answered.

Frazer's eyes became like glinting steel in his whitening face. "Why in all hell did you leave her there?" he demanded.

"It was near by, and the best place I could think of," stuttered Rouge. "I told her how to act, so she'll be safe. She is waiting for me at a table in one corner."

"You have a soul for music, Rouge, and I suppose I should not expect you to get past a dance hall, even when you're looking after a lady." Donal started for the door. "Come on, we must get her."

"But how about Rose?"

"Rose! Bosh!" snapped Frazer. "She hasn't nerve enough to kill herself." By this time his quick footsteps were waking the echoes along the dark stairs. The others followed, awed by his anger.

"Yes," agreed De Garcia, "let the little fool who kill me go. Let us go on to the Nymphia and get the blonde woman of Van Dyke for Donal."

Rouge was appalled when he found the table, where he had left Hope Dennison, filled with a group of beery merrymakers and he kept his eyes averted from Don's white face and glaring eyes. The waiter who had spoken to her was found and gave ıe information that "De swell peroxide had blown wid de Salvation Army kid, called Dot."

But Dot was a will-o'-the-wisp. At Salvation Army headquarters they learned that Dot had not been in and was not expected. Her work kept her out much of the time. A policeman gave them the first clue. He had seen Dot and "a dame in a sealskin beat it across Portsmouth Square." In the hope that she might be resting on one of the benches, they made a circuit of the Square and were turning away, dejected, when the fusilade of the highbinders began.

Rouge and the groaning De Garcia moved with interest toward the firing; but Donal Frazer stood, chin on breast, staring at the grass beneath his feet. He must find her! Find her quickly! This girl with the Greek face and the shy, sweet eyes. His heart thudded, his breath came hurriedly with fear—fear for the girl whom he had seen for the first time less than three short hours ago.

De Garcia and Rouge had returned to him and were standing before the Stevenson monument in the centre of the Square.

"It is the bum ar-rt!" cried De Garcia, looking at the monument with its bronze ship of old Spain riding the crested waves. "It is rotten! It is a cr-rime! Never do they put up the sculpture which is gr-reat. Such bum ar-rt! It makes me seeck!"

"Don't get excited or you will open your wound," said Rouge soothingly.

"Come!" Frazer's voice was harsh and quick. For a moment he loathed his companions who could never be really moved save by their art. "Come, we are going to the police. Miss Dennison must be found!" He led the way across Kearney Street toward the Hall of Justice.

De Garcia forgot his artistic and physical injuries for the moment. "Surely," he said. "She is real, she is what you say, the true goods. We will go to the police. We will find her." He waved his stick encouragingly.

"She is probably with this Dot. The girl will be kind to her," said Rouge, desiring to excuse himself for desertion of his charge.

"How do you know what this Dot is?" flared Donal, only to be stopped by a cry.

A girl with black hair, escaping from its pins and falling about her face, was run-

ning toward them, calling "Rouge! O Rouge!"

"It is one friend of yours, Rouge; she cry you by the name."

"Never saw her before," Rouge muttered.

"You are Rouge, aren't you?" she gasped as she came up to them.

Frazer answered, "Yes, this is Rouge. Are you Dot? Where is Miss Dennison? Where did you leave her? Is she safe?"

"No introductions necessary, boys. You guessed me at the barrier. Mine was easy, seeing your clothes-rack friend here is a signboard for him who runs to read. But how you guessed Dot first crack, I don't know."

"Never mind," answered Frazer. "Where is Miss Dennison?"

"That's why I chased you a whole block. She's somewhere under Chinatown. I lost her."

"Great heavens! Under Chinatown—kept a prisoner? Impossible!"

"She's down one of the tunnels, unless she's found her way out. We had to skidoo down the 'Secret Way,' " she went on, telling them of the evening's adventures from the time when she, as she said, "Butted in on a shoestring."

Even De Garcia was now impressed with the seriousness of the position of this Boston girl, who might be in the worst possible danger.

"Quick! We must get the police," said Donal in a shaking voice.

But Dot vetoed the idea promptly. "The bulls don't know a b c about this underground game. Besides, she wouldn't want her pic on the front page of the yellows. My old Kee Chow can find her quicker than the whole blooming force."

"But what are we to do?" inquired the thoroughly frightened Rouge.

"Do?" repeated Dot. "Follow her of course. Come with me to Kee Chow's and we'll see if we can't hire a guide. Want to see Chinatown?" she drawled in imitation of the guides of the quarter.

There was a policeman barring admission at the door of Kee Chow's restaurant; but Frazer knew him and they were allowed to pass in and up the stairs. Only one Chinese was in sight in the outer room and he was evidently in a condition of extreme nervousness. He recognized Dot; but to "Where's Kee Chow?" would only m "Me no sabbee. Me no sabbee."

"She's down in the basement under somewhere," said Dot. "Unless she s into some other part of the 'Secret Way.' Anyhow——"

"Anyhow from here she started," said Donal firmly. "If there is a way from here into that tunnel, let us find it."

So Dot led them into the back room where she and Hope had been. Frazer and Rouge pulled back the tapestry where Kee Chow had disclosed the door. There was nothing, seemingly, save solid wall. Donal searched for a secret spring, working with his nails and pocket knife over the entire wall, while Dot poured cold tea for herself and De Garcia out of the pot which still stood where she had left it when the alarm came.

Their search was useless. Try as they would, they could discover no entrance to the Secret Way.

II

Donal Frazer's face was set determinedly. "We must follow her," he said quietly, "if we have to tear this building down."

"I'd go for the police," suggested Rouge. "They can raise such a hubbub that the Chinks will be glad to hunt her up and see that she is safe."

"The police are hopeless when it comes to dealing with the Chinese underground," replied Donal grimly.

Dot sniffed. "Go for your grandmothers," she said scornfully. "And tell 'em to bring their specs 'cause there ain't much light to see by. Say, are you boys game?"

"For what?" demanded Donal.

"I know a girl who married a Chink. She was one of the girls on the Coast. I've never called nor left my card since she went to housekeeping in the chop-suey line, but I guess she'd come through if I gave her the proper noise. Paints-and-oils here has a slice out of him and blood on his shirt. If you'll stick for the game, I'll go deal her a hand."

"You mean?"

"Oh, we've been in a scrap and somebody

. tuck taken in his bright hopes of a life and it's up to us to skidoo. See?"

ouge and De Garcia shook their heads.

'You may think you look innocent," rerted the girl. "But crime is written all over your phiz. If Paints-and-oils hasn't killed some one in the last hour, it isn't due to his looks. Anybody that takes two squints at me will swallow any story of midnight murder I care to hand out. I haven't butted in on any such doings so far in my young existence, and the bulls haven't any dark glances for yours truly. But Miss Dennison is all to the good and I'm willing to be anything in the way of crime and having to get away, just to find her."

"I suppose this friend of yours can get us into the Secret Way and we will have some chance of finding or following Miss Dennison," said Frazer.

"You're right," replied Dot. "Come on."

They hastened along the street till they came to a dark alleyway lit only by a single big lantern. This lantern was half way down the block and its illumination fell on a heavily barred door covered with Chinese placards. Here Dot rapped lightly but hurriedly. A face appeared in a little grating almost hidden by a swinging shutter. To the face Dot addressed herself with such effect that the door was opened and the four of them found themselves in a dark and dirty hallway. Their silent guide took them past heavy curtains, through a steadily thickening atmosphere of drugged smoke. At the end of the passage their guide stopped. "Me fetchee," he muttered.

"Now you boys back me up," whispered Dot Travis. "Groan, you Indian!" she hissed at De Garcia.

Garcia groaned from sheer nervousness.

A figure appeared in the doorway — a white woman, though so painted, withered and boney, she might have been a piece of antique carving. Dot called out softly, "Say, Tillie, it's Dot, and I've got to skidoo with these boys. Trouble, Tillie. All sorts of it."

The woman stared at them with glazed eyes and Frazer saw that she had been smoking opium. "Anybody see you come here?" she demanded, motioning them in and closing the door.

"No one," replied Donal.

"Cut out the spiel, Tillie," cried Dot. "We've got to make a get-away. And we aren't going to leave here, either. Say, you aren't going to turn us down, are you?"

The woman seemed puzzled. Her roving eyes caught the stain on De Garcia's shirt and the end of the bandage beneath his chin. Instantly she became eagerly alive. "So that's your game now, is it?" she snarled at Dot. "I always thought you were the little sissy just from Sunday school. Hah!" she laughed mirthlessly.

"It won't do you much good if they get us in your place," said Dot quickly.

The woman blanched. Without another word she opened a door behind her and motioned them through. Frazer was the last to enter. The door closed after him. There was the snap of a heavy lock. They were in utter darkness.

"This is the devil!" ejaculated De Garcia. "Where is it that we are?"

Dot's voice almost broke as she replied, "God knows! This is the worst joint in Chinatown and Tillie's husband is the boss of it. Boys, I guess my little scheme didn't work the way it panned first off." Frazer was sure he heard her catch and strain back a sob.

"First thing, let us find out what kind of a place this is," he said, striking a match. By the feeble light his eye caught a bit of candle on the end of a table. Lighting this he led the search about the room. There was no door except the one by which they had entered.

"It has the smell most awful," groaned De Garcia, tapping excitedly on ceiling, walls, and floor with his stick.

"That's hollow!" shouted Rouge and plunged down on the floor to struggle with the iron ring of a trap door.

Once in the cellar they were still at a loss, but Dot, now that she was sure that the woman, Tillie, had accepted their story and tried to conceal them, insisted that they must go farther down. "We went a whole story below Kee Chow's basement," she told them.

Their search for an exit seemed vain until Rouge tried to move a barrel, lying, with its head out, on its side against the wall. The barrel was immovable. Rouge stooped

down and, crawling into the barrel, vanished. His voice drifted back, "Come on, you people."

A foot or so away from the barrel's mouth, Frazer found candles and matches carefully laid upon a brick, and they began picking their way down the winding passage. Dot Travis would not hear of a division of forces. "We'll see this thing through together," she insisted.

"It is we will die together," said De Garcia, groaning over his wound.

They proceeded a hundred yards arriving at a cross tunnel where Frazer's quick eye caught the glint of something in the earth of the floor. He picked it up. "That's one of her hair pins," said Dot, looking over his shoulder.

"But which way was she going?"

Dot peered down the tunnel, stooping to see its length. When she arose her finger was on her lip. "Sh—h!" she whispered. "There's someone up there."

Without a word Frazer knelt down, shading the candle that its light might not shine into the tunnel. But his scrutiny was fruitless. He started to rise and lifted the candle. It went out with a hiss. A violent report filled the tunnel with a crash of noise.

The four turned and fled. Stumbling along in the darkness, De Garcia's foot became entangled in a fold of the girl's cloak and they fell, without effort to save themselves, down a flight of steps. Donal and Rouge close behind De Garcia and the girl only saved themselves by extending hands to either wall. Carefully, step by step, Frazer went down. "Only four steps," he said. "They cannot be badly hurt."

De Garcia's voice came from the floor. "If I arrive out of this place I will kill some one!" he stuttered.

"If I arrive out, I'll quit slumming in Chinatown and stick to the Coast!" said Dot ruefully. "I've lost my hat, torn my skirt, skinned my knee, lost my temper and spoiled my nose."

Frazer relit a candle and surveyed the two on the planks as they picked themselves up and went on more circumspectly. "We must get on quickly," he said. "Our highbinder friend may take it into his head to follow."

When they had traversed seemingly endless miles of tunnel, which now and then twisted around some rocky obstacle, crept over or dipped below yet anc Rouge stopped them. "We must be u the bay. I smell clams."

At that instant a distant rumbling gr suddenly and sharply louder. The tunne seemed to quake and give. With a common impulse they dashed on and stumbled up a short flight of stone steps to find themselves on Meiggs Wharf just as a Belt Line engine trundled a string of heavily laden flat cars along the street behind them.

"Oh, will we ever find our wandering child?" gasped Dot hysterically.

III

THE fog was thick and gray, the breeze from the ocean, chill. Spent with the effort of her flight, Hope had no energy for further exertion and sank down upon a heap of shingles in the lee of a lumber pile. Here she was protected somewhat from the cold wind and could rest a while.

Out at the end of the wharf, a fog bell pealed mournfully and solemnly its warning to the moving vessels on the bay. Farther down the waterfront, a siren signal horn emitted doleful cries at regular intervals. Now and then a little engine puffed through the fog trailing long lines of freight cars back and forth. She could see its headlight through the shifting mist and it comforted her.

But she was too exhausted to care about her loneliness. She wanted rest and warmth and, most of all, sleep. Her eyes would close despite the cold and dampness which penetrated her clothing like rain. Her mind refused to grasp the horrors she had been through. Strangely enough all she could remember distinctly was the consoling voice of Donal Frazer. She went to sleep, there on the wharf, where the lumber boats from the northern pineries had unloaded their fragrant cargoes.

The cold awoke her very soon, a cold that cut through to the bone and caused her absolute pain. The wind had shifted to the west and was blowing with a keener chill. Her bulwark was useless now. She must move on, get to some place where there was a fire; else, she felt, she would die of exposure. She must search for those who had tried to be kind to her or for others who

l be kind. The few moments of repose leared her brain and replaced a bit of lost energy. She, who had never slept omfortably in her life, now stretched her amped limbs and beat the blood into her .iff hands. She crept from the lumber pile and stamped up and down the dock, swinging her arms across her breast, like a farmhand on a winter's morning.

There was still no sign of dawn in the East, though the fog was too thick to determine. She thought it must be near morning; the crowding events of the night seemed to have filled countless hours. She set out, down the long line of wharves, toward the light in the sky that betokened the city.

It was the sobbing of a woman that stopped her. At first, she thought it a distant sound from off the bay. She paused and waited for it again, and when it came, in unstifled sighs and moans, she almost fled.

"I cannot do it! I cannot do it!" The cries were some place in the fog and very close. "Let me die! I cannot kill myself!"

"Hello!" called Hope. Her voice was faint and trembling. The sobs did not cease. She was strongly inclined to run away, to leave behind this added terror of the night. If she had remained with Donal Frazer; if she had stayed where Rouge had put her in the dance hall; if she had kept firm hold of Dot's hand, she would not now be alone, half dead and hearing those heart-wrenching sobs. It was a woman in trouble. She could not desert her. The anguish in those moans came from a pain greater than any discomfort of her own. Her misfortunes shrank, to their rightful size before this sound of misery, and she gained courage from this greater pain. A misfortune that she might help shook off her growing lethargy.

Slowly, through the thick fog, Hope made her way out the long pier, following the sound of the weeping, and came to a little bundle of clothes and hair sprawled on the wet planking. She knelt down laying a soft hand on the shuddering shoulder. The mass of hair was flung back and a face looked into hers. A sea lantern on a tall pile, bravely coping with the murk, gave a diffused, feeble light. Indistinctly, Hope could see that the face was young and beautiful; that there were large dark eyes, rimmed by thick lashes; that the quivering lips were red and full. Though wet and bedraggled, the figure was lithe and straight. This was a woman worth saving, if beauty was of value to the world.

"What is the matter?" asked Hope of the eyes that were staring into her face with the amazement of one who sees a ghost.

"Gracious Mary! Ah, Madonna! You have been good to come at my prayers. Help me to die. Be kind to me that has loved. Give me the courage to die!"

Hope shook the shoulder in a very human way. "I am not the Madonna," she said sharply. "I am a girl like yourself and I will not help you to die. I will help you to live. What were you going to do?"

"Drown myself." Hope shivered. "But I did not dare. It was so cold and so black, the water. I must die! I must die!" and the little figure fell back on the plank, face to the boards, and sobbed.

"This will never do. Come, get up. We will go away from here." Hope shook the girl with an energy that finally brought her to her feet.

"I must die!" she kept sobbing.

"Then do it some other way. There are many ways more comforting than cold water. Take poison." A helpless impatience possessed Hope.

"It burns and stings so. No, I have thought many times and long about the way. I would stab myself, but the blood—oh——." The girl shivered.

"There is gas," suggested Hope, drawing the girl with her away from the water and toward the shore end of the pier. "Some people prefer gas. I have been told that it is very soothing."

"We use coal oil at our house," said the girl, beginning to walk of her own volition.

A wild desire to break into shrieks of laughter surged over Hope, while she wracked her brain to think of some other way that women take to end the journey of life. If she could keep this girl's mind from its purpose until she could lead her away from the water, she was sure she could dissuade her from jumping into the bay. With a substitute method of suicide she felt she would be able to cope.

"In Paris in the studios," she said, "they kill themselves with the fumes of charcoal. It is the pleasantest way. You just get ready in a nice pose and go to sleep, and when it is all over, you are beautiful to look at. Wouldn't it be lovely to die that way?" Hope had taught a class in Sunday School and her tone was of the sweet and mellow softness that used to calm the children's restlessness.

"Studios of Paris!" cried the girl, wrenching her arm from Hope's grasp. "Oh, I must die! I must—I must!" She ran swiftly back over the way they had come. Hope utterly dismayed chased wildly after her. It was a race for the water, but the girl, who sought its healing power for her pain, was no match for Hope in a burst of speed. Half way out the pier Hope caught her and throwing her arms about her bore her to the planks. For a little time they lay there panting and sobbing together, then with "I'll be good; I'll go with you," the girl arose and Hope led her away from the wharves.

"Now," said Hope, when she had recovered her breath, "I will take you home. Tell me where you live."

"It is no use. I tell you I *have* to die! Do you understand? There is no other way. I cannot go home. If it isn't the water then something else. Perhaps the charcoal would be the best."

"Tell me about it. I may be able to help," said Hope, gently. They sat on the edge of a sidewalk, Hope questioning, but the girl, whose sobbing had become a choking moan, held her hands against her breast and answered nothing. Trying to alleviate the pain, Hope mentioned all the reasons for life and told of her own desire to brighten, in any way that sympathy or money could, this darkness in the girl's life. Still the little figure of despair ceased not to moan. Suddenly she stood up. "Perhaps—just perhaps, I may not need to kill myself. You have been good—oh, so very good to me! I must find him—find Donal!" and she sped away into the fog.

Hope followed but was soon stumbling among railroad tracks and lost to all sense of direction. "She will find Donal," she repeated in a dazed whisper. "She will find Donal. Oh, why does not Donal find me."

IV

At last, wearily, Hope wandered in street of warehouses; dead, gray buildi. with shuttered windows and steel doors. Th sidewalk soon became a stairway, up whic. she climbed past poor homes where dogs barked at her and cats abandoned their nocturnal rendezvous to glide into the mist. The fog enwrapped her in dreary loneliness.

Suddenly, above her and far away to the right, she heard the voice of a man singing. The air was one from Il Trovatore. She held her breath to listen as the invisible singer came nearer. Soon she could hear the words, sung in Italian, in a strong, sweet tenor. The man was braving the morning winds with the power of his lungs, singing lustily into the fog. And he could sing.

Hope, whose opera season was a round of box parties, knew music well, was able to appreciate this superlative effort of the night. When the last note died away, she began the ascent of another flight of steps. Halfway up the singing started again, this time close above her on the steps. Again the strong sensation of being in a dream possessed her. Now the toreador's solo from Carmen was hurled out with sweetness and with fury. It was good to hear such music after her night of terrors. When it ceased, the singer still invisible in the fog, she leaned forward, as she would have done in her opera box, and applauded.

"Hulloa, who's there? Who calls?" The question came in the sweet tones of the singer.

"It is a stranger—a lady who is lost," replied Hope in Italian. "Will you help me?"

"Wait till I come," was the response.

There was a clattering of metal and out of the darkness and mist came a man who carried at either end of a yoke, across his shoulders, a great tin can. In his hand was a quart measure. He was short of stature, thick-set, black bearded. Drops of moisture dripped from his slouch felt hat and his high rubber boots were shiny with dampness. "But you are American," he cried as he approached near enough to see Hope. "What are you doing up here this hour of the morning?"

"I have lost my way and my friends. I

, cold and tired. It has been a night ffering for me and I simply must find .ce to warm myself and rest. I have no ney but I can get money to-morrow. I ll reward you well if you will help me .ow."

She was pleading with him, unconsciously, leaning forward with hands clasped and eyes upraised to his face.

"You sing?" he said abruptly stating a fact more than a question.

"Yes. Not as you sing, but a little."

Her voice told him more than the words. "Ah! you *can* sing. Do you know the duet 'Addio senza Rancor' from the La Boheme?" and he hummed its opening notes. She knew and she sang. Standing there on a landing in the stairway sidewalk up Montgomery Street at four o'clock of a spring morning in San Francisco, Hope Dennison, as in a dream, sang Mimi to a milkman's Rudolfo. Sang as she had never sung in any drawing room. Before her was the broad, squat Italian, but she saw only the steady gray eyes of Donal Frazer and sang to them. She forgot her miseries as their voices mingled and drifted with the fog, and her deep breaths sent the blood warmly through her veins.

When they had finished, the milkman, who had set his cans down by the fence, took off his dripping hat and made her a low bow. "You are grand, signorina, and I am your slave. Come. I will take you where you may have fire and rest, and it is near here. It is at the House of a Hundred Steps. No, do not faint at the name. You are already most of the way to the top. We will go there at once and some day, perhaps, you will let me hear you sing again." He picked up the yoke and led her back to where a flight of steps ran up from the street into the fog. They were broad steps of stone cut out of the solid rock of the hill. "Will you take my arm?" requested the milkman.

"Thank you, signor. I have traveled a thousand miles and a thousand steps, or it seems so to me. Will there be a woman at the house at the end?"

"Woman? Ah, no. I could not take you to the women of my country in the quarter, the women I know. They would not understand. You are in trouble and I take you to a good man. He is not a priest, but he is, like him, to be admired for his goodness. There is not a dog, be it ever so flea-bitten, that is turned away hungry from that house. Our children love him, though he is not of our language or our religion. He is kind and brave and true; you may trust him as you would your own mother. It is but a few steps farther and you are at his door."

It was but a few steps, but they were hard steps for Hope's wearied feet. The milkman supported her, almost carrying her to the landing before the door. She leaned against the railing while he rapped a long and hard tattoo on the panels.

They were above the thinning fog. The bay lay below them, so near it seemed a stone might be tossed into it from where they stood and the lights of the ships at anchor could be seen as shaded glows. From this height, Hope beheld the silhouette of the buildings in the centre of the city, the skyscrapers that she looked down upon. It was all below her, the horrors of the night, the dance hall, Chinatown and the wharves.

The Italian was pounding on the door with his measure but the house remained quiet. There was a light turned low showing dimly through the curtained windows. "Misere! he is away," cried the milkman; and Hope's heart sank.

It was cheering to hear his "Never mind. We can get in, for his door is never locked. See? Here is the latch string out for us or for any one who is weary." He thrust the door open and went within, Hope following.

In a large room a lamp was burning low on a centre table. The milkman turned up the wick and Hope looked about her. A huge stone fireplace, where a log was smouldering, was her first impression—the prospect of heat. The brightening light showed her that she was in the workroom of a student. The walls, where great beams framed the oiled redwood, were lined with rows of books, while on the tables more books were heaped. There was a desk with a typewriter and sheaves of paper, blank and manuscript, lying loose, a telephone on a stand in the corner, rude but comfortable men's chairs here and there, a piano at one side and a long, low cushioned seat before the two wide windows overlooking the bay.

The milkman was replenishing the fire while Hope surveyed her surroundings. He evidently had no difficulty in finding his way about, for he came from the rear of the house with an armful of wood and kindling and blew the coals into a lively flame. "Take off the wraps and this will soon dry you off," he said, warming his hands. "For me, I have to continue the round to supply the milk. Otherwise many of my people will oblige to drink their breakfast coffee black, which is not good. This house is yours, signorina. I speak for the owner," he continued with a smile, "for he would say the same, but better said. You may pull the latch cord within and be sure of privacy. Good morning, I go." Bowing low the gallant milkman backed through the door.

Alone, a roof above her, a fire before her, Hope proceeded to make herself comforable. In a side room she found a man's lounging robe, which she borrowed and soon had her wet coat and over-skirt steaming before the hearth. It was a cozy home, she thought sleepily, as she rolled the biggest padded chair where the warmth of the fire would reach it. Then she turned the lamp out and, as she did so, looked from the window. The East was red with the dawn. The fog was gone save for thin shreds shifting close on the bosom of the bay which now was beginning to dimple with the pink of the sky's reflection. She could see the moving figures of men making sail on an anchored bark. Beyond were the hills, blue hills with their summits crested with radiance. Her night was gone. She sank into the chair, her eyes closed and she slept.

V

"I have been the long hours without a single damn drink!" De Garcia sank down on a stack of fish nets on Meiggs wharf with this mournful and sincere diatribe against fate. His companions found places where they, too, might rest; and the manner, in which they lurched into comfortable positions, told of the exertions they had put forth to find Hope Dennison. Dot Travis, used to her all night rounds in saving those who could be saved from the Barbary Coast, was the freshest of the four, but she too was glad to rest after the second jour the night under Chinatown.

"Ah, this love of humanity, which my soul, will some day be the death me," continued the painter, who hated t silence of concentrated thought. "Here a.. I, wounded and smarty, hunting through these holes in the underneath for a Van Dyke woman. It is a cr-ime! Van Dyke, he never could paint with his cold Flemish blood. He was not Whistler nor the great Velasquez. They are ar-rt! They have the insides."

"Oh, shut up, Garcia!" Rouge interrupted.

"Please let him go on and tell me," cried Dot. "He's grand. It's like the spieler at the Sultan's Harem, only more so."

"So it is love of humanity that is driving you to these exertions, Garcia?" asked Rouge.

"It is my gr-reat hear-rt that beats for every one; yes, even for that little devil who stab me wrong with the knife and cause me to sting in the chest. And you, Rouge, why do you weary the legs over this girl which you do not know?"

"Conscience. I left her alone and in such a place. It is all my fault," and Rouge dropped his head in his hands.

"Buck up, Red," said Dot, "I'm the villian, with the cigarette, in the mellerdrammer. I took the lady from you and put her into the cru-el, cruel world." Suddenly her slang dropped from her. "There was a little girl back of that perfectly beautiful face of hers. It made me remember—and I had almost forgotten that goodness existed in this world." Dot's voice wavered.

Still Donal Frazer sat staring straight before him into the fog.

"Ah, yes," said De Garcia, "she was the cold beauty of the north. I paint the palms of the southlands where the su- kisses those trees. Velas——"

"Shut up!" roared Donal, jumping to his feet. "Do you want to drive me mad, all of you, with your maunderings? Here I am trying to plan out some way to get track of her—pray God she is safe. Come on, or get to your beds, I am going to find Hope Dennison!"

They sprang to their feet in astonishment, for Donal Frazer was not prone to violence.

was swinging off toward the city, and y ran to catch up with him. "We will k by you, Don, wait!" called Rouge.

"Where is it to be now?" asked De Garcia.

"The police. We will have those tunnels and underground opium dens searched. If she is in Chinatown, we will find her. I am going to the police and tell the Chief the story. We cannot stop to worry over the publicity now."

"We'll stop at Kee Chow's and see if he's returned. He's better than the Chinatown squad of police, if we can get hold of him, and he'll do more for me than the Chief will do for you," said Dot earnestly.

The North Beach morning cars had not begun to run, so they hurried along the wharves, thus saving themselves the climb over the hill. In silence they skirted the bluffs of the hills and turned into the Embarcadero. "Listen!" said Rouge as he suddenly paused.

High above them, beautiful as the voice of angels, rose the sad and pleading strains of "Boheme." Softened by the distance and fog, yet clear in quality of tone, it rose and mounted higher, male and female voice in perfect blending, to the final chord. Rouge removed his hat and stood, his eyes raised in adoration. When the last note died, Dot broke into tears, almost hysterical in their bitterness. "She is with them—the angels are singing!" she sobbed.

"Angels! Damn! It is Riandardo—the man," spluttered De Garcia. "The woman? Ah, she I do not know, but she can sing. She have the hear-rt and the blood which pound through the veins. She is the artiste!"

"But singing here—at such a time?" questioned Rouge.

"He is the man of milk, as he go his beat, when he is where that people do not mind that they awaken to beautiful music—my people, the gr-reat Latins, who love beauty —then he sing. But she who sing Mimi so rich and true, her I do not know."

"Was there—did you—was there not something in her voice——?" Frazer was talking confusedly and gazing upward toward the crest of the hill. "I thought it sounded like her."

"Like Miss Dennison?" There was blank astonishment in Rouge's tones. "You have never heard her sing, Don?"

"No—of course not—but as I imagine her voice would be if she sang. I am crazy, I guess."

"You are tired out, Donal."

"She? That Van Dyke woman sing like that? Oh, no, my Don. Nevair, nevair! It is the women of the South who sing like the Mimi, the Carmen, the Lucia." But Don was hurrying on again and did not listen.

At Kee Chow's tea house, the Chinese attendant nodded mysteriously to Dot and she followed him to a corner away from the others. When she returned her face wore a smile, the first since she had heard the duet from "Boheme."

"There's news from the front," she cried. "And while it isn't the whole bolt of silk, it's buttons and trimmings. Miss Dennison is not in Chinatown, down stairs or up. Kee has sent me word that she went through, got out. He hasn't got her card with her present address, but, anyhow, she is away from his yellow friends. Ain't that grand? He's still on her trail."

"Are you sure you can believe him?" asked Frazer.

"Believe him? He's a whiter yellow man than any white man I'm confidential with. He wouldn't lie to me to save his pigtail. Don't worry about the veracity of this item. Rejoice! She's safe!"

Her conviction and enthusiasm were contagious. "What is next to be done?" asked Rouge as they went down the stairs. "I am as hungry as a deer hound. I vote we eat."

"And drink," added De Garcia.

"At nine, I'm to come back for further reports. Kee is to get word to me then. I suppose we might as well spend some of the interval playing with a knife and fork," said Dot.

Even Donal Frazer was imbued with Dot Travis' faith and confidence in Kee Chow's ability to find Hope Dennison. He turned to her and a smile relaxed the strained lines of his face. "Then, Miss Dot, I invite you to breakfast with us at the House of the Hundred Steps," he said.

VI

"I MUST find Donal."

The thought was an inspiration to Ros-

aria. If there was any path, that she might take leading away from death, Donal Frazer would know and guide her. Was he not the refuge of all troubled Bohemia? Had he not saved Pazzoni, when the sheriff put locks on the door of his studio and read legal papers at him that would not let him get his canvases, his brushes or colors? Had he not taken little Jimmy Clinch out of prison when he pulled down the Coggswell monument because it was bad art? If anyone could make smooth her rough way, Donal was he. So she broke away from this girl who talked a different language than the studios and ran to Frazer's home.

He was not there. Of course he would be with De Garcia, beside his dead friend's body. She made a frightened journey, through black alleys back to the studio. Prying with startled eyes around each corner before venturing, she approached the building from the rear and looked up at its window, the window where De Garcia had entered to meet her knife. It was dark and her worst fears were confirmed. They had taken him to the Morgue. If she had only wounded, not killed, there would be a light by which the watchers sat. She sat down in the mire of the alley, heedless of discovery and wept.

Tragically she reviewed the details of her fury. He had neglected her to paint the foolish girl, from the Institute, who rhapsodized equally over his eyes, his rings and his pictures. And finally he crowned insult with injury: his canvas of dancing Bacchantes, now on the easel, did not hold her own fair, slim figure.

To cease painting her? Ah, that was to Kill! She had come to his studio this night, finding on the easel the new picture, sketched in. She recognized most of the figures—girls who, compared with her, were as the duck to the swan, the cow to the deer. And she had been seized by all the furies. She had always been in all his paintings, frequently the reason for them. To be told that she was not needed, when there were Bacchantes to be done on a huge canvas in oils, had driven her over the edge of despair.

But now this insult was forgotten. She could think of her painter-lover only as he had been through the years she had known him—kind, generous and proud of beauty. The feel of his arms about her the only thing on earth that she desi now, and she wept bitter tears that she ha done this thing.

Day came as she sat beneath the window. A patrolman, passing, saw her there in the alley and pulled her to her feet with no gentle hand. "Get along home now," he said gruffly. She fled in affright. "I must find Donal," she repeated to herself as she crept through deserted streets toward his house. She dared not take a car. The police would be hunting for her and she must see Donal. Find him before they caught her—dragged her to prison.

Kee Chow, highbinder and tea-house proprietor, trailed as the Indian trails, by those imperceptible signs that are left in the passing of the pursued. He found the place in the tunnels where Hope had fallen exhausted. From there, step by step, with many retracings, he followed the passages she had taken to the outlet on the wharves near the Chinese Detention shed. By a passing fisherman Coolie, he sent word back to Dot and continued on the trail.

It was enough for Kee Chow that Littee Missee had begged him to find her friend. That absence from his restaurant after murder had been done, placed him under suspicion by the police was of secondary importance. Littee Missee had cried real tears from eyes he had never seen dimmed. He would risk the rope to bring back her smiles.

Hope Dennison never knew how many infinitesimal fractions of her outer self she left behind her that night, but Kee Chow found bits of fur from her jacket on the bundle of shingles where she had rested, threads from her gown on the wharf where she had struggled with Rosaria. On the stairs, where she had begun the climb up Telegraph Hill, was the impress of little muddy feet. Then a glove where she had sung the duet. On the stone steps, the marks of her damp and dragging skirts were plain to the Chinaman's keen eye.

Riandardo finished his deliveries of milk in silence. He could sing no more this morning after that inspired duet. But he thought much and wondered more about the Mimi whose voice had been true. If his figure had not grown so broad with the

years, if his voice had not harshened with the fogs of the sea—ah, would it not be glorious to take her to sing with him as he used to sing when he was a bright star in the operatic firmament of the Central and Southern Americas! It could never be for he was become squat and husky voiced. He might see her again and maybe she would sing for him or with him. It would be his excuse that he would tell the kindly owner of the House of the Hundred Steps that he had taken the liberty of giving his home to the signorina. Yes, he would go back when the sun was higher, and she had finished her sleep, and beg her to sing.

Snuggled together in a corner of the almost empty street car, the tired artists and the Salvation Army girl dozed, while Donal Frazer kept watch. As his street neared he shook them awake and they left the car, Rouge and De Garcia ahead. They had taken only a few steps when they were stopped by a startled cry.

"Garcia! Garcia! my Garcy! Can it be thou and alive!"

"Little Rose! Surely it is I, your own Garcia. Come to these arms which ache that they may hold thee."

Rouge and Frazer turned their backs upon this meeting of the Latin lovers, but Dot, filled with curiosity, peeped.

Rosaria, convinced that this was her Garcia in the flesh, flew to him with outstretched arms. "Thank the saints that they have preserved thee to me!" she sobbed. "Ouch!" cried the painter, as she flung herself on his bandaged breast. "It is the pain —the pain of the stab, my little one. No, do not draw away—I love this suffering which you give me. All night have I search to tell of the forgiveness. Surely, yes, I forgive."

"And you will paint me in the picture? O, Garcia, why did you leave me out of the picture which is seven feet long?"

"Those Bacchantes? O, little Rose, do you not know that they must be of a fatness and coarse? Ah, you are the delicate, the refined. You are not fitted for these coarse pictures."

After the embrace that accompanied this diplomatic explanation, Don and Rouge broke up the treaty of peace by greeting the prodigal. Then together, De Garcia's arm around the waist of his Spanish sweetheart, they all climbed the steps to Frazer's house. They arrived at the door and were about to enter when there came a call from a clump of eucalypti near by and a queer figure in flowing shirt and baggy trousers came running toward them. "I flound him lady!" cried Kee Chow. "O Littee Missee, I flound him lady!"

Donal Frazer had pulled the latch string opening the door. In a chair by the dying fire, wrapped in his own robe, deep in slumber, reclined Hope Dennison, the morning sunlight making a golden aura of her hair.

"Now what do you know about that?" gasped Dot Travis.

VII

"LET HER sleep," was Donal's dictate and they willingly obeyed him. Quietly they looked in at the door and assured themselves that it was really she who was so peacefully sleeping in the House of a Hundred Steps. Then they gathered in the big kitchen at the back where they would not disturb the lovely usurper of the house.

Kee Chow explained how he had trailed Hope and having found her had sent a messenger to bring Littee Missee to her, and, having finished his tale, began to prepare breakfast.

Donal Frazer stood at the door listening. "Hush, she is moving about," he whispered.

Hope had awakened to look about the strange room in great wonder at finding herself there. Then she remembered and one by one the experiences of the night came back to her. She sighed wistfully for she was still lost, penniless and friendless in this unknown city. As she turned to the window her eyes fell upon a picture of De Garcia. There could be no mistake. It was a full length photograph; just so he had looked before he climbed the fire-escape to —what?

The beneficent but absent owner was evidently a friend of the painter, she thought. Through him, if he would but come, she might learn of De Garcia and his friends. She realized that even the mystery and horror of the artist's last cry, did not give him first place in her interest. She wanted most to learn of Donal Frazer, if he was searching for her or had thought of her

after she was gone. She picked up one of the books on the table and turned to the fly-leaf. There on the inner cover she saw a book-plate: ex libris Donal Frazer. Hurriedly she took up book after book. All were marked with the same name.

The opening of the door caused her to look up. Donal Frazer was coming toward her, white of face but in his eyes a look that enwrapped her with warmth, comfort and safety. Unconsciously her hands went forth to meet him and a feeling of having reached home came over her.

"You are safe—safe!" he whispered hoarsely. "Can you ever forgive me for the horrors you have been through?" A flush spread across his face reddening the temples. He stammered and his hands gripped hers painfully. Hope's eyes filled with little dancing glints of light.

"You forgive me all the fright of this night? I can never forgive myself," his eyes pleaded.

Frankly, honestly her face lifted to his. "I think," she said, "I have found friends," her voice halted shyly on the word, "in this frightful night that I would go through more nights of terror to retain."

The door creaked and Dot's voice sounded through the crack. "O, Lord High Chamberlain, mayn't we come in? There are five of us dying in the ante-chamber to greet Her Majesty. Let 'er 'umble servants enter."

"Come in, come in, my friends!" cried Hope eager with excitement. She was still in Donal's robe, her hair loosened in her sleep was tumbling about her shoulders but she neither knew nor cared. They rushed in, Dot, Rouge, Rosaria and De Garcia, and fairly flung themselves upon her with joyous exclamations and questionings, while Kee Chow, looked in from the kitchen, smiling blandly. Clasping hands they danced wildly about her. And Hope Dennison, the cultured, the carefully reared, took Dot Travis, the Salvation Army lass of doubtful past, in her arms and kissed her full upon the lips. "My dear little friend!" she said warmly.

Then came a clattering knock at the door. "Who is there?" called Donal.

"Riandardo," came the answer and Hope recognized the voice of her musical milkman.

"Come in!" she cried. "You, too, my friend! Ah, we are together now—all my friends of the small hours!"

Big Game Teddy Might Have Spared

Mr. Roosevelt having captured the attention of every one in every corner of the globe, it was not surprising that tads of five and six years were agog with his invasion of Europe. A little girl said to her grandfather, "It was too bad that the King died before Mr. Roosevelt got to England, wasn't it, grandpa?" and her grandfather agreed that it was a great pity, but her small brother seemed plunged in deep thought by the remark, and after shaking his head with a mighty sigh remarked, "Maybe he wouldn't have shot him, anyhow."

A Saving Anyway

O'Brien: So the landlord lowered the rint for yez. He'll save money at that.
Casey: How so?
O'Brien: Shure, it's less he'll be losin' when ye don't pay it.

The Student

"You look awfully tired, young man," said the benevolent looking woman to the young man with the books under his arm.
"Yes, ma'am," replied the student, "I'm studying for a doctor."
"It's a shame! Why don't you let the doctor study for himself?"

THE SPIRIT OF THE SERVICE

By DONALD FRANCIS McGREW

Author of "The Blood That Binds," etc.

IN WHICH A CYNICAL YOUNG HEIRESS LEARNS SOMETHING FROM LIEUTENANT GORDON MACDONALD OF THE PHILIPPINE CONSTABULARY AND A MORO CHIEF; AND THE SERVICE IN SPITE OF MACHINE GUNS AND AN AMBUSCADE MAKES A REAL SOLDIER

WHEN a youth of twenty-four has been more than usually hard hit by the charms of a young woman, and finds in a crisis that she has little or nothing worth mentioning beneath the surface, he is more than apt to make a blithering ass of himself. But Lieutenant-of-Philippine-Constabulary Gordon MacDonald had a distinct horror of resembling a blithering ass on any occasion. While he was not laughing and rollicking like a cow-puncher headed for town, his keen face showed no trace of sorrow; and as he rode into Camp Keithley, he softly hummed a tune. It ran something like this:

"Her French ways are all a bluff,
She's as French as Paddy Duff,
I wonder where she gets that stuff—
She lives down in our alley!"

He was still humming the air when, having left his horse at the battery stables, he rounded the corner of the ordnance storehouse on his way to headquarters. There he broke off, and stopped short with an ejaculation of surprise.

Not more than ten paces away, a young woman sat on a camp stool, facing an artist's easel. In front of her was an exceptionally tall Moro warrior, naked save for his breech cloth, and posed in the act of swinging a wicked four-foot bolo. Possessing a pair of shoulders that any athlete would have envied, he tapered from head to ankles like some beautifully proportioned statue. Crouched before him, in an ecstacy of fear and pleading, was a Moro girl in a purple robe. Her blue-black hair, falling in cascades over her smooth brown shoulders, touched the ground on either side.

He looked at the pair only once, and then his eyes returned to the artist. He would not have called her beautiful, as the word is commonly applied. There was a severely classical symmetry in the lines of the long sharp nose, the firm masculine chin, the wide gray eyes. Hers was an unusual face. More, it was an attractive and even a fascinating face. It radiated a keen intelligence. Its coloring was exquisite. And never, Gordon reflected, had he seen such contrasts in a feminine countenance. While it suggested many masculine traits, it nevertheless gave one the impression that she was filled to her finger tips with all the subtlety and artistry of womanhood.

So he stared, and kept on staring, until she looked up.

"Well," she inquired in low contralto tones, "may we go on, or may we——"

Gordon whipped off his cap, and stepped forward with profuse apologies.

"You're pardoned," she said, favoring him with a smile. Her tone was cordial, for he was a prepossessing boy. "I was somewhat nettled, because the colonel promised me that every one should be kept away from this spot until I finished the sitting. Ali Dhau doesn't like to pose when the white warriors are watching. However, I suppose he didn't tell you, Mr.—or is it Captain——"

"MacDonald. Lieutenant. I do not belong here, but to the constabulary. That is why I hadn't heard, you see."

She looked at him now with frank admiration.

"So you're Lieutenant MacDonald of Pedro's Pass?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, please! I hope they haven't been telling you a lot of rot about that."

"Saving a whole brigade with but one company is not rot," she said, rising to extend her hand. "At any rate," with a little deprecatory laugh at her unusual forwardness, "I've heard so much about that fight that I feel almost acquainted."

Now this would have delighted any young officer who still loved to jingle his spurs. But Gordon, disliking flattery for the very reason that he liked it immensely, grew visibly embarrassed. He mumbled inarticulately, and turned to the Moros.

They had relaxed from their pose, and the warrior, caught in a foolish act by a fighting man of the Americanos, was grinning sheepishly. But even as he warmed to the boyish smile, Gordon noticed that Ali Dhau's left hand was covering a spot on the biceps of the right arm.

"What tribe is this man from?" he asked quickly.

"I have no idea. Why?"

"Did you see any mark on his right arm?"

"Why, yes. Some sort of brand—a crescent and a star, I think."

"I thought so when he covered his arm. You see, he belongs to the Las Balos tribe, a badly wanted lot of outlaws."

"So that's why I had such a hard time getting him to uncover for this picture! I thought he wanted to come to this quiet spot because of his pride."

"Well, that probably had something to do with it, too."

"As I found out when I started to hire him. The woman finally persuaded him. She said they needed money badly."

"No doubt they do. You see, before the Americans came, no warrior of the Las Balos tribe ever tilled a field. They depended on raids to supply them with labor, and they practically ruled this section of the country. Now it is different. Before my company was formed, a mountain battery tried to teach them that slave-taking is wrong by shelling their barrio. So, rather than surrender, they retreated to some mountain lair—which we can't find, by the way—and as the tilling is exceptionally poor, they've been hard put to it for subsistence. Otherwise I do not think that you could have induced him to pose at all."

"How interesting!" exclaimed the girl. "Proud highland warrior! Too much of the blue blood to do anything beneath the dignity of a fighting man!" Then she gave vent to a little cynical laugh, and looked away over the mountains. "I'd like to find a real character like that," she said. "Even if he were only a savage. But the fact remains that he did take the money for this posing. Like every one else, he has his price."

Gordon turned to look at her. For the first time he noted how clearly defined were the outer and inner edges of her lips. His instincts always sought a medium between mawkish sentiment and cynicism, and a display of either was never to his taste. Coming from a girl, the latter was especially displeasing.

"I can't say that I've found that to be true in my experience," he said, turning back to Ali Dhau.

"You'd find it so if you deliberately set out to prove the theory!"

Gordon seemed not to hear. He was eyeing the Moro's shoulders with a prospective air, and suddenly he asked pardon, and stepped forward.

"Thou art of the Las Balos!" he bluntly declared, using the patois.

The young warrior's left hand dropped to join the right on the hilt of the bolo. He neither affirmed nor denied, but every muscle in his body grew tense in readiness.

"It is not in my heart to arrest thee," Gordon calmly assured him. "I have come to ask thee—who take money for a woman's work—to take more money for a man's work in the constabulary."

Ali Dhau scowled, then hung his head and dug the big toe of his right foot into the ground. Gordon saw him look furtively at the woman.

"The soldiers of the constabulary get many *pesos* and much *chow* for fighting," he continued. "Wouldst thou carry the rifle of a man with men who conquered Dato Pedro, O Ali Dhau?"

"Dato Balos has no spawn who serve the Americanos!" cried the woman, her black eyes blazing. "Ali Dhau, if thou goest, thy dato will have thy blood."

"I give thee my word," said Gordon, addressing the man and ignoring the woman, "if thou partakest of my salt, no harm shall come to thee from Dato Balos."

"If thou goest, thou shalt not take me!" raged the Moro girl.

Ali Dhau dropped his head still lower.

"Ha!" cried Gordon. "Is a warrior of the Las Balos to be led as a carabao with a ring in his nose—by a woman?"

The shot went home. "*Shusan mu pogaree!*" gritted the Moro; and he raised the bolo above the American's head.

The girl Moutina laughed ecstatically; Miss Camden, the artist, emitted a faint cry; but Gordon smiled unconcernedly into the bloodshot eyes.

"A warrior is what he proveth himself," he said quietly.

The light in the Moro's eyes flickered. Suddenly he lowered his bolo and extended it, hilt first, to Gordon.

"Before thou takest it," he said, "I have but one request. Wilt thou ask me to betray the hiding place of my people?"

"That I will not, Ali Dhau. Thou hast my word."

"Then I will prove myself a good soldier for thee, O Teniente," he said, placing the bolo in Gordon's hands.

Moutina pushed forward. "When I have spoken as I have spoken?" she cried.

Ali Dhau faced her with an angry growl. "Since the Sultan made thee a free woman, thou hast talked too much. Because thou hast weaved strange stories with thy feet within his court, thinkest thou that thou canst change a warrior's heart? Light of the heavens art thou to me, but first I am a man. Thou comest with me."

The girl raised herself on the balls of her feet, and placing her hands on her hips, twisted sideways in a truly Oriental expression of contempt. She looked him up and down, then spat upon the ground in her rage.

"Pig!" she cried. "When I spoke for money in the matter of this picture foolishness, I did not think of betraying our people. I go with no Las Balos who taketh money to fight his own tribe."

With a grunt of rage, Ali Dhau leaped toward her, but Moutina, jumping backward, wheeled and fled down the path toward Marahui.

"Thou canst beat me only when thou art a man of thine own people!" she called back over her shoulder.

For a space the future of Gordon's recruit hung in the balance. He had taken no formal oath, and even his great rage could not hide the intense longing with which he eyed her departing back. He ran a matter of ten paces toward her before he remembered, and returned to face his new commander.

"See what much kindness hath brought me!" he grunted. "That is what a man receiveth when he giveth ear to the talk of a freed woman, O Teniente."

"Why didst thou not beat her long ago?" asked Gordon, knowing the breed.

If a Moro can be said to blush, this one did. At least he avoided Gordon's eyes, and dug his big toe into the dirt.

"Allah hath not permitted me to understand this foolishness which hath come over me," he mumbled in shamed and perplexed tones.

Gordon's soft brown eyes grew a trifle misty as he smiled down at bowed black head. Had he not known his man, he would have patted him on the shoulder. Instead he only said: "Allah alloweth none of us to understand that, O Ali Dhau," and when the Moro straightened, his own face had resumed a grave, business-like aspect.

"I have business that will keep me two hours," he said. "At the end of that time we will depart." Then, as the Moro ac-

knowledged the order, he turned back to Miss Camden.

"I have enlisted this man in the constabulary," he informed that somewhat breathless young woman. "And I think that I owe you several apologies."

Dorothy Camden thought so, too. She was not at all used to being neglected, nor was she especially fond of losing "subjects." But for the moment she was thinking of Ali Dhau's upraised bolo.

"Possibly I can get another model," she said. "Never mind that." And she looked at him with something of admiration and a great deal of puzzled wonder. "That was the first time I ever saw an officer face a very tight little moment. Will you tell me why you did it?"

Again Gordon flushed. At any other time he might have replied flippantly, stating that the government gave beautiful leather medals once a year for these performances. Just now her direct gaze was disconcerting.

"Well," he stammered, "a fellow couldn't very well make an ass of himself by running away, could he?"

"No, of course not. But you might have jumped back, and drawn your pistol—prepared to defend yourself, you know. *You* just stood still and smiled. *Why* did you do it?"

Gordon was growing decidedly uncomfortable. He saw that he was not going to put this extraordinary young woman off with jokes about leather medals.

"There is only one real basic reason," he said as easily as he could. "It all helps to make Ali Dhau and his kind better soldiers. A soldier can't very well look up to an officer's uniform if the officer in it allows the yellow in him to run away with his head."

"Yes, yes, I can reason that out, too. But what is it the government offers you for taking such chances? What is it that you expect to get out of it?"

It was then that Gordon fully sensed how far she was from understanding men who give the best of themselves for the pure love of the work. Her standards were entirely materialistic, and in analyzing the psychology of people's actions, she invariably sought for a material motive. She measured life only as a period of time in which one could grasp all manner of pleasures. Therefore it seemed a very dear thing to place at stake while adding one mere soldier to the constabulary.

"I'm afraid," he said at last, "that I could not very well explain that without appearing too damnably—oh, well, sentimental, and all that rot, you know. I get a great deal out of it, though not exactly what you mean." Then with a little laugh to hide his own embarrassment, "I'll tell you. If you're here a year from now, ask Ali Dhau. He'll be able to explain it to you by then."

Miss Camden was still puzzled and skeptical. "I doubt it," she smiled. "I've seen his initial motive. He went into the constabulary for money, and no doubt he'll stay for the same reason."

"He went in for money," acknowledged Gordon, "but he'll stay for something else." Then, as the provincial governor loomed up in the distance, he took advantage of his advent to plead urgent business.

Thus he extricated himself from a rather uncomfortable situation. Later he rode off toward his hill station with Ali Dhau. He told himself that he had forgotten the strange artist, and to prove it he hummed a verse which ran as follows:

"Now the bos'un's mate was a man see-date,
But fond of amusement, too;
So he played hop-scotch with the starboard watch
While the captain tickled the crew.
And the cook was Dutch and behaved as such,
For the diet he fed the crew-ew-ew
Was a number of tons of hot cross buns,
Served up with sugar and glue!"

Nevertheless, in the days that followed, he was annoyed to find that Dorothy Camden's face occasionally came up before him. This was not surprising, since she was so unusual as to be almost unique; but no woman had any right to make such a distinct impression upon him after his recent experience. Furthermore, he kept their different points of view in mind, and determined not to "make a bally ass of himself again, even if he did happen to be lonely."

He had forgotten, however, to take Dorothy Camden into his calculations. This young woman had been left an enormous income at an immature age, and among

other things, she had attracted enough men in her tempestuous career to make her somewhat contemptuous. Now that the shoe appeared to be fitting the other foot, she began to realize some of the sensations of "a bad little girl" who cannot always have just what she wants when she wants it.

"If you're honest," she said to the blushing face in her glass, "you'll admit—you'll admit——" Then she called herself a sentimental fool, and declared that she would pack and leave at once—and went directly down stairs to tell Captain and Mrs. Haynes that she liked the scenery and the savage characters very, very much. She liked them so much, in fact, that she intended to fit up a little studio and stay on with them indefinitely.

But the hastily erected studio seemed to have little attraction for Gordon. During the next two months he rode into Keithley but three times. Naturally he called at the studio on his rounds, but some other officer was usually there, and he never made the slightest attempt to see her alone. When chance did throw them together, he shunned all comparisons of personal viewpoints which pave the way to more intimate understanding.

This enraged her as much as the change which was creeping over her against her will. She sensed the opinion that he had formed of her, and it hurt. She was not selfish at heart, but generous to a fault. She wanted to believe the things that this boy stood for, but all her experience had substantiated the opposite. Even the regular officers—who abhorred sentimentalism—said quite frankly that they soldiered only in the hope of some day replacing a man higher up. They took chances because it was necessary. She never saw the young officers touch the colors when alone, and neither had she watched an officers' mess giving a toast to the Service. Consequently she could not believe other than she did. And as this served as a barrier between them, she hated it. She also hated herself for caring, and him for the altogether sweet and courteous position he had taken up behind it.

At their third meeting, some of it blazed out before she could check it. "Do you know," she exclaimed, "that you are altogether impossible, Mr. MacDonald?"

Gordon eyed her in amazement. "I? I don't quite understand."

She had meant his blindness; but she martialed her woman's wits to hide her error. "It is because I am so interested in the natives and the work of the constabulary," she said quickly. "And you, who are in close touch with them, seldom tell me anything about them. You haven't even told me of Ali Dhau."

"I'm sorry. I'm sure I've been quite stupid. Ali Dhau is still with us."

"He likes the money, does he?"

Gordon smiled at this little shaft. "Oh, yes, of course." Then in an attempt to chance the drift, he said, "He figured in an interesting little affair with my sergeants just after he reached the company."

"Tell me about it, please."

"Why, he belonged to the Las Balos outlaws, as I told you. And of course he knows of their retreat. So my sergeants came to me and said, 'Teniente, let us give this man the water cure and make him tell where it is.' "

"And?"

"I told them no. I had promised Ali Dhau that I would not make him tell against his will."

"But wouldn't the capture of the Las Balos be a tremendous feather in your cap?"

"Naturally."

"Then why on earth did you make him such a promise?"

"Great Scot, can't you see that? How could I ask a man to be a traitor to his own convictions, and honestly expect him to remain a fit member of the Service at the same time?"

Dorothy sat back and eyed him strangely. "I wonder," she said, dreamily. "I wonder ——" Then with an abrupt change, "I suppose that settled it, eh? Ali Dhau came to you and swore eternal allegiance in gratitude?"

Gordon frowned a little. "No," he said slowly, "I can't say that he did."

"No?" she cried, eagerly. "Then these experiments do not always work, do they?"

"In this case," he admitted reluctantly, "it is a question. Ali Dhau has grown very surly and quiet of late. My men tell me that Moutina has paid a few secret visits

to the post at night, but she has not returned to him."

"So he hesitates between the woman and the money, eh? Oh well, I'm not surprised. It is only a struggle between one selfish motive and another, you know. You cannot eliminate the basic elements of human nature, even in the Service."

This parting shot recurred to him many times upon his homeward ride. His instincts told him that more than half her cynicism had been assumed for his special benefit, but it all hurt, nevertheless. Neither could he deny her assertions about Ali Dhau until he solved his problem. However, he could do one thing in the future. He could stay away from places where a fellow was trapped into making statements that made him appear a sentimental ass, so he determined to avoid the studio in future.

In due time this had its own effect. Dorothy gave over looking into her glass, and vowed that no man on the earth would ever make the slightest impression upon her life. To substantiate this declaration, she danced seven times with Lieutenant Hixon at the regimental hop, snubbed him unmercifully at the end, quarreled with her maid, and then rose from her bed and walked the veranda until daylight. The next night she rode into Gordon's highland post with a retinue of native servants.

"I expected to arrive in time to pitch a camp by daylight," she said to him when he came running down the hill. "My *muchachos* didn't know your horrid trails."

The boy stared at her, at a temporary loss for words.

"Please don't," she smiled, with something like a challenge in her eyes. "I've only come out to ask you if I can't have Ali Dhau for a few hours a day after drill, for I simply could not get another model to finish that picture."

"Glad you came," he said, regaining himself. "But if you intended to pose Ali Dhau, I'm very much afraid that you arrive just in time to see your hopes go glimmering."

"You don't mean that he is running away?"

"I don't know, but I fear the 'woist,' as they say in the third act. At any rate, I can only stay a minute. I'll show your *muchachos* where to pitch camp, and then I must run back up the hill."

She turned at his words to look at the small mesa in question. It rose directly behind the boy's quarters. On the summit, clearly outlined against the light of a crackling fire, a Moro soldier stood beside a large Victrola. This was rendering "In The Hall of The Mountain King," while on the slope she discerned the faint outlines of many soldiers, all stretched at ease and listening to the music.

"How picturesque!" she cried. "Couldn't I go up and catch the color of all that, too?"

For some reason he hesitated an instant, then suddenly decided in the affirmative, and after showing her *muchachos* the site for her camp, he led her up past the little soldiers to the summit. Here he paused to question the sergeant in charge of the machine. Then he turned back to Dorothy and led her to his camp chair.

"I suppose," she said, after listening to one of Brahm's Hungarian dances, "that all this is designed to help you instill the ennobling—ahem—lessons of the Service?"

He grinned. "Oh, yes. Of course. I also read them excerpts from The Buffalo Bill Weekly, or sing them snatches from The Walloping Window Blind."

"Bravo!" she cried. "Well, at any rate they seem to appreciate it. The whole company is down there, is it not?"

This time Gordon did not smile. "No. Not to-night. Some of them are out keeping an eye on our mutual friend, Ali Dhau."

She quickened perceptibly. "Oh, yes. Ali Dhau. You started to tell me down below."

"Well, as I said, Ali Dhau has been sulking. So I've kept men watching him. Five nights ago Moutina came here, and I was able to slip up and overhear the conversation. She told him that if he would pretend to betray his own people and lead us into a trap, Dato Balos would make him a teniente dato, while she would be his slave for life.

"That time Ali Dhau refused. But we know that he received a bark message from a passing caravan to-day, and he did not come to listen to the music to-night. So I had him followed, and they tell me that he's now under a ledge down there on the river bank. No doubt he is waiting for Moutina."

"To desert?"

Gordon's reply was cut short by the appearance of an armed sentry. He pushed his way out of the grass in their rear, and came directly to his commander.

"Banca come 'cross de ribber, sir," he reported.

"Very well. I'll have to leave you, Miss Camden."

"Oh, couldn't I come if I keep perfectly quiet?"

In answer he gave her a shrewd, appraising glance, then took her hand, and, with her, followed the sentry into the grass.

"I don't know whether Ali Dhau intends to desert or not," he said, answering her question at last. "If he does, I have a squad across the river to intercept him."

"Oh!"

"I've also instructed the sergeant to keep on playing the phonograph. That is to impress Ali Dhau with the fact that we are all around the hill. But we must keep quiet now."

A minute later, they struck a gentle slope, and from this point onward they stepped with exquisite care. Finally, after a seeming age of suspense, Gordon squeezed her hand, bringing her to a standstill.

As they dared not part the grass in front of them, she could not see the river. But she heard voices not more than ten feet below them, and these, she knew, must have come from Moutina and Ali Dhau. The differences in their tones were unmistakable. The woman's rose and fell, now cutting like a thin knife, now caressing and pleading in soft, throaty gutturals. The man spoke less volubly, with masculine Moro grunts. And though she could not understand a word of the patois, she listened with intense interest until the voices ceased, and the splash of a paddle heralded the departure of the banca. The varying inflections told their own story.

"Did he go with her?" she asked, searching Gordon's troubled profile when they had regained the summit.

"No," he told her.

Though she burned with curiosity, the evident reluctance with which he answered checked any further questions. It was patent that he wished to think. So for a time she allowed him to sit and stare into the fire.

He was still sitting there when Ali Dhau, having worked his way back to the barracks in supposed secrecy, came up the hill and halted before his company commander. She hardly recognized her long-haired warrior in this clean-shaven, close-cropped soldier. Yet he had lost none of his savage splendor. The snappy, red fez, the trig, blue shirt, and the neat, khaki riding trousers only served to accentuate the splendid lines of his tall muscular figure. He stood out, clean-cut against the firelight, like some figure cast from bronze.

"Could I hold speech with the Teniente alone?" he asked, saluting.

Gordon's face was carefully inexpressive. "Is it very important, O Ali Dhau?"

"Of the greatest, O Teniente."

"Very well," said Gordon. He then addressed Dorothy. "Do you care to go down and see the rest?"

At her eager assent, the three went down the hill to his quarters. There he led them into the library.

"Well?" he said, when Dorothy was seated.

Ali Dhau, his fez crushed between nervous fingers, looked askance at Dorothy; then, at a word of assurance from Gordon, he plunged into his story.

If she had expected anything theatrical, Dorothy was disappointed. The Moro met his commander's gaze with a frankness that was too frank, but beyond that he might have been making an ordinary report. When he had finished, Gordon asked him a few questions in the patois, and then quietly dismissed him.

Up on the summit Dorothy had been able to suppress her curiosity. Now it burst bounds.

"Well?" she cried, "What did he say?"

Gordon crossed one leg over the other, and tapped at his knee with the end of his cigarette. He gazed thoughtfully at his boot the while.

"Ali Dhau told me that he could not eat the salt of two peoples," he said finally. "So he promised to lead us to Dato Balos' secret retreat; and I accepted his offer."

"But he's going to lead you into an ambuscade, isn't he?"

"Yes."

The girl leaned forward, her eyes wide.

"Do you mean to tell me," she cried, "that you are actually going to allow him to do this, when you know that he is lying?"

"It does look rather that way."

"But why on earth don't you arrest him?"

"Well, see here now—suppose you had a wild horse that you were trying to tame. And the horse, longing for the freedom of the prairies, bucked against the restraint of the saddle girth, and in so doing, fell and broke his leg. You wouldn't set about healing that leg by breaking his head, would you?"

"Of course not—if the horse was worth taming. This animal has already proved himself worthless."

"No. Not quite."

She looked at him in amazement. "Well," she said at last, "that sort of reasoning is too deep for me. I'll give it up. But come, now—confess. Isn't there some other reason for not arresting him?"

"Well, of course Ali Dhau is the only one here who knows the Las Balos hiding place."

"Ha! Now we're getting at it. The prime factor in the problem is the little item in the official reports, 'Dato Balos, notorious outlaw, captured by——'"

"On the contrary," Gordon cut in, "Dato Balos is a secondary factor in my calculations."

The girl almost stamped her foot in her bewilderment. "Who or what is the most important, then?"

Gordon looked at her. His brown eyes were frank and serious on the surface, but in their depths she sensed the veriest hint of mirth.

"Why, the Service is, of course."

This brought Dorothy to her feet. "Lieutenant MacDonald," she exclaimed, "if I were your older sister, I'd shake you, for you've allowed me to become so fearfully interested in this that I'm in a perfect mental fuddle, and now you won't explain. It isn't fair."

The boy laughed outright at this outburst. "No," he admitted, "I haven't been fair." Then he became serious and a touch of color showed under the tan of his cheeks. "If I tell you what is in my mind, will you believe me and not think me foolish?"

Dorothy sat down, facing him. "Of course I'll believe you."

"Well, then, it's just this. I can't a rest Ali Dhau and do any possible good t the Service. Of course I would if I had t but I will not unless I do have to. You see, the constabulary on Mindanao is still more or less of an experiment. We have to impress these natives with the fact that this organization is good; that it is efficient; that it is worth while belonging to. Jailing Ali Dhau would seem to reflect upon him alone, at first sight; but there are usually two sides to a question. He'd stand forth as a unit upon whom the system had failed. Furthermore, he'd leave prison with hatred for the constabulary in his heart; and you can imagine how far his words would go toward helping us make the impression I have spoken of."

"Why, that's all clear enough. But I don't see how you are going to cure him by sticking your head into this noose."

"I don't know that I am. I'm only going to seize every chance I have."

"I can't see a single one."

"I can."

"Well?"

"That," smiled Gordon, "is part of my dark secret. I'll tell you about it some day if I have a chance to try it."

The girl bent her head; her brows knit, and her lips pursed in a smile that was half cynical. Finally she raised her eyes to his.

"Well," she said, "I must say that it sounds well—even if I can't understand how you hope to make a good soldier out of Ali Dhau. What I do understand is this—you say you *think* you have a chance to, and you've also practically said that you're going to risk your own life for the sake of this one, single almost worthless savage. But what is at the back of it all? Why are you going to do it?"

A dark red mottled the boy's face. "You said that you would believe me," he reminded her, somewhat stiffly. "I meant exactly what I said—barring that rot about the risks."

Dorothy winced inwardly before his words, and then became furious. It was the gulf between them, outlined more distinctly than ever. All the emotions of the past weeks swept through her with renewed force. She hated herself for caring, but most of all she hated this boy who seemed

prove out all that in which she could not believe. Bah! That was it! He only seemed to. If she could prove this, if she could humiliate him——

With the thought, a great inspiration came to her.

"Lieutenant MacDonald," she said, turning back to him, "I'll have to beg your pardon." She faced him easily enough, knowing that her color would pass for that of contrition. "I do believe you, and I am convinced that you are absolutely sincere."

The apparent sincerity of her own deepened tones made Gordon lower his eyes. He was now ashamed of his rudeness.

"I believe you are absolutely sincere," she repeated, "and to my mind it follows that a sincere man must be honest. Well, I'm glad of that. And I'll tell you why. If I have offended you at times with my—er—cynical curiosity, please know that there was a method in my madness. I have been looking for an honest man for a long while."

"To reward him as they do in the Sunday school books?" grinned Gordon, in an attempt to hide his pleasant discomfiture.

"No, no, I'm not joking. I've been bilked and bamboozled until I'm tired of it, that's all, and I'm looking for an honest business manager. If you'll take the place, I'll send you back to New York at my own expense and pay you the same salary that I'm paying the man who holds the place now." And she named a figure amounting to ten times his present salary.

Gordon slowly uncrossed his legs. "But I have had no business experience," he said.

"That makes little difference to me. A man who has had military training can soon pick up details, and it will be cheaper for me to pay for a few months of mistakes than several years of rascality."

Gordon arose and paced back and forth, his hands thrust into his pockets in a decidedly unmilitary manner. New York—Broadway—the opera—a decent cocktail now and then—a well appointed bachelor's apartment near Central Park—oh, it sounded great—ripping! By George, he would like to canter over the driveways. He would even give a great deal to see the children dancing on the sidewalks of Washington Square. And when he thought of the Brevoort, with its delightful French atmosphere—oh, what in hell did life in this God-forsaken wilderness offer him, anyway?

"By James!" he exclaimed, "The very thought of it gets me like a ninth inning rally in the bleachers! I think that—that ——"

Just then someone knocked at the door. He opened it to face Ali Dhau.

The Las Balos was unused to the ways of deception. Ali Dhau feared that his previous reluctance might give Gordon cause to wonder at his sudden change, and he was not altogether certain that he had been convincing. Therefore he returned to further impress Gordon with his fidelity.

"If by any chance it is Allah's will that we fight Dato Balos with little success," said he, "and it is so written that I am about to fall into his hands, wilt thou remember thy promise to keep me from him? For know thou, O Teniente, that I would prefer thy bullet, if all else fail, to his torture."

A change came over the boy. The eagerness and wistfulness with which he had dreamed of New York gave way to something that made him older and steadier. And as his brown eyes had softened when Ali Dhau had bowed his head before the confusion of love, so did they soften now.

"Go to thy bed and sleep like a soldier, Ali Dhau. I will take care of thee."

Then he turned to Dorothy and gave her his answer.

That answer made it necessary for her to return to Keithley, for the constabulary company departed at dawn, bound for the Las Balos retreat.

At an interjunction with one of the Keithley trails, a mountain battery joined them. The three-inch guns in this branch of the Service are carried in pieces upon the backs of mules, and are usually in plain sight. This day they were covered with canvas. While Ali Dhau had never seen the American guns that "shot the length of Mindanao," he had noted their effect, and a glance at one of the detached barrels might have awakened his suspicions, and caused him to lead them to some out-of-the-way place. So he was told quite casually that this was a pack train carrying supplies.

Late on the second afternoon they arrived at a point near the Las Balos retreat, and Gordon asked Ali Dhau to point out a convenient ridge from which he could see the casa.

The Moro led him to a wooded ridge that overlooked a valley some three thousand yards in width. At first Gordon could see nothing resembling a dwelling, but when Ali Dhau pointed out an expanse of shrubbery about a thousand yards away, he understood. Dato Balos had simply thatched over a huge space between two rocky hollows, and covered the usual nipa roof with boughs. Gordon pointed this out to his battery commander, and the latter, suppressing a grin of satisfaction, grew busy with his glasses. Then, leaving the "pack train" on the ridge "for safety's sake," Gordon and Ali returned to their company.

With the fall of night they started wending their way into the dark valley; and at eight Ali Dhau turned round to whisper that he had found the entrance—a long gut between two ledges of rock, thatched over with nipa and branches.

"See, Teniente," he whispered, " they are so certain of their safety that they do not even keep a man at watch here. Thou hast but to rush in thy company and they will all be caught helpless before they can reach their bolos."

The new soldier's teeth chattered with excitement as he spoke for he knew that every warrior in the casa had his bolo in his hands, and that part of them were crouching just above the entrance to make the trap complete. But he did not know that Gordon was also aware of it; that the sergeants had quietly distributed a number of pipe-torches behind him in the dark; that a few of the men were already creeping up the side of the casa toward the roof; that fifty had been detailed to remain at the entrance; and that a small detachment from the battery, with hand-machine guns, had been following the company. So he mistook Gordon's low chuckle for a sign of elation at the coming capture.

"All right," Gordon whispered, "lead the way, Ali Dhau."

The Las Balos nodded excitedly, and went ahead. He proceeded stealthily enough for a space, but when he reached the spit where the flickering rays of the inner fires lighted the tunnel, he broke into a run; and Gordon, taking up the "double-time" behind him, came round a turn and into full view of the casa.

The sight of it brought a gasp from him, for it was an imposing spectacle. Around the edges of the huge room were arranged a number of small huts, their doors and windows crowded with women and children. In front of these, and standing in double rank, was an army of Las Balos warriors. They were evidently divided into companies, for one group carried old flint match-locks, the second four-foot bolos, and the third double-edged barongs. The fourth was armed with long-handled, shovel-bladed spears. They stood erect, their match-locks and bolos at the "carry," and their great spears pointing in alignment at the roof; and from the tall teniente datos to the last man among them, they presented the finest examples of physical perfection that Gordon had ever seen.

He was given only a second in which to review them. Not far from the centre of the enclosure, the tribe had erected a thatched hut which boasted a gaudily decorated veranda. On this veranda, seated under a yellow canopy, Gordon discerned the figure of Dato Balos. Some thirty feet away, Ali Dhau had dropped to his knees before him.

"O, Dato!" he cried in the hush. "I have brought thee the price of my redemption."

A great howl of derisive laughter arose from the women. Then from among them there sped the girl Moutina. She danced in front of Ali Dhau, her teeth exposed in a derisive smile.

"Thou hast brought thy carrion self to death!" she chanted. "O, thou Bastard Americanisto, thou double-dealing fool——"

"Hold thy tongue, woman!" thundered Dato Balos, rising to his full height. His robes fell away with the movement, uncovering a mighty chest, cross-belted with gold, and glittering with medals. "It is not given to women to pronounce sentence on men."

An American sergeant behind Gordon whispered, "Can't we open the ball with these machine guns, sir?"

Gordon checked him with a sharp, "Hold steady till I give the word," and then mo-

tioned to one of his own sergeants. With him he strode forward to a position beside Ali Dhau. The latter was just rising in dazed confusion to his feet.

"Who is it thou wouldst sentence, O Lion of the Hills?" cried Gordon.

The Las Balos chieftain folded his arms across his breast, and regarded Gordon with an indulgent smile. At any other time the boy would have thrilled to the sight of it. The man was superb in his arrogant assurance. He was so certain of his position that he could afford to waste time in satisfying his savage love of the theatrical.

"What commission hast thou from Allah that gives thee right to ask, O Americano?"

"My commission is not from Allah, but from the United States Government. I am come to serve its warrant upon thee, O Unbroken Spear Shaft, and unless thou surrender quietly, there shall be blood between heads and shoulders."

Again the women cackled, but Dato Balos silenced them with a roar. This done, he looked Gordon up and down with an eye that held no small amount of admiration.

"Thou are a brave man, with much humor," he said. "Howbeit there shall be yet another score against me when I have dealt with this bastard Moslem who ate of thy accursed swine. And how wilt thou arrest me for thine own death? Can a dead man serve as his own avenger? Can a dead man——"

But Gordon saw that Ali Dhau had heard enough. He stood gazing from Moutina to the dato, his black eyes filled with horror. Seizing him by the right wrist with his own right hand, Gordon whipped him round, facing the constabulary. Simultaneously he thrust his left arm under the right elbow of Ali Dhau, and his right hand pressed sharply downward. With this jiu-jitsu "come-along," he jerked the Moro on a run toward the company.

At the same instant his sergeant leaped upon Moutina, securing the same hold. Though she screamed with rage and pain, she, too, was forced to follow.

These actions signaled the beginning of chaos. Before Gordon reached his ranks, a dozen torches had been ignited. Sailing over the heads of the Las Balos, these landed upon the roofs of the huts. Simultaneously the roof above them began to crackle with flames, while the machine guns, at a yell from Gordon, went into action with a roar. They mowed down the foremost Moros in swaths. The remainder, charging forward at the commands of their tenientes, were met by the combined fire of the machine guns and the constabulary rifles.

Rushing in among his men Gordon turned Ali Dhau over to a corporal, and then wheeled to handle his retreat. He had no intention of getting his men into a hand-to-hand conflict if he could avoid it. He started them out through the tunnel, meeting each assault with a stand by the machine guns. As soon as the gut was cleared, they ran back a few yards; when the raging tenientes led on another rush, the constabulary checked them with a hail of lead.

Out at the entrance, a furious encounter was in progress between the two reserves. But this came to an abrupt ending with the addition of one of the machine guns. Confused by this merciless thing which sprayed lead as a fire-hose throws water, the Las Balos reserve broke into unsteady groups. The coming of a second machine gun routed them, and they fell back into the woods.

"Just the same, the others will be boiling out of that fire trap in a minute," panted Gordon, addressing the battery sergeant. "Our only chance to nail them is to stick right here where we can command the tunnel. I'm going to send up the rocket."

"Let 'er go, sir," grunted the sergeant, training his gun down the cut. "We'll stick."

A second later a rocket soared into the sky, trailing a six-inch band of flaming red behind it.

They waited for five—eight—ten seconds. Inside the enclosure, the hubbub had dwindled until they could distinguish authoritative voices. The tenientes were reorganizing their men for a rush that would offset their momentary confusion before the machine guns, and prove that no Las Balos tribe would ever be defeated by the despised Christian hirelings.

"By God, I'll hand it to 'em for gameness, with that roof burning over their heads!" grunted the battery sergeant.

Then a dull boom sounded in the distance, and the heavens seemed to split apart some

twenty feet from the machine gun. The air was filled with flying missiles, and a batteryman fell across Gordon's feet. A second shell exploded within ten feet of the inner entrance; and then, with a crash that deafened them, two shells burst at once in the very centre of the great roof.

"And they did the business," smiled Gordon, telling Dorothy of the affair six weeks later. The Las Balos came out on the run, but there we were, facing them with the machine guns and our rifles. Even then we had to knock 'em galley west with a volley before they'd stop. And then another shell made a mess of them. Poor old Dato Balos! His men were carrying him in the lead—all shot up, too—and he was sobbing with rage. 'Why art thou not man enough to fight us man to man?' he yelled at me. 'Stop these devil-things which come from nowhere, and we will beat thee with our naked hands, thou carrion!' And damme if it didn't make me feel ashamed, for it was hardly fair, was it? But of course I had to take them in, and so now the whole outfit is under guard at the convict camp above Overton, waiting for the provincial governor's sentence."

"I hope he isn't too hard on them," said Dorothy, eyeing him with a pride that she found hard to conceal. He had just returned from a second march of two weeks' duration, and he was grimy and stubbled with beard; but she seemed rather fond of looking at him, and did so, to her heart's content.

She was a somewhat different Dorothy from the girl who had offered him the managership. If she were not altogether tamed, she was at least subdued. And she was glad of it. She had been absolutely convinced that there are people in the world whose values are not entirely materialistic, and the thought of it had sweetened her mind.

As for Gordon, he would have stared at you had you suggested that they were in love. On the other hand, he was ready to tell the world at large that they were the very best of friends—oh, ripping!

"Yes, I do hope he is not too hard on them," she repeated. "But aside from that, I've a large, large bone to pick with you."

"What is it, O exception to thy curious sex?"

"You needn't laugh. I want to know all about Ali Dhau."

"Well," he smiled, "I wanted to wait until he returned, but I suppose I'll have to tell you.

"You see, when we returned to the post, my sergeants wanted me to place him in the guard house. But of course I didn't.

"All this surprised Ali Dhau as much as it did the rest of the men—who would not speak to him. He was too much a Las Balos to come and beg for mercy, but I saw him looking at me now and again as though he were wondering, wondering. And he was. He was wondering what sort of torture I had in mind for him, and no doubt had concluded that it was going to be something hellish, since I was spending so much time planning it.

"We only had one conversation. That was in relation to Moutina. He asked me what disposition I would make of her. I turned her over to him, gave him one of the married quarters, and told him to beat her well, like a sensible Moro. He did, and ever since then he has been turning out to drill with the neatest laundered uniforms in the company. She does them herself.

"However, he was not wholly happy. In fact, I am quite sure that he was acutely miserable up to the time we started upon this last hike.

"Then I had a chance to wreak my horrible vengeance. Remember hearing of that triple murder down at Misamis? We knew the Moro that did it. I couldn't send a squad after him, as I needed the whole company to handle the trouble in Bacalog. I could only spare one man—a reliable man, a fellow who would follow the murderer from here to Borneo—a fellow game enough and loyal enough to snake him out from under his very dato's nose, if needs be. And so——"

"You sent Ali Dhau!"

"Move to the head of the class. You win."

Dorothy leaned back and clapped her hands. "Oh, what an experiment! But aren't you afraid he'll desert?"

Her question was answered by Gordon's uplifted hand. Turning with him, she listened to a sound of footsteps that were coming up the walk. It was the tread of a man,

though the soft "pad-pad" was as light as the step of a sprightly woman; and somehow, before the fellow knocked at the door, Dorothy's heart leaped to the rhythm of his movements.

"He didn't desert when he was thinking of those tortures," said Gordon, rising to his feet as Dorothy stepped to the door. Then, as she opened it, "What hast thou to report, O Ali Dhau?"

The soldier came in and saluted. He was grimy beyond description; he was ragged and swamp-stained; and his head and breast were bound with bloody bandages. His left hand was behind his back.

"The prisoner is in the guardhouse for the night, O Teniente."

"That is good, Ali Dhau. But what is wrong with thy left hand?"

The fierce pride in the soldier's eyes faded before a mist of confusion. Somewhat shyly he brought from behind his back a piece of ham. He looked at it with loathing, then suddenly dropped on his knees, bowed his head, and extended it humbly to Gordon.

"I am no woman that I do this," he said. "But here is flesh of the swine. If it be thy wish, thou canst break it upon my head. I am thy man."

For the third time in their acquaintance the brown eyes grew misty as they looked on the bent head of Ali Rhau. This time they were softened with something that a woman would have called "infinitely sweet."

"Stand on thy feet, Ali Dhau," he said, "and go to thy bed a whole man and a soldier. A salute between officer and man is enough for a man in the Service."

And, as Ali Dhau walked out with head erect, Gordon looked into the glowing eyes of the girl who now understood. The Service has its own reward for those who are in tune with the spirit of its meaning.

UNSPEAKABLE EVIDENCE

By G. COURT

Author of "An Alibi for Love," "Sleeve Links," etc.

HARRINGTON GALE'S GENIUS PENETRATES TO THE HEART OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AND AIMS A BLOW AT THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE OF A WOMAN'S HOPES

"WHAT is the difference between a rig and a buckboard?"

"A rig embraces every kind of wayside vehicle—a buckboard does not embrace—it discards—you'll know better presently."

Harrington Gale looked at the speaker with welcoming astonishment. The man who had introduced himself as Merivale was five foot nothing and clad in overalls; his shirt was open at the neck and his hands reminiscent of oil, but the voice bespoke education and wider associations than an Electric Light Power House in the heart of the mountains of British Columbia. His well-kept black hair and sensitive humorous mouth seemed more akin to the dramatic atmosphere of Broadway.

"Let's get in," he nodded toward the cart which stood outside the railway depot, and Gale climbed up by his side, leaving his friend Danvers to guard the grips in the back seat. "It's a five mile drive to the camp. We have a toy train that runs up and down to this place, but the line is being used today by the lumber men; so Mr. Hastings sent me down to fetch you."

"Been in the Camp long?" queried Gale. The horses were swinging along up the winding hill road and the morning air blew fresh from the mountains. On their right the swift flowing river ran its turbulent course, bearing on its waves the shingle bolts of cedar to the expectant mills below; away on their left in the forest the logging train was creaking its way down with its freight of giant trees, so great that a man may stand by a fallen trunk and be completely hidden from view.

"Nearly two years. By day I am just a little more than 'the dust beneath thy turbines lying,' for I sweep it away and feed the engines with oil."

"And by night?" Gale listened to his whimsical self depreciation with interest. He glanced at his hands—which were artistic—and wondered if a woman were to blame. He divined New York as his springboard of life.

"By night we are a pleasant democracy, where men at leisure proffer the brotherhood of man and women crave it. The only outcasts are the night shifts—in the power house or the nurseries. We have a charming little club house, where evening dress is unknown; there is a dance this evening. Mr. Hastings will forget that Heaven made him a director of the company; his daughter will deign to notice even the sweepers of dust."

They reached a sign post pointing to the left and saw in front of them a woman picking flowers. Every moment of the drive had served to strengthen Gale's liking for the quaint little man by his side, who evaded the perils of the narrow road like an inspired Jehu, while he ejaculated farseeing criticisms on the camp and its dwellers.

"Miss Hastings?" queried Gale doubtfully, pointing forward.

"Far from it, a Mrs. Ranger, a great believer in the brotherhood of man. She would have no use for the popular idea that dreams of Heaven are a kind of transcendentalized oratorio. She would prefer a region where marrying and giving in marriage is still in vogue. A great fisher of men, and also a great fisherman."

"Widow?"

Merivale nodded.

"Her husband knew more about volts than is good for any man and became too intimate with them. They resented it. He was buried a year ago. She stays on here in his old house—the authorities pitied her. She acts as charwoman—if one may mention cheap china when discussing rare

porcelain—for half a dozen bachelors of whom Jack Barnard and I are two. Jack was a graduate of Edinburgh University, who speculated in real estate—unsuccessfully. Now he and I keep house together. I think she envies me."

"And Jack?"

"He comes from Scotland and gives nothing away."

The horses broke into an easy canter, as they breasted the hill. Merivale pulled them to a standstill.

"Can we give you a lift?"

The woman turned round slowly and came toward them. Gale was startled by her beauty. She was tall, and moved like a super-snake. Her dark, heavy-lidded eyes were flooded with half-veiled lights. She looked conscious of unearthly wisdom, setting her apart in a solitude of pitying smiles. Her cheap print dress fitted her body but not her soul. "A reincarnated Egyptian," was Gale's silent comment, "worthy to accept the homage of Kings." He thought of the phrase "The twilight of the Gods," and wondered lazily if the mountain air were making him poetical.

She bowed to the two strangers with perfect ease and arrived gracefully beside Danvers. Any other woman would have clambered.

A minute or two later the Camp came into view, a plateau of land perched among the mountains. At the far end the huge white power house, the last word of man amid the silences of God, dominated the landscape. All down the long straggling street were tidy little cottages with corrugated iron roofs glistening in the sun, the homes of a hundred workers. On a knoll in the centre of the village, stood a wooden bungalow, proud of its red tiles and flower garden. By the gate was Rachael Hastings waiting to give welcome to her father's much traveled guests.

"Are all the employees here artists, redolent of—epigrams?" asked Gale as he sat by her side in the cool veranda. The question was idly put, but a touch of heightened color in the girl's face warned him that he was only on the fringe of the surprises this lonely spot might offer. He had met Rachael in New York—a radiant figure—a whirlwind of enjoyment. He had sat by her side at dinner more than once and wondered whether a ceaseless round of gaiety wholly satisfied her.

"Isn't he interesting?" she answered; "no one here knows anything about him. He has quite a library and a violin. All the children in the place adore him."

Any further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Hastings, a tall, thin man with a goatee beard and a hustle. His upper lip was clean shaven. He reminded Gale of pictures of Uncle Sam.

"We are going to take you for a cruise up the river," he said after a hearty greeting, "I want you to see how we have tamed the resources of Nature."

They walked through the village, and climbed a flight of stairs beside the power house. An exclamation of surprise broke from Gale's lips. In front of them lay the river broadened into a flat sheet of water, dammed back by immense masonry, the outflow regulated by giant sluices.

"Let me introduce our engineer, Jack Barnard, to you," said Mr. Hastings, as they stepped on board a petrol launch.

Gale remembered Merivale's terse description "A Scotchman who does not give anything away," and smiled at the brawny Viking who nodded pleasantly to him.

The scene, as the boat moved cautiously up stream, was weird and desolate. The river, dammed back to create an increased pressure for the turbines of the power house, had slowly but inevitably flooded the whole of the narrow valley between the mountain ranges on either side. The channel turned and twisted amid snags and dripping moss-grown branches that rose threateningly above the surface, as the launch throbbed onward through an endless avenue of trees, dead or doomed because their roots were drowned. Dank and matted, the remnants of luxuriant bushes and undergrowth swayed uneasily to the rippling waves—splashes of sunlight gleamed on endless aisles of water that opened up through the mazes of the dying forest. They passed the relics of what had once been homes, isolated, uninhabitable shacks surrounded by water and reeking with damp; some of them half buried by the flood; others with the roof tops barely showing, a changeless wilderness of hopelessness and

decay. "How deep is it flooded?" asked Gale. He had watched it in fascinated silence for miles, leaving Danvers to talk to Miss Hastings and her father.

"About fifteen feet at present," answered Mr. Hastings.

"At present?"

"Yes—the dam is built high enough to raise the water another ten feet. We shall do it before long."

"Then even these roofs will vanish! It's the loneliest thing I have ever seen." He turned to the girl who was standing by his side; he felt she would understand his feeling more than her father, who worshipped power as his only Idol.

"These dead trees always look to me like life's failures," she said softly, "dumb with the unexplained tragedy of their existence."

Gale smiled back; she thought she heard him murmur something about "Less than dust," but before she could ask him, he went slowly forward to talk to Jack Barnard in the engine room. By the end of the voyage he knew much that there was to know about the towing of lumber; he felt he could cross-examine an expert on swifters and swifter-wires and dangers of logs jumping booms in a choppy sea. He loved the reserve strength of the big engineer in mind and body, and appreciated the fascination he might have for the woman with the dark mysterious eyes.

At the dance in the evening, Gale strolled across to renew the acquaintance and ask one more question as to the best means of securing logs of differing lengths in a boom. The engineer, clad in the freedom of flannels and a soft collar, was restless and preoccupied. Gale drifted slowly away, an amused spectator. The long low room was decorated with flags, and an air of light-hearted irresponsibility prevailed. The clear cut distinctions between employer and worker, skilled electrician and beginner, seemed to have vanished; enjoyment was a right, unrestricted by differences of salary. The three months' visit of Mr. Hastings had effected wonders; he realized that the gaiety of women alleviates isolation and tends to masculine contentment and hard work.

Gale watched the door and saw Rachael and Mrs. Ranger enter together, a striking contrast. "Rouge et noir," he smiled to himself as he caught the gleam of Rachael's burnished hair. Jack Barnard gravitated toward them. His manner was perfect, baffling detection, but when the band struck up, the widow was his partner, dancing with the dreamy grace that breathed of spices and the desert and all the untrammelled whisperings of the East.

It was not till late that Merivale claimed Rachael as his partner. He looked up at her—and then down again at himself—with a wrinkled smile devoid of bitterness, as if deprecating the Providence that had made her tall and graceful.

"Shall we go outside instead of dancing?"

She loved his gentle humor, disarming the need of closely guarded pity, and nodded acquiescence.

They wandered out into the silence, and reached the edge of the gorge. Away in the distance beneath them, the river crooned its hymn of longing for the sea, a soft breath of air from the pine-clad ridges freshened the heat of the summer night and the great dome of stars hung above the tiny village—pinnacled in loneliness, away from the world.

"I'm not surprised that Moses went up to a mountain top to get the commandments," he began abruptly, but his voice was tinged with incurable regret.

"Inspiration?"

"Yes—but I wonder whether 'anything that is his' means you must not covet your neighbor's body. I suppose Barnard is my neighbor even though he lives in the same house."

She did not know whether she wanted to laugh or cry. She remembered how conscious she had been of his lack of height, when she first met him. Of late she had forgotten it. She had learned to assume that he was tall as she had learned to assume everything else unknown in his favor.

"But you have so many things that he might covet."

"Have I?" he murmured, "have I? It's rather sad to be lonely."

She riveted her gaze on the foaming water.

"What have I got—what can I ever have," he went on sadly, "to make me less lonely?"

"You have your books—and your music." She tried to speak lightly.

"I ask for bread and you offer me a stone—my books and my music have lost their voices. God help me. I hear only yours now."

She turned and looked at him. The thin ascetic face was gray and drawn. All the delicate lines of whimsical humor, of gentle deprecating laughter at himself and the world had vanished.

"Then why not hear it?"

There was a shadow of a smile about her lips as with effortless dignity she stretched a hand toward him.

"You mean you could——?"

"I mean I shall."

"But an oiler!"

She laughed contentedly at his tone of horror. A shooting star flashed across the sky and she wished him well.

"I should not mind if you were a good oiler—but you are not. They say you've no education in machinery. But it does not take a genius to know that you've been educated in something else. I do not know why you are masquerading as an oiler. You need not tell me—I fancy father will have to fire you—then I shall get busy. Father has great influence—so have I—with father."

"You needn't." The joy of youth and the riot of living were in his voice. She assured herself he was not much shorter than other men.

"Why not?"

He paused a minute before answering, and then he seemed to her to stand outside his own life, poking fun at some one else.

"I used to live in New York. You were not out in those days and I never happened to meet your father. Three years ago I was engaged to be married."

He expected a protest—but she made no sign.

"Do you mind?" he asked.

"Not a bit; a man should be a girl's first choice—and a girl a man's last, if you want experienced happiness. Amateur heroes are out of date."

She found his detached attitude infectious—she would have explained away a dozen crimes and gloried in them.

"We were going to be married, but I heard her, accidentally, sneer at my height. Her charming expression was that 'the pill was gilded and small enough to be ignored.' It really hurt and made me self-conscious."

A wave of pity swept over her; she had admired his pluck and happy insouciance, his genial popularity and unwavering gaiety and imagined that he accepted his lack of inches without sensitiveness. That he had suffered like this in silence, gave her pain.

"So I sought for solitude." He pointed round him to the horizon which seemed to bar them from the world of men. "I found it."

She nodded her head in sympathy. She could not speak.

"And then you came. I went on oiling. There's no gilt edge to that kind of bondage."

"I'm proud you did."

"That's why I lost myself," he answered, as they walked back slowly. "I wanted to find some one who would—more than put up with me."

Gale and Danvers were sitting on the veranda next morning, smoking lazily, when Mr. Hastings suddenly came in sight, walking rapidly. He hurried up to the low fence that surrounded the house and beckoned them toward him. He had taken off his wide Panama hat and stood mopping his forehead with a big handkerchief. His cigar nestled uninvitingly in the corner of his mouth, a forgotten and chilly derelict.

"My God! Gale," he said in a low voice, looking anxiously round, "a horrible thing has happened."

Gale stood silent, waiting. His host's face was hectic, his excitement was painful.

"Such a thing has never been heard of up here; their value is fabulous—he only asked for her this morning."

Gale deliberately struck a match and offered to relight the dead cigar.

"Now tell me," he said quietly, "what are they—who is he and who is she?"

Mr. Hastings passed his hand confusedly over his brow.

"Life has been going rather quickly for me this morning," he said apologetically. "At ten o'clock Merivale called on me and asked for leave to marry my daughter and threatened to fire me if I refused."

"To fire you?" exclaimed Gale and Danvers in unison.

"Yes—he turns out to be *the* Gilbert Merivale who practically controls the stock of this whole concern. He could end my directorship in three months. And he's been touching his hat to me all these months!"

There was a twinkle in the old man's eyes in spite of his anxieties.

"And you retain your billet?"

"I had no option and did not want one. Rachael has exercised hers."

"That's 'he' and 'she,'" smiled Gale; "now, what are 'they'?"

"Merivale left the office at eleven—he was going back to his house to get what he called an 'earnest' to bind the bargain. Five minutes later he telephoned to say the 'earnest' had vanished. 'Earnest' indeed!"

"Well?"

"A pearl necklace that belonged to his mother worth a hundred thousand dollars, a diamond pendant, a ring, and a pair of pearl drop ear-rings. 'Earnest'—good Lord! All gone without a trace—stolen—such a thing up here—horrible—terrible!"

"Where's Merivale?" snapped out Gale.

"Down at his shack. I told him to stay and let nothing be moved."

"Come." Gale was already on his way, swinging with quick strides down the village. Mr. Hastings was spare and active but he found the pace severe.

Merivale was on the veranda, waiting. His shack was at the opposite end of the village to the power house, and stood just where the road up which they had come the day before, began to drop down to the valley. There was only one other cottage in sight of it, a hundred yards away.

"Whose cottage is that?" asked Gale as he mounted the steps. It was characteristic of him that he offered no congratulations. His mind was absorbed in more imminent matters. Weddings could wait.

"Mrs. Jones lives there; her husband is an engineer."

The door of Merivale's shack opened straight into a big sitting room. Gale motioned the others to be seated and stood with his back to the mantelpiece. It was an unusual room to find in such a place. The whole of the wall that ran from the entrance to the kitchen was lined with books, from floor to ceiling, neatly arranged according to size and color. It was easy to see that the owner loved the bodies as well as the souls of his treasures. The other walls were hung with pictures—a medley collection of signed mezzotints and oleographs, colored horrors from Christmas magazines and war maps.

"Jack Barnard has an undivided half interest," smiled Merivale in apology.

"What have you lost?" asked Gale. "No—please don't move till I tell you."

"A pearl necklace that belonged to my mother."

"Value?"

"A hundred thousand dollars." Merivale was still in his oiler's working clothes.

"What else?"

"A diamond pendant I had ordered more than a week ago for—you know?"

Gale nodded.

"For Miss Hastings—a ring with a half hoop of diamonds, and a pair of ear-rings with drop pearls."

"And they have all vanished?" Gale refrained from questions of worth.

"Every one—box and all."

Gale moved to the seat under the window that looked out into the veranda.

"Where was the box? Yes—get up and show me."

Merivale walked toward the kitchen door at the back of the room. Near it was a buffet let into the wall. He pulled open a drawer.

"I put a box containing them all in here just before I went up to see Mr. Hastings at ten o'clock."

"Are you sure they were all there?"

"Absolutely."

Gale looked thoughtful, and his eyebrows contracted.

"Was the box locked?"

"Yes—but not the drawer. Of course I never suspected any trouble."

"Did you show them to any one?"

"No."

"Barnard lives here with you?"

"Yes."

His smile was eloquent of effortless faith, unconscious of a doubt.

"When did he go to work?"

"He left with me and has not yet returned."

"Was the back door locked?"

"Yes; I had the key in my pocket all the time I was out."

"And the front door?"

"It shuts automatically. Mrs. Ranger is the only person who has a key besides Jack and me. She comes in to clean up."

Gale glanced up quickly.

"The lady we picked up yesterday?"

Merivale leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"She may steal hearts—but not diamonds; besides, she'd done her work and gone away before I did."

"Honest as the day," chimed in Mr. Hastings, "but not popular with the women. Her life is hard—don't give them a chance." Gale appreciated the whispering gallery of feminine discontent that might surround her, and determined to weigh well any word he heard against her. He knew that by the evening no one would be immune from suspicion.

He made a tour of the room, noting everything, looked at the fastenings of the windows and searched for finger marks on the glass. Suddenly he stopped in his wanderings by the bookshelves and dropped on one knee.

"Have you been reading 'Pilgrim's Progress' lately, Merivale?"

Danvers smiled to himself at the look of astonishment on the other men's faces. Merivale's mouth went into a stern line as if he deprecated such irrelevant humor. He stood to lose more than a hundred thousand dollars, but his mother's necklace meant more than mere money.

"No," he answered rather shortly.

Gale pointed to the second shelf up, a foot from the floor.

"All your other books from floor to ceiling are perfectly straight with the outer edge of the shelf. Some of the books in this row have been pushed in, and recently, for there is no dust on the inch or two of shelf that shows."

Merivale rose to his feet and came across the room.

"That's strange," he said. "I took 'A Tramp Abroad' from that shelf this morning, looked up a quotation and put it back and carefully got all the books in a straight line at the edge; I hate a 'crinkly' row."

"And 'Pilgrim's Progress' has been turned upside down," said Gale, pointing; "did you leave it like that?"

"Not on my oath."

Gale took the book out of the shelf and gazed at it carefully.

"I think we had better ask Mrs. Ranger to come here," he said; "you might ring her up Merivale. Say nothing about the rest of us."

Within five minutes the door opened and the widow stood at the entrance, framed like a picture against the dazzling sunlight. She drew back when she saw the four men gathered, as though fearing intrusion, but Gale called her in. Every one stood until she was seated. She gazed round her with happy astonishment, satisfied to live in a world of men.

"Mrs. Ranger," said Gale, "do you mind telling us what you were doing after you left here this morning?"

Her lips parted with a faint smile, for a moment she lifted her heavy eyelids, and seemed to focus her far-off thoughts on human things.

"Is this the Catechism taught in England or the service for those hopelessly at sea?"

"Look here, Mrs. Ranger," Merivale broke in, but Gale waved him into silence.

"Please listen to me," said Gale quietly. "Something rather awkward has happened and we want your help."

"All right, but you are very mysterious. Directly I left here at about quarter to ten I went over to that next cottage belonging to Mrs. Jones. I only left there a few minutes ago and went to my own house up the village."

"Where were you in Mrs. Jones' house?"

"I was on the veranda, ironing. Mrs. Jones was inside, washing. The window was open and we were talking all the time."

"You can see this house from here?"

"Yes."

"Did you see any one come to this house?"

"Only Jack Barnard. He came in about half past ten and left again in five minutes."

There was a sudden pause and no one spoke, but suspicion was there to be called groundless.

"What's it all about?" she asked, but no one answered her.

Gale was thinking deeply. Soon he slipped away, leaving Mrs. Ranger to the valedictory mercies of the other three, and found his way to Mrs. Jones' cottage. The old lady knew him by sight already and was voluble with delight when he praised her flowers.

"Mrs. Ranger helping you this morning," he asked, pointing to a neat pile of linen.

"Ay!" she answered, "she's a worker."

"I thought I saw her up at the post office this morning."

"No, sir! We worked together from quarter to ten till a few minutes ago, then I walked up with her to her house and came back here. She never went to the post office, I can swear."

"Talking all the time she was here?"

Mrs. Jones placed her fat red arms where her waist should have been and smiled.

"Any one else come along, while you were working and talking?"

"No—sir!" she exclaimed with emphasis and was still wondering at Gale's questions long after he had arrived back at the shack and reported progress to the other three men.

"Look here," said Gale to Merivale, "did you have any letters from the jewelers about these things?"

"Several."

"Saying when they were coming?"

"One—a week ago."

"And left them lying about?"

"Undoubtedly."

Gale walked across once more to the book-case.

"Who teaches school here?"

"Miss Hampton."

"What are the school hours in the morning?"

"Nine to eleven—then a break of ten minutes—then on till lunch."

"And all children must go?"

"Yes—compelled to by law; they come from all round—some of them even by boats from the homesteads that lie on the higher land near the river's banks."

"I should like to see Miss Hampton—a little later."

"Oh! here comes Barnard."

The big man glanced inquiringly at the crowd.

"I say, Jack," exclaimed Merivale, "what brought you back here in the middle of the morning?"

"Half an hour off—and a big thirst on," he answered, shrugging his shoulders.

The rest of them drifted away—leaving the two friends alone.

And by lunch time the village buzzed with the enthusiasm of a first-class mystery.

When lunch was over Gale went up to the school with Mr. Hastings and saw Miss Hampton. On their return they found Danvers watching a game of tennis. Mr. Hastings had had a gravel court installed—he nicknamed it "The Flirtatorium."

"Merivale obviously holds his friend innocent," said Gale in a low voice.

The little man and his burly companion made an odd looking pair. They were fighting strenuously against doughty opponents. Mrs. Ranger sat in a deck-chair watching; by her side was Rachael. Wives gossiped in cliques, girls isolated men. There was no dearth of conversation. Everybody looked on Merivale with awe and on Rachael with affectionate envy. From snatches he overheard, Gale gathered that no breath of suspicion had touched Barnard's name. A pause came in the set after a desperate game—and a man named Steel called out to Barnard for a match.

"You'll find some loose in the outside pocket of my coat," he answered.

The coat was hanging on a nail fixed into the uprights that supported the wire netting around the court.

Gale followed Steel casually with his eyes—and saw his brows tighten as he took out two or three matches. He seemed to be looking steadily at something in his hand. Then without waiting he walked across to Merivale who was standing with his back to him, about to serve.

"Is that one of the jewels you lost, Merivale?"

There was a quick rush of feet across gravel and a score of people breathless.

Steel held out his hand and in the palm of it lay an ear-ring with a pearl drop.

"Yes," said Merivale gravely; "where did you find it?"

The man looked confused and glanced inquiringly at Barnard, who gave no sign.

"In Barnard's pocket," came the slow reply.

Gale watched the crowd. With an involuntary movement, as if dreading infection, it swayed away from Barnard—and the silence hurt. Every vestige of color left Merivale's face. He looked as if some one had convicted him—not Barnard—of a crime. No one moved except Mrs. Ranger.

"It's a plot to ruin you," she cried in her rich deep voice, stepping to his side and looking proudly round for confirmation.

But no one spoke.

Barnard seemed dazed—incapable of action.

"You must come with me, Barnard," said Mr. Hastings sadly, but with the voice of authority, "and stay—without your liberty—till the police arrive."

"But I wouldn't prosecute!" cried Merivale sharply.

"It's bigger than a private wrong—in a place like this; there must be vindication or punishment—or our security ceases."

The four players put on their coats forlornly, their game abruptly ended. The little crowd scattered, throbbing with anticipation. They all liked Barnard but excitement in the village was rare. The day seemed to compensate for months of dullness.

Mr. Hastings and Jack Barnard walked away in silence together. Gale and Danvers went up the hill past the big dam, found a boat and rowed up the river.

They returned later in the afternoon and Gale hurried to Mr. Hastings' study.

"Well?" said the director wearily. "So I need not have troubled you after all. It's all come out by itself."

"Has it?" asked Gale.

"What do you mean?"

"I want you to start an authoritative rumor that you are going to raise the river level to-morrow that extra ten feet."

Mr. Hastings put down the cigar he was smoking and stood up.

"What?" he asked incredulously.

"You need not really do it—but the rumor must start and see that every one hears it—but don't say a word till after dark. Then at midnight when the night shifts are all on duty and there is no one wandering about the village, I will get you and Merivale to come on a little expedition with Danvers and myself. Blankets will be desirable."

"What on earth are you driving at?"

"Forgive me if I tell you no more at present. I do not want to raise a suspicion in your mind against any one—I want to 'catch them with the goods'."

By midnight the village was still, the lights were brilliant in the power house showing the sleepless watchers, keeping unending vigil that distant cities might slumber in safety, but everywhere else silence reigned. The little party of four left the house at varying intervals, that no late straggler might mark them, and after unobtrusive wayfaring, foregathered at a spot beyond the big dam by the water's edge. A lantern was lighted and they marched steadily through the low-lying mist along a forest trail close to the river's bank. Not a sound reached their ears but the protesting ooze of the wet ground as they hastened forward and the liquid note of a distant owl. Twenty minutes brought them to an old disused log cabin—standing back a few yards from the river. The owner had left it to fester by the side of the stagnant water when the land he had laboriously cleared of timber had sunk forever beneath the rising tide.

"We stay here till dawn," said Gale, pushing open the rotting door. "We must make ourselves as warm and as dry as we can. We collected some wood this afternoon. Let's make a fire."

They gathered round the hearth, and determined to be merry, but the dank solitude was oppressive. The fog outside, and the reeking moisture of the walls inside, weighed on their spirits, in spite of well-meant efforts.

"What *are* we doing?" asked Mr. Hastings at last. Every minute he had been expecting Gale to explain this mysterious and uncomfortable outing and at length he felt he could bear ignorance no longer.

Gale looked up at him with a smile that was half an apology.

"Have patience with me till the dawn," he pleaded.

At the first glimmer of morning, Gale opened the door and called the others. They stood on the edge of a great back water lazily lapping the half-drowned trunks of endless trees; three hundred yards away in the leafy distance was the main stream gray

and lifeless in the early light. A boat lay moored beneath them. Gale pointed to her and they clambered in. Danvers took the oars and pushed and paddled as best he could, forcing a way through standing timber and floating logs. A little way before they reached the main stream, they came to a barn half submerged, surrounded by cedars, except on the side where it faced the river. Danvers guided the boat in through the opening, where the doors had been. Just above their heads were the wooden beams which had formed the ceiling of the barn. Near the entrance was a trap-door; Gale opened it and drew himself up into the loft and bade Mr. Hastings follow him. The other two men drifted off in the boat to hide nearby.

"This unfortunate homesteader had prepared for the winter just before you drowned him out," said Gale.

The floor of the loft was stacked with logs, split for firewood—running in a double rampart five feet high right across from one sloping eave to the other.

Hastings looked round the place in mute astonishment. Event had followed event rather dizzily, and he scarcely knew where the normal ended and the surprising began. The pale morning light came in wearily through a hole in the end of the building that had once been a window.

"Look here, Mr. Hastings," said Gale, "I believe the jewels are hidden somewhere in this loft. I have had no time to search as yet—I do not expect to have time now. Besides, I want to find the thief, not merely the treasure. I'm going on the other side of those logs; you will stay here please on this side in the far corner facing the trap door. There is an old barrel there and some boughs that will serve as a screen."

"But to what end?"

"Hush!" whispered Gale hastily. "Be quick and get to cover."

Far away came the faint whisper of a sound—only audible because it was regular and repeated. It crept into a greater rhythm, the girding of wood against wood and the indrawn whistle of water cut sharply. Gale could almost feel the approach of a Canadian canoe paddled by an expert hand. He crawled over the logs and crouched behind them, holding his breath, as he heard a boat float into the lower part of the barn and the person in charge making her fast. Mr. Hastings stole behind his barrel and branches and longed to call out to Gale but refrained. He had already suffered from the cold and chill of the night but his blood nearly froze as he saw the trap door slowly, very slowly, rising up. Gale could only listen; he could not see. But he was conscious of a human being moving across the floor toward him; then a voice began counting from the left-hand end of the logs, one—two—three and so on up to twenty-seven.

A sudden movement showed him where a log in the front pile must have been touched. Very quietly and without a sound he started to withdraw the corresponding log in the back pile.

He waited a second or two fearful lest he might be seen if the stealthy visitant were glancing through the hole; then very carefully he lowered his head. There was a tunnel right through to the other side; half way a sponge-bag was lying, and working its way steadily toward it was an arm. Gale pushed his own hand through his end of the opening and as the unknown hand touched the bag, he seized it with an iron grip. A startled shriek of terror rang out, and Gale still grasping the hand put his head up over the top of the barrier. On the other side, dumb with horror, her wild black eyes wide open for once, as if fearing some hideous apparition from the Unseen World was Mrs. Ranger, her lips colorless and sagging, her face a leaden gray. Mr. Hastings sprang out from his hiding place and dashed across to her, as she struggled to free her hand, half standing, half kneeling on the wet and slippery floor.

"Don't let her escape," cried Gale. He let her hand go—but retained the bag. She rose to her feet and leaned against the pile of wood for support. Gale blew a whistle and Danvers and Merivale rowed up to the barn and climbed into the loft.

"Are these your jewels?" asked Gale as he undid the bag and drew out a pearl necklace and a diamond pendant, a half hoop of diamonds and one pearl ear-ring.

"Yes," came the answer without hesitation, "this ear-ring matches the one found in Jack Barnard's pocket."

The four men turned and faced the woman—but she gave no sign. Her arms were on the top of the woodpile, her face hidden, her body shaken with sobs.

Gale touched her gently on the shoulder and pointed to the trap-door. Danvers helped her into the boat—and without another word they started on their homeward way, towing the canoe behind them.

"A police sergeant arrived last night," said Mr. Hastings quietly to Gale as they reached the shore; "we had better wake him—and"—he glanced round to make sure he was out of earshot, "effect a change of prisoners."

"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, Mr. Gale, the first moment you're not hungry." Rachael smiled her command from behind her coffee pot. Gale glanced round the breakfast table and saw the eager faces bent on him.

"Do you remember the book that was upside down?" he said, turning to Merivale. "That was what started me. You went out at ten and the jewels were safe; you returned at eleven and the jewels had vanished. The back door was locked; you had the key—the front door would only open to you—or Barnard or Mrs. Ranger."

"What about the windows?" asked Rachael.

"I looked at them. They are all high up from the ground, except the one from the veranda, and that only opened from the top—and then only half way."

"Quite right," said Barnard; "we fixed that on purpose to prevent temptation."

"I was sure," continued Gale, "the entrance was effected through the door. Now it was either Barnard, who admittedly was there, or else Mrs. Ranger's key was used."

"But she was in Mrs. Jones' veranda all the time."

"I know, and but for one circumstance I agree that things would have looked bad against you, Barnard."

"What was it?"

"All along the wall from the door to the buffet where the jewels were put away were the book-shelves. Some of the books had been pushed back on the shelf two feet from the ground, and one of them was upside down and—sticky. Barnard is well over six feet and if intent on crime would not stoop down to play with books. A sticky book two feet from the ground suggests a loitering child. If the book contains pictures the presumption becomes much stronger."

"Thank the Lord!" ejaculated Barnard, and every one smiled.

"Now, who sent the child? Not Barnard, for he came himself. The only other person who has a key is Mrs. Ranger. She was on Mrs. Jones' veranda all the morning. She did not come herself. She sent the child."

"But all the children are in school at that time!" exclaimed Rachael.

"Precisely—and that is where her abnormal cunning comes in—no ordinary child was available. A conversation with any ordinary child Mrs. Jones would have overheard—once the theft became known an ordinary child would talk. The only child that would suit Mrs. Ranger's purpose would be one who, through some infirmity, did not go to school—one who could not talk so that Mrs. Jones would notice her—one who could not overhear any subsequent gossip about the crime."

"A deaf and dumb child! Little Elsie Atkinson!" cried Merivale. Gale nodded.

"Such a child is cut off from gossip. People only trouble to convey her elementary facts. I found out from the school teacher that there was a deaf and dumb child who lives away on the hill side, who comes in twice a week regularly to the store. Yesterday was one of her days. I went to see her in the afternoon and talked to her on my fingers. She was perfectly frank and perfectly innocent. She had come to the store, then sought out Mrs. Ranger, the one person in the village who can talk the deaf and dumb alphabet, according to her usual custom, for the pleasure of a chat. Mrs. Ranger was on the veranda, gave her the key, and told her on her fingers to go to the other shack and fetch a box she would find in the drawer. The child never opened the box but merely did as she was told. She admitted to 'Pilgrim's Progress' and hands sticky with candy."

"But how did Mrs. Ranger plan it?" asked Barnard, slow and cautious in his reasoning.

"She saw the letters saying the jewels were coming, she saw the box containing them, she knew that little Elsie would come in that morning, and she deliberately planned her clever coup."

"But how did you spot the barn?" asked Hastings, who was still somewhat inclined to shiver.

"If we had charged her on Elsie's statement, she would have laughed and produced some other box—saying that was the one the child fetched. It was essential to find the Merry Widow handling her booty. Now in a village this size concealment is difficult—the guilty mind of an amateur always expects a search and nervously imagines that every wall is transparent. Digging would attract attention. The natural result is an obscure and unusual hiding place. All the time that I was voyaging up and down the river the first day I was here, I was saying to myself what an ideal place any of these half-submerged huts would be for the concealment of a crime. I knew she was an ardent fisherman and could go on the river without attracting attention. The conclusion was obvious that she would choose a shack—the first convenient shack well hidden from the village. After Danvers and I had talked to the child, we rowed up the river prospecting. We found the barn almost hidden by trees. The trap door had been opened recently."

"But the ear-ring in my pocket?" cried Barnard.

Gale looked at Merivale and then at Rachael and guessed that their happiness meant sorrow for Barnard.

"Thou art blind as a bat, Jack," Merivale broke in helpingly. "Honest now, has Mrs. Ranger never suggested to you that you and she were made for each other?" The big engineer actually blushed and hung his head.

"At the dance," he murmured, "she drew a blank."

"She wanted wealth—she wanted immunity—she wanted revenge," smiled Merivale in reply; "a triple alliance of blessings she all but achieved. Standing up for you in the tennis court was part of her plot. You had better thank your deliverer."

"I'm grateful," said Barnard, stretching out a hand to Gale.

THE INHERITED ANIMAL

By C. WELLS NIEMAN

Author of "Bashford's Try Out," "The Go-Devil," etc.

A BOSTON LOVE AFFAIR, A WILD WEST HOLD-UP, AND AN OIL FIELDS RECEPTION, ALL GET MIXED UP IN ONE BEAUTIFUL SOUL-SATISFYING SCRAP. NEIMAN IS BACK WITH ANOTHER HONEST-TO-BLAZES OIL FIELDS STORY

YOU HEAR plenty these days about brute force, and I reckon the folks that claim it's no use to anybody but mules and steam engines are playing safe in the long run. But life—anyway down here in the California oil fields—isn't all long run; and it's those short, quick sprints that are liable to make all the difference. I got in mind the time Henry Adams came down to our Midway camp, fresh out of Harvard and looking for a chance to see life, and though of course Henry didn't drift in as any bright shining example of brute force, circumstances sort of put it onto him—circumstances and the inherited animal.

The first time I ever uncorked an eye on Henry was one day when I noticed a stranger talking to the bartender at the Last Chance. I was boss of the inspection crew that went the rounds of the company's camps blowing out the producing wells and looking after the casing and keeping things generally at top notch, and I didn't get around to Oil Strata oftener than every six months, so there are always plenty of people I don't know in town; but Henry wasn't that kind of stranger. He was a stranger to the whole oil country, the kind the dogs in a camp bark at just because they don't understand him.

However, I may as well say so; the special reason for my trip at this particular time was not to my liking at all, being's how it was a sort of a half-baked detective job.

It was all on account of a hold-up job perpetrated on our general paymaster, Charlie Chiswel, a couple of weeks ago. You've heard of him—the boys used to call him Charley Coldchisel because he was so all-fired sharp and had such a way of driving himself into things. This holdup was the first and only time Charley ever had it put over him, I reckon, and then a gang held him up in his office at the Flowing Fortune and got away with a payroll the size of a yellow dog. He carried a forget-me-not of that pleasant occasion in the shape of a red gash over one eye that he claimed wouldn't ever heal up till he'd landed the gang in a safe-deposit vault.

Now, my pleasant job on my rounds this time was to seek out and report to this cold-chisel person any suspects disguised as honest workingmen. Nice job for an oil-well inspector—not!

"Say, Sam," the bartender calls out to me, "here's somebody you ought to know. Shake hands with Mr. Adams, fresh off the

ice from Boston, Mass." And by the wink he gave I knew he'd been stuffing the young fellow with more than whisky, the way some people do, thinking it funny business to lie blue blazes to a greenhorn and get him to believe anything you can get him to believe.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Adams," I says, holding out my hand. "I suppose you're making a tour of the fields here, and I hope you'll be favorably impressed with what you see."

I'm one of the old timers and I've never got round to shake the habit of being polite to strangers from the East, for in the early days the very breath in our vests depended on those fellows—and the little round toys they brought in their pockets. And even though this one didn't look like cash in the bank, wearing dirty overalls and a flannel shirt and all the trimmings of a working man, I'd been used to seeing investors tog up that way, thinking it was the costume of the country—one of 'em even had on a cowboy outfit once, spurs, chaps and gun complete, and just missed being strung up for a bad man on sight, but he went away leaving about a quarter million souvenirs with us, so we learned that appearances are sometimes pleasantly deceiving.

"I am pleased to meet you," Henry answers, "but I mustn't allow you to take me for a tourist. I work at the Midway field as a roustabout."

"Huh!" I grunts, too surprised to do anything but believe him. "You from the East and working? Is it a bet or something?"

"No," he says, "I'm out here to learn what they couldn't teach me at Harvard—knowledge of my fellow men; and the best way I can acquire that is by mingling with them and working as one of them."

"Well," I says, "I don't get the hang of your idea, though maybe it's all right. But if you're hired at the Midway you'll be on my gang to-morrow, so you might as well come out with me now. I'm on my way and there's a seat in the buggy that ain't working. I'd like to hear more about this classical theory of yours."

"But I came in with the skinner," he objects, "and was going back with him to-night."

"Don't you worry," butts in the barkeeper. "He'll be too drunk to notice whether he's got six mules with him or seven."

I don't like that kind of smart aleck talk—repartee they call it in the dime novels—so I gave the barkeep the disgusted glance and shoved Henry out of the place and into my buggy.

Henry was the most enthusiastic student of real life I'd ever laid ear to. He just bubbled with talk all the way out to camp and was so pleased at having somebody willing to listen to him he told me pretty much everything there was to tell about himself, and what he didn't say then came out later. It seems that one of Henry's ancestors, so he said, had rowed No. 7 on the crew that brought the *Mayflower* into American politics, and the family'd lived in Boston ever since the boat docked without hardly setting their patent leathers outside the city limits. That kind of exclusive life had made 'em grow shells on themselves like turtles and got 'em so they didn't care to associate with anybody who wasn't the same kind of turtle. They always went to Harvard and took all the degrees on the list and then came out and worked at jobs in lawyers' offices and banks and brokers' places and that sort of literary business.

He'd started through the same mill and been tied up in a stall in that big education menagerie and fed wisdom straight from the original bucket for seven years till he had more initials behind his name than in front. But somewhere in his backbone there must have been one of those little animals that made his *Mayflower* ancestors restless enough to come over in the first place, and he hadn't been willing to settle down in his shell without first having a try and a shy at the territory outside Boston. Anything's liable to happen once you get a few red corpuscles contaminating real blue blood.

He was tall and black-haired and kind of thin, especially round the lower part of his face, and he had eyes that looked as if there wasn't ever a dream very far from them. He appeared about as much like a roustabout as a gilt-edged dictionary in six volumes looks like a cookbook, but he was having a grand old time wearing overalls and bunking in with his fellow-humans; and I reckon he was, as he said, learning some-

thing he couldn't have got any other way. All that worried him was that his people might hear what he was up to—or down to as they'd have put it—in which case they'd have fainted and the family couldn't have held up its head for two generations and the rest of the turtles would have excluded them from their exclusiveness and there'd have been dignified hell to pay. Of course they knew he was in California, and that was some scandal itself, but his mail was taken care of by a clerk in a hotel at Los Angeles, and he'd done all he could so as not to have his crime detected.

"I guess I get you, Henry," I says after he'd told me this far, "and your scheme ain't so bad, but for a man that wants to study human nature right where it's humanest and most natural I wouldn't exactly recommend the Midway as a place to catch life hot off the bat. It's nothing now but a pumping camp."

"Why," he says, "it appears to me like an exceedingly live place. Was it ever any different?"

"Ever different!" I turns on him. "Why, the place looks as if the clock had been wound up and the cat put out and the cellar door slammed to and bolted. The spirit's gone—the feeling that you're chasing something and'll catch it around the next corner—the rainbow that's humping itself over camp and liable to explode and drown you in diamonds. You ought to have seen the place when the prospecting was on and the drilling crews swarming over the landscape and the whole camp crawling with excitement. Once you find your oil the sun don't rise the same over any camp. It quits work and settles down like a man that's had money left him, and the boys—the real boys, that a man wants to travel with—drift away to some new camp, and there's nobody left but a lot of lazy tikes hanging around the engine house without enough to do to keep 'em healthy."

"Tell me," asks Henry, his eyes shining and the blood working up into his narrow cheek bones, "are there any camps left where they haven't found the oil yet?"

"They're few and scarce," I answers, "and you'd best not look for 'em. I like your spirit though, Henry. There's no four-flush about your ideas of educating yourself. But one thing I want to ask you, since you've been so free to tell me what you have. Are you doing all this overall stunt just for the simple-pure cause of the higher learning?"

"Of course," he answers; but there's a little something shaky in his voice. "What else—why should I be here if it weren't for that?"

"Oh, for nothing else," I agrees as cheerful as if I believed him, "only I've always noticed that when a man, especially a fellow that's been brought up the way you have, does something different from anything he's ever done before, it's because—well, there's always a woman somewhere in the story."

The way his face started to imitate the rising sun I knew I'd won a cigar on that shot, and after about a mile of painful silence he came through with it. She was a real Boston girl, I gathered, anyway she had a regular Puritan Brand Baked Beans name, Priscilla Hancock, and she'd led such a sheltered exclusive life her folks wouldn't let her know that the U. S. had ever admitted any other states to associate with the original thirteen. She'd gone through the female annex of the same mill as Henry, and they'd been engaged to be married during cradle days, but just lately something had gone wrong. She'd got tired of him, he thought, maybe, because she decided to call off the matrimonial probabilities and play a lone hand in the game of life. Henry couldn't understand it at all, said that sort of thing wasn't done in Boston, and had been so broken up he didn't want to see that part of the country for a while. But after he'd been talking a while I began to get an idea about that girl.

"Henry," I says, "I've got about one per cent. of one per cent. as much education as you, but I know what's the trouble with your girl. It's the inherited animal in her."

"What do you mean?" asks Henry. "What animal's that?"

"First cousin to your own," I answers. "Inherited straight from the Pilgrims or the Puritans or the Plymouth Rocks or whatever it was your ancestors called themselves."

More than that I wouldn't tell him,

though the thing stood pretty clear in my mind. She was a high-spirited girl, and had too much natural push to be satisfied with any man raised entirely on Boston tea and Harvard toast. I hoped that if there was anything to the fellow except intellect the fields would bring it out. Anyway, he was pointed right.

For all of Henry's education he was more of a fool in some things than the average man that ran away from home at the age of eight and absorbed his learning from the remarks of a sea-captain. It seems that his particular pal at camp was a fellow named Al Christian, who Henry thought was one big treat in the line of humanity, a simple, straightforward gentleman in overalls with ideas and ideals and a love of his fellow creatures that made a Red Cross nurse look like a cat with her back up. I'd never wasted eyesight on the man before, but the minute I saw him I knew he was wrong—so crooked he'd make a corkscrew look like the shortest distance between two points. It was a wonder Bashford, the time-keeper at the Midway, had ever taken him on, but Bashford's got lots to learn that way too. I decided not to say anything to Henry, for one reason because I wanted to watch this nature's nobleman on the quiet and head him off if he tried to do the company any dirt. Anyway Henry was in for education and ought to be let get it, even if something dropped on him. He'd been taught too much already—it was time now for him to learn something.

When my crew got in, next day, things began to jump along in the regulation way, and I was too busy to pay attention to anything but cleaning wells. Mike Donlin always went a day or so ahead of me and got things started. He was a red-haired Irishman with a temper as short and the same color as his hair, and he had a red-headed way of introducing himself to those pump-tenders and engine-feeders that convinced 'em we'd arrived and their vacation was over. He didn't always get into a fight, but was always willing to, and his face was like one of those billboards along the railroad with a big sign on it that says "Try it once!"

We were just starting to pull casing on No. 3 when, to make matters interesting, Mr. Henderson showed up. As a visitor that General Superintendent of ours is about as welcome as a Gila monster in your bed. My idea of heaven is to see Mr. Henderson stroll into an oil camp cool and smiling and cheerful, hand cigars around and say, "Hello, boys! Everything going fine, I see. Well, don't overwork, because the company's pretty well satisfied with things as they are."

And my idea of the other place is the way he does it in real life.

As if he wouldn't have been enough all alone, he had a telegram in his hand. It was from the Old Man himself and read:

> "Arrive to-morrow. Arrange to entertain party including ladies."

"Entertain 'em!" he yells at Bashford. "What does he think we run here—open-air vaudeville? We're fixed fine to entertain party including ladies!"

"That's easy," I puts in. "We'll take 'em out and have a picnic supper in the grove."

"Huh?" he roars. "Grove?" and he and Bashford looked around that desert, wild-eyed and searching as if maybe there might be a tree they'd overlooked heretofore.

"Sure," I goes on, "and then we'll have a bathing party on the beach and take 'em for an aeroplane ride——"

"Go to hell!" he bellows, and turns on his heel so hard he nearly went twice around.

Well, an oil camp is a great place to invite ladies to, there's so much to see, and if they look slow and take in all the details that entertainment'll last five good minutes. After that it's about as interesting as a visit to your grandfather's cousin in the Old Soldiers' Home. As a matter of fact I had a good deal more license to be worried than anybody else, for I could see it coming as plain as the curl in a pig's tail how that entertaining was going to be all on me. The men in the party would get together in the office with Mr. Henderson and Bashford, and open a bottle of Yellowstone and settle down to talk the business they'd come out to talk, leaving me under orders to show the ladies around. They weren't due till next day, but I began getting blue over the situation right away—and then suddenly I remembers Henry Adams.

If any man could be spared off a crew it

was that student of real life, and with his education and general finish he was just pointed at by the finger of destiny to entertain that party. I'd make him put on civilized clothes and wash the oil out of his features and talk Boston to those ladies. I thought he'd be glad of the chance to mingle once again with his kind; but he wasn't, it turned out when I gave him the order. Claimed he hadn't come out here for that, and how he was in a condition of spiritual detachment from his world which couldn't be interfered with, and would have gone on some more, but Mike Donlin shut him up.

"Ye can cut the Chinase jabber, young feller," he yells, "an' opin yer eyes to the boss's orders. Tay parties or murdher, 'tis all one to ye whin ye're told to do a thing——"

"It's all right, Mike," I breaks in. "You seem to have let the light of reason into him, and he'll show up on schedule fixed for entertaining. And Henry," I calls after him, "if you've got a dress-suit with you put it on. We'll show 'em we know what's what in Midway."

It was about nine o'clock the next day when Mr. Buskirk and his party came down the road. There were two big automobiles of party, and they piled out in front of the office till it looked as if the landscape wasn't going to hold 'em all. He'd brought his son Van, and Crocker, one of the big engines of the S. P. Railroad, and a couple of other men who looked able to take care of themselves, and a young fellow of about Henry Adams' general style and makeup —and, of all the men in the world I did *not* want to see—Charley Chiswell. Mr. Buskirk hadn't raised any false alarm about the ladies. There were four of 'em, Van's wife, and Crocker's, and his daughter—regular California people, at home wherever you put 'em—and a tall girl, very dignified, the kind that ought to be on a marble post in the rotunda of the state capitol, pretty enough as a work of art but too cold in the eyes for a real girl.

After the first how-do-you-dos all around Mr. Buskirk hooked me off to one side and gave the word. Of course I didn't raise any objections, just grinned as if I'd been lying awake over night hoping to be asked to show the ladies something in a place where there wasn't anything to see. Then I whistled for Henry. As a matter of fact I wouldn't have minded the job so much if it had just been Van's wife and the Crockers, for anybody'd feel at home with them and glad to be there, but the fellow—Lionel Frost was the name his folks had embroidered onto him—was going along with us, and the tall girl too, and I didn't feel quite up to 'em. She made a kind of try at being friendly, but she was no mixer and right from the start as much out of the game as a one-legged veteran at a country dance. I'd no more think of talking to her than I would of asking the preacher to go fishing on Sunday. I was mighty glad I'd fixed it for Henry to set up his derrick on the job. I looked all round, to give him the high sign, but somehow he'd got out of sight, which was funny, for I'd seen him hovering around in the dim distance when the party came. That made me pretty mad, and I called Mike over and told him to go fetch the young fellow.

I looked to see him show up about twelve and a half seconds later, but instead Mike came back looking mighty puzzled and whispered that Henry wanted to see me bad—something important. You bet that didn't make me feel any better, having to play nurse to that fellow's educated scruples, but I reckoned I better see what he wanted. So I set 'em all to counting how many strokes a minute one of the pumps was making—which shows you how I was put to it for entertaining—and made for the bunk-house. Henry was standing back of the door looking through the crack. He had pulled off his good clothes—he hadn't put on the dress-suit as I told him to, anyway—and was in his overalls and flannel shirt again, and he had his felt hat pulled down over his forehead like a moving picture train robber.

"What the devil?" I starts. "Why aren't you out on the job?"

"I can't," he answers, looking scared and helpless. "She's there."

"She who?" I asks. "There's four of 'em."

"She's there," he says again, sort of gaspy. "Priscilla Hancock! The one I told you about."

"Well, if she's a friend of yours——" I

says, trying to remember what he'd told me.

"She's my fiancée," he answers. "We're betrothed. She mustn't see me here."

"If you mean by that you're going to marry her some day," I says, "what's the harm in her seeing you here?" Then I remembers about the Boston turtles. "Well," I says, giving in, "I reckon you're let out then. But how's it happen she's down here in Midway? It's some ways from home for her."

"She's been visiting Bess Crocker in Los Angeles," he answers. "They went through Vassar together. I suppose she asked her to come down here with them. What a rotten coincidence—what a damn rotten coincidence. It doesn't seem possible."

"Coincidences happen," I remarks, "to Boston people same as to real folks. But I got to get back to 'em now, and if they want to see the inside of this bunk-house you get under a bunk."

I started off to my crowd again, but I never finished that day's entertaining, not in the way you'd call entertaining, that is. I'd not more than set my foot outside the bunk-house when one of the boys on my crew, Jess the carpenter, a little wiry fellow, mighty good at his job but apt to go off the handle when things happened he hadn't calculated on, came running up. He'd been looking all over camp for me, scared and jumpy as a calf hunting its mother.

"Sam," he calls out. "What're we going to do? No. 3 derrick's started to fall and we can't hold her!"

I didn't blame No. 3 much for starting to fall, because they'd pulled up about three hundred feet of steel casing and leaned it against that derrick, and I wasn't pleased with Jess for losing his head that way over the proposition. No. 3 is about half a mile from camp, the other side of a little hill, and I found my crew running around like ants with their hill kicked up, and the derrick in a bad way, leaning over as if it had got tired of life and wanted to lay down. All that kept it from doing that was a rope Jess had made fast near the top and carried over to a pumping-jack, and so far it was all right; only when the crew began hauling on that rope to right the derrick, the casing got jammed into the crossbeams and couldn't be budged. If they pulled any more the crossbeams might tear loose and let the casing right through the whole side. It was a kind of ticklish job, but a little patience and not getting excited was all it needed. I had 'em make a line fast to each length of casing and pull it away from the crossbeams, one at a time, then I buried a dead-man and rigged up a block and tackle, and she went back nice and easy, straight and pert as when she was born.

There wasn't really any trouble at all about that job, but it took about two hours—and great jack-rabbits, I'd forgotten clean utterly about those ladies! If they'd been entertaining themselves all this time with counting pump-strokes my respect for their intelligence was as small as a horn-toad's ears.

It took about three jumps to get me to the top of the hill where I could see camp again. There wasn't a sign of ladies or anybody else moving. The office door and windows were wide open and I could hear the tail end of a cuss word floating out, so I knew they hadn't been invited to join the discussion. Then I noticed that where the automobiles had been standing, in the shade of the mule shed, there was only one left. And suddenly I saw Henry Adams coming out of the engine house as independent and careless about being seen as the only rooster in a henyard.

"See here, Henry," I comes up to him with, "what's the meaning of this? Where's my party and what's happened to the other auto?"

"It's all right, Mr. Carruthers," he answers. "I arranged matters in your absence so as to relieve you of further care."

"What in blazes do you mean?" I asks. "And who gave you license to arrange matters anyway?"

"Why," he says, "you appeared to be detained by matters of importance and Christian very kindly offered to show your guests around the country. They took one of the cars and a chauffeur, and they've been gone about half an hour now. Wasn't that all right? They'll enjoy themselves——"

I caught him by his lanky shoulders and yanked his face up close.

"Henry Adams, you're a fool and a damn fool and a double-damn fool!" I yells at

him. But you get busy now and answer me some questions. Who all went in that automobile?"

"Why, there were the women, of course," he answers, "and Lionel Frost—he's a cousin of Miss Hancock's and a junior at Harvard—and Christian and the chauffeur——"

"Which chauffeur?" I rips out.

"The short one, the chap with the little round head——"

"With the cauliflower ear and the stone-bruise on his cheek?"

"I wasn't near enough to notice," Henry answers, "but he seemed to know Christian —I suppose they'd met before——"

"Yes, I reckon they've met before, all right," I remarks. "Anybody else?"

"Just before they started Christian went over to No. 1 well and came back with Fred Turner and squeezed him into the front seat——"

"Turner!" I yells. "I've had my suspicions of him too. Now I know——"

"But what's the matter?" Henry asks, scared without knowing why. "Did I do wrong?"

"You did a plenty," I says, thinking at the rate of two hundred a minute. Then I told him what I thought of Christian, and what I thought of Henry Adams, too, for letting a crowd like that get hold of those women and ride off with 'em in an automobile.

I tell you he looked pretty sick before I'd got done barking at him; and then his jaw set hard, with his thin lips shut together in a straight black line and the dream in his eyes turned white hot with the fire just spitting out.

"Kidnapped!" he shouts. "My God, such a thing happening to Priscilla!" He stood in his tracks a second, and then he turned as if he'd been hit and broke for the automobile standing by the mule shed.

"Kidnapped be damned! This here's real trouble. Here, where you going?" I yells at his back.

"Going to follow 'em!" he snaps without stopping to look around.

The chauffeur wasn't in the auto, and I was looking this way and that for him, but Henry didn't wait for anybody. He jumped into that wagon and began jabbing and poking at things and yanking levers around, and before I could get to him he had the things going with a noise like a barrel of stones rolling downhill. I swear he didn't seem to care whether I went along with him or not, and I don't know that he even noticed I'd climbed into the back seat.

"Wait!" I yells. "We can't do this alone. We've got to get help."

"Help be damned!" he answers.

"But maybe they got guns," I protests.

"Guns be damned!" he says, hauling over the wheel and making that auto waltz on its two hind legs.

The fool would have started off by himself after three men, maybe gunned to the limit, and I'd have gone along with him unless I choked him first, but just at that minute around the corner of the mule-shed came Mike Donlin. I yelled to him to jump in, but he stood there like a fool, not seeming to get onto what I wanted. There wasn't any time to stop and explain, so I just leans way out and yells, "Come on! Fight!" and that red Irish head made a dive through the air like a comet stung by a wasp and landed all over that back seat and me too.

Out across the desert Henry swung, following the tracks of that other auto; and pretty soon we branched off to the east and were streaking along the old road to the Last Dollar camp. Anyway, we were hitting parts of the road, the parts a little nearer heaven than the majority, for never yet did I see a man run an auto like Henry. Turns in the road didn't mean anything to him: he'd cut across lots, scaling the hills and dropping down the other side. One place we came to was an arroyo about ten feet wide and half a dozen deep, and we could see where the other auto had made considerable of a run-about to dodge it; but Henry didn't have the dodge idea in him. He just yanked the jump lever or something and that machine lifted its front legs up and struck out with its hind ones and we hit the ground so far the other side of the arroyo we never saw it. You don't have to believe me unless you want to, for maybe my ideas of that ride got kind of mixed. Mike and I were doing our best to hang on to something, but everything we laid hold of kicked us loose again and we'd land way over somewhere else. Pretty soon all we

could keep a grip on was each other, and anybody to see us would have thought we were having the savagest kind of a wrestling match with all rules suspended.

But you can't eat up road like that without getting somewhere, and pretty soon I made out to brace my teeth with my tongue so they wouldn't get blown down my windpipe and steadied myself by one of Henry's ears.

"Pull her up!" I yells. "I got an idea." And after pretty near strangling him the machine slowed down to a trot. "Right the other side of this hill we're coming to," I says, "is a kind of valley. We'll get out here and sneak up to the top and maybe we can see 'em without giving ourselves away just yet."

Even Henry could get the sense of that, so we left the auto and snaked it on our vests over to the top of the hill. Right below us was the Last Dollar, and we could see all over that deserted camp. The company had blown up two years before, and everything had been left standing right where it was. There were a couple of derricks and a bunk-house and an old lean-to without anything to lean against—just the corpse of a camp the place was. But what took our eye was the auto we'd been trailing. There she was, standing right in front of the bunk-house! Something appeared to have gone wrong, for all our people were out walking around looking at it, except the chauffeur and Christian and Turner who were fooling with one of the wheels. Henry was for walking right down and asking the ladies to step into our auto, thinking the fellows would be too scared to put up a fight. It looked as easy to him as stealing a girl at a dance away from some patent leather Willie without the spunk of a wilted shirt-front. Mike was for tearing down on 'em, swinging our fists and yelling the battle cry of County Cork, and willing to do the trick all by himself while we watched him. But I was boss of that crew, for which all hands can be mighty thankful.

I felt pretty sure those tough-faced lads were up to something crooked, but to make our job good and complete we ought to wait till we could get some evidence to lay against them. My plan was to slide down among the sagebrush and through an old pipe trench I knew about up to one corner of the bunk-house where we'd be close enough to hear anything they said, also be in shape to put a kink in anything they started. The scheme tickled Henry, for it looked like a larger dose of real life than he'd ever more'n read about, but it didn't set well with Mike, for he was afraid maybe we couldn't get anything on those boys and there wouldn't be any fight after all.

It was fine sport crawling through that brush, a regular appetite-sprouter. Where there wasn't enough brush we'd burrow through the sand like gophers, and little pebbles used to get started in around my collar and work clear down to my boots, scratching every inch. At the last we made a doubled-up run and reached the corner with nobody wiser. From there we had a pretty good chance to see what was going on, because that old house was so full of holes it would hardly stand anyway. The auto had cast a shoe in the off hind tire and they'd had to put on a new one, it appeared. The way they've got autos down to-day all a man has to do to change a tire is to get out and swear at it, but in those days it wasn't so easy. The tire on that car must have given 'em a good deal of trouble and used up lots of time, to judge by the tools lying around and the sweaty temper those fellows were in. But they had it all fixed when we got there and were in a piling hustle to get started again, and the ladies, including that Frost cousin of Miss Hancock's, who'd been gently mooning around over the scenery, seeing that things were ready sauntered up and began climbing in. Mrs. Crocker had the door open and was putting her foot on the stepping-board when that Christian insolently laid hold of her arm.

"Say, Ma'am," he comes out with, "we've got something to tell you, and we aim to tell it now. You folks ain't going to get onto this car."

"We ain't!" snaps back Mrs. Crocker. "Who says so? And what are you up to, anyway?"

"Me and my friends here," answers Christian in one of those gruff voices that blow straight off a sandpaper disposition, "have concluded to leave this part of the country, and we got to have the wagon here

to use in our travels. You ladies are goin' to walk back to camp——"

"Walk back to camp!" shrieks Mrs. Crocker; and then there broke loose the darnedest female commotion ever I hope to see and come through alive. Crocker's wife, and Van's wife, and Bess Crocker too, just lit into those fellows for all their tongues and lungs were worth. They took turns telling 'em what they thought of 'em, only their turns all came at the same time, which made it trying on the ears. Even Miss Hancock must have said something, for I saw her mouth going through the motions, but her remarks got lost in the general conversation. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they'd have talked those nervy villains clear off their feet, given time, but it had got to the point now where it was up to us to mix a little action into the scene.

I'd been having my hands full holding Mike in, and when I gave him the sign he was off and around the corner of that shack like a greased pig struck by lightning. I was right after him, of course, but I only got there in time to catch a bird's-eye wink of Christian walking backward with his chin up in the air and his hands trying to grab the clouds and Mike getting ready for another swing. Then I saw that chauffeur yanking and hauling at his rear pocket, and I closed on him from in back, holding down his arms and trying to ram in his backbone with my knee. It was mighty unhandy, and he squirmed and wriggled like a coyote caught by the tail, all the time trying to out with the gun or put it in action through his pocket.

As we whirled 'round I got a glint of Henry Adams and Turner squaring off at each other, and at the next whirl they were laying into themselves in a mix-up of arms and legs that looked like a dozen apiece. Then my lad made out to jerk his gun loose, and I was back again to the matter in hand. Once he fired, and I found later some powder marks on my right leg and a black streak that might have been the graze of the lead. Next minute I landed a knee-kick that caught that gun just right, and it sailed a dozen feet off. But that shot had made me crazy, killing mad. I dropped the fellow's arms and got a clinch round his neck and hugged till my wrists cracked with the way they pressed against his windpipe. Then we must have tripped, for first I knew I was on my back and him on top, but with my arms still wedging his head off.

Lying there with nothing to do but choke the life out of a fellow human I looked around at the general situation. Mrs. Crocker and the Harvard boy were standing by the auto, too surprised to yell anything appropriate to the circumstances; and off a little ways was Henry's Boston Priscilla. She didn't have that high-brow, mile-away look in her eyes now, but something that was bright and eager and—I hate to say it—darn near murderous. I followed the fire from her eyes and saw Henry and Turner rolling over and over in the sand like twined-up tumble weeds, fighting for the very life of them. Then the chauffeur's heels began kicking a tattoo on my shins, the way a man will when he's choking his last, and I let go and jumped to my feet. Back of me Christian was lying quiet on his side, while Mike Donlin pranced around yelling for him to get up and finish it like a man. My friend, with a taste of air, was gaping and gurgling and making out to come to, but hadn't a sand-flea's worth of fight in him, so I turned to help Henry.

But the main show was over there too, for Henry had both knees on Turner's stomach and his fists were having the time of their lives beating in the fellow's face. Our crowd had scored a triple knockout, but take it all round that rough and tumble wasn't exactly a pretty sight for ladies. It had young Harvard scared colorless, and Mrs. Crocker was leaning against the side of the auto or she'd have toppled over. As I looked at those two something sailed in between us—Priscilla. Like the *Mayflower* in a storm at sea she floated right up to Henry Adams and grabbed him by his shoulder.

"Henry!" she cries.

Henry let up on Turner and got to his feet, but he didn't answer a word. He didn't have the nerve even to meet her eyes, but tried to pretend he was hunting in the sand for a suspender button he'd lost in the fight. Then suddenly he seems to get up some spunk and looks her in the face.

"Well, Prissy," he says, "you've seen the brute in me asserting itself, haven't you?

I suppose after this I'll never look the same to you."

"No you won't!" she cries. "And thank God for that!"

"Why, what do you mean?" he asks, having trouble to get his mouth open and shut.

"I mean that I've seen you act a man's part," she answers, "and I'm prouder of you in overalls, fighting like a hero, than if you were a college president."

"But—" asks Henry, "but what will they think of me in Boston?"

"Boston!" she says, spitting out the word as if it was a sour olive. "Boston can go—to Halifax!"

About an hour afterward we pulled into camp, Van's wife driving the auto with the ladies and we following in the other with our prisoners tied up and lashed around with ropes and straps and pieces of chain till they didn't have a chance so much as to sneeze. When we got there you can take it from me we kicked up some stir, a good deal more even than I had figured on. For some heated moments it looked as if those ex-pirates were going to enjoy the luxury of being lynched by millionaires, for Mr. Buskirk and Crocker were just like wild animals when they heard how their women had been treated, and Van wasn't much better.

The big surprise, though, was when Charlie Chisel fastened his eye on Christian and Turner—also it was the answer to why those two were so all-fired keen about making a quick getaway from camp just then.

They'd been in the gang that held Charlie up! The chauffeur too—Charlie's own chauffeur!—was a kind of silent partner to the gang and had tipped 'em off to the payroll job.

Well, sir, you can doubt my word if you want to when I tell you that Charlie Chisel was glad to meet up with his old friends again. He was so thundering glad he wanted to hug 'em to death—with a rope; and nothing could have kept him from it except that maybe they'd squeal on the balance of their pals. They did too, about a week later in the Kern County jail—at least Christian turned state's evidence, though that didn't let him out of ten years for the auto stealing.

You might think this would be enough lively doings for one day, but it wasn't, for no sooner had we settled with the criminal element of our programme than along comes that Boston pair, Henry and Priscilla. They'd decided, they said, to get married at the Crockers's in Los Angeles, and right away, too, while they felt good and strong for it.

I tell you it's a terrible thing when little inherited animals once get on the warpath! Those two young people, who'd been brought up to be turtles, and always expected to be turtles, broke away from everything they'd ever learned and shed their shells at the first touch and go of real life. All the years of exclusiveness just rolled off 'em like a dog shaking himself after a swim, and the whole bunch of highbrow degrees Henry had slaved himself weak in the eyes for weren't worth one blow of his fists on Turner's face. They went back to the wild, those people did, and I don't believe they've ever come out of it.

In Boston, Henry told me, a betrothal ran along from five to fifteen years and the relatives and friends would come crawling in a couple of months ahead of time from the Back Bay and the Fenway and surrounding turtle ponds, and there'd be one big dignified doings; and then the happy couple after a trip to Italy would settle down and live exclusively ever after.

This wedding, though, they'd arranged as a personal insult to Boston. It wasn't only going to be quick and sudden, but every man, woman, child or Chinaman in the oil fields that wanted to drop in for a free feed was guaranteed a rousing welcome and the one big time of his life. New England papers please copy.

It was a mighty lucky thing, I thinks to myself, that those two had found each other while the finding was good, because Boston must be a pretty lonesome place for an inherited animal without any mate, don't you think?

THE FETISH OF REMORSE

By ACHMED ABDULLAH

Author of "The Brother of Eagles," "The Tale of a Bluff," etc.

A TENSE AND BREATHLESS STORY OF THE RUTHLESS POWER OF GOLD, STAGED IN THE REEKING TONKIN JUNGLE WHERE DEATH LURKED BEHIND EVERY TREE—A STORY WITH A SURPRISE—AND ONE THAT WILL LEAVE YOU GUESSING AS TO THE REAL SOURCE OF A BOB-TAILED HEART FLUSH

ANATOLE GAUTIER lost all idea of time and place. Twenty years of life were wiped clean from the slate of his memory. Once more he was in Tonkin. Once more he was young and very enthusiastic. Once more he faced Durand, good old Durand, the friend of his youth.

The moon, a bloated thing of copper swinging among the trees, threw down a single broad ray of orange which fell on Durand's face. Gautier recognized the familiar features, the round face, the black, silken beard, the crooked sabre cut across the forehead which he had received at fencing school when the leather tip had slipped from the blade.

They were both deep in thought. Something had to be done. The Tonkinese had given them until daylight to decide. Two more hours! A low wind stirred the dead leaves at their feet, a wind as hot as a breath of flame.

Somewhere in the distance a jackal howled.

They were both afraid. Of course. But there was something else, a nameless, brooding, sinister feeling which crept through their souls. A harshly discordant note was pealing through the recesses of their beings.

And so they looked into the spectre-pregnant, stygian darkness, and listened to the night-sounds of soft-winged things which flopped lazily overhead, and of slimy, swishing things which glided and crawled underfoot. Both were afraid to speak.

When on their way back to the Coast, to Saigon, from the interior of French Indo-China, their guides, bearers and interpreter had deserted them more than four days ago, here in the jungle, they had not taken it very much to heart. They were young and strong; they were fairly familiar with jungle-craft. They would make the Coast somehow. And then—just three minutes' talk with the agent of the Australian syndicate. They would pass over what they had brought from the interior, and in return they would receive a check of six figures. Even split in two, it would mean a comfortable income for life; more than that: it would mean riches and the chance to multiply them.

Then, a few hours ago, the Tonkinese had come from nowhere, out of the jungle, hundreds of them. Tonkinese rebels they were, and they called themselves *les poings du patriotisme et de la paix*—the fists of patriotism and peace—a gentle touch of Mongol humor which did not appeal to either Gautier or Durand.

Suddenly the two Frenchmen had understood why the guides and the interpreter had deserted them. It was evident that they had been watched every step of the way; that even at the Coast, in the very office of the Australian agent, there had been spies in the pay of the Peacock Banner.

They were two against a small army. There would be no arguing, no bargaining whatsoever. These yellow devils had the whip-hand.

The leader of the Tonkinese, a tall, courtly, well-bred man, had left them two hours ago. Durand, who had a smattering of the local dialect, had given greetings in it; florid, flattering greetings. The Tonkinese had bowed to the ground and had replied in the same language.

"By applying oil or flattery most things are softened. But these three never soften: a sword, a leather receptacle for clarified butter, and a Tonkinese."

Then he had continued in French, perfectly correct French, though with the peculiar stiff wording and the gentle sing-song of the Mongolian.

"Do not break your tongue over our barbaric patois, my friend. I speak French. I have lived in your country. I have studied in Paris. I have learned there that dealings with Christians are uncertain. Either three times the principal is obtained—or nothing at all. Thus shall I make sure to obtain from you three times the principal."

There had been nothing intimidating in his voice. His accents had been rich and gentle; with a bronze tone to them like the echoed murmurings of an ancient temple gong.

"Look," he had continued, and his face had been as stony and as passionless as that of the Buddha who meditates in the shade of the cobra's hood. "I am an open book before you, and I bid you read. *I am Vasanda.*"

He had paused. They had shuddered at the name; and the Tonkinese had smiled gently, very gently.

"Yes. I am Vasanda. I am the man who makes war on you French; *according to the way we make war.*"

Again he had smiled; and again the two Frenchmen had shuddered. For they had heard at the Coast about the way Vasanda, the Tonkinese outlaw—"patriot" he styled himself—made war.

The Tonkinese had bowed to the two Frenchmen.

"With your permission." He had squatted easily on his heels, and had lit a cigarette, first courteously offering his case to the two. Then he had continued. "I and my young men have again stepped on the path of strife. We have performed the proper ceremonies before the many shrines. We have laid naked blades on our shaven heads, thus symbolizing our voluntary renunciation of this life's vanities. We have offered rice and drink to the shades of the departed heroes who died for our land in the ancient days. We have consecrated our souls and our bodies to our people." Again he had smiled, a boyish, impish smile. "But it appears that prayers and the laying of blades on shaven heads do not purchase the rifles and ammunition the French are using. Yet there is a shipment of such weapons waiting for me somewhere"—he had made a vague, circular gesture—"but the payment demanded for these so necessary weapons is exorbitant. Also the foreigner who has the weapons demands gold. A cursed swine he, who will be born again in the bodies of noisome, crawling insects for many lives to come. But gold he demands, and gold he shall get. It is an easy matter. You may consider it as done."

He, Gautier, had then regained part of his wits.

He had spoken with a suspicion of arrogance.

"What have we got to do with it all, Vassanda?"

"Everything, my master, everything. Because, look you: you will supply the gold. You do not believe me? Behold. I will show you."

He had lit another cigarette, swaying gently from side to side, to ease the strain on his heels.

He had proceeded to explain that he knew all about their little expedition. How they had visited the court of Bah-ngoh, the great king of the interior, who, short of cash because of his latest fantastic harem extravagancies, had been forced to part with his famed one hundred-carat pink diamond "The Star of the Middle Kingdom"; how even before leaving the Coast they had made arrangements with the Australian agent to sell the stone to him for five million francs—ten times the sum which they'd pay for the stone; how they had completed their transaction in the interior and were now returning to the Coast with the stone.

Gautier had looked wild-eyed. He had stammered.

"You—you want—the stone—*the stone* ——"

He had taken the diamond from an inner pocket, clutching it madly to his breast as a mother clutches her first-born when fever stalks through the land. The light of the camp fire had mirrored a thousandfold in the facetings of the diamond, like countless, intersecting rainbows; endless, zigzag flashings of electric blue and deep rose and keen, arrogant emerald-green; like the shooting of dragon-flies and purple-winged tropical moths.

But Vasanda had only smiled and waved the stone away.

"No, no. By the lives of the many Bodhisats! I do not wish your plaything.

They had felt relieved at such altruism. But a moment later their relief had changed into impotent hatred and rage.

Vasanda had risen to his full height. There was a look in his oblique eyes as sharp and clear as edges of splintered glass. His voice had lost its gentle, soothing quality. He was now speaking with harsh-riveting emphasis.

"What good is the stone to me? I cannot eat it. I cannot drink it. I cannot kill with it. I am not a woman of the inner bazaars to long for scented hair oil and jewels. Neither could I sell it. For behold: the stone is known. Also is it known who bought it. The Australian agent waits for it now, there, at the Coast." He had pointed to the East, into the silent, brooding jungle. "He is waiting; and he is waiting to pay—five million francs. He will pay it to the one of you two who brings the stone. Such was your agreement. For, careful men, you considered the possibility of one of you dying of fever. An unhealthy land this!" He had smiled. "And so it will be. One of you will go to the Coast with the stone. He will go unharmed, peaceful. I myself shall show him the right way. He will give the stone to the Australian and receive the money—in gold. Then he will return to a place which I shall appoint, with the gold. The other—I shall hold him as hostage. He shall be honorably treated. For thirty days I shall hold him. For thirty days I shall wait for the return of the first—with the gold. And then, if he does not return with the gold, also if he should play false and talk to the French—and remember that I have many spies—I shall kill the hostage." His voice had again been very soft and gentle. "I shall kill him slowly. Oh, so very slowly. There shall be no hurry. The first day I shall cut off an ear and the next day his tongue. Perhaps. A matter of choice, my friends, of the moment's inspiration. A little bit of his throbbing body cut off to-day, another to-morrow. Thus for two weeks. Perhaps three. It depends upon the vitality of the man who is being killed. You both look strong and healthy. You would last a long time under the little knives. Raw wounds, my friends, remember that. Also there will be insects, the flying cockroaches and the bramras which follow the smell of blood and festering flesh. Also there will be ants, many ants, and a thin river of honey to show them the trail."

He had lit another cigarette. He had yawned. Then he had continued.

"Consider. One goes to the Coast. The other remains as my guest. It has been told me that you two love each other with the love of twin brothers. Thus I believe that he who goes to the Coast will return—with the gold. It is a safe gamble. I give you two hours to decide which one of you two shall go, and which one shall stay behind. Remember the little knives—and the little ants which follow the trail of the honey——"

The Tonkinese had bowed and stepped back into the black jungle.

And now the two hours were nearly over.

Vasanda had said that they loved each other with the love of twin brothers. It was true.

They had visited the same school in Paris. They had been *copains de lycée;* roommates, class-mates, bench-mates during the long plastic years of childhood and youth. They had served in the same regiment, at Tours. They had sown their wild oats along parallel lines. No woman had even come between them. They had been apprentices, then clerks in the same office. Finally they had established themselves in business as partners. They bought and sold precious stones.

They were the best of friends. They knew that their mutual liking and friendship, their trust in each other, their combined honest, square-souled decency and strength was a solid edifice which sheltered them against petty jealousy and envy.

When they had gone to Tonkin to buy jewels, they had done so eagerly, expectantly. A little adventure, they thought; a ray of vivid tropical light to break into the complacence of their home business. And they had done mighty well in the Far East during the two years of their stay.

Finally had come their chance to buy and

sell "The Star of the Middle Kingdom," the famed pink diamond which had been the dream of every jeweler for three generations. It had been a big, promising chance; and they had gone after it with the enthusiasm of youth.

Yes. They knew each other well. *And they knew that each knew the other as well as he knew himself, and that their characters, their virtues and their shortcomings, were exactly the same.* And so, when Vasanda had come to them out of the jungle they felt suddenly as choked in mephitic air. The thought of the unspoken, half-formed desires in their hearts stretched before them as a boundless bog.

For, knowing each other so well, they also knew that the foul tropics had bred in each the sordid love of gain, the cruel ruthlessness of desire. They knew that, though enigmatic and close-hidden, there was yet in both their hearts that grim craving after money—hard and merciless as a bitter-cored stone fruit.

Friends? Why of course they were friends. But then they had lived in the tropics for two years, breathing, thinking, eating, drinking the poison of the yellow lands. There was the chance to reach the coast—with the stone—and then the Australian agent—the gold—and over there, across the way, was Paris.

Friendship? Duty of friendship?

If friendship it was, it was a friendship of their own making—of their own unmaking, if they wished. So they thought, and each could read the other as an open book. For they were friends who loved and knew each other as twin brothers rocked in the same cradle.

One would go to the coast—to bring the gold. The other would stay behind as a hostage—and there were the little knives and the ants which always follow the honey trail.

And suddenly they knew, both knew, that the one who would go to the coast would never, never come back. For there were five million francs in gold—and back yonder was France, Paris, home—and the chance, the lovable, damnable chance!

Suddenly Durand laughed — that dry, harsh laugh of his—and he threw a greasy pack of playing cards into the circle of meager light which came from the little camp fire.

"Let the cards decide, old friend," he shouted. "The loser stays; the winner goes to the Coast. And he returns here with the gold—inside of thirty days. It is understood, is it not, *mon vieux?*"

And again he laughed his cracked, high-pitched laugh.

"Of course," Gautier replied. "The winner comes back with the gold—inside of thirty days."

But he could not look into Durand's eyes, nor could Durand look into his.

"One hand of poker! Draw to your cards and show-down!" cried Durand.

Anatole Gautier picked up the deck. He shuffled, slowly, mechanically, his thoughts far away, at the Coast. Suddenly it seemed to him that his brain was frantically telegraphing to his fingers. A fit of nerves? No, no. He looked at his hands. They were shuffling; shuffling in a perfectly normal, perfectly steady manner. It wasn't nerves. Still his brain kept telegraphing, and he kept watching the motions of his fingers—and then he saw that his second finger and thumb had shuffled the ace of clubs to the bottom of the deck.

Had he done it on purpose? He wondered. All his life he had amused his friends with card tricks. He reflected. There was the Coast. There was the stone. There was the gold. There was Paris. And here was the stinking, festering jungle—the Tonkinese—Vasanda—the little knives — and the ants—the ants.

Another ace joined the first at the bottom of the deck—the third—the fourth.

Then the harsh, jarring, arrogant voice of Jean Durand.

"Deal! Damn you, deal! You'll shuffle all the spots from the cards." Gautier was about to shuffle again. But the other stopped him with a savage gesture. "No, no, no. Don't you dare shuffle them again."

Gautier cleared a little space on the ground with the point of his shoe. The dead leaves stirred with a dry, rasping sound. Something slimy and phosphorous-green was rapidly squirming away.

"Cut, Durand."

He put the cards down between them, on the ground. The other was calmly lighting

a cigarette, making no attempt to cut the deck. Gautier spoke again. There was entreaty, supplication, despair in his tense, strained voice.

"Cut, Jean! Cut, for the love of God!"

The sweat was pouring from his face. Little luminous blue spots were dancing in front of his eyes. Something like a gigantic sledgehammer was striking at the base of his skull. His blood throbbed thickly in his veins. His hands seemed swollen out of proportion.

"Cut!" he cried again.

Durand laughed at him with a mad, demoniac light in his beady eyes. He laughed.

"No! Deal them as they lay. I shan't cut. You are too anxious for me to cut. *Too anxious.* No, no. Deal, and be damned to you!"

Gautier dealt. And mechanically, even as he was watching them, his fingers gave to himself five cards from the bottom of the deck. Four of them were aces. The fifth was the queen of hearts.

Durand picked up his hand. He looked at it. He laughed again.

"Give me two cards, Anatole. I'm going to take a chance. I have a hunch that I'll win."

Gautier studied his own hand. Four aces —and the queen of hearts. The queen of hearts! He would never forget that red queen. She seemed to smile at him. A sardonic grin was on her silly, painted lips.

The queen of hearts! Of course he would discard her. Might as well make the other believe that he had bought one of the aces. So he discarded the queen. She fell face upward. The wind carried her a little to one side—a little away from the circle of light—over to where Durand was sitting.

But still Gautier could see the mocking smile on her painted lips.

Then he dealt. Two cards to Durand, one to himself.

There was a *short*, tense silence. Durand was studying his hand. He looked up and stared at Gautier. Gautire felt embarrassed Did the other suspect him? Now was the time to act, to act well, to simulate surprise. He looked away from the other. He studied his hand; he studied it again and again as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

Then he gave a mad shriek of joy.

"I win! I win! Four aces! By the Madonna, four aces!"

And he threw his hand on the ground, face up.

Durand picked it up. He examined the cards one by one.

"One—two—three — four — four aces." His voice was thick, choked.

Then he studied his own cards. Again and again. Beyond the feathery tops of the trees a haggard morning sun was rising. A flickering, pale-yellow ray fell on Durand's face. It looked drawn and green.

Suddenly a change came over him. He straightened himself up. He rose.

At the same moment, Vasanda stepped out of the jungle. He bowed deeply, courteously.

"You have decided?" he asked in his gentle sing-song.

"Yes." It was Durand who spoke. "I stay with you. Gautier goes to the Coast. He returns here with the gold—inside of thirty days." He broke into his dry, harsh, high-pitched cackle. "He returns here with the gold—with the gold—with the gold! *Au revoir, mon ami.*"

He did not offer to shake hands. He bowed mockingly. He was about to go. Suddenly he noticed that the cards were still clasped in his hand—the cards were losing cards which had cost him fortune and life.

He threw them on the ground, in front of Gautier, face up. A second later, he was gone.

Anatole Gautier looked dazed. It seemed to him that he had lived through all this before. In a former life? Yes. It must have been in a former life, a former incarnation.

He remembered the whole scene, every single detail.

But wait, wait! There had been a difference. What was it? He thought and thought and thought.

Then doubt came into his soul. Had it really all happened in a former incarnation? Had it not been in this life; twenty years ago? Old memories flashed up in red streaks.

Yes. Twenty years ago. He remembered the whole scene. But there was a difference, a little difference.

Suddenly he knew. He knew where the difference was. There, in that scene of his dead life, Durand had gone into the jungle. Of course. He had lost. He had seen the four aces; a nearly unbeatable hand. And then he had laughed. *But he had torn the cards into small pieces; he had thrown the pieces into the dying camp fire!*

And here—here were the cards, whole, face up. He looked at them. He studied them. It was a heart flush—up to the queen.

The queen of hearts.

But he remembered that he himself had discarded that same identical queen of hearts. A gust of wind had carried the bit of pasteboard a little to one side, to where Durand was sitting. Had then Durand cheated? Had he picked up the card to make his flush?

Gautier trembled in every limb. He called after the other.

"Durand! Oh, Durand!"

The other turned and looked at him, questioningly.

Gautier stared. He rubbed his eyes. But this was not Durand at all. This was Jenkinson, the American, his friend. And the other, the Tonkinese by his side. Why it was Lee Mon Kau, the Chinaman with the long, gold-encased fingernails, and the heavy-lidded purple-black eyes.

Suddenly the whole scene flashed up. He remembered. Why, yes—*this* was Paris—his home; and he had arranged it all; he and his two friends: Thomas Jenkinson, the big, good-natured, slightly sarcastic American, and Lee Mon Kau, the Chinaman. Yes. Together they had arranged it all. He, Anatole Gautier himself, had coached the American in the sound of Durand's voice . . . he himself; because he wanted to get an actual picture, an actual moment of his dead life, visualized once again, lived once again. Of course it sounded real. Jenkinson did remarkably well. Jenkinson should have been an actor. . . .

And of course the atmosphere, the carefully staged, carefully prepared atmosphere of the room made the whole cursed impression more real than ever. Florist and painter and decorator had joined hands to change the large living room of his house into a bit of Tonkinese jungle. Even the moist heat had been faithfully reproduced. Also there was the incense; that mad, blue-clouded Indian incense in the jeweled silver censer, breath-clogging, mind-choking. And the acting—the acting! Yes, yes—he remembered it all!

He turned on Jenkinson. He spoke with a thick, angry voice.

"You—why didn't you do as I told you? Why didn't you tear up the cards as Durand did? As he did twenty years ago? Look—look—you picked up the queen of hearts from the discard. You cheated. And Durand did not cheat. It was I who cheated. I who killed my friend. Durand did not cheat."

He broke into a paroxysm of tears.

Lee Mon Kau smiled. He opened the windows. A gust of fresh clean air came from the garden.

Jenkinson put his hand on the Frenchman's shoulder.

"Yes. Durand tore up the cards. So you told me. But then, my friend, how do you know? You did not see his hand. He might have cheated. Eh? *He might have cheated.*

Gautier looked up. He spoke mechanically, stupidly.

"He might have cheated." Again and again he said it. "He might have cheated. He might have cheated."

And suddenly, with a great throaty cry of relief, he fell on his knees. He raised his hands above his head.

"Thank God, thank God!" he shouted. "He might have cheated!"

And he dropped on the ground in a swoon.

A Howelling Time

"W-i-l-l-i-a-m D-e-a-n H-o-w-e-l-l-s, t-o-n-i-g-h-t," spelled a street gamin from a placard at which he was squinting with one eye closed.

"I say, Dinny, who's dat guy, Billy Dean?" questioned a brother Arab at his side. "Wot's it he howls for?"

DANDY BOY AND THE HON'RABLE MAWDE

By ANNESLEY BURROWES

Author of "The Long Chance," "The Man Who Wouldn't Marry," "The Flintskinners," etc.

IN WHICH THE PUNCHERS DOWN AT THE BUNK HOUSE SEE THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE INTERRUPTED. BUT EVEN DANDY BOY WAS FORGOTTEN WHEN THE WHOLE OUTFIT WENT TO DENVER TO RIDE IN THE GREAT BRONCHO BUSTING CONTEST FOR THE HONOR OF THE OLD BAR Z

SAY, that was the doggonest, queerest outfit that ever come acrost the old San Angelo trail. They got it put together at the railroad, and when it come up over the big rise by the Bar Zee bunk house, say, it had Buffalo Bill skinned thirty-six ways from the deuce."

Buck Lanfear leaned back against the rocky hill-side and grinned under his brown mustache. His eyes traveled slowly across the sunburned valley to the summits of the Apache range, glowing in the rays of the noonday sun. In the upper air an eagle whirled. A thousand feet below a herd of peccaries nosed through the mesquite, looking like weasels in the distance. Beyond the blot of shade thrown by the single pine the sun beat fiercely, and the Pinto tugged at the long rope, and whinnied.

"He minds it," said Buck, nodding sidewise at his horse. "Old Easymark, there, was a three-year-old, and he seen the whole thing, same's me."

The cowboy rolled a cigarette very slowly, as though the memory were pleasing to him, then lighted it and blew a lazy smoke ring toward the blue sky of Texas.

"I'd been riding for the Circle C most five weeks," he went on, "me being loaned to old man Chadwick, along of Curly Weeks and Dad Webster being shot up by a bunch of sheepmen. I got back to the Bar Zee about four o'clock of a Saturday afternoon. There weren't none of the boys in sight, so I set down on a bench, and dropped into a snooze. Then I wakes up quick-like, and here's the grand procession, just toppin' the se.

"First comes the Big Noise—that's this Waldo Emerson, the Bar Zee manager I'm just telling you about, and he's looking solemn, like he was chief marshal at a Elk funeral. Then comes some of our boys riding mighty polite and their faces was dead straight.

"Then for fifty yards there ain't nothing but mesquite, and then comes the main show. Say, you'd swore it was the old Deadwood coach, only twice as big, and all painted up green and yellow to beat fourteen of a kind; and up on the box seat, driving four-in-hand, like a old stager, is the lord—the gink we'd heard tell of for years, but ain't never seen him—the Britisher what owns the Bar Zee outfit.

"I knowed it was the lord, soon as I seen him, 'cause one of the boys had cut his photograft out of a New York paper and stuck it on the bunk-house wall. He was wearing white whiskers, and likewise a yellow overcoat with pearl buttons onto it 'most as big as the bottom of a tin cup, and each one of them buttons had a different picture on it—folks in uniforms riding after houn'-dawgs, and shooting prairie hens and catching fish—a different picture on every button, so help me gawd, and each of them as big around as a tin cup.

"This here Deadwood coach was full of lady-folks, and say, they was the real perfectos, just like them chromos what you draws with fifteen cigaroot coupons and five two-cent stamps.

"Following after the coach comes a string of buckboards full of menials, and then more of our boys, each of them towing a long-necked horse what was groomed so fine you could almost see to shave in him, and each of them ornery punchers looking

sheepish, like he was piloting a zebra out'n the zoo.

"Well, this here cavalcade prances up to the ranch house, and the Deadwood coach vomits out its lady-folks, and the menials crawls out of the buckboards, and down comes the lord off of the box, and passes his picture-gallery overcoat to his valet, and they canters into the house.

"But the main actors is still to come, and the bunch ain't scarcely inside when down the trail comes a pink-and-white girl riding hell-to-split on a tall black, and this here girl is a dead ringer for Mlle. Dolly de Belmont, the champeen equestrienne what you see with the big show, only, believe me, she has Dolly de Belmont backed clean off the map for looks.

"She's wearing a little derby hat, like Mlle. de Belmont, and riding side-saddle, with one of them long slimsy black gowns that most touches the ground; and as she gewhizzes past she looks at me out of a pair of big brown eyes and throws the nicest smile you ever seen on a girl. I tell you, she 'most has me goin', and as I stands there in the middle of the trail, a-goggling, I'm 'most knocked off my feet by a dandy boy wearing balloon pants like he was George Gould, and he goes shooting past on a big chestnut mare. He's a right smart looking kid, too, with a clean shaved brown face and good shoulders, and by the way he looks after the girl you can tell he don't see the trail, or the ranch house, or the big blue sky. All he sees is the girl, and looking after them two folks I gets a hunch there'll be doings on the old Bar Zee.

"Well, Dandy Boy passes her just as they gets to the house. He jumps off his horse like he was a real rider, and helps her down. Then they lopes inside, and I got a chanct to round up old Baldy and ask him what's the dope.

"It's Lord Bruton," says Baldy, "the boss from over home. We been dreadin' for years he'd be horning in on us, and now," he says, "it's came. The boys is plumb loco, but the Big Noise, he's enjoying himself like he was a rat in a pork bar'l."

"Well, as Baldy dopes it out, seems like the lord has gone most broke, playing the horses and picking the one worst bet in the stock market, and so he's come out to the Bar Zee to economize, bringing Mrs. Lord, and his three sisters, what's named the Hon'rable Miss King-Harmons; likewise his daughter, the pink-and-white girl, and she's christened the Hon'rable Mawde Sybil Gwendoline Fraunces King-Harmon. D'ye get that? And her only a heifer, just rising eighteen. Likewise Dandy Boy, he's a lord's son and a hon'rable, only his name's the Hon'rable John Smith, which he spells it 'Smythe' for decency's sake, his grandfather having been in the beer trade. That's a fine bunch of 'hon'rables,' ain't it? Most as many as they have on the board of education over to Tombstone.

"This here Hon'rable Mawde is a fine upstanding girl, with wide shoulders and a little waist, and cheeks on her like a pair of Missouri peaches. So, it ain't long before the boys is peekin' at her sly-like, and mighty wishful, and she's aglimpsing back at them, kind of admiring, like she thought cowboys was the real cheese; though of course the boys wouldn't have the nerve to get friendly, them being just ornery punchers and her being the lord's daughter; but the Big Noise, that's this here Emerson man, the ranch manager, there ain't nothing bashful about him. He's Johnny-on-the-spot with a red necktie and new brown boots, all a-shining, and a clean shave, and his teeth scrubbed up like they was marble headstones; and honest-to-Josh he's looking most like a lord himself. He's a handsome guy, this here Emerson, just like one of them cowboy pictures on the cover of a story book, and he fixes it to get acrost with this whole bunch. So, its Emerson here, and Mr. Emerson there, till the Big Noise gets to be a howling hurricane; and yet he's known all through the cow country for a skunk and a four-flusher, and one that'll back down before any real man that stands up to him. But at that, I got to hand it to him as a cow man. He knows his business. He's the best rider in the state and what he can't do to a steer you can just as well forget it.

"Well, while this Emerson is putting it over on the lord and the ladies, Dandy Boy, that's this Hon'rable John Smythe, he's making good with the boys. He ain't no conversationer; he don't talk none, no mor than he was a sheep-herder, and yet ever

one on the outfit knows him for a man, and likes him as such. Of course the boys can't help joshing a bit, and they slips him a few, such as always is coming to a tenderfoot, but Dandy Boy stands for it like a sport, and before long, I tell you Hombre! English-lord stock is over par on the Bar Zee. Only this here Negras, what had a greaser for a father and his mother come off the Bowery — this here Negras, he reckons it's up to him to show Dandy Boy where he belongs.

"So, when one of the boys hands out a story like punchers always passes to the simple stranger, this Negras lets out a yawp you can hear clear up to the ranch house where Hon'rable Mawde's layin' in a hammock telling this Emerson party what grand people punchers is, and how she admires to meet up with a gentleman what's a real man.

"By this time Hon'rable Mawde and Emerson's so thick the boys is wondering where Dandy Boy comes in. Of course we know Dandy Boy's always stood ace-high with the lord and the girl, too, and if Emerson's trying to get her, as it sure looks that way, it won't be no cinch, and he'll be trying some of them low-down games he's noted for. So, when he starts getting next to this Negras person, and playing him favorite, like he never done before, I dopes it out that Dandy Boy's going to have something on his hands like he don't see in Shropshire. After thinking it over some, I passes him the tip, but he only smiles that quiet way the boys likes.

"Perhaps I'll be before him," he says, and he don't say no more, which seems nervy talk for a tenderfoot.

"Well, this Negras party from yawping every time one of the boys passes one to Dandy Boy—this Negras starts to hand out a few himself, and My Soul! as Dandy Boy says, they was sure raw ones. Dandy Boy stands for it longer than he'd ought to, and then he says one night, careless and quiet-like, he says:

" 'Hombre,' he says, 'your style of humor is unpleasing to me. Amuse yourself tonight all you want,' he says, 'and then cut it out. Otherwise,' he says, 'it might have a ingrowing effect on your health.'

"Next evening when Dandy Boy comes down, Negras starts something again. It ain't much, but Dandy Boy just reaches forward like he was picking a cherry, and he passes Negras a little jolt on the jaw, much as to say, 'I don't want to take no advantage of your innocence, but this is just to let you know there's more like it in the same corral.'

"Negras lets out a squawk and jumps back, and I reckon all the greaser blood he's got is right plumb in his ugly face. He reaches in through the window, grabs a butcher knife that lays handy on the table, and jumps fer him.

"Dandy Boy don't move. He don't even bat an eye. He just stands there smoking his cigaroot, and looking pleasant. But every puncher in the bunch is moving and they pree-cipitates theirselves onto Negras like a thousand of brick, and when the dust clears Negras is on the ground, all covered with cowboys settin' on him.

" 'Let him up,' says Dandy Boy, sharp-like, and six punchers crawls off'n the body, mighty unwilling.

" 'Give him his knife!'

" 'No, by g——,' says Baldy, holding to it hard.

" 'Give it back, I say,' raps out Dandy Boy, quick and stern, like he was talking to soldiers. 'Fall back, you men!'

"The boys stands back kind of scared and startled, 'cause they never seen Dandy Boy like that before; and Baldy, he throws the knife on the ground, a-cursing.

"Negras grabs it and jumps for Dandy Boy like a catamount. Dandy Boy meets him square.

Honest-to-Josh, Hombre, it looked like a miracle. I don't know how Dandy Boy done it, but there he was smoking his cigaroot, with the knife in his hand, and Negras, he's on his back ten foot away, yawping, and feeling to see if his arm was broke.

" 'Come on,' says Dandy Boy, to Negras, quiet and pleasant, like he was talking to a lady; 'hurry up,' he says, 'if you don't mind, I'm due back to the house.'

Negras turns to get away, but Big Larry Teagan grabs him by the neck, turns him round and passes him a kick in the stern. 'G'wan in, ye coyote,' he says to him, 'Fight!'

"By this time Dandy Boy has a fresh

cigaroot lit, and don't never take it out of his mouth while he gives Negras what Teagan called 'the father an' mother of a batin'.' Finally Negras gets in a clinch and the following second he's on his back, taking the count, having been thrown clear over Dandy Boy's head.

"Say, was there some yellings? Well, you're a tootin'. You could hear them boys clear over to the Lazy Y, yawping like a bunch of Navajos. Just to see a lord's son put it over on a puncher like that. Say, every one of them boys wants to shake hands with Dandy Boy at onct, and even Negras, having come to, and his Bowery blood boiling up on top—this here Negras comes up, mighty sheepish, and holds out his hand, and Dandy Boy takes it like a man, and says, 'Boys,' he says, 'this is just a bit of good humor between ourselves. Don't let it go no further than us,' he says; 'and specially not up to the house. This here Negras,' he says, 'is going to be a friend of mine!'

"Say, wasn't that great? Well, in a minute the Big Noise comes down a-towing the Hon'rable Mawde, and they wants to know 'w'at t'ell,' and Dandy Boy he says we've been enjoying a bit of a friendly set-to, and the Hon'rable Mawde asks us won't we please show her how them things is dragged off.

"So two of the boys does a little vaw-devill stunt, and Hon'rable Mawde says its plumb grand. That's all there's to it. But say, after that, if the Bar Zee outfit was this here electoral college, and Dandy Boy wants to be President of the U-nited States, say, all he's got to do is whistle for it.

"By and bye we hears things about Dandy Boy. He don't never hand out no dope about himself, but Bud Skinner gets it on the side, being strong with the Hon'rable Mawde's hired girl, what they call a lady's maid. Seems like Dandy Boy is a soldier out to India, and Bud Skinner gets it off the lady's maid that he belongs to what they call the extinguished service order, along of rounding up a bunch of brown niggers what's stampeding with a gatling gun; and that sends his stock up some more, not so much account of what he done, but because he keeps so darned quiet about it. And Bud Skinner, he gets it off the lady's maid, that the general thanks Dandy Boy in front of the regiment, and that if Dandy Boy wants he can write a lot a letters after his name, showing what he done, only he don't want to. And Bud gets it that Dandy Boy and the Hon'rable Mawde was sort of half engaged, but not quite.

"Now, wouldn't you gamble that Hon'rable Mawde would be proud to have a man like Dandy Boy a-chasing her? Well, she ain't. She's been reading story books till she's plumb loco. She thinks cow punchers is grand, and she picks this ornery, pusillanimous cuss, Emerson, as the real feathers. She's always settin' round with him, talking about manhood and strength, and primal instincts, and cowfeed like that; and Dandy Boy don't seem to be in it no more.

"Of course Dandy Boy gets plumb sore, but what's he going to do? He's too proud to mix in with Emerson, and he sure ain't going to squeal to the lord, so he just don't do nothing, but if you watch him close, you can see he's losing flesh and color. The boys seen it, same as me, and I tell you, it made us feel bad. 'Course the lord ain't on to this. He don't reckon Emerson's in the game no more than was Nigger Jim, carrying water to them long-necked horses in the box stalls. But you-bet-you, if it comes to a showdown between them three there'll be some bucking on the part of this here lord that'll make a untamed broncho look like it was a pet kitten.

"Well, about now, Hon'rable Mawde, she reads a story-piece about a Ropin' somewheres up in Wyoming, and nothing does her but we has a little ropin' all to ourselves, and the lord, he's got to give a prize of fifty dollars for the champeen of the Bar Zee.

"So the boys has to round up a bunch of bad steers and the ropin' is dragged off. Say I sure got to hand it to this here Emerson when it comes to tying a steer. They ain't his equal in the state, and if he wasn't such a yellow dog I could stand for him, but of course he had to do a bunch of grandstand stunts that spoiled his work, as a real rider looks at it. But, Hon'rable Mawde, she don't understand them things. She thinks Emerson's circus riding is plumb grand, and when he takes the fifty for ropin' and tying, which he certainly deserved it

and spends the money on books for to uplift us punchers, why say, there ain't nobody like this here Emerson, and Dandy Boy, what's a real man, he's all to the bad.

"After the ropin', it's plain that there's only two things for Dandy Boy to do. He's got to call this here Emerson, or quit the game. Course, Dandy Boy won't shoot none. It ain't his way, and the boys don't expect it of him, so it ain't no big surprise when he says to me one night pretty soon, 'Buck,' he says, 'I'm 'bliged if you'll hook up the buckboard early to-morrow and drive me over to railroad,' he says, 'I'm going away.'

"He didn't say no more, and when I told the boys them words, honest to Josh, they most bellered—to think Dandy Boy had been beat out by the Big Noise.

"Next day, me and him drives over to the railroad, and all the way over, Dandy Boy don't open his head, and I don't have nothing to say neither. I gets his baggage checked, and then the train comes whooping along, and we says good-bye.

" 'If you're ever in England, Buck,' he says—them's his very words—'if you're ever in England,' he says, 'come to see me at Hawkwood.' That's his father's ranch—'and,' he says, 'I'll try and give you as good a time as you've give me;' and he says: 'I want you to come.' And he gets aboard.

"As the train pulled out, I seen him come onto the back platform, and he stood there a long time, looking back wistful; and the last I seen him, when the train rounded the curve, he was waving his hand at me.

"So, I goes over to the ho-tel, and gets all lit up, and I stayed there three days a-whooping it. On the level, Hombre, I couldn't of drove home no sooner, not if I'd stood to win the whole blamed outfit.

"Well, with Dandy Boy off the place, things is plumb different. Everybody seems kind of lonesome, except this here Emerson, and he's grinning like a she-wolf. Only this lady's maid, she gives it to Bud Skinner, that when Hon'rable Mawde's around, Emerson's looking like he was a sick hen, the way lovers does when they are trying to make a hit off one what's above them.

"By-and-bye, this lady's maid hears the two of them talking, and Emerson singing a song like how turrible it is to be born poor, when the girl you worships is far, far above you, and Hon'rable Mawde tells him the rank is but the guinea stamp, and the man's the whole carcass, and this here Emerson ups and puts it to her straight—won't she fly with him, and Hon'rable Mawde, she says this is so sudden, and it is a turrible step for a girl to take, and she must have time to think. And Emerson, he makes a big squawk about if she loves him like he loves her, she won't want no time. And he most has her goin', when all of a sudden the lord, he horns in with a newspaper all about the big Fall Bustin' up to Denver, and he says Emerson is got to enter for the champeenship of the world, and he'll take along the whole blamed outfit to see him win the belt, and the dough goes with it. Hon'rable Mawde, she says that's magnif'cent.

"So, what's this unhappy Emerson party to do? The lord tells him to rustle 'round, pronto, and get things in shape, for time is short. So off goes Emerson. But, this here lady's maid, she seen his face and she gives it to Bud Skinner, that he looks like a tiger balked of his prey. Them's the exact terms what she used, and Bud, he gives it to the boys, while we was bedding down at the bunk-house.

"That same night, when the lady's maid is doing the Hon'rable Mawde's hair, she ups and tells, casual-like, what the boys thinks about the Big Noise, and Hon'rable Mawde, she gets mad as a wet hen, and tells this maid she don't want to listen to no gossip from the bunk-house, and she's plumb surprised that this maid would dare to have the nerve to mention it to her. 'Course, the maid says she's plumb sorry, but she gives it to Bud Skinner that Hon'rable Mawde ain't spoke to her since, except to order her round. This maid tells Bud he ain't to breathe it to nobody, and Bud says sure he won't, but when he gets down to the bunk-house, 'course he couldn't hold a thing like that.

"Next thing we gets, Emerson is still keeping after her hard, but Hon'rable Mawde seems to be stalling him off, and this lady's maid, she catches Hon'rable Mawde setting alone, looking at Dandy Boy's picture, and sort of half crying, and I tell you we was all wishing Dandy Boy was back again, but nobody ain't heard from

him since he got to Chicago, and they reckon he's gone back across the salt water.

" 'Course the boys is all tore up over it, and the betting's about even, some saying that if Emerson can't get her now, he won't never get her, and some saying that when he gets the belt, as he sure will, Hon'rable Mawde will be so dippy, he'll have her roped and tied within forty-eight hours. Me, I dopes it out that Hon'rable Mawde's about half woke up, only she's in so darned deep with Emerson she don't know how she's going to pull out. She's sure did every blamed thing that would make a man like Emerson do what he done, but now he's gone and did it, she wishes he wouldn't. I tell you, these women people's all alike, don't matter whether it's the lord's daughter, or Mandy Jane, the biscuit shooter over to the Grand Union eating shack, and right now if this Emerson coyote has the nerve to throw Hon'rable Mawde acrost his cow horse, and ride over to the nearest minister, I'd bet my shirt Hon'rable Mawde don't tell him 'No,' when he gets her there.

"Next evening this here lady's maid passes it out to Bud Skinner that Emerson's been in, and made a strong play to get Hon-'rable Mawde away, because we're all starting for Denver in the morning, but seems the Hon'rable Mawde don't fall for him, but finally he wants her to say that if he wins the belt she won't hold him off no longer, and he makes her say it. And this lady's maid, she says Hon'rable Mawde is like a dove in the talents of a hawk—them's her exact words—and Hon'rable Mawde's been crying all evening, and she says Emerson's going to get her, because Hon'rable Mawde's all in, and won't have the nerve to hold him off no longer, belt or no belt. And when Bud Skinner reels this off down to the bunk-house, honest to gawd, it don't take much more to make the boys get out their gats and go after this here Emerson. They talked that way, but nothing come of it.

"We gets to Denver just in time for the first day's bustin', and I tell you when our outfit canters onto the field, we has 'em all a-rubbering. The lord has on his overcoat with the pictures on the buttons, and the Deadwood coach is all a-shining, and the four long-necks is groomed to a finish, and the ladies is all got their Paris gowns, and us punchers riding two-and-two on our cow-horses, with our guns, and chaps and all the regalia we got, and they's three or four Eastern dudes along with the lord's party. And I tell you when the crowd sees us, they sets up a roar like we was the President of the U-nited States, and all the White House ladies.

"The party don't get off the coach at all. They're showing people how they act Over Home, so they just pulls up a little way from the stand, and they stays right there a-top. They has champagne on ice, and sandwiches, and jellied birds, and all kinds of eatings. And there's Emerson along with the dudes, all slicked up in a suit of Fifth Avenue fixings, and say, on the level, this here Emerson, he looks as good as any of them. And Hon'rable Mawde, she acts kind of chirked up, like she was glad to see him looking so slick, beside them dudes. Seemed like she was thinking after all, he ain't such a bad bargain.

"Well, I ain't going to tell you all about this here Bustin'. You've saw the stands, and the flags, and the crowds, and all such. There's the usual skirmishing—loose horses tearing round the field, judges and ropers, running up and down, the air full of dust, the bands playing, bad horses thrun down, and kicked up, and saddled, and rid to a finish. And there was riders bucked off, and riders pulling leather, and riders a-riding on the cinch, and riders playing to the stand, and riders that rides like they was real riders, and judges cutting out the good ones, and passing up the mavericks, so's to settle whose the champion of the world.

"I tell you, Hombre, that's the greatest sight on earth, and the lord and ladies is pleased clean to the bones. Even Hon'rable Mawde with Emerson a-hanging over her head like the sword of Dammickels, as this maid tells it, even Hon'rable Mawde's looking like she never see such a grand sight before; and that day she learns things about clean riding, and dirty riding, and grandstand riding, that she never knowed before, and I reckon about this time she begins to guess that Emerson's doings at the Bar Zee ropin' weren't the real pigskin, like she thought they was. I was watching her clost, and it seems to me like Hon'rable Mawde was kind of woke up.

"Next day Emerson has to ride, and he leaves his dude fixings down to the ho-tel, and wears his regular riding outfit. He rides twic't that day, and it sure was a sight to look at him. He's known for a skunk wherever there's cowmen, but the boys couldn't help but cheer him. Then of course he gets all swole up, and has to start playing to the stand. He starts bowing and grinning, and a-waving, and doing stunts that looks good to the tenderfoot, but they ain't riding.

"Then the real cow people that's cheering, they quits it cold, and when Emerson rides again, and starts drinking out of a bottle with his horse a-jumping, why that makes us all plumb sick. And when I looks at Hon'rable Mawde, she ain't watching Emerson. She has her eyes on some of the boys, and I guess she hears things, and is looking kind of sadful, and some ashamed.

"So, I dopes it out she's thinking about this here bunk-house gossip, what she wouldn't hear the maid tell to her.

"By this time everybody knows who the lord is, and the big men from all over the West are coming up, and making theirselves acquainted, and welcoming him to the country. The valet's passing out the wine and seegars like a bartender, but nobody mentions nothing about the Big Noise, which the lord thinks some queer. By-and-bye, the lord mentions this Emerson, and while they all has to admit that Emerson can ride, they quits right there, and the lord seems to gather that this Emerson party ain't liked.

"Then, after the bustin' is over for the day, the judges comes up to welcome the lord to their midst, and taste his champagne, and when they're going away, mighty pleased, one of the judges tips it off to him, friendly-like, that his manager is sure a rider, but the lord better tell him to quit this monkey-riding or he's going to lose the belt.

"Well, that night this lady's maid gets off, and goes to the show with Bud Skinner, and she gives it to Bud that she hears the lord telling the lady-folks about the judges warning Emerson, and Bud, he gets it, that Hon'rable Mawde, she won't eat no dinner that night, and goes to bed sick, and won't have the maid undress her, and that's how this maid gets to the show with Bud. And this maid gives it to Bud, that Hon'rable Mawde she's all a-trembling and white as a sheet. So I guess Hon'rable Mawde is awoke!

"The third day of the bustin' we're all there, Hon'rable Mawde, and the whole bunch. The Deadwood coach is the pop'lar centre of interest. They's always a crowd 'round, and the valet is dealing out seegars and sandwiches like it was a free lunch counter. This is the busy day for the judges. They was fifty riders, and nobody defending the title, and they has to work the candidates clean to the limit, so as to pick the man what's sure best.

"Emerson's riding again to-day, but still he can't help showing off a little—not much but just enough to kind of rile the boys up. I take notice of Hon'rable Mawde, and she ain't looking at him at all. She's watching the people she knows is off the range, and they ain't doing any yellings for Emerson. All the cheering is done by the towners in the stands. But I tell you, the cow people is dead scared Emerson's going to get the belt; and there ain't a puncher on the ground wouldn't give a month's pay to see him beat. Well, that night, they was a mighty sick bunch, for Emerson is still in the ring, and there's only one rider left to stand between him and the champeenship.

"The judges might have made Emerson ride again that day, and beat him, because he was tired, and the other man is fresh, but you know what them judges is. They was dead sore on Emerson but they'd give him the last chanct to win, even if it broke their hearts, so it went over for another day.

"You can bet when the show opens the next day, there ain't a vacant seat in the stands. The city's plumb empty, and every human being that's got the price is there to see the big ride-off for the champeenship of the world. Of course the Deadwood coach is on hand, and there's a hundred punchers and cowmen close to it.

"The other man is the first to ride, and there's a big roar when the judges calls him out. Seems like he comes way down from Idaho, and ain't rid the range for six years, but when he was riding for old Judge Larkin, up in Idaho, they say there weren't his beat for a horse-wrangler in the whole West. He's a likely looking critter

too, well set-up, with a heavy brown mustache, and a little chin whisker, and looks good, in his gray wolf-skin chaps, and his hat turned down over his eyes. You can bet the boys gives him a hot send-off.

"The judges has picked a big black for him, a horse they call 'Blackie,' with a white stocking, that's said to be the hottest stuff they got.

"Blackie stands for the saddle like a lamb. And he keeps standing while Idaho mounts him slow, and careful, keeping an eye on his head.

"But Idaho's feet ain't scarcely in the stirrups when the black goes up in the air like a rocket, and comes down like a ton of brick. He goes up and down, up and down, four times, just like that, and then shoots acrost the field like a whirlwind, twist and turn, sun-fish, side-buck, crow-hop, rear, and jolt! Say, there wasn't anything a bad horse ever done that this here one fergot.

"Gee! how the boys yelled, and this here Idaho a-sittin' him like he growed there.

"Right turn; left turn; but Idaho's always ahead of him, just as if he knew what Blackie's doing before Blackie knows it himself.

"You've heard the boys yell, 'Yip! Yip! rider, rider! He's a rider! Go it Idaho!' The whole mob's yawping like Injuns, and the judges howling with the rest of them, and Idaho, you bet he rides!

"Up in the air goes the black, and then straight ahead, pitching like a crazy ship in a typhoon, and Idaho a-settin' as ca'm as a bird, and gracefully swinging the quirt at every jump.

"The wire fence is just ahead, and Blackie shoots over and dives into it, head down, like a battering ram. The wire gives, and springs back, throwing Idaho and the Black into a tangle of hoofs, and legs, and dust, and the crowd falls dead silent. But when the Black comes up on his feet again, by gosh! Idaho's right there in the saddle. The Black can't shake him. He shoots half across the field, and stops dead in his tracks, all sweating, and trembling, and beat to a finish.

" 'All in!' yells the ropers.

" 'Get down!' shouts the judges, and then the crowd breaks into whoopings and yellings such as you never heard and they makes a run to grab Idaho, but the judges and ropers drives them back, and then they call Emerson.

"The Big Noise comes out grinning, and swaggering. As he passes the coach, he looks up at where Hon'rable Mawde's settin', and smiles at her, but she don't smile back. It seems to me his face is kind of pale and green looking, and the smile don't set straight. They're holding a savage-looking gray for him, that's ramping and fighting like a she-lion.

"Emerson walks over. He's still grinning but there ain't no spring to his gait, and when he half turns, I see his face is gone white, like paper.

"He takes his saddle off his shoulder, and goes to her, and the mare turns and rises at him, like a whirlwind. Emerson jumps back, like he was a tenderfoot. Then he turns, and throws his saddle on the ground, and you can see he's trembling like a leaf.

" 'Boys,' he says, 'I—I can't ride. I—I'm sick.'

"And the word goes whooping through the crowd that Emerson won't ride, because he's sick; and he sure was sick, but it was just the yellow boiling out of his gizzard, and poisoning his blood, because Idaho's made a great ride, and Emerson is dead scared he couldn't beat it.

"I looks at Hon'rable Mawde on top the coach, and I lets out a yell, 'cause I can see she's half glad, and half sort of relieved-lookin'. Then the secretary's buckling the belt on the Idaho party. The crowd's yelling like they was crazy, and the punchers is most tearing Idaho limb from limb.

"The lord, he's plumb disgusted, but he's a good loser, and he says, 'Aw,' he says, 'I should like to congratulate this aw—champeen.'

"One of the big cowmen starts away, and ina few minutes come back a-towing Judge Larkin, and this Idaho, with his hat pulled way down like a tough man. And the judge he says, 'Lord Bruton,' he says, 'Let me make you acquainted with Buster Jack, of Idaho. He's rid range fer me six years ago, and he's just come back acrost the salt water. You got a right to be proud of a countryman of yourn', he says, 'what's the best rider in the world!'

"The lord turns to Hon'rable Mawde, what's come down off the coach, and says he, 'Mawde,' he says, 'This is Mr. Buster Jack of Idaho.'

"Hon'rable Mawde's a-looking at this here Buster person kind of scared-like and when he pulls off his big hat, that's been down covering his eyes, she gives a sort of little scream, and the lord and me, say! we most drops dead, fer I'll be gosh-dinged, if it ain't the Hon'rable John Smythe—Dandy Boy!

"Hon'rable Mawde stands a-swayin' for a second, with a look on her like somebody had saved her from drowning. Then she jumps for Dandy Boy, and him all in his chaps and covered with sweat, and she grabs him.

"Then everybody yells again, but the Bar Zee boys feels kind of fooled.

"For a lord's son they'd thought Dandy Boy licked the universe, but 'course if he was a puncher himself there weren't nothing so wonderful 'bout what he done."

Whipple's Revenge

It all started with the refusal of the First National's president to make a loan of fifty thousand dollars to the iron and steel concern.

This angered Whipple, the company's president, and one day he strode into the bank with two checks in his hand. One was the check of the firm for the total amount of its cash balance in the bank, and the other covered the amount of his private deposits.

It was his purpose to withdraw both, and to cut all connection with the disagreeable and old-fashioned bank.

"Give me all the money on these checks," he said sternly to the cashier.

"How will you have it, sir?" the cashier asked coldly.

"Large bills," returned Whipple laconically, "the largest you've got. I'm going to take it over to Donaldson for purposes of deposit."

He said this with a grin. The cashier stepped into the vault. He called to two or three of the clerks to assist him.

Behind the spot where Whipple stood there was a large old-fashioned table. Each clerk, as he left the vault, placed something on this table and went back for more.

Finally they stopped coming and going and the cashier, with a sardonic grin, pointed to the pyramidal pile on the old table.

"Sir," said the cashier politely, "sorry that we are out of large bills to-day. I think your money is all there."

Whipple looked at it. He was unmoved, though it would have taken a horse and wagon to carry all the coins away.

"I want to count this cash," he said pleasantly. "I have forgotten the amount of the checks. Please let me see them, will you?"

The cashier, beside himself with inward laughter, handed out the checks.

"Now," said Whipple, seating himself, "will you just open each one of these bags so that I may count the coins?"

"Sir," said the cashier, "it will take you a week. This is not a boarding house."

For answer Whipple pointed to the "Count your cash before leaving the window" sign.

"I do but follow your directions," he returned.

"All right," answered the cashier, and he untied the bags.

Then hastily, and before they knew what he was doing, F. W. Whipple, president of the Monroe Iron and Steel Company, thrust his hand into the first bag and took from it a very small handful of coins. He did the self-same thing with each bag in turn.

When Whipple had finished, two of his pockets were more or less laden with small coin.

"Gentlemen," he said with a smile, as he placed in his pocket the two checks which he had held in his hand, "I have changed my mind. I shall not withdraw my whole account from the bank. I have determined to take with me only that which I have placed in my pockets. You may charge my account with just what I took."

"The devil!" muttered the cashier. "How much did you take?"

"That, gentlemen," returned F. W. Whipple, unmoved, "you may best determine by counting what is left."

And they had to do it.

THE SNIPER

By ALBERT DORRINGTON

Author of "Death Echo Cañon," etc.

THIS IS NOT A WAR STORY, BUT A STORY OF LONDON IN WAR TIMES, AS FULL OF SUPRISES AS A NUT IS OF MEAT

WE CAN OFTEN NAME THE GERMAN SOLDIER WHO SHOT YOUR HUSBAND, BROTHER OR SON. WE GIVE FULLER DETAILS THAN THE WAR OFFICE. OUR SYSTEM IS PURELY SCIENTIFIC. IT IS THE RESULT OF A SPECIALIZED AND FAR-REACHING INQUIRY SERVICE.

IT WAS a bold advertisement, and occupied half the window space of the International Inquiry Bureau. Pedestrians sometimes halted with a jerk to read it. Men and women with sons and relatives fighting in Flanders passed on wondering whether such claims were genuine or merely the effusions of commission-hunting charlatans.

"It wouldn't be hard for them to tell us more than the War Office," a man stated huskily. "All the same I don't think any institution can live up to that press notice. It beats Sherlock Holmes to a frazzle!"

At the end of a white-paneled corridor, in one of the Bureau's most daintily furnished chambers, sat Cayley Troop, Chief of the Inquiry Department. The top of Troop's head was pink and bald; his eyes narrow at the points as though the blinding light of his discoveries had pinched them. Clients learned to regard him as a kind of human eagle chained to a desk. The professional glitter in his eye was more convincing than the office window advertisement. And the sheep-faced inquirer who entered to consult him about a missing brother or son at the front, was soon at his ease regarding Troop's knowledge of German brigades and units, his almost occult powers of divining inpenetrable secrets.

A pale overworked secretary appeared in the doorway and coughed to attract his attention. "Mrs. Lorimer has just called, sir," he announced. "May I show her in?"

Troop looked up from his desk and pondered swiftly. The name Lorimer was familiar. Her case had interested him. Six months before, her husband, Noel Lorimer, had gone to the front as a member of the Army Medical Corps. He had been shot by a German sniper at a farmhouse near La Vendee. Troop had noted a look of horror in the young widow's eye at the way her husband had been picked off while rendering aid to the wounded and dying. Pretty women always interested Troop, especially in their moments of grief and despair. He knew that many of these young widows would cheerfully shoot at sight the slayers of their husbands.

He had consoled her, but while stressing the difficulty of dealing with the enemy's hired assassins, had assured her that even a commissioned sniper in the German Army was not beyond reckoning with. He had invited her to call again.

He nodded to the secretary, and a few moments later the widow of Noel Lorimer was seated before him. She was not more than twenty, with a touch of the Spaniard in her slow burning eyes. Each movement conveyed something of the suave beauty of her supple young body. Yet, despite her charm of gesture and speech, Troop diagnosed a mutinous anger against the sniper of La Vendee.

"My coming here may seem childish, Mr. Troop," she began somewhat passionately. "I can think of nothing but this miscreant who could shoot a defenceless man striving to aid the wounded and maimed!"

Troop inclined sympathetically, then, very slowly, opened a letter with a Belgian postmark. He read it pensively while the silence of Infinity seemed to leap between them. After awhile he spoke and his words were like a sword-cut.

"The sniper who shot your husband is in England, Mrs. Lorimer. I may add that he is employed at the present moment in this city!"

She stood up swaying slightly against the chair, the red signals from her heart flashing in her cheeks. "Do you mean that he is a prisoner?" she demanded.

The bald, pink head shook. "He is a free man, Mrs. Lorimer. After the fall of Antwerp he deserted the German Army and came here in the guise of a Belgian refugee. At present he is known as Auguste Wiegand. His real name is Louis Brandenberg. He belonged to the 57th Bavarian Regiment stationed at La Vendee. Being an excellent shot he volunteered to take up a position near an old farmhouse at St. Meuve. It was from this hiding place that he picked off your husband!"

The slow fire in Beatrice Lorimer's eyes seemed to darken and blaze. "What is Brandenberg doing in this country?" she demanded.

Troop's answer was short-clipped and precise. "He is a waiter. Do you want the name of his hotel?"

The blood-red of her cheeks grew ashen. For an instant he thought she would collapse. Then: "There must be no mistake about this sniper's identity, Mr. Troop. What proof have you that he is the man who shot my husband?"

Troop's face seemed to recede and then dart toward his questioner. "After shooting your husband, Brandenberg descended from his hiding place and stole his note book. I believe that this note book is still in his possession. There is no doubt whatever concerning the fellow's identity. Do you want his address?"

"I do!" Her whole being seemed to vibrate in her pent-up anger against the privileged assassin who had taken her husband's life. "If Noel had been a soldier carrying arms I could have born no enmity. He was murdered while succoring the dying. And this miscreant Brandenberg is permitted to—do——"

"Go to the authorities if you will," Troop interrupted gently. "But your case may be difficult to prove although I, as director of this institution, am positive that he is the sniper of La Vendee."

"I shall not go to the authorities. They will allow him to escape. Give me the name of Brandenberg's hotel. I shall not trouble you further."

Troop coughed and allowed an unbirdlike smile to soften his eagle expression. "We have been to some expense in this matter, Mrs. Lorimer. You will readily understand——"

"How much?" she interrupted.

The unbirdlike smile vanished, and the eagle eye explored the expensive jewelry about her wrists and throat, the diamonds peeping at him in clusters from the necklace she wore. "Let us say two hundred guineas, Mrs. Lorimer, and you shall have the pleasure of meeting the sniper who put a bullet through your husband's heart!"

She took a check book from her pocket, filled in the amount with a pen from the desk, and passed it to him.

Troop glanced at the signature as he thrust it carelessly into a drawer, then drew an envelope from a near pigeon-hole. On it was written:

AUGUSTE WIEGAND
HOTEL MAZARIN
PICCADILLY

II

BEATRICE LORIMER entered the Hotel Mazarin like a priestess ascending an altar steps. A watchful attendant hurried near to inquire her wants, and to assure her that the excellent service of the hotel was at her disposal.

She followed him to a small private dining room where a mirror above the oak mantelpiece showed the faint scarlet of her cheeks, the almost ghostly brilliance of her eyes. Almost mechanically she sat at the little table, while the attendant vanished to announce her coming. For several moments she permitted her fiercely imaginative mind to re-picture Noel lying face down in the wheel-rutted road near the farmhouse at St. Meuve, blood oozing from the bullet hole in his breast. There came to her also, a swift and terrible picture of the German sniper, Brandenberg, a white-skinned, thick-lipped beast crouching in the clump of pines at the rear of the farm. She saw him approach Noel's supine figure with plundering hands, saw him place his still smoking rifle on the ground to allow a quick search of the victim's pockets; and then a stealthy and rapid return to the pine-shelter.

She was suddenly conscious of a waiter standing beside her chair, of a gilt-edge menu held near for her consideration. For ten seconds she considered it with unseeing eyes, then slowly, very slowly looked up into the garçon's face.

"What is your name?" she inquired steadily.

A wan smile creased his pallid features. His reply was soft and scarce audible. "Jacques Monier, mademoiselle. I am at your service."

Her eyes fell again to the gilt-edged menu. "There is a waiter here named Wiegand. He is a Belgian, if I remember rightly. May I see him?"

Again the wan smile that reminded her of a Chinese mask; and again the terrible silence that left her stark still in her chair with only the trumpet call of her mission stirring her brain to life. Then after ages it seemed, the door opened. A soft footstep fell near her chair. She did not look up because he was speaking.

"Mademoiselle has sent for me. How may I serve mademoiselle? He moved round the table and stood before her, a wine napkin outspread on his left arm. He was not more than eighteen, with blonde eyes and the face of a child. She looked at him again, wonder and doubt striving in her until her sobbing heart seemed to leap and suffocate.

"Your name is Louis Brandenberg," she found voice to say. "You are a deserter from the German Army!"

In a flash the waiter's pose had gone. He was standing erect, eyes illumined, head flung back. Then for an instant the childish softness returned to his face. A round German tear welled in his blonde eyes.

"Mademoiselle, spare me! If I am caught these English will shoot me. Have pity, mademoiselle!"

Her hand became clenched on the table. She had another flying picture of Noel lying in the wheel-rutted track near the farmhouse. "You shot my husband at a place called La Vendee. It was on the twentieth of September. He was attached to the Medical Corps. You will understand that I have taken some trouble to find you!"

He stared round-eyed at her, and his Teutonic dismay left him slack-lipped and gasping a little. A sudden gleam of understanding lit his eyes; the slack lips grew suddenly tense.

"Madame, you overwhelm me! I was at La Vendee on the date you mention. I also shot a Red Cross officer named Lorimer!"

"You coward!"

He flinched as though naked steel had touched him, but it was the action of one unafraid of steel. "Madame, I crave your pity and forgiveness!"

"You did not spare the seeker of the wounded and the dead!" she taunted. "From your coward's hiding place you picked off the doctors, the nurses, the dying!"

Again he flinched, but the serenity of the unruffled child returned to his brow. "Madame, I found your husband's grave the day after they brought him in. Some day you will see the little white cross I put there. Some day," he went on with difficulty, "you may see another near by. It also has a white cross. It marks the resting place of Marie Brandenberg, my little Alsatian wife who lived with the Santons at the farmhouse at St. Meuve. We had been married a year. The war called me away, and Marie went to live with the Santons! My regiment moved here and there until it brought me to La Vendee, and only a little way over the hills was the Santons' farm at St. Meuve. My heart was full of joy at the thought of seeing Marie again."

He paused at the sound of footsteps in the passage outside as though in fear of being disturbed. After they had gone he continued speaking in a sharp undertone. "When the French and English closed round the farm the people of the district fled. Marie stayed because she knew that I was at La Vendee, and because the Santons knew that the French would not molest them. It was here Marie met your husband, madame!"

"Go on." Beatrice Lorimer had grown ashen.

The blue of his eyes seemed to harden, although the boyish tremor still stayed in his voice. "He used to go to the farmhouse for fruit at first; and the Santons gave him flowers for the hospital and fresh milk for the wounded soldiers. Then your husband began to see Marie and write her

letters. They used to walk together in the woods when he could steal an hour from his work. I was in the first line of trenches, beyond La Vendee, at the time. My corporal gave me word of Marie occasionally. One day he asked if I would like to do some sniping near the farm. I told him I would go. Well, madame," he hesitated again, while his right hand went to his inner breast pocket with military suddenness, "we have Marie Brandenberg's letters to Noel Lorimer of the Army Medical Corps. I got them from him after I had killed him! You may read them at your leisure, madame!"

He cast a small war-soiled packet of letters on the table before her.

There was a silence in which he almost could hear the loud beating of her heart. Her hand moved to the packet. Then, as if overcome by nausea, she thrust them aside.

He nodded. But it was Beatrice who spoke first. "You judged them guilty," was all she said.

It was a long time before he answered. His breath came through his tight-shut teeth; his head was bent, his chest heaved. "Some day, madame, you will read those letters. I pray you have pity on the two people they concern—I pray you have pity on them and me. They said he was married to a wife in England, and I could not understand why such a man should steal my love from me, the love that cried like a child in my heart when I shot her in the woods at La Vendee!"

Beatrice stood up, shaken to her depths. In the doorway she turned and looked back at his sobbing shoulders. "God forgive you!" she said, and almost ran from the hotel corridor into the street.

Here the hot sunlight stayed on her cheek and cleared her throbbing senses. It was some time before she recovered herself. With half-seeing eyes she hailed a taxi and drove to Scotland Yard.

Arriving she was shown into a square, high-windowed apartment where sat the chief superintendent of police. He looked up with a curious smile of recognition as she entered. Pushing aside some papers he indicated a chair briefly.

"I had almost forgotten your case, Miss Lorimer," he said genially. "It's almost a month since you reported last. Do you like your work?"

"Immensely sir. I have been engaged on the Troop case, if you remember."

He regarded her flushed young face with almost fatherly concern, his brow creasing in his effort to recall her case more clearly. Each hour brought dozens of more or less interesting problems to be solved, and sometimes the issues were confusing.

"The Troop gang have given us trouble," he stated pensively. "If I remember rightly you undertook to impersonate a widow whose husband had been shot by a German sniper. You invented a story and took it to the International Inquiry Bureau. Troop decided to put you in touch with the sniper who sniped your non-existent husband. Did he?"

Beatrice nodded. "They found an actor, sir, who gave adequate reasons for sniping a husband I did not possess. And Troop took my check for two hundred guineas."

Very briefly she related what had happened while the old chief lay back in his chair, tight-browed but inwardly chuckling. "Excellent, excellent!" he broke out when she had finished. "This Louis Brandenberg is evidently an artist at the game. We are now in a position to jail the whole crowd for fraud!"

Beatrice was thinking of the sobbing shoulders, the child-like eyes of the boy-impostor whose acting was touched by the salt of inward tears. She was thinking of the two graves at La Vendee, of the little Alsatian wife Marie who never existed. The voice of the chief dispelled her mental pictures.

"We'd better arrest Troop at once, Miss Lorimer. It will mean five years for him and this Louis Brandenberg. I congratulate you. This is your first scoop since you became attached to the Criminal Investigation Department. Keep it up. We need ladies of your imaginative powers. Go home now and rest. You will hear from me this evening."

Beatrice returned to her little flat in South Kensington, a feeling of weariness and depression overcoming her after her morning's work. It had all seemed so real, so convincing. But the chief had said her work was good, so nothing else mattered.

Beatrice had few friends in life. Although her parents had left her comfortably provided, her restless nature craved for work out of the beaten track. She had gone to the chief of police with a burning desire to distinguish herself in the hunting down of criminals. The old chief had been very patient, and had assigned her one or two unimportant missions connected with women and children. Her entry into the Troop case had revealed an amazing and daring fraud.

Late that evening Troop was arrested. Brandenberg was nowhere to be found. A fortnight later the disgusted chief received the following note from Beatrice Lorimer:

Dear Sir:

I beg to resign my post as a member of the C. I. D. The work is really too trying for my nerves. Let me add another confession of feminine weakness. The artistic side of Louis Brandenberg's nature has impressed me. He is not a criminal. He is merely a brilliant young actor fallen among thieves. His real name is Madison. I can vouch for him becoming a useful member of society in future. We were married at a registry office on Thursday last.

BEATRICE LORIMER.

"Damn!" muttered the chief under his breath. "I've lost the only real genius that ever entered the department!"

Practical Difficulty

A Scottish lassie, asked by her teacher, "Why did the Israelites make to themselves a golden calf?" replied with the ever ready and practical reasoning of her countrywomen: "Well, ye ken, marm, they hadna as muckle siller as wad mak' a coo."

A Piece

The head of the family is about to eat an apple.

"Say, pa, give us a piece," says the wife.

"Yes."

"Oh, pa, give me a piece," says the daughter.

"Yes."

"Oh, pop, I want a piece," says the son.

"Yes."

"Won't you please give me a piece, too, uncle," says the niece.

"Here," says the disgusted head of the family, "the rest of you take the apple and give me a piece."

An Inquisitive Passenger

"How do you find your way when out of sight of land?" asked the girl, of the capta...

"By means of the compass," he replied genially.

"Oh, yes," she exclaimed delightedly, "and when you are going from home I suppos you use the gopass."

After that he kept busy and allowed no passengers to come near him.

A Stubborn Corpse

Members of the South Bend Police Department spent a fruitless two hours Monday morning in quizzing John Harvath, of Kentucky Street, who was shot and killed at Winkler's crossing.—*Goshen (Ind.) News-Times.*

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF CLEEK

The Riddle of The Stones of Flame

By T. W. HANSHEW

A TRUSTED EMPLOYEE DONE TO DEATH BEHIND LOCKED AND BOLTED DOORS, AN UNIMPEACHABLE MESSENGER SET UPON BY THIEVES AND ROBBED OF THE MOST PRECIOUS OUTPUT OF A SOUTH AFRICAN MINE—A TWO-FOLD MYSTERY SOLVED BY CLEEK, ONE-TIME "MAN OF THE FORTY FACES"

IF THERE is any spot in London more famous in the history of precious stones in general and diamonds in particular than Hatton Garden, that place remains to be found. For from the time the jewels have been removed from their native earth and clay, and passed through the hands of the various customs officers, Hatton Garden is their objective, there to be cut, polished and set in diverse ways and patterns till they are fit to grace the throat of a queen, the arm of a chorus girl, or to adorn the finger of the bride to be.

It may be imagined, therefore, that it came as something more than a shock to the tenants of this vicinity when they arrived on the scene of their labors, to find that grim tragedy had stalked into their midst overnight; and that not only had the most famous diamonds in the world vanished like dewdrops in the sun, but the trusted manager of one of the biggest firms had been found stabbed to death in the office, and there were apparently no clues or even reasons to account for this attack, for the stones had already left his charge. Ordinarily, perhaps, it might not have exerted quite so much interest as it did in the public mind but for the peculiarly mystifying circumstances, and the fact that it crowned a series of persistent jewel robberies which had taken place in the same quarter for many months past.

Naturally, Scotland Yard was called into action, with the additional spur of an immense reward, from Willis, the senior partner of the firm, and Scotland Yard responded promptly by handing the case over to Cleek.

"It is not only the reward which will tempt you, my dear fellow," said the redoubtable Superintendent Narkom to his famous lieutenant, "though it is a pretty stiff one too, but the whole thing is so inexplicable—so full of perplexing points, that I myself am absolutely befogged over it."

"Suppose you give me the history of it, then, so I can put on my thinking cap a bit beforehand," said Cleek, settling himself firmly in his chair. "You only said it was a matter of diamond robbery over the phone."

"Yes, but robbery with a murder thrown in at the other end. There doesn't seem much sense in murdering men after the theft is committed. Still, here goes:

"The firm affected are Messrs. Willis & Drew, and as the senior partner stands to lose £50,000, and the other, Leslie Drew, is likely to be arrested for the murder, you can imagine what a case it is."

"Willis—Drew," echoed Cleek. "Do I know them—names sound familiar, too—H'm—no, wait a minute, dear old chap. I like to work things out for myself." He drew his brows down in a hard line, and sat thinking hard. Willis—Drew—diamonds—let me see, it's a mine I was thinking of. Ah, yes—the Braganza Mine—South Africa—weren't they London agents for that particular mine. said to be one of the biggest in Kimberly—that is if they are the Hatton Garden firm."

"The identical people, old chap," said Narkom excitedly. "They do next to nothing else now but polish and attend to the output from that mine and are making their fortune over it—despite the periodical robberies."

"What's that?" rapped in Cleek sharply; "periodical robberies? What do you mean?"

"Well, according to Mr. Willis they have had their messengers set upon and robbed of one or two consignments of small stones regularly every month, and though the police have been called in nothing has been discovered; but now, when it comes to a question of 'The Stones of Flame'——"

"Stones of Flame—but Heavens, man, you don't mean that anything has happened to those glorious stones, do you?"

"You know them!" said Narkom.

Cleek sucked in his breath and nodded vigorously.

"Know them!" he said, "who doesn't? Why, I remember when they were shown in their natural state—uncut—at the Imperial Institute--under special guards as a tribute to our colony, South Africa, and bought finally by Willy Poel, the South African millionaire, and now—stolen—but it is impossible—absurd!"

"Not so impossible as you see, Cleek," returned Mr. Narkom. "They were brought to Messrs. Willis & Drew to polish and set, and as you can imagine, they've had a pretty anxious time."

Cleek nodded sympathetically.

"I don't know whether you know their offices, 43 Hatton Garden, it's an old-fashioned place and except for every door and window being fitted with steel shutters I don't believe a thing's been altered since they took the place from Wilfred Scobell himself."

Cleek twitched an enquiring eyebrow.

"Scobell had the place on a fifty years' lease," explained the superintendent. "He was a jewel cutter and dealer himself in a small way, but went bankrupt at the time of the Boer War. However, he was lucky enough to be an old school friend of Bob Willis—as one went down the other had gone up—and Willis, like the splendid fellow he appears to be—took over Scobell's rooms, lock, stock and barrel, and installed him as manager—practically, you might say, making him a partner without the responsibility."

Cleek nodded approvingly. "A jolly kind act, that," he said warmly. "I hope to goodness you are not going to tell me that that man has betrayed his trust and bitten the hand that saved him."

"Not he," said Narkom promptly. "According to Willis, the man worshipped the ground he walked on, and he reproaches himself bitterly for ever having entered into partnership with Drew instead of Scobell himself. Poor old chap—seems to have had pretty hard luck."

"Gad, man, but don't tell me he is the man murdered!"

Mr. Narkom nodded, and Cleek gave bent to clicking sounds indicative of sympathetic distress.

"One of them, that is," supplemented Narkom.

Cleek spun round on his chair.

"You see, it's like this," continued Mr. Narkom hurriedly. "These precious Stones of Flame, as the natives called them, proved a heavy responsibility."

"Well, Scobell was in such a hurry to get them off the premises, that directly they were finished he asked Willis to send them up to Llandrindod Wells where Mr. Poel was staying, as soon as possible, as they seem to have been worried by the attacks made on previous messengers. Young Drew was just about to start on his holidays, but he declared that he would take them himself that very night, catching the mail train. Naturally this pleased both parties, and it appears that Mr. Scobell packed the stones in a steel-lined securely locked case and gave them to Mr. Drew before leaving the office."

"I suppose there isn't any doubt that he did leave the office, is there?"

"Not the slightest, for he came out with Drew himself, Mr. Willis having gone earlier, to a meeting.

"The policeman on point duty can tell you that he spoke to both men, and as the door had been shut and therefore automatically locked, it was impossible for Scobell to get back. Not a sound was heard by the police or night watchmen, nor is there any sign of disturbance on the outer doors. And how that man got in without leaving a sign is an everlasting mystery."

"Surely he had his keys, all he had to d was to come back and let himself in——

"For once, old chap, you are wrong, that

is just what he could not do, for he had not got the key. The door is fitted with steel panels and a special automatic lock, for which there are only two keys, one for each partner. Mr. Willis says they wanted Scobell to have one made for him, but he refused."

"Refused, and why, pray? Do they know?"

"Yes, as it happens, they do. He was afraid of the responsibility, so the partners used to take turns, week by week, to come early so as to let the workmen, the typist, and Scobell himself, into the office."

"Hum! He might have borrowed Mr. Willis's key."

"No, that is just what he did not do, for it was Mr. Willis himself and the typist, a Miss Elsie Carville, who discovered the tragedy when the office was opened up this morning."

"I see, but what of Mr. Willis himself then, I suppose his movements are well authenticated?"

"Perfectly. He was at a public dinner at the Hotel Cecil, and didn't leave there till hours after both the robberies and murders took place. Besides, it isn't likely that he is going to tamper with stones of such notoriety as the Stones of Flame. Their loss means utter ruin to him."

"Unless they were insured to very near their full value."

"Hardly likely, my dear chap. the premium would be colossal even if any company would undertake it."

"Quite so, quite so, but, 'Robbing Peter to pay Paul' has been known to be done, unless of course—Hum!—it doesn't matter. Tell me what happened to Mr. Drew after he went off with the Stones of Flame."

"Young Drew says that just as he was leaving his chambers in Jermyn Street, 'bout ten o'clock, the jewel case locked up in his portmanteau, as he stepped out of the dark doorway, he received a crushing blow on the back of his head which sent him down like a nine-pin, and when he did recover consciousness naturally the thieves had decamped, stones and all, a regular clean sweep, simplicity itself; because as no one knew they were outside of Hatton Garden save three men, no special precautions had been taken to guard them."

"Hum, and what happened after that?" asked Cleek, tapping his fingers restlessly on the chair. "I suppose Drew rushed off to the police station."

"No, that's just what the idiot didn't do," snapped Mr. Narkom irritably.

"He says he was so dazed and stunned by the horror of the loss that he crawled up to his own rooms and collapsed on the bed. His man was away, having been given the day and night off, as Drew was going on holiday."

"The idiot, the blithering idiot," said Cleek softly, "unless it was a put-up job he gave the men more time to get away, I wonder." He pinched up his chin and rubbed it gently with a soft hissing noise.

"That's what I thought," said Narkom bluntly, "but the lad, he isn't much more, is so cut up, I cannot believe it possible. However, he did have the sense to telephone to Mr. Willis."

"At what time did he commit that act of sense?" rapped in Cleek.

"An hour later, he thinks. He says it was a long time, because his head hurt him so. Anyway, Willis nearly had a fit when he learned the news, and so did the police, but next morning things were worse. When they reached Hatton Garden they found outwardly the office was quite all right, but inside, well, it's a regular pandemonium, poor old Scobell found stabbed to death with a stiletto, his blood all over the table and chairs, and what is more incredible, another man, a perfect stranger to everybody, as dead as a doornail, lying just within the door as if trying to get out. Evidently he was poisoned, but how and why fair beats everybody. In addition to this, young Drew nearly died with the shock, he says, for on the table was that steel-lined casket, empty as the proverbial Mother Hubbard's cupboard."

"An interesting case at all events," was Cleek's comment. "I suppose there is no doubt regarding the room being impregnable as it seems, no other entrance or sliding panel. Those old houses, you know, are funny places."

"Not the slightest, Cleek. The office is at the top of the house and runs the entire floor, a barred window at each end fitted with steel shutters similar to the single door

opening into it. Glass partitions have been put up dividing the room into three sections for the typist, the jewel cutters, and Mr. Willis's private office. As the room stands on the side detached from the other buildings, both walls are in fact solid brick. Wynn's Passage, a public right of way, runs between it, and the wall is a solid, unbroken surface without a window from base to roof. There isn't a crevice big enough to let a mouse through, much less a man, so there it remains, Cleek."

"Just so, my dear Narkom. Suppose we give our Mr. George Headland a chance to scratch his head over it. Personally I find it very hard to believe that if only young Drew knew about those stones, and had the only key to the door—that story of a knock on the head, etc., is very hard to swallow, but I'll tell you more when I've had a chance to look around a bit."

At Hatton Garden Cleek found Mr. Willis to be a pleasant mannered and somewhat sympathetic man in the early fifties, who well carried out Mr. Narkom's belief as being exceptionally kindhearted, and who, albeit his face bore traces of the anxiety and distress under which he was laboring, was prepared to do his best to render every assistance to the law.

Mr. Drew, on the other hand, despite his bandaged head and face drawn with pain, was striding up and down the room, obviously the outer and typist's office, with the aspect of an enraged tiger cheated of its prey.

"For God's sake, do something, Mr. Headland," he implored, when mutual introductions had been made. "I need hardly tell you, I am nearly crazy, between the physical and mental agony I am enduring. The loss of these stones means financial ruin."

"Quite so," agreed Cleek solemnly, "and as there is nothing spiteful people won't believe in these days, there is every possibility, I suppose, of you yourselves being accused of having had a hand in it."

"Good Heavens, what rot," flung back the young man heatedly.

"In what possible way," put in Willis, with a shade of contempt, "could I or my partner benefit by the robbery?"

"Well," said Cleek, scratching his head dismally, "there is the matter of insurance, don't you know, cost a colossal premium, but if only one payment had been made, and then the stones gone, well, that's the line of reasoning, do you follow me?"

"I certainly do, so, but happily for our reputation, though not for our pocket," said Mr. Willis pompously, "such a line cannot be taken, for in consequence of having a patent time-lock safe, steel-shuttered doors and windows, we considered it would be a waste of money to pay such a high premium as would naturally be demanded, and so did not enter into any assurance at all. The loss, therefore, is solely and entirely ours. That they will be recovered I haven't the slightest hope, but I want to clear my partner here from any possible ill, save the loss of his and my fortune."

"B' Gad, it is hard lines," said Cleek, seeing here a possible "rung" drop out of a possible "ladder," and forthwith puckering up his brow and doing a bit of hard thinking.

To their surprise he turned and walked up the room, pausing on the threshold of the room in the front of the building, where his concern seemed more bent on the furniture, then on the bodies of the murdered men, and beyond a superficial glance in the direction where the bodies lay—those of an elderly man and a young one of about twenty—and a word of surprise regarding the condition of one of them, he appeared to give them not a second thought. But that word of surprise was in itself significant.

"Hullo," he said, in an easy off-hand sort of manner. "That," nodding to the figure of the elder man, "is Mr. Scobell I presume. Was he going to a meeting, too, or was he in the habit of wearing evening dress in the daytime? I thought you told me he came away with Mr. Drew."

"So he did," said that gentleman quickly. "That's another of the mysteries of this affair. First time I ever knew old Scobell possessed a dress suit, much less seen him in one; and what possessed him to dress himself up like that, and come back to this hole (to say nothing of how he got in without attracting attention) Heaven alone knows."

"Heaven knows many things," replied

Cleek oracularly, as he went on doing what he called "poking about," while Mr. Drew was speaking. "Perhaps Heaven knows, too, why he brought a bottle of champagne with him and got out the glasses. What's that, Mr. Narkom, how do I know it was champagne? Why, look at the champagne glasses, for one thing, to say nothing of this," he pounced on two or three shining bits of tin-foil, "see, part of the capsule. Evidently he had poured it out and hidden the bottle away. Haven't found a champagne bottle, I suppose!" He wheeled round on Mr. Drew, who was listening to him, with open eyes and mouth.

"I didn't. It was Willis who opened up." He turned to his partner who shook his head solemnly.

Cleek stood at the table, and picked up one of the glasses and examined it closely, sniffing at it vigorously and holding it up to the light.

"These belong to you, Mr. Willis?" he asked abruptly.

It was Drew, however, who answered the question.

"Probably belong to the Café Vilano, Italian ice cream shop opposite. Send us in a meal occasionally when we stay late."

"H'm, I see." Cleek walked over to the steel-barred window and looked down on the little restaurant, designated by Drew as "an ice cream shop." It was of the usual Italian variety, with the unappetizing sight of a couple of tired-looking chops, garnished by stale tomatoes and flanked by two mitre-folded serviettes in the window.

"Probably brought them up with him," said Drew.

"Probably," said Cleek. "Cut across, Mr. Narkom, will you, and ask whether they sold a customer a bottle of champagne, with the loan of two glasses."

Mr. Narkom cut across accordingly, and Cleek, replacing the glass on the table as if it held no further attraction for him, walked back into the outer office.

"Is this the only room belonging to you?" he asked Mr. Willis, who was watching him covertly, and evidently not highly impressed by his manner.

"Yes," he replied. "As you see, it is all one big room, divided off by thick sound-proof glass partitions. The workroom is at the back. My office is at the front, and Miss Carville, the typist, works in here. There is only one door, or outlet."

"Ah, yes," said Cleek, "I see. That is her hat, I presume," pointing to a large hat crowned with a wreath of poppies, hanging behind the door. "And where is the young lady, by the way; on her holiday?"

"Why, of course not," said Mr. Drew quickly. "Poor little girl, she was so overcome by the horror of it all, that when I came, I got the key of the empty office downstairs and bundled her down, machine, table and all. I wouldn't have had her given such an upset for worlds."

He spoke so warmly that Cleek his head cocked on one side, for all the world like an attentive terrier who sees a rat, stared at him fixedly.

"Ah, yes," he said, "that's her machine going now, isn't it?" He walked to the door and opened it, listening attentively to the click-click of the machine below. "Ah," he smiled knowingly, "a beginner. I see! Not very high speed, uses her first and second finger more than her fourth, does a lot of rubbing out, too, eh?"

He came back and looked humorously at the waste-paper basket, already half filled with badly typed, unfinished letters.

Mr. Willis frowned. "Yes, she is not very satisfactory and I should have discharged her at the end of last week, if poor Scobell had not interfered. We had to replace our Miss Brendon, who was taken ill a fortnight ago. But really, Mr. Headland, this is sheer waste of time——"

"I'm very interested in typewriting," said Cleek serenely, "sort of fellow-feeling, don't you know. Thought of taking it up myself at one time. I wonder what school she learned at. Ah, well, let's have a look at the other room. What's that, Mr. Willis, nothing touched there, it's the bodies that are the chief? Shouldn't like to say that, but there's plenty of time to examine them, my friend, they won't run away. Ah, here is Mr. Narkom. Well, my friend?"

"A miss, dear old chap. Haven't got a license for wines, and Mantonelli, the proprietor, says Mr. Scobell never went near the place yesterday. He's in an awful way, one of his waiters hasn't turned up, and he's as short-tempered as he's short-handed."

"Ah, well, never mind. I want to have a few words with Miss Carville, please, before going further."

He did. It was not more than a minute before young Drew, hurrying down the stairs, returned, in company with a young lady, as slight and petite in figure as Mr. Drew was tall, and from the protective glances he bestowed on her, it was pretty obvious to less observant eyes than those of Cleek's that Mr. Drew, like Mr. Scobell, was willing to overlook many of Miss Carville's typing mistakes for the sake of her company.

That she possessed more than the modicum of good looks was undeniable. Large, dark, languishing eyes glanced timidly from beneath golden brown lashes, which contrasted strongly with the masses of bright gold-colored hair piled up in elaborate puffs and coils and rolls, that showed it to evident advantage. Her slight figure was clad in a black poplin gown, but she looked such a lady of birth and breeding that had it not been for the violet stains of typewriting ink, Cleek would not have been surprised had Mr. Willis introduced her as his daughter.

Her voice, too, was very low and musical, as she answered the questions put to her by Mr. Headland, who stood looking out of dull, bewildered eyes, undoubtedly as much befogged as Mr. Narkom himself.

She was horribly nervous and horribly frightened, as was natural under the circumstances, but she told her story plainly and straightforwardly, and with a glance of pity every now and then turned to the next room.

"I am told, Miss Carville," said Cleek, "that you were the first to catch sight of the dead men. Can you give me the exact positions?"

"I think I can, sir," she said. "It was so horrible. I came in here first with Mr. Willis, as usual—took up my notebook and went to his room, while Mr. Willis himself looked into the workroom. I pushed open the door and there was a heavy weight against it, it was one of them. I only caught sight of Mr. Scobell, he was in the chair—then the blood, and I shrieked and shrieked and shrieked," she broke off shudderingly.

"Quite so," said Cleek. "Quite so. And did you know Mr. Scobell at all, outside of the office," he asked with startling irrelevance.

Miss Carville looked honestly surprised, as well she might, and Mr. Drew advanced almost threateningly, but evidently reassured by the young lady's quickly answered negative.

"Certainly not," she said haughtily. "I never saw Mr. Scobell in my life till I came here, nor after I left the office at night." Her dark eyes flashed dangerously and her voice became startlingly loud and grim.

"No offense, Miss, I'm sure," said Cleek humbly, "just a thought of mine. I don't think you can tell me any more, Miss. Seems to me a corker of a case, right through."

At a word from Mr. Willis, the girl withdrew, and a minute later could be heard the clicking of the typewriter.

"Nice girl, that," said Cleek approvingly. "Pity she's so untidy!" He stooped and picked up a bit of typing paper fallen from her skirt, and throwing it presumably in the waste-paper basket. It must be said presumably, for as he turned and swooped down on that useful article it could only be for that purpose.

"And now, with your kind permission, Mr. Willis, we will have a detailed look at our dead friends inside there. I haven't given them due attention yet, because I begin to see a grave error has been made in the cause of death of Mr. Scobel, at any rate."

"An error, Mr. Headland?" said Mr. Willis pompously, and facing round on him. "How can you say that, when you haven't so much as looked at either of the two poor fellows. As for my poor old friend, you'll be telling me next that he wasn't stabbed to death, even though the weapon is sticking in him, right under our very eyes."

"But eyes are very easily deceived, Mr. Willis," retorted Cleek, placidly. "As a matter of fact I'd rather trust my nose than my eyes any day, in detecting a crime, and if anybody tells you there's nothing but violets, when you distinctly smell musk it 'gives you to think,' as our French friends say."

It was not a pleasant sight, for a dead man with a stiletto sticking in him is by no means one conducive to calm one's nerves

and in addition there seemed to be a surprising amount of blood on the table and chairs.

But Cleek mystified Mr. Willis even more by leaning over and sniffing the dead man's mouth and hair, then with thumb and forefinger parting the half-closed lids. A sharp sound broke from his lips, and turning on his heel, he switched over to that of the younger man, evidently of foreign birth—either Swiss or Italian.

A little satisfied laugh from Cleek caused Mr. Willis to frown even more heavily.

"Gentleman," rapped out Cleek, "I have the honor to inform you of two positive facts. First and foremost, that Scobell was killed hours before this man; and second, that if that stiletto had been a sword, it could not have done what it is supposed to have done, since he was already dead at the time."

"Good Lord!" began Mr. Narkom and Mr. Drew in one breath, but Cleek checked them with a wave of his hand.

"Why he has been killed I cannot quite see, though I have an idea, but the facts remain, that he died from poisoning. All this stuff here is so much good red ink. Cyanide of potassium was the material used, judging by the contents of that glass, given to him in that glass of champagne — by whom?"

"Why, by that young joker over there, of course," interposed young Drew quickly. "Who else could it be? He must have been in here after Scobell and I left. That was after the policeman downstairs saw the light in the window."

He was right after all.

III

Had a bombshell been thrown into their midst, there could not have been caused m[illegible] consternation, and one and all gazed at [illegible] man in open-mouthed astonishm[illegible]

"L[illegible]ed Mr. Willis sharply. "Lights [illegible] our window. Nonsense, man, you are mad. You forget the steel shutters. How could any light shine through them?"

"Yes, that's what Scobell told him. We had just come down the stairs, don't you know, and the policeman was just coming up to ask if everything was all right."

"Well, I'm blest!" said Cleek, a queer little smile traveling up one side of his face.

"Tell me," he turned suddenly on the two members of the firm, "were you in the workroom or your own office, when you decided to send off the Stones of Flame?"

"Here in this room," was the prompt reply, "but the shutters were down—and no one could possibly have seen through them. We packed them here, at least, poor Scobell did, at the desk directly after."

"H'm—I see!" said Cleek, walking aimlessly round and round the room, his gaze fixed now on the ceiling, then on the skirting, till not a square inch of space had escaped his eyes. He came to rest at last before the window, and tested for himself the steel shutter which rolled up automatically, making the window almost hermetically sealed, by the weight of the metal.

"Very clever idea, that," was his comment, approvingly, "but, I say, what about when you open the window in the daytime?"

"It never was opened," said Mr. Willis. "It is fastened up—Poor Scobell's idea—he was simply crazed on keeping the diamonds safe, and yet as sure as Fate as a new consignment has gone out this last three months, the messenger has been waylaid and robbed; in one case, we sent two men of unimpeachable honesty and both men were laid out, by men waiting at the bottom of Hatton Garden. It is absolutely uncanny."

"Kind of second sight, eh," jerked in Cleek, turning on his heels suddenly and continuing his prowl round the room.

"Ah," he stooped suddenly at the side of the big roll-top desk, "you packed your diamonds in sawdust, eh, Mr. Willis?"

"Good heavens, no, man!" said that exasperated gentleman. "Of course not; the very finest cotton-wool."

"Ah, my mistake," flung back Cleek, still in a stooping posture, his hand supported against the panel of the desk. Suddenly a little cry escaped him, and he put his hand suddenly to his back.

"Lord! but I've done it again!"

"Done what again?" asked young Drew solicitiously.

"Cricked my back," was the reply. "Give me a hand up again, will you, Mr. Narkom. Ah, thanks, old friend," as the superintend-

ent complied readily enough. "Well, that settles this place," he said, casually. "All we have to do is to find out who the other young gentleman is, and there you are, don't you know."

There he certainly was, and as Fate took the case into her hands, she supplied the answer to that part of the riddle by the sudden appearance of a stout and greasy Italian, clad in the conventional dress-suit and apron, beloved of his class. Panting and anxious, he stood at the door, left open by Miss Carville.

"Why, Mantonelli," exclaimed both partners in a breath, and as Cleek noted the furtive look and stertorous breathing of the proprietor of the "ice-cream shop," he grew very, very still.

"Signor, I cam' to ask you ze fafor, ze greatest favor, to look at heem. Ah, yes, but it ees heem!" he shrieked, for his gaze had wandered past to the figure of the dead young Italian, also in evening dress, and it did not need his exclamation of "Gustave, it ees heem!" to tell Cleek the identity of the dead stranger.

"He ask me all of a sudden for what you Inglis call ze night off. I thought heem gone mad. I say, Non—but he disappear suddenly in ze evening—and he is 'ere—dead. What does it mean, Signors?"

"Mean? I'll tell you what it means, gentlemen, to-night, or I'll eat my hat," said Cleek, his eyes glittering with excitement. "Mr. Mantonelli, I want a dinner prepared for six-thirty sharp, the very finest dinner you can prepare for me. What's that? For how many? I'll tell you when I see the menu. Never mind the expense; throw your whole staff and soul into it, and I'll come over and choose the wine myself. Off you go."

The Italian needed no further word—with a flourish of his greasy apron, he was gone, leaving Cleek with a twisted little smile on his face.

"Gentlemen, I'm going to ask you for both your keys, so as to keep this room shut, and perhaps you wouldn't mind going down and asking Miss Carville if she will want any more paper, or anything else from this room, till I come back."

"Any ideas, old chap?" asked Narkom anxiously, directly the door closed on the two partners who straightway began a quest for another office.

"Bushels," was the laconic reply. "Sometimes a hair will show which way the wind blows, old chap, and when it blows in the right direction, the mills of Fate grind exceedingly small. Trot off and find that clever young policeman for me, and if you can keep our friends downstairs out of the way for a few minutes, I may be able to give Mr. Willis the surprise of his life."

Mr. Narkom, seeing that no further information was forthcoming, departed on his quest, and succeeded in keeping both partners in hot argument over the fact of being turned out of their own office, even for the short space of half a day.

The natural demand, however, of Miss Carville for her hat on the clock striking the lunch hour of one, precluded any further delay, but when Mr. Willis opened the door of the office, it was to find Mr. George Headland, deeply engaged in making his stubbly hair before a piece of looking-glass, and surveying his reflection with undoubted self-satisfaction.

He glanced up at their entry unabashed by Mr. Willis' unspoken contempt, or Miss Carville's giggle, quickly repressed, as she reached down her poppy-crown hat.

"Ah, going out to lunch, Miss Carville?" he remarked, jauntily swinging a little back, as that young lady swept by him haughtily and ran downstairs.

"What's that, Mr. Willis, discovered anything did you say? Yes, I've discovered that I'm jolly hungry, and I've got to go downstairs before I can come upstairs again. Ha, ha!" he gave an inane little giggle.

"We detectives must have our little joke. No, my friend, there's nothing more to discover now. I'll come at six o'clock. That's it, shut the door; thank you, gentlem[illegible] hoping you won't be greatly inc[illegible]d. Now we shan't be long. [illegible] Mr. Narkom, if you please. [illegible] get back to Scotland Yard."

With a little wave of the key, the companion to which he had given the dazed superintendent, Cleek lurched down the narrow stairs, out onto the pavement, and was round the corner before Mr. Willis could draw breath.

The distance which lies between that part of Hatton Garden, where the building occupied by Messrs. Willis and Drew stood, and Scotland Yard, is one easily walkable. In fact, a man might have no difficulty in covering the ground in something under half an hour. It was then rather remarkable that it was nearly two hours later before any sign was heard from Cleek at that historic building, where Mr. Narkom waited in vain, and then it was in the form of an urgent telephone call for Petrie.

Had any one been listening, they would have been perhaps more mystified than enlightened by the conversation which took place, for Petrie was soon heard to say, "Six be enough, sir? I can let you have more—as easy as wink—eight, sir. Yessir, in plain clothes. Yessir, I understand; surround the place and bag every one—righto, sir!"

Perhaps, too, if anyone had seen the the beery, corduroyed navvy who lounged into the little oilshop in Hatton Garden, and after buying some candles and matches, to say nothing of a specimen of a special line of screw-drivers, might have been forgiven if they did not recognize in him the smart young inspector who appeared later on behalf of the electric light company, and walked into the Café Vilano, with a demand to see the electric light meters.

As all the staff were evidently hard at work in the kitchen, cooking and preparing for the dinner of their lives, it was not surprising that the inspector had to find the meters for himself, and accordingly proceeded, strangely enough, to look for them in every corner of the place.

Even when he did find them, he must have taken a tremendous time over them, for it was fully half an hour before he emerged and walked up the street with a smart young policeman on the beat, who [illegible] nearer promotion than he had ever been in all his life.

What Cleek did with his time after that, will never be known, but even if Mr. Narkom had seen him, up at the great post office, being initiated into the mystery of the Morse dash and dot telegraphic system, he would only have been still more mystified. Sufficient to say that at six o'clock, when it was just getting dark up in the office, where Mr. Narkom, with Miss Carville downstairs typing most energetically at her post, sat anxiously waiting for him, Cleek walked in.

"Ah, Mr. Narkom, hope I haven't kept you waiting," was his greeting. "I'm awfully sorry, old chap, but I haven't had time to take in the wine list to old Mantonelli opposite. You'll just have time to get them on ice for me—here it is."

He detached a leaf of his note-book, which the superintendent took off with him, while Cleek, without so much as by your leave, sat down at the desk, fidgetting restlessly with his feet, all of which did not tend to allay the irritation of the partners thus set at naught.

Another minute, he gave a twitch of the head, and a scrap of a laugh, as Mr. Narkom came tumbling into the room.

"Right, was I?" asked Cleek, screwing round in his chair and looking at the superintendent.

"I should think you were. You said, 'Diamonds leaving to-night'."

"Good man," purred Cleek.

"In the name of all that is mysterious," began Mr. Drew, but was suffered to go no further than that.

"Cleek, by way of a change," interjected the owner of that name. "No reason now that you should not know it."

"Cleek!" the two partners spoke as one man, Drew finishing with a devout, "Thank Heaven—the only man in the world for this job."

"At your service, gentlemen," he replied. "Mr. Willis, many thanks for the reward; I'm going to win it within the next three minutes."

"Good Lord, man! you don't mean to tell me that you know who stole my precious stones or who murdered my best friend?"

"To both questions, yes, my dear sir. Come here, walk softly, all three of you, and don't make a sound sufficient to wake a cat." Then as they followed him in silent amazement, he led them to the door. From outside in the street there arose oaths and screams, that one might well have thought a fire had broken out in the windows of the Café Vilano.

"Come on, come on," said Cleek, in a swift, sharp whisper, and beckoning them to follow bore down onto the landing. Here they found Miss Carville, evidently flust-

ered by the noise. With both hands clasped on the rail, she was leaning over, evidently straining to catch the cause of the noise and trouble.

"What is it? What's the rumpus?" sang out Cleek, as he reached her side.

"I don't know, sir," she gave back, tremulously. "All at once, I heard it. What does it mean?" She glanced hurriedly up at him.

"Merely that your little game is up, my friend," rapped in Cleek, reaching over so quickly, that before she could unlock her fingers from the bannister rail, a steel band was snapped round each slender wrist, and those hands were helplessly locked together. "Got you, you infernal scoundrel. Look sharp there, Mr. Narkom; there may be a knife in her skirt. I know the beauties! That's it! I thought so. Played, sir, played. That's got her, yes, leave the rest to Petrie and Hammond; bring this little beast up here."

It was but a minute later, and the clawing, biting, curse-spitting figure of Miss Carville was securely bound onto the chair, while the partners were peppering Cleek with questions, and all the tenants of the neighboring houses and offices were piling into the street to witness what was practically the wholesale arrest of every inhabitant of the Café Vilano.

Cleek shut the door on the din, content to leave it to his subordinates.

Then he turned onto his prisoner, who had sunk down sobbing so piteously that it was evident young Drew would be likely to set her free.

"Stop that row, Jules Borelle," flung out Cleek, while a cry of sheer amazement burst forth from the rest.

"Did you think Cleek was going to forget that wonderful transformation, made for Margot herself?" Let's see what you filled it with this time."

Leaning over, he gave a switch, a pull, and in his hand was the becoiled and elaborate wig, leaving a fair and smooth-haired, young Frenchman of about three-and-twenty.

Regardless of the hubbub, Cleek's fingers twined restlessly in the hair, and he gave a little yap of delight as he pulled out a little wad of cotton-wool.

"Well, I'm dashed," said young Drew, then gave a sudden howl, a sudden cheer, and flung his arms round Mr. Willis, as one after another there came forth the missing Stones of Flame.

It was half an hour later, the Italian prisoners had been carted away and with them Jules Borelle, and Cleek and Narkom stood in the office.

"Want to know how I discovered the trick?" said Cleek, answering the query put to him by Mr. Willis, as that gentleman dried the check made out for one thousand pounds payable to "Hamilton Cleek."

"Why, it was quite easy to see that a woman's hatpin couldn't have made all that mess even if it was blood, which it wasn't.

"Hatpin," rang out Mr. Drew.

"Yes, hatpin, my friend, and its twin was in that poppy-wreathed hat. Eyes are also useful, I admit, Mr. Willis. When I smelled the cyanide, and found traces of sawdust near that desk, to say nothing of a golden hair clinging to it, I knew who had been concerned in the murder, and who had come from the Café Vilano to do it. No, it wasn't Gustave; he came up later and found the other man dead, and to pull himself together 'finished' that glass. It was a false step on the part of Mantonelli not to recognize his own glasses."

"Yes, but how did they get in?" asked Mr. Drew.

"Oh, very simply—I'll show you—shut the door on me, a minute."

Cleek lurched out of the room. There was complete silence, broken a minute or two later by a click and a low laugh. They turned, in time to see Cleek coming through the side of the roll-top desk.

"That leads down to the wine-cellar opposite," he said, calmly. "Mantonelli wanted to put any blame on to Gustave, that . why he came up to see what was going to happen. I kept him too busy for the rest of the day to do any harm."

"I don't understand what you meant just now by those diamonds," said Drew.

"Ah, that was a clever trick. Look——" he stooped and pulled hard at the carpet below the desk, beneath which showed a rod and wire.

"That connected to a battery and two

lamps let into the top of that window, my friend—'dot and dash' messages were sent out to the watchers opposite, and there you are."

"By whom—Miss Car—I mean——"

"No," said Cleek sadly, "Scobell was the traitor. He had these rooms fitted up for that purpose, but he was taken in, too, by our handsome Miss Carville and sent her notes—this one she dropped. He was to have shown her or given her the Stones of Flame that night. He put false stones in your precious casket, keeping the real ones back. Young Borelle probably took them, poisoned Scobell and walked out. When Gustave came up with the casket, which they had just broken open and found nothing for their pains, he found our friend dead. The rest is simple, and if Borelle had only decamped instead of using the wig as a hiding place, all would have been well, as it is. Thank you for the check, Mr. Willis. Take my advice, unscrew that window and then do business as usual."

He turned and clattered down the staircase—a free man once more.

The Warmest Kind

Dante and Virgil were on their celebrated hike through the lower regions.

In the neighborhood of the seventh circle they came upon a group of lost souls, who seemed to be particularly uncomfortable. They were not undergoing any especial form of torture, but they were perspiring profusely, as the sweat upon their faces eloquently indicated.

"Who are these?" asked Virgil, pointing to the luckless company.

His Satanic Majesty laughed mirthfully.

"These? Oh, that's just a little joke I have," he replied in perfect good humor.

"Joke!" cried Dante reprovingly.

"Surely," giggled His Highness, turning the steam on another notch. "They are 'warm personal friends' of mine."

"That's a hades of a joke," said Virgil, as they passed on.

INSIDE THE CABIN

By GEORGE HYDE PRESTON

Author of "The Conscience of McCann."

HOW AN UNJUSTLY PUNISHED KLONDIKER'S SWEET REVENGE TURNED BITTER WITHIN HIS MOUTH AND A BETTER THING TOOK ITS PLACE

BIG BILL GARVIN opened the door of his cabin, and, stepping out, picked up an armful of wood.

The night was snapping cold. The moon was rising from behind a ridge of desolate hills.

"It's some sharp," said Garvin, "better than thirty below, I guess." He was talking to himself. Men do that when they are alone in Alaska. It helps keep off the oppression of the vast silence that broods over the North.

He turned back into the cabin with the wood and shut the door against the icy air that came rushing in after him.

Filling up the firebox of the Yukon stove, he went on cooking his supper. "I wonder what the boys is doing up at the old camp," he muttered. "It wasn't no particular fault of theirs. I would have voted the same way, likely. The gold was found in my cabin all right. The miners' meeting decided fair enough in driving me out of the camp, considering the evidence. It was him that fooled them, to save his own skin! He knowed how the poke came to be in my bunk. Damn him, I'll——"

The smoke of scorching bacon rose in Garvin's face and made him cough.

"I hadn't ought to think of him when I am trying to cook," he muttered. "When I does, I forgets everything else."

He set the frying pan on the back of the stove and opened the door to let the smoke out of the cabin. Before he closed it again, he turned his face up river and said like a man who is repeating some familiar ritual, "Let me live long enough to kill him! That's all I ask!"

He closed the door, finished cooking his meal and put it on the rude table, which was lighted by a candle stuck through a hole in the bottom of an empty can turned upside down.

He had drawn up his chair and was pouring a cup of coffee, when he heard a crunching on the snow outside the cabin, and then a sound as though some one had fallen against the door.

"Hello! Who's there? Come in!" he called.

There was a moment's fumbling at the latch string, then the door opened and a man covered with frost staggered across the threshold and sank to the floor.

"I'm—all in—and starved," gasped the man in short jerks. "For God's sake—give me——" He stopped suddenly and stared up at Garvin from under his frost whitened eyebrows. "You!"

Garvin leaped for his rifle that hung on the wall back of his bunk.

"Yes, it's me, Shorty Hinds!" he said. "I was just speaking about you," he went on in a deadly even tone. "I was just saying that I was going to kill you!" Garvin's lips writhed a little as he spoke, and his teeth shone white in the candle light, like those of a snarling animal.

The man on the floor gazed at him dumbly.

Garvin put the rifle to his shoulder, held it so for a breathless instant, and then lowered it with a baffled oath. "It's too much like shooting a poisoned rat, the way you are now," he exclaimed. "I've got to wait."

"You might as well shoot now," gasped the man. "I'm near dead anyhow. I can't go—no further. They are close behind me—they'll soon be here—and then—"

"So there's more than me wants to shoot you," put in Garvin grimly.

"Shoot! No!" A note of scorn came into Hind's weak voice. "There's a marshal up at the old camp now—and law! They don't want to shoot me—they wants—to catch me—and—send me—outside—to the pen—they——" His voice trailed off into mumbling. His head fell forward on his

breast. He rolled limply over on the floor, unconscious.

"Clean beat out," commented Garvin, looking down at the huddled body without a trace of pity in his face.

As he spoke, there came a sound of yelping from up river.

"Dog team!" exclaimed Garvin, starting up. "By God, they're coming now!"

He gripped his rifle and looked at the man on the floor with hating eyes. Then he shook his head. "No, I can't do it. I can't shoot a man that ain't on his feet. Not even him. But I ain't going to miss my chance!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I won't let them take him! He ain't never going out of this cabin alive!"

Garvin glanced swiftly around the room. "What will I do? Where will I hide him? They will look in the bunk, and under it, sure." His eye fastened on a big sack made of brown canvas that hung empty on the wall. One that he used as a cover for his sleeping-bag when he was on the trail. He jerked it down.

"The sawed-off cuss will go into it easy. I've got to work quick! That there dog team is coming along fast!"

Opening the sack, Garvin pulled it up around the form of the unconscious man, and with a quick upward jerk settled the limp body down into it. Then, dragging the sack to the middle of the floor, he shoved some clothes into the open end, leaving a woolen shirt sticking part way out, and threw down a jumper and some flannels near by, as though he were unpacking.

"They won't never think of looking for him in a sack lying in plain sight in the middle of the floor," muttered Garvin. "If he was to come to, in there, and struggle like, there would be things doing, but I'll have to take a chance on that."

[illegible]ut his ear to the door and listened. [illegible] almost here!" he ejaculated. "That's Tom McCoy's voice cussing the dogs."

He hastily hung up his rifle on the wall back of the bunk, and, sliding into his chair, was eating when they knocked at the door.

"Come in," he called.

Four men entered. Garvin knew them all. They had been his friends once.

He met them with a scowl.

"What do you want?" he demanded. "What are you coming down here for? Ain't you done enough, driving me out of the camp? Do you want to do me more dirt? Say you, McCoy," he exclaimed, turning savagely on one of the men, "what do you want?"

"Nothing of you, Garvin," returned McCoy. "We didn't know you was here, or where you was. We want Shorty Hinds for —for good reasons. He is heading down river. Has he been here?"

As he spoke, McCoy gave a swift, searching glance around the cabin.

"Been here?" snarled Garvin. "Do you know how long he would last if he was standing where you are now? Just till I could reach for that gun!" Garvin made a fierce gesture toward the rifle hanging on the wall.

McCoy nodded. "I guess that's right," he agreed. "Shorty sure did give you away pretty bad," he added, as he stepped around the canvas sack.

Garvin glanced down involuntarily. The sack appeared to him to move a little. "Of course it didn't," he told himself. "Tom just stirred it with his foot."

"Come, boys," said McCoy sharply, "we must be moving. Shorty is ahead of us yet, but he can't last forever without grub. We are bound to get him. He maybe knowed that this wasn't a healthy place for him to stop, and is making for Dago Pete's roadhouse ten miles or so down the river. Joe is the kind that would help him out, and ask no questions, if Shorty would come down liberal with some of the dough he is getting away with. Well, so long, Garvin. Sorry to have broke in on you unceremonious like."

The others nodded curtly as they filed out.

Garvin held the door open a crack and watched them as they went down the trail at a swinging gait.

"They think that I am a thief!" he muttered through his set teeth as he closed the door. "They think that I am a thief! And all because of him!" with a look of hate at the sack.

Garvin took a quick stride, and, seizing the sack by the bottom, gave it a fierce jerk that dumped Hinds out on to the floor, where he lay sprawling queerly.

"I wonder if he is dead," thought Garvin. "Of course he ain't," he scoffed. Snakes like him ain't so easy killed; whisky will bring him around."

Garvin lifted him from the floor, and, putting him on the bunk, trickled a little whisky between his lips.

Hinds gasped, stirred and opened his eyes.

"Take some more," said Garvin, raising him up and putting the bottle to his lips. Hinds took an eager gulp, then he stared at Garvin. "I thought you was going to shoot me," he said.

"I am," returned Garvin grimly, "as soon as you can stand up. Do you want some grub?"

Hinds gazed at the food on the table with famished eyes.

"I'm starved," he muttered.

"Well, there it is. Go to it."

Hinds put his feet unsteadily to the floor, and staggering to the table, fell upon the food like an animal and groveled over it, swallowing in great gulps like a famished dog. Finally he was satisfied, and gave a long sigh of repletion. He blinked stupidly at the candle light for a moment or so, then his head nodded heavily and fell forward among the dishes.

"Asleep!" ejaculated Garvin. "Or is he playing foxy? Get up!" he cried, shaking Hinds' shoulder.

The man stirred, muttered and settled back.

"All in!" nodded Garvin. "Dead to the world. I've got to wait till he wakes up."

Garvin took some blankets, and spreading them out on the floor, rolled Hinds up in them. Then he sat down on his bunk and watched the sleeping man gloomily. "Clean beat out! Couldn't wake him with a cannon! But to-morrow morning it will be different, and then——"

After a time Garvin's head nodded. He started up with a jerk and stared wildly at the sleeping man.

"He's there all right, but suppose I go to sleep and he wakes up—and gets away!"

Garvin passed his hand nervously over his face. "What's the use of being such a durned fool," he ejaculated irritably. "Why not settle it right now? He glanced at the rifle and then at the sleeping man, and shook his head. "I can't do it that way. I'll watch him till he wakes up."

And through the long hours of the Arctic night, Garvin, at times moving restlessly about, and at times sitting motionless on his bunk, kept his vigil, and watched the sleeping man with gloomy, implacable eyes, lighting a fresh candle when the old one burned away.

At last the man on the floor woke up and blinked at his enemy sitting on the bunk.

"I thought I was eating something," he said, reaching out confusedly with his hand.

"You was—last night," returned Garvin.

"Last night? Oh, yes, last night. 'Pears like I've had a sleep. Maybe I'm dreaming yet. I thought you was going to shoot me."

"I am—now!" cut in Garvin. "Get up!"

"Ain't you going to give me no show?" muttered Hinds.

"What show did you give me back up there?" exclaimed Garvin, putting his hand on the rifle hanging behind him.

"If I ain't going to have no chance, why didn't you plug me when I was asleep?" sneered Hinds. "You might just as well. Why didn't you?"

Garvin hesitated for a moment, then he burst out with an oath, "Because that would a made it too easy for you. I want you to know that I am killing you! I want you to see it coming! Get up!"

Hinds half rose and then pitched forward with a startled cry.

"None of that foxy game! Get up! Quick now!" ordered Garvin fiercely.

Hinds clutched at his right leg and pressed his fingers into it, without speaking. Then he beat it with his fist. "There ain't no feeling in it," he said huskily. "It's dead like."

"Get up!" repeated Garvin.

"I can't!" Hinds' voice was a scream. "It's dead, I tell you! Bill," he besought. "Maybe if I was to move a little it would come all right."

Garvin took his hand off the gun, and stepping forward, lifted Hinds to his feet.

"Let me put my hand on your shoulder, Bill, and I'll try to take a step."

There was a moment's pause. Suddenly the hand on Garvin's shoulder thrust him violently back, and Hinds sprang like a

panther for the rifle, snatched it from the wall, and turned it upon Garvin!

"You're easy, Bill," he jeered. "I'll do the shooting myself, from now on!" His eyes narrowed. "Got anything you want to say before I begin?"

Garvin looked straight into the crafty face behind the gun, his eyes alive with hate. "No I ain't you thief! Why don't you shoot?"

"Don't be in such a hurry to have a hole blowed through you," sneered Hinds. "I've got something to say myself first, but it won't take long."

Garvin stood silent.

"That was a smooth trick you turned on the boys from up river."

Garvin stared.

"I come to, like, you see," grinned Hinds, "and I heard some of your pow-wow with 'em."

Garvin said nothing.

"Unintentional, of course," went on Hinds, "you done me a pretty good turn, seeing how things has turned out. And that there meal afterward tasted pretty fine, even if it was kind of like fattening me up the way they does hogs before the killing," he said with a wry smile.

Garvin's mouth twitched. "How long are you going to keep this up?" he demanded. "Why don't you shoot and have done with it?"

"I'm going to—right now!" snapped Hinds.

He raised the rifle to his shoulder.

"Because of what I have just mentioned," he went on deliberately, "I am going to shoot—like this!" And suddenly jerking up the rifle, he fired through the roof of the cabin!

Garvin stared confusedly. "What the devil are you——"

"That was a pretty poor shot," put in Hinds coolly. "See if you can better it. Catch!" And with a reckless laugh, he tossed the rifle into Garvin's hands!

Garvin gripped the weapon convulsively. He looked up at the roof and then at the man in front of him, his face working. He half pointed the rifle at Hinds, hesitated, and then, with a sudden fierce oath, sent it crashing through the window.

Hinds' jeering laugh filled the cabin. "I knowed my play would spike your gun! That's the kind of a durned fool you are! That's what I figgered on! Well, I've got to mush, Bill. I'm in some of a hurry. Tell the boys I enjoyed hearing their kind remarks concerning me, even if I wasn't in shape to come out and say howdy to 'em. So long!"

The door closed on Shorty Hinds' mocking face.

Garvin stood motionless, staring straight before him, his eyes full of impotent hate. "Why didn't he shoot me!" he muttered through his clenched teeth. "I'd rather he had! The sneaking thief figgered right. I can't do nothing! He spiked my gun good and plenty! He has given me my life! I can't never kill him now!"

we have received numerous letters. Here are two that are representative. We are especially glad to use them in this issue because another of the Felix Hazard stories appears in this issue.

DEAR SIR:
It is a welcome surprise to find Edward Mott Woolley writing fiction—and such fine mystery stories at that! We read his story in the February issue on "The Man Who Disappeared," the first thing in the magazine and write this to ask for more like it.

L. and J. WILSON, Newark.

DEAR EDITOR:
Bully for Edward Mott Woolley! Get him to write more Felix Hazard stories like the one in your February issue.

A READER, Chicago.

Here's a man who wants more novels by George C. Shedd. So do we. Mr. Shedd is a very busy man and writes more as an avocation than as a vocation. We only wish that he could give more time to his truly excellent work.

EDITOR, SHORT STORIES:
SIR: The best novel you have ever run was "The Incorrigible Dukane," by George C. Shedd (it appeared in your issue of Jan. 1915) and the next best is "The King's Messenger," by the same author in your February 1916, issue. You ought to get more stories from this author. Here in the West where he and his brothers are so well known and liked we think his work the best ever.

G. B., Lincoln, Neb.

That novel "On the Honor of a Liar," by William B. Hamby, published back in our January issue seemed to strike a responsive note. Here are a couple of representative letters about it.

DEAR EDITOR:
"On the Honor of a Liar," is the best thing I ever read in your magazine. Give us more of that Hamby man's yarns. You can depend on me to buy a magazine whenever I see his name in it.

Sincerely
NAOMI STULGMANN, Staunton, Va.

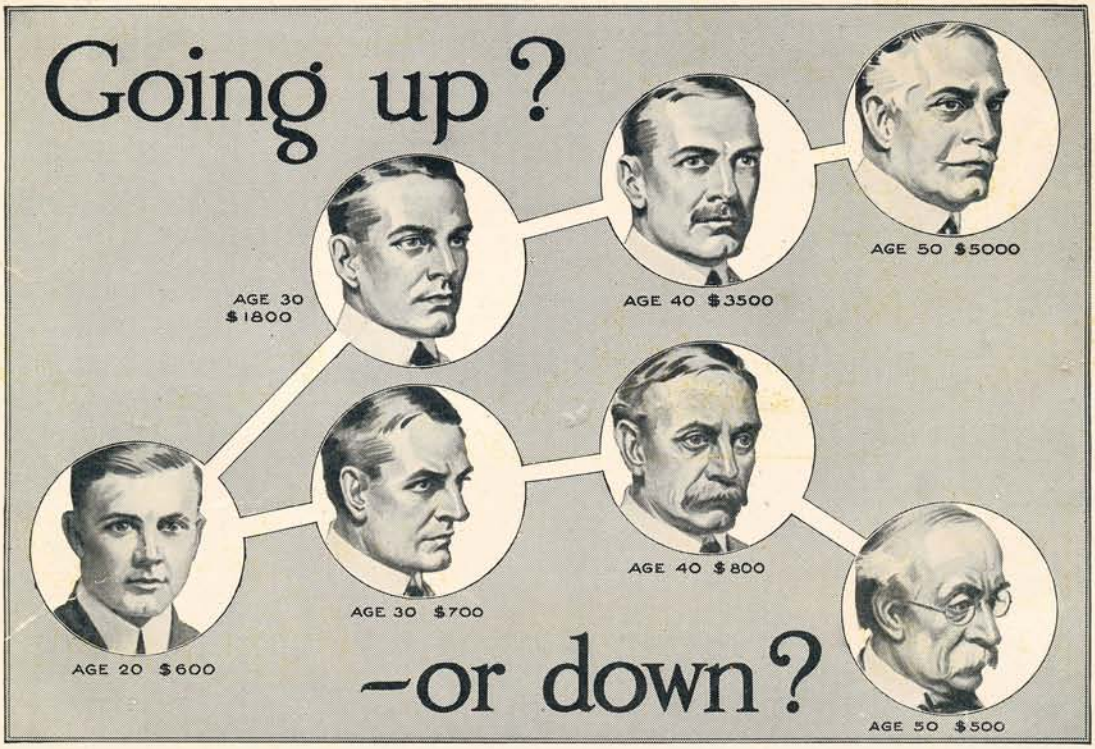
DEAR EDITOR:
I've been wanting to see the "Truthful Berthas," of the land truthfully shown up. But never did I have this satisfaction till I read "On the Honor of a Liar." It is a pity that it can't be published in tract form, and handed round to the "good folks," that make us all so miserable with their lying truthfulness.

Yours truly,
MYRA O. SMITH, New York City.

KILLED IN ACTION

Even here in the United States there are few of us who have not been touched more or less intimately by the great war. Every reader of SHORT STORIES who remembers the novel "Lost Sheep" by Captain Vere D. Shortt which appeared in our issue of July 1914 will feel a thrill of personal loss at the announcement of the death of this author.

Captain Shortt was killed "somewhere in France" in the great offensive of the Allies between September 25th and 27th last fall. The announcement of his death only came through to this country in fragmentary dispatches sent to some of the literary journals. As an English Army officer he had a brilliant career; as an author his work was read and loved by unnumbered thousands both in England and in this country.



HERE is your future charted for you, based on the actual average earnings of trained and untrained men.

Which way will you go? You'll either go *up*, through *training*, to a position that means good money and more comforts as the years go by, or you'll go *down*, through *lack* of training, into the ranks of the poorly paid.

It rests entirely with you which way you go. You can make or break your own future. And *now* is the time to decide. Not next year, not next month, but *now*. You *can* go up if you want to. You can *get* the training that will command a trained man's salary. The International Correspondence Schools have helped hundreds of thousands of men to qualify for advancement. Let them show *you* how *you* can prepare yourself, in your own home, for the position you want in the work you like best.

At least, *find out* what the I. C. S. can do for you, by marking and mailing this coupon. It will be the first step upward. Choose your future from this list, then get this coupon into the mail today.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 3752, Scranton, Pa.

CUT OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 3752, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER	☐ ADVERTISING MAN
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Window Trimmer
☐ Electric Car Running	☐ Show Card Writer
☐ Electric Wiring	☐ Outdoor Sign Painter
☐ Telephone Expert	☐ ILLUSTRATOR
☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER	☐ DESIGNER
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ BOOKKEEPER
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Stenographer and Typist
☐ Gas Engineer	☐ Cert. Public Accountant
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER	☐ Railway Accountant
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Commercial Law
☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER	☐ GOOD ENGLISH
☐ Metallurgist or Prospector	☐ Teacher
☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Marine Engineer	☐ CIVIL SERVICE
☐ ARCHITECT	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ AGRICULTURE
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ POULTRY RAISING
☐ Concrete Builder	☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Navigator ☐ Spanish
☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING	☐ Chemist ☐ German
☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ AUTO RUNNING ☐ French
☐ SALESMANSHIP	☐ Auto Repairing ☐ Italian

Name _____

Occupation & Employer _____

Street and No. _____

City _____ State _____

THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS, GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

19 Jewel Burlington

The Master Timepiece Now Sold Direct for Only

$2.50 A Month

Write today for our great offer on the master timepiece—*adjusted* to the second—*adjusted* to positions — *adjusted* to isochronism — now sent *direct to you without a penny down.* If you decide to keep it, pay only the rock-bottom direct price (the same price that even the wholesale jeweler must pay) either for cash or at the rate of $2.50 a month. Send coupon today.

Write for Special Offer!

Send us the coupon below—or a postcard for the great, sweeping *direct* offer on the genuine Burlington. *We want you to see and examine the Burlington.* Find out for yourself what a magnificent timepiece it is — and at a price which must surprise you. Write today for the book that shows you handsome illustrations in full color of the newest watch cases that you have to choose from. The latest triumphs of master goldsmiths are yours on this special offer.

New Ideas in Watch Cases

Block and Ribbon Monograms, Diamond Set, Lodge, French Art, Dragon, Etc.

Send the Coupon for New Watch Book

Learn the inside facts about watch prices, and the many superior points of the Burlington over double-priced products. Just put your name and address on the coupon, letter or postcard and get the Watch Book Free.

Burlington Watch Co. 19th Street and Marshall Boulevard—Dept. 1434 **Chicago, Ill.**

Burlington Watch Co.
19th St. and Marshall Blvd.
Dept. 1434 Chicago, Ill.

Please send me (without obligation and prepaid) your free book on watches with explanation of your cash or $2.50 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

Name_____

_____