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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

OCTOBER 1920

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THE BLUE BOOK

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The red glare of the steel-mills is the vivid background of this spirited story of real men in action.

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Few of the many sea stories we have printed have shown such imaginative originality as this.

'Surance Money By Alexander Hull 53

A darky story of the most amusing sort. Mr. Hull has struck a new and rich vein here.

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The author of "The Other Key" and "Red Retribution" is at his best in this engaging story of Chinatown.

Little Death By Edison Marshall 69

The mink has been named by Mr. Marshall *Little Death*; you who read this story will agree that the title is well chosen.

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One of the most daredevil exploits of Chester Fay, prince of the underworld, is described in this thrilling story.

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MAGAZINE

October
1920

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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"There's a deal happens on the field that doesn't get into the field orders," said Kipling's *Mulvaney*. This story is based on a happening of that sort.

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"The Sporting Finish" pictures the last and most hazardous undertaking of our benevolent thieves.

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The Brazen Peacock By H. Bedford-Jones 90

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When the faces of men are turned toward home

*Worry and defeat are written on
some but on others you read mastery*

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October
1920

THE
BLUE BOOK
MAGAZINE

Vol. XXXI
No. 6

Gun-sight Pass

A
Three-Part
Novel



By

William MacLeod
Raine

CHAPTER I

"CROOKED AS A DOG'S HIND LAIG"

IT was a land of splintered peaks, of deep gorges, of barren mesas burned by the suns of a million torrid summers. The normal outgrowth of it was warfare. Life here had to protect itself with a tough and callous rind, to attack with a swift and deadly sting. Only the fit survived.

But moonlight had magically touched the hot, wrinkled earth with a fairy god-mother's wand. It was bathed in a weird, mysterious beauty. Into the crotches of the hills, lakes of wondrous color had been poured at sunset. The crests had flamed with crowns of glory, the cañons became deep pools of blue and purple shadow. Blurred by kindly darkness, the gaunt ridges had softened to pastels of violet, and the bony mountains to splendid sentinels keeping watch over a gulf of starlit space.

Around the campfire the drivers of the trail-herd squatted on their heels or lay sprawled at ease. The glow of the leaping flames from the twisted mesquite lighted their lean faces, tanned to bronzed health

by the beat of an untempered sun and the sweep of parched winds. Most of them were still young, scarcely out of their boy-hood; a few had reached maturity. But all were products of the desert. Its alkali dust was caked on their unshaven cheeks. The high-heeled boots, the leather chaps, were worn at its insistence. Upon every line of their features, every shade of their thought, it had stamped its brand indelibly.

The talk was frank and elemental. It had the crisp crackle that goes with free unfettered youth. In a parlor some of it would have been offensive, but under the stars of the open desert it was as natural as the life itself. They spoke of the spring rains, of the Crawford-Steelman feud, of how they meant to turn Malapi upside down in their frolic when they reached town. They "rode" each other gayly with jokes that were familiar old friends. Their horseplay was rough but good-natured.

Out of the soft shadows of the summer night a boy moved from the *remuda* toward the campfire. He was a lean, sandy-haired young fellow, his figure still lank and unfilled. In another year his shoul-

ders would be broader, his frame would take on twenty pounds. As he sat down on the wagon-tongue at the edge of the firelit circle the stringiness of his appearance became more noticeable.

A YOUNG man waved a hand toward him by way of introduction. "Gents of the D Bar Lazy R outfit, we now have with us roostin' on the wagon-tongue Mr. David Sanders, formerly of Arizona, just returned from makin' love to his paint hoss. Mr. Sanders will make oration on the why, wherefore and how-come-it of Chiquito's superiority to all other equines whatever."

The youth on the wagon-tongue smiled. His blue eyes were gentle and friendly. From his pocket he had taken a knife and was sharpening it on one of his down-at-the-heel boots.

"I'd like right well to make love to that pinto my own self, Bob," commented a weatherbeaten puncher. "Any old time Dave wants to saw him off onto me at sixty dollars, I'm here to do business."

"You're sure an easy mark, Buck," grunted a large fat man leaning against a wheel. His white, expressionless face and soft hands differentiated him from the tough range-riders. He did not belong with the outfit, but had joined it the day before with George Doble, a half brother of the trail foreman, to travel with it as far as Malapi. In the Southwest he was known as Ad Miller. The two men had brought with them in addition to their own mounts a led packhorse.

Doble backed up his partner. "Sure are, Buck. I can get cow-ponies for ten and fifteen dollars—all I want of 'em," he said, and contrived by the lift of his lip to make the remark offensive.

"Not ponies like Chiquito," ventured Sanders amiably.

"That so?" jeered Doble.

He looked at David out of a sly and shifty eye. He had only one. The other had been gouged out years ago in a drunken fracas.

"You couldn't get Chiquito for a hundred dollars. Not for sale," the owner of the horse said a little stiffly.

Miller's fat paunch shook with laughter. "I reckon not—at that price. I'd give all of fo'ty for him."

"Different here," replied Doble. "What has this pinto got that makes him worth over thirty?"

"He's some brone'," explained Bob

Hart. "Got a lag full of tricks, a nice disposition, and sure can burn the wind."

"Yore friend must be valuing them parlor tricks at ten dollars apiece," murmured Miller. "He'd ought to put him in a show and not keep him to chase cow-tails with."

"At that, I've seen circus hosses that weren't one-two-three with Chiquito. He'll shake hands and play dead and dance to a mouth-organ and come a-runnin' when Dave whistles."

"You don't say!" The voice of the fat man was heavy with sarcasm. "And on top of all that edjucation, he can run too!"

THE temper of Sanders began to take an edge. He saw no reason why these strangers should run on him, to use the phrase of the country. "I don't claim my pinto's a racer, but he can travel."

"Hmp!" grunted Miller skeptically.

"I'm here to say he can," boasted the owner, stung by the manner of the other.

"Don't look to me like no racer," Doble dissented. "Why, I'd be most willing to bet that packhorse of ours, Whisky Bill, can beat him."

Buck Byington snorted. "Packhorse, eh?"

The old puncher's brain was alive with suspicions. On account of the lameness of his horse he had returned to camp in the middle of the day and had discovered the two newcomers trying out the speed of the pinto. He wondered now if this precious pair of crooks had been getting a line on the pony for future use. It occurred to him that Dave was being engineered into a bet.

The chill, hard eyes of Miller met his. "That's what he said, Buck—our packhorse."

For just an instant the old range-rider hesitated, then shrugged his shoulders. It was none of his business. He was a cautious man, not looking for trouble. Moreover the law of the range is that every man must play his own hand. Wherefore he dropped the matter with a grunt that expressed complete understanding and derision.

Bob Hart helped things along. "Jokin' aside, what's the matter with a race? We'll be on the Salt Flats tomorrow. I've got ten bucks says the pinto can beat yore Whisky Bill."

"Go you once," answered Doble after a moment's apparent consideration. "Being

as I'm drug into this, I'll be a dead game sport. I got fifty dollars more to back the packhorse. How about it, Sanders? You got the sand to cover that? Or are you plumb scared of my broomtail?"

"Betcha a month's pay—thirty-five dollars. Give you an order on the boss if I lose," retorted Dave. He had not meant to bet, but he could not stand this fellow's insolent manner.

"That order good, Dug?" asked Doble of his half-brother.

The foreman nodded. He was a large, leather-faced man in the late thirties. His reputation in the cattle country was that of a man ill to cross. Dug Doble was a good cowman—none better. Outside of that his known virtues were negligible, except for the primal one of gameness.

"Might as well lose a few bucks myself, seeing as Whisky Bill belongs to me," said Miller with his wheezy laugh. "Who wants to take a whirl, boys?"

Inside of three minutes he had placed a hundred dollars. The terms of the race were arranged and the money put in the hands of the foreman.

"Each man to ride his own *caballo*," suggested Hart slyly.

This brought a laugh. The idea of Ad Miller's two hundred fifty pounds in the seat of a jockey made for hilarity.

"I reckon George will have to ride the broomtail. We don't aim to break its back," replied Miller genially.

His partner was a short man with a spare, wiry body. Few men trusted him after a glance at the mutilated face. The thin, hard lips gave warning that he had sold himself to evil. The low forehead, above which the hair was plastered flat in an arc, advertised low mentality.

AN hour later Buck Byington drew Sanders to one side.

"Dave, you're a chuckle-headed rabbit. If ever I seen tinhorn sports, them two is such. They're collecting a living off'n suckers. Didn't you *sabe* that come-on stuff? Their packhorse is a ringer. They tried him out this evening, but I noticed they ran under a blanket. Both of 'em are crooked as a dog's hind laig."

"Maybe so," admitted the young man. "But Chiquito never went back on me yet. These fellows may be overplaying their hand, don't you reckon?"

"Not a chancet. That tumblebug Miller is one fishy proposition, and his side-kick

Doble—say, he's the kind of a bird that shoots you in the stomach while he's shaking hands with you. They're about as warm-hearted as a loan shark when he's turnin' on the screws—and about as impulsive. Me, I aim to button up my pocket when those guys are around."

Dave returned to the fire. The two visitors were sitting side by side, and the leaping flames set fantastic shadows of them moving. One of these, rooted where Miller sat, was like a bloated spider watching its victim. The other, dwarfed and prehensile, might in its uncanny silhouette have been an imp of darkness from the nether regions.

Most of the riders had already rolled up in their blankets and fallen asleep. To a reduced circle Miller was telling the story of how his packhorse won its name.

"So I noticed he was acting kinda funny, and I seen four pin-pricks in his nose. O' course I hunted for Mr. Rattler and killed him; then I give Bill a pint of whisky. It ce'tainly paralyzed him proper. He got salivated as a mule-whacker on a spree. His nose swelled up till it was big as a barrel—never did get down to normal again. Since which the ol' plug has been Whisky Bill."

This reminiscence did not greatly entertain Dave. He found his blankets, rolled up in them, and promptly fell asleep. For once he dreamed, and his dreams were not pleasant. He thought that he was caught in a net woven by a horribly fat spider which watched him try in vain to break the web that tightened on his arms and legs. Desperately he struggled to escape, while the monster grinned at him maliciously, and the harder he fought, the more securely was he enmeshed.

CHAPTER II

THE RACE

THE coyotes were barking when the cook's triangle brought Dave from his blankets. The objects about him were still mysterious in the pre-dawn darkness. The shouting of the wranglers and the bells of the *remuda* came musically as from a great distance.

Hart joined his friend, and the two young men walked out to the *remuda* together. Each rider had on the previous night belled the mount he wanted, for he knew that in the morning it would be too

dark to distinguish one broncho from another. The animals were rim-milling, going round and round in a circle to escape the lariat.

Dave rode in close and waited, rope ready, his ears attuned to the sound of his own bell. A horse rushed jingling past. The rope snaked out, fell true, tightened over the neck of the cowpony, brought up the animal short. Instantly it surrendered, making no further attempt to escape. The roper made a hitch round the nose of the broncho, swung to its back and cantered back to camp.

In the gray dawn near details were becoming visible. The mountains began to hover on the edge of the young world. The wind was blowing across half a continent.

Sanders saddled, then rode out upon the mesa. He whistled sharply. There came an answering "nicker," and presently out of the darkness a pony trotted. The pinto was a sleek and glossy little fellow, beautiful in action and gentle as a kitten.

The young fellow took the well-shaped head in his arms, fondled the soft, dainty nose that nuzzled in his pocket for sugar, fed Chiquito a half handful of the delicacy in his open palm, and put the pony through the repertory of tricks he had taught his pet.

"You wantta shake a leg today, old fellow, and throw dust in that tinhorn's face," he murmured to his four-footed friend, gentling it with little pats of love and admiration. "Adios, Chiquito. I know you wont throw off yore old pal. So long, old pie-eater."

Across the mesa Dave galloped back, swung from the saddle, and made a beeline for breakfast. The other men were already busy at this important business. From the tail of the chuck-wagon he took a tin cup and a tin plate. He helped himself to coffee, soda biscuits, and a strip of steak just forked from a large kettle of boiling lard. Presently more coffee, more biscuits and more steak went the way of the first helping. The hard-riding life of the desert stimulates a healthy appetite.

THE punchers of the D Bar Lazy R were moving a large herd to a new range. It was made up of several lots bought from smaller outfits that had gone out of business under the pressure of falling prices, short grass, and the activity of rustlers. The cattle had been loose-bedded in a gulch close at hand, the upper end of

which was sealed by an impassable cliff. Many such cañons in the wilder part of the mountains, fenced across the face to serve as corrals, were used by rustlers as caches into which to drift their stolen stock. This one, no doubt, had more than once played such a part in days past.

Expertly the riders threw the cattle back to the mesa and moved them forward. Among the bunch one could find the T Anchor brand, the Circle Cross, the Diamond Tail, and the X-Z, scattered among the cows burned with the D Bar Lazy R, which was the original brand of the owner, Emerson Crawford.

The sun rose and filled the sky. In a heavy cloud of dust the cattle trailed steadily toward the distant hills.

Near noon Buck Byington, passing Dave where he rode as drag-driver in the wake of the herd, shouted a greeting.

"Turble hot. I'm spittin' cotton."

Dave nodded. His eyes were red and sore from the alkali dust, his throat dry as a lime-kiln. "You done said it, Buck. Hotter 'n hell or Yuma."

"Dug says for us to throw off at Seven Mile Hole."

"I wont make no holler at that."

The herd leaders, reading the signs of a spring close at hand, quickened the pace. With necks outstretched, bawling loudly, they hurried forward. Forty-eight hours ago they had last satisfied their thirst. Usually Doble watered each noon, but the desert yesterday had been dry as Sahara. Only such moisture was available as could be found in black grama and needle grass.

The point of the herd swung in toward the cottonwoods that straggled down from the draw. For hours the riders were kept busy moving forward the cattle that had been watered and holding back the pressure of thirsty animals.

Again the outfit took the desert trail. Heat-waves played on the sand. The sun rays were like tongues of fire. Vegetation grew scant except for patches of cholla and mesquite, a sand-cherry bush here and there, occasionally a clump of shining poison ivy. A heavy cloud of yellow dust rolled forward with the herd.

Sunset brought them to the Salt Flats. The foreman gave orders to throw off and make camp.

A COURSE was chosen for the race. From a selected point the horses were to run to a clump of mesquite, round it,

and return to the starting place. Dug Doble was chosen both starter and judge.

Dave watched Whisky Bill with the trained eyes of a horseman. The animal was an ugly brute as to the head. Its eyes were set too close, and the shape of the nose was deformed from the effects of the rattlesnake's sting. But in legs and body it had the fine lines of a racer; the horse was built for speed. The cowpuncher's heart sank. His bronco was fast, willing and very intelligent, but the little rangepony had not been designed to show its heels to a near-thoroughbred.

"Are you ready?" Doble asked of the two men in the saddles.

His brother said: "Let 'er go!" Sanders nodded. The revolver barked.

Chiquito was off like a flash of light, found its stride instantly. The training of a cowpony makes for alertness, for immediate response. Before it had covered seventy-five yards the pinto was three lengths to the good. Dave, flying toward the halfway post, heard his friend Hart's triumphant "Yip, yip, yippy-yip!" coming to him on the wind.

He leaned forward, patting his horse on the shoulder, murmuring words of encouragement into its ear. But he knew, without turning round, that the racer galloping at his heels was drawing closer. Its long shadow, thrown in front of it by the westerling sun, reached to Dave's stirrups, crept to Chiquito's head, moved farther toward the other shadow plunging wildly eastward. Foot by foot the distance between the horses lessened to two lengths, to one, to half a length. The ugly head of the racer came abreast of the cowpuncher. With sickening certainty the range-rider knew that his Chiquito was doing the best that was in it. Whisky Bill was a faster horse.

Simultaneously he became aware of two things. The bay was no longer gaining. The halfway mark was just ahead. The cowpuncher knew exactly how to make the turn with the least possible loss of speed and ground. Too often, in headlong pursuit of a wild hill steer, he had whirled as on a dollar, to leave him any doubt now. Scarce slackening speed, he swept the pinto round the clump of mesquite and was off for home.

Dave was halfway back before he was sure that the thud of Whisky Bill's hoofs was almost at his heels. He called on the cowpony for a last spurt. The plucky

little horse answered the call, gathered itself for the home stretch, for a moment held its advantage. Again Bob Hart's yell drifted to Sanders.

Then he knew that the bay was running side by side with Chiquito, was slowly creeping to the front. The two horses raced down the stretch together, Whisky Bill half a length in the lead and gaining at every stride. Daylight showed between them when they crossed the line.

Chiquito had been outrun by a speedier horse.

CHAPTER III

DAVE RIDES ON HIS SPURS

HART came up to his friend grinning. "Well, you old horn-toad, we got no kick comin'. Chiquito ran a mighty pretty race. Only trouble was his laigs wasn't long enough."

The owner of the pony nodded, a lump in his throat. He was not thinking about his thirty-five dollars, but about the futile race into which he had allowed his little beauty to be trapped. Dave would not be twenty-one till coming grass, and it hurt his boyish pride to think that his favorite had been beaten. He stroked in silence the heaving flank of the pinto.

Another lank range-rider drifted up. "Same here, Dave. I'll kiss my twenty bucks good-by cheerful. You'n the li'l hoss ran the best race at that. Chiquito started like a bullet out of a gun, and say, boys, how he did swing round on the turn!"

"Much obliged, Steve. I reckon he sure done his best," said Sanders gratefully.

The voice of George Doble cut in, openly and offensively jubilant. "Me, I'd rather show the way at the finish than at the start. You're more liable to collect the mazuma. I'll tell you, now, that broom-tail never had a chance to beat Whisky Bill."

"Yore hoss can run, seh," admitted Dave.

"I know it, but you don't. He didn't have to take the kinks out of his legs to beat that plug."

"You get our money," said Hart quietly. "Aint that enough without rubbin' it in?"

"Sure I get yore money—easy money, at that," boasted Doble. "Got any more you want to put up on the circus bronc?"

Steve Russell voiced his sentiments

curtly. "You make me good and tired, Doble. There's only one thing I hate more 'n a poor loser—and that's a poor winner. As for putting my money on the pinto, I'll just say this: I'll bet my li'l pile he can beat yore bay twenty miles, a hundred miles, or five hundred."

"Not any, thanks. Whisky Bill is a racer, not a mule-team," Miller said, laughing.

The young cowpuncher loosened the center-fire cinch of his pony's saddle. He noted that there was no real geniality in the fat man's mirth. It was a surface thing designed to convey an effect of good fellowship. Back of it lay the chill implacability of the professional gambler.

THE usual give-and-take of gay repartee was missing at supper that night. Since they were of the happy-go-lucky outdoor West it did not greatly distress the D Bar Lazy R riders to lose part of their paychecks. Even if it had, their spirits would have been unimpaired, for it is written in their code that a man must take his punishment without whining. What hurt was that they had been tricked, led like lambs to the killing. None of them doubted now that the packhorse of the gamblers was a "ringer." These men had deliberately crossed the path of the trail-outfit in order to take from the *vaqueros* their money.

The punchers were sulky. Instead of a fair race they had been up against an open-and-shut proposition, as Russell phrased it. The jeers of Doble did not improve their tempers. The man was temperamentally mean-hearted. He could not let his victims alone.

"They say one's born every minute, Ad. Dawged if I don't believe it," he sneered.

Miller was not saying much himself, but his fat stomach shook at this sally. If his partner could goad the boys into more betting, he was quite willing to divide the profits.

Audibly Hart yawned and murmured his sentiments aloud. "I'm liable to tell these birds what I think of them, Steve, if they don't spend quite some time layin' off'm us."

"Don't tell us out loud. We might hear you," advised Doble insolently.

"In regards to that, I'd sure worry if you did."

Dave was at that moment returning to his place with a cup of hot coffee. By some perverse trick of fate his glance at that

moment fell on Doble's sinister face of malignant triumph. His self-control snapped and in an instant the whole course of his life was deflected from the path it would otherwise have taken. With a flip he tossed up the tin cup so that the hot coffee soured the crook.

"Goddelmighty!" screamed Doble, leaping to his feet.

He reached for his forty-five, just as Sanders closed with him. The range-rider's revolver, like that of most of his fellows, was in a blanket roll in the wagon.

Miller, with surprising agility for a fat man, got to his feet and launched himself at the puncher. Dave flung the smaller of his opponents back against Steve, who was sitting tailor-fashion beside him. The gunman tottered and fell over Russell, who lost no time in pinning his hands to the ground, while Hart deftly removed the revolver from his pocket.

Swinging round to face Miller, Dave saw at once that the big man had chosen not to draw his gun. In spite of his fat the gambler was a rough-and-tumble fighter of parts. The extra weight had come in recent years, but underneath it lay roped muscles and heavy bones. Men often remarked that they had never seen a fat man who could handle himself like Ad Miller.

THE two clinched. Dave had the under hold and tried to trip his bulkier foe. The other sidestepped, circling round. He got one hand under the boy's chin and drove it up and back, flinging the range-rider a dozen yards.

Instantly Dave plunged at him. He had to get at close quarters, for he could not tell when Miller would change his mind and elect to fight with a gun. The man had chosen a hand-to-hand tussle, Dave knew, because he was sure he could beat so stringy an opponent as himself. Once he got the grip on him that he wanted, the big gambler would crush him by sheer strength. So, though the youngster had to get close, he dared not clinch. His judgment was that his best bet was his fists.

He jabbed at the big white face, ducked, and jabbed again. Now he was in the shine of the moon; now he was in darkness. A red streak came out on the white face opposite, and he knew he had drawn blood. Miller roared like a bull and flailed away at him. More than one heavy blow jarred him, sent a bolt of pain shooting through him.

The only thing he saw was that shining face. He pecked away at it with swift jabs, taking what punishment he must and dodging the rest.

Miller was furious. He had intended to clean up this bantam in about a minute. He rushed again, broke through Dave's defense, and closed with him. His great arms crushed into the ribs of his lean opponent. As they swung round and round, Dave gasped for breath. He twisted and squirmed, trying to escape that deadly hug. Somehow he succeeded in tripping his huge foe.

They went down locked together, Dave underneath. The puncher knew that if he had room Miller would hammer his face to a pulp. He drew himself close to the barrel body, arms and legs wound tight like hoops.

Miller gave a yell of pain. Instinctively Dave moved his legs higher and clamped them tighter. The yell rose again, became a scream of agony.

"Lemme loose!" shrieked the man on top. "My Gawd, you're killin' me."

Dave had not the least idea what was disturbing Miller's peace of mind, but whatever it was moved to his advantage. He clamped tighter, working his heels into another secure position. The big man belched with pain. "Take him off! Take him off!" he implored in shrill crescendo.

"What's all this?" demanded an imperious voice.

MILLER was torn howling from the arms and legs that bound him, and Dave found himself jerked roughly to his feet. The big raw-boned foreman was glaring at him above his large hook nose. The trail-boss had been out at the *remuda* with the jingler when the trouble began. He had arrived in time to rescue his fat friend.

"What's eatin' you, Sanders?" he demanded again curtly.

"He jumped George," yelled Miller.

Breathing hard, Dave faced his foe warily. He was in a better strategic position than he had been, for he had jerked the revolver of the fat man from its scabbard just as they were dragged apart. It was in his right hand now, pressed close to his hip, ready for instant use if need be. He could see without looking that George Doble was still struggling ineffectively in the grip of Russell.

"Dave stumbled and spilt some coffee on George; then—George, he tried to gun

him. Miller mixed in then," explained Hart.

The foreman glared. "None of this stuff while you're on the trail with my outfit. Get that, Sanders? I won't have it."

"Dave he couldn't he'p hisse'f," Buck Byington broke in. "They was runnin' on him considerable, Dug."

"I aint asking for excuses. I'm tellin' you boys what's what," retorted the road-boss. "Sanders, give him his gun."

The cowpuncher took a step backward. He had no intention of handing a loaded gun to Miller while the gambler was in his present frame of mind. That would be equivalent to suicide. He broke the revolver, turned the cylinder, and shpoked out the cartridges. The empty weapon he tossed on the ground.

"He ripped me with his spurs," Miller said sullenly to the foreman. "That's how I come to turn him loose."

Dave looked down at the man's legs. His trousers were torn to shreds. Blood trickled down the lacerated calves where the spurs had roweled the flesh cruelly. No wonder Miller had suddenly lost interest in the fight. The *vaquero* thanked his lucky stars that he had not taken off his spurs this evening and left them with the saddle.

THE first thing that Dave did then was to strike straight for the wagon where his roll of bedding was. He untied the rope, flung open the blankets and took from inside them the forty-five he carried to shoot rattlesnakes. This he shoved down between his shirt and trousers where it would be handy for use in case of need. His roll he brought back with him as a justification for the trip to the wagon. He had no intention of starting anything. All he wanted was not to be caught at a disadvantage a second time.

Miller and the two Dobles were standing a little way apart, talking together in low tones. The fat man, his foot on the spoke of a wagon-wheel, was tying up one of his bleeding calves with a bandanna handkerchief. Dave gathered that his contribution to the conversation consisted mainly of fervent and almost tearful profanity.

The brothers appeared to be debating some point with heat. George insisted, and the foreman gave up with a lift of his big shoulders.

"Have it yore own way. I hate to have you leave us after I tell you there'll be no

more trouble, but if that's how you feel about it, I got nothing to say. What I want understood is this,"—Dug Doble raised his voice for all to hear,—“that I'm boss of this outfit, and wont stand for any rough stuff. If the boys, or any of 'em, can't lose their money without belly-achin', they can get their time *pronto*.”

The two gamblers packed their race-horse, saddled and rode away without a word to any of the range-riders. The men round the fire gave no sign that they knew the confidence men were on the map until after they had gone. Then tongues began to wag, the foreman having gone to the edge of the camp with them.

“Well, my feelin's aint hurt one li'l' bit because they wont play with us no more,” Steve Russell said, smiling broadly.

“Can you blame that fat guy for not wantin' to play with Dave here?” asked Hart, and he beamed at the memory of what he had seen. “Son, you ce'tainly gave him one surprise party when yore rowels dug in.”

“Wonder to me he didn't stampede the cows, way he hollered,” grinned a third. “I don't grudge him my ten plunks. Not none! Dave, he give me my money's worth that last round.”

“I had a little luck,” admitted Dave modestly but cheerfully.

“Betcha!” agreed Steve. “I was just starting over to haul the fat guy off Dave when he began bleatin' for us to come help him turn loose the bear. I kinda took my time then.”

“Oncet I went to a play called ‘All's Well That Ends Well,’” said Byington reminiscently. “At the Tabor Grand The-á-ter, in Denver.”

“Did it tell how a freckled cow-punch rode a fat tinhorn on his spurs?” asked Hart.

“Bet he wears stove-pipes on his laigs next time he mixes it with Dave,” suggested one coffee-brown youth. “Well, looks like the show's over for tonight. I'm gonna roll in.”

Motion carried unanimously.

CHAPTER IV

THE PAINT HOSS DISAPPEARS

WAKENED by the gong, Dave lay luxurious in the warmth of his blankets. It was not for several moments that he remembered the fight or

what brought it about. The grin that lighted his boyish face at thought of its unexpected conclusion was a fleeting one, for he discovered that it hurt his face to smile. Briskly he rose, and grunted “Ouch!” His sides were sore from the rib-squeezing of Miller's powerful arms.

Byington walked out to the *remuda* with him. How's the man-tamer this mo'ning?” he asked of Dave.

“Fine and dandy, old lizard.”

“You sure got the dead wood on him when yore spurs got into action. A man's like a watermelon. You can't tell how good he is till you thump him. Miller is right biggity, and they say he's sudden death with a gun. But when it come down to cases, he hadn't the guts to go through and stand the gaff.”

“He's been living soft too long, don't you reckon?”

“No, sir. He just didn't have the sand in his craw to hang on and finish you off whilst you was rippin' up his laigs.”

Dave roped off his mount and rode out to meet Chiquito. The pinto was an aristocrat in his way. He preferred to choose his company, was a little disdainful of the cowpony that had no accomplishments. Usually he grazed a short distance from the *remuda*, together with one of Bob Hart's string. The two ponies had been brought up in the same bunch.

This morning Dave's whistle brought no whinny of joy, no thud of hoofs galloping out of the darkness to him. He rode deeper into the desert. No answer came to his calls. At a canter he cut across the plain to the wrangler. That young man had seen nothing of Chiquito since the evening before, but this was not at all unusual.

The cowpuncher returned to camp for breakfast and got permission of the foreman to look for the missing horses.

Beyond the flats was a country creased with draws and dry arroyos. From one to another of these Dave went, without finding a trace of the animals. All day he pushed through cactus and mesquite, heavy with gray dust. In the late afternoon he gave up for the time and struck back to the flats. It was possible that the lost broncos had rejoined the *remuda* of their own accord or had been found by some of the riders gathering up strays.

Dave struck the herd-trail and followed it toward the new camp. A horseman came out of the golden west of the sunset to

meet him. For a long time he saw the figure rising and falling in the saddle, the pony moving in the even fox-trot of the cattle country.

The man was Bob Hart.

"Found 'em?" shouted Dave when he was close enough to be heard.

"No, and we won't—not this side of Malapi. Those scalawags didn't make camp last night. They kep' travelin'. If you ask me, they're moving yet, and they've got our broncs with them."

This had already occurred to Dave as a possibility. "Any proof?" he asked quietly.

"A plenty. I been ridin' on the point all day. Three or four times we cut trail of five horses. Two of the five are being ridden. My Four Bits hoss has got a broken front hoof. So has one of the five."

"Moving fast, are they?"

"You're damn whistlin'. They're hiving off for parts unknown—Malapi first off, looks like. They got friends there."

"Steelman and his outfit will protect them while they hunt cover and make a get-away. Miller mentioned Deaver before the race—said he was figurin' on going there. Maybe—"

"He was probably lying. You can't tell. Point is, we've got to get busy. My notion is we'd better make a bee line for Malapi right away," proposed Bob.

"We'll travel all night. No use wasting any more time."

DUG DOBLE received their decision sourly. "It don't tickle me a heap to be left short-handed because you two boys have got an excuse to get to town quicker."

Hart looked him straight in the eye. "Call it an excuse if you want to. We're after a pair of shorthorn crooks that stole our horses."

The foreman flushed angrily. "Don't come belly-achin' to me about yore broom-tails. I aint got 'em."

"We know who's got 'em," said Dave evenly. "What we want is a wage-check so as we can cash it at Malapi."

"You don't get it," returned the big foreman bluntly. "We pay off when we reach the end of the drive."

"I notice you paid yore brother and Miller when we gave an order for it," Hart retorted with heat.

"A different proposition. They hadn't signed up for this drive like you boys did. You'll get what's coming to you when I pay off the others and not before."

The two riders retired sulkily. They felt it was not fair, but on the trail the foreman is an autocrat. From the other riders they borrowed a few dollars and gave in exchange orders on their pay-checks.

Within an hour they were on the road. Fresh horses had been roped from the *remuda* and were carrying them at an even Spanish jog-trot through the night. The stars came out, clear and steady, above a ghostly world at sleep. The desert was a place of mystery, of vast space peopled by strange and misty shapes.

The plain stretched vaguely before them. Far away was the thin outline of the range which inclosed the valley. The riders held their course by means of that trained sixth sense of direction their occupation had developed. They spoke little. Once a coyote howled dismally from the edge of the mesa, but for the most part there was no sound except the shuffling of the horses' accouterment and the occasional ring of a hoof on the baked ground.

The gray dawn, sifting into the sky, found them still traveling. The mountains came closer, grew more definite. The desert flamed again, dry, lifeless, torrid beneath a sky of turquoise. Dust-eddies whirled in inverted cones, wind-devils playing spirals across the sand. Table lands, mesas, wide plains, desolate lava stretches—each in turn was traversed by the riders.

They reached the foothills and left behind the desert shimmering in the dancing heat. In the deep gorge, where the hill creases gave them shade, the punchers drew off the trail, unsaddled, hobbled their horses and stole a few hours sleep.

In the late afternoon they rode back to the trail through a draw, the ponies wading fetlock-deep in yellow, red, blue and purple flowers. The mountains across the valley looked in the dry heat as though made of papier mâché. Closer at hand the undulations of sandhills stretched toward the pass for which they were making. A mule deer started out of a dry wash and fled into the sunset light. The long, stratified faces of rock escarpments caught the glow of the sun and became battlemented towers of ancient story.

The riders climbed steadily now, no longer engulfed in the ground-swell of land waves. They breathed an air like wine, strong, pure, bracing. Presently their way led them into a hill pocket which ran into a gorge forested with piñons stretching toward Gunsight Pass.

The stars were out again when they looked down from the other side of the pass upon the lights of Malapi.

CHAPTER V

SUPPER AT DELMONICO'S INTERRUPTED.

THE two D Bar Lazy R punchers ate supper at Delmonico's. The restaurant was owned by Wong Chung; a Cantonese celestial did the cooking and another waited on table. The price of a meal was twenty-five cents regardless of what one ordered.

Hop Lee, the waiter, grinned at the frolicsome youths with the serenity of a world-old wisdom.

"Bleef steak, plork chop, lamb chop, hlam'neggss, clorn bleef hash, Splanish stew," he chanted, reciting the entire bill of fare.

"Yes," murmured Bob.

The waiter said his piece again.

"Listens good to me," agreed Dave.

"Lead it to us."

"You takee two—bleef steak and hlam'neggss mebbe," suggested Hop helpfully.

"Tha's right. Two orders of everything on the *meenyoo*, Charley."

Hop did not argue with them. He never argued with a customer. If they stormed at him, he took refuge in a suddenly acquired lack of understanding of English. If they called him Charley or John or One Lung, he accepted the name cheerfully and laid it to a racial mental deficiency of the 'Melicans. Now he decided to make a selection himself.

"Vely well. Bleef steak and hlam'neggss."

"Fried potatoes done brown, John."

"Flid plotatoes. Tea or cloffee?"

"Coffee," decided Dave for both of them. "Warm mine."

"And custard pie," added Bob. "Made from this year's crop."

"Vely well." Hop Lee's impassive face betrayed no perplexity as he departed. In the course of a season he waited on hundreds of wild men from the hills, drunk and sober.

Dave helped himself to bread from a plate stacked high with thick slices. He buttered it and began to eat. Hart did the same. At Delmonico's nobody ever waited till the meal was served, or for plates, for that matter.

ABOUT to attack a second slice, Dave stopped to stare at his companion. Hart was looking past his shoulder with alert intentness. Dave turned his head. Two men, leaving the restaurant, were paying the cashier.

"They just stepped outa that booth to the right," whispered Bob.

The men were George Doble and a cow-puncher known as Shorty, a broad, heavy-set little man who worked for Bradley Steelman, owner of the Rocking Horse Ranch, what time he was not engaged on nefarious business of his own. He was wearing a Chihuahua hat and leather chaps with silver conchas.

At this moment Hop Lee arrived with dinner.

Dave sighed as he grinned at his friend. "I need that supper in my system, I sure do; but I reckon I don't get it."

"You do not, old lizard," agreed Hart.

"I'll say Doble is the most inconsiderate guy I ever did trail. Why couldn't he of showed up a half-hour later, dad gum his ornery hide?"

They paid their bill over the counter and passed into the street. Immediately the sound of a clear, high voice arrested their attention. It vibrated indignation and dread.

"What have you done with my father?" came sharply to them on the wings of the soft night wind.

A young woman was speaking. She was in a buggy and was talking to two men on the sidewalk—the two men who had preceded the range-riders out of the restaurant.

"Why, miss, we aint done a thing to him—nothin' a-tall." The man Shorty was speaking, and in a tone of honeyed conciliation. It was quite plain he did not want a scene on the street.

"That's a lie." The voice of the girl broke for an instant to a sob. "Do you think I don't know you're Brad Steelman's handy man, that you do his meaness for him when he snaps his fingers?"

"You sure do click yore heels mighty loud, miss." Dave caught in that soft answer the purr of malice. He remembered now hearing from Buck Byington that years ago Emerson Crawford had rounded up evidence to send Shorty to the penitentiary for rebranding through a blanket. "I reckon you come by it honest. Em always acted like he was God Almighty."

"Where is he? What's become of him?"

"Is yore paw missin'? I'm right sorry to hear that," the cowpuncher countered with suave irony. He was eager to be gone. His glance followed Doble, who was moving slowly down the street.

The girl's face, white and shining in the moonlight, leaned out of the buggy toward the retreating vaquero. "Don't you dare hurt my father! Don't you dare!" she warned. The words choked in her tense throat.

Shorty continued to back away. "You're excited, miss. You go home an' think it over reasonable. You'll be sorry you talked this way to me," he said with unctuous virtue.

Then, swiftly, he turned and went straddling down the walk, his spurs jingling music as he moved.

QUICKLY Dave gave directions to his friend. "Duck back into the restaurant, Bob. Get a pocket full of dry rice from the Chink. Trail those birds to their nest and find where they roost. Then stick around like a burr. Scatter rice behind you, and I'll drift along later. First off, I got to stay and talk with Miss Joyce. And say, take along a rope. Might need it.

An instant later Hart was in the restaurant, commandeering rice and Sanders was lifting his dusty hat to the young lady in the buggy.

"If I can he'p you any, Miss Joyce—" he said diffidently.

Beneath dark and delicate brows she frowned at him. "Who are you?"

"Dave Sanders, my name is. I reckon you never heard tell of me. I punch cows for yore father."

Her luminous hazel-brown eyes steadied in his, read the honesty of his simple boyish heart.

"You heard what I said to that man?"

"Part of it."

"Well, it's true. I know it is, though I can't prove it."

Bob Hart, moving swiftly down the street, waved a hand at his friend as he passed. Without turning his attention from Joyce Crawford, Dave acknowledged the signal.

"How do you know it?"

"Steelman's men have been watching our house. They were hanging around at different times the day before yesterday. This man Shorty was one."

"Any special reason for the feud to break out right now?"

"Father was going to prove up a claim this week—the one that takes in the Tularosa water-holes. You know the trouble they've had about it—how they kept breaking our fences to water their sheep and cattle. Don't you think they're trying to keep him from proving up?"

"Maybe so. When did you see him last?"

Her lip trembled. "Night before last. After supper he started for the Cattleman's Club, but he never got there."

"Sure he wasn't called out to one of the ranches unexpected?"

"I sent out to make sure. He hasn't been seen there."

"Look's like some of Brad Steelman's smooth work," admitted Dave. "If he could work yore father to sign a relinquishment—"

Fire flickered in her eye. "He'd ought to know dad better."

"That's right, too. But Brad needs them water-holes in his business bad. Without 'em he loses the whole Round Top range. He might take a crack at turning the screws on yore father."

"You don't think—" She stopped, to fight back a sob that filled her soft throat.

DAVE was not sure what he thought, but he answered cheerfully and instantly. "No, I don't reckon they've dry-gulched him or anything. Emerson Crawford is one sure enough husky citizen. He couldn't either be shot or rough-housed in town without some one hearin' the noise. What's more, it wouldn't be their play to injure him, but to force a relinquishment."

"That's true. You believe that, don't you?" Miss Joyce cried eagerly.

"Sure I do." And Dave discovered that his argument or his hopes had for the moment convinced him. "Now, the question is, what's to be done?"

"Yes," she admitted, and the childish tremor of the sweet lips told him that she depended upon him to work out the problem. His heart swelled with glad pride at the thought.

"That man who jus' passed is my friend," he told her. "He's trailin' that duck Shorty. Like as not we'll find out what's stirrin'."

"I'll go with you," the girl said, vivid lips parted in anticipation.

"No, you'll go home. This is a man's job. Soon as I find out anything I'll let you know."

"You'll come, no matter what time o' night it is," she pleaded.

"Yes," he promised.

Her firm little hand rested a moment in his brown palm. "I'm depending on you," she murmured in a whisper lifted to a low wail by a stress of emotion.

CHAPTER VI

BY WAY OF A WINDOW

THE trail of rice led down Mission street, turned at Junipero, crossed into an alley and trickled along a dusty road to the outskirts of the frontier town.

The responsibility Joyce had put upon Dave uplifted him. He had followed the horse-race gamblers to town on a purely selfish undertaking; but he had been caught in a cross-current and was being swept into dangerous waters for the sake of another. Doble and Miller were small fish in the swirl of this more desperate venture. Dave knew Brad Steelman by sight and by reputation. The man's coffee-brown hatchet face, his restless black eyes, the high, narrow shoulders, the slope of nose and chin, combined somehow to give him the look of a wily and predaceous wolf. The boy had never met anyone who so impressed him with a sense of ruthless rapacity. He was audacious and deadly in attack, but always he covered his tracks cunningly. Suspected of many crimes, he had been proved guilty of none. It was a safe bet that now he had a line of retreat worked out in case his plans went awry.

A soft, low whistle stayed his feet. From behind a greasewood bush Bob rose and beckoned him. Dave tiptoed to him. Both of them crouched behind cover while they whispered.

"The 'dobe house over to the right," said Bob. "I been up and tried to look in, but they got curtains drawn. I would of liked to seen how many gents are present. Nothin' doing. It's a strictly private party."

Dave told him what he had learned from the daughter of Emerson Crawford.

"Might make a gather of boys and raid the joint," suggested Hart.

"Bad medicine, Bob. Our work's got to be smoother than that. How do we know they got the old man a prisoner there? What excuse we got for attackin' a peaceable house? A friend of mine's brother

oncet got shot up makin' a similar mistake. Maybe Crawford's there; maybe he aint. Say he is. All right. There's some gun-play back and forth, like as not. A b'iling of men pour outa the place. We go in and find the old man with a bullet right spang through his forehead. Well, aint that too bad! In the rookus his own punchers musta gunned him accidental. How would that story listen in court?"

"It wouldn't listen good to me. How-come Crawford to be a prisoner there, I'd want to know."

"Sure you would, and Steelman would have witnesses to swear the old man had just drapped in to see if they couldn't talk things over and make a settlement of their troubles."

"All right. What's yore program, then?" asked Bob.

"Darned if I know. Say we scout the ground over first."

THEY made a wide circuit and approached the house from the rear, worming their way through the Indian grass toward the back door. Dave crept forward and tried the door. It was locked. The window was latched and the blind lowered. He drew back and rejoined his companion.

"No chance there," he whispered.

"How about the roof?" asked Hart.

It was an eight-roomed house of fairly modern construction. From the roof two dormers jutted. No light issued from either of them.

Dave's eyes lighted.

"What's the matter with taking a whirl at it?" his partner continued. "You're top hand with a rope."

"Suits me fine."

The young puncher arranged the coils carefully and whirled the loop around his head to get the feel of the throw. It would not do to miss the first cast and let the rope fall dragging down the roof. Some one might hear and come out to investigate.

The rope snaked forward and up, settled gracefully over the chimney, and tightened round it close to the shingles.

"Good enough. Now me for the climb," murmured Hart.

"Don't pull yore picket-pin, Bob. Me first."

"All right. We aint time to debate. Shag up, old scout."

Dave slipped off his high-heeled boots

and went up hand over hand, using his feet against the rough adobe walls to help in the ascent. When he came to the eaves, he threw a leg up and clambered to the roof. In another moment he was huddled against the chimney waiting for his companion.

As soon as Hart had joined him, he pulled up the rope and wound it round the chimney.

"You stay here while I see what's doin'," Dave proposed.

"I never did see such a fellow for hoggin' all the fun," objected Bob. "Aint you goin' to leave me trail along?"

"Got to play a lone hand till we find out where we're at, Bob. Doubles the chances of being bumped into if we both go."

"Then you roost on the roof and lemme look the range over for the old man."

"Didn't Miss Joyce tell me to find her paw? What's eatin' you, old-timer?"

"You pore plugged nickel!" derided Hart. "Think she picked you special for this job, do you?"

"Be reasonable, Bob," pleaded Dave.

His friend gave way. "Cut yore stick, then. Holler for me when I'm wanted."

Dave moved down the roof to the nearest dormer. The house, he judged, had originally belonged to a well-to-do Mexican family and had later been rebuilt upon American ideas. The thick adobe walls had come down from the earlier owners, but the roof had been put on as a substitute for the flat one of its first incarnation.

THE range-rider was wearing plain shiny leather chaps with a gun in an open holster tied at the bottom to facilitate quick action. He drew out the revolver, tested it noiselessly and restored it carefully to its place. If he needed the six-shooter at all, he would need it very badly and very suddenly.

Gingerly he tested the window of the dormer, working at it from the side so that his body would not be visible to anybody who happened to be watching from within. Apparently it was latched. He crept across the roof to the other dormer.

It was a casement window and at the touch of the hand it gave way. The heart of the cowpuncher beat fast with excitement. In the shadowy darkness of that room death might be lurking, its hand already outstretched toward him. He peered in, accustoming his eyes to the blackness. A prickling of the skin ran over him. The

tiny cold feet of mice pattered up and down his spine. For he knew that though he could not yet make out the objects inside the room, his face must be like a framed portrait to anybody there.

He made out presently that it was a bedroom with sloping ceiling. A bunk with blankets thrown back just as the sleeper had left them filled one side of the chamber. There were two chairs, a washstand, a small looking-glass, and a chromo or two on the wall. A sawed-off shotgun was standing in a corner. Here and there were scattered soiled clothing and stained boots. The door was ajar, but nobody was in the room.

Dave eased himself over the sill and waited for a moment while he listened, the revolver in his hand. It seemed to him that he could hear a faint murmur of voices, but he was not sure. He moved across the bare plank floor, slid through the door, and again stopped to take stock of his surroundings.

He was at the head of a stairway which ran down to the first floor and lost itself in the darkness of the hall. Leaning over the banister, he listened intently for any sign of life below. He was sure now that he heard the sound of low voices behind a closed door.

The cow-puncher hesitated. Should he stop to explore the upper story? Or should he go down at once and try to find out what those voices might tell him? It might be that time was of the essence of his contract to discover what had become of Emerson Crawford. He decided to look for his information on the first floor.

Never before had Dave noticed that stairs creaked and groaned so loudly beneath the pressure of a soft footstep. They seemed to shout his approach, though he took every step with elaborate precaution. A door slammed somewhere and his heart jumped to the sound of it. He did not hide the truth from himself. If Steelman or his men found him here looking for Crawford, he would never leave the house alive.

HIS foot left the last tread and found the uncarpeted floor. He crept, hand outstretched, toward the door behind which he heard men talking. As he moved forward, his stomach-muscles tightened. At any moment some one might come out of the room and walk into him.

He put his eye to the keyhole and through it saw a narrow segment of the

room. Ad Miller was sitting astride a chair, his elbows on the back. Another man, one not visible to the cowpuncher, was announcing a decision and giving an order.

"Hook up the horses, Shorty. He's got his neck bowed, and he wont sign. All right. I'll get the durn fool up in the hills and show him whether he will or wont."

"I could of told you he had sand in his craw." Shorty was speaking. He, too, was beyond the range of Dave's vision. "Em Crawford wont sign unless he's a mind to."

"Take my advice, Brad. Collect the kid, and you'll sure have Em hog-tied. He sets the world an' all by her. Y'betcha he'll talk turkey then," predicted Miller.

"Are we fightin' kids?" the squat puncher wanted to know.

"Did I ask your advice, Shorty?" inquired Steelman acidly.

The range-rider grumbled in an indistinct answer. Dave did not make out the words, and his interest in the conversation abruptly ceased.

For from upstairs there came the sudden sounds of trampling feet, of bodies thrashing to and fro in conflict. A revolver-shot barked its sinister menace.

Dave rose to go. At the same time the door in front of him was jerked open. He pushed his forty-five into Miller's fat ribs.

"What's yore hurry? Stick up yore hands—stick 'em up!"

The boy was backing along the passage as he spoke. He reached the newel-post in that second while Miller was being flung aside by an eruption of men from the room. Like a frightened rabbit Dave leaped for the stairs, taking them three at a time. Halfway up, he collided with a man flying down. They came together with the heavy impact of fast-moving bodies. The two collapsed and rolled down, one over the other.

Sanders rose like a rubber ball. The other man lay still; he had been put out cold. Dave's head had struck him in the solar plexus and knocked the breath out of him. The young cow-puncher found himself the active center of a cyclone. His own revolver was gone. He grappled with a man, seizing him by the wrist to prevent the use of a long-barreled revolver. The trigger fell, a bullet flying through the ceiling.

Other men pressed about him, trying to reach him with their fists and to strike him with their weapons. Their high heels

crushed cruelly the flesh of his stockinged feet. The darkness befriended Dave. In the massed mêlée they dared not shoot for fear of hitting the wrong mark. Nor could they always be sure which shifting figure was the enemy.

Dave clung close to the man he had seized, using him as a shield against the others. The pack swayed down the hall into the wedge of light thrown by the lamp in the room.

Across the head of the man next him Shorty reached and raised his arm. Dave saw the blue barrel of the revolver sweeping down, but could not free a hand to protect himself. A jagged pain shot through his head. The power went out of his legs. He sagged at the hinges of his knees. He stumbled and went down. Heavy boots kicked him where he lay. It seemed to him that bolts of lightning were zigzagging through him.

The pain ceased, and he floated away into a sea of space.

CHAPTER VII

BOB HART TAKES A HAND

BOB HART waited till his friend had disappeared into the house before he moved.

"Thought he'd run it over me, so I'd roost here on the roof, did he? Well, I'm after the ol' horn-toad full jump," the puncher murmured, a grin on his good-looking face.

He too examined his gun before he followed Dave through the dormer window and passed into the frowsy bedchamber. None of the details of it escaped his cool, keen gaze, least of all the sawed-off shotgun in the corner.

"That scatter-gun might come handy. Reckon I'll move it so's I'll know just where it's at when I need it," he said to himself, and carried the gun to the bed, where he covered it with a quilt.

At the top of the stairs Bob also hesitated before passing down. Why not be sure of his line of communications with the roof before going too far? He did not want to be in such a hurry that his retreat would be cut off.

With as little noise as possible Bob explored the upper story. The first room in which he found himself was empty of all furniture except a pair of broken-backed chairs. One casual glance was enough.

He was about to try a second door when some one spoke. He recognized the voice. It belonged to the man who wrote his pay-checks, and it came from an adjoining room.

"Always knew you was crooked as a dog's hind laig, Doble. Never liked you a lick in the road. I'll say this. Some day I'll certainly hang yore hide up to dry for yore treachery."

"No use to get on the peck, Em. It don't do you no good to make me sore. Maybe you'll need a friend before you're shot of Brad."

"It relieves my mind some to tell you what a yellow coyote you are," explained the cattleman. "You got about as much sand as a brush rabbit, and I'd trust you as far as I would a rattler, you damned sidewinder."

Bob tried the door. The knob turned in his hand, and the door slowly opened inward.

The rattle of the latch brought George Doble's sly shifty eye round. He was expecting to see one of his friends from below. A stare of blank astonishment gave way to a leaping flicker of fear. The crook jumped to his feet, tugging at his gun. Before he could fire, the range-rider had closed with him.

The plunging attack drove Doble back against the table, a flimsy round-topped affair which gave way beneath this assault upon it. The two men went down in the wreck. Doble squirmed away like a cat, but before he could turn to use his revolver Bob was on him again. The puncher caught his right arm, in time and in no more than time. The deflected bullet pinged through a looking-glass on a dresser near the foot of the bed.

"Go to it, son. Grab the gun and bust his haid wide open," an excited voice encouraged Hart.

BUT Doble clung to his weapon as a lost cow does to a 'dobe water-hole in the desert. Bob got a grip on his arm and twisted till he screamed with pain. He did a head spin and escaped. One hundred and sixty pounds of Arizona cow-puncher landed on his midriff, and the six-shooter went clattering away to a far corner of the room.

Bob dived for the revolver, Doble for the door. A moment, and Hart had the gun. But whereas there had been three in the room, there were now but two.

A voice from the bed spoke in curt command. "Cut me loose." Bob had heard that voice on more than one round-up. It was that of Emerson Crawford.

The range-rider's sharp knife cut the ropes that tied the hands and feet of his employer. He worked in the dark, and it took time.

"Who are you? How come you here?" demanded the cattleman.

"I'm Bob Hart. It's quite a story. Miss Joyce sent me and Dave Sanders," answered the young man, still busy with the ropes.

From below came the sound of a shot, the shuffling of many feet.

"Must be him downstairs."

"I reckon. They's a muley gun in the hall."

Crawford stretched his cramped muscles, flexing and reflexing his arms and legs. "Get it, son. We'll drift down and sit in."

When Bob returned, he found the big cattleman examining Doble's revolver. He broke the shotgun to make sure it was loaded.

Then, "We'll travel," he said coolly.

The battle-sounds downstairs had died away. From the landing they looked down into the hall and saw a bar of light that came through a partly open door. Raised voices were lifted in excitement.

"One of Crawford's riders," some-one was saying. "A whole passle of 'em must be round the place."

Came the thud of a boot on something soft. "Put the damn' spy outa business, I say," broke in another angrily.

Hart's gorge rose. "Tha's Miller," he whispered to his chief. "He's kickin' Dave now he's down because Dave whaled him good."

Softly the two men padded down the stair-treads and moved along the passage.

"Who's that?" demanded Shorty, thrusting his head into the hall. "Stay right there or I'll shoot."

"Oh, no, you wont," answered the cattleman evenly. "I'm coming into that room to have a settlement. There'll be no shooting—unless I do it."

His step did not falter. He moved forward, brushed Shorty aside and strode into the midst of his enemies.

DAVE lay on the floor. His hair was clotted with blood, and a thin stream of it dripped from his head. The men grouped round his body had their eyes

focused on the man who had just pushed his way in. All of them were armed, but not one of them made a move to attack.

For there is something about a strong man unafraid more potent than a company of troopers. Such a man was Emerson Crawford now. His life might be hanging in the balance of his enemies' fears, but he gave no sign of uncertainty. His steady gray eyes swept the circle, rested on each worried face, and fastened on Brad Steelman.

The two had been enemies for years, rivals for control of the range and for leadership in the community. Before that, as young men, they had been candidates for the hand of the girl that the better one had won. The sheepman was shrewd and cunning, but he had no such force of character as Crawford. At the bottom of his heart, though he seethed with hatred, he quailed before that level gaze. Did his foe have the house surrounded with his range-riders? Did he mean to make him pay with his life for the thing he had done?

Steelman laughed uneasily. An option lay before him. He could fight or he could throw up the hand he had dealt himself from a stacked deck. If he let his enemy walk away scot free, some day he would have to pay Crawford with interest. His choice was a characteristic one.

"Well, I reckon you've kinda upset my plans, Em. Course I was a-coddin' you. I didn't aim to hurt you none, though I'd a-liked to have talked you outa the water-holes."

The big cattleman ignored this absolutely. "Have a team hitched right away. Shorty will 'tend to that. Bob, tie up yore friend's haid with a handkerchief."

Without an instant's hesitation Hart thrust his revolver back into its scabbard. He was willing to trust Crawford to dominate this group of lawless foes, every one of whom held some deep grudge against him. One he had sent to the penitentiary. Another he had actually kicked out of his employ. A third was in his debt for many injuries received. Almost any of them would have shot him in the back on a dark night, but none had the cold nerve to meet him in the open. For even in a land which bred men, there were few to match Emerson Crawford.

Shorty looked at Steelman. "I'm waitin', Brad," he said.

The sheepman nodded sullenly. "You done heard your orders, Shorty."

THE ex-convict reached for his steeple hat, thrust his revolver back into its scabbard, and went jingling from the room. He looked insolently at Crawford as he passed.

"Different here. If it was my say-so, I'd go through."

Hart administered first aid to his friend. "I'm servin' notice, Miller, that some day I'll bust you wide and handsome for this," he said, looking straight at the fat gambler. "You have given Dave a raw deal, and you'll not get away with it."

"I pack a gun. Come a-shootin' when you're ready," retorted Miller.

"Tha's liable to be right soon, you damn horsethief. We've rid most a hundred miles to have a li'l talk with you and yore pardner there."

"Shoutin' about that race yet, are you? If I wasn't a better loser than you—"

"Don't bluff, Miller. You know why we trailed you."

Doble edged into the talk. He was still short of wind, but to his thick wits a denial seemed necessary. "We aint got yore bronc's."

"Who mentioned our bronc's?" Hart demanded swiftly.

"Called Ad a horsethief, didn't you?"

"So he is—you too. You've got our ponies. Not in yore vest pockets, but hid out in the brush somewheres. I'm servin' notice right now that Dave and me have come to collect."

DAVE opened his eyes upon a world which danced hazily before him. He had a splitting headache.

"Wha's the matter?" he asked.

"You had a run-in with a bunch of sheep-wranglers," Bob told him. "They're going to be plumb sorry they got gay."

Presently Shorty returned. "That team's hooked up," he told the world at large.

"You'll drive us, Steelman," announced Crawford.

"Me!" screamed the leader of the other faction. "You got the most nerve I ever did see."

"Sure. Drive him home, Brad," advised Shorty with bitter sarcasm. "Black his boots. Wait on him good. Step lively when yore new boss whistles." He cackled with splenetic laughter.

"I dunno as I need to drive you home," Steelman said slowly, feeling his way to a decision. "You know the way better'n I do."

The eyes of the two leaders met.

"You'll drive," the cattleman repeated.

The weak spot in Steelman's leadership was that personally he was not game. Crawford had a pungent personality. He was dynamic, strong, master of himself in any emergency. The sheepman's will melted before his insistence. He dared not face a showdown.

"Oh, well, what's it matter? We can talk things over on the way. Me, I'm not lookin' for trouble none," he said, his small black eyes moving restlessly to watch the effect of this on his men.

Bob helped his partner out of the house and into the surrey. The cattleman took the seat beside Steelman, across his knees the sawed-off shotgun. He had brought his enemy along for two reasons. One was to weaken his prestige with his own men. The other was to prevent them from shooting at the rig as they drove away.

Steelman drove in silence. His heart was filled with surging hatred. During that ride was born a determination to have nothing less than the life of his enemy when the time should be ripe.

At the door of his house Crawford dismissed him contemptuously. "Get out, you yellow wolf!"

The man with the reins spoke softly, venomously, from a dry throat. "One o' these days you'll crawl on your hands and knees to me for this."

He whipped up the team and rattled away furiously into the night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE D BAR LAZY R BOYS MEET AN ANGEL

JOYCE came flying to her father's arms. The white lace of a nightgown showed beneath the dressing-robe she had hurriedly donned. A plait of dark hair hung across her shoulder far below the waist. She threw herself at Crawford with a moaning little sob.

"Oh Dad—Dad—Dad!" she cried, and her slender arms went round his neck.

"It's all right, sweetheart. Yore old dad's not even powder-burnt. You been worryin' a heap, I reckon." His voice was full of rough tenderness.

She began to cry. He patted her shoulder and caressed her dark head, drawing it close to his shoulder. "Now—now—now, sweetheart, don't you cry. It's all right, li'l honeybug."

"You're not—hurt," she begged through her tears.

"Not none—never was huskier. But I got a boy out here that's beat up some. Come in, Dave—and you, Bob. They're good boys, Joy. I want you to meet 'em both."

The girl had thought her father alone. She flung one startled glance into the night, clutched the dressing-gown closer round her throat and fled her barefoot way into the darkness of the house. To the boys, hanging awkwardly at the gate, the slim child-woman was a vision wonderful.

Her father laughed. "Joy aint dressed for callers. Come in, boys."

He lighted a lamp and drew Dave to a lounge. "Lemme look at yore haid, son. Bob, you hotfoot it for Doc Green."

"It's nothing a-tall to make a fuss about," Dave apologized. "Only a love-tap, compliments of Shorty, and some kicks in the slats, kindness of Mr. Miller."

IN spite of his debonair manner Dave still had a bad headache and was so sore around the body that he could scarcely move without groaning. He kept his teeth clamped on the pain because he had been brought up in the outdoor code of the West, which demands of a man that he grin and stand the gaff.

While the doctor was attending to Dave's injuries, the cow-puncher caught sight once or twice of Joyce at the door, clad now in a summer frock of white with a blue sash. She was busy supplying, in a brisk, competent way, the demands of the doctor for hot and cold water and clean linen.

Meanwhile Crawford told his story. "I was right close to the club when Doble met me. He pulled a story of how his brother Dug had had trouble with Steelman and got shot up. I swallowed it, hook, bait and sinker. Soon as I got into the house, they swarmed over me like bees. I didn't even get my six-gun out. Brad wanted me to sign a relinquishment. I told him where he could head in at."

"What would have happened if the boys hadn't dropped along?" asked Doctor Green as he repacked his medicine-case.

The cattleman looked at him, and his eyes were hard and bleak. "Why, Doc, yore guess is as good as mine," he said.

"Mine is that you'd a-been among the missing, Em. Well, I'm leaving a sleeping-powder for the patient in case he doesn't get to sleep in an hour or two. In

the morning I'll drop round again," the doctor said.

He did, and found Dave much improved. The clean outdoors of the rough-riding West builds blood that is red. A city man might have kept his bed a week, but Dave was up and ready to say good-by within forty-eight hours. He was still a bit under par, a trifle washed-out, but he wanted to take the road in pursuit of Miller and Dobie, who had again decamped in a hurry with the two horses they had stolen.

"They had the bronc's hid up Frio Cañon way, I reckon," explained Hart. "But they didn't take no chances. When they left that 'dobe house, they lit a-runnin' and clumb for the high hills on the jump. And they didn't leave no address neither. We'll be following a cold trail. We're not liable to find them after they hole up in some mountain pocket."

"Might. Never can tell. Le's take a whirl at it anyhow," urged Dave.

"Hate to give up yore paint hoss, don't you?" said Bob with his friendly grin. "Aint blamin' you none whatever. I'd sleep on those fellows' trail if Chiquito was mine. What say we outfit in the mornin' and pull our freights."

WHEN Joyce was in the room where Dave lay on the lounge, the young man never looked at her, but he saw nobody else. Brought up in a saddle on the range, he had never before met a girl like her. It was not only that she was beautiful and fragrant as apple blossoms, a mystery of maidenhood whose presence awed his simple soul. It was not only that she seemed so delicately precious, a princess of the blood royal set apart by reason of her buoyant graces, the soft rustle of her skirts, the fine texture of the satiny skin. What took him by the throat was her goodness. She was enshrined in his heart as a young saint. He would have thought it sacrilege to think of her as a wide-awake young woman subject to all the vanities of her sex. And he could have cited evidence. The sweetness of her affection for rough Em Crawford, the dear maternal tenderness with which she ruled her three-year-old brother Keith, motherless since the week of his birth, the kindness of the luminous brown eyes to the uncouth stranger thrown upon her hospitality: Dave treasured them all as signs of angelic grace, and they played upon his heartstrings disturbingly.

Joyce brought Keith in to say good-by to Dave and his friend before they left. The little fellow ran across the room to his new pal, who had busied himself weaving horsehair playthings for the youngster.

"You tum back and make me a bwidle, Dave," he cried.

"I'll sure come or else send you one," the cow-puncher promised, rising to meet Joyce.

She carried her slender figure across the room with perfect ease and rhythm, head beautifully poised, young seventeen as self-possessed as thirty. As much could not be said for her guests. They were all legs and gangling arms, red ears and dusty boots.

"Yes, we all want you to come back," she said with a charming smile. "I think you saved Father's life. We can't tell you how much we owe you. Can we, Keith?"

"Nope. When will you send the bwidle?" he demanded.

"Soon," the restored patient said to the boy; and to her: "That wasn't nothin' a-tall. From where I come from we always been used to standin' by our boss."

He shifted awkwardly to the other foot, flushing to the hair while he buried her soft little hand in his big freckled one. The girl showed no shyness. Seventeen is sometimes so much older than twenty.

"Tha's what us D Bar Lazy R boys are ridin' with yore paw's outfit for, Miss—to be handy when he needs us," Bob added in his turn. "We're sure tickled we got a chancet to go to Brad Steelman's party. I'm certainly glad of to met you, Miss Joyce." He ducked his head and scraped back a foot in what was meant to be a bow.

Emerson Crawford sauntered in, big and bluff and easy-going. "Hittin' the trail, boys? Good enough. Hope you find the thieves. If you do, play yore cards close. They're treacherous devils. Don't take no chances with 'em. I left an order at the store for you to draw on me for another pair of boots in place of those you lost in the brush, Dave. Get a good pair, son. They're on me. Well, so long. Luck, boys. I'll look for you-all back with the D Bar Lazy R when you've finished this job."

The punchers rode away without looking back, but many times in the days that followed their hearts turned to that roof which had given the word *home* a new meaning to them both.

CHAPTER IX
GUN-SIGHT PASS

THE pursuit took the riders across a wide undulating plain above which danced the dry heat of the desert. Lizards sunned themselves on flat rocks. A rattlesnake slid toward the cover of a prickly pear. The bleached bones of a cow shone white beside the trail.

The throats of the cowpunchers filled with alkali dust, and their eyes grew red and sore from it. Magnificent mirages unfolded themselves: lakes cool and limpid, stretching to the horizon, with inviting forests in the distance; an oasis of lush green fields that covered miles; mesquite distorted to the size of giant trees, and cattle transformed into dinosaurs. The great gray desert took on freakish shapes of erosion. Always, hour after hour beneath a copper sky, they rode in palpitating heat through sand-drifts, among the salt bushes and the creosote, into cow-backed hills beyond which the stark mountains rose.

Out of the fiery furnace of the plain they came in late afternoon to the uplands, plunging into a land of deep gorges and great chasms. Here manzanita grew and live oaks flourished. They sent a white-tail buck crashing through the brush into a cañon.

When night fell, they built a fire of niggerheads, and after they had eaten found its glow grateful. For they were well up in the hills now, and the night air was sharp.

In the sandy desert they had followed easily the trail of the thieves, but as they had got into the hills, the tracks had become fainter and fewer. The young men discussed this while they lay in their blankets in a water-gutted gulch not too near the fire they had built.

"Like huntin' for a needle in a haystack," said Bob. "Their trail's done petered out. They might be in any one of a hundred pockets right close, or they may have bore 'way off to the right. All they got to do is hole up and not build any fires."

"Fat chance we got," admitted Dave, "unless they build a fire like we done. Say, I'd a heap rather be sleepin' here than by that niggerhead blaze tonight. They might creep up and try to gun us."

Before they had been in the saddle an hour next day the trail of the thieves was

lost. The pursuers worked till sunset trying to pick it up again. The third day was wasted in aimless drifting among the defiles of the mountains.

"No use, Bob," said his friend while they were cooking supper. "They've made their get-away. Might as well drift back to Malapi, don't you reckon?"

"Looks like. We're only wastin' our time here."

Long before day broke, they started. The cañons below were filled with mist as they rode down out of the mountains toward the crystal dawn that already flooded the plain. The courthouse clock at Malapi said the time was midnight when the dust-covered men and horses drew into the town.

THE tired men slept till noon. At the Delmonico restaurant they found Buck Byington and Steve Russell. The trail-herd had been driven in an hour before.

"How's old Alkali?" asked Dave of his friend Buck, thumping him on the back.

"Jes' tol'able," answered the old-timer equally, making great play with knife and fork. "A man or a hawss don't either amount to much after they oncet been stove up. Since that bronc' piled me at Willow Creek I been mighty stiff, you might say."

"Dug's payin' off today, boys," Russell told them. "You'll find him round to the Boston Emporium."

The foreman settled first with Hart; then he turned to the page on his pocket notebook that held the account of Sanders.

"You've drew one month's pay. That leaves you three months, less the week you've fooled away after the pinto."

"C'rect," admitted Dave.

"I'll dock you seven and a half for that. Three times thirty's ninety. Take seven and a half from that, leaves eighty-two fifty."

"Hold on!" objected Dave. "My pay's thirty-five a month."

"First I knew of it," said the foreman, eyes bleak and harsh. "Thirty's what you're gettin'."

"I came in as top hand at thirty-five." "You did not," denied Doble flatly.

The young man flushed. "You can't run that on me, Dug. I'll not stand for it."

"Eighty-two fifty is what you get," answered the other dogmatically. "You can take it or go to hell."

He began to sort out a number of small

checks with which to pay the puncher. At that time the currency of the country consisted largely of cattlemen's checks, which passed from hand to hand till they were grimy with dirt. Often these were not cashed for months.

"We'll see what the old man says about that," retorted Dave hotly. It was in his mind to say that he did not intend to be robbed by both the Doble brothers, but he wisely repressed the impulse. Dug would as soon fight as eat, and the young rider knew he would not have a chance in the world against him.

"All right," sneered the foreman. "Run with yore tale of grief to Crawford. Tell him I been pickin' on you. I hear you've got to be quite a pet of his."

This brought Dave up with a short turn. He could not take advantage of the service he had done the owner of the D Bar Lazy R to ask him to interfere in his behalf with the foreman. Doble might be cynically defrauding him of part of what was due him in wages. Dave would have to fight that out with him for himself. The worst of it was that he had no redress. Unless he appealed to the cattelman, he would have to accept what the foreman offered.

Moreover, his pride was touched. He was young enough to be sensitive on the subject of his ability to look out for himself.

"I'm no pet of anybody," he flung out. "Gimme that money. It aint a square deal, but I reckon I can stand it."

"I reckon you'll have to. It's neck meat or nothing," grunted the foreman.

Doble counted him out eighty dollars in cattlemen's checks and paid him the rest in cash. While Dave signed a receipt, the hook-nosed foreman, broad shoulders thrown back and thumbs hitched in the arm-holes of his vest, sat at ease in a tilted chair and grinned maliciously at his victim. He was "puttin' something over on him," and he wanted Dave to know it. Dug had no affection for his half-brother, but he resented the fact that Sanders publicly and openly despised him as a crook. He took it as a personal reflection on himself.

STILL smoldering with anger at this high-handed proceeding, Dave went down to the Longhorn Corral and saddled his horse. He had promised Byington to help water the herd.

This done, he rode back to town, hitched the horse back of a barber-shop, and went in for a shave. Presently he was stretched in a chair, his boots thrown across the foot-rest in front of him.

The barber lathered his face and murmured gossip in his ear. "They say George Doble and Miller claim they're going to Denver to run some skin game at a street fair. They're sure slick guys."

Dave offered no comment.

"You notice they didn't steal any of Em Crawford's stock. No, sirree! They knew better. Hopped away with broncs belonging to you boys because they knew it'd be safe."

"Picked easy marks, did they?" asked the puncher sardonically.

The man with the razor tilted the chin of his customer and began to scrape. "Well, o' course you're only boys. They took advantage of that and done you a meanness."

Dug Doble came into the shop, very grim about the mouth. He stopped to look down sarcastically at the new boots Sanders was wearing.

"I see you've bought you a new pair of boots," he said in a domineering voice.

Dave waited without answering, his eyes meeting steadily those of the foreman.

The big fellow laid a paper on the breast of the cow-puncher. "Here's a bill for a pair of boots you charged to the old man's account—eighteen dollars. I got it just now at the store. You'll dig up."

It was the custom for riders who came to town to have the supplies they needed charged to their employers against wages due them. Doble took it for granted that Sanders had done this, which was contrary to the orders he had given his outfit. He did not know the young man had lost his boots while rescuing Crawford and had been authorized by him to get another pair in place of them.

Nor did Dave intend to tell him. Here was a chance to even the score against the foreman. Already he had a plan simmering in his mind that would take him out of this part of the country for a time. He could no longer work for Doble without friction, and he had business of his own to attend to. The way to solve the immediate difficulty flashed through his brain instantly, every detail clear.

It was scarcely a moment before he drew out an answer. "I'll tend to it soon as I'm out of the chair."

"I gave orders for none of you fellows to charge goods to the old man," said Doble harshly.

"Did you?" Dave's voice was light and careless.

"You can go hunt a job somewheres else. You're through with me."

"I'll hate to part with you."

"Don't get heavy, young fellow."

"No," answered Dave with mock meekness.

Doble sat down in a chair to wait. He had no intention of leaving until Dave had settled.

AFTER the barber had finished with him, the puncher stepped across to a looking-glass and adjusted carefully the silk handkerchief worn knotted loosely round the throat.

"Get a move on you!" urged the foreman. His patience, of which he never had a large supply to draw from, was nearly exhausted. "I'm not goin' to spend all day on this."

"I'm ready."

Dave followed Doble out of the shop. Apparently he did not hear the gentle reminder of the barber, who was forced to come to the door and repeat his question.

"Want that shave charged?"

"Oh! Clean forgot." Sanders turned back, feeling in his pocket for change.

He pushed past the barber into the shop, slapped a quarter down on the cigar-case, and ran out through the back door. A moment later he pulled the slip-knot of his bridle from the hitching bar, swung to the saddle and spurred his horse to a gallop. In a cloud of dust he swept round the building to the road and waved a hand desirously toward Doble.

"See you later," he shouted.

The foreman wasted no breath in futile rage. He strode to the nearest hitching-post and flung himself astride leather. The horse's hoofs pounded down the road in pursuit.

Sanders was riding the same bronco he had used to follow the horse-thieves. It had been under a saddle most of the time for a week and was far from fresh. Before he had gone a mile he knew that the foreman would catch up with him.

He was riding for Gunsight Pass. It was necessary to get there before Doble reached him. Otherwise he would have to surrender or fight, and neither of these fitted in with his plans.

Once he had heard Emerson Crawford give a piece of advice to a hotheaded and unwise puncher. "Never call for a gun-play on a bluff, son. There's no easier way to commit suicide than to pull a six-shooter you aint willing to use." Dug Doble was what Byington called "bull-haided." He had forced a situation which could not be met without a showdown. This meant that the young range-rider would either have to take a thrashing or draw his forty-five and use it. Neither of these alternatives seemed worth while in view of the small stakes at issue. Because he was not ready to kill or be killed, Dave was flying for the hills.

The fugitive had to use his quirt to get there in time. The steepness of the road made heavy going. As he neared the summit, the grade grew worse. The bronco labored heavily in its stride as its feet reached for the road ahead.

But here Dave had the advantage. Doble was a much heavier man than he, and his mount took the shoulder of the ridge more slowly. By the time the foreman showed in silhouette against the skyline at the entrance to the pass, the younger man had disappeared.

The D Bar Lazy R foreman found out at once what had become of him. A crisp voice gave clear directions.

"That'll be far enough. Stop right where you're at or you'll notice trouble pop. And don't reach for yore gun unless you want to hear the band begin to play a funeral piece."

THE words came, it seemed to Doble, out of the air. He looked up. Two great boulders lay edge to edge beside the path. Through a narrow rift the blue nose of a forty-five protruded. Back of it glittered a pair of steady steely eyes.

The foreman did not at all like the look of things. Sanders was a good shot. From where he lay, almost entirely protected, all he had to do was to pick his opponent off at his leisure. If his hand were forced, he would do it; and the law would let him go scot free, since Doble was a fighting man and had been seen to start in pursuit of the boy.

"Come outa there and shell out that eighteen dollars," demanded Doble.

"Nothin' doin', Dug."

"Don't run on the rope with me, young fellow. You'll sure be huntin' trouble."

"What's the use of beefing? I've got the

dead wood on you. Better hit the dust back to town and explain to the boys how yore bronc' went lame," advised Dave.

"Come down and I'll wallop the tar outa you."

"Much obliged. I'm right comfortable here."

"I've a mind to come up and dig you out."

"Please yoreself, Dug. We'll find out then which one of us goes to hell."

The foreman cursed, fluently, expertly, passionately. Not in a long time had he had the turn called on him so adroitly. He promised Dave sudden death in various forms whenever he could lay hands upon him.

"You're sure doin' yoreself proud, Dug," the young man told him evenly. "I'll write the boys how you spilled language so thorough."

"If I could only lay my hands on you," the rawboned cattleman stormed.

"I'll bet you'd massacre me proper," admitted Dave quite cheerfully.

Suddenly Doble gave up. He wheeled his horse and began to descend the steep slope. Steadily he jogged on to town, not once turning to look back. His soul was filled with chagrin and fury at the defeat this stripling had given him. He was ready to pick a quarrel with the first man who asked him a question about what had taken place at the pass.

Nobody asked a question. Men looked at him, read the menace of his sullen angry face, and sidestepped his rage. They did not need to be told that his ride had been a failure. His manner advertised it. Whatever had taken place had not redounded to the glory of Dug Doble.

LATER in the day the foreman met the owner of the D Bar Lazy R brand to make a detailed statement of the cost of the drive. He took peculiar pleasure in mentioning one item.

"That young scalawag Sanders beat you outa eighteen dollars," he said with a sneer.

Doble had heard the story of what Dave and Bob had done for Crawford and of how the wounded boy had been taken to the cattleman's home and nursed there. It pleased him now to score off what he chose to think was the soft-headedness of his chief.

The cattleman showed interest. "That so, Dug? Sorry. I took a fancy to that boy. What did he do?"

"You know how vaqueros are always comin' in and chargin' goods against the boss. I give out the word they was to quit it. Sanders, he gets a pair of eighteen-dollar boots, and jumps the town before I find out about it."

Crawford started to speak, but Doble finished his story.

"I took out after him, but my bronc' went lame from a stone in its hoof. You'll never see that eighteen plunks, Em. It don't do to pet cow-hands."

"Too bad you took all that trouble, Dug," the old cattleman began mildly. "The fact is—"

"Trouble! Say, I'd ride to Tombstone to get a crack at that young smart Aleck. I told him what I'd do to him if I ever got my fists on him."

"So you *did* catch up with him."

Dug drew back sulkily within himself. He did not intend to tell all he knew about the Gunsight Pass episode. "I didn't say *when* I told him."

"Tha's so. You didn't. Well, I'm right sorry you took so blamed much trouble to find him. Funny, though, he didn't tell you I gave him the boots."

"You—what!" The foreman snapped the question out with angry incredulity.

The ranchman took the cigar from his mouth and leaned back easily. He was smiling now frankly.

"Why, yes. I told him to buy the boots and have 'em charged to my account. And the blamed little rooster never told you, eh?"

Doble choked for words with which to express himself. He glared at his employer as though Crawford had actually insulted him.

In an easy conversational tone the cattleman continued, but now there was a touch of frost in his eyes. "It was this-away, Dug. When he and Bob knocked Steelman's plans hell west and crooked, after that yellow skunk George Doble betrayed me to Brad, the boy lost his boots in the brush. Course I said to get another pair at the store and charge 'em to me. I reckon he was having some fun joshin' you."

The foreman was furious. He sputtered with the rage that boiled inside him. But some instinct warned him that unless he wanted to break with Crawford completely, he must restrain his impulse to rip loose.

"All right," he mumbled. "If you told him to get 'em, 'nough said."

CHAPTER X

THE CATTLE-TRAIN

DAVE stood on the fence of one of the shipping-pens at the Albuquerque stockyards and used a prod-pole to guide the bawling cattle below. The Fifty-four Quarter Circle was loading a train of beef-steers and cows for Denver. Just how he was going to manage it Dave did not know, but he intended to be aboard that freight when it pulled out for the mile-high town in Colorado.

He had reached Albuquerque by a strange and devious route of zigzags and back-trackings. His weary bronco he had long since sold for ten dollars at a cow-town where he had sacked his saddle to be held at a livery stable until sent for. By blind baggage he had ridden a night and part of a day. For a hundred miles he had actually paid his fare. The next leg of the journey had been more exciting. He elected to travel by freight. For many hours he and a husky brakeman had held different opinions about this. Dave had been chased from the rods into an empty box-car and out of it to the roof. He had been ditched half a dozen times during the night, but each time he had managed to hook on before the train had gathered headway. The brakeman enlisted the rest of the crew in the hunt, with the result that the range-rider found himself stranded on the desert ten miles from a station. He walked the ties in his high-heeled boots, and before he reached the yards, his feet were sending messages of pain at every step. Reluctantly he bought a ticket to Albuquerque. Here he had picked up a temporary job ten minutes after his arrival.

A rawboned inspector kept tally at the chute while the cattle passed up into the car.

"Fifteen, sixteen—prod 'em up, you Arizona—seventeen, eighteen—jab that white-face along—nineteen—hustle 'em in."

The air was heavy with the dust raised by the milling cattle. Calves stretched their necks and blatted for their mothers, which kept up in turn a steady bawling for their strayed offspring. They were conscious that something unusual was in progress, something that threatened their security and comfort, and they resented it in the only way they knew.

Car after car was jammed full of the

frightened creatures as the men moved from pen to pen, threw open and shut the big gates, and hustled the stock up the chutes. Dave had begun work at six in the morning. A glance at his watch showed him that it was now ten o'clock.

A middle-aged man in wrinkled corduroys and a pinched-in white hat drove up to the fence. "How're they coming, Sam?" he asked of the foreman in charge.

"We'd ought to be movin' by noon, Mr. West."

"Fine. I've decided to send Garrison in charge. He can pick one of the boys to take along. We can't right well spare any of 'em now. If I knew where to find a good man—"

THE lean Arizona-born youth slid from the fence on his prod-pole and stepped forward till he stood beside the buckboard of the cattleman.

"I'm the man you're lookin' for, Mr. West."

The owner of the Fifty-four-Quarter-Circle brand looked him over with keen eyes around which nets of little wrinkles spread.

"What man?" he asked.

"The one to help Mr. Garrison take the cattle to Denver."

"Recommend yourself, can you?" asked West with a hint of humor.

"Yes sir."

"Who are you?"

"Dave Sanders—from Arizona, first off."

"Been punchin' long?"

"Since I was a kid. Worked for the D Bar Lazy R last."

"Ever go on a cattle-train?"

"Twice—to Kansas City."

"Hmp!" That grunt told Dave just what the difficulty was. It said: "I don't know you. Why should I trust you to help take a trainload of my cattle through?"

"You can wire to Mr. Crawford at Malapi and ask him about me," the young fellow suggested.

"How long you ride for him?"

"Three years comin' grass."

"How do I know you're the man you say you are?"

"One of yore boys knows me—Bud Holway."

West grunted again. He knew Emerson Crawford well. He was a level-headed cow-man, and his word was as good as his bond. If Em said this young man was trustworthy, the shipper was willing to take

a chance on him. The honest eye, the open face, the straightforward manner of the youth recommended his ability and integrity. The shipper was badly in need of a man. He made up his mind to wire.

"Let you know later," he said, and for the moment dropped Dave out of the conversation.

But before noon he sent for him.

"I've heard from Crawford," he said, and mentioned terms.

"Whatever's fair," agreed Dave.

An hour later he was in the caboose of a cattle-train rolling eastward. He was second in command of a shipment consigned to the Denver Terminal Stockyards Company. Most of them were shipped by the West Cattle Company. An odd car was a jackpot bunch of pick-ups composed of various brands. All the cars were packed to the door, as was the custom of those days.

After the train had settled down to the chant of the rails Garrison sent Dave on a tour of the cars. The young man reported all well and returned to the caboose. The train-crew was playing poker for small stakes. Garrison had joined them. For a time Dave watched, then read a four-day-old newspaper through to the last advertisement. The hum of the wheels made him drowsy. He stretched out comfortably on the seat with his coat for a pillow.

WHEN Dave awoke it was beginning to get dark. Garrison had left the caboose, evidently to have a look at the stock. Dave ate some crackers and cheese, climbed on the roof, and with a lantern hanging on his arm moved forward.

Already a few of the calves, yielding to the pressure in the heavily laden cars, had tried to escape it by lying down. With his prod Dave drove back the nearest animal. Then he used the nail in the pole to twist the tails of the calves and force them to their feet. In those days of crowded cars almost the most important thing in transit was to keep the cattle on their legs, to prevent any from being trampled and smothered to death.

As the night grew older, both men were busier. With their lanterns and prod-poles they went from car to car relieving the pressure wherever it was greatest. The weaker animals began to give way, worn out by the heavy lurching and the jam of heavy bodies against them. They had to be defended against their own weakness.

Dave was crossing from the top of one car to another when he heard his name called. He knew the voice belonged to Garrison, and he listened to make sure from which car it came. Presently he heard it a second time and localized the sound as just below him. He entered the car by the end door near the roof.

"Hello! Call me?" he asked.

"Yep. I done fell and bust my laig. Can you get me outa here?"

"Bad, is it?"

"Broken."

"I'll get some of the train-hands. Will you be all right till I get back?" the young man asked.

"I reckon. Hop along right lively. I'm right in the jam here."

The conductor stopped the train. With the help of the crew Dave got Garrison back to the caboose. There was no doubt that the leg was broken. It was decided to put the injured man off at the next station, send him back by the up train, and wire West that Dave would see the cattle got through all right. This was done.

Dave got no more sleep that night. He had never been busier in his life. Before morning broke, half the calves were unable to keep their feet. The only thing to do was to reload.

He went to the conductor and asked for a siding. The man running the train was annoyed, but did not say so. He played for time.

"All right. We'll come to one after a while, and I'll put you on it," he promised.

HALF an hour later the train rumbled merrily past a siding without stopping. Dave walked back along the roof to the caboose.

"We've just passed a siding," he told the trainman.

"Couldn't stop there. A freight behind us has orders to take that to let the Limited pass," he said glibly.

Dave suspected he was lying, but he could not prove it. He asked where the next siding was.

"A little ways down," said a brakeman.

The puncher saw his left eyelid droop in a wink to the conductor. He knew now that they were "stalling" for time. The end of their run lay only thirty miles away. They had no intention of losing two or three hours time while the cattle were reloaded. After the train reached the di-

vision point, another conductor and crew would have to wrestle with the problem.

Young Sanders felt keenly his inexperience. They were taking advantage of him because he was a boy. He did not know what to do. He had a right to insist on a siding, but it was not his business to decide which one.

The train rolled past another siding and into the yards of the division town. At once Dave hurried to the station. The conductor about to take charge of the train was talking with the one just leaving. The range-rider saw them look at him and laugh as he approached. His blood began to warm.

"I want you to run this train on to a siding," he said at once.

"You the train-dispatcher?" asked the new man satirically.

"You know who I am. I'll say right now that the cattle on this train are suffering. Some went last another hour. I'm goin' to reload."

"Are you? I guess not. This train's going out soon as we've changed engines, and that'll be in about seven minutes."

"I'll not go with it."

"Suit yourself," said the officer jauntily, and turned away to talk with the other man.

Dave walked to the dispatcher's office. The cow-puncher stated his case.

"Fix that up with the train conductor," said the dispatcher. "He can have a siding whenever he wants it."

"But he wont gimme one."

"Not my business."

"Whose business is it?"

The dispatcher got busy over his charts. Dave became aware that he was going to get no satisfaction here.

He tramped back to the platform.

"All aboard," sang out the conductor.

DAVE, not knowing what else to do, swung on to the caboose as it passed. He sat down on the steps and put his brains at work. There must be a way out, if he could only find what it was. The next station was fifteen miles down the line. Before the train stopped there, Dave knew exactly what he meant to do. He wrote out two messages. One was to the division superintendent. The other was to Henry B. West.

He had swung from the steps of the caboose and was in the station before the conductor.

"I want to send two telegrams," he told the agent. "Here they are all ready. Rush 'em through. I want an answer here to the one to the division superintendent."

The wire to the railroad official read:

Conductor freight number 17 refuses me siding to reload stock in my charge. Cattle down and dying. Serve notice herewith I put responsibility for all loss on railroad. Will leave cars in charge of train-crew.

DAVE SANDERS,

Representing West Cattle Company.

The other message was just as direct.

Conductor refuses me siding to reload. Cattle suffering and dying. Have wired division superintendent. Will refuse responsibility and leave train unless siding given me.

DAVE SANDERS.

The conductor caught the eye of the agent.

"I'll send the wires when I get time," said the latter to the cowboy.

"You'll send 'em now—right now," announced Dave.

"Say, are you the president of the road?" bristled the agent.

"You'll lose yore job within fohty-eight hours if you don't send them telegrams now. I'll see to that personal." Dave leaned forward and looked at him steadily.

The conductor spoke to the agent, nodding his head insolently toward Dave. "Young-man-heap-swelled-head!" he introduced him.

But the agent had had a scare. It was his job at stake, not the conductor's. He sat down sulkily and sent the messages.

The conductor read his orders and walked to the door.

"Number 17 leaving. All aboard," he called back insolently.

"I'm staying here till I hear from the superintendent," answered Dave flatly. "You leave an' you've got them cattle to look out for. They'll be in yore care."

The conductor swaggered out and gave the signal to go. The train drew out from the station and disappeared around a curve in the track. Five minutes later it backed in again. The conductor was furious.

"Get aboard here, you hayseed, if you're going to ride with me," he yelled.

Dave was sitting on the platform whittling a stick. His back was comfortably resting against a truck. Apparently he had not heard.

The conductor strode up to him and

looked down at the lank boy. "Say, are you coming or aint you?" he shouted, as though he had been fifty yards away instead of four feet.

"Talkin' to me?" Dave looked up with amiable surprise. "Why no, not if you're in a hurry. I'm waitin' to hear from the superintendent."

"If you think any boob can come along and hold up my train till I lose my right of way, you've got another guess coming. I aint going to be sidetracked by every train on the division."

"That's the company's business, not mine. I'm interested only in my cattle."

The conductor had quite a reputation as a bully. He had intended to override this young fellow by weight of age, authority, and personality. That he had failed filled him with rage.

"Say, for half a cent I'd kick you into the middle of next week," he said, between clamped teeth.

The cowpuncher's steel-blue eyes met his steadily. "Do you reckon that would be quite safe?" he asked mildly.

That was a question the conductor had been asking himself. He did not know. A good many cowboys carried six-shooters tucked away on their ample persons. It was very likely this one had not set out on his long journey without one.

"You're more obstinate than a Missouri mule," the railroad man exploded. "I don't have to put up with you, and I won't."

"No?"

The agent came out from the station, waving two slips of paper. "Heard from the super," he called.

One wire was addressed to Dave, the other to the conductor. Dave read:

Am instructing conductor to put you on siding and place train-crew under your orders to reload.

Beneath was the signature of the superintendent.

The conductor flushed purple as he read the orders sent by his superior.

"Well," he stormed at Dave. "What do you want? Spit it out."

"Run me on the siding. I'm gonna take the calves out of the cars an tie 'em on the feed-racks above."

"How're you going to get them up?"

"Elbow-grease."

"If you think I'll turn my crew into freight-elevators because some fool cattle-man didn't know how to load right—"

"Maybe you've got a kick comin'. I'll not say you haven't. But this is an emergency. I'm willin' to pay good money for the time they help me." Dave made no reference to the telegram in his hand. He was giving the conductor a chance to save his face.

"Oh, well, that's different. I'll put it up to the boys."

Three hours later the wheels were once more moving eastward. Dave had had the calves rolled down to the feed-racks above the cars.

CHAPTER XI

THE NIGHT CLERK GETS BUSY *Pronto*

THE stars were out long before Dave's train drew into the suburbs of Denver. It crawled interminably past residence sections, warehouses and small manufactories, coming to a halt at last in a wilderness of tracks on the border of a small narrow stream flowing sluggishly between wide banks cut out in the clay.

Dave swung down from the caboose and looked round in the dim light for the stockyards engine that was to pick up his cars and run them to the unloading pens. He moved forward through the mud, searching the semi-darkness for the switch-engine. It was nowhere to be seen.

He returned to the caboose. The conductor and brakemen were just leaving.

"My engine's not here. Some one musta slipped up on his job, looks like. Where are the stockyards?" Sanders asked.

This conductor was a small middle-aged man who made it his business to get along with everybody he could. He had distinctly refused to pick up his predecessor's quarrel with Dave. Now he stopped and scratched his head.

"Too bad. Can't you go up town and phone out to the stockyards? Or if you want to take a street-car out there, you'll have time to hop one at Stout street. Last one goes about midnight."

In those days the telephone was not a universal necessity. Dave had never used one and did not know how to get his connection. He spent several minutes ringing up, shouting at the operator and trying to understand what she told him. He did not shout at the girl because he was annoyed. His idea was that he would have to speak loud to have his voice carry. At last he gave up, hot and perspiring.

Outside the drugstore he just had time to catch the last stockyards car. His watch told him that it was two minutes past twelve.

He stepped forty-five minutes later into an office in which sat two men with their feet on a desk. The one in his shirt-sleeves was a smug, baldish young man with clothes cut in the latest mode. He was rather heavy-set and looked flabby. The other man appeared to be a visitor.

"This be the office of the Denver Terminal Stockyards company?" asked Dave.

The clerk looked the raw Arizonan over from head to foot and back again. The judgment that he passed was indicated by the tone of his voice.

"Name's on the door, aint it?" he asked superciliously.

"You in charge here?"

The clerk was amused, or at least took the trouble to seem so. "You might think so, mightn't you?"

"Are you in charge?" asked Dave evenly.

"Maybe so. What you want?"

"I asked you if you was runnin' this office."

"Hell, yes! What're your eyes for?"

The clerk's visitor sniggered.

"I've got a train of cattle on the edge of town," explained Dave. "The stockyards engine didn't show up."

"Consigned to us?"

"To the Denver Terminal Stockyards company."

"Name of shipper?"

"West Cattle company and Henry B. West."

"All right. I'll take care of 'em." The clerk turned back to his friend. His manner dismissed the cow-puncher. "And she says to me, 'I'd love to go with you, Mr. Edmonds; you dance like an angel.' Then I says—"

"When?" interrupted Dave calmly, but those who knew him might have guessed his voice was a little too gentle.

"I says, 'You're some little kidder,' and—"

"When?"

THE man who danced like an angel turned halfway round, and looked at the cowboy over his shoulder. He was irritated.

"When what?" he snapped.

"When you goin' to unload my stock?"

"In the morning."

"No sir. You'll have it done right now. That stock has been more'n two days without water."

"I'm not responsible for that."

"No, but you'll be responsible if the train aint unloaded now," said Dave.

"It wont hurt 'em to wait till morning."

"That's where you're wrong. They're sufferin'. All of 'em are alive now, but they wont all be by mo'nin' if they don't get attention."

"Guess I'll take a chance on that, since you say it's my responsibility," replied the clerk impudently.

"Not none," announced the man from Arizona. "You'll get busy *pronto*."

"Say, is this my business or yours?"

"Mine and yours both."

"I guess I can run it. If I need any help from you, I'll ask for it. Watch me worry about your old cows. I have guys coming in here every day with hurry-up tales about how their cattle wont live until I get a wiggle on me. I notice they all are able to take a little nourishment next day all right, all right."

Dave caught at the gate of the railing which was between him and the night clerk. He could not find the combination to open it and therefore vaulted over. He caught the clerk back of the neck by the collar and jounced him up and down hard in his chair.

"You're asleep," he explained. "I got to waken you up before you can *sabe* plain talk."

The clerk looked up out of a white frightened face. "Say, don't do that. I got heart-trouble," he said in a voice dry as a whisper.

"What about that onloadin' proposition?" asked the Arizonan.

"I'll see it to right away."

Presently the clerk, with a lantern in his hand, was going across to the railroad-tracks in front of Dave. He had quite got over the idea that this lank youth was a safe person to make sport of.

They found the switch-crew in the engine of the cab, playing seven up.

"Got a job for you. Train of cattle out at the junction," the clerk said, swinging up to the cab.

The men finished the hand and settled up, but within a few minutes the engine was running out to the freight-train.

Day was breaking before Dave tumbled into bed. He had left a call with the clerk to be wakened at noon.

After he had eaten breakfast at the hotel, he went out to have a look at his stock. He found that on the whole the cattle had stood the trip well. While he was still inspecting them, a voice boomed at him a question.

"Well, young fellow, are you satisfied with all the trouble you've made me?"

He turned, to see standing before him the owner of the Fifty-four-Quarter-Circle brand. The boy's surprise fairly leaped from his eyes.

"Didn't expect to see me here, I reckon," the cattleman went on. "Well, I hopped a train soon as I got yore first wire. Spill yore story, young man."

Dave told his tale, while the ranchman listened in grim silence. When Sanders had finished, the owner of the stock brought a heavy hand down on his shoulder approvingly.

"You can ship cattle for me long as you've a mind to, boy. You fought for that stock like it had been yore own. You'll do to take along."

Dave flushed with boyish pleasure. He had not known whether the cattleman would approve what he had done, and after the long strain of the trip this endorsement of his actions was more to him than food or drink.

"They say I'm kinda stubborn. I didn't aim to lie down and let those guys run over me," he said.

"Yore stubbornness is money in my pocket. Do you want to go back and ride for the Fifty-four Quarter Circle?"

"Maybe, after a while, Mr. West. I got business in Denver for a few days."

The cattleman smiled. "Most of my boys have when they hit town, I notice."

"Mine aint that kind. I reckon it's some more stubbornness," explained Dave.

"All right. When you've finished that business, I can use you."

If Dave could have looked into the future he would have known that the days would stretch into months and the months to years before his face would turn toward ranch-life again.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAW PUZZLES DAVE

DAVE knew he was stubborn. Not many men would have come on such a wild-geese chase to Denver in the hope of getting back a favorite horse worth

so little in actual cash. But he meant to move to his end intelligently.

If Miller and Doble were in the city they would be hanging out at some saloon or gambling-house. Once or twice Dave dropped into Chuck Weaver's place, where the sporting men from all over the continent inevitably drifted when in Denver. But he had little expectation of finding the men he wanted there. These two rats of the underworld would not attempt to fleece keen-eyed professionals. They would prey on the unsophisticated.

His knowledge of their habits took him to that part of town below Lawrence Street. While he chatted, his foot on the rail, a glass of beer in front of him, he made inconspicuous inquiries of bartenders. It did not take him long to strike the trail.

"Two fellows I knew in the cattle country said they were comin' to Denver. Wonder if they did. One of 'em's a big fat guy name of Miller—kinda rolls when he walks. Other's small and has a glass eye. Called himself George Doble when I knew him."

"Come in here most every day—both of 'em. Waitin' for the Festival of Mountain and Plain to open up. Got some kinda concession. They look to yours truly like—"

The bartender pulled himself up short and began polishing the top of the bar vigorously. He was a gossip soul and more than once his tongue had got him into trouble.

"You was sayin'," suggested the cowboy.

"That they're good spenders, as the fellow says," amended the bartender to be on the safe side.

"When I usta know 'em they had a mighty cute little trick pony—name was Chiquito, seems to me. Ever hear 'em mention it?"

"They was fussin' about that horse to-day. Seems they got an offer for him, and Doble wants to sell. Miller he says no."

"Yes?"

"I'll tell 'em a friend asked for 'em. What name?"

"Yes, do. Jim Smith."

"The fat old gobbler's liable to drop in any time now."

This seemed a good reason to Mr. Jim Smith, alias David Sanders, for dropping out. He did not care to have Miller know just yet who the kind friend was that had inquired for him.

But just as he was turning away, a word held him for a moment. The discretion of the man in the apron was not quite proof against his habit of talk.

"They been quarrelin' a good deal together. I expect the combination is about ready to bust up," he whispered confidentially.

"Quarrelin'? What about?"

"Oh, I dunno. They act like they're sore as a boil at each other. Honest, I thought they was goin' to mix it yesterday. I breezed up wit' a bottle, an' they kinda cooled off."

"Doble drunk?"

"Nope. Fact is, they'd trimmed a Greeley boob and was rowin' about the split. Miller, he claimed Doble held out on him. I'll bet he did, too."

DAVE did not care how much they quarreled or how soon they parted after he had got back his horse. Until that time he preferred that they would give him only one trail to follow instead of two.

The cow-puncher made it his business to loaf on Larimer Street for the rest of the day. His beat was between Fifteenth and Sixteenth Streets, usually on the other side of the road from the Klondike saloon.

About four o'clock his patience was rewarded. Miller came rolling along in a sort of sailor fashion characteristic of him. Dave had just time to dive into a pawnbroker's shop unnoticed.

A black-haired, black-eyed salesman came forward to wait on him. The puncher cast an eye helplessly about him. It fell on a suit-case.

"How much?" he asked.

"Seven dollars. Dirt cheap, my friend."

"Got any telescope grips?"

The salesman produced one. Dave bought it because he did not know how to escape without.

He carried it with him while he lounged up and down the sidewalk waiting for Miller to come out of the Klondike. When the fat gambler reappeared, the range-rider fell in behind him unobserved and followed up town past the Tabor Opera House as far as California Street. Here they swung to the left as far as Fourteenth, where Miller disappeared into a rooming-house.

The amateur detective turned back toward the business section. On the way he dropped guiltily the "telescope" into a delivery-wagon standing in front of a grocery. He had no use for it, and he had already

come to feel it a white elephant on his hands.

With the aid of a city directory Dave located the livery stables within walking distance of the house where Miller was staying. Inspired perhaps by the nickel detective stories he had read, the cowboy bought a pair of blue goggles and a "store" collar. In this last, substituted for the handkerchief he usually wore loosely round his throat, the sleuth nearly strangled himself for lack of air. His inquiries at such stables as he found brought no satisfaction. Neither Miller nor the Pinto had been seen at any of them.

Later in the evening he met Henry B. West at the St. James hotel.

"How's that business of yore's gettin' along, boy?" asked the cattleman with a smile.

"Don't know yet. Say, Mr. West, if I find a hawss that's been stole from me, how can I get it back?"

"Some one steal a hawss from you?"

Dave told his story. West listened to a finish.

"I know a lawyer here. We'll ask him what to do," the ranchman said.

They found the lawyer at the Athletic Club. West stated the case.

"Your remedy is to replevin. If they fight, you'll have to bring witnesses to prove ownership."

"Bring witnesses from Malapi. Why, I can't do that," said Dave, staggered. "I aint got the money. Why can't I just take the hawss? It's mine."

"The law doesn't know it's yours."

Dave left, much depressed. Of course, the thieves would go to a lawyer, and of course he would tell them to fight. The law was a darned queer thing. It made the recovery of his property so costly that the crooks who stole it would laugh at him.

"Looks like the law's made to protect scalawags instead of honest folks," Dave told West.

"I don't reckon it is, but it acts that way sometimes," admitted the cattleman. "You can see yoreself it wouldn't do for the law to say a fellow could get property from another man by just sayin' it was his. Sorry, Sanders. After all, a bronc's only a bronc. I'll give you yore pick of two hundred if you come back with me to the ranch."

"Much obliged, seh. Maybe I will later."

The cowpuncher walked up the streets

while he thought it over. He had no intention whatever of giving up Chiquito if he could find the horse. So far as the law went, he was in a blind alley. He was tied hand and foot. That possession was nine points before the courts he had heard before.

The way to recover flashed to his brain like a wave of light. He must get possession. All he had to do was to steal his own horse and make for the hills. If the thieves found him later,—and the chances were that they would not even attempt pursuit if he let them know who he was,—he would force them to the expense of going to law for Chiquito. What was sauce for the goose must be for the gander, too.

Dave's tramp had carried him across the Platte into North Denver. On his way back he passed a corral close to the railroad tracks. He turned in to look over the horses.

The first one his eyes fell on was Chiquito.

CHAPTER XIII

FOR MURDER

DAVE whistled. The pony pricked up its ears, looked around, and came straight to him. The young man laid his face against the soft silky nose, fondled it, whispered endearments to his pet. He put the bronco through its tricks for the benefit of the corral attendant.

"Well, I'll be doggoned," that youth commented. "The little pinto sure is a wonder. Acts like he knows you mighty well."

"Ought to. I trained him. Had him before Miller got him."

"Bet you hated to sell him."

"You know it." Dave moved forward to his end, the intention to get possession of the horse. He spoke in a voice easy and casual. "Saw Miller awhile ago. They're talkin' about sellin' the paint hawss, him and his partner Doble. I'm to saddle up and show what Chiquito can do."

"Say, that's a good notion. If I was a buyer, I'd pay ten bucks more after you'd put him through that circus stuff."

"Which is Miller's saddle?" When it was pointed out to him, Dave examined it and pretended to disapprove. "Too heavy. Lend me a lighter one, can't you?"

"Sure. Here's three or four. Help yourself."

The wrangler moved into the stable to attend to his work.

Dave cinched, swung to the saddle and rode to the gate of the corral. Two men were coming in and by the sound of their voices were quarreling. They stepped aside to let him pass, one on each side of the gate, so that it was necessary to ride between them.

They recognized the pinto at the same moment Dave did them. On the heels of that recognition came another.

Doble ripped out an oath and a shout of warning. "It's Sanders!"

A gun flashed as the pony jumped to a gallop. The silent night grew noisy with shots, voices, the clatter of hoofs. Twice Dave fired answers to the challenges which leaped out of the darkness at him. He raced across the bridge spanning the Platte, and for a moment drew up on the other side to listen for sounds which might tell him whether he would be pursued. One last solitary revolver-shot disturbed the stillness.

The rider grinned. "Think he'd know better than to shoot at me this far."

He broke his revolver, extracted the empty shells, and dropped them to the street. Then he rode up the long hill toward Highlands, passed through that suburb of the city, and went along the dark and dusty road to the shadows of the Rockies silhouetted in the night sky.

His flight had no definite objective except to put as much distance between himself and Denver as possible. He knew nothing about the geography of Colorado, except that a large part of the Rocky Mountains and a delectable city called Denver were there. His train trip to it had told him that one of its neighbors was New Mexico, which was in turn adjacent to Arizona. Therefore he meant to get to New Mexico as quickly as Chiquito could quite comfortably travel.

Unfortunately Dave was going west instead of south. Every step of the pony was carrying him nearer the roof of the continent, nearer the passes of the front range which lead by divers valleys and higher mountains beyond to the snow-clad regions of eternal white.

Up in this altitude it was too cold to camp out without a fire and blankets.

"I reckon we'll keep goin', old pal," the young man told his horse. "I've noticed roads mostly lead somewheres."

Dave broke over valleys of swirling mist

far below the rider. The sun rose and dried the moisture. Dave looked down on a town scattered up and down a gulch.

He met an ore-team and asked the driver what town it was. The man looked curiously at him.

"Why, it's Idaho Springs," he said. "Where you come from?"

Dave eased himself in the saddle. "From the Southwest."

"You're quite a ways from home. I reckon your hills aint so uncurried down there, are they?"

The cow-puncher looked over the mountains. He was among the summits, aglow in the amber light of day, with the many blended colors of wild flowers. "We got some down there too that don't fit a lady's boodwar. Say, if I keep movin' where'll this road take me?"

The man with the ore-team gave information. It struck Dave that he had run into a blind alley.

"If you're after a job, I reckon you can find one at some of the mines. They're needin' hands," the teamster added.

Perhaps this was the best immediate solution of the problem. The puncher nodded farewell and rode down into the town.

He left Chiquito at a livery barn, after having personally fed and watered the pinto, and went to a hotel. Here he registered, not under his own name, ate breakfast and lay down for a few hours' sleep. When he awakened, he wrote a note with the stub of a pencil to Bob Hart. It read:

Well, Bob, I done got Chiquito back, though it sure looked like I wasn't going to. But you never can tell and as old Buck Byington says it's a hell of a long road without no bend in it and which you can bet your boots the old alkali is right at that. Well I found the little pie-eater in Denver O K but so gaunt he wont hardly throw a shadow and what can you expect of scallawags like Miller and Doble who don't know how to treat a horse. Well I run Chiquito off right under their noses and we had a little gun play and made my getaway and I reckon I will stay a spell and work here. Well good luck to all the boys till I see them again in the sweet by and by.

DAVE.

P. S. Get this money order cashed old-timer and pay the boys what I borrowed when we hit the trail after Miller and Doble. I hit out too sudden to settle. Five to Steve and five to Buck. Well so long.

DAVE.

The puncher went to the post office, got a money order, and mailed the letter; then

he returned to the hotel. He intended to eat dinner and then look for work.

Three or four men were standing on the steps of the hotel talking with the proprietor. Dave was quite close before the boniface saw him.

"That's him," the hotel-keeper said in an excited whisper.

A brown-faced man without a coat turned quickly and looked at Sanders. He wore a belt with cartridges and a revolver.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

Dave knew at once this man was an officer of the law. He knew, too, the futility of trying to escape under the pseudonym he had written on the register.

"Sanders—Dave Sanders."

"I want you."

"So? Who are you?"

"Sheriff of the county."

"What you want me for?"

"Murder."

Dave gasped. His heart beat fast with a prescience of impending disaster. "Murder!" he repeated dully.

"You're charged with the murder of George Doble last night in Denver."

The boy stared at him with horror-stricken eyes. "Doble? My God, did I kill him?" He clutched at a porch-post to steady himself. The hills were sliding queerly up into the sky.

CHAPTER XIV

TEN YEARS

ALL the way back to Denver, while the train ran down through the narrow crooked cañon, Dave's mind dwelt in a penumbra of horror. It was impossible he could have killed Doble, he kept telling himself. He had fired back into the night without aim. He had not even tried to hit the men who were shooting at him. It must be some ghastly joke.

None the less he knew by the dull ache in his heart that this awful thing had fastened on him and that he would have to pay the penalty. He had killed a man, snuffed out his life wantonly as a result of taking the law into his own hands. The knowledge of it shook him to the soul.

It remained with him, in the background of his mind, up to and through his trial. What shook his nerve was the fact that he had taken a life, not a certainty of the punishment that must follow.

West called to see him at the jail; and to the cattleman Dave told the story exactly as it had happened. The owner of the Fifty-four Quarter Circle walked up and down the cell, rumpiling his hair.

"Boy, why didn't you let on to me what you was figurin' on pullin' off? I knew you was some bull-headed, but I thought you had a lick o' sense left."

"Wisht I had," said Dave miserably.

"Well, what's done's done. No use cryin' over the bust-up. We'd better fix up whatever's left from the smash. First off, we'll get a lawyer, I reckon."

"I gotta li' money left—twenty-six dollars," spoke up Dave timidly. "Maybe that's all he'll want."

West smiled at this babe-in-the-woods. "It'll last as long as a snowball in you-know-where if he's like some lawyers I've met up with."

It did not take the lawyer whom West engaged long to decide on the line the defense must take. "We'll show that Miller and Doble were crooks and that they had wronged Sanders. That will count a lot with a jury," he told West. "We'll admit the killing and claim self-defense."

THE day before the trial Dave was sitting in his cell cheerlessly reading a newspaper when visitors were announced. At sight of Emerson Crawford and Bob Hart he choked in his throat. Tears brimmed in his eyes. Nobody could have been kinder to him than West had been, but these were home folks. He had known them many years. Their kindness in coming melted his heart.

He gripped their hands, but found himself unable to say anything in answer to their greetings. He was afraid to trust his voice, and he was ashamed of his emotion.

"The boys are for you strong, Dave. We all figure you done right. Steve he says he wouldn't worry none if you'd got Miller too," Bob breezed on.

"That's no way to talk, son," reproved Crawford. "It's bad enough right as it is, without you boys wantin' it any worse. But don't you get down-hearted, Dave. We're allowin' to stand by you to a finish. It aint as if you'd got a good man. Doble was a mean-hearted scoundrel if ever I met up with one. He's no loss to society. We're going to show the jury that too."

They did.

But Dave was unable to prove self-defense. Miller stuck doggedly to his story.

The cowpuncher had fired the first shot. He had continued to fire, though he must have seen Doble sink to the ground immediately. Moreover the testimony of the doctor showed that the fatal shot had taken effect at close range.

The jury found him guilty of murder in the second degree. The judge sentenced him to ten years in the penitentiary.

When Bob Hart came to say good-by before Dave was removed to Cañon City, the young range-rider almost broke down. He was greatly distressed at the misfortune that had befallen his friend.

"We're gonna stay with this, Dave. You know Crawford. He goes through when he starts. Soon as there's a chance, we'll hit the governor for a pardon. It's a damn shame, old pal. That's what it is."

Dave nodded. A lump in his throat interfered with speech.

"The ol' man lent me money to buy Chiquito and I'm gonna keep the pinto till you get out. That'll help pay yore lawyer," continued Bob. "One thing more: You're not the only one that's liable to be sent up. Miller's on the way back to Arizona. If he don't get a term for hawss-stealing, I'm a liar."

The guard who was to take Dave to the penitentiary bustled in cheerfully. "All right, boys. If you're ready, we'll be movin' down to the depot."

The friends shook hands again.

CHAPTER XV

IN DENVER

THE warden handed Dave a ticket back to Denver, and with it a stereotyped little lecture of platitudes.

"Your future lies before you to be made or marred by yourself, Sanders. You owe it to the Governor who granted this parole and to the good friends who have worked so hard for it that you be honest and industrious and temperate. If you do this, the world will in time forget your past mistakes and give you the right hand of fellowship, as I do now."

The paroled man took the fat hand, but the hard cynical eyes made the warden uncomfortable. Once or twice before he had known prisoners like this, quiet, silent men who were never insolent, but whose eyes told of iron-seared souls.

"Well, wish you luck."

"Thanks."

The convict turned away, grave, unsmiling.

The prison officer's eyes followed him a little wistfully. He had been unable to influence him as he had others.

Sanders walked slowly out of the office and through the door in the wall that led back to life. He was free. Tomorrow was his. All the tomorrows of all the years of his life were waiting for him. But the fact stirred in him no emotion. As he stood in the dry Colorado sunshine his heart was quite dead.

In the earlier days of his imprisonment it had not been so. He had dreamed often of this hour. At night, in the darkness of his cell, imagination had projected picture after picture of it, vivid, colorful, set to music. But his parole had come too late. The years had taken their toll of him. The shadow of the prison had left its chill, had done something to him that had made him a different David Sanders from the boy who had entered. He wondered if he would ever learn to laugh again, if he would ever run to meet life eagerly as that other David Sanders had a thousand years ago.

HE followed the road down to the little station and took a train to Denver. It was his intention to go back to Malapi, to the country he knew and loved, but he wished to pick up a job in the city for a month or two until he had settled into a frame of mind in which liberty had become a habit.

Early next morning he began his search for work. It carried him to a lumber-yard adjoining the railroad yards.

"We need a night watchman," the superintendent said. "Where'd you work last?"

"At Cañon City."

The lumberman looked at him quickly, a question in his glance.

"Yes," Dave went on doggedly, "in the penitentiary."

A moment's embarrassment ensued.

"What were you in for?"

"Killing a man."

"Too bad. I'm afraid—"

"He had stolen my horse, and I was trying to get it back. I had no intention of hitting him when I fired."

"I'd take you in a minute, so far as I'm concerned personally; but our board of directors—afraid they wouldn't like it. That's one trouble in working for a corporation."

Sanders turned away. The superintendent hesitated, then called after him.

"If you're up against it and need a dollar—"

"Thanks. I don't. I'm looking for work, not charity," the applicant said stiffly.

Wherever he went it was the same. As soon as he mentioned the prison, doors of opportunity closed to him. Nobody wanted to employ a man tarred with that pitch. It did not matter why he had gone, under what provocation he had erred. The thing that had damned him was that he had been there. It was a taint, a corrosion. He could have picked up a job easily enough if he had been telling a lie about his past. But he had made up his mind to tell the truth. In the long run he could not conceal it. Better start with the slate clean.

When he got a job, it was to unload cars of fruit for a commission house. A man wanted in a hurry, and the employer did not ask any questions. At the end of an hour he was satisfied.

"Fellow hustles peaches like he'd been at it all his life," the commission man told his partner.

A few days later came the question that Sanders had been expecting: "Where'd you work before you came to us?"

"At the penitentiary."

"A guard?" asked the merchant, taken aback.

"No. I was a convict. The big lithe man in overalls spoke quietly, his eyes meeting those of the Market Street man with unwavering steadiness.

"What was the trouble?"

Dave explained. The merchant made no comment, but when he paid off the men Saturday night, he said with careful casualness: "Sorry, Sanders. The work will be slack next week. I'll have to lay you off."

The man from Cañon City understood. He looked for another place, was rebuffed a dozen times, and at last was given work by an employer who had vision enough to know the truth that the bad men do not all go to prison and that some who go may be better than those who do not.

IN this place Sanders lasted three weeks. He was doing concrete work on a viaduct job for a contractor employed by the city.

This time it was a fellow-workman who

learned of the Arizonan's record. A letter from Emerson Crawford, forwarded by the warden of the penitentiary, dropped out of Dave's coat pocket where it hung across a plank.

The man who picked it up was a gossip, and he read the letter before returning it to the pocket. He began at once to whisper the news. The subject was discussed back and forth among the men on the quiet. Sanders guessed they had discovered who he was, but he waited for them to move. His years in prison had given him at least the strength of patience. He could bide his time.

They went to the contractor. He reasoned with them.

"Does his work all right, doesn't he? Treat you all civilly. Doesn't force himself on you. I don't see any harm in him."

"We aint workin' with no jailbird," announced the spokesman.

"He told me the story, and I've looked it up since. Talked with the lawyer that defended him. He says the man Sanders killed was a bad lot and had stolen his horse from him. Sanders was trying to get it back. He claimed self-defense but couldn't prove it."

"Don't make no difference. The jury said he was guilty, didn't it?"

"Suppose he was. We've got to give him a chance when he comes out, haven't we?"

Some of the men began to weaken. They were not cruel, but they were children of impulse, easily led by those who had force enough to push to the front.

"I wont mix with no convict," the self-appointed leader announced flatly. "That goes."

The contractor met him eye to eye. "You don't have to, Reynolds. You can get your time."

"Meanin' that you keep him on the job and let me go?"

"That's it exactly. Long as he does his work well, I'll not ask him to quit."

A shadow darkened the doorway of the temporary office. The Arizonan stepped in with his easy swinging stride.

"I'm leaving today, Mr. Shields." His voice carried the quiet power of reserve force.

"Not because I want you to, Sanders."

"Because I'm not going to stay and make you trouble."

"I don't think it will come to that. I'm talking it over with the boys now. Your work stands up. I've no criticism."

"I'll not stay now, Mr. Shields. Since they've complained to you, I'd better go."

THE ex-convict looked around, the eyes in his sardonic face hard and bitter. If he could have read the thoughts of the men, it would have been different. Most of them were ashamed of their protest. They would have liked to have drawn back, but they did not know how to say so. Therefore they stood awkwardly silent. Afterward, when it was too late, they talked it over and blamed each other.

From one job to another Dave drifted. His stubborn pride, due in part to a native honesty that would not let him live under false pretenses, in part to a bitterness that had become dogged defiance, kept him out of good places and forced him to do heavy unskilled labor for the poorest pay.

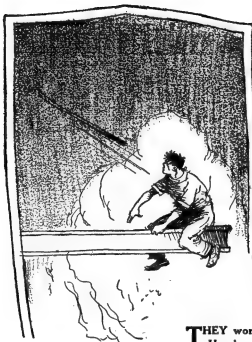
Yet he saved money, bought himself good cheap clothes, and found energy to attend night school, where he studied stationary and mechanical engineering.

The library he patronized a good deal, but he gave no time to general literature. His reading was of a highly specialized nature. He studied everything that he could find about the oil-fields of America.

The stigma of his disgrace continued to raise its head. One of the concrete workers was married to the sister of the woman from whom he rented his room. The quiet, upstanding man who never complained or asked any favors had been a favorite of hers, but she was a timid, conventional soul. Visions of her roomers departing in a flock when they found out about the man in the second floor back began to haunt her dreams. Perhaps he might rob them all at night. In a moment of nerve tension, summoning all her courage, she asked the killer from Arizona if he would leave.

He smiled grimly and began to pack. For several days he had seen it coming. When he left, the expressman took his trunk to the station. The ticket which Sanders bought showed Malapi as his destination.

THE second installment of this remarkable novel of the West by the author of "The Yukon Trail" and "Oh, You Tex!" will appear in the next, the November, issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.



The Night Shift at Jaynesville

By
Warren H. Miller

THEY work in a volcano, these steel-mill huskies. Here's a flame-vivid story of what happened there one critical night.

JIM BURBRIDGE glared back at the Super, who sat solidly at the broad, polished oak desk of the central mill office and searched his soul for appropriate words.

"All right!" he raged. (There were choice mill epithets he would rather have used). "I'm through! I can't be here *both* day and night! If John Royce didn't finish the limestone platform, I may be responsible for it, but I can't sit up and *make* him do it. I guess I'll quit."

"I wish you would!" snorted the Super, sardonically, staring with ruthless indifference at Jim. He didn't mean it, Jim knew, but one of the Super's fetishes was that no man was essential to the mill.

"You know, Mr. Leavenworth, that the night shift's the trouble shift around these diggin's—that's why I always take it myself," retorted Jim. "And I'm sure Royce does the best he can with the day-shift gang—otherwise I'd fire him danged sudden. As for that broken wobbler, the reason I let the gang put it in instead of going at it myself and maybe saving a few minutes of time is—" He hesitated a moment. "Well, Super, it's a private one, that I'd rather not try to explain, if you don't mind."

"All right—forget it," grunted the Super incuriously. "But get that platform done

tonight, Burbridge. Dayton tells me we've got a 'hang' forming up in Number 2 blast furnace, and it'll give way on us if we don't get in more limestone flux. It's up to you."

He turned, fidgeting with his papers, and Jim went out of the office feeling somehow as if he had been spanked. All steel men are husks, and when one husk belabors another, the process is cruel to mind and body. Every man in Jaynesville Rolling Mills was a husk, a physical heavyweight. Your nervous, wiry type had no place in that mill. Sons of Anak were they all, with tempers as violent and wills as forceful as those of big men the world over. There had not been a single suggestion of leniency, of sympathy, in the Super's tones. He liked Jim in his rough, domineering way, and Jim liked him with the sort of liking that causes one he-man to punch and pound the fellow-husk that he loves. All the bruisers in the mill loved each other that way, but if they showed it at all, it was sure to be in scornful and opprobrious epithet, returnable in sarcasm quite as biting.

As for Jim's reason for not tackling the wobbler, he always kept that a carefully guarded secret. To be specific, in spite of his immense frame and athlete's sinews, Jim's heart often bothered him—a relic of

a kid case of typhoid fever. On exciting occasions it invariably jumped and thumped and cut up in a way that caused faint spells to sweep over him. Instinctively, therefore, he usually held back and let his men go at the job, unless it was essential that he take the lead himself.

HALF of our troubles in life exist solely in vain imaginings, and as Jim trudged across the windy black areas of the mill yard, he was suffering acutely from that mind-made disease. He imagined that the Super was down on him; and as he passed the various foremen and chiefs of departments on their way to the night shift, he imagined that they nodded to him indifferently, without the usual taunting gibe or sardonic jest. Their greetings seemed to him lacking in some quality of cheer. He felt that they were distant toward him and disliked him, though it was all due, most probably, to the execrable weather, which kept every man's thoughts preoccupied.

But even though he labored under the delusion that the whole works did not give a whoop for him, he had no intention of quitting. To him the romance, the conquering, heroic thrill of the great steel-mill tingled to the very roots of his soul. He loved the vast, Cyclopean stage on which his work was cast. Always a gorgeous spectacle, with its play of converter glare against the inky buildings, its blue-flames curling from the iron chimney tops, its giant, muffled thunderings of steam hammer, rail-roll and blast blower, the Jaynesville Steel-mill, as he crossed its yard, seemed like a fortress of industry—a giant's castle. Even more lurid than when it squatted shimmering in the sun, its bastions glimmered on the black screen of night with the illumination of the white-hot steel; its chimneys belched black smoke and blue gas-flames against the starlit sky. Lit up with the glow of huge caldrons of converter steel, the mill stood pricked out in vast squares and shafts of light, while far overhead the rolling billows of black smoke tumbled from tall chimney-tops, tinted with orange edgings of light reflected from the converters.

Force, force without stint, was here. The thumping grunt of the main-roll engines bulldozing steel ingots through the rails; the puffings of yard locomotives hauling long trains of iron ingot molds; the muffled thud of great blast-furnace blowers

driven by walking-beam engines four stories high; the sharp scream of the rail saws; the continuous clang of rails tumbling into iron gondola cars—the noise and tumult of industrial battle, the battle for the world's advancement that is never done. Tens of thousands of horsepower shook the ground underfoot; force beyond the comprehension of man welded the tough steel into the rails needed to span the spaces of the earth.

AS Jim entered his office shack, messenger-boys on bicycles flocked to him, bearing yellow trouble slips. There was always trouble, more or less, somewhere within the five square miles of the mill yard, and Burbridge was chief of repairs. His first slip told of a broken valve-stem, blower-engine, Number 5 Blower-house. His repair-gang scattered under barked orders to storeroom and machine-shop, while Burbridge ran for the blower-house, picking his way over the mesh of tracks by the glare from converter flame and mill window. Entering its iron door, the accustomed smell of clean oil and live steam greeted his nostrils. Up in the dim vault of the blower-house towered the tall A-frame of the engine, its silent walking-beam a mute protest against this stoppage of the mill's life. A knot of machinists were already at work unbolting the offending valve-bonnet, and presently his own men charged in, lugging a brightly polished new valve. Half an hour's work sufficed to plop it onto the seat of the broken one and replace the bonnet. Then, with a groan and a whistle of steam, the big blower-engine began to move, its long connecting rod descending inexorably, swinging the crank into the depths of the pit, rotating the forty-foot flywheel, and setting up a cough and rattle of air-pressure in the blower cylinders—that the blast furnaces might have vital oxygen again to carry on the long process of turning Michigan ore into finished rails.

A bicycle boy slammed the blower-house door and came running up to Burbridge with a yellow slip. "Urgent!" it read. "Rail snarl in the Number 6 rail-rolls. Hurry."

Calling his men, Jim set off at a run. A quarter of a mile away the lurid light from the roll-mill windows foretold fierce, swift action ahead, and they covered the space on the double, grabbing crowbars off the racks as they entered the mill. A weird

battle was going on under the red murk that hung over the rail-table. Men, every second in danger of their lives, were fighting a writhing, twisting mass of red-hot rails that towered and squirmed over and about them. Giants were they, men who did not know how to flinch, who jabbed and pried with ready bars, dodging and jumping among the fiery serpents, parting them, straightening them, driving them apart.

One red ribbon of steel, running off sideways out of the rolls, had started it all. It had welded to its neighbor like putty, and the two had risen and curved like fighting snakes, toppling over their peacefully running neighbors and starting a riot among the coiling, red-hot, plastic rail shapes.

As Burbridge came in, the rolls had already been reversed and the unruly monsters were being run out of the fray by the same rolls that had just shot them out on the table. Burbridge's gang ran out on the iron rail-table and fought a rear-guard engagement, prying and separating the twisting tails of the snarl. He drove his bar into a mess of three of them welded together by the shock of their impact, and hopping over the blazing steel, his men seconded him like well-drilled soldiers. It was fast and furious work, for such a rail allowed to grow cold is worse than no rail at all.

In a few moments the table was clear and the fresh heads of the rails, straightened by their passage backward through the rolls, came shooting out along their accustomed grooves. Burbridge breathed raucously, dizzy with the heat and exertion.

"Who started this?" he demanded of the foreman of the rolls.

"Podrazza—the Hunk, yonder—he's yellow. Got cold feet. Ran when the rail started to go."

"Fetch him here!" ordered Burbridge. "Podrazza, you no *dobre*, no good—see?" He glared angrily at the panic-stricken Hungarian.

"You go catchem timeslip—pay-office. You're fired—get me?" he shouted, waving him away. "It takes the Irish, or a West Virginian mountaineer, to run that job," he added to the foreman. "Don't put any more foreigners on there." He indicated the long line of men that stood on guard on the rail-table.

"I'll lend you one of my men until you can rout out one from the day shifts."

HE turned over his trouble slips and dispatched men to attend to the various minor breakdowns. A slip requiring his immediate presence at the Number Two converter caught his eye, and, remembering the Super's injunction, he started out across the black, wind-swept areas of the mill yard to where a tall, slanting shaft of light told of a converter at work, blowing blast-furnace iron into steel. He found Dayton the converter foreman up on the operating platform.

"Mr. Burbridge, I want you to watch this next pour," Dayton greeted him. "It's running too acid, and the quicker we get that extension to the platform finished and working up on top of this blast-furnace, the better. Our checkers are going to begin rejecting rails if we don't—and the furnace has been needing re-lining for some time as it is."

He pulled the hydraulic control levers as he spoke, and the converter made a giant dip; its flaming sword of gases, shot through with scintillating sparks, swept down in a great arc, bathing the iron walls of the room with laving flames. Dayton pulled another lever, and a huge caldron swung over until it hung under the snout of the converter. Below, a puffing locomotive had drawn a train of ingot-molds under the caldron to receive the steel from its spigot.

A living stream of blinding, white-hot liquid iron poured from the converter into the caldron, gradually filling it as the two men watched. Finally the hissing waves of white and violet rose to the top, and the watchers put on blue glasses to protect their eyes. Then Dayton pulled another lever, and a shower of manganese ore tumbled out of a chute and plopped into the fiery bath. Tongues of purple, violet, blue and orange arose from the surface as the reaction took place.

Dayton shook his head. "Too acid, Mr. Burbridge—as you can see for yourself. We can't add any more manganese and still keep to the specifications. You'll have to finish that platform and get more limestone coming tonight, or we are in for a lot of rejected rails, and there'll be the devil to pay. The construction gang quit at five—can't your men finish that platform for us?"

"I reckon it's up to us," admitted Burbridge. "I'll get the mob here. Let's see your furnace pour."

Dayton swung the converter until its

glowing nozzle rested under the nose of a long cast-iron trough, coming out from the vast iron side of the blast-furnace. Tucked in under a ring of columnar steel struts that braced the huge cone of the furnace bottom, a group of giants, armed with long iron bars, prodded at a white knothole of lute clay. Presently a white-hot glare shot out, showers of scintillating sparks flew forth in a stream like dazzling fire-flies, falling harmlessly on the naked shoulders of the furnace-men; and then a fast rivulet of liquid iron darted down the trough, to be swallowed by the greedy maw of the converter. The river of molten iron did not pour steadily; it spurted in jerky blobs, while ominous rumblings came from inside the blast-furnace.

"Gee! It's skeery, working here—short as we are on limestone flux!" complained Dayton nervously.

"How so?" inquired Burbridge. "The Super's worried for fear we'll get a hang—think he's right?"

"We're liable to start the hang any minute!" croaked Dayton. "And then—good night! I've got kids, too."

BURBRIDGE went white in spite of himself. He had lived through one "hang"—and did not want to see another. It occurs when the spongy, porous mass of half-molten ore, lacking flux, forms a great arch inside the blast-furnace. As the liquid metal below is tapped off and no more melt comes down, it leaves a deep void below, and when the arch finally crumbles and falls, hundreds of tons of ore drop down into the cone of the furnace, and an explosion greater than that of a hundred boilers takes place. At the last one to occur in the works the whole bottom of the blast-furnace was blown open, rivers of white-hot iron squirted forth in every direction with the speed of a lava eruption; men were incinerated in their tracks; steel columns and struts were melted off their bases; and a works' locomotive, caught in the stream of fire, blew up like a toy balloon over a gas-jet. It had been a night of terror—and Burbridge had been in the thick of it.

"That metal pours as if we were gettin' one now," went on Dayton uneasily. "For God's sake, Mr. Burbridge, be nice with your steel up there! And don't drop no I-beams down, rough-like, on the platform. If we've got a hang forming up in there, any little jar'll likely start it going."

"I'll get that limestone platform finished up at once," said Burbridge decisively. He went out into the windy night and captured a few bicycle boys, sending them scouring the mill to round up his gang. Then he hurried around the blast-furnace under the ring of cone struts, and was shot up in its ore elevator to the platform on top.

"Takes a hunk to hit up this pace," he grinned. "Nothing like a steel-mill for a he-man's job! A hang!" He shrugged his shoulders with conviction. "Only had one in my time—thank God!" he added.

The enlargement of the blast-furnace platform was being done by carrying out a corner of it over the furnace nozzle opposite Dayton's operating platform, more than a hundred feet below. When Burbridge stepped out to size up the job, the wind was shrieking, roaring and rattling through the chains and rods of the filling-cone crane gear on the furnace top. The continuous rumble of ore-cars dumping their loads into the cone, the rattle of the gears as they lowered it and the ore disappeared into the furnace to the accompaniment of bursts of blue flames, the whine and whistle of the wind, and the fumes of gases rising from the hot caldron and ingot-molds below—these made a lurid setting for the task to be done.

A pile of structural steel lay on the platform, and one glance at the job told Burbridge why the day gang had quit promptly at five. Two channel-irons had already been run out to form one corner of the extensions, but their outer ends had not been bolted up. Instead they rattled and shook in the wind, clashing against each other with every gust. Some one would have to crawl out there and join them up, and the day gang had had one big think about it and just decided to quit, no one caring to risk it.

When Burbridge's gang came up with the next load of ore, they eyed the job—respectfully. Most of them, Burbridge knew, were thinking of their families, and how far their tiny lodge insurances would carry them in case of accident. Who would look after the wife and kids, if a man should be blown off that channel-iron into the white-hot converter-flames below?

Burbridge looked at the quivering steel. He was their leader; typhoid heart or no, it was up to him.

"Norton, come here," he called to one of his most trusted men.

"Can't do it, sir!" broke in Norton earnestly. "I'm married and got two kids—"

"Cut it!" interrupted Burbridge. "I'm going out there myself—don't worry; it's all right. All I want you to do is to get out on yonder railing and hand me a pry-bar when I get to the end of the channel. Ta-ta, boys—there's nothing to it, anyhow!"

LICKING dry lips, Burbridge set foot on the channel-iron. It shivered and shook under him, and he got down astride of it. Fear began to descend upon him like a pall. The channel swayed under him; death seemed to lurk in the deep void below. The devilish wind never seemed to cease clutching and tearing at him with invisible fingers; stifling fumes of gases choked the breath in his lungs.

Burbridge stopped to quiet his pounding heart and looked about. The big brass chimes of the alarm-whistle on the round iron wall of the furnace grinned at him sardonically not twenty feet away. It was used to give the alarm in case of a threatening hang. Its pull-rope led down in the dark distances to Dayton's platform far below. Burbridge gazed at it, fascinated, as he reflected what it was there for. So far, his men had handled gingerly the structural iron on the platform and no act of theirs had given the least jar.

Lying at full length on the channel-iron, twining both arms and feet around it, Burbridge edged on like a snake. He could see the knot of men down under the cone struts, driving with their long bars at the plug-hole for another pour, now and then glancing up at him with strained faces. Slowly he crawled out, hugging the structural shape with all his strength. Farther and farther away from its solid, riveted anchorage he crept. More and more it swayed and wobbled with his weight, while the wind wrenched at him with increasing violence, striving with its greedy fingers to tear him loose and hurl him down into the abyss below.

"I—n—never—was—so—doggone—scairt—in all my life!" Burbridge confessed to himself through chattering teeth as for a moment he lay still, yet clinging tight to the channel-iron. "I'd give a thousand to be out of this this minute!" he told himself, seeking the steady comfort of his own voice. "Hell of a lot any of 'em cares for me down there! Why am I here, anyhow?"

But on he went, and at length reached the dizzy end of the iron and peered at the open rivet-holes at the end. Of course they didn't match—they never do, but all that was needed was a small pry-bar.

"Norton," he croaked, "pass me that bar!"

He could not see Norton, who was somewhere out on the railing behind him, but as he stretched forth a free hand backward across space he felt the cold end of the steel, and his fingers closed around it.

"Have you got it?" quaked Norton, holding fast to a railing-head with his other hand and leaning out far toward him.

"Yes. Let go—hell!" yelled Burbridge furiously, for instead of a light pry-bar, the worthy Norton had handed him a heavy, twenty-pound crow! Its weight threw Burbridge completely out of balance, as he gripped desperately at the channel-iron and—then an icy terror shivered through him like an electric shock, galvanizing him into frantic efforts to regain his balance. Suppose that bar should drop—and jar loose the hang!

BURBRIDGE reeled sidewise off the channel, wrenched inexorably over by the weight of the heavy crowbar. Clinging with viselike grip of legs and one arm, he hung head downward, still gripping the bar. Slowly his body rose—sank back with the fruitless effort—rose again—held for a fleeting instant; then dizzily he drew himself up. The other hand was limp with exhaustion from holding the heavy bar, but still Burbridge hung grimly on. Another effort, and he was lying on top of the channel-iron again, and for the first time breathing hopefully. A last resolute tug at the crowbar and he hauled it up and rested it at last across the channel-iron, balancing it against the force of the wind with rigid, clawed hands.

He turned and glared at the trembling Norton. "You damned—pin-headed—idiot!" he barked at him savagely. "Don't you know anything!"

"It's the only one we had, sir," whined Norton. "You said you wanted a bar."

"Pry-bar!" gasped Burbridge, livid with anger. "Haven't you any sense—" And then came the thing that his doctor had often warned him against. Burbridge felt that typhoid heart of his leaping in sickening, jerky pulsations; and his strength faded away as his wrists grew numb, paralyzed, where they still gripped the heavy

crowbar. He had intended to crawl back to safety with it; now its weight alone held it, he had no hands to hold it against the caprice of the wind, nothing but his body to resist being hurled off into the abyss below.

Burbridge groaned. The wind seemed to renew its efforts on both him and the bar. "The bar!" he gasped, eyes staring. "If it strikes anything, it starts the hang! Nothing can stop it, once this damn' thing slips away from me."

All unconsciously the workers below went on with the routine of the pour. Burbridge hung on, face buried in his arms, calling up every ounce of will-power he possessed to drive away the cramp. He had read somewhere that the mind can dominate the body—well, here was a test, and a good one! Another gust of wind shook the channel-iron. He set his teeth and pressed himself fiercely against the bar to steady it. Grit, determination, the will to hang on and endure until the end, none of them seemed to overcome that immovable paralysis of his wrists.

A sharp tang of steel on the channel-iron aroused him. He raised his head and looked cautiously around. Norton had possessed himself of a small pry-bar and was swinging it out to him, pendulum-fashion by a long rope.

Burbridge bared savage teeth at him. "Don't!!!" he snarled. "Can't you see, I'm paralyzed?"

But Norton could not hear him over the rattle of the cone-gear machinery, nor guess his predicament. Already, with the next swing, the pry-bar rose in high arc, and down it came, smart and sure, right into the crook of Burbridge's elbow. It was the last straw. Those few pounds of steel, added to the drag of the rope, were all that were needed. Burbridge, losing his precarious balance, toppled over sideways again, catching his elbow frantically over the channel-iron—but the big crowbar had slipped out from under his arms and had shot downwards.

"L'kout below!" he yelled, staring downward, horrified, at the bar of falling steel. At his warning shout the knot of men at the furnace-trough dropped their bars and fled. *Clang!* came up a ringing clash of steel as the bar struck one of the ring of big struts that braced the blast-furnace cone a hundred feet below. A vast tremor, a shivering, thunderous scrape shook the furnace to its foundations.

"God! She's going! We've started it!" groaned Burbridge. "The hang! And they don't realize it!" He lay on the channel-iron and prayed—no words, but a deep unspoken demand on the Almighty to give him back his strength came welling up from the depths of a strong man's soul. He *must* have the use of his wrists—*must* have the power to warn those men below!

CLANG! came resounding up from the depths as the bar crashed on down to Dayton's platform. Another and more severe tremor shook the furnace walls. Burbridge's own men, feeling that mighty convulsion under the floor, dashed for the ore-elevator in a body.

Burbridge could see the men below looking up. Their attention had been entirely on the falling bar. They hadn't noticed the breaking of the hang, if indeed they could feel it at all. They had not a moment more to live! Burbridge begged for his strength; he fought with God, wrestling with Him furiously, his mind insistent, urgent, concentrated in the one purpose that dominated all else. He begged and pleaded, as a martyr before a Roman emperor, for the right to warn his fellow-men. And under this keen stress, he felt the control of his nerves coming back. His palms moved—his knuckles, his fingers. With a gust of unuttered thankfulness to Him he sat up and coiled feverishly the small rope of the pry-bar. Then he cast it quickly, surely, at the big lever of the alarm-whistle. The shivering channel-iron on which he sat like a man on horseback, the tearing wind dragging ceaselessly at his body, all sense of the minor dangers had left him, and he worked exultingly as the bar struck the whistle lever and twined around its pull-rope with its momentum. Burbridge braced himself and pulled fiercely on his cord. Scalding hot water gushed out of the brass mouths of the chimes and spewed all over him, but he ducked low and held on. Live steam hissed demoniacally; then a soul-sickening, thunderous screech drowned every other sound.

LOOKING down, Burbridge could see the furnace men running for their lives. Dayton, bewildered, looked up and then scudded from the platform. A sudden riot of exhaust-puffs shot up from the locomotive as she backed away, pushing her train of ingot-molds at full speed out of danger. On the instant came a dull

rumble of thunder inside the blast-furnace; the crumbling arch of ore in its bowels had given way. It was instantly followed by the mighty roar of an explosion which rocked the whole structure like the eruption of a volcano, drowning even the scream of the whistle. Burbridge gripped the whipping channel-iron and clung. A great ring of flame shot out around the filling cone at the furnace-top, and blue flames twenty feet long roared out over his head, while down below, through the bursting bottom of the furnace, he could see the swift rivers of white-hot lava rushing out, eating up the iron tracks in the yard, laving around the foundations of converter and cone struts, spreading a lake of fire far and wide over the yard. He saw white explosions of steam go off like bombs as the liquid iron flowed around the hydraulic cylinders under Dayton's control-platform, blowing them into fragments. He saw waves of fire strum in torrents against the piers of the cone supports, melting them away like wax. A forlorn human atom alone on the breast of a volcano, he could look down and see hundreds of queer little black, forked creatures—fellow human beings—fleeing every which way from the red terror.

Then, with a stealthy, gliding movement, like a falling elevator, the channel-iron on which he lay began to dip downward, lowering giddily. The struts were melting away; the huge blast-furnace was settling—leaning; nothing on earth could stop it from crashing down across converter and mill building alike. And it was going over—with him on it!

Burbridge released the whistle-cord, shutting off its distracting din. There was nothing left to do—but wait. Slowly, inexorably, with one slight lag following another, the channel-iron dipped—dipped in a long and increasing slant.

His watch ticked off the minutes that were yet left to him of life. He was not afraid of death. He had conquered the fear that had always held him back, the fear of the unknown that comes from a weak heart. He had not even prayed—God didn't want prayer: He wanted manhood! At irregular intervals violent explosions shook the blast-furnace, rocking his swaying support like a reed in the wind. He noted them incuriously. All that down below—what did it matter to him? So far as he was concerned, it was all over but the final tumble.

THEN: "He—ell! Now that's right curious!" he ejaculated with sudden interest. "Damned if the old can isn't settling upright again! What do you know about that!" he muttered excitedly. "Somebody's got a head on him down below."

For as a result of those explosions, more felt than heard by him, the blast-furnace was tending to settle upright once more. Like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, it had heeled over some eleven feet and then started back again.

Keen, capable minds had been at work down below, and had somehow averted the catastrophe. Fifteen minutes passed, and then the corrugated iron door of the ore-elevator shaft opened. Leavenworth, the Super, stepped out.

"You, Jim!" he bellowed joyously. "Caught with the goods!" he jeered, pointing at the whistle-cord still gripped in Burbridge's hand. "Say, you ought to have one of those Cosses de Guerre for that!"

Jim grinned. "What I want to know is, just why the ol' can didn't go over and spill me all over the yard!"

"Huh! Think we were going to lose you—or the furnace—not on your life!" laughed the Super happily. "We've had our eyes on you for the last hour. Come on down; we got your men out by an extension ladder."

"Yes, but what did you do?" queried Burbridge excitedly. "I sure thought nothing on earth could keep her from going over like the old office stove when those struts melted away below—"

"We dynamited away the strut-piers on the other side of the furnace. The boys wouldn't give you up while there was a chance left—slob! Didn't you feel her settle back, you poor nut? She's dropped nearly twenty feet!"

"Dynamited the supports on the other side!" gasped Burbridge at the audacious, ruthless originality of it—directed force without stint to overpower the blinder forces of destruction. "I didn't know I was worth that much good dynamite!" he laughed as he regained the platform.

"Didn't, hey!" yelled the Super, coming at him gleefully with both fists as Jim got to his feet. "Yah—you no-'count, worthless old hambone!" he whooped delightedly. And he punched him—Lord, how he punched him! Manhandled him, with the delirious, joyful mauings of a he-man striving to express his love for the husk who works by his side.

The Abode of Dread



By
Franklin French

FAR down in the Indian Ocean, on a murky December afternoon, a bluff-bowed, square-sterned old whaling bark hoggied along on a course to the northward. The *Mary Blum* had been two years and four months out from her home port. The catch had been better than an average, for she was comfortably deep in the water with her cargo of sperm oil and two tons of whale bone; and in a locker down in the skipper's room a collection of tin cans and boxes contained an aggregate of sixty-odd pounds of ambergris.

Precious stuff, ambergris. Worth its weight in gold, and much prized by manufacturing perfumers, though it is produced as a waxy mass by disease in the stomachs and viscera of bull sperm whales. Small wonder that the skipper, "Blackstrap" Morgan, kept the locker doubly locked, and daily hoped for an additional whale that would yield another find sufficient to make the total above the hundred-pound mark. That would have meant, at least, a gift of a gold watch and chain from his ship owners. They were generous to the faithful stewards of their business.

On that murky afternoon Skipper Morgan paced back and forth on the weather side of the after-deck and pondered the matter of whether he should hold to the course northward into the Indian Ocean, or buck the trade winds toward the old whaling areas of the South Pacific. It was largely a matter of luck.

But his meditation was sharply interrupted by the cry from the crows-nest, a cry that always brought instant attention and excitement. "Ah-ho-e-e-e!"

"Where away?" bawled Skipper Morgan, knowing by the nature of the call that it was not whales in sight.

"A whale boat, suh—three p'int's on the lee bow," the lookout reported. "No-o-o ves-sil in sight, suh."

"A lost boat, Simms, d'you s'pose?" Skipper Morgan inquired as his first mate appeared from the cabin companionway.

"I'd think so," Simms replied, stopping to look aloft. "Anybody into 'er?" he bellowed to the men in the crows-nest.

"Cahn't see any, suh," the reply came.

"Keep 'er off, and we'll run down to it," Skipper Morgan ordered the man at the wheel. The man hove the wheel up a full turn, and the old bark swung her head away from the wind until the drawling cry, "Stead-ay," from the crow's-nest warned that the distant whale boat was in line with the ship's head. "Nor'east by north," the Skipper noted on the compass. "Hold that," he ordered, and trotted forward to the fore-rigging, to swing out, despite his paunch, and run nimbly up the rigging, presenting a spectacle like a huge, pot-bellied rat as he went up to the crows-nest.

ALl hour and a half later the old bark, with foreyards aback, headed into the wind in the lee of the drifting boat; and

the second mate's boat and crew were lowered to tow the castaway alongside.

"What've we got, Pete?" A dead man?" Skipper Morgan asked the second mate, as he looked down from the rail into the battered boat at the almost nude figure of an emaciated old man with long, scraggly, yellowish-white hair and beard, who lay huddled under the thwart.

"No suh; he aint dead—he's breathin'. But he's so damn near gone, he aint goin' to last much longah, suh."

"What's that thing in the stern?"

"Some kind of a funny-lookin' skin, suh. It looks like it's got some water in it."

"Lay on, bullies. We'll get the poor devil aboard as quick as we can," Skipper Morgan ordered the men who had gathered along the rail to see the subject of the ship's excitement. Immediately davit-tackles were hooked to both boats, and the pair hoisted in. The weathered, warped, and battered pick-up was let down on the main-deck, and all hands crowded about to see the dying man, to look at the effects of some queer and deadly disease, and study the strange-looking skin—a combination of what apparently had once been the dermic covering of an animal half goat and half lizard.

"The poor devil looks bad, don't he?" the cook remarked to Skipper Morgan. "S'pose it's scurvy?"

Skipper Morgan studied the seamed countenance of the shrunken body for a time. "It don't look a tur'ble lot like scurvy, either. He aint swelled up like scurvy does. Taint scurvy. —Johnny, jump down to my room and bring the brandy-bottle," he ordered the cabin boy.

With the men to help, a fair dose of the strong liquor was poured down the man's throat, causing him to gulp at it for breath; and the gathering of men watched for signs of stirring consciousness. The body lay as before. Then the cook brought a half pitcher of hot pea soup, and a tumblerful was poured after the brandy. But no sign more than deglutition was made by the cadaverous being.

"Somehow I've got the idee that he wont die for a while yet," Skipper Morgan remarked. "The brandy and soup will brace him up consid'able. Jump down hold, bullies, and bring up somethin' to lay him out on. He's nigh dead for want o' sleep. That's what's the matter with him."

A rough pallet of old canvas and bags was quickly made on the main hatch, and

the pitiable creature was moved from the battered boat to the pallet. Hours passed, yet no life was visible in the strange being, more than an occasional rise and fall of the emaciated breast.

"If it wa'n't for his lookin' so, I'd say he'd been boiled in Injy ink," the cook remarked to a sailor of the dog watch that evening. "Pore ol' feller. How ol' d'you s'pose he is, Jack?"

"Dunno. If looks count for anything, he's ninety to a hunderd, I'd say."

IT was Jiggers, in the morning watch, that startled the entire ship's company. The watch was busily swabbing the deck with water from overside; and Jiggers, with back turned to the main hatch, felt a touch on his ribs, and turned to find the grimacing face of the pick-up within a foot of his own. With a scream of horror, wild-eyed, Jiggers dashed for the forecandle, leaving the men of the watch a-gape at the spectacle of the corpse-like figure peering curiously about at its strange surroundings. For a few moments they stood as if spell-bound and watched the creature rise in its tottering nakedness and go toward the galley, whence issued the smell of cookery. And the cook, surprised by the livid face in the doorway, yelled and leaped through the opposite door. Simms, the mate, came hurriedly to discover the cause of the excitement, and guessed that something was amiss in the galley. But none too soon, for the starved being was in the act of thrusting a bony hand into a pot of boiling porridge as Simms caught an arm and led him outside.

"Geuft. Gooma. Gooma," the old man begged piteously, and clawed at Simms' restraining hands.

"Get alive, cook! Bring something we can let him have," Simms sharply ordered the daft, open-mouthed cook.

The shaken cook speedily obeyed, and brought a loaf of bread. And Simms forced his charge back to the pallet, where the famished old man began to gorge and choke on huge handfuls from the loaf.

"Bring some water, cook," Simms ordered, and restrained the old man from his ravenous eating until the bread had been soaked in water.

The old man, a pitifully striking *Rip Van Winkle* of hoary and yellowed age, greedily seized the soaked lumps of bread from Simms' hand and swallowed them as rapidly as he could.

"Geuftma. Gooma isk," he begged, plainly indicating a craving for more as he peered into Simms' face.

"No. No more now. Bimeby," Simms replied, with an understanding of the meaning of the unintelligible words of the old man. "Bimeby more. You sleep now," he ordered, and forced the old man to lie down on the pallet again.

The old man struggled for several minutes to rise; then, overcome by the sense of food in his starved stomach, fell asleep.

MUCH laughter followed Simms' narrative of the morning incidents, at the breakfast table in the cabin.

"By gorry, suh, the looks of 'im is a plenty to scare a man if he come'd round you sudden-like," Peter, the second mate, declared with a grin. "He looks worser nor a lot o' dead men I've seen in my time. An' I wa'n't right anxious to be too close to them, neither."

"He does look tur'ble bad,—no mistake 'bout that,—but looks can't kill very fur," Simms remarked as he stirred a huge mug of coffee. "But that man has seen some tur'ble doin's somewhere, an' he's had a awful time o' gittin' out of it alive. Like's not, what he's been in would've killed most of us. It's been a awful thing, whatever it was."

"What do you make out of it, Simms?" Skipper Morgan asked. "I can't figger it out at all. I was lookin' at that water-skin last night. And I don't know of no place where you'd find a animal like what that skin came off of. It aint all goat, ner all lizard, ner snake. I've been ashore on most o' the islands from here to South America, an' there's goats on a lot of 'em. But I never saw anything that's at all like that thing must've been. An' where, in the name o' God, could that man have come from—the nearest land to win'ward is close on twenty-seven hundred mile. He'd never drift that far an' be alive. An' he aint done anything but drift—no sail, no spars, and only a couple o' old splintered sweeps that no man could do much with. And I can't make out how he's got such a awful look to him. He aint dead. An' yet, if he'd been dead for a month, he couldn't look no worse—mebbe not as bad."

"He's been a white man, all right—you can tell that by lookin' at 'im," Simms said. "And he's been in some place for a long time where he didn't have nobody to

talk to, or he wouldn't have forgot how to talk. This mornin', when he says, 'Geuma isk,' I knew right off he was tryin' to say, 'Give me to eat.' But he'd forgotten how to say it."

"Do you s'pose ne's nigh as old as he looks?"

"Taint likely. He looks like a awful old man—white hair an' all. But he's been in some place that's made an old man out of 'im long before his time to git old. That's the way it looks to me."

"And it looks like we'll have to larn 'im to talk to find out anything about 'im," Skipper Morgan remarked. "And I guess we'd better fix a place for him down in the hold. The crew would jump overboard, or mutiny, if he was put amongst 'em in the foc'sle."

Simms laughed. "I should say so. Jiggers and the cook dern near jumped overboard this mornin' when the old feller got close to 'em. And I had to grit my teeth to take hold of 'im to take him out the galley."

"Well, we'll do the best we can for him," Skipper Morgan remarked. "Taint likely he'll die now, bein's he can eat like that. And tell the cook to feed him along a little at a time till he gets so he can stand it. I s'pose he ought to have some kind o' medicine, but I don't know o' nothin' in the medicine chest that'd do anything fer 'im. So we'll just let 'im alone for a few days, and let 'im kind o' pick up his reck-'nin' so he can tell us somethin' about hisself."

THE old bark wallowed her way northward for several days—days that were eventless to a seaman's mind. And as the sun rose in the sky, the weather grew warmer and the breeze more balmy. One day was like the next—a routine of ship life in the alternation of watches, spar scraping and greasing, deck scrubbing, and the constant lookout kept from the crow's-nest; and the beams from the brassy moon of the Indian Ocean danced on the rolling sea at night.

The old castaway had been given a shirt and trousers for his nakedness; but his improvement was slow, as if the age in his diseased body was loath to yield what it had gained. He made no signs of communication to any except the cook, and that only for food. Once, one of the seamen, who often performed as tonsor, approached the aged man with a pair of

shears and made signs of cutting the long, yellowish-white hair and beard. Gibbering with fright, the old man scuttled down the main hatch steps, and remained out of sight of the deck for two days.

But as time passed, he doddered about the decks or sat on the break of the cabin deck and gazed at the sea for periods of hours. Then, as the days wore on, the crew noticed that he listened more and more to such conversation as went on around him, though he gave no sign that he understood. And the development of the habit gave Simms, the mate, an idea. He went to his room and brought some worn, well-read books, and placed them in the old man's hands. And a miracle happened. For a time the old man peered into meaningless pages; then, with new companions, he disappeared into the hold to sprawl on his pallet and spend hours over the enigma of the printed word. And memory revived. For it was observed later that he was sedulously studying and puzzling over the unfamiliar lines; and the men in the night watches often heard strange gibberish from the darkness of the hold. The old man was earnestly seeking again the comfort of his mother speech. And a day came when he approached Simms with the dilapidated books, and said: "Me bux. More it."

"You want more books to eat?" Simms laughingly asked.

"Yuss."

Simms replaced the books with others, much to the delight of the old man, who promptly disappeared into the hold with the new treasures.

"You'd think he'd larn to talk faster," Skipper Morgan remarked. He had witnessed the transaction of the books.

"Well, I'll tell you, suh, what I think the trouble is," Simms made reply. "He's been through somethin' awful—a heap sight worse'n we've ever dreamt of. An' it's hangin' in his mind like a blanket what he can't see through."

"Don't seem reasonable to s'pose a man would forget to talk, does it?"

"Yes suh. Right reasonable. Lots o' people forget who they are—and in a mighty short time, too. An' like as not, this old feller aint talked to nobody for a lifetime."

"Well, I dunno but what it looks that way," Skipper Morgan remarked. "But if it'd been me, I'd have talked to myself a lot if there'd been nobody else to talk to.

Yessuh, I surely would. I'd have climbed up on the big rocks wherever I was, and preached sermons what the wind never heard before. Yessuh, I'd have larned a lot by just listenin' to myself. Some people larn a heap that way."

Simms and the second mate laughed over that; for they knew Skipper Morgan's sea dogmas of religion in general: preach unto thyself as much as thou please; sail as thou wilt; the winds are free.

THE weeks quadrupled into months. The old bark followed a course far northward into the trade winds, thence south again toward the western Australian coast, twice crossing the great sperm whale grounds. After a month's cruise through the waters north of Australia, where two fifty-barrel whales were captured and cut-in, the whaler headed northward again, across the trade winds and the tropics and into the warm Japan stream, and plowed onward into the north Pacific, breasting gales and calms with equal contentment. Only the direst and fiercest of Nature's moods—the hurricane and the typhoon—disturb a whaler's routine.

Then, one day, a school of five sperm whales was sighted at seven miles, feeding contentedly in a tide rip. The school was wary. But as the sun sank beyond the western horizon, a monster bull whale was lashed with rolling lines to the bark; and the crew, alert to the danger of losing the prize by a sudden change of weather, promptly began the work of cutting the endless strip that spirals the leviathan from head to fluke, and rapidly removing the blubber for the try-works and the oil casks. And as Skipper Morgan and Mate Simms joked and laughed with the abandon of happy men over their midnight coffee, their eyes often turned to a grey mass of fresh ambergris that lay on a canvas near the cabin companionway.

"He was a good fish," Skipper Morgan remarked as he lit his pipe. "All o' a hundred barrels o' ile and ninety pounds o' 'gris. Him an' them two down in twenty-five south since we picked up the old man—I dunno but what we'd ought to keep the old feller 'board-ship for the next v'yage out. Looks like he brought the luck with him, don't it?"

Simms laughed at that. "Well, 'cordin' to what a sailor thinks of the luck in a black cat or a preacher 'board-ship, he couldn't have."

"Well, since I let him have my testament, he's been doin' a reg'lar bizness o' preachin' down in the hold o' nights, 'specially when it's blowin' hard."

"Preachin'? D'you reckon he gets scared?"

"No; 'taint that. It's more like he doesn't want anybody to hear 'im. Last week when that blow was on, Tinker and Cracklins had the middle watch on the main-deck. And they said they stood in the lee o' the galley and listened to the old feller layin' it off from Genesis to somewhere else all through the watch. He had to stop right often for tryin' to think o' words to talk with, like he couldn't think of 'em fast enough, but he was meanin' what he said. And the men say he aint no fool at it, either."

"Well, if he's talkin' to God 'bout things, I reckon he'll come out all right bimeby. But it's damn queer he don't get no better to look at. He looks just as bad as he did the day we found him. And he's gettin' so that he wont go near anybody else any more than he can help, just as if he didn't want nobody near him."

Simms laughed again. "You could hardly blame him for that. The crew wont go near him if they can help it, and he was bound to see it sooner or later. You just can't help feelin' that he's a dead man that's walkin' 'round—that's how the crew looks at it. And they just can't help it, or I s'pose they would."

THE summer months passed, and the old whaler skirted the archipelagic Aleutians, nosing her way westward, homeward bound. The results of the long voyage were beyond the expectations of the beginning of the voyage three years before. Twenty-one whales had filled the cargo space in the hold with seventeen hundred barrels of oil. Upward of four thousand pounds of whale bone were stored in the lazarette, and a little more than one hundred and fifty pounds of precious ambergris was locked in the lockers of the skipper's room. And there was yet time to capture a right whale, and extract from five hundred to one thousand pounds of whalebone from its cavernous mouth. But the crew counted the probable days before the "hook" splashed overside in San Francisco bay and ended the long voyage. For them, enough was plenty. And Skipper Morgan saw the questioning looks in the eyes of the men—and wise in sea lore, he

understood. He, too, had visions of a homecoming that were good to conjure with.

"We'll square away for home with the first good breeze, Mr. Simms," he announced to the mate one afternoon.

"Here's hopin' we'll have a sou'west gale before the dog watch goes off tonight," Jiggers, who had the trick at the helm, exclaimed. And he vented his joy in a clattering jig that sent Skipper Morgan and Simms off into roars of laughter.

But light breezes delayed the squaring away for more than a week. And one morning, soon after dawn, the crew scurried into the boats and raced after three right whales that had found a patch of their favorite globigerina about two miles away on the weather bow. Simms' boatsteerer drove a harpoon deep into one huge bull, and it raced off to windward with the boat in tow, which was soon lost to sight.

But the third mate's boat had better luck. The boatsteerer drove his harpoon as the boat crossed a whale's back, and the deadly tonite bomb fired by the harpoon killed the quarry instantly. The boat's crew waved the black flag and waited for the bark. Pete returned after an hour's chase of the third whale, and with a supply of food for an emergency, was sent to aid Simms. The bark worked up to the dead whale, cut-in the blubber and hoisted the great head on deck to cut out the bone, and made sail to work to windward in the direction that Simms had gone. All day Skipper Morgan kept an anxious watch from the crows-nest for the missing boat. But nothing was seen until the gloom of night was settling on the sea and sky; then Pete's boat returned to the ship.

"The black flag is up, fifteen mile to win'ward, suh!" Pete bawled while yet a quarter of a mile from the ship.

"Good enough," quoth Skipper Morgan. And he raced joyfully down the rigging from the crows-nest to attend to the dumping of the discarded whale head.

"A thirty-mile chase," he suggested to Pete when the boat had been hoisted to the davit heads.

"Yes suh. An' Mr. Simms had a hot time o' killin' 'im, too—fiahed five bombs into 'im in the fight. An' when the whale was fin'ly dead, he sunk."

"Sunk?"

"Yessuh—down a t'ousand fathoms. I give Mr. Simms more line so he could let 'im go down further if he had to."

"Simms can hold him, then?"

"Yessuh. He's got 'im."

"There's a whaleman for you," Skipper Morgan remarked pridefully, and set about working the ship to the sunken whale.

DAWN was breaking when the line in Simms' boat was passed up the side of the vessel and the boat hoisted in.

"A right good job, Mr. Simms," Skipper Morgan greeted.

"A fifteen-thousand-dollar fish needs it sometimes," Simms replied, and took the mug of hot coffee the cook was offering.

A harpoon with a long shank and heavy weights was attached to the taut whale line with guides, and with a heavy line fastened to it, was let loose to go whizzing into the depths for a stronger hold on the dead whale. The donkey-engine in the hold was brought into use, and in an hour the largest whale of all the catch was in lashings beside the bark.

"Cappun, what do dat b'romyter say?" a Barbadoes colored man saucily inquired from among the crew as they were cutting in the blubber.

"It says we'll square away for home if we get that whale in by noon," Skipper Morgan goodnaturedly replied.

The Barbadoes man promptly kicked the man before him, and ordered, "Cut fastah, niggah!"

The man who had felt the kick looked backward, with the remark, "Begob, there's wanst in a whoile a toime a nagur can kick an Irishman an' get ahf wit' his loife. Niver thry it ag'in!"

With the blubber and bone on deck, the old whaler squared away for home soon after the noon sight. And a happy crew began the work of trying out the additional one hundred and seventy barrels of oil and cleaning the new lot of fifteen hundred and fifty pounds of whalebone—and praying for wind.

"She's just about as deep in the water as I care to have her," Skipper Morgan remarked to Simms. "She's got all she can carry to my likin'."

"Ninety thousand dollars' worth I figure it," Simms mentioned. "I've done worse."

Throughout the later weeks, the old castaway had grown more aloof. For days the only one to see him was the cook, who handed food and drink down the hatch to the shy old creature. Even when the crew stowed the oil, the men caught only glimpses of him lying far back under the

deck, on the casks under some deadlight, but always absorbed in some book or paper to the exclusion of all else. Conjecture as to his origin or circumstances had dwindled to an occasional remark concerning his manner and custom. No one had heard his laughter; nor had anyone seen aught of anything that meant the light humor of smiles. Laughter in him was dead. But many of the men had heard his preachments in the dark watches, and for a time they had marveled. No change had come into his physical being that they had seen. He was, to their eyes, the same cadaverous creature that had been taken on board almost a year before. His appearances on deck—the times when he huddled against the weather rail or rigging and gazed at the dancing wave crests of the sea for hours—grew less frequent. Such appearances had meant a shunning of that part of the deck by the crew. Yet no one had seen or surmised the change in the dulled eyes, nor sensed the light of reason and the profound thought that had grown up in him. Shunning, they had failed to see.

WALLOWING comfortably along on the course before westerly weather, the old whaler approached the California coast. And during a sunny October afternoon, the mountain crests of the coast line steadily arose above the eastern horizon. The crew ambled about the decks and feasted their eyes on the distant, blue panorama; and Skipper Morgan, pacing back and forth on the cabin deck, paused now and then to gaze landward. It was a welcome sight. Suddenly Skipper Morgan turned to Simms.

"Say, Simms, the old feller in the hold aint never told us nothin' 'bout who he is, nor where he came from," he said. "I'd ought to get that straightened out right away for the custom house. They've got to know all about them things. Get the old feller up here, and let's see if he can tell us anything."

"Aye, sir," Simms replied, and went to the main hatch. A few minutes later he came back, followed by the old man, whose emaciated figure presented a weird, pathetically hideous spectacle in the slanting sunlight as he clutched Simms' Testament to his scrawny bosom and faced Skipper Morgan.

Abashed by the steady look in the eyes of the deathly being, Skipper Morgan hesitated for words. "You see, 'taint like I—

I want to—to bother you none," he began. "But you see, I've got to ask you somethin' about—well, I've got to fix up somethin' for the custom house. You see, it's like that."

The old man stood for several moments, silent; yet his eyes did not waver. Skipper Morgan waited for a time, then asked:

"You've larned to talk—haven't you—since you came aboard?"

"Yes sir. I have," the old man replied, causing his hearers to start at his guttural croaks. It was as though a raven had spoken. The crew began to gather along the rail and the break of the cabin deck to witness the strange proceedings. "The books helped me remember."

"Where did you come from—I mean, where were you born?"

The old man hesitated for a few moments, and let his gaze wander to the distant mountains. Then, for support, he leaned against the galley coaming.

"My memory avaieth naught," he said. "It faileth much, and remembereth but a land like yonder mountains where people did live in houses; and wherein was an great school."

"A college—was it?"

"Yes sir. And we did learneth to preach the words of God."

"But how did you come to be away down in the Indian Ocean?"

"I knoweth not where it be."

Skipper Morgan pondered. "Didn't you go to sea—some way?"

"I remembereth but a woman, who wast my mother, perchance, and a kind old man; and they did tell me to abide in a ship like unto this one for a time. I wast sick inside me, and goeth not to the great school as much as I did wish. And I did goeth upon the sea."

"A ship like this one?" Skipper Morgan mused aloud. "What was her name—do you remember that?"

The old man seemed to study the question for a time.

"A name was upon the hinder part, like unto *C-o-r-m-o-r-a-n-t*," he spelled. "It was of letters of great size, as of twice the span of my hands."

SKIPPER MORGAN suddenly looked at Simms. "That was the old Cormorant—out o' New Bedford. I went boatsteerer in 'er nigh thirty year ago. And she went a v'yage to the South Pacific 'bout twenty year ago, and never was heard of again."

He turned to the old man. "You was in her?"

"Yes sir."

"Where was she lost?"

"I knoweth not. I remembereth only the wrath of the sea that did smite the ship as it lieth among the great rocks."

"She struck on a reef, prob'ly, that nobody knew anything about. Lots o' whalers have done that. Was it on some island? Was there any land there?"

"No sir. Only rocks. And the men goeth away in boats. We saw them not again."

"Who never saw them again? You?"

"Yes sir. I and the man who sang."

"How was that? What made him sing?"

"I knoweth not. He sang much—and laughed, too. And he did jump into the sea, and cometh not back again."

"Went crazy. Lots do when they're lost at sea. But what become o' you—where did you go to?"

"I knoweth not. It was the very great bad place."

"What was it—an island? Was there water all around it?"

"Yes sir. I did walketh about it one day to see if it was all bad. And yea, it was worse than where we did live."

"Where who lived?"

"The people who did find me. They were green and black people; and very kind were they."

"How many of 'em?"

"At first there was as many as three shipsful. But some died, and the serpents did eat many, and the odas trees killed some. And when the white wind came, some died with sleep. There were few more to live than my fingers when the fire burned the land, and the sea became angry and smote over it."

"It sunk in the sea?"

"Yes sir. A very great bad and evil time was it."

SKIPPER MORGAN was plainly bewildered by the old man's statements. In many phases the story seemed preposterous in the light of what he knew concerning all the oceans and their islands and coasts. Yet there seemed no lack of truth in the aged man as he calmly stood and held the testament to himself; even that was an act of faith. Skipper Morgan needed a way to belief.

"How did them people find you? Where was you?"

"In my boat on the sea. There were many of them in canoes, and they goeth to find a new land to dwell upon. For the land whence they had come was smote by the sea, and was no more. After many days they found me. And after many more days we saw the great bad place. But we did not know it was bad before the great wind came to destroy the canoes, and we could not travel forth again. We putteth many stones in the boat, and it was spared the wrath of the great wind."

"Hurricane, prob'ly."

"Yes sir. It was even very great. And it came many times afterward, and always with very great wrath."

"Yes; I know what they are. I've been through a half a dozen of 'em. They're a derned sight worse'n any wrath there ever was—blowin' the paint right off o' the woodwork," Skipper Morgan asserted. He was beginning to perceive his bearings in the strange tale; for hurricanes were within his scope of experience at sea. And like a cautious navigator when the orb of day is obscured, he mentally decided to reckon from the simple facts of dead reckoning.

"How did you folks live on the island? What did you have eat—cocoanuts?"

"I knoweth not—the cocoanuts. But we did find thereof many berries. And likewise, also, the mahno, which did grow in the ground like unto the bigness of my leg. And likewise, also, the dombra, which is of the bigness of my head, and grows upon trees. We did break it with stones for to eat."

"Them was cocoanuts," Skipper Morgan commented.

"And also we did make sharp sticks in the water to catch pish-fish by night. The serpents swam in the sea to eat them, and we did catch many pish fish when they jumped upwards from the sea not to be caught and eaten by the great serpents."

"What did them pish fish look like?" Skipper Morgan wanted to know, still determined to array the minor points first.

"They were of the bigness of yourself. They went very swiftly in the sea, and did say 'pish' from out their heads when they did swim."

"Porpoises," declared Skipper Morgan. "What else did you have to eat?"

"A very great many of small fishes did live in the sea. Also, we caught them with spear sticks. And the mombo came to sleep on the sand by the sea, and lay the eggs of them."

"Sea turtles," quoth Skipper Morgan. "What else?"

"Also, the birds of the sea made many nests that we might eat of the eggs. Likewise, we slew them with spear sticks for meat and raiment."

"Well, that'd be right easy to do, 'cause they aint a mite scary when they're nestin'. And we used to gether their eggs by the tubful off o' some o' the islands, in the nestin' season," Skipper Morgan said. "But what kind of a thing was it that you got that waterskin off of? 'Taint all goat, ner lizard, ner snake. A right cur'us animal, I'd say."

"Yes, it was of the mosa. They had hair and two legs for part, with horns and long ears upon their heads; and were with scales like the serpents on the long part that came after. And they sat upon their tails, even to four paces high, when they did eat of the trees. Also, when sleep came upon them, they did hang from the trees by their tails. And likewise, we slew the unwary among them, with staves, for meat. But they ran with swiftness; and for many days betimes they slept not, that even so, we did eat no meat of their flesh, though they did live in many places. And by night they did ha-ha much in great noises, like scoffers and fools and weak-wits, that we lived in fear of them and the serpents and the great wind; though many times the fearsome things cameth not in answer to the ha-ha noises of them."

"I'll be dad-burned if it aint too much fer my reckonin'," Skipper Morgan declared, scratching his head in perplexity. His mind was threshing about in a sea of doubt. Yet dead-reckoning is dependable under certain circumstances. "Them laughin' goats was funny animals—I never heard o' nothin' like 'em before. But how did you get water? There's a lot o' islands all through the archpellygo where there aint a drop o' water."

"Even so. But the water of springs cameth out of the rocks and ran down upon the sea. And some were hot, and some were cold, and of some we did not drink, lest we died thereof. And always when the land was angry and made noises and shaking and fire and smoke to send the white wind to creep upon us, the waters did become green like unto the trees and the grass, while we slept in the many days of the white wind. And some did die."

"Could that've been fog, Simms?"

Skipper Morgan asked the mate, though his manner expressed a doubt.

"Taint likely. Prob'ly gas from them volcanic fires."

"Sure. That's what it was—and the smell of it knocked 'em over while it was blowin' round 'em."

"Yea. And it did maketh us sleep as unto death for many days, and we moved not," the old man croaked earnestly. "And the waters became more vile, and was green like the grass, much even to the great sickness of our bellies when we drank thereof."

"Brimstone, I'd imagine—er somethin' like. And it'd be like paint fer drinkin' water," Skipper Morgan remarked. "Them volcanic islands are all purty much like that, 'specially the little ones. And they aint much of a place I'd care to live on, and have to depend on rain for water."

BUT Skipper Morgan had begun to glean some points of drift, leeway, and the set of currents in the apparently preposterous narrative. The loom of distant headlands were in the murky weather to leeward, and he decided to try bolder waters.

"What kind o' trees was them poppas trees—the ones that killed the Kanakas?" he asked.

The old man silently held up his bony hands, with backs together, and worked the fingers violently.

"They were like unto that," he said simply. "But of a very great bigness."

"Crabs?" queried Skipper Morgan.

"Devil fish," suggested Simms.

"Did they live in the sea?" Skipper Morgan asked.

"Na! They grew upon the land. They were ferocious like unto beasts of the Testament, and did slay other trees. Other trees did not grow near unto them, lest they die."

The ship's company exchanged glances of skepticism. It was beyond them. Skipper Morgan looked at Simms with questioning eyes.

"What do you make out o' that, Simms?"

"Well, I don't know, suh. Sounds like they must 'a' been like devil fish bein' trees."

"Sounds derved funny," remarked Skipper Morgan. "What was they like? Did they have long arms onto 'em like this?" he asked the old man, and extended his arms for description.

"Yes sir. Two and three, and often-

times as many as all my fingers did they have arms, like unto the bigness of yonder cask; and long, near unto the span of this ship, were they, and grew upon the main part by many directions. And they moved about with great joy, upwards in the air, when the rains came upon them; and did lie in wait upon the ground when we came nigh unto them, to seize and devour the blood of them they caught. Yea, and one great odas slew three women and one old man one day, and maketh them bloody in death. They went to find berries, and the odas did lie in wait, and seized upon them with great fierceness. Many times did they that, and mayhap, two score of the people did perish from them. But they were frightened of the great wind and wound themselves tight about with their arms when the wrath of the wind was upon them, lest they perish. And we did find to cast sand upon them, and maketh them believe that the great wind was come. And likewise, they wound themselves tight about, in fright of the wind that seemed upon them.

"But they did seize upon the great sercents, and maketh mighty battles of fight with them, even unto death. For he who was mightieth prevailed. Yea, even to nine days they fought betimes, and maketh mighty struggles in the wrath of their spirits, for the odas tree did lusteth for blood to devour."

"By gum, I don't know what to make o' that," Skipper Morgan declared solemnly, and thrust both hands into his trousers pockets with an air of skepticism.

"Something like what I seen once in the Straits o' Malacca," Simms remarked. "An' it sounds just about as strange as them trees, too. We was comin' up the Straits. And one afternoon a big junk, in shore from us, got fouled by one o' them big devil fish, like there is down there. An' lemme tell you, there was a heap o' ki-ki'in' around that junk for a while, till them coolies cut off some o' them big arms what the old devil fish had around them. Most folks wouldn't believe that; but I seen it."

"Yes, I've seen some o' them big fellers myself," Skipper Morgan remarked. "And it looks just as reasonable fer somethin' like that to be on land somewheres as to be prowlin' around in the sea. Say, what was them big sarpints like?" he asked the old man.

"Also, they were of a great bigness," the

old man declared, in his solemn, croaking voice. "Even so long as the span of this ship, some were they. And there were to three score, and mayhap more of them."

"Caesar's ghost! They couldn't have been reg'lar snakes?" Skipper Morgan queried incredulously.

"I knoweth not of snakes. But they did have monstrous great heads—like unto the books saith the frog hath,—with vile and long fang-teeth to slay and devour prey. And upon the sides of them were flat arms, even as the pish fish; and they were bony, with scales like unto stones. And betimes they bloweth mightily, and maketh smoke as of hot water when they did lie upon the land, and grunteth 'youf, youf,' even as the book saith of swine, when they did sleepeth."

"**W**HAT on earth did they live on?" Skipper Morgan wanted to know. Even the dead reckoning of the narrative was slipping.

"They did go by night to slay the whales and hunteth the pish fish."

"God save us! Killin' whales?"

"Yea. Many times have mine eyes seen them slay the whales. Also they cometh in the night many times to seek us for prey. And we did live in fear of them, for they did devour Melta and her two babies, and Oomba, the chieftain, and many others. And one day, Jheu and Lasta and me, we did go to find the mahno for food. And cameth a great serpent, which did seize upon Lasta, and maketh Jheu and me near to death with fear. But we did maketh travail against the serpent, and smote him with great stones. Yea, and I smote him ten times on the eye with a great stone, and avaieth nothing. For he did eat Lasta and grunteth 'Youf, youf,' for sleep to come upon him in contentment. And we did beat our breasts with despair, and went away in grief and sorrow for Lasta. And like unto vultures, as the books saith, the serpents did come to seek they who died in sickness. Yea, many times did they come."

"Wan't there no way to kill the derved things?"

"One we slew. A great wind did break many trees. And a serpent of much bigness eateth of whale-flesh, and lieth among the trees to sleep and grunt. And we did tie two trees about his neck with the boat rope, like unto the books saith a yoke doth. And when he wakened, many trees did he

break with a mighty struggling. Yea, and the mosas did come in multitudes, and maketh much ha-ha noises for the defeat of a great enemy. For he avaieth nothing against the yoke, and on the sixth day he did grunt no more. And by great rejoicing, we did flay him from out his skin to make an great boat, before the serpents did find and devour him—which was good."

Skipper Morgan's mind was beginning to ride comfortably in a gale of doubt—the slaughter of leviathans had been his life-long business. And he chuckled as he remarked to Simms:

"I reckon we could've had a right good time gunnin' them sarpiants, with some whalin' gear, Simms."

Simms laughed. "'Twould've been a good deal like shootin' house-cats, to walk up to 'em while they was gruntin', and plump tonite bombs into 'em with a shoulder-gun. Not much fun in that?"

"What become o' the rest o' the people? Are they on the island yet?" Skipper Morgan queried, turning to the old man again.

"I knoweth not. There is no island, because of the great bad and evil time that did come upon it."

"Well, I'll be derved! What happened to it?"

"Even in the night it cometh upon the island, and did make to burn mightily with monstrous fires and great pillars of smoke and clouds of hot water, and burneth to the heavens above in great wrath to destroy us and all living things upon it. And it did shake and rend the land in upheavings and falling down, and maketh the rocks and stones to flow like unto water and hiss and burn mightily. And behold, the land did begin to sink into the sea. And when the day was come again, we did flee upon the sea in the boat and the serpent boat to spare our lives from the mighty wrath of the land."

"Well, where did the rest go to—the Kanakas?"

"I knoweth not. For we did travel many days upon the sea, and did pray to see the land of some place again, lest we perish of the great hunger. For we did have but little of the dried pish fish and mosa to eat thereof, and mayhap a score of sea birds that we did catch with spear sticks. And by night did come a great wind upon us,—I in my boat, and they in theirs,—and the rope, which was as rot with great age, did breaketh. And when the day was come, I saw them not with mine eyes, though I

did look with great fear, lest I not see them again. And I maketh the boat to go this way and that to find them again, but without avail. Then the great sleep cometh upon me,—how many days I knoweth not,—and I ope my eyes when the day was come. And behold, I am on this ship."

AWED by the narrative, not a member of the crew moved. The old man stood, holding the Testament against himself with his blue and bony hands, and silently regarded the rising mountains. If cavil there was to be, he apparently cared little about it; he had told of whence he had come; there was naught else to tell.

Skipper Morgan pondered the horrific episodes of the narrative, for he could neither reject nor believe it. There were elements in it of which he had sure knowledge—if they were true, a *posteriori*, the others were true; for the old man's condition, the decayed and rotted whaleboat, and the strange looking mosa skin, were bits of indubitable evidence. In the end he did not know what he thought. The thing was beyond him, as was the parable of Jonah and the whale. He knew of no whale that could have swallowed Jonah—of that, he was sure. Yet he did not care to cast doubt upon the Scriptures, for it might have been in some other way. The old man's history was something to be studied from more than one angle; later, perhaps, the thing would be plainer. He, too, looked at the coastal mountains for a time. "Well, I suppose you'll be mighty glad to git back to your people, after bein' away so long," he remarked to the silent old man.

"Nay," croaked the old man. "It is not for me."

"Why, we'll be in an' have the hook down by midnight if the breeze holds up," Skipper Morgan said.

"Even so."

"Well, you'll be there, wont ye?"

"Nay. I goeth to my Father."

Skipper Morgan paused. "Derned if I know what that means."

"There is a great gratitude in my heart that ye did save me from the sea until now. For there is much that I did seek and I have found," the old man declared as he nervously fingered the testament. "Many years did my people mourn in sorrow and grief, and they have forgotten; though it is but a span and I shall greet them before my Father, who lovest all things. And even as ye did unto me, the people on yonder mountains will do likewise unto me. For I am a leper unto them. I goeth not among them."

"Derned if I can see what you're goin' to do," Skipper Morgan declared.

"Thus and so," the old man croaked solemnly, and stepped to the cabin rail. And raising his eyes to heaven, with extended, suppliant gesture, he said: "I come, O Father, I come!" And before the startled skipper or crew could act, he stepped over the rail and dropped like a plummet into the sea, still clutching the Testament, and disappeared in the depths.

MAN overboard! Into the starboard boat, bullies!" Simms, galvanized into sudden action, cried to the startled crew as he leaped to the davits. The crew rushed to follow him, and many hands snatched at the tackles to lower the boat.

A few moments later, ere the boat had started downward, the skipper, still watching the spot astern, checked them:

"Avast lowerin'. T'wouldn't be no use; the old feller aint comin' up any more. Mr. Simms, I reckon he's right about that. He's been through a-plenty, and I don't reckon we'd ought to blame him for not wantin' to go through what'd be a derned sight worse. We'll let the Custom-house think what it dern pleases, for I'm beginnin' to hope he'll have no trouble in findin' his folks. Make the boat fast again."

JOHAN FLEMING WILSON, author of "Across the Latitudes," "The Princess of Sorry Valley," "The Master Key" and many other fine stories and novels, has come back to the writing field since his return from France, and is now producing his best work so far. His "Credit," a brilliant story of the sea, will be a feature of the forthcoming November issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.



'Surance Money

by

Alexander Hull

CAROLINE, otherwise known as Mrs. Arthur Alexander Tobie, was a stunning woman. Even white folks freely admitted that. They had been known to stand at the corner of Jimpson's drugstore with eyes a-goggle and mouths agape, intent and single-minded, staring at Caroline as she came buxomly and breezily down the street. Even "quality" folks were affected thus by Caroline in her holiday regalia. Mrs. Edgar Quinctilius Jepson, for instance, the very uppitiest of the society white folks, had been observed no later than yesterday smitten with envy of chocolate-brown Mrs. Tobie.

Caroline was coming down Seventh Avenue on the glaring, sunny side of the street, superbly conscious of her eminent attractiveness to the eye. Her ample feet were shod in white canvas with wide ribbon bows; the arching columns of her shapely nether limbs were hosed in pink silk. Her gown was lavender, the gift of Governor Pattison's wife, for whom Caroline had cooked, and Caroline's personal selection. Her hat was a broad-brimmed picture piece of a rather nondescript cream, gayly bedizened with two orange plumes. This splendor, all-sufficient in itself, was topped and crowned by a cerise parasol.

Calvin Plummer, leaning against the lintel-post of the Elite Pool Parlor, considered Caroline, justly, the most splendid

sight in America. She affected his heart most agreeably, sending through his frame a little surge of warmth that beggared that of the busy sun. He straightened up, fumbled at his tie, uncrossed his long legs, smoothed out the wrinkles in his gray cool-cloth suit, rolled his eyes with a show of ecstatic white, and, with a wide sweep of his hat, stepped briskly up to Mrs. Tobie.

"You is sho'ly lookin' mos' pow'ful scrumptious this fine aft'noon, Mis' Tobie," said Calvin.

"That's the way I is feelin', Miste' Plummer," responded the lady. "Now that tri-flin', no-count pusson what done invigorated me into marryin' him with his lyin' tongue is puffickly sure drapped into the discard, I feels mo' like a chitterin' young gal than like a lone widow woman."

"Yes'm," said Calvin, grinning. "An' that's jes' how yo' is lookin', Mis' Tobie. Like a young gal—prezackly like one of them chitterin' young gals—only mo' so. Yes'm, mo' so! An' that's jes' like it had ought to be. These young gals—I isn't sayin' they aint all right, Mis' Tobie, but compared to a matoor and accomplished female, like what you is, what is jes' as young-lookin' an' spy as any of 'em, and is got besides a pow'ful lot of good jedgment—why, wheah is they? That's all I axes you—wheah is they?"

Mrs. Tobie laughed with a fine show of teeth.

"Why," continued Calvin, replying to his own rhetorical question, "I tells you wheeah they is—they isn't nowheahs! That's wheeah they is!"

THE evidence of Calvin's pocketed fingers corroborated his notion that he still had the six bits Judge Green had paid him that morning for mowing the judicial lawn. Calvin, as it happened, saw mighty little of the wherewithal, being rather unfavorably known among white folks as "about the laziest dardy in town." He had been a time-server for three weeks to make the necessary money to buy the natty gray suit he was now wearing. He had done no work since obtaining the fine raiment except the lawn-mowing this morning. Acquiring the suit had left him elegant but very languid, very averse to causing his brow again to bead from honest toil. He was tired, very tired.

Now, if he was to treat Caroline at the Perfection Ice Cream Parlor, it would entail more labor to replenish his pocket: for no gentleman could afford to be absolutely without spending-money. Even if it were only two bits, a great gulf yawned between him who possessed it and him who ignobly possessed it not. Calvin was torn for a moment between ambition and conservation. But it was a quick, sharp tearing, and there was no question about ambition winning.

"It's a powful wa'm aft'noon, Mis' Tobie," said Calvin softly. "An' that bein' the case, what would yo'-all say to a dish of ice cream?"

The lady proved anything but loath. Three minutes later they were seated upon opposite sides of a little table in the shady depths of the Perfection Ice Cream Parlor. Worse fate, the lady was ordering Happy Holiday Perfection Combination Sundae—thirty-five cents. Calvin became swiftly preoccupied with mental arithmetic. Suppose, as indeed wasn't unlikely, Caroline hinted at another? His arithmetical equipment stood the strain. Twice thirty-five was seventy. He was for the moment in a quandary.

Finally he decided upon lemon phosphate—five cents, and determined to sip it very slowly: with great care it might outlast two sundaes.

"It's been troubled with indigestion," he explained. "Hit's docte' he say drink lemon phosphate. Hit's powful good fo' digestion, he say."

Mrs. Tobie giggled. "It oughter be," she said. "It's powful thin food. It wont give yo' no gout, Miste' Plummer, that's possolutely sho'."

Calvin laughed uneasily and changed the subject.

"So the 'surance company done decided that Miste' Tobie was fo' ce'tain deceased?" he inquired.

Mrs. Tobie nodded. "Uh-huh! It was jes' like that Ahthuh Alexande' pusson to go off an' be secretive 'bout dyin'. Theeah was a time when I jes' 'bout completely despaied of eve' gettin' that 'surance money, Miste' Plummer. Fo' a yeah and a half he done held me out of my rights, when with jes' a little mo' carefulness I might have had the 'surance money the ve'y day of his demise. That's what carelessness does. But then, that Ahthuh Alexande' neve' did show no consideration!"

MRS. TOBIE had been quite a topic about town for a long time. Eighteen months previously her care-free spouse had disappeared over night from the stern-wheel steamer *River Belle*. To Caroline he was worth about ten dollars a month alive and one thousand dollars spot cash dead. It was a well-known fact that he couldn't swim. It seemed highly improbable that, gathering momentum as he stoked, he had flung himself along with a four-foot length of cottonwood in the furnaces of the *River Belle* and been incinerated. Neither was he naturally of a secretive or deserting nature. He was on the contrary an amiable, omnipresent, uxorious person, who had to be driven from his home to his work. He was the last person on earth that one might expect to encounter in a port of missing men.

In view of all this, it seemed needlessly cruel in the 'surance company to require something in the nature of visible remains.

There were a number of young negroes, not so particular as the 'surance company, quite ready to step into Mr. Tobie's shoes at the risk of bigamy—but they were not, in Caroline's eyes, upon the eligible list. Those who might be eligible—notably Calvin Plummer and his rival, husky young George Washington Sparks—seemed, however, to regard Mrs. Tobie with the waiting eye. The very personal charm of these young gentlemen had rendered them, through vast experience, cautious. Mrs. Tobie with the 'surance money of the late

Arthur Alexander was no doubt a fine catch. Without it she was more likely to be an expense. She was an elegant dresser. She had her own ideas upon the subject of husbands. She liked them to be "puvidin'." So Calvin and George, without relinquishing their status as suitors, had nevertheless let it be understood that, with a vast respect for their country's marriage laws, they were waiting proof of Caroline's singly blessed state before actually committing themselves.

The rumor was afloat that this morning one thousand dollars had been deposited to the dusky charmer's credit in the First National Bank.

"So," said Caroline, "though naturally I is not an onfeelin' pusson, I was relieved to heah that the comp'ny finally accepted the demise of my fo'me' husband."

"How come?" asked Calvin curiously. "How come they do?"

"Two nigge's 'long the levee 'bove Jackson's Bend done confess that the body come 'shore that same week, and they bury him. An' with what proof they give, the comp'ny done give up the 'sputifyin'. They see, I reckon, how it aint no mo' use."

"Um-m," said Calvin. "I'se pow'ful glad to heah 'bout that, Mis' Tobie. I done been waitin' fo' them proofs fo' a long time now."

Mrs. Tobie scooped up the last succulent spoonful of milky syrup and chopped nuts, and smiled so amiably that the edge on her words escaped Calvin.

"Yes, Miste' Plummer, yo' has."

"An' now, Ca'line," pursued Calvin, "I jes' wants to say to yo'—I jes' wants to say—to say I been—"

Mrs. Tobie laughed. "Then yo' bette' say it faster than what yo' is! I is due at the Ladies Civic and Economic Society in prezackly ten minutes."

CALVIN cast a quick look about. They were seated in a curtained alcove and no one else was in sight. He hitched his chair rapidly around the table and seized the resplendent lady's plump hand.

"Ca'line," he said fervidly, "I's been in love with yo' fo' the longest time! I been wantin' to ask yo' eve' since yo' husband got hisself drowneded, would yo' marry me. I would've axed yo' a long time ago, only Lawyer Bricker, he say to me: 'Calvin Plumme', is yo' a-hankerin' fo' to spen' the next twenty yea' of youah life a-breakin' rock in the quarries? Because,

he say, 'that is the penalty yo' will get ef yo' commits brigamy. An' fu'the'mo', ef that Tobie pusson aint dead—an' the 'surance comp'ny, what is lots wiser than what yo' is, it say he aint dead, not legal dead—why, it wont be only yo' what will go to prison, but Mis' Tobie, she will go too. Yo' take my advice,' he say, 'an' wait till yo' heahs that the 'surance comp'ny is sho' 'nough satisfied that Tobie is dead, an' then yo' will be safe, because ef the 'surance comp'ny don't know ef he is dead or not, theah aint nobody what could know, because they makes it a business to know.'

"So out of consideration fo' you, Ca'line, I sets back an' bides my time. But ef the comp'ny say Tobie is sho' 'nough dead, I is satisfied. I axes yo', will yo' marry me?"

"I likes you mighty well, Calvin," responded the lady.

"I is pow'ful glad to heah yo' say that," said Calvin.

"But I is a practical pusson. I'se got to look at this matte' fum all sides, an' see what is bes'. I don't anticipate no difficulty gettin' myself a husban'. In fact, I'se had fough pupposals already today."

"Fough?" gasped Calvin, alarmed.

"Uh-huh—fough," said the lady firmly. "Two of 'em was fum no-count nigge's what I jes' give 'em theah walkin' pape's without no fu'the' traffickin'. The others—well, I is jes' going to say to yo' what I say to Geo'ge Washin'ton Spa'ks 'bout a hour ago.

"It aint like I was a poo' pusson, what aint able to take keer of he'self. I'se a puffedly independent woman. I'se been married befo', too. Theah aint no novelty 'bout bein' married fo' me. Theah was lots of times when I was married to that Ahthub Alexande' that I wish I wasn't. Theah was plenty of spells when I would have been glad to be shet of him.

"So I made up my mind to this: It costs seventeen dollahs and fough bits to get divo'ced in this State. That's a fack. Lawyer Bricker he tol' me jes' yeste'day. So I makes up my mind that the fust el'gible gentleman what comes to me with seventeen dollahs an' fough bits in his hand fo' my divo'cement pape's, in case I don't like him as well, afte' tryin' him out, as I think I do, and what can also show me that he has a good job what will fu'nish him with the wheahwithal to puvide liberally fo' my daily necessities—that's the man what I is gwine fo' to marry."

"Uh-huh!" said Calvin thoughtfully.

"So," concluded the lady, rising, and loosening her hand without visible emotion, "ef yo' means business, Calvin, yo' knows my platfo'm."

"Ye'm," said Calvin sadly.

"I mus' be goin'," said Mrs. Tobie, smiling brightly. "Thank yo' fo' yo' delicious refreshments, Miste' Plummer!"

"Doa' mention 'em, Mis' Tobie," said Calvin abstractedly.

Seventeen dollars and four bits! He had never had so much visible wealth at one time in his life. Still, thrice he'd had over ten dollars. It was possible. But a job? Jobs were scarcer than hen's teeth right now. There were lots more men than jobs. Besides, Calvin wasn't considered possible timber for any job but the odd job. White folks wouldn't think of hiring him. And what colored employer—

"I unde'stand," continued Mrs. Tobie, "havin' heard him say so a couple of days ago, that Pa'son Crackweather was prognosticatin' ove' hirin' a clerk fo' his grocery store."

"Is that so?" demanded Calvin eagerly. "Is yo' tell that triffin' Geo'ge 'bout that too?"

"No, I isn't exackly tell him," said Mrs. Tobie. "I isn't exackly tell him, but—"

BUT Calvin was gone.

His idol's avowal for self-determination hadn't disturbed him very much. He knew that he had a wheedling way with him that was very effective with women. He had a really supreme confidence in his ability to get his fingers on quite a lot of those dollars if the lady married him.

The two conditions—seventeen dollars and four bits and a job—summed up together verged upon the onerous. But a thousand dollars was a mighty lot of money. He didn't know exactly how much it was. He did know, however, that he had frequently accomplished miracles with five dollars. And a thousand—how many times five was a thousand?

He paused at Lawyer Bricker's door and inquired.

"Two hundred times, Cal. Two hundred!" And the shyster lawyer's face broke into a thousand laugh-wrinkles.

"Two hunderd!" said Calvin, awed. "Golly, that am a pow'ful lot of money—, it am, fo' a fack!"

And forthwith he hot-footed it toward Parson Crackweather's little store.

Parson Crackweather plied competently

two trades. He led ably the souls of three hundred hectically religious parishioners of the 'Leventh Avenue Church, and for this he drew annually one hundred and fifty dollars. And mark the wording: *he drew it*. Like every man nobly possessed of a great cause, he put *his* whole soul into his preaching, and he made it most efficacious.

If it be true that he put his whole soul into his preaching, it is likewise true that he was a man with two souls,—a dual personality,—because he put his whole soul, too, into his grocery business.

Not to split hairs, Parson Junius Scipio Crackweather, a portly gentleman of some thirty-four years of age, was a business' genius. If he had been born white and dropped down in another environment, there would have been another name to be added to the list of millionaires. The name of Crackweather would have been as familiar as the name of Rockefeller. As it was, he had done very well where fate had put him. The town was full of highly respected white folks whom he could have bought and sold.

In the world of colored people he was a brainy man among children. He had figured prominently as an official in all sorts of benevolent, charitable and financial societies, and he had emerged from them all with well-lined but inconspicuous pockets. He never talked about his money; he never flashed any of it. So, though Calvin knew, by repeated hearsay evidence, that he was rich, he had no idea of the real extent of his wealth.

Calvin didn't know, either, that Parson Crackweather was seriously considering the purchase of an automobile, that he was about to pause in his steady flow of acquisition and spend something. He didn't know that the sun of generosity, awakened from its winter by a woman's winsomeness and desirability, was shining upon the hitherto ungenerous heart of Junius Scipio, and that it had warmed that heart to the point where the Parson waited only the accumulation of two hundred dollars more or so before purchasing a real car.

Calvin did know, though, that he wanted the job badly, and that he'd have to hurry if he beat George Washington Sparks to it.

He found Parson Crackweather behind his counter, arrayed not in the clerical broadcloth, but in the merchant's apron. The Parson was weighing out sugar for Mrs. Wickie—sugar and two unobtrusive

black fingers that wouldn't mount up to more than an extra ounce or two. When he had taken Mrs. Wickie's offering, he turned to Calvin.

"What yo' want?" he inquired.

"I heah that yo' is wantin' a clerk," said Calvin.

"Huh—don't need no clerk. Is a clerk gwine to bring me mo' business?"

THIS started something in Calvin's brain as the Parson had known it would. "I is got a lot of friends, Pa'son," he said. "I wouldn't be 'sprised what they would trade mos' any place what hired me."

"Is yo' had any 'sperience?" demanded Crackweather.

"No—but I is pow'ful quick learnin'," said Calvin. "Judge Green he say I's the quickes' nigge' in town."

"I heah him say that," said Crackweather pleasantly. "He say yo' the quickes' one to quit wo'kin', and the quickes' one to ax fo' yo' pay, an' the quickes' one to git col' feet, ef the wo'k is hard."

"Yo' is fokin', Pa'son."

"I don't nevah joke," said Crackweather positively. "You mus' be thinkin' of some other' man."

"Then yo' don't want a clerk? Mis' Tobie, she say—"

"Huh! Might want a clerk—mebbe. Don't know as I wants yo'. Clerks is plenty. I can git inexperienced clerks any time. Aint no trouble 'tall 'bout that. 'Sides, George Washington—"

"I makes a lot sma'ter clerk than Geo'ge," said Calvin desperately.

"That so? How I know that?"

"I *show* yo'! Yo' jes' lemme have a chance fo' to show yo'!"

"Well," said Crackweather reluctantly, "I tell yo', Calvin. It's thisaway: I don't know as I want a clerk nohow. But I *mought* use a clerk, ef I could git one what was A Number One. He'd have to be 'sperienced clerk, though."

"Yo' mought do—or Geo'ge mought. I don't know. I aint got no way how I can know. Cou'se, I wants the one of yo' what is the bestest. That stands to reason."

"Cou'se," admitted Calvin.

"Well, I tell yo' then, what I *mought* do. I mought give yo' job as 'prentice, an' try yo' out."

"'Prentice—what's 'prentice?" demanded Calvin suspiciously.

His suspicions were confirmed. "'Pren-

tice," explained Crackweather, "is somebody what is learnin' the trade. He aint get paid the regular wages till he is comp'tent to do the work same as a 'sperienced clerk. But soon as he is 'sperienced, then he gets regular wages, same as anybody."

"Huh!" said Calvin doubtfully. "How long time it take to get 'sperienced?"

"Not ve'y long—fo' a smart man like yo' say yo' is," responded Crackweather benevolently but vaguely.

"An' how much is 'prentice pay?"

"Three-fifty a week," said Crackweather.

"An' regular pay?"

"Seven-fifty."

"Uh-huh! All right, I takes the job. I starts workin' tomorrow mo'ning."

"Geo'ge is startin' tomorrow mo'ning," said Crackweather.

Calvin emitted a groan.

"But I tell yo' what I *mought* do," Crackweather resumed. "I mought let Geo'ge work a week and then yo' a week, tu'n about, an' by the time yo' is both 'sperienced, I would know which on yo' was the bette' clerk. How that suit yo'?"

It didn't suit Calvin at all, but he wasn't an unreasonable dardy. Beggars couldn't be choosers. In the face of necessity he could compromise, to his last button.

"That suits me."

"Then Geo'ge takes the first tu'n, and yo' starts working week fum tomorrow," said Crackweather. "An' of cou'se, I specks the one what has the most folks comin' in to trade with him is the one what has got the best chance of landin' this job puma-nent."

"That Geo'ge," said Calvin bravely, "I speck he isn't got mo'n 'bout half as many friends as what I is. 'Bout the only good thing I can say fo' that Geo'ge, anyway—he husky. I *show* yo', Pa'son!"

LEAVING his employer, Calvin started off down Parker Street. At the fourth house he paused with calm assurance. He knocked, and the door was opened by a good-looking young girl, Miss Sally Pinafer. At the sight of Calvin Plummer a broad delighted smile broke archly over her features.

"Come right in, Miste' Plummer," said the dusky damsel cordially. "I'se pow'ful glad to see yo'!"

"Thank yo', Miss Pinafer," said Calvin, bowing and scraping in his most elegant manner. "Nuffin' would give me mo' pleas-

ure than to step in and chat with yo', but this afte'noon unfo'tunately I is a wo'kin' man. I is jes' come to axe yo' a favo', Miss Pinafer."

"Sho'ly, sho'ly, Miste' Plummer. I is delighted to grant yo' a favo'. Jes' mention it, please!"

"I is wo'kin' in Pa'son Crackweather's store, beginning a week fum tomorrow, an' I wishes to bespeak yo' custom fum that time on, Miss Pinafer. Ouah intentions—afte' that time—is to show the customer every consideration. Ouah motto is: 'We aims to please.' I simply wants to say that we appreciates yo' past custom, and would be glad to welcome yo' in the future—afte' a week fum tomorrow!"

"Sho'ly, Miste' Plummer!" cried the girl gayly. "Sho'ly!" Then she added reproachfully: "It's been a mighty long time that we aint see yo' 'bout heah in a social way, Cal."

"I'se been a pow'ful busy man, Miss Pinafer. Yo' hasn't any idea how busy I—"

"Is yo' got a 'gagement fo' Friday night?" inquired the girl softly but firmly.

And Calvin, knowing he was caught, perforce shook his head.

"No'm, Miss Pinafer. I is free fo' Friday evenin'."

"Then I axes yo' fo' dinner that night," she said promptly.

"Yes'm, thank yo'. I'll sho' be heah," said Calvin uneasily. There was something in her eye that told him he'd better be, if he wanted the Pinafer trade. Well, it had to be. Of course, she was a very attractive girl, much more charming than Caroline Tobie. But then, she hadn't a thousand dollars. He'd watch his step pretty carefully. "An' now," he concluded, "I speck I'll have to be moseyin' 'long. I'se a pow'ful busy man this aft'-noon."

He moved away in a troubled mood. Miss Pinafer liked him too well for his peace of mind.

He knocked at the second door beyond Miss Pinafer's. A very obese negress in once-blue calico opened the door and stood in it, arms akimbo, highly belligerent.

"How-do, Mis' Graham!" said Calvin ingratiatingly. "I is come to axe yo' ef yo' would trade at Pa'son—"

Majestically she stopped him. "Geo'ge Washington Spa'ks was heah an' axed me that, so they aint no use in yo' perambu-latin' round me none. Geo'ge is fough

times the man what yo' is. I neve' did have no use fo' yo' nohow. Yo' kin git right out of mah ya'd, an' yo' needn't tarry none, an' yo' needn't come back no mo'! Yo' triffin', lazy, ornery, no-'count—"

Calvin got.

The rebuff didn't particularly faze him. He had expected that. It was enemy territory. The knowledge that George was always just ahead of him, however, was discomfiting. He redoubled his energy and his persuasions. By nightfall of the second day he left pretty thoroughly convinced that he had George well beaten.

TIME dragged: three months passed.

By every reasonable arithmetical formula Calvin Plummer should have passed the seventeen-fifty mark long since. He had worked faithfully for three months and should have had all sorts of money to show for it, but—he had precisely eleven dollars and forty-three cents. He and George were running neck-and-neck, for George had twelve dollars and two cents. George's occasional stumblings into the pitfalls of gambling hadn't cost him quite as much as Calvin's more social mishaps.

Calvin had fallen for a splendid green felt hat, for a pair of terribly tan shoes and for three fine ties, one lavender, one pink and one green. Confronted by fine feathers, all the steel in his nature melted in a fiery pleasure in adornment. He was more elegant than he had ever been before.

Then Miss Sally Pinafer had cost him quite a lot, in a manner which ordinarily he wouldn't have minded, but which now was distinctly depressing. Miss Pinafer was tireless in the consumption of pink ice-cream. She had a way of happening casually upon Calvin in front of the Perfection Ice-Cream Parlor, and of somehow hypnotizing him inside, where in rapid succession she would consume one, two or even three dishes of the confection, and thus keep him poor.

Calvin was proving the truth of the infallible formula: The cost of living increases directly with the income. Still, what could he do? If he ditched the costly Miss Sally in order to distance George, he lost his star customer. The Pinafers were faithful; they never bought anything during George's week. And he dared not offend them, because each bi-weekly accounting had shown (under the Parson's very able handling) that it was still nip-

and-tuck between the two 'prentices. One week George ran a dollar or two ahead; another, Calvin was in the lead.

The Parson said he neve' would of believed theah was two colored boys nowhere what was so puffedly matched! He found it, as yet, utterly impossible to chose between them.

The Parson had his car now. The presence of a 'prentice in the store made it occasionally possible for him to get out and practice running it. He had gotten almost to the stage where timid folks were willing to take a chance with him.

Of course, neither George nor Calvin was satisfied with the state of affairs. One week's work at regular clerk's wages would have sent either of them over the top. How to get that week's regular wages was the question. The Parson was vastly conscientious about it. He would have been glad to make a decision, he said, if either of them had only distanced the other. And he would consider, he stated, that a signal victory of that sort would certainly mark the victor as ready for promotion from the apprentice class.

As a last resort Calvin earnestly considered the removal of his rival by force; but that too he gave up. George was a husky man, handy with his fists and with a knife as well. It was too dangerous, too doubtful.

Finally he decided to consult Lawyer Bricker. Lawyer Bricker, upon the presumption that this was professional advice, charged Calvin one dollar, paid in advance, and Calvin poured out his woes.

"An' he say we don't know 'nough to be clerks yet," he concluded. "He say we is got a lot to learn. But 'bout the onliest thing we aint done is put the sand in the sugar, an' he always do that his ownsef. I wants to ax you, is we 'titled now to be reg'lar clerks, or is we got to go on being 'prentices? An' ef you say we is 'titled to be clerks, I is gwine to make that Pa'son pussen come th'ough."

The shyter lawyer sat in wrinkled, deeply cogitant silence for a moment—for two moments—for five. Then he rose and took down from his dusty shelf a large and worn volume. It was a Latin lexicon, but it was also a mighty convincing volume to any negro, as Lawyer Bricker had had ample cause to know. His clients had a great awe of that volume. It had settled a thousand disputes out of court. He turned the pages, searching sharply with a

gnarled finger, none too clean. Presently he grunted and pointed to a line.

"There," he said, "I think that disposes of your difficulty."

Calvin eyed the finger and the page reverently.

"Yassuh—yassuh," he said. "Sho' does—sho' does!" And then, doubtfully: "Uh—what does it say, suh? I isn't got my specks with me."

"It says," replied Lawyer Bricker seriously, "that you are entitled to full and regular clerk's pay, if you can get it."

"Yassuh—yassuh!" cried Calvin delightedly. "That sho' disposes of that Pa'son pussen, don't it? Sho' does—sho' does!"

And he went out, poor creature, greatly pleased with himself and Lawyer Bricker and his information.

ONE problem remained, then: the elimination of George.

He found George also quite pleased by the legal advice, and willing, within certain limits, to be reasonable about it. George had long ago arrived at Calvin's conclusion—that so long as the Parson had two of them, he never would raise their wages. Only George had it fixed in his mind, somehow, that the proper thing was for Calvin, not himself, to be eliminated. It appeared for some time to be a deadlock.

George thought, and Calvin thought. They thought in unison and they thought separately. Then they thought some more. Finally it was the gambling instinct that came to the solution.

"I tells yo' what," said George. "They's jes' one way to decide this yeah dilemma, and that's the spo'tin' way."

"The spo'tin' way?"

"Uh-huh!" And George produced two large yellow dice from his pocket.

"Um-m-m—I don't know 'bout that!"

"It's the onliest way what they is!" insisted George.

"Um-m-m!" Calvin scratched his head thoughtfully. George was accustomed at divers times to boast that his middle name was Bones or Ivory. There might be something in it. But then he reflected that George had been trying for weeks to expand his scant wages by the gambling method, without any success. Ill luck had loved George like a brother. Calvin brightened up.

Besides, suppose he did lose? One thing about it, Calvin Plummer was one mighty tired ducky—mighty tired. Work-

ing for Parson Crackweather, and Judge Green, and Mr. Holcomb, and other calloused drivers of men wasn't exactly a sinecure. Not any sort of work was, for that matter. The longer he thought about the future, the tiredier he became. And in a minute or two even his present state seemed unendurable. No, he felt that he couldn't go on with it, at any cost!

But if he won, Mrs. Tobie intended seeing that he stuck by the job.

Oh, well! He might just possibly endure sticking by it until he had coaxed from her some of those fascinating dollars. Once he had them, let her divorce him! She was welcome!

"Um-m-m!" he said, therefore. "Mought as well, I specks. I is jes' that down-right tired, I don' seem to care fo' nuffin' no mo'. Don' get no time fo' nuffin'. Don' have no mo' fun. Jes' a-holdin' mah poor ol' nose to the grindstone, night an' day, till I'se jes' a-achin' fum mah haid to mah feet. I aint carin' much ef I do lose!"

Nevertheless, three minutes later, when, via the sporting route, George Washington Sparks won the job and the right to the lady, Calvin Plummer rose and went away from that spot in a state of almost morbid depression.

Deep dejection flowed over his soul in great and increasing waves. Gloom filled the bright Sunday morning air. He was a fool. To have staked every thing upon a throw of the dice! A madman, no less! Jobless and bitter, he passed down Eleventh Street, uncomforted by his own spick-and-span magnificence, uncheered by the ten dollars and forty-three cents in his pocket. For him truly no sun shone and no bird sang. For him no—

GOOD-MO'NIN', Miste' Plummer!" Calvin glanced up and swept off his hat with a melancholy grace.

"Mo'nin', Miss Pinafer."

Miss Pinafer giggled and gurgled deliciously. "Is yo' heah the big news?" "News? I aint heah no news," said Calvin gloomily.

"I'se gwine to be bride—smaid!" said Miss Pinafer, with a long, provocative pause between the two syllables.

"Oh! Is yo'?" said Calvin indifferently.

"Uh-huh. Sho' is!" laughed Sally.

"Uh-m! Who is gettin' married now?"

"Pa'son Crackweather!"

"Huh! Ol' Crackweather gettin' pow'ful gay, aint he?" said Calvin, grinning

coniemptuously. "Ol' skinflint! Gettin' mighty gay!"

"I'se astonished to heah yo' speak that-away 'bout yo' employer, Miste' Plummer!" said Sally.

"Huh! Aint no employer of mine!" said Calvin shortly. "I quit him. Aint nuffin' would hire me to wo'k fo' him no mo':"

Then he inquired casually: "Who he gwine to marry, Miss Sally?"

"Ho!" cried Sally. "He gwine to marry my ve'y bestes' friend. Cou'se, we had a little misunde'standin' fo' a while, but yest'-day she come round to me and 'splain herself, and now we is the bestes' friends once mo', and I is gwine to be bride'smaid at high noon tomorrow."

"Who is this lady?" asked Calvin.

"Mis' Tobie."

"Mis' Tobie!"

"Uh-huh!"

Calvin had jumped at the name as if pricked by a pin. He stood now, mouth agape, staring at Sally Pinafer likē an idiot. Suddenly his graven face became mobile. One emotion after another chased across his features. In the end, wild mirth won the steeplechase.

"Whoopee! Whoopee!" he howled.

Sally stared at him a moment coldly. "Yo' mus' be pow'ful glad 'bout something," she remarked curiously.

"I is, I is!" said Calvin, between paroxysms. "I'se pow'ful glad I isn't Geo'ge Washington Spa'ks. Cause why? Cause that pusson is 'bout to suffer a mos' 'scru-ciati'n' disappointment, Miss Sally!"

"That so?" inquired Miss Pinafer.

"Sho' is—sho' is!" cried Calvin gayly. "When I lef' him, 'bout fifteen minutes ago, he was all lit up with the 'spectation of bein' the second husban' of Mis' Tobie!"

After a moment he began to look at Miss Pinafer with an unprejudiced eye. Mrs. Tobie being now inaccessible, he could do that. Miss Pinafer was a mighty personable young woman. Following the lure of the widow's gold hadn't brought him much of anything but work and trouble, after all. Sally had a good place with Judge Green now, in the kitchen. Attractive girl, too—stylish, and generous. Always had liked her.

"What yo' say," he inquired, grinning sheepishly, "to yo' and me takin' a little 'scursion up to Island Pa'k this evenin'?"

Miss Pinafer smiled at him tenderly.

"That suits me fine," she said happily. "It'll be jes' like ol' times all ove' again."

Coin of the Dead



By
Lemuel L.
DeBra

WE sat in a booth of the *Hang Far Low*, my good friend Chan Yin Do and I, munching Shensi almonds and rice cakes and sipping a most fragrant Dragonbeard tea. From the street below, the main avenue of San Francisco's Chinatown, came the weird strains of a Chinese orchestra; and I knew that the funeral procession, the services of which we had witnessed, was passing. When we could no longer hear the discordant wail of the flageolets nor the jarring clang of cymbals, Chan Yin Do put his tiny bowl aside, smacked his lips with satisfaction and answered the question I had put to him.

"Yes, it is quite true that in some parts of China it was once the custom to bury sums of money with the dead; and although many of those tombs have been looted by you foreigners, there yet remains much treasure in the old graves of the Middle Kingdom."

I refilled our bowls with the steaming Dragonbeard, and passed the cigarettes to Chan Yin Do.

"Why do you say all the looting was done by foreigners?" I inquired politely. "You know many of the younger Chinese have abandoned the superstitions of the older generation. I believe I read once that in a certain province, I have forgotten just where, revolutionists planned

to finance their movement by robbing the graves of that 'coin of the dead.'"

Chan Yin Do nodded, and an odd look came into his slant, black eyes. With a long, polished nail he flicked the ash from his cigarette, and as he raised his arm the flowing sleeve of his satin blouse fell back and disclosed a bracelet of finest Yunnan jade.

"That would be very wicked and foolish," he said. "The money could not be recovered without disturbing the bones of the buried; and, as anyone knows, great misfortune would befall the one who did such a sacrilegious act; and, what is still worse, evil spirits would pursue and bring ill luck to the family of the one whose bones were disturbed, even though many generations had intervened. Only when the bones of one's ancestors lie in peace can one have a propitious *fung shui*."

To this, I made no reply. We sat a moment in silence.

"Still, it has been done," Chan Yin Do admitted, finally. "Once there was in San Francisco a young man of the family of Lee, named Wah Sin, who, because he had gone to an American school, thought he was very smart and that the older Chinese were very foolish. One time he read in your books about the ancient custom of burying money with the dead in China; and, remembering how he had seen such

things in his childhood, he went back to the Middle Kingdom to rob the graves. He thought he would very easily become a wealthy man. And he—he found—

Chan Yin Do hesitated. I summoned a waiter and directed him to fetch more tea and cigarettes; and while Chan Yin Do, with noisy relish, sipped at the steaming tea, I waited in silence. I wanted to hear what happened to Lee Wah Sin when he defied the religious beliefs of his people and went back to his native land to steal that "coin of the dead."

Presently Chan Yin Do lighted another cigarette. Then he began:

LEE WAH SIN was the son of a fish-monger whose stall was on Clay Street and who was a very honest and industrious merchant. Old Lee wanted his son to learn the fish and shrimp business, which is quite profitable when one knows how to evade the foolish laws of the foreign devils; but the boy was very unfilial and disobedient, as are so many of the younger generation.

"My stomach rebels at the sight of your filthy shop!" he told his father one day. "When I see you coming home for evening rice with a noisome gunny-sack about your middle and fish-scales on your slippers and a basket of fish-heads on your arm, I am ashamed to admit to my fine friends that that smelly old man is my honorable father."

"But one must do something," spoke up his mother who hoped in her heart that the boy would become almost anything save a cleaner of fish and a sheller of shrimps.

"Yes," agreed Lee Wah Sin, "that is quite true. So I shall go to an American school and learn the wisdom of the *fan quai*; and then I shall earn money easily like old Soo Hoo Nam Art who, because his stomach is big with wisdom, does nothing but cut pieces from the *fan quai* newspapers and then write them in our language for the *Chinese Daily World*."

Old Lee was very angry because of his son's perverseness; and he would have gotten the boy a sound beating with bamboo, which he richly deserved. But the boy was very strong and wilful, and the old father had lost his strength from much opium-smoking, and a strange disease which many fish-cleaners get had attacked his eyes and made him almost blind. So while old Lee sputtered angrily, Wah Sin

left the house and went whistling down the street to play billiards.

One day when Lee Wah Sin had learned so much from the American books that he had almost forgotten his "Thousand-Word Classics" and the other things his old Chinese tutor had taught him, he picked up a foreign-devil book that told about Chinese customs. The writers of those foolish books think our customs very strange; but, as anyone should know, they are not strange at all. Lee Wah Sin thought the book very amusing indeed; for he had come to think that he was very smart and he laughed at the things the old Chinese do.

In the book, he read how the old Chinese always have a geomancer select the burial ground so that the evil spirits will not molest the dead; how we do not build houses or go on journeys unless the geomancers agree that the time is propitious; how we worship our ancestors who have gone, instead of giving all to the new generation which is here; and he read about many other customs which my people in the Middle Kingdom have followed faithfully for four thousand years and more, but which you white foreign devils, because you are so young, and hence very ignorant, think quite foolish.

And among those customs which Lee Wah Sin read about in the book was the one of burying money with our dead. It reminded him, as I have told you, of how, when he was a child in the Middle Kingdom, he had often seen sums of money placed on the altar with the ceremonial meats and buried with the dead.

"Now, instead of burying that money with those who are dead and, therefore, know nothing, how much better if it were given to the young men and young women for fine clothes," reasoned Lee Wah Sin. "Haie, I wish I had some of it! There must be quite a fortune in those old burial grounds! There are many, many millions of people in the Middle Kingdom; but the number that walk the earth is but a handful compared with the number of those who lie in the ground. If I could get even a part of that 'spirit money' that lies with those crumbling bones, I would be very rich."

So in the days that followed, Lee Wah Sin thought much about the money that lay in the moldy graves of his ancestors; but he said nothing about the plan that was taking shape in his scheming heart.

It was several moons later that the great opportunity came to Lee Wah Sin. An American importing company wanted a Chinese youth with an English education to go to Canton for them to act as buyer. Lee Wah Sin lacked much of having completed his education, but he could speak English with a very glib tongue. He obtained the position, and sailed on the first steamer.

He had been in Canton only a month when he asked permission to visit his father's people who lived in the interior on the Si-kiang to the west of Canton. His employers did not like to let him go; but Lee Wah Sin was very obstinate, and on that same day he obtained passage on a *ho-tau* that was leaving for the up-river villages.

Since he thought he was a very shrewd fellow, Lee Wah Sin dressed now like his own people; and he pretended to be one of them, although all the time he was laughing at them and at their customs.

IN the months that had passed since Lee Wah Sin first thought of going to China to steal the money that had been buried with the dead, he had made a definite plan. He remembered that, many years before, he had seen his father's elder brother laid away with the ceremonial meats and quite a sum of money. So Lee Wah Sin had planned to go first to their native village and steal the money from his uncle's tomb. If this venture proved successful, it would give him capital and confidence to continue his undertaking.

"If I find only a few strings of copper *cash* in each grave, I shall soon become a rich man as riches go in China," thought Lee Wah Sin to himself as he sat on the deck of the *ho-tau*, listening to the chanting song of the boatmen.

Thus it was that when Lee Wah Sin arrived at the village of the Lees, he sought some one who could tell him of the family of Lee; and so he came that morning to my father's house, for the villagers told him that at the house of Chan he could obtain food and lodging and could learn about his own people. My father was a very old man, and he remembered the father of Wah Sin very well. When he learned that old Lee had prospered in the land of the white foreign devils and that the son had a well-filled purse, my father took him in and charged him only a trifle more than was the custom.

So Lee Wah Sin staid with us, spending his time wandering around the village and into the fields. He visited many of the family of Lee; but he soon learned that they were much more interested in the money in his purse than in him.

Then one day Lee Wah Sin said to one of the family of Lee:

"On the morrow I must begin my journey back to Canton. I have already told you how I promised my honorable father that I would visit the burial ground of the Lees and make sure that the sepulchre of my father's father and of my father's elder brother has not been disturbed by marauding hands. So today I ask that you go with me and point out the place where lie the bones of my honorable uncle and grandfather, that I may keep the promise I have given."

Now the Lees thought this a very generous and filial thing; so, for a small sum, one of them guided Lee Wah Sin through the pulse fields to the low, rocky hills where, for many generations, those of the family of Lee had been interred. It was a very propitious spot, high, and free from dampness. The graves were dug in the sides of the soft rock; and, after the coffin, with the ceremonial meats and the "spirit money" had been placed therein, the opening had been closed with rocks and sealed with clay from the river. Lee Wah Sin was very loud in his praises of the Lees for the way they had cared for the burial ground of their ancestors; but, secretly, he was thinking how easy it would be to find the place at night and to break into the sepulchre of his uncle.

We thought nothing of it that evening, my father and I, when Lee Wah Sin, as was his custom, went out shortly after dark, saying he would walk by the river; nor did we suspect anything unusual when he returned somewhat late and went directly to bed without speaking to anyone. It was not until morning rice that we knew something was wrong. Lee Wah Sin did not arise and eat with us. When my father went to call him, he found Lee Wah Sin still in bed, very green in his face, and moaning with pain. Seeing that one of Lee Wah Sin's arms was badly swollen, my father examined it. The arm was broken.

"How did this happen, Lee Wah Sin?" demanded my father. "Why did you not tell me last night?"

"I—I fell over the river-bank onto the

rocks," Lee Wah Sin replied. "I did not tell you because I was not sure it was broken."

"That was very foolish," my father scolded him. "Surely you must have known it was broken. Now the arm is badly swollen; and it will be much more difficult to mend."

So my father sent me quickly to Lung Nim's to buy some *Leung-Tsoy-Suen Tit-Dar Yenk Tsau*, which, as anyone knows, is a very wonderful remedy when one's bones are broken; and he called in old Doctor Ng Poon Gee who, since it was seven o'clock when he arrived, gave Lee Wah Sin seven large pills and put seven healing plasters on his broken arm. I heard my father and Doctor Ng Poon Gee talking in low voices where Lee Wah Sin could not hear them. They said something I could not quite understand; but it was about the length of Lee Wah Sin's purse and the length of time he would probably be ill.

INSTEAD of being well the next day, Lee Wah Sin was much worse. He had a very bad fever, and he talked foolish words and would not eat. My father shook his head, and Doctor Ng Poon Gee shook his head; and they agreed that Lee Wah Sin must have done something very wicked indeed.

Then one day, when Lee Wah Sin had been sick a long time, although his fever had been cured with a medicine my father made of two kinds of serpents, a buffalo's foot, ginseng and rice spirits, a Lee man came to our door and asked for my father. I remember the Lee man spoke very angrily:

"*Aih-yah*, bad luck has fallen upon the family of Lee. The riverbank on which we have had our hog-house for many seasons has caved in, and we have lost three hogs. A strange disease has attacked our ducks, and nine have already died. At the same time, a son was born to one of the wives of Lee Gow; but, although the child was taken quickly to the river and washed, an evil spirit stopped its nostrils, and the child died."

"Ts, ts! What misfortune!" sympathized my father. "Have you made the propitiatory offerings?"

"We have," replied the Lee man; "but, as you very well know, such misfortunes could come only from a bad *fung-shui*. So we sent one of the family of Lee to our

burial ground to see if, perchance, water which mildews the bones had seeped into the graves; or, what would be much worse, to learn if any enemy had disturbed the bones of our ancestors."

"*Haie*, that would be a terrible thing!" exclaimed my father, drawing away from the Lee man, and looking about him fearfully. "What did you find?"

"We found," cried the Lee man, fiercely, "that some one has broken into a sepulchre of the Lees and scattered the bones. It must have been done at night, for the opening had been very poorly closed, as though the one who did it worked in darkness. Now, as you very well know, distinguished and venerable Chan, there is no one in the village who would do such a wicked thing. We believe it was done by our cousin, Lee Wah Sin, who has forgotten the good his father taught him and remembers only the evil he has learned in the land of the white foreign devils. Only a few days ago, Lee Wah Sin had Lee Gum's boy show him the way to the very grave that has been disturbed. We know that Lee Wah Sin was staying under your roof, but we have heard that he has not been seen for several days. Is not his flight sufficient proof of his guilt? So I have come to you, honorable Chan, to ask if you know whence Lee Wah Sin has fled."

When the Lee man had finished speaking, my father, as was his custom, smoked a pipe in silence. Then, blowing the ashes from the bowl, he shook his head sadly, and clicked his tongue.

"Ts, ts! What misfortune!" he exclaimed. "I am very sorry for you; but I do not know if I can help you. Perhaps by tomorrow this time I may have news for you. Yes, on reflection, I am sure that if I had a few handfuls of *cash* to hire errand boys, I could have some very good gossip for you tomorrow."

So the Lee man gave my father the money. And when the Lee man had gone, I said:

"Honorable father, I wish you would permit me to earn a few of those *cash*. And if you need another errand boy, I could get Wong Sam for you."

My father frowned at me. "You are very stupid, Yin Do," he said.

Then he put the whole of the *cash* into his own purse, and went into the room where lay Lee Wah Sin. Wondering why my father had thought me stupid, I sat

down close by the door and listened. And almost at once I heard Lee Wah Sin exclaim:

"Oh, distinguished and excellent Chan, surely your liver is large with benevolence! I heard what the Lee man said; and I know how you have protected me. But, sir, it is true, all true, what the Lee man said. I have had much time to meditate while lying here; and I know now that I have been very foolish and wicked. What can I do, sir? How can I escape the righteous wrath of the Lees?"

My father was silent a long time. I could hear the sputtering of his long pipe, and I could hear him blowing the ashes from the bowl.

"It is a very difficult matter," he said at length. "Perhaps I can help you; but first tell me: Why did you do this terrible thing?"

Then Lee Wah Sin told my father the whole story, as I have told it to you. He told my father how he had read in the book of the "spirit money" that lay in the graves of China, and how he had planned to rob those graves.

"SO I went back that night to the grave of my father's elder brother," said Lee Wah Sin, "and with a stout spade I opened the sepulchre. With my flashlight, which I brought with me from San Francisco, I searched around the coffin on the rocky floor; but I could not find the money I sought. Then, finally, I turned the coffin over, and there I saw many coins.

"I gathered the coins and put them in a bag I had brought for the purpose; and, as I gathered them, I thought what a foolish custom it is to bury money with the dead, and what a foolish belief it is that any harm will come of taking that 'spirit money.'

"I was still picking up coins when a strange thing happened. My flashlight, for no reason that I knew, went out.

"And then, while I knelt there in the darkness, I heard the rattle of a stone outside the grave. Thinking that some one had discovered me, I hastened out. It was very bright with starlight. There was no sound. There was nothing that I could see that could have caused that stone to move.

"But that was not all. As I looked down at the willows by the river-bank I saw a most terrible sight, and I heard a fearful sound. Those willows, honorable Chan, were tossing and swaying; and I heard a

noise like the sobbing and moaning of winter winds through dead branches. Yet there was no wind!

"I began to feel very strange; and my stomach grew cold. It seemed that the air all about me was moving with the angry spirits of the Lees. I looked back into that dark grave; and a great fear took hold of me. I dared not enter that sepulchre again.

"So I hastily covered the opening; then, with the spade in one hand and the sack of 'spirit money' in the other. I walked my way in great haste and in fear. There were noises all about me; yet I could see no one. The tall grass of the foot-hills billowed like an angry sea; yet there was no wind.

"I started to run; and it was then I fell. I stumbled; yet the path was smooth and there was no reason why I should have stumbled; and I fell over the river-bank to the rocks below. I knew my arm was broken, but I was afraid to tell you.

"Yes, I have been very foolish and wicked," concluded Lee Wah Sin. "While the fever was on me, I had visions of the wrong I have done. The old Chinese are right: The bones of one's ancestors must not be disturbed. It is because I have done this wicked thing that misfortune has fallen upon the Lees. It is because of my evil deed that I have been lying here ill. I have been punished; and it is proper that I should have been punished. So I ask you, venerable Chan, what can I do? If the Lee men find me here, they will surely slay me."

I was very glad when Lee Wah Sin finished his story, for it seemed that the room had become very cold and dark, and I was trembling with fear. While I debated whether to run from the house into the sunshine, my father spoke:

"Ts, ts! What a wicked thing you have done! Yes, the Lee men will surely slay you. That is the law. And it is right."

There was silence then, for about the time it takes to drink a cup of tea; then my father said:

"It would help some, perhaps, if the 'spirit money' could be restored to the grave of the Lee man."

"Ah, I have it all here," spoke up Lee Wah Sin, eagerly. "It is all here in this bag by the grass-seed pillow. I have not touched it. I have not even dared to look at it. Could you, sir scholar, take it back for me?"

"It would be very dangerous," my father objected. "A Lee man might observe me and think that I was the one who had stolen the money. Besides, the spirits would be angry with me if I even so much as touched the string that binds the sack."

"Yes, that is true. But I will pay you well. I will pay you anything you ask."

"*Haie*, I could not accept money for such a thing!" exclaimed my father, haughtily. "It would be sacrilegious. Still, on reflection, I think there would be no harm in giving me a sum of money to buy offerings, for I shall have to propitiate the spirits."

"I will do that, gladly."

"Then it would be well to give the Lees a good present of money so they can rebuild the hog-house that has fallen, buy more hogs and ducks, and pay the expenses of burying the child that died."

"I will do that, too, sir," agreed Lee Wah Sin. "How much would you suggest?"

My father meditated a moment.

"Count what money you have," he said, finally. "First, pay me what is owing for your keep. Then set aside enough for your passage back to Canton. Divide the remainder into two parts: one-half for the Lees; and the other half to be used by me in making sacrifices."

FOR a time, Lee Wah Sin did not answer. Then he spoke very quietly:

"But, honorable Chan, that will leave me nothing."

"You will need nothing. You will be in Canton where you have a good position."

"Alas," cried Lee Wah Sin, "I no longer have even a position. I told my employers that I might engage in other business, and that if I did not return at a specified time, they could secure some one in my place. The appointed time for my return has passed while I lay here ill."

"Well, you will at least have your life, and that is more than you will have if the Lees discover you. On reflection, I am half a mind to turn you over to the Lees, for by helping you I am incurring the anger of the gods, and there is no profit in it for me."

"Oh, I will pay, I will pay!" cried Lee Wah Sin. "Do not turn me over to the Lee men!"

"Then it is settled," said my father. "A *ho-tau* leaves at sunrise for Canton. I will

hide you in the rice fields below the village; and when the *ho-tau* passes, you can swim out and go aboard. Now count out the money as I have directed; for the longer you wait, the angrier the spirits will be."

So Lee Wah Sin took his purse and divided the money as my father had told him. Then my father said:

"Now give me what is owing me for your keep." And Lee Wah Sin gave it to him. Then my father said:

"Now, of the remainder, give me the half that I am to use in making propitiatory offerings for the sin you have done." And this, also, was given to my father. Then my father said:

"Now give me the other half that I may send it at once to the Lees before they learn you are here and take both your life and your money." And this, Lee Wah Sin did also, thanking my father for his generous help and wise counsel.

"Now," said my father, "since I have the money in hand with which to buy the sacrificial offerings, the spirits know of my good intentions; therefore, you may now give me the bag of money you took from the grave of your father's elder brother."

Lee Wah Sin lost no time in taking the bag from beneath the grass-seed pillow and handing it to my father.

For a time, neither made speech; and I heard only the sputtering of my father's pipe, and the hissing of his breath as he blew the ashes from the bowl. Then at length he spoke; and I thought his talk was very strange and startling.

"*Haie!*" he chuckled, "you are indeed a fool, Lee Wah Sin. Your head is as empty as your purse. You have a little learning; but you have not learned enough. You were right about the money buried in our graves; and yet you were wrong. What do you think is the value of this money you found beneath the bones of your uncle?"

"Why, I did not take time to count it," replied Lee Wah Sin; "but there are several silver coins in addition to many copper *cash*. I would say the value is at least five thousand *cash*."

My father laughed uproariously. He shook the bag of jingling coins.

"It is worth about two hundred *cash*!"

Lee Wah Sin uttered a great cry, and he spoke words that were very strange to me although I have since heard foreign devil teamsters use the same words in speaking to their lazy horses.

"Let me explain," said my father. "It is true that we used to bury sums of good money with the bodies of our dead. But one time the word went about from village to village that there was to be a revolution, and that the revolution was to be financed by opening the graves and recovering this 'spirit money.' Whereupon the people reasoned that to have the graves of their ancestors profaned and to be robbed at the same time was too much; so they went quickly to all the graves and recovered the money themselves. Then they went to the gold and silver merchants and had worthless pieces of metal struck off in imitation of the real money; and they put these worthless counterfeits in the graves. Since then they use these imitations, a whole sack of which costs no more than two hundred copper *cash*; in some places they use merely little round pieces of paper. It is all the same to the spirits of the dead.

"So, Lee Wah Sin, you see now why you are a fool. The money that was buried with your uncle was long ago recovered by the Lees. All you got is this bag of worthless metal." And again my father laughed and shook the jingling sack.

AFTERWARD I learned that when my father finished speaking, Lee Wah Sin looked at him a long time; then, with a groan like that of one who is dying, or wishes to die, Lee Wah Sin turned his face to the wall.

Presently my father came out. I remember he carried in one hand the good money Lee Wah Sin had given him; and in the other hand he had the sack of "spirit money" which Lee Wah Sin had stolen. I saw him put the good money into a bag and hide it in his blouse. Then he looked long and thoughtfully at the sack of "spirit money" which he had placed on the table.

I saw my father reach out a hand to take hold of the string that was around the neck of the sack; I saw him suddenly draw back his hand, and I heard his breath hiss between his lips. Then, after awhile, he seized the cords in his trembling hands and untied the bag; and as he peered into the sack, a startled look came over his face and his hands shook so that the sack slipped from his fingers and fell, jingling, to the table.

The room, it seemed to me, had again become very dark and cold; and I was trembling with fear for I knew my father

had done a very profane and dangerous thing. I turned and fled out of the house into the sunshine by the bamboo fence.

I was there by the fence, wondering at the things I had seen and heard, when my father came to me and said:

"Go quickly with these two hundred cash to Gow Li. Tell him I desire to purchase 'spirit money' with the whole sum."

So I did as my father told me.

The next day when the Lee man called, my father said:

"I find that what you have told me regarding Lee Wah Sin is correct. He has gone. He did not go at the time you thought, but that has nothing to do with the matter. He left my house at night and hid in the rice fields below the village until morning, when he swam out and boarded a *ho-tau* for Canton."

"Then, venerable Chan, we can do nothing," cried the Lee man.

"It is a foolish man who is hasty in speech," retorted my father. "Listen well to what I have to tell you: Before he left, Lee Wah Sin gave a bag of money to my keeping. Undoubtedly, he repented of his sin and desired to make amends. Tonight, go to the grave that has been disturbed. Do not take a light, but in darkness cast this 'spirit money' into the sepulchre of the Lee man whose bones have been molested. Then quickly close the grave and seal it. If you do faithfully what I have said, your *fung shui* will become propitious and the evil spirits will no longer pursue the family of Lee."

Then, while the Lee man could not speak for joy, my father took from beneath his blouse a sack of jingling coins; and the Lee man thanked my father in a loud voice, and walked his way in haste.

I spoke up quickly:

"Honorable father, you have made a grievous mistake! You did not give the Lee man the sack of 'spirit money' that Lee Wah Sin took from his uncle's grave; you gave him the one I bought of Gow Li for the two hundred copper *cash*!"

My father jumped. He turned quickly and closed the door.

"*Haie*, you are a fool!" he cried fiercely. "Hold your tongue until you have learned wisdom!" And he scowled at me so horribly that I said no more, knowing that I must be very stupid, indeed; for, of a truth, I was about to tell my father, also, that he had forgotten to give the Lee man

the money Lee Wah Sin had left to pay for the hoghouse that fell, the hogs and ducks that were lost, and the expense of burying the child that died because of Lee Wah Sin's wicked deed.

My father went to his great bamboo chair by the table, and sat down. From his stocking he took his long, tasseled pipe; and for a time there was silence save for the sputtering of the pipe and the hissing of my father's breath as he blew the ashes from the bowl. Finally he spoke to me, more kindly:

"My son, I perceive that you are observant. That is an excellent trait. If I had not been observant I would not have noticed that the sack of 'spirit money' which Lee Wah Sin took from the grave of his uncle was all good money. That was true what I told him about the people recovering the good money that had been buried with the dead; but I recalled afterward that the Lees used to quarrel about that very thing, accusing one of not bringing back all the money they were sure had been put in the grave of a Lee. Lee Wah Sin, being more greedy than religious, searched more carefully, and found a sack of good money worth perhaps five thousand *cash*. Since the Lees have forgotten all about the money, I can keep it without any loss to them.

"Observe then, how it is more profitable to do good than to do evil!" my father concluded. "I could have given Lee Wah Sin

over to the Lee family, and they would have slain him and would have divided his money amongst themselves, which would have been of little benefit to them because there are so many Lees. So I chose to do good. I restored the *fung shui* of the Lees. I saved the life of Lee Wah Sin. And, out of it, I have made a nice profit."

AGAIN I refilled our bowls with the steaming Dragonbeard.

"And Lee Wah Sin?" I inquired. "What became of him?"

Chan Yin Do looked at me, and I was sure I saw a smile lurking in the depths of his long, black eyes.

"*Haie!*" he exclaimed softly. "That was a very good lesson for Lee Wah Sin. He fled from China and returned to San Francisco as soon as possible. He found that during his absence his father had died. Since Lee Wah Sin had given up his schooling before it could be of any real use to him, he took over his father's fish market. He is a very old man now, and they speak of him as one who observes faithfully all the old Chinese customs. If you should stand by the Restaurant of the Fragrant Flower near the hour of evening rice you will see an old man come slowly up Clay Street. He wears a noisome gunny-sack about his middle; there are fish-scales on his slippers and a basket of smelly fish-heads on his arm. That, my son, is Lee Wah Sin."

"THE BROKER OF MARRIAGES"

"THE Broker of Marriages," another picturesque and colorful story by Lemuel L. De Bra, will be a feature of the next, the November, issue of *The Blue Book Magazine*. Along with it will appear "The Second Life of Monsieur the Devil," a thrilling novelette by H. Bedford-Jones, and many short stories by Edison Marshall, Paul Annixter, George Allan England, Clarence Herbert New and others.



Little Death

by
Edison Marshall

THERE is always a gentle wind that blows through the Divide just at the fall of darkness. It comes from the snowfields, but whither it goes and where it dies no government weathermen have ever taken the trouble to determine. It does various things as it goes along—pausing here and there to wag the tops of the pine trees, like great semaphore signals to one another, brings certain smells and other messages to the senses of the wild creatures, and plays a curious song in the reeds of the river's edge. On this particular evening, Amos Hardman felt that it would also bring in the cold.

But the man didn't particularly care. It was true that as yet he had built no cabin on his recently acquired farm on the Upper Umpqua. But he had a tent on the very shore of the river, and as all campers know, a tent can be made snug and warm in the worst of weather. There were plenty of warm blankets, and there was more firewood on the hills about than any man would care to attempt to measure in a lifetime. In fact there were hundreds of miles of nothing but firewood. For one of the greatest timber belts in the world sweeps on either side of the Umpqua River of Oregon.

He would have no cause to fear the chill night that was sure to follow. It would

probably be the first frost of the fall. Leaves in a moment struck yellow and red, falling acorns and the first glint of the wings of the waterfowl—this was what frost meant to the high plateaus. It meant even more personal things to Amos Hardman. He wondered if his cattle would suffer on the range, and if his growing things would be killed. He busied himself about the little farmyard.

The chickens were going to roost, and methodically, Amos Hardman counted them. There had been a full dozen when they had mounted to their perches the previous evening. Now there were just eleven. He called into the growing shadows.

Just a moment he stood in thought; then he turned one hundred yards up the river. On the green bank he found what he was looking for—a little telltale bunch of feathers and curious dark spots on the herbage. The angry furrows grew in the man's face as he bent to examine them.

With the care of a detective he looked at the tracks in the soft dirt. He was naturalist enough to identify them at once. "A mink," he said to himself. "The low-lived little critter!"

It was all very plain. A mink—one of those bloodthirsty little slayers that have hunting-grounds on the waterways—had made short work of one of his pullets. It was the loss of a few cents, and it was even

a greater blow to his feelings. Amos shook his fist at the river.

"Hang you, I'll get you for that if it takes all winter," he cried. "You little bandit—you'll die for it yet. What a mink was ever created for is a mystery to me, anyway—the most worthless, useless, no-good thief in the world."

He turned swiftly back to his tent and obtained his shotgun; then looked up and down the shore. He thought he might catch sight of the robber. The shadows grew and deepened; and soon it became plain that even Hardman's keen eyes could no longer detect a mink's body in the reeds. He turned up the hill for a final effort, in a field that lay nearly a mile from his riverside tent.

"Most worthless critter in the world," he said to himself as he started off into the shadows. "No use to anything or anyone on earth."

BUT although Amos Hardman had eyes trained to the distances of the hills, there were many things indeed that he could not see. He had lived many years among the wild things of the forest. He was a kindly man, as mountaineers go, and not swift to condemn. Yet there were existences in the forest about him, the motives and missions of which he could not grasp. No man ever lived long enough to understand all the mysteries of the wilderness and perhaps even Little Death, the Mink, had his place in the scheme of things.

For there is a curious balance in nature. It seems to be the plan of nature that no one species may be allowed to overrun the earth. The ideal seems to be a world literally teeming with all forms of life, and that means that a certain number of foes must be created for every living form to keep the numbers of each in check. The stately cougar and the larger beasts of prey are too proud to devote much of their time and energies to the rodents and fowl and such small people, and nature soon saw the need of a new breed of meat-eaters to take care of them. So she evolved a whole family of small-sized, wiry, courageous hunters and identified them with a little gland of astonishingly potent musk in the body of each.

The weasels, the ferrets, the otters, the martens—even the despised mink was a member of this family. If Amos Hardman had thought about this fact, perhaps he

wouldn't have been so quick to condemn its existence as useless and purposeless. There were many things indeed he didn't know about Little Death; otherwise his tone might have been different. He didn't know of the hundreds of rodents, each destructive to his crops, that the mink took care of every year. And like all men, he couldn't see the unfolding of events.

If he had been able to, perhaps a moment's understanding of the mysteries of existence might have come to him. He would have known that every living creature has its mission and its place, from the buzzards that follow the dead, to old Woof the bear, grunting in the thickets. Some were created to keep the numbers of some other breed in check, some were to clear the ground of certain fast-spreading plants, but the missions of many of them are too obscure for the eyes of men to see.

Hardman didn't think about these things as he climbed the hill. He only thought about the growing chill in the air and because he was only human, he listened to the stir of the waking forest life about him.

LITTLE Death was clever at many things; but most of all he surpassed in keeping out of sight. It was the first lesson his mother taught him, long ago in the grass nest beside the river. "Never show yourself till just before the leap," the old she-mink had said. And perhaps, anticipating even then the rapture of ripping out a jugular vein with his ivory teeth, his wicked little eyes had glowed like two rubies in the velvet fur. For the leap of a mink is as swift, as savage a thing as is to be seen in all the savage wilderness, and usually there is death at the end of it. Once to see it is to understand how the little slayer won his name.

The same rule held when Little Death was the hunted, rather than the hunter: to lie still like a little strip of brown mud between the reed-stalks, until it became perfectly certain that his enemy had seen him and flight was the only course. For Little Death had many enemies. Millions of women, all over the broad earth, offered much gold for his soft coat. There were traps in plenty, all along the Upper Urpqua, there were the greater beasts of prey, and the wide-winged marsh-owls had unpleasant habits of slipping up behind him when least expected. These great birds had wings that were silence itself, claws

that were sharp and deadly, and many fledglings always hungry for the flesh of the little people of the river. Even before he had left the nest, Little Death had had nightmares of the two blue eyes in the twilight.

There were not many human wayfarers along the Upper Umpqua, but such as there were rarely caught sight of him. And this speaks well for the little bandit's ability to conceal himself. The few trappers and hunters that came along were men of rather exceptional powers of vision. Mostly they were lank, dark mountaineers who didn't miss much of what was going on about them. Though there is no more deceitful jade in the world than Mother Nature, always pretending that her living creatures are just patches of light and shadow, most of these mountaineers had long since learned her wiles. If a tenderfoot should pass within five paces of Little Death's body and fail to see him, it would be nothing at all to wonder at, but when Amos Hardman, he who had lived forty years on the Divide, did just this thing it was something for the forest people to talk about. One can even imagine a wise old Kingfisher, blue-coated policeman who had a beat on a certain ripple of the Umpqua, squawking out this bit of scandal to old Woof the bear, catching crawfish on the shore, and the furry old fellow sitting back on his tailless haunches and grunting with laughter.

BUT it was true that ordinarily, human beings completely failed to see the little people of the river. Of course, no one could fail to notice Woof, and dull are the eyes that are not filled with delight at the sight of the black-tail deer, drinking at the water's edge. When Whisperfoot, the cougar, cared to show himself at all, no man in his right senses cared to look the other way. And the glory of the elk is a name. The little people, however, went mostly unobserved. They were physically small, their coloration was highly protective, but most of all they were wary and elusive as so many little shadows. Some of them were not mammals at all; the great trout, for instance, that waved lazy tails at the still bottoms of the deep pools. Farther down the river a pair of beavers made engineering plans through the long night, and the blue heron told a pair of little ruddy ducks, flirting their tails in a certain shal-

lowed himself at the neck of an old slough. But they all were crafty and furtive and shy beyond all telling, and most of them, like Little Death himself, did most of their hunting either in the eery hours of twilight or at night.

This particular twilight he came creeping forth from a little bunch of tall reeds on the river bank. No one could have guessed, one minute since, that the few yellow stalks would have made such a perfect hiding place. The hour was late, the light was dim, yet one little moment of close scrutiny would have sufficed to completely change one's opinion about Little Death. In a moment one would cease to think of him as an insignificant little rat of the river, and would know him for what he was—a hunter and a killer, more blood-thirsty than a tiger, more cunning than a fox, more savage than a wolf.

He was Little Death, the mink, less in size than a rabbit, but as fierce and terrible a hunter as is known in the whole wilderness world. His little red eyes burned with a wicked light as he took the trail.

NATURE has been trying a long time to secure efficiency in her various creatures. She has always been improving her types and her methods have been sure but exceedingly deadly. It was just a simple proposition of killing off, by process of the survival of the fittest, all the less efficient and incapable creatures. She has made mistakes, but few of them remain to clutter up the earth. And once or twice she has achieved a positive masterpiece.

The little animal that, serpent-like, came slipping out upon the game-trail beside the river was really nothing less than a masterpiece of nature. No one could doubt it, to see him in action. It isn't known that nature had any efficiency expert to help her out, but naturalists do know that this little beast of prey, in his own sphere, is as capable, effective, and withal as deadly a hunter as ever followed a trail. He is just as effective in a tree as on the ground, though this fact isn't relished at all by the feathered people that make nests in the branches. He is agile, fleet beyond belief, and ferocious up to his last breath.

As he came out from his hiding-place, he didn't make a false motion. No hare could have moved through the reeds more swiftly than he. He really didn't have any limits. He could dart up a tree as quickly as a squirrel. He could slip into a rabbit bur-

row or a hollow tree with the ease of a ferret. If he wished, he could range far from his native waters and keep equally well fed. And even the great lake trout in the pool were no more at home in the dim paths of the river bottoms than he.

Scientists can tell about his teeth—how perfectly they are arranged and sharpened for a life of rapine. There have been trappers, now and then, who have carelessly gotten their hands in range of these same teeth—and thereafter have ever spoken softly every time the name of Little Death has been mentioned. The jaws are manipulated with tremendous bunches of muscles, the eyes miss little of what is going on about him, the nose is keen, and a thrown blade could scarcely equal the speed of his leap. Many and strange are the stories of his ferocity, his deathless courage and, curiously, most of them are true.

A rabbit had bounded along the river bank earlier in the evening, and Little Death had found his trail. Just for an instant he stood up on his haunches, like a squirrel, and if the light had been better one could have seen a transformation in the fierce face and body. He seemed to grow more furtive. The lips drew back, revealing a gleam of polished ivory. But the most pronounced change of all was in his eyes.

They suddenly became little points of reddish flame. Little Death's blood was up. The rabbit was still far off, but the blood-madness had already come upon him. All flesh-eaters know this passion—a lust to heat the blood and ignite the brain—but in none of them is it more pronounced than in Little Death and his fellows. A tiger, for instance, will often linger over its wounded prey. For long hours it will administer terrible caresses with claws and fangs, but this cold cruelty is unknown in the mink. His passion is too great for that. All he knows is to slay, and slay quickly, with white teeth at the throat; then leap to another victim.

LITTLE DEATH stood shivering, with the fury and the madness upon him. Then he started stealing down the river. But all at once he halted, and whipped about on his hind legs. No human eyes could follow that motion. For an instant he crouched, utterly motionless, and his red, fiery eyes searched the deepening shadows. He wasn't sure, but it seemed to him that a deeper shadow had flitted across

his trail. All his life, Little Death had known this same, curious darkening across his path. He had wakened from his dreams in the reeds in horror of it. It was made by only one thing—the swift passage of wings.

Little Death's eyes were keen; yet he could see no longer. Perhaps, forty yards distant, a shadow swept across a single bright star that had pushed through the twilight sky. But it was too dark and far away for even a mink to see plainly. And so intent was he upon the trail that he was willing to disregard it.

And disregarding this particular shadow was one thing his mother had told him, every time the dark came down, that he must not do. It was the deadliest of all the many deadly mistakes a mink can make. For that shadow often means the presence of Velvet Wings, the great horned-owl, that is terror itself to all the Little People. Velvet Wings can come like a cloud, and his talons are death. His voice alone, in the silence, is enough to strike terror into all the little folk within hearing. But the silence grew and deepened about Little Death and he kept to the trail.

By now, the darkness was growing over the lake region. The pines still stood in curious silhouette against the western sky, but the outline of even the close tree-trunks was blurred and indistinct. The river gleamed, ever so softly. The reeds began their night song, that curious rustle they make as the wind plays over them, a sound that lingers long in the memory. All the forest world was wakening.

It was the hunting hour, and Little Death's passion grew upon him. There seemed to be something in the air, a fever and excitement that the night wind had brought on. He didn't know it, but farther up the slope Whisperfoot, the cougar, was stalking his buck. There was no particular way in which Little Death could know it, because cat-tail feathers, falling on the reeds, make more sound than Whisperfoot at his hunting. Moreover, he is tawny and hard to see in the shadows. If he had known, the mink might have been more wary. The great cat does not ordinarily attack such small game as minks, but like most other forest creatures, his habits are not entirely known and never to be trusted.

AND there was one other stirring creature in the same little forest patch back of Hardman's tent. He was hunting

too, but not for food. The lowering night had brought the cold, and the breed to which Cold Eye belonged was particularly susceptible to the lowering of the temperature. Cold Eye was looking for a warm place to lie through the night and must make haste.

He seemed to move with strange stealth, scarcely a leaf rustling under him. Not even his eyes were visible in the shadows. He crept lower, down toward Hardman's tent.

But the man was still on the hills, and didn't see Cold Eye come. For certain very good reasons, Hardman would have taken no joy in this visitation. For Cold Eye was known far through the forests, a creeper in the dust and a seeker of warm places in the cold nights. He was the great gray rattlesnake that had lain all day on the ledge. He was old, the poison glands in his head were full, and the forest creatures scampered off the trail to get out of his way.

He was angry because the deepening cold had driven him from his ledge, and his savagery had grown upon him as he progressed down the trail. He didn't understand the gray wall that now had reared in front of him. He slipped slowly under it.

Hardman was a mountaineer, brawn and bone, and his bed was a pallet of boughs, spread on the ground at the mouth of the tent. His blankets, two pairs of them, were spread on top. And at first Cold Eye did not understand them.

But slowly he slipped into them, into the warmth and the darkness. Slowly he coiled, till at last only a gray circle, deadly past all things, remained. He would sleep here through the night, he thought. He would strike with deadly fangs any one that came to disturb him. Only his head was exposed.

On the hill above, Amos Hardman had finished his work. It had been a hard day, and he was tired. He thought with pleasure how he would swiftly remove his boots and trousers, and leap between the blankets.

He would sleep well, he thought, at least if that worthless existence, the mink, did not revisit his hen-roost during the night. Yes, he would sleep well, for Cold Eye would be waiting with bared fangs for any one who would contest the bed with him. And all things slept well after Cold Eye had spoken to them.

THE darkness had fallen, by now, but the moon was up. Otherwise it would have been too dark for even Little Death to hunt. It made a curious patchwork of light and shadow on the trail; it worked strange miracles with the many ripples and waterfalls of the river, changing them seemingly to wondrous works in silver; it glinted on the tops of the pines. The rabbit trail circled back, and Little Death had made the circuit when the shadow fell again. But it was behind him, and he didn't see it. Neither did he see the two circles of blue fire that for an instant burned at him out of the shadows. The trail was growing hot, and the only emotion he had left was anticipation of the killing that was to come. He had quite forgotten that Velvet Wings also kept watch over this same hunting-ground. Otherwise, he wouldn't have sped forward so gaily.

Once more he paused to listen to a long-drawn howl from the thickets at one side. It was a curious, angry, disappointed sound and if Little Death's intellect had been just a little greater, he might have understood. Whisperfoot had missed his stroke. His paw had whipped down a fraction of a second too late, and the buck was a streak in the darkness by now. This was never soothing to Whisperfoot's disposition. He was angry, and he didn't care who knew it. The sound chopped squarely off in the middle.

But if Little Death had known the little drama that immediately followed, he would have been really vitally interested. Just in the last notes of his howl, a shadow had suddenly leaped across Whisperfoot's nose. It is an old saying in the forest that a cougar has always one jump left in him. Whisperfoot had just that one jump, and he gave it, fast as light. It wasn't very big game. It was just a rabbit speeding in stark terror up the slope. But it had come too suddenly and was gone too quick for even the cougar's lightning blow to overtake it. The long, meat-hook talons dug into the earth a half inch behind the little white tail.

Whisperfoot started to howl again, but abruptly bethought himself better of it. He had an idea. It seems to be true that no animal, excepting man, can really reason; thus Whisperfoot's curious behavior can hardly be ascribed to actual reasoning and foresight. Perhaps it was simply an inspiration—instinct developed, in that curious phrasing of which no one exactly

knows the meaning, to the *nth* degree. Whisperfoot simply seemed to know that in just a moment some beast of prey would come darting along that way on the rabbit's trail.

He didn't know just what kind of beast it might be. He didn't care. He was sufficiently strong and large to master any other flesh-eater of the Oregon forest, unless, by a liberal interpretation, one would call Woof a flesh-eater. Were it a fisher or a wild-cat or even a wolf, Whisperfoot need not be afraid. And Woof, the bear, would no more attempt to catch a rabbit than he would try to bite off his own diminutive tail. He was quite a foolish old bear at times, especially when the love-sickness was on him in the fall, but he had never been *that* foolish.

The idea had no more than occurred to Whisperfoot, and his muscles had set (because in animals there is no time lost between an idea and its muscular response) than he knew he had guessed the truth. Little feet came scratching along in the dead leaves. They were coming swiftly and, indeed, they were very little. But Whisperfoot had missed his stroke and anything in the way of flesh was acceptable.

And if the bright eyes of Velvet Wings were watching from the sky, perhaps the great owl thought he was to be cheated after all. He came winging down the trail but a short distance ahead of Amos Hardman on the way to his tent and his bed.

LITTLE DEATH was running straight into the cougar's ambush. Whisperfoot would not miss this time. He would gauge his stroke correctly. And except for one little prank of the forest gods—those spirits whose sport it is to watch the everchanging drama of the wilderness—Little Death would have known no further adventures that night. Whisperfoot was crouched in the shadow but the moonlight probed through and reflected in his eyes.

Just for an instant they flashed like singular blue electric bulbs, two circles, close together, in the darkness. The eyes of the mink were red with passion and blood lust—for he was hot upon the rabbit's trail—but they were not so blinded that he did not discern the warning. Since his earliest kittenhood he had known about the two blue danger signals in the darkness.

It was not that he had ever encountered Whisperfoot before. Rather it was just a

matter of instinct, an instinct all living creatures possess, that such twin moons mean danger. The eyes of Velvet Wings himself had these same surface lights; and that fact alone was enough to draw the mink up short in his tracks.

If he had raced on twelve more inches, he would have never got past the ambush alive. If he had stopped in his tracks for one half of a breath, Whisperfoot would have reached out a barbed paw and snatched away his life. But he did neither of these things. Whisperfoot struck, but before the paw landed Little Death had leaped aside. If he surpassed at nothing else, he knew how to dodge and his muscles were chain lightning itself. Whisperfoot struck with his other paw, and Little Death dodged again.

The rabbit was at once forgotten. Little Death was dodging for his life. Twice more the claws came down within an inch of his furry body, and by now Whisperfoot was striking all about him and he would have suggested to Woof's grim sense of humor a human being vainly striking at a mosquito. Then Little Death gathered himself for a great spring and leaped full over Whisperfoot's low-hung head. Then he darted away through the tall grass.

Whisperfoot chased him, striking at him again and again, but always when the paw came down Little Death was elsewhere. The mink cut back, made a swift circle, and a moment more was at the river bank. The cougar understood these tactics. Once more he leaped at the brown serpent in the air, and except for the luckiest chance would have fallen into the river. And *that* would have given the forest people something to laugh about for a half-dozen moons.

Little Death struck the water with a splash, and was immediately out of his sight. It was his own element. His claws were semi-webbed, and he took the ripples like a salmon. The chase had lost its terror for him. One hundred feet down the river he pulled up on the bank, his fur sleek and close-lying from the water.

He drew himself up, perhaps intending to utter his chattering laugh of scorn at the cougar on the opposite shore. Perhaps he was listening to the nearing footsteps of Hardman, on the way to his tent. In fact, Whisperfoot, angry and disappointed, was already slinking back into the shadows as inconspicuously as possible. But Little Death's laugh was never uttered.

He crawled up the bank into the very mouth of Hardman's tent and his little red eyes saw what Hardman never could have hoped to see—the head of Cold Eye, the serpent, stretching from the blankets. Cold Eye also had heard the man's step, and was waiting with lifted head for any one that came.

IF any one of a number of things had been different from what they were, a certain fight to the death on the shores of the Umpqua would have never come to pass. For it is true that few mink in their right senses would care to attack a full-grown rattlesnake. In the first place, old Cold Eye was a wonderfully efficient hunter on his own account. His bulk was many times that of Little Death. And even the lower intellect of a mink knew that one little scratch of the loose-hung fangs was simply death with just a few moments of quivering in between.

But in the first place, Little Death was feeling unusually sure of himself. He had just extricated himself from the claws of a cougar, and this was a legend to pass down to his children. In the second place, his blood was up from the excitement of the chase. And lastly, he was angry all over at the rabbit's escape. It would be hard to imagine so many emotions flooding him at once, but their combined effect was to put him on fighting edge. The sight of the rattler, suddenly looming just in front of him, the blood-smell and the realization that here was the noblest game he had ever faced was like a spark to powder.

He seemed to puff out. The wet hair erected all at once, and in one second seemed to be dry. The light danced in his eyes. The muscles set and contracted seemingly without conscious effort, and he sprang fast as a light shaft toward the serpent's throat.

Then there began the grim and terrible battle that the little people of the river came out to see. Cold Eye was not to be felled by that first attack. The head swayed aside, then the long body lunged out. It came like a spear comes, almost straight in the air and faster than the eye could follow. Little Death rolled back and over, and both contestants found themselves in the moonlight, clear outside the mouth of the tent.

Little Death got in his bite as the snake came down, but he almost died to pay for it. Cold Eye's head whipped back, and the

mink's leap to safety was none too soon. The flat head seemed to graze his shoulder.

TWO of the most agile, the most indomitable slayers in the whole wilderness world were matched on the river bank that night—cold fury on the part of Cold Eye and savage ferocity on that of Little Death. The moon showed the whole thing. The entire wilderness world seemed to stop in its business and look. The two fought almost in silence, so little sound that even the song that the wind played in the marsh reeds was not obscured.

It is true that Cold Eye hissed as he turned to parry Little Death's lunges. But it was only a faint sound, dying quickly in the silence of the night and charged full of the icy hatred of which the snake is the embodiment. And perhaps the mink's light feet rustled and crinkled in the leaves. It was almost as if he were dancing—some savage dance of death about a victim—so lightly did he spring back and forth. The whole fight was misty and unreal in the moonlight: two strange figures in a dance of death. Only once did the rattles sound: that far-carrying warning, sharp and high, that is as menacing an articulation as is ever heard in the wilderness. It was more than that. All that is deadly, all the lightning perils that can fall so swiftly on the dwellers of the Wild were symbolized in that piercing note.

Little Death danced about him, lunging in again and again: stroke and parry, gleaming teeth and darting head, bunching muscles and lightning lunge, bite and scratch and little wicked eyes burning out of the savage face. The serpent was more stately, bowing almost like a dancer in a minuet. He swayed gently, until he thought he saw his opening. Then the long head would lunge out and thwack down, and not even the eyes of the wild creatures were trained enough to follow that motion.

Little Death seemed so lithe, so slender, so unbelievably agile that he gave almost a reptile appearance himself. The flat, savage head helped out the delusion; only the wicked teeth revealed his true raptorial character. Cold Eye had felt their sting a half-dozen times, but they had never reached a vital place and the mink had been afraid to bite too long and deep. The whipping head of the snake was looking for just that chance.

Little Death's rage grew upon him with every passing second. The hair stood straight until he looked three times his natural size. Ever he leaped faster, ever his wicked little eyes had a more lurid flame. Cold Eye, however, still lived up to his name. Something glittered on either side of the flat head like bits of broken glass, strangely bright but cold enough to freeze the blood in the veins and paralyze the muscles. Little Death knew enough not to meet *those* eyes. In a fight where it was leap against leap, fang against fang, he had a fair chance of living to tell of it, but a battle of eyes with a reptile was a different matter. Little Death was a bloodspiller, but he didn't know black magic. For though naturalists deny it to the chapter's end, there is a power in the cold, glittering eye of a serpent, and for the little people to meet it is to be frozen in their tracks. A cold priestess to all that is deadly and merciless—that was the serpent, fighting in the moonlight.

IT was an incredibly graceful thing, this battle on the river's bank. Sometimes their shadows, as they hung on the water's edge, danced off across the ripples. Little Death hopped back and forth, now darting almost as Cold Eye darted, now swaying on his haunches, now leaping, now recoiling, but always staying just out of the reach of Cold Eye's lashing head. Mostly they fought in eery silence.

If the serpent had been fighting any other creature than a mink and had been in the least afraid of being conquered, he would have sprung immediately into the water. It is one of the ways of serpents to make a swift path across a river. But he knew enough not to try these tactics here. If the serpent was a water dog, Little Death was a fish. The wild waters were the smaller creature's own element, and he would have had every advantage.

Again and again Cold Eye got in savage blows, strokes that didn't go quite true yet in which the flat head had pummeled the mink's sides; and Little Death was frightfully shaken and bruised by the furious jerk and recoil of the long body every time he himself had been able to get in a bite. But it is a trait in the nature of a mink never to give up, once embroiled in a fight. The tradition of their courage has carried far through the wilderness, not without cause. His fury increased and with it his effectiveness. Ever he seemed quicker of

recoil. So absorbed was he that he could give no heed to any other danger: a dozen shadows could have flitted across the glinting river and he would have never seen them. Nor did he hear the descending feet of Amos Hardman, on the way to his tent. Perhaps, with one little successful lunge, Cold Eye could yet win the battle in time to go back to the blankets to keep company with the warm human figure. Not that it would be warm all night. Warmth dies from the veins after the rattler's bite.

ONCE more the snake lunged out. It was almost fatal to Little Death. The fangs combed the fur on his shoulder. The weight and velocity of the head knocked him aside, and the snake darted forward to strike again. And this was a mistake.

The snake was not quite in the best position for a blow. Too much of his length was already stretched out. But the truth was, he had seen Little Death rolled head over heels, and he didn't have quite the proper respect for the mink's ability to recoil. "There are none so swift, so agile as I," he tells the wicked-eyed little sons of him in the serpent nest, and Cold Eye thought that he himself wouldn't have been able to snap back to a position of battle before the poisoned fangs could sink home. But he hadn't quite counted on the fact that a mink is almost, if not quite, a masterpiece of nature.

It all transpired so quickly that even the little people that watched the fight didn't quite discern the details. For the smallest, littlest fraction of a second, less than stop-watch could measure, Little Death seemed to lie still from the force of the blow. The snake's glittering eyes saw the posture, and he lunged down far-out, with the full force and length of his body. But when he was in the air, a wonderful transformation occurred in the little, still handful of brown fur.

All at once, Little Death uncoiled like a spring. He leaped to one side, at the very fraction of a second that the head darted past. Cold Eye had sprung too far to recoil. The white teeth flashed, cut, buried deep, and closed—fairly on the serpent's spine. Cold Eye would paralyze no more fledglings in their tracks. Although his clammy tail would have certain motion for some hours, he was simply and assuredly dead. The battle had waged out from Amos' tent and the long body lay fifteen

feet in the shadows from the door. Little Death had lived up to his name.

He seemed very small but wholly deadly as he investigated the wound. The blood-madness, of which the weasel tribe are particularly susceptible, was on him even from this cold blood. He chattered in his rapture and ferocity. Once more he danced about the body, as if in triumph.

But the curtain had not yet fallen on the little drama of the river.

In the middle of his triumphal dance, a shadow swooped to the earth. So fast it came that there seemed to be no break in the flood of moonlight. It sped out of the dark sky, and it swept, faster than a man may sweep his arm, along the moonlit river margin. And before the river people could blink their eyes, the dead rattlesnake was left lying still and alone in the reeds.

Velvet Wing, the great owl, had seen his chance at last. He had dipped out of the air, swooped on his silent wings over the battle scene, and even now was darting away with Little Death held fast in his talons.

"THE end of Little Death," the little people said, as the shadow passed.

But it's a strange thing about the world that there is always one more card in the sleeve of Fate. It was played then.

There was an astounding explosion out of the darkness. It wasn't just a small-sized sound, or even a fairly large sound. It was an incredible bellow and roar that seemed to make the air crack and rock about them. In the silence, it was a sound to strike deaf all who heard it. The little people simply tumbled over backward with astonishment and terror.

The shadow that was over the river abruptly dipped in its flight. It wavered strangely, and something fell out of its talons. Little Death's luck was with him after all. He struck, not the rocky shore, but the glinting water of the river, and Little Death was known out and far as a high-diver. He was bleeding from the battle with Cold Eye and from the claws of Velvet Wings, but neither of these things had made him forget how to swim. He struck off boldly, among the dim passages of the sunken logs, and sped to safety.

And it was all because Amos Hardman had returned with his shotgun. He hadn't come in time to get in bed with Cold Eye. In fact, he didn't even know that the reptile had called on him, for the serpent's

body was obscured in the shadows, fifteen feet distant. He came just in time to see the shadow of the owl in the moonlight and, likely enough, Amos Hardman was still thinking of his chickens. In fact, it was one of the few subjects Amos Hardman—and a good many other farmers as well—ever did think about. Likely enough this owl was flying away with one of them.

He had thrown his shotgun to his shoulder and fired. He hadn't stopped to take aim. He was too angry at the threatened loss of his fowl. The report was the sound the little people had heard, by which they were still almost petrified from terror. The truth was that Amos had shot very badly; otherwise he could have hardly missed the great form of the owl. All he succeeded in doing was to sink a few shots into the feathers and along the skin and the only result, beside terror, was a sudden relaxation of the bird's muscles that caused him to dip in his flight and open his claws. Of course the rascally mink had fallen out—safely into the river.

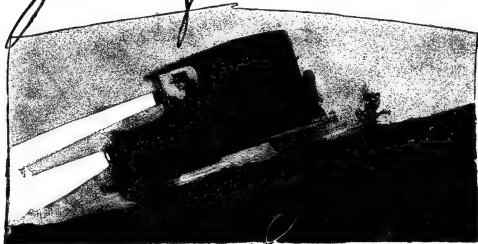
Amos Hardman heard the splash, and at first he didn't understand why he couldn't see the clump of feathers that would mean one of his fowl, floating down the moon-illuminated river. But he did see a black head that for an instant came up right in the middle of a glinting patch of water. And he was smitten with horror at a sudden suspicion that came into his mind.

"May I be strung up!" he suddenly exploded. "That owl was carryin' off the mink—and I made her drop him!"

He turned into his test, almost speechless with self-wrath. "The ornery little thief," he roared. "The most worthless, useless, plague-take-it varmint on the earth! What was he made for anyway—blast his thievin', bloodthirsty ways. I'll get traps and get him yet!"

If the mink, one hundred yards down the river, had heard, he might have leaned back upon his haunches and laughed his scorn. Why should he fear the traps of men. They could only continue to give him a life of zestful adventure. The years would pass, still to find him fishing and hunting and thieving and fighting his deadly fights in the twilight—the very rogue and rascal that Nature ordained him to be. His useless existence would continue for some time yet, while out in the shadows the last muscular quiver of Cold Eye's tail had begun to die.

The Gray Brotherhood



AN exciting story of Chester Fay, underworld prince, and of one of his most daredevil exploits Henry Leverage at his best.

by
Henry Leverage

A GRAY taxi was threading the traffic of Fifth Avenue. Up through the wealthiest street in the world the driver flashed with all the aplomb of a professional "bucker" who knew the elastic limits of the automobile laws.

Chester Fay leaned forward now and then and studied the hands which shifted the lever at the street intersections like those of an American Ace at the "stick" of a biplane.

"Good boy," he exclaimed when the taxi came to a grinding halt before the doorman of the Hotel Rockingham. "Good kid!" he added when he extended the fare.

"I thank you," said the driver of the gray taxi.

Fay paused at the marble steps of the Hotel Rockingham. The taxi turned and darted southward.

Wheeling with a pucker of interest on his features, Fay strode through an alley of palms and bronze vases and leaned over an onyx-topped desk where stood a trim-looking clerk whose collar and tie indicated prosperity in subordinate positions.

"Arthur Hilton?" Fay questioned.

"By appointment?"

"Yes. He phoned me at—" Fay glanced up to the gilt clock over the clerk's head. "Exactly twenty minutes ago!" he declared.

The page who responded to the pressure of a button led the way to a private elevator, nodded to the pilot and closed the green-grilled door when Fay stepped briskly inside the cage.

He was whisked to a silent stop on an upper floor. He stepped out and faced a gray-haired English detective of the superior type, who had been pacing an ornate hallway.

"Arthur Hilton?" said Fay.

"By Sir Arthur's consent?"

"Certainly!"

"You may follow me," drawled the Scotland Yard man.

Fay found himself in the foyer of a splendid suite. He waited, toying with his cap, as the detective passed through a rift in the portières which led in the general direction of Fifth Avenue. He was on the point of coughing to attract attention when the curtains parted in invitation.

SIR ARTHUR HILTON stood by a long window with the white light of a western sky reflected across his furrowed face like the reaching hand of a specter.

"You're Fay?" he said as the Scotland Yard man backed into the shadow of an inner room.

"Yes. Chester Fay—Mr. George Mott, the reformer's friend."

"Good—good and bad! There's the old Nick to pay. Putney Stephney of Downing Street—a King's greyhound—with thirty thousand pounds in American banknotes, was found dead on top of a goods-train at Poughkeepsie this morning."

Fay pulled out a cigarette.

"Murdered!" declared Hilton with a rising voice. "Killed in cold blood somewhere between the steamer dock at West Street and—and Poughkeepsie."

Fay dragged on the cigarette, thrust his hands into his pockets and leaned forward. His eyes hardened slightly. They fastened upon the steady stare of Sir Arthur's own.

"Facts are these," resumed the British representative. "Stephney had landed at the dock at ten-twenty last night. Was seen by two of the steamship company's detectives, who were watching all embarking passengers."

"Was that the *Carpathia*?" asked Fay.

"Yes—the *Carpathia*! Stephney came down the gangplank, turned at the custom-room, went inside a telephone-booth, came out and was observed taking a gray taxi at the foot of the dock. That was the last seen of him until the chief of the railroad detectives at Poughkeepsie found his body on top of a goods-train. Skull was slightly crushed. Pockets rifled. Portfolio, with banknotes and memoranda, missing."

"Quick work!"

"Beastly quick!" shot back Hilton through rigid lips. "Beastly clever, too!"

The British representative glanced toward the doorway before which the portières draped. He strode to Fay's side and leaned forward as his fingers clutched the investigator's left shoulder in the grip of a bulldog.

"Stephney didn't die from the crushed skull," he said tersely. "That accident came afterward. He was killed by an unknown method. He was lured to death in the heart of civilization!"

"An unknown method?"

"Fact! Had the coroner of Poughkeepsie on the wire not an hour ago. A surgeon from Plattsburg happened to assist at the autopsy. It was he who detected the condition of the lungs. Also, Stephney's face was greenish-black."

Fay backed away and allowed Sir Arthur's hand to drop. His eyes glazed with speculation. They hardened.

"You have other facts?" he asked.

"Little more! Stephney was last seen alive getting into a gray taxi which disappeared soon afterward. He was headed for this hotel. I sat up until three o'clock waiting for him."

"Who else knew he was coming to New York?"

"The Washington Embassy."

"Who knew it in London?"

"Downing Street."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"American crooks."

"Everybody blames them—for everything."

Sir Arthur frowned. "I've given you the case—on account of Mr. Mott's interest in ex-convicts and the Gray Brotherhood."

"Oh, I'll take it. I'll jump! I want all the facts you can allow me to have."

"I've given you everything. The body found at Poughkeepsie on top of the goods-train was Stephney's. There's no doubt of that. He was first identified by the tailor's name in his pockets—Concre, of London, I think. We've a solicitor up there who made a complete identification."

"Did Stephney ever visit New York before?"

"Once, two years ago—just after the end of the war."

"Would he know any women here?"

"Hardly! He was to come right to me!"

Fay moved a chair and lifted his cap. He turned at the portières. His glance toward Arthur Hilton was one of understanding.

"You and Mr. Mott alone know that I am on this case?"

"It is locked with us!"

"I have *carte blanche*!"

"Up to ten thousand pounds."

"Good-by!" said Fay, creasing his checked cap as he parted the curtains and strode through the suite to the hallway of the hotel.

HE jabbed at a pearl button until the private elevator floated up to him. He reached the street and turned toward the Avenue. He saw there a gray taxi. A young man sat on the driver's seat. He was moving southward close by the right curb.

A swift sprint, a ducking lunge before the silver radiator of a polished limousine,

a hasty reach for the wind-shield of the taxi, and a startled exclamation from the driver—these occurred within seven seconds.

"I'm going downtown," said Fay, settling back in the front seat and staring boldly at the driver. "Don't mind if I ride out here?"

"I certainly do! It's against the company's regulations."

"Set the meter and drive on. I've really got something I want to say to you."

"Well, of all the nerve!"

"Certainly—certainly! I've always been interested in this new company with the gray taxies and the paroled men who drive them. I'm a Western newspaper man—come from Chicago. Suppose you tell me all about the Gray Taxi Company. How many taxies are there? Who's the originator? How's business? Do you cover the steamship docks?"

"Say! On the dead, you've got nerve. I'm going to call the first traffic-cop I meet. There's one!"

Fay reached into his right-hand trouser pocket. His hand appeared with a five-dollar bill between his fingers.

"I'll bet you this you don't," he said, pressing the bill into the driver's lap. "Take it and buy a good dinner. There's another coming to you if you answer my questions."

The driver clutched the steering-wheel with both hands as he brought his knees together and pressed a leather toe upon the throttle. The taxi leaped by the traffic cop, dodged a bus and roared on down the Avenue until an open place was gained.

"Go slow," said Fay. "Loaf along and let me get some dope for my article. Who owns the Gray Taxi Company?"

"James Ponsardin."

"Proprietor of the morning *Messenger*?"

"Sure! He owns the company."

"How many taxies?"

"Fifty running now."

"Who manages it?"

"A girl!"

"What?"

"Sure! Her name is Elsie De Groot. She's making it pay, too."

"That's interesting." Fay stared into the alert face of the driver at the wheel. "Is she an ex-convict?"

"I never heard that said about her!"

"Loyal!" thought Chester Fay, shifting in his position. "You never heard," he re-

peated aloud. "That's definite. Do you keep records of passengers carried?"

"We make a report out at night. Miss Elsie gets them."

"Do your taxies cover the steamship docks?"

"Sometimes—if there's a call."

Fay saw that he was in the presence of a very matter-of-fact young man who was making his own way in the world.

"Mind taking me to the Southampton Line?" he asked.

The driver's answer was to glance around the right-hand side of the taxi, slow to a crawl, then swing the corner with both arms over the wheel.

FAY braced himself for five blocks of cobbled streets upon the surface of which ragged children played ball and dodged death. He stepped down from the taxi as it came to a gliding stop before the ornate entrance to the great dock.

"Mind waiting?"

The driver glanced at the taximeter.

"You've paid me for a couple of hours."

"Stay right here. I'll be back in ten minutes."

Chester Fay found two English detectives covering the dock. With them was a Secret Service operative of slight acquaintance.

"Hello!" he said, drawing this man to one side. "Say, Gardner," he whispered, "who would know down here what happened last night when the *Carpathia's* passengers came down the planks? I want to trace a man who took a Gray taxi. The man is—"

"Putney Steph—Stephney."

"Yes." Fay raised his brows. The matter was evidently out.

"Has he been found?"

Fay shook his head. He recalled that Sir Arthur Hilton had not given instructions to make public the matter of the finding of the body on the railroad train at Poughkeepsie.

"Not found yet, eh?" Gardner said. "Well, I did all I could. Come over here. That's right. Now we can talk. That British team are listening-in."

"What did you find?"

"Stephney came down the plank, showed his passports, went into a slot-booth, lugged his bag and a leather case out toward the street and there hailed a Gray taxi. That much is settled. The taxi was driven by a chauffeur with reddish-brown

hair. His nose was slightly turned up. He had on a yellow coat and leather leggings. He'd been waiting around the dock for over three hours."

"Must have expected him!"

"Looks that way, Chester. He had plenty of fares offered him. You see, them Gray taxies are all the fashion now. They're gettin' the business."

"You were here at the time the passenger arrived?"

"No. I got my information from old Harry, who watched the express wagons and taxies. He's positive about the red-haired chauffeur. Said he was a bold trick!"

"He's right. Good-by!"

Fay left the Government operative and darted for a telephone booth. Into the slot of this he dropped a nickel and obtained, after a brief wait, Mr. George Mott's secretary.

"This is Chester Fay!" he said briskly. "Say, get about ten of the Gray Brotherhood rounded up right away and cover these assignments. Got it?" he added, drawing the door shut with caution. "Yes—yes! They'll do. Cover Poughkeepsie and a corpse found there this morning on top of a New York Central freight-car. Cover the morgue. Have them see the Army surgeon who made the autopsy on the lungs. Have them connect with the coroner and the railroad detectives who found the body."

Fay paused and mopped his brow with his sleeve. It was hot in the booth.

"Yes, there's more!" he snapped. "Cover James Ponsardin of the *Messenger*. Put him to bed and get him up in the morning. Find him and keep the boys tailing him till I call them off. That's all . . . no, send Rake to the corner of the block where the Gray Taxi Company has its garage. Tell him I'll meet him there in fifteen minutes!"

IT was eleven minutes later when Fay requested the driver of the taxi to deposit him on the northeastern corner of the block around which Gray taxies to the number of a score or more were scattered.

Fay handed over a second bill with a polite bow.

"I'm going to visit your boss," he said with a quick smile. "I'll pump her in private for that write-up of mine. It ought to go big in our Western syndicate."

The driver twisted his wrist and studied

the time. He set the meter to the off position. "Good-by!" he said, leaning over and releasing the emergency brake. "I'm much obliged!"

Fay turned and stared into the broad Irish face of the ex-convict he had expected to meet.

"Ah, Rake—on time!"

"Sure, Chester! I was just watchin' you and that wild-looking driver. They're gettin' all the high-class business."

"Come on! Follow me and keep your eyes open. We're going to look a little lady over. Miss Elsie, the manager, is under suspicion."

Fay led the way along the sidewalk and threaded his steps through a group of young men outside the Gray Taxi Garage. He eyed each one for possible red hair and turned-up nose. He entered the doorway, dodged a fast-flying taxi which was coming out on second speed, then knocked upon the ground glass of a door marked PRIVATE—KEEP OUT—THIS MEANS YOU!

A slip of a girl answered the knock. She glanced from Fay's face to the peering countenance of Rake.

"Well?" she asked.

"I'm looking for a Miss Elsie De Groot," said Fay, thrusting his foot forward. "I'm a newspaper man. I—want to write her up for a Western syndicate. It ought to bring some business."

The girl toyed with a pencil which she jabbed like a bayonet into a raven-hued turban. "I'll see," she said, turning and gliding through an inner door.

Presently her elfin face gladdened the opening as Fay half advanced into the outer office.

"Come in, please. Miss De Groot will see you."

CHESTER FAY removed his cap, crushed it between his fingers and stepped briskly forward. He paused before the edge of a rug. Across this rug sat a girl. She swiveled in a businesslike chair and threw one neat ankle over the other. She glanced impatiently upward.

"We'd like to see you alone," Fay said as he noted a mop of reddish hair and a freckled nose which seemed to be pressed up by an unseen finger. "Alone," he added, swinging upon the stenographer and jerking his chin toward the door.

"Why, certainly!"

The girl slipped out and closed the door. Fay left Rake's side and moved up close

to a littered desk which bore some resemblance to order.

"To be brief as time!" he said, drawing a card from his pocket. "To be brief," he whispered, replacing the card, "I want to know just why you took a taxi at or about six o'clock last night, went down to the Southampton Dock and waited for a passenger who wore a Silver Greyhound—indicating that he was on British Government business, urgent and pressing."

The girl's broad forehead whitened slightly. She recrossed her trim ankles. She tapped the desk before her with polished nails. She reached and adjusted a hairpin in her reddish knot, which added beauty to a resolute, somewhat bold face.

"I don't know what business that is of yours!" she said.

Fay frowned. "It's the people's business! It's Charles Mott's business. Are you going to help me?"

"I never talk to strangers. You may be Mr. Mott's representative. You may be connected with the Gray Brotherhood. How do I know?"

"You know what happened to your fare last night?"

The girl swung in the chair and glanced at Rake. Her eyes opened to brown pools of protest. She brought both feet down on the rug and rose with her hand on the back of the chair.

"You both better go."

"Just a minute. You know Putney Stephney?"

"Perhaps I do."

"You know what happened to him?"

"No!"

"Do you want to know?"

"See here!" The girl's voice indicated reserve strength. "See here! This is my office. We—I, am obeying the law. Our business is of such a nature that we do not talk to strangers. To tell you frankly, I detest people who ask too many questions."

Fay took the thrust with good humor. "They're not all the same," he said, moving closer to the girl and regarding her with admiration. "Now you, for instance, know full well that I didn't come here without being pretty sure of my ground. You'll have to answer my questions, or you will be called to account for a number of nasty accusations. Mr. Mott is your friend—he also is my friend!"

The girl turned helplessly toward the closed door. She tapped her foot on the rug. She bent her head.

"How came you to know Putney Stephney?" Fay asked, feeling his way for a surprise.

"I met him two years ago. He was just a good friend of mine. I can't see your purpose in questioning me concerning him."

Fay watched her lips tremble. He had conceived a liking for Elsie De Groot over the period of minutes. He said through his white teeth:

"Putney Stephney was murdered last night!"

THE girl swayed. She reached blindly for the arms of the chair.

"Murdered by an unknown method!"

A gasping sob racked the air. The beat of a powerful engine throbbed the garage. It was like the roll of a muffled drum.

"Foully murdered! Done to death between the steamship dock and Poughkeepsie, where he was found with skull crushed and his lungs empty of air. He was last seen getting into your taxicab!"

"Oh, don't! It isn't true!"

Fay leaned until his eyes compelled hers to waver. "It's true," he whispered. "Now, tell me what happened to Putney Stephney? The matter is going to do the Gray Brotherhood and the Gray Taxi Company considerable harm."

"Do with him?"

"Certainly! What did you do with him?"

The truth, and nothing but the truth. It's bound to come out!"

"See here!" The girl braced her shoulders and stared back defiantly. "See here!" she flashed with sudden anger. "I can give you no information except—"

"Except what?"

"The record of the call. That is all that I will ever give you or anybody else. My personal affairs are not to be dragged about by an amateur investigator."

"That's all I want." Fay turned and motioned for Rake to leave the office. He waited until the door closed with a click.

"We're going to be frank," he said. "I'm here to help you out. You met Stephney at the dock, after waiting around for hours. I'd judge by this action that you knew him. He perhaps wirelessly or telegraphed you from Quarantine."

The girl brushed her hair from her eyes with the back of her right hand. She stared at the rug, then into Fay's keen face.

"I met him by his own appointment."

"Ah! Now we're getting on, Miss Elsie.

You met him—after waiting a long time. He had an enormous sum of money. You alone knew that he was coming. He trusted in you so as to be safe in a city comparatively strange—to him. He—”

“Trusted me—yes! We stopped at Figaro’s on Forty-second Street. We had a club sandwich served to us. I sat outside with him because I—I had these clothes on.”

The girl swept her hands over her leggings and short skirt.

“And then?”

“Why, I took him on uptown within six or seven blocks of the Rockingham. He said he would walk the rest of the way. I left him on the curb. He started north.”

“That’s clear,” said Fay. “He started north. Did you see him any more?”

The girl dropped her eyes and studied the design of the office rug. “I did and I didn’t. He got in another cab—I think!”

“What?”

“Yes. There was no reason for him to do that. He had only a few blocks to go in order to reach the hotel.”

“What kind of a cab?”

“One of ours—a Gray taxi.”

“Well, don’t you know who was driving it? Was it following you?”

A PUZZLED pucker gathered in a little square upon the girl’s white forehead. She reached to the littered desk and lifted a call-sheet. She held this out with shaking fingers.

“I’ve questioned every one of my drivers. No one of them admits taking Mr. Stephney or anyone else to the Rockingham. I didn’t understand it last night; I don’t now. It was certainly a taxi painted like ours that he got in. I thought it so strange.”

“Did this other driver call him?”

“I don’t know. I was turning when I looked up the Avenue. Putney was running from the curb with one hand raised. He jumped on the running-board of the taxi, which disappeared from under an arc-light. I didn’t see anything more.”

“Didn’t that strike you as a strange proceeding?”

“Yes, it did! I thought a lot about it. I went over the call-sheet and asked all of the drivers. Two are out yet, but I know where they were at the time.”

“Do you often take representatives of the British Government around? Have they a charge-account?”

“I can’t answer those questions. You must ask Mr. Hilton.”

“Do you want to tell me anything about James Ponsardin?”

The girl started. She folded the call-sheet by running it through her fingers.

“No, I don’t! You’ll have to see him.”

Fay fished in his pocket and brought forth the same card he had before shown to the girl.

“You’ll find me at Mr. George Mott’s office. Please call me up if you discover anything. Ask those two drivers whom you didn’t question. Help us in every way. This murder is an international matter. Keep thinking about what happened last night. We must find the murderer!”

Fay laid the card on the desk, bowed slightly toward the silent girl, nodded to the stenographer, and joined Rake in the run-away of the garage.

THE big ex-convict was staring at the group of drivers who were awaiting assignments. He smiled broadly as he felt Fay’s hand on his shoulder.

“Some bunch, Chester!”

“Any of your old pals here?”

“The only one I remember is that snob-nosed mechanic over there—the fellow under that car.”

Fay wheeled. A pair of bright eyes, grease-rimmed and shadowed with blond lashes, was peering out at him. A tapping sounded upon the rear axle of the taxi as Fay stooped a trifle. The mechanic extended one hand and coiled his fingers about a spanner.

“The only one in the place,” said Rake.

“I served time with him somewhere—maybe in Sing Sing, maybe Joliet.”

“Come on, Rake!”

Fay led the way to the sidewalk, nodded pleasantly to the staring drivers, then turned toward the west. It was at the corner of the block where he paused and glanced in the direction of the garage.

“The entire case rests there,” he declared without pointing. “Stephney was murdered in a Gray taxi. He was suffocated in some way to render him unconscious. He was tossed on top of a freight-train after being well plucked. This much we know. Now, how was it done?”

“I don’t think a woman was mixed up in it. That girl looked like a perfect lady. An old night-hawk, who is as crooked as his whip, might do it. He could get a cab an’ turn the trick.”

"But the mysterious way of suffocating a man?"

The ex-convict scratched his head.

"That's different," he admitted. "O'Toole, Flynn, Fogarty, Harris an' Johnson—they ought to discover something, Chester. Harrigan, Mr. Mott's man, sent them running after you telephoned. He's called on the Harlem Branch for three more of the Brotherhood to cover the case. You've got nine or ten boys out now."

"Hardly enough. We'll get more! Suppose we walk west for a block or two. I want to think this puzzle over."

Rake fell in behind Fay. They crossed the street and took a shady side. The last rays of the western sun struck slanting through the cañon of tenements. The street resounded with the shouts of urchins playing ball. A truck went by as Fay paused and clicked keys in his pocket.

He glanced up at Rake.

"We'll have to cover the Hudson River homes," he said. "Looks to me as if the body was being taken over the railroad track when it was thrown on top of a freight-car. Who is investigating Poughkeepsie and the routing of the train?"

"O'Toole an' Flynn went north, Chester."

Fay dragged out his watch and studied the dial. "It's too early yet for them to report. It's too—"

HE stared open-mouthed toward the

Avenue ahead of him. He reached and clutched Rake's arm. He gripped this with fingers of steel.

"Did you see that?"

"See wot, Chester?"

"The Gray taxi that went by?"

"I saw one. I didn't notice it particularly."

"It was being driven thirty miles an hour by Elsie De Groot! I'm positive it was her. Reddish hair and turned-up nose!"

"That's the colleen who runs the garage?"

"Yes—the girl of the garage! The same little lady who met Putney Stephney at the steamship dock last night."

"We're gettin' on, Chester. It looks bad for the Brotherhood."

"And for the Sisterhood! We just finished talking to her not a half—not twenty minutes ago; and there she goes uptown—full speed and more."

Fay eyed his watch and ran a polished

finger-nail over the crystal. "Twenty-two minutes!" he declared, replacing the time-piece in his vest pocket.

"Let's go back, Chester."

"No! We'll go on to the office of the morning *Messenger*. Foley is their sporting editor. Perhaps he can tell us something about Ponsardin and the taxi-company."

"Nice name!" blurted the ex-inmate. "Sounds like a doped wine an' deep-dyed villainy."

Fay grasped Rake by the elbow and hurried him in the direction of the avenue up which the taxi had flashed. There was no trace of it. Fay hesitated a moment, like a keen hound on a scent, then fell into a brisk walk northward, which took him to the somewhat unostentatious building that housed the uptown offices of the *Messenger*.

Foley, the sporting editor, was in. He greeted Fay with a hand thrust over a battered typewriter propped upon a broken desk. He thrust aside a bundle of press clippings and cleared off two chairs.

"Sit down!" he welcomed. "Got some dope on the crook game for me?"

Fay leaned back and glanced about the office with slow caution, then shot a question at Foley through rigid lips.

"What do you know about Ponsardin—your proprietor?"

Foley tried to wink with lashless eyelids. He upended a huge can of cold tea, drank deeply, glanced at the keyboard of his typewriter before he set the can down on the corner of a box which had once contained ink rolls.

"What do I know? Nothing! He's a queer stick. Bought the paper about three years ago. Hardly ever see him. Goes to Washington quite often. The police are investigating the sheet, I guess."

"Ah!" said Fay.

"Yep! There's been talk of the actual ownership being in the hands of a lot of sure-thing grafters and gamblers. I'm looking for a knockout and an upper-cut from the postal authorities, any time. You can't pinch me! I don't write the editorials."

"They advocate horse-racing and open gambling?"

"They certainly did—a year or two ago. Now we've been instructed to hit a bunch of contractors and reformers. Take it from me, Fay, I don't think the *Messenger* is making any money."

"Bills paid and all that?"

"Oh, sure! James Ponsardin is rated three A's and a One."

"Is he French or Swiss?"

"Came from Switzerland, I think. Bright fellow, but—"

"Where does he live? Directory gives an apartment on Riverside Drive."

"I went up there once with some tickets to a bout. He wasn't there. Butler said he was up-State. I guess he's dug in, covered up and pulled the hole in after him. No one around here or downtown knows where to find him."

"Do you know anything about the Gray Taxi Company?"

"The one with the ex-convict drivers?"

Chester Fay nodded.

"No. I heard the bunch talking about it. Why did you ask?"

Fay rose from his chair and threw back his shoulders. "Your boss is supposed to own it," he said. "Ponsardin is the owner! I've got a case that's far from being clear, Foley. I'll give you first chance when I've worked it out for Mr. Mott. Good-by!"

RAKE led the way out and down the steps to the street.

"Where to, Chester?" he asked as they stood on the sidewalk.

"Nearest telephone!" said Fay, thrusting his hands in his pockets in search for some change.

Rake waited outside of the cigar-store while Fay entered a booth. Night was dropping on the city. The sun had set over the blue barriers of the Palisades. The lights of Broadway sashed the purple heavens from south to north. Forty-second Street with its sign-clusters marked the center of the illumination.

It was a long ten minutes before Fay emerged with his teeth clamping a slender Perfecto. He passed one to Rake.

"Smoke up!" he said. "It's on the British representatives. I've got a good lead from Arthur Hilton. It's one I overlooked in my haste this morning. I think we get our people tonight!"

"What people, Chester?"

"The crooks who killed Stephney. They were after bigger game. The others of Stephney's suite are due on the *Imparada*. Hilton tells me privately that she has been sighted from Sandy Hook."

Rake examined the cigar, then lighted it and started puffing.

"I don't get you! What's due on the ship? What's it got to do with—"

Fay started toward Broadway. Rake followed with the question still upon his mind.

"We're closing in," said Fay as he brought a sheet of paper from his side pocket and spread it out on the palm of his right hand. "I did a lot of phoning. There's nothing new at Poughkeepsie—except that the train upon which Stephney's body was found was made up on Tenth Avenue, New York."

"That's Death Avenue!"

"It's well named. It left at seven o'clock. It passed the Harlem River at eight-sixteen. It reached Harmon at nine-three. It rolled into Poughkeepsie early in the morning and was shunted on a side-track. The railroad detectives searched it carefully while looking for tramps. It was then they found the body."

Rake eyed the sheet of paper.

"Did O'Toole get all that?" he asked.

"Yes. He saw the coroner and the Army surgeon. Stephney was suffocated and completely out of this life when his body was dropped on top of the train. That must have been from some small bridge leading over the tracks to the Hudson River. It was either to a boathouse or a private estate."

"Go on," said Rake.

"Hilton—Sir Arthur—tells me that two members of the same banking firm, coming over on the *Imparada*, have considerable money with them. This Commission, of which Stephney was a member, came on different steamers on account of a secret matter pertaining to pending treaties. These two members will dock sometime tonight."

"At the same pier, Chester?"

"At the Southampton Pier."

"That looks like business. We'll be there, eh?"

"Right there! We'll meet the bankers at Quarantine, substitute ourselves for them, and land, all regular and proper, at the Southampton dock. I notified Harigan, at Mr. Mott's office, to get our outfits. They'll be waiting for us with a valet at the Battery. We will have a valet."

"What, Chester?"

"Joe Yeader will play that part to perfection. Remember his accent? He did time in Brixton Jail."

"I don't get it all," blurted Rake. "What is coming off?"

FAY furrowed his brow and stared seriously toward the paper in his hand. He thrust it into his pocket. "I'll explain later," he said. "We're going right into the lion's den. We'll bait the trap with more banknotes. We've got to clear the name of the Gray Brotherhood and the ex-inmates working for the Gray Taxi Company."

"Do you suspect that girl?"

"I have every reason to believe she is guilty."

"She don't look the part."

"Looks and beauty are skin deep!"

"She didn't talk like a gun moll or a fallen sister."

"She's employed by a man who is suspected by the police and Mr. Mott. She has sole charge of Ponsardin's taxicab interests. She was the first to meet Stephney on this side of the Atlantic. She was the last to see him alive, according to her own admission. What would you think from all that?"

"I think a lot, Chester. But appearances are deceiving. She'd never admitted takin' that Stephney from the dock if she was guilty. She'd denied it. The only time my Mary, at home, is lyin' to me is when she says nothing."

"Illogical logic!"

"Sure—an' it's the truth, nine times out of ten, Chester."

Fay glanced at his watch and quickened his steps. "We'll take the Subway to the Customhouse. From there we go over the Bay."

Rake scratched his head and followed Fay down the steps, past the ticket-chopper, and lunged with him into the warm interior of a subway car. They were hurtled southward. Fay said nothing during the quick trip. His mind wove the details of the plan which he had to save the name of the Gray Brotherhood.

He mounted to the surface of the street, closely followed by Rake. He sought a phone-booth before crossing to the Customhouse. Rake heard him giving a series of rapid-fire directions to Harrigan, the manager at George Mott's headquarters.

Fay emerged, tossed a dollar across to the cigar-clerk and jerked his thumb toward a box of Perfectos. "Eight of those!" he said. "Eight!"

Outside, in the cool evening, the two men drew a long breath of smoke for the final plunge. They dodged a flashing taxi, climbed the Customhouse steps, and

found, after consulting an alert doorman, that the harbor master's assistant was in.

To him Fay showed his card, his authority from George Mott, and other identifications. He sealed the matter with a cigar. The assistant to the harbor master made out passes in duplicate. He found the sealing wax and a well-chewed pen. He passed the finished documents over, after a scrawled signature in each corner.

"They'll take you aboard anything from here to the Hook," he said, leaning and watching Fay.

"Thanks!" said Fay. "I'll see if they will!"

THE ferry-house was thronged with passengers as the two ex-inmates searched about for Joe Yeader. These passengers thinned. A man stepped forward and clucked from the corner of his mouth.

"All right," said Fay swiftly. "Hop aboard, and we'll follow."

Rake trailed Yeader and Fay. The three men secured seats in the smoking-cabin. Yeader, crossing his legs over a yellow kit-bag, took Fay's proffered Perfecto, and drawled:

"At your service, sirs. Beastly sultry night."

The ferry-boat reached St. George. The three rushed for a train which would pass Quarantine Station on an inland route. They descended at a dark station, walked rapidly through silent streets till they came to the gleaming waters of the Narrows.

Fay saluted a man on guard, showed his authority from the Customhouse, and received permission to enter the telegraph station.

He turned on the steps and glanced down at Yeader and Rake.

"Stay here!" he said. "Hold the bag. I'm going up and find out when the *Imparada* comes in. Also, I shall send a wireless message to the manager of the Gray Taxi Company."

Rake started. He frowned in perplexity. "How can you do that, Chester?"

"I've got authority to do most anything. I want a Gray taxi to meet us when we dock with the *Imparada*. Perhaps your nice little blonde with the turned-up nose will be driving."

Rake shook his head when Fay disappeared. He clenched his fists and glanced upward at the topmost light in the dark tower. He swung on one heel as Yeader touched his shoulder.

"Big ship coming in!"

"The *Imparada*?"

"Looks like it. We'll have to hurry. Call Chester!"

Fay appeared at Rake's third shrilling whistle.

"All set," he said, waving his arm toward the Government dock. "Let's get down to the quarantine boat."

A dark wharf jutted like a pointing finger from a green, sloping shore. Upon this wharf great, rusty cables and buoys were scattered.

Fay led the way through the buoys and presented his passes to a sailor on guard before a wire gate.

"Going out to the *Imparada*!" he said authoritatively.

The sailor hitched his trousers, turned, squinted through the sea mists, then swung the gate.

"You'll have to hurry," he said. "The quarantine boat is casting off her shore lines."

WRAPPED in the cloak of gray vapor, the three men crouched forward of the wheelhouse and stared out across the Narrows to where a great ship glided like a glow-worm in a garden.

They heard the quarantine boat's bells as it maneuvered beneath the towering overhang of the giant passenger ship. They mounted a pilot's ladder which had been lowered for the quarantine officers.

Fay whispered into an officer's ear after he sprang over the rail. He motioned aft. Rake and Yeager, with the kit-bag, followed closely.

The two British bankers were seated at the taffrail. To them Fay told his mission, and his object of substituting himself and party, in order to discover who had slain Stephney. The bankers had already been informed of the murder. They were noncommittal. They rose from steamer chairs, studied Fay's credentials, stared keenly at Yeager and Rake, then consulted in whispers.

"All right," they said finally. "Come to our staterooms."

The transformation which was made while the ship glided to her dock was thorough and startling. Fay upended Yeager's kit-bag and sorted out its contents. He changed his appearance before the eyes of the silent Britishers. He put on goggles and borrowed a more pronounced checked cap than the one he had worn to the ship.

He ran a hand across his face, then tapped a well-bound packet suggestively.

"All set," he said, looking at himself in a glass. "By Jove! George Mott or Arthur Hilton wouldn't know me!"

Wrapping a long mackintosh about his slender form, Fay threw open the door and led the way to the boat-deck.

"We'll stand here," he said to Rake and Yeager. "The ship is almost in. Now play your parts. Look out for a Gray taxi."

The ship snugged against the dock, under pressure from two snorting tugs. Steam plumed aft the giant funnels. A bell clanged its final message to the engine-room. A gangplank was raised in the gloom. It steadied and swung inboard.

"Come!" cried Fay. "Follow me!"

The way led down through a companion, along a luggage-littered deck and past the second officer, who gave the signal that they could descend the gangplank.

Fay shaded his face from the Central Office men at the foot of the plank. He turned and motioned for Rake and Yeager. They hurried over the splintered dock and reached the first of the shore throng to meet the incoming passengers.

"Go ahead!" said Fay to Yeager. "Lug the bag and find the taxi. Tell the driver you're from the British Banking Commission. Pile on all the Cockney you know."

THE throng parted. Fay saw, to one side of the dock entrance, a waiting taxi. Upon its seat a form crouched. Yeager waved his hand, opened the taxi door, tossed in the bag and assisted Fay and Rake to mount the running-board and step inside.

"'Otel Rockingham!" exclaimed Yeager. "Go ahead!"

The door clicked shut with a strong pressure. The driver lowered the taximeter flag, released the brake and moved through first, second, and into third speed with the cunning manipulation of a professional.

Fay rubbed the thick plate glass at his side, glanced out at the flashing lights and street intersections, before he leaned down and opened the bag.

"Take these," he whispered, handing Rake and Yeager two heavy automatics. "Plant them on the seat. Now this hatchet."

Joe Yeager straightened with the package in his hand. He broke the string,

ripped off the wrapping paper and held out a bright-looking hatchet.

"Hold it ready!" said Fay. "We're turning into Fifth Avenue!"

The taxi swerved, straightened and lunged northward. Rake sputtered and swore as he attempted to open a door. Yeager bent over and tried the knob on the other door.

"Did you notice our driver?" asked Fay.

"Red hair and turned-up nose," said Yeager. "What to hell kind of a bloody trap did we get into?"

Rake turned and pressed his nose against the front glass of the taxi. He turned as Fay reached and jerked down the blind.

"It's Elsie De Groot!" he blurted. "It's the dame of the garage!"

"Listen!"

A slight noise like a steam-exhaust sounded. Fay reached close by the seat. He pressed one knee against Yeager. He nodded comprehendingly.

"The air's gettin' thinner!" exclaimed Rake. "I can't breathe!"

Fay dropped to his knees, swayed, and ran his hand over the bottom of the cab. He curled into a knot with his feet on the seat. He raised a hand and indicated for Rake and Yeager to bend down.

"We're supposed to be dead!" he whispered. "There's a suction pump on the engine that's exhausting the air from the cab. The driver started the pump when she started the cab. The windows and framework are built to withstand enormous outside pressure."

THE taxi came to a sudden halt at a curb.

The driver sprang from the front seat, mounted the running-board and pressed a pair of sharp eyes against the side glass. Fay, Rake and Yeager lay on the cab floor with their faces shielded by their up-thrown arms.

The driver swung into the seat, raced the engine, and clicked through the speeds. The taxi darted up Fifth Avenue. It gained Fifty-ninth Street and turned into the Park. It swung the dark curves on its swift passage uptown.

Fay's fingers groped along the seat and clasped an automatic. "Get the other!" he said into Rake's ear. "You, Yeager, take the hatchet and pry at the bottom of the door. I've got my hand over the suction pipe. We won't be suffocated."

The ride seemed endless. The taxi rolled from out the foliage of the Park and

climbed a long hill. It turned northward along street-car tracks.

"Broadway!" said Fay, sensing his position. "We're going right out Broadway."

Rake gasped and pressed a finger across his mouth. He coughed, pounded his chest, and recovered himself. His eyes glared indignantly. He waited till the taxi clattered over a bridge, then he protested:

"Let me out, Chester. I'll wring that damn girl's neck! I can't stand this much longer. There's no air."

"Sisst!" said Fay. "Are you sure Elsie De Groot is driving the taxi?"

"Sure! I'd swear to it!"

Fay chuckled. "We'll soon know. This is Yonkers. We've passed Getty Square. We're turning now. Now we're going north. Two turns and then a straight road. I'd know where we are, blindfolded."

IT was twenty minutes later when the taxi slowed, backed, then swung toward the left and took a narrow bumpy road. Fay sat up, pressed his toe on the sucking exhaust-pipe and clamped his teeth with a suggestive grind.

"All ready!" he said nudging Yeager.

"See, we're rising. We're going across a bridge. Listen! That's the New York Central Railroad below us. This is where Stephney was thrown on the freight-train. Now—look out!"

The taxi dropped down a long, sharp incline with its brakes grinding. It rounded a lodge-gate, swung by a dark, stone house and came to a sudden halt in a sheltered courtyard.

The driver sprang out. Fay braced his feet against the door. He heard two voices in whispered conversation. A third joined in with a protesting snarl. The handle of the door clicked. A key was inserted. The lock snapped open.

Fay bent his knees, aimed at the exact center of the panel and kicked outward. He rolled over with the force of his blow. He staggered from the cab with Yeager and Rake scrambling after him.

"Get up your hands!" he exclaimed, jabbing forward the automatic. "Up! Up! Up! All three of you!"

Rake lunged swiftly and wrapped his arms about the forward figure of a startled group. He went down with the man under him.

The two figures in front of Fay's auto-

matic hesitated, spread, and bolted to right and left. Fay lowered his gun, fired once at the ground, then dashed in pursuit of the taxi-driver, whose khaki leggings were a fair mark to follow.

He gained with each stride. He reached forward, stumbled over a low wall, and clutched a coat which was torn from his fingers. He bounded across a roadway, dropped the automatic and made a flying tackle which brought his quarry to the close-cropped grass.

"Lie still, you!" he ordered as his fingers closed on a pair of flailing arms. "Get down! I think I know you!"

FAY'S hands gripped with strength. He heard a low moan below him, and eased the clutch he had fastened upon a thick throat. He wheeled and stared toward the courtyard. Rake had already secured his prisoner. The big ex-convict was looking up the road, which merged into gloom and dripping trees. A man was bounding along this road, with Yeager close behind him. The Cockney raised his revolver in a slow aim. He lowered it and dashed on. A taxi with blazing cones of yellow light swung over the bridge across the railroad track and began descending the grade. It slowed. It stopped with a shriek of metal bands on metal.

Two drivers sprang from the front seat and reached for the man whom Yeager was pursuing. He sank to his knees in the roadway as other forms scrambled from the taxi. He was surrounded by a resolute group of taxi-drivers. Their leader called an order and came running toward the taxi in the courtyard.

Fay twisted his fingers in a close collar, ran his hand over the figure below him and found, in a pocket, a matted red wig. He sprang erect.

"The mechanic of the garage!" he exclaimed. "You settle one doubt! You impersonated Elsie De Groot!"

The leader of the drivers who had arrived in the second taxi ran across the courtyard, paused, and stared at Fay's

prisoner. She turned with her eyes sweeping the windows of the silent house. She came over the grass.

"Just in time, Miss Elsie!" said Fay. "You got a man up the road. Who was he?"

"A crook! And this is—"

"This is one of your mechanics. He resembles you. He must have had access to your desk. He impersonated you by putting on a wig, after you set Stephney down on Fifth Avenue. He was Ponsardin's tool. His taxi was equipped with a suction-pipe and a set of snap locks on the doors. It was death to enter it. They were after big game tonight."

The girl shuddered. She turned away from Fay and his prisoner.

"I don't know how it all happened," she said. "I suspected the mechanic after your visit. We followed him tonight. He had a taxi exactly like ours. We lost him in the Park. We were close behind you. Then—we found the trail again, up above Yonkers. It led here. You see, he had different tires than most cars. One was vulcanized on the tread and made a different mark in the dust."

"That was clever!"

The girl trembled slightly.

"Who's the third man," Fay asked, "—the one you looked at before you came over to me?"

"Oh, that's Ponsardin! He's the owner of the Gray Taxi Company. I wonder what will become of it now? I hate to see the boys lose their jobs."

"They wont, and you wont. I'm sure I can fix things so that once in a while I can drop around and call upon Miss Elsie De Groot—President and General Manager of the Gray Taxi Company—which Mr. George Mott will surely take care of, no matter what happens to Ponsardin."

The girl seized Fay's extended hand.

"That'll be corking! The Gray Brotherhood has certainly cleared its name tonight."

"And so have you!" said Chester Fay with a smile.

"THE SECOND LIFE OF MONSIEUR THE DEVIL," a novellette by H. BEDFORD-JONES, will be a feature of the forthcoming November issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

The Brazen Peacock



(What Has Already Happened:)

HOWARD Z. FRASER, wizard of oil, mining and transportation, finds his wealth distasteful because his only son Bob, whom he had dismissed in anger two years before, is lost in the Orient. Fraser, who had built the foundation of his fortune in Asia years before, decides to return to the Orient, seek Tahir Beg, an influential Kurdish chief and friend of his wild youth, and get his help in finding Bob.

Meanwhile, as Fraser arranges to sail, Tahir Beg, on the other side of the world, hears that an American named Fraser is at Erbil, and determines for the sake of his old friendship to go and bring him back to his home in the Hamavand country.

While Tahir Beg is gone, Shaik Nuri, a dissolute ruler of Sulaimanieh, south of Hamavand, rides north and chances to spy Sefid, the beautiful daughter of Tahir Beg, and vows to possess her.

Arriving at Erbil, Tahir Beg finds Bob Fraser. As they are talking, a boy comes in with a brass peacock which Bob had found and had sent to a jeweler to be burnished. This, it develops, is the god of the devil-worshippers whom his master is making his allies.

At Hamavand Bob is much impressed by the beauty and grace of Sefid. Later Bob sets out on a two-day journey for flour

for the chief's household, and while he is alone in the arid valley, he realizes he loves Sefid. He is awakened at dawn by sounds of hoof-beats and a shot that just missed him. His own bullet finished his assailant, on whose body he finds his own brazen peacock. Instantly alarmed, he rushes back to the chief's home, where he finds that emissaries of Shaik Nuri have stolen Sefid. With Tahir Beg and his warriors, Bob prepares to go after the girl. . . .

Howard Z. Fraser had come to Samara in record-breaking time and fared forth into the hill country accompanied only by his faithful Winkler, two trusted Hamavands and a small group of men under the command of Ra'sul Majid, the secret emissary of Shaik Nuri.

Fraser is betrayed and captured, yet rescued by Sefid, and together they both make their escape. Recognition and revelation of her antecedents, as Hélène de Montfort, follows. Sefid becomes separated from the elder Fraser, but while awaiting his return is found in a deserted village by Bob, who is surprised at the news of his father's presence. Setting out to meet the father, they are ambushed by Ra'sul Majid, who, however, through Bob's heroism, meets with a well-deserved fate.

But the end is not yet. Shaik Nuri is upon them and away with him they ride into new captivity. Little, however, did the proud chieftain dream that before the

A Three-Part Novel

by

H. Bedford Jones



day was over his captives would be plucked from him by the mocking hand of Uthman the Persian, lord of Penjivan.

(*The Story Continues:*)

CHAPTER XI

"All doors will be seen decorated with red lilies, as a sign of the baptism of the people."—*The Black Book.*

"THIS is not so bad," reflected Uthman al Hudr with great complacency. "I lost the White Pearl and Agha Fraser, may Melek Taus curse him! But now I have gained the White Pearl again, and with her the son of Fraser—and I think I can take vengeance upon the son no less than upon the father!"

A smile grew in his dark, stern face as he gazed upon the moving cavalcade.

Free of all Jaf vengeance had escaped Al Hudr and his men—free with their booty and slaves, past the Aorami mountain wall, past that steep and precipitous defile which led into the Penjivan fastness—that defile which ten men could hold against an army—and they now were heading homeward.

Bob Fraser, riding bound among other captives—most of whom were women or girls—was glimpsing a district upon which few outsiders had ever looked. Ahead,

towering into the blue sky, was the mighty rock of Penjivan; a rock of sheer scarp, a black segment of the Persian land upthrust at heaven in challenge. Here, and in the few valleys around that could be entered in only one or two places, had dwelt through ages the Persian sect whose Yezidi brethren were strewn in Mesopotamia.

From the talk of those about him, on that fast, hard flight into refuge, Fraser had learned much. The religion of the Satan-devotees forbade them any dealing with the outside world; the faith of these Persian folk differed somewhat from that of their kin over the border, and among them had arisen Al Hudr, a commanding force not to be denied. He had welded them as he wished and was now their emir in rule as well as in religion.

Primitive were the habitations that nestled among the crags and hillsides, and primitive were the people who gazed upon the long columns winding through the secluded valleys. Wild mountaineers were these worshipers of Satan, yet as he came among them and passed their villages and listened to the talk around him, Fraser was astonished more and more by the simplicity of the folk and the quaintly stark contradictions of their faith—a faith which comprised the beliefs of Islam, the Mosaic customs of the Jews, and the sacraments of Christianity.

At the doorways of all the houses that

he saw, were great clusters of crimson flowers; and when he questioned one of his guards concerning this, he found that in the month of the Yezidi new year every family of baptized devil-worshippers adorned their doorways thus as a symbol of their faith—the Black Book commanded it, said the warrior. Upon Fraser hinting that the custom might have been borrowed from the Jews, the Persian scoffed loudly and berated him for an ignorant infidel.

IN the midst of that caravan, his gloomy band of men around him, rode Shaik Nuri. He and his followers had sent their women-folk and choicest possessions on to Penjivan, when first the fury of Tahir Beg and the Hamavands had burst upon Sulaimanieh; so that they were now forced to go thither themselves. It was a bitter pill for that proud Shaik Nuri; a most bitter pill, for now Al Hudr had taken the White Pearl from him, and on every hand the Yezidis jibed and scoffed at him—and to be the butt of such a joke is anguish to every Moslem! Yet he was helpless; against the power of Al Hudr he dared nothing.

The Yezidis, hill warriors all, thought that their leader had played a crafty and clever game. The White Pearl had been stolen, and all the blame and brunt had fallen upon Shaik Nuri, who had lost his city and barely escaped with his life. Escaping, he had found the White Pearl and had blindly carried her on to Al Hudr—who had blandly taken her again. An excellent joke!

The great point to this jest was that in the Yezidi mythology the name of White Pearl figured largely as a symbol of the creation. Therefore it was very meet that Al Hudr should mate with her, after this month of the new year should be past; for this reason, also, great honor was paid to Sefid. As he marched with Al Hudr's personal slaves and booty, Bob Fraser watched the breed camels which bore her, on ahead; presents were showered upon her by all the folk—gifts of flowers, jewels, cloths, by those who sought her future favor with Al Hudr. And this fact gave Bob Fraser an inspiration.

Since that morning when he had departed to fetch flour, Bob Fraser had not returned to the house of Tahir Beg; he had ridden hard with the chieftain, and had been in the thick of the fighting at Sulaimanieh. Thus, he had been given no

chance to deposit the brazen peacock with his own effects, for Tahir Beg carried no baggage in the field.

Wishing to keep the brazen image, which promised to have some value, Fraser had sewn it into a corner of his saddle-bags. These bags had been woven, in kilim fashion, by Sefid herself, and had been a present to him from the girl. Now, on the march into Penjivan, Bob Fraser had noted that in the division of the booty his horse and saddle had fallen to the lot of one of the guards who watched over Al Hudr's slaves.

Except for being stripped of his weapons, Fraser had not been robbed; at the time of his capture there had been great haste and confusion, and later on it was no doubt thought that he had been stripped by his first captors.

So, on the night before they came to Al Hudr's stronghold on the Penjivan rock, Fraser took his store of English gold from his belt, and went to this guard.

"Here, friend," he gave the man a sovereign as he spoke. "There are more of these if you will do me a certain favor—one that will advantage you also, by Allah's grace!"

"Well said, infidel! Speak!"

"When I was among the Hamavands, I knew the White Pearl well," pursued Bob Fraser. "On that horse which you ride is her own saddle, and the bags were woven by her own hand. Take them to her, and she will be much pleased with the gift. Mention my name, that she may intercede for me with Al Hudr; she will bear you in mind also, and these things may lead to some good for both of us."

"By the bird of Melek Taus, that is good news!" exclaimed the warrior eagerly. "Keep your gold, infidel; I have more plunder now than I can carry, and this news will make the fortunes of us both. Good! I will make the gift this very night."

So the man did, reporting later that Sefid had received the bags with great joy; and accounting his future assured, the warrior was only too glad to help Fraser on the march. Since the saddle-bags had thus come to Sefid, Bob Fraser was certain that her wit would see some hidden reason therein, and would find the brazen peacock. It might be of great use to her in any emergency, he knew.

As for himself, he had no hope, realizing that Al Hudr meant to vent that ancient

hatred upon him. Sefid had informed him of the things that lay betwixt his father and Al Hudr, and Fraser did not doubt that the chieftain meant to take vengeance upon him for his father's actions of sixteen years previously.

ONCE or twice he saw the two Hamavands who had been taken prisoner with him; they were slaves, and seemed to be accepting their lot with a stoical calm. Of escape there was no chance, and any hope of rescue seemed equally vain. To north, east and south the Penjivan valleys were defended by the great ramparts of the snowy peaks; the only direct entrances, from the west, were capable of being defended by small forces against any army. Here in these mountain fastnesses the Yezidis had dwelt for centuries unmolested—fierce fighters, too poor to make the effort of conquering them profitable.

Uthman al Hudr was now making them rich with plunder, bringing the world to them; and Fraser, when he saw the city of Penjivan open before him, knew that the chieftain had seized upon and made the most of the chance of a lifetime.

In ancient days some fortress of the Sassanid kings had crowned this mighty rock, whose flat top and devious ascent made it an impregnable stronghold for the folk dwelling in the valleys roundabout. The old walls were here, repaired by Uthman, enclosing the whole surface of the hill-crest; and within the walls were buildings, new and old. Fraser gained an impression of wide streets, stout stone-built houses with scarlet flowers at their doors, fountains and running brooks beside the way. Then, before his immediate section of the caravan, opened a gate in a wall—and he was in the center and very heart of this ancient town, the citadel or palace of the old kings that was now the palace of Al Hudr the adventurer.

This, like the outer town, conveyed the idea of being new yet ancient—the walls, huge blocks of hewn stone, repaired and renewed; the decorations, the tiles, the extensive gardens, all seeming to have been done on ancient lines. Al Hudr had taken this ruined city of the kings and had restored it faithfully. Within this citadel was actually an inner city—and for this there was a reason.

Bob Fraser was kicked into one of a number of cells that lined the inner side of the wall. These cells overlooked the

gardens, among which were situated other buildings; the palace, the chief local shrine at which the Yezidis worshipped, the harem or "forbidden" quarters of the women belonging to the inner garrison, and other structures. Gazing forth from his cell at this scene, Fraser soon came to an understanding of the situation here in the inner city. It was not hard to comprehend, for numbers of men were continually passing the line of cells, their talk deafening the ear. And of these men, few showed the distinctive garb of the Yezidis. Many of them wore the forbidden blue, nearly all were Persians of Kurds, as their attire testified, and most of them swore by Allah rather than by Melek Taus.

Al Hudr, the adventurer, may have been originally a Yezidi; at any rate, he had come here to Penjivan and had gathered a force of outlaws behind him for a nucleus. Around this nucleus he had gathered the Yezidi folk from their scattered valleys. Here in the inner citadel he lived with his chosen band, all of whom were of course nominal converts to the religion of Melek Taus, and from here he was extending his power in a widening arc.

It was no mean power. From the talk he heard, Fraser gathered that this stroke at the Sbarizur plain was the first really extensive blow that Al Hudr had dealt. There were to be no more scattered raids, no more night-ridings in small bands. Al Hudr had now placed himself and his Yezidis in the field openly, contenders for temporal rule; into the lives of the isolated Yezidis he had brought the wide world, and for them he would carve a kingdom in the world. After this there would be no raids; there would be the march of armies!

ALL that long afternoon, as into the inner citadel poured the slaves and the loot of Al Hudr and his chosen band, the talk poured up like incense before the cells; Fraser heard much boasting about future deeds—extending a conquest over Persia was the least of the intended triumphs. Alliances, he gathered, had been already formed with many tribes around, and one of Shaik Nuri's dejected men was solemnly promised that within two months the shaiks would be restored to Sulaimanieh and placed at the head of all the Kurdish tribes.

"They're wild, drunk with exultation and blood!" reflected Fraser, sitting in his bare cell and watching the dusty scene from

gloomy eyes. "Al Hudr has given them plunder and fighting. These Yezidis, oppressed and scattered for ages, have gathered around his tangible and visible standard with all their fanatical strength—he's an able devil, all right! I wonder where dad and Tahir Beg are, this minute?"

To this there was no answer.

With the morning, he had sight of Uthman al Hudr, who entered the inner city in triumph, passing within a hundred yards of the prison cells. The chieftain wore now a helmet and suit of chain-mail such as may still be found in Persia—more for romantic appearance than for utility—and over his shoulders was slung a huge cloak of vivid green. This, no doubt, was the reason of his nickname Al Hudr, or the Green One. Fraser never afterwards saw him without this cloak, which he appeared always to wear when in Penjivan.

Uthman's men lined the walls and the street leading into the gardens; behind the chieftain was a long procession of the Yezidi folk, headed by their priests—*pirs* and *shaihs*—clad in ceremonial garments of white linen.

The procession passed onward to the shrine—the tomb of some Yezidi saint—and away from Fraser's sight; there was not a glimpse of Sefid, and what had become of her he knew not.

In the two days that intervened, he heard more than one scrap of talk concerning her; talk which showed him that she was not in the harem but had been given a share in the palace itself—to the Yezidis, superstitious folk at best, her name and her destined marriage with Al Hudr seemed to place her on an equality with the chieftain. Al Hudr was fostering this impression. Fraser gathered that he was intensely proud of his bride-to-be and wished by all means to increase her prestige among the people he ruled.

On the third day after this, one of the Persian guards unlocked the door of Bob Fraser's cell and summoned him forth.

"Come, Nazarene! Our lord wishes speech with you."

Fraser followed his guard, not without much relief, for he had begun to think that his very existence was forgotten. Instead of being led to the palace, he was somewhat surprised when he was conducted through the gardens to a terrace that was floored with ancient marble flags, in the midst of which played a pool of water with a small fountain in its center.

By this fountain was standing Al Hudr. The latter eyed Bob Fraser keenly, then ordered the guard to withdraw. The two men were left alone.

"Peace be with you, Agha Fraser," said Al Hudr, a thin smile on his virile features. "I have not forgotten you; but in the past days I have been busy. Do you know that betwixt me and your father lies an ancient evil?"

"I have heard something of it," said Fraser quietly. In the chieftain's face he read a cruel and intolerable pride, and it came to him that he was now to suffer torture. Yet in this he erred.

"When you fell into my hands," said Al Hudr, watching him, "it seemed to me that by taking vengeance upon you I should thus allay my hatred for your father. So, indeed, I meant to do; yet now it seems to me that this would be but a sorry action, and one most unworthy of me. My quarrel is not with you, but with your father, and with him shall I settle. So on that head, Agha Fraser, fear nothing."

"I am not afraid," and Fraser smiled a little. "I am astonished that there should be so keen a strain of nobility in a robber chieftain like you, Uthman. If you have no quarrel with me, why do you keep me prisoner? For what purpose?"

AL HUDR'S eyes narrowed sleepily, like the eyes of a watching cat.

"Softly, infidel! I have quarrel enough," he answered. "You slew Ra'sul Majid, who was an emir of the Yezidis, and who had been traveling among the Mosul branch of our people, exhorting them to join me here. Therefore, your death is demanded by my folk, his brethren."

"That was fair fighting," said Fraser simply. Al Hudr nodded.

"So I have heard; and by Melek Taus, it seems that you are no coward! Know you where your father and Tahir Beg now are?"

"Rattling at your gates with the Jaf tribes behind them, I suppose."

"No." Al Hudr frowned. "They have disappeared, may the angels seize on them! If they were at my gates, well and good; through those, they could not break. Well, no matter. You are here, and the White Pearl is mine."

"Unless you release her unharmed, Persian," said Fraser steadily, "fate will surely find you! If you force her into your harem, I will not rest until I have your

CHAPTER XII

"I have made it a strict rule that everyone shall refrain from worshipping all gods."
—*Revelation of Melek Taus.*

life; and although I am your prisoner and you may kill me, my father and Tahir Beg will stay upon your trail until they have pulled you down. So take warning! Let her go free, with me, and we have no further interest in your affairs; otherwise, this crime will invite your fate—"

Al Hudr laughed softly.

"Cease your prattling, child! What care I for you or your friends? Now listen to me: do you remember the image of the brazen peacock that was in the house of Tahir Beg?"

"Yes," said Bob Fraser, "it was mine."

"My man, who bore it in the flight thence, was probably killed," said Al Hudr. "That was a great loss to me, for this image was one of the seven sacred *sanjaks* or standards of our faith, and since the days of the Emir Solomon had been handed down among the Yezidis. Where that image now is, you doubtless can tell. Besides that, two only now remain, and they are in the hands of the Mosul branch of our people." I want that brazen peacock, Agha Fraser; and for it, I offer you your life."

"Ah!" said Fraser. "I am not too greatly concerned with my life just now, Al Hudr. What about the White Pearl? If you will send her back unharmed to her father, you shall have the—"

"Fool! She is here, and she stays here—better the White Pearl than a thousand of peacocks!" The eyes of Al Hudr flashed. "Let her name not again pass your lips, infidel! It is for your life, and that alone, that I bargain. Do you accept or not?"

For a bare moment, Fraser hesitated. Then he came to swift decision.

"Where it is now, I cannot say," he answered. "But I will write a note which you will send to Tahir Beg, demanding that the brazen peacock be given the messenger; when the latter brings it here, you will release me. Is that sufficient?"

Al Hudr eagerly assented.

"Agreed! When it arrives, you shall go free—the word of Uthman upon it! Until then, give me your parole—"

"Not at all," said Fraser. "If I am a captive, I am a captive."

The other shrugged his shoulders. "Very well." Turning, he clapped his hands, and a guard appeared.

"Take this man to the palace and give him the room assigned to him," said Al Hudr. "He will write a letter, which you will bring me. *Wa'l sala'm!*"

HAVING seen that Al Hudr's passionate eagerness to possess the brazen peacock quite overbore his crafty prudence, Fraser had not hesitated to drive the bargain. It could only afford him a temporary relief, for it could not be long until Al Hudr would know that Sefid possessed the image; however, Bob Fraser found himself released from the cage-like cell, and he was sanguine in hope that something might turn up at any moment to his advantage.

He had no idea of buying his own life with the peacock, for he knew that the image might yet prove of tremendous aid to Sefid, and he was content to leave it thus to her. The news that there seemed to be no pursuit of the Yezidis, which he speedily confirmed by talking with his guards, was a cause of greater worry to him. He had hoped desperately—even as he knew Sefid must be hoping—that Tahir Beg would come hammering at the Penjivan valleys with all the Hamavands and the Jaf tribes following him. Also, he had hoped that his father would be with the great Kurd, for he believed his father to be still alive.

Was Tahir Beg, then, dead? Had pursuit been abandoned? It seemed incredible; yet the dwellers in the valleys below the Penjivan rock were on guard, and had seen no sign of any foes. The Kurds had attempted no pursuit of the victorious raiders. The racial hatred between Kurd and Yezidi, a hatred centuries old, seemed stunned into quiescence.

Bob Fraser found no great beauty of architecture in the palace through which he was conducted; it was built massively of beams fetched from the mountain slopes, but the old stone-flagged floors showed that it had been reared upon some ancient site. If it was not elegant, however, it was extremely luxurious, and the rich rugs of Sharizur now carpeted its floors and added to its beauty. The palace was built about one huge central hall, which he rightly judged to be used by Al Hudr on state occasions.

Fraser was conducted to rooms in the rear of the palace, which he was informed were his. These, he found, were part of an enclosed area, which included a portion

of the gardens, and which were continually under guard—either of black slaves, or of Persian mercenaries. When he reached his destination, writing materials were brought him, and he wrote out a letter to Tahir Beg as agreed upon, which his guard took over and presumably delivered to Al Hudr for forwarding.

This finished, Fraser indulged in the luxury of a bath, was wine and dined by a slave who had been appointed to wait upon him, and presently, feeling more contented with his lot, lighted his pipe and sauntered forth into the gardens.

"It's a gilded prison, all right," he reflected, "but it might be a heap worse. Those cages along the wall, for instance—ugh! For the present there's no great danger; Sefid is safe until the month is over, and that will be another three weeks. In the meantime, if Al Hudr does not discover that she has the peacock, I can hope for something to turn up. Escape may not be so hopeless—"

HE was thinking thus, when, turning a bend in the path that wound through this prisoned portion of the gardens, he came plump upon Shaik Nuri, who was standing there gazing at the ground in an attitude of despondent melancholy. The bandage was gone from his head, but his arm still lay in its sling. Gone, too, were the numerous weapons that had formerly adorned his person. That he, also, was a prisoner, was not hard to guess.

Shaik Nuri lifted his head and gazed at Fraser, who had halted. To his surprise, Bob Fraser found in those sensual and cruel features no blaze of animosity or hatred; only despair was stamped in them—it came to him swiftly that this young shaik was a broken man. For a long moment the two gazed steadily at each other.

"You are Agha Farizur," said the shaik dully. A gleam stirred in his eyes. "Ah! Would that I had fallen fighting beneath the Hamavand bullets, ere I had been snared in the nets of this accursed worshiper of Shaitan! Would that I had slain you in the courtyard there at Erbil, or been slain, ere I had listened to the lying promises of this Persian infidel!"

Despite the evil soul of the young shaik, despite that it was Shaik Nuri who was primarily responsible for all that had happened to himself and to Sefid through sending Al Hudr to steal the girl and the brazen peacock, Fraser could not but feel a twinge

of pity as he looked at the broken chieftain. This free lord of the hills had been ensnared in the gins of a more subtle and powerful man, and had been ruthlessly cast aside.

"You are a prisoner, then?" said Fraser. "I thought you were allied with Al Hudr—"

For the first time a flash of hatred lighted the despondent features.

"What is honor to an infidel?" broke out Nuri bitterly. "Because I desired the White Pearl, whom he took from me, this unspeakable dog has kept me prisoned, and has scattered my men among his dog-brethren; weak as I had become, he feared me! May the tomb of his father be broken into by jackals! And you, Nazarene, you are a prisoner likewise?"

"Yes," said Bob Fraser with a shrug. "I know now, Shaik Nuri, why you wanted that brazen peacock, in the caravansary at Erbil. You recognized it as the god of these infidels?"

The other nodded gloomily and dismissed the subject, as of no importance.

"I shall never see Sulaimanieh again, or the wide plain of Sharizur, or the fertile Azmir hills!" There was no whine to the young chieftain's voice, only a note of plaintive mourning, as of one who sees his own fate very clearly and shuns it not. "And you will sit in my place, my uncle Kadir—you, the wily old fox of our family, supported by the rifles of the Englishmen! Truly said the poet Palangani: 'I see in the white beauty of women the ruin of princes and the pallor of death, and in their red lips the flaming of cities.'"

FRASER forebore to remind the other that it was not the beauty of Sefid which had led him to this strait, but his own unbridled passions.

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, cease your lamentations!" exclaimed Fraser impatiently. "You are in no danger, shaik—"

The other smiled—an indescribable smile pregnant with hidden things.

"You know little of this Al Hudr, oh Nazarene! He fears me and he hates me, therefore has he condemned me to death within eight days."

"To death!" exclaimed Fraser with some incredulity. "While there are a hundred of your men here—"

The other made a gesture that did not lack pride.

"What are a hundred warriors among his hundreds? They will not see me again, for unless I abandon the true God and proclaim belief in this accursed Melek Taus, he has sworn to slay me. To win his faith a shaik of Sulaimanieh would be good fortune in his hand, eh? But never will I spit upon the faith of my fathers, as they would have me; never will I deny Allah and turn to the worship of Shaitan the accursed! Look to your own case, Nazarene, for I think that he will give you the same choice ere long."

Shaik Nuri abruptly turned away and disappeared among the enclosed gardens.

Reflecting often on this meeting during the days that followed, Fraser concluded that only the existence of the brazen peacock had saved him from this same choice. There had been naught to save Shaik Nuri, who had fallen horribly into the pit of his own digging. After egregiously tricking his ally, after leaving him to the mercy of Tahir Beg, after taking out of his very hand the White Pearl, the lord of Penjivan was too crafty to free so potential a foe. Yet, could he exhibit a man of this rank and fame as a convert to Melek Taus, he might be well content. It was not for nothing, however, that the Shaiks of Sulaimanieh were notorious for their bigoted and fanatical adherence to Islam, and Fraser knew that this young chieftain would never apostatize.

Through the following days, Fraser was not allowed to leave his apartment or the portion of the gardens allotted to him. Shaik Nuri did not again appear, nor did he see anyone with the exception of the two guards who remained in his rooms day and night. These, who were changed thrice daily, were members of Al Hudr's personal following; they displayed no animosity toward Fraser, but treated him much as one of themselves, whiling the time away with song and story.

Nothing had been heard of Tahir Beg or the Jaf tribes, and they taunted Bob Fraser good-humoredly that his friends had left him with the White Pearl to the mercy of Al Hudr, into whose territory they dared not follow. This seemed true enough, and worried him greatly. The most probable explanation was that his father and Tahir Beg were both dead.

UPON the eighth evening after his meeting with Shaik Nuri, he was abruptly summoned forth by his guards, who fas-

tened golden fetters upon his wrists and led him out into the audience hall. Here he found a great company assembled, including Al Hudr's mercenaries and the chief men of the Yezidis. Upon a dais at the upper end of the hall whither he was conducted by his guards, sat Uthman in person; and beside him, couched amid gorgeous silken carpets, was Sefid.

For a moment the eyes of Sefid and Fraser met. In that brief meeting, Fraser read that she had come to no hurt; he smiled slightly, and she answered the smile with a very slight gesture that brought sudden hope into his heart. Then he turned—and saw Shaik Nuri standing between two guards, facing Al Hudr.

"Do you still prefer Islam to the worship of Melek Taus?" demanded the chieftain, who was noted among his warriors for not wasting words.

"There is but one God, and Mohammed is the prophet of God!" intoned Shaik Nuri proudly. "Accursed be Shaitan!"

A growl rippled and eddied through the ranks of the Yezidis, but with a leap Al Hudr sprang to his feet and drew his curved scimitar—a blade that shimmered with jewels in the light of the lamps overhead. And when they saw this, from all his men went up a long howl of delight.

"Loose him, and give him the best blade among you!" cried Al Hudr, throwing off his long green cloak. "Now summon Allah to your aid, infidel, for you will have need of him! Stay—since your right arm is useless, mine shall also be tied. Here, slave!"

Summoning the nearest slave, Al Hudr had his own right arm tied about his waist. At this touch of romantic chivalry the watching crowd howled anew; but Fraser, noting how Al Hudr balanced the scimitar in his left hand, guessed that the chieftain could use either arm with equal skill.

Shaik Nuri did not shrink from the measuring of swords. Standing forth with the blade that had been given him, he lifted the steel and cried aloud:

"Allah! Allahu akhbar, the Compassionate! Great is God, the Merciful!"

A thin smile curved the cruel lips of Al Hudr.

"By the hidden name of Melek Taus—*Azazil!*" he shouted, and leaped forward.

The two blades met in midair—met and clashed, clashed again. The young shaik seemed transmuted by the touch of a weapon; he flung himself upon Al Hudr in

a passionate fury, attacking with fire, an *élan*, that drew roars of admiration from the crowd. For an instant it seemed that he would bear down the older man by the sheer frenzy of his onrush. Al Hudr gave never a stroke back, but devoted himself to upbuilding his flaming blade into a wall impenetrable.

Then suddenly, Al Hudr's glittering steel licked out like a flash of light. So swift, so sudden and terrible was the blow that few saw it. But the chieftain leaped backward, and his voice pealed up in a shrill yell of mockery.

"Ho, infidel! Where is your Allah now?"

Shaik Nuri stood motionless an instant—then a great sigh seemed to burst from him, and he collapsed in a red heap. With its single blow, that razor-edged steel had shorn into his life and had bitten him half asunder.

A WILD roar of voices filled the huge hall—a roar of wolfish applause, a roar of mad acclaim for the greatest and most terrible swordsman of them all! None of the Sulaimanieh men were present, apparently; indeed, Fraser later learned that ten of them had been put to death that morning, and that under this example the others had consented to embrace Melek Taus; but they were not brought to see the death of Shaik Nuri, for Al Hudr was by no means desirous of goading his mercenaries into vengeance and bloodfeuds.

Before the uproar had quieted down, and while Al Hudr was cleansing his weapon upon a cloth offered by a slave, there came a surge and wave of the bodies filling the hall. Through the crowd broke an officer, who flung himself toward Al Hudr with a shout. The chieftain roared at the crowd for quiet, and as a curious hush fell, the words of the officer came clearly to Fraser.

"Lord, a Nazarene, alone and unarmed, has been sent on from the lower valleys and has been brought through the outer city to our gates."

"A Nazarene? A prisoner?"

"Not so, lord. He has come of his own will. According to his tale, he is the slave and servant of Agha Farizur, and has come hither to serve him in his captivity."

Fraser listened, startled and incredulous. It occurred to him that Tahir Beg must have sent someone—yet that were impossible, if this arrival was a Nazarene!

Al Hudr glanced at his captive, and all eyes followed his. He frowned, then a thin smile curved his lips.

"Bring the man here," he said, "but first search him well. Who can this be, Agha Fraser? When we were in the country of the Hamavands, you had no slave."

"Who it is I know not," answered Fraser, helplessly.

Down the length of the hall a lane was opened, and presently everyone craned forward eagerly, for Christians were not seen every day in Penjivan—unless under compulsion. No less eager than the rest, Bob Fraser rose on his toes. When he saw the man who was striding up the hall amid guards, a low word of astonishment broke from him. Instantly, Al Hudr was at his side.

"You know this infidel?" demanded the Persian softly.

Fraser nodded, unbelieving his own senses. "He—he has served me all my life, and my father." He lifted his voice suddenly. "Winkler! Is that really you?"

WINKLER, for it was none other, halted and stared around. Before him was the red mass that had been Shaik Nuri, and he whitened perceptibly. Then his gaze fell upon the figure of Fraser, and a glad cry burst from him.

"Mr. Robert! Tell these heathen that it's all right, sir—"

Eagerly, Fraser turned to Al Hudr and spoke in Persian.

"This man speaks the truth, Uthman! How he came here I know not, unless he came to this land with my father. Send him away again, I pray you, and do him no hurt—"

Al Hudr merely made an impatient gesture and stepped forward toward Winkler, who met him with a blank stare. The chieftain smiled slowly, and spoke in Kurdish.

"Whom seek you here, Nazarene?"

Fraser was even more surprised when he heard Winkler break into slow and difficult Kurdish, yet manage to make himself understood. Winkler told a plain and unvarnished tale—how he had been with Tahir Beg and Howard Z. Fraser when word came to them that Sefid and Bob had been taken prisoner; how pursuit beyond the vale of Sharizur had been futile; how he had set out with certain companions, who had later deserted him, and how he had made his way to Penjivan in the face

of many difficulties in order to serve his master. It was a long tale and not quickly told.

To those who heard it, this quixotic fidelity of servant to master was not only perfectly understandable, but it was thoroughly admirable. Obviously, Winkler was frightened; and it was equally obvious that he intended to do his duty at all costs. Al Hudr questioned him regarding the movements of Tahir Beg, but Winkler knew only that he had placed Howard Z. Fraser in safe hands and had then set forth to find Bob. So transparent was his devotion that Al Hudr could not but believe his tale. To eastern minds, here was the perfect servant.

"Let it be as you wish," said the chief-tain with a shrug. "You shall remain with Agha Fraser and serve him; his fate shall be your fate, and his luck your luck."

"So be it," answered Winkler, quite unruffled by the implied threat.

"If I had such slaves as this infidel Nazarene," quoth Al Hudr, gazing fiercely about the hall, "Melek Taus would be lord of Persia and Rumistan itself! Take Agha Fraser to his quarters, and send the servant with him."

CHAPTER XIII

"A servant is to call the people, saying, it is the call of the prophet to a feast."—
The Book Al Jiwah.

RELIEVED of his golden fetters, Bob Fraser was returned to his own quarters. As though in a dream, he shook hands with Winkler; for a moment, words were beyond him.

"Good heavens, Winkler!" he exclaimed at last. "It doesn't seem possible that you're here, in the flesh! Man, it's like a piece out of the Arabian Nights—to think of you coming all through these hills by yourself—"

"But I didn't, sir," broke in Winkler, smiling.

"You didn't? Why, you just told them you did—that was what made the big hit with Al Hudr—the faithful-servant stuff and all that—"

"Yes, sir." Winkler permitted himself a grin. Much of the old formality of Winkler had vanished; adventuring had largely effaced his dignified placidity.

"Your father and Tahir Beg felt convinced that this was the story to tell, Mr.

Robert. They brought me as far as the first Penjivan valley—"

"They brought you?" repeated Fraser, staring at him in astonishment. "Then—why, you old rascal! Was that story of yours all a pack of lies?"

"Just about, sir. You see, we knew that you were here, and Miss Sefid too, so it was necessary that you be reached in some way. When I suggested that I come openly, Tahir Beg was delighted; he seemed to think that these heathen would consider it quite the thing to do, just as they did. So I came. But—the things I've seen, Mr. Robert! That dead man in the hall—and to imagine that these heathen actually worship Satan, sir—"

"Never mind all that; Winkler, you're a genius—a hero! Coming here to this place by yourself, in a perfectly calm assurance—"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but it was nothing of the sort," put in Winkler. "I was scared out of my skin all the time, I assure you!"

"Damned if you showed it, then!" roared Fraser delightedly, clapping him on the back. "Bully for you! Say, what does it all mean, anyhow? Where's dad all this time? Why hasn't Tahir Beg done a thing to rescue his daughter?"

Winkler glanced around cautiously. One of the guards was at the outer door, watching them, but he had no knowledge of the English speech.

"It's like this, sir," answered Winkler, lowering his voice. "Your father had been hurt—nothing serious, but some contusions—"

"Yes, Sefid told me about that. Go on!"

"And most fortunately, I happened to meet him and brought him to Tahir Beg—"

"You? Were you knocking around on private adventures of your own?"

WINKLER looked a trifle agitated.

"Well, sir, I'll come to that later. It's more important just now to tell you what's what. We met Tahir Beg and then found that to pursue this Al Hudr directly would gain very little. Tahir Beg and your father met the leaders of the Jaf tribes, who were most happy to go into partnership with them, so to speak, against these heathen, sir.

"They worked out a scheme, by which most of the Jaf troops were to take their time and then to attack the lower Penjivan

valleys at a given day. To break through those valleys was impossible, according to the best accounts; so your father took charge of things there, while Tahir Beg with a few hundred picked men set off to circle around through the mountains. He had guides who could bring him on the Penjivan country from the rear, where no attack was thought possible because of the mountains—and he'll break out suddenly close to this city, sir. This will so alarm the lower valleys that your father may break in there, and while they're doing that we are to set fire to the city here—"

"Whoa!" exclaimed Fraser, laughing. "Look here, Winkler—do you still read those dime novels you used to devour in the old days?"

"Eh? Why, yes, sir—"

"Well, you're making yourself into a regular bloodthirsty old pirate chief, aren't you! We've no matches, but that doesn't matter; we can kill a few dozen of the best fighters in Kurdistan, and set fire to the outer city, and maybe knock out Al Hudr as we go along—huh? Winkler, I'm surprised at you!"

"Well, sir, I'm only going by what your father and Tahir Beg said!" answered Winkler doggedly. "According to them, Mr. Robert, there would be no chance whatever in a straight attack. The only hope was to attack unexpectedly, and a big surprise when Tahir Beg got in from the rear, and then put over the finishing blow by making them think that enemies were in the very city itself. They're depending on us to do it, sir."

Fraser sobered. "All right, Winkler; we'll not fail 'em. I don't know just what we can do, but we'll see. When is this attack to take place?"

"Whenever Tahir Beg can get through the mountains, sir. He left camp a week ago—how long it will be, I can't say."

Fraser whistled. "Well, it's a gay life! Never mind. Tell me about dad!"

Until late that night the two sat up talking, and for the first time Fraser heard of how and why his father had come to Kurdistan, and of all that had happened since his coming. In return, he was able to give a coherent understanding of things to Winkler, who was very hazy regarding the Yezidis and all that had happened. Winkler, in fact, had been under the impression that he had come into a land of wild maniacs; and the barbaric splendor of Al Hudr had quite dazzled him.

UPON the following day, Al Hudr himself paid a brief visit to Fraser's quarters, evidently to assure himself that Winkler's story was true; the chieftain was in affable mood and paid more attention to Winkler, with whom he seemed delighted, than to Fraser. To the latter he merely said that nothing had been heard from the messengers as yet.

"You've made a hit with the chief," chuckled Fraser, when their visitor had departed. "Tahir Beg had a wise hunch, all right, when he said that the faithful-servant business would go over strong. Stick to it, old boy! Hello, who's this?"

Their guards had been changed during the visit of Al Hudr. Now that the chieftain had departed, one of the warriors promptly settled down against the door and went to sleep; the other, however, approached Fraser and Winkler. He was a total stranger.

"I have a message for you, Agha Fraser. You do not remember me, of course?"

"No," said Fraser, regarding him sharply.

"I was one of Shaik Nuri's men—it was I who guarded you there upon the road, when we captured you."

"Oh! Then you are one of the apostates—"

The man flushed darkly. "Peace, agha, in the name of Allah!" he said, his voice thick. "We are brought to shame, all of us; our life is become as bitterness, and we live but to put a knife into this accursed infidel Al Hudr and send him unto hell. I would have done it now, except that I had a message for you—and the slaying would have meant your death also."

"What is your message?" asked Fraser coldly, not quite believing the man.

"This, agha. It was given to me by another of our comrades. What it is, I know not."

From an inner pocket of his Kurdish vest the guard produced a folded paper. Fraser took it and went to a window. He opened the paper and found it to be a letter in Persian:

In the name of God, the Compassionate!
Greeting to Agha Fraser from the White Pearl.

Those two Hamavand men who were captured with us, have been given me as slaves. They are bold men, and are in touch with the men of Sulaimanieh. Also, I received the brazen peacock and shall use it at the feast tomorrow night, at which you are to be present. Al Hudr has promised to admit you as a guest.

Leave all to me. We shall win or lose

everything. When I stand up, that is the signal; join me swiftly and do not hesitate to obey me.

Fraser stared at the writing in joyful amazement. It was the first he had heard from Sefid since their capture; the first intimation he had had that she was alive and well. He turned and called Winkler to him, and translated the writing.

"There's a woman for you, Winkler!" he exclaimed. "Instead of being overcome by her position, she has gone to work and means to do something! If I had half her spirit—"

Winkler gave him a shrewd glance, then smiled faintly.

"Do you think, sir, that what she means to do can interfere with Tahir Beg's plans?"

"I can't tell, of course; but I can't see how. Perhaps she has found some means of escape—it's evident that she and the two Hamavand men have gone to work on those fellows from Sulaimanieh. Perhaps this guard of ours knows what's up. If he could get a note to her, telling about the outside situation—"

Fraser beckoned the guard, who joined them at once.

"This letter is from her who is called the White Pearl," he said quietly. "Can you place an answer in her hands?"

"Impossible, agha," said the other promptly. "I know not whom to trust, nor how to get the letter to her. Most of our comrades have sworn to slay Al Hudr, but some of them have been won over by bribes of women and gold, so that it were folly to trust them."

"What is intended tomorrow night at the feast?"

THE Kurd shook his head. "Agha, I know not. That there is to be a feast, I know; and many of us have received word to hold ourselves ready to act at that time. What is intended, however, has not come to us. Nor do we know whom to trust."

"Very well." Fraser reluctantly abandoned the hope of getting any word to Sefid. It would be too apt to frustrate all her own plans if discovered. He swiftly determined to trust this Kurd fully.

"I can tell you this—that certain of your kinsmen, the Jafs, are waiting to drop upon the city from the rear and attack. If there is any fighting tomorrow night, set fire to the palace and to all other

buildings you or your comrades can reach. You understand?"

A flash of fierce joy gleamed in the features of the man.

"Unto Allah be glory!" he answered fervently. "I understand, agha. It shall be done! Now be careful—that dog yonder is stirring, and I do not think they trust me too well—"

The Kurd hastily returned to the side of his comrade and flung himself down as though lazily watching the prisoners.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Winkler uneasily, "but on thinking over this affair, I am not so sure that I like it. I'm afraid Miss Sefid has determined to do something desperate. Now, if you could make her wait until Tahir Beg comes—"

Fraser turned and put both hands on Winkler's shoulders, meeting the man's eyes squarely.

"My dear Winkler," he said, "Tahir Beg may never come; how on earth he can get around and through those mountains, which are inhabited by wild folk friendly to Al Hudr, without giving any warning, is more than I can see. Perhaps he can do it. More likely, he can't!

"We're in a precarious situation here, apt to be slaughtered at any moment. But Sefid is in far greater peril than we—and she has more brains than I have. To interfere with anything she has planned, would be folly."

"But, Mr. Robert, what can she have planned?" persisted the puzzled Winkler. "Escape—"

"I don't know and I don't care," broke in Fraser, laughing. "We're at the end of our rope, Winkler; any day those messengers may return with news that they can't find Tahir Beg—which means that Al Hudr would string me up gladly. The chances are they've been bagged by my father and the Jafs, and when the Yezidis find that the messengers are slain, Al Hudr is going to give me a bath in boiling oil or some such pleasantries. Now, if Sefid has framed up something, we'll swing in with her and help turn the trick, that's all! So no more growling, old friend—tomorrow night will show!"

"Very well, sir," said Winkler, stifling a sigh. "May I ask, sir, whether this Miss Sefid wears trousers, like most of these women?"

"She does, Winkler—in a perfectly adorable fashion! And, old man, we're going to be married!"

WINKLER gulped. Then: "Does she—er—know it yet, sir?"

Fraser grinned delightedly. "Winkler, you're all right! No, she doesn't suspect it yet. What d'you think dad will say when I tell him?"

"I will venture a guess, sir, after I have seen the lady. I regret that I was too much stirred by emotion when I arrived to notice anything—"

"Aren't you congratulating me?"

Winkler gazed reflectively at him for a moment. "No, sir; you must remember that I have not yet seen her—and I believe she is a heathen, sir—"

Fraser flushed, then broke into laughter. "Confound you! I always knew you had enough backbone to serve a camel, old sport! Well, you take a good look at her tomorrow night, and heathen or not, if you don't congratulate me I'll miss my guess! Besides, I'll let you try your hand at converting her before we're married."

A faint smile broke Winkler's impassivity.

"Thank you, Mr. Robert—but I'd rather not try anything of the sort. If I may say so, sir, I think the whole affair is decidedly in bad taste."

With this dry pronouncement, Winkler departed into the adjoining chamber for a bath. Fraser gazed after him, half frowning, a trifle startled by the attitude of his companion. It was undeniably true that Sefid was an adherent of Islam—

"Confound it, what do I care?" muttered Fraser. "If she were the queen of China I'd still think her the most glorious woman living! And there'll be some way out of it all—there's sure to be! Just at present the chances are that we'll never live long enough to talk of marrying, so why bother trouble now? But what the devil did he mean was in bad taste—talking about Sefid, or my meaning to marry her? You're a deep one, all right! I'll bet dad is missing you a whole lot right now."

With the following day, one of the giant black eunuchs called on Fraser with word that his attendance at a banquet that evening was ordered by Al Hudr, and that if he desired silk robes for the occasion they would be furnished. Fraser refused, having no mind to part with his soiled and tattered uniform—the last link left to him with the outer world.

The day dragged. He saw no more of his friend the Sulaimanian; from the Persians who guarded him he found that Al

Hudr was giving the feast that evening in honor of the White Pearl. Certain fast days were provided by the Yezidi faith, but as a rule this month of the new year was celebrated with song and feast; there was little that was gloomy in their religion.

Neither Fraser nor Winkler had a weapon of any description. They were entirely ignorant of the plan Sefid had in mind, but Fraser knew the girl well enough to impress upon Winkler the necessity of instant obedience.

"We'll have to join her the instant she gives us the signal by standing up," he said, "and then we'll have to waste no time talking. Whatever she says to do, we must do! I imagine she does not know of your presence yet."

"You don't think she will actually start a row, sir?"

"If she does, we're all done for, as far as I can see," admitted Fraser. "But, if she does, then grab anything handy and hit everyone in sight! There's no telling what that girl will have the nerve to spring, and I mean to back her up to the limit. According to all I can screw out of the guards, she's been laying low and fooling Al Hudr into thinking that she's friendly and complaisant to his wishes; and if so, I imagine she'll have a big surprise in store for him! She has brains, Winkler!"

"So I have understood, sir," murmured Winkler drily.

CHAPTER XIV

"Watch well if ye can read the heart of a woman; for there is no guile like unto her guile."—*Al Barani.*

WELL might Uthman al Hudr feel pride in himself and his achievements, as he stood in his audience hall that night and welcomed his guests. Down the length of the hall were set long tables, laden with viands which were accounted choice for Penjivan, and with wines which the Yezidi religion did not forbid. From many sources had come the dishes of gold and copper, bronze and brass and silver, even the china, which covered the tables; from the same sources had come the rich carpets underfoot, the rare Gigim and Turkoman broderies along the walls, the clusters of ancient arms and armor that upbore the lights.

At the head of the tables was the peacock throne, or rather couch, that had been

fashioned for Sefid. Not for Al Hudr had this been done; regal chieftain though he was, he and his men partook of the rough equality of the mountain folk, and he made no pretense to rule by any grace other than the strength of his own arm—which was quite sufficient. For Sefid, however, he had provided his best; it was a rather crude representation of a peacock facing the tables, the body serving as cushioned seat, the tail outspread above and behind. It was symbolic of Melek Taus, of course, as Sefid's name was to the Yezidis a symbol of creation, and awed murmurs came from the Yezidi leaders who arrived in the hall.

Al Hudr had emptied all his coffers to hang that barbaric seat with jewels, until the thing glittered and glimmered with radiant fires; and he had done so gladly. Never had it occurred to him to ask Sefid's opinion in the matter of the marriage. To him, as to all the Yezidis, he had captured her—and therefore she was his.

Sefid herself had done much to encourage this impression. Knowing how futile were any reluctance or refusal, she had assumed a passive rôle, ever greeting Al Hudr friendly wise and allowing him in his overweening pride and arrogance to draw his own conclusions. She was a woman, and she had only woman's weapons with which to fight; therefore, she used them relentlessly and terribly.

When she came through the doorway behind the peacock, and stepped forward, a mighty shout of acclaim arose from the crowded hall, and Al Hudr joined in it as he came forward to welcome her and lead her to her seat. She was clad plainly and simply in white, the golden shimmering crown of her hair casting a glory about her face; from the passionate eagerness of Al Hudr she shrank a trifle, then placed her hand in his and smiled. At sight of the peacock throne, her eyes widened amazingly. Al Hudr looked into those eyes of deepest blue, speckled like richest lazuli with gold, and laughed in delight of her. As though to set off her beauty by contrast with his own garb, he wore only his usual Persian chain mail beneath his mantle.

"Welcome to the White Pearl!" he said gravely. "See, Melek Taus awaits his beloved! I shall sit at your feet and worship, beauteous one—"

"No," she broke in, standing beside the peacock to survey the place. "No, Al Hudr! Sit yonder at the tables, facing me, so that I may see you!"

AT this arose great laughter, for the speech was taken to be the naïve words of a girl drunk with proud love of her future lord. In this sense, too, Al Hudr understood her; and seeing her confusion before all the folk, he broke into soft laughter and assented.

"As you wish, White Pearl! Name then my seat, and I shall rejoice in your eyes."

Sefid indicated a seat that was some distance away, but facing her—a seat from which Al Hudr could not easily come to the peacock throne, by reason of the tables between. To this seat the chieftain went, and gaily lifted a winecup toward her, and drank.

Thus the feast began, while there was much music of Yezidi timbrels and Kurdish flutes, and wine ran freely.

Sefid, sitting upon her peacock throne and gazing across the crowded hall, was very pale with realization of what was to happen here by her plotting. The great mass of folk were Yezidis, both men and women; all of Al Hudr's Persian and Kurdish warriors were here also, save those watching at the outer gates and walls, and many of their wives likewise. Behind the feasters were slaves—huge black men, dumb eunuchs, many girls, dancers and wine servers, and others. At either side of the peacock throne stood the two Hamavand men, who served Sefid as slaves; and this night their eyes were glittering with strange fires.

Among the throng, too, were many of Al Hudr's men whose eyes were fastened upon Sefid with the same glittering intensity—men who had once worn the long garments of Sulaimanieh, men who had served the dead Shaik Nuri, and would serve him still. Sefid smiled as she met their eyes, and there was something terrible in her smile—but her face softened when she saw Bob Fraser, at one of the nearer tables, watching her. When she smiled at him, her eyes were alight with a merry greeting. Then she saw the man who stood behind and served him.

She turned to one of her faithful Hamavand men, frowning.

"Who is that man serving Agha Fraser? Is he not a Nazarene? Find out for me."

The Hamavand called one of the blacks who was passing, and Sefid questioned the slave. She found what was known about Winkler, and nodded. That Winkler had come as a messenger from her father or from Fraser's father, she did not doubt.

"Good!" she said in Kurdish to the Hamavands. "That will mean another helper—good! Tahir Beg has had some hand in his presence here, brethren!"

The two Hamavands looked at each other, and laughed fiercely.

For this night of gaiety Al Hudr had called into play all his resources, and as the wine flowed more freely the abandon of the entertainment was increased. The numbers of the musicians were swelled; party after party of dancing girls filled the side courts or threaded their way among the tables—now luring the feasters with seductive, half-clad dances of the harem, now masked and costumed in grotesque barbarity. Between the dances, men fought with scimitar or knife; fought in wild exhibitions of swordsmanship that brought the wine-maddened feasters to their feet in frenzied acclamations.

PRESENTLY one of the Hamavands leaned toward Sefid.

"It is time, White Pearl, it is time! The wine is in men's heads by now—even those Sulaimanians are drinking, may Allah requite them the shame! Presently one of them will have drunk too much—"

Sefid nodded quickly, understanding the danger. She flashed a look at Fraser, who had drunk little—a look of warning that he did not lose.

"Very well," she answered. "Go to Al Hudr and tell him to command silence, for I have something to say."

The Hamavand lingered an instant.

"Give me your permission to stay by his side, Sefid!" he breathed quickly. "Then I will have my knife through him ere—"

She flashed him an angry glance that made him straighten up.

"Have I not said that I am no assassin?" she returned heatedly. "The man is no coward, and shall not have a coward's fate! If it is the will of God that he should fall among the others, let him fall; if not, let him fight clear of them!"

"If he does that, lady, then we are lost," said the Hamavand.

"Better be lost with honor, than win by coward's blows," she retorted. "You have your own work to do; if you are unwilling to do it, then say so, and I will arrange otherwise!"

"We obey, Sefid," said the man, humbly enough, and departed.

He made his way toward Al Hudr, who, although flushed with wine, had not ceased

to watch Sefid, and who guessed that a message was coming to him. He received her bidding with a nod, then came to his feet and uttered a shout that brought immediate silence. The Hamavand was already on his way back to the side of Sefid.

"Peace!" cried out Al Hudr, his voice vibrating through the hall. "The White Pearl wishes to speak. Peace, and let no man speak until she has finished!"

Silence fell, and through the hall certain men sat up straighter and watched Sefid with glittering, intent gaze.

She did not rise, however, but for a moment looked straight at Al Hudr; perhaps in that moment she was regretting all that she had planned, justifiable though it might be; perhaps the sight of this splendid barbarian, lord of the unconquered hills, stirred a womanly hesitation in her. If so, the hesitation vanished when she glanced at Fraser and met his frowning eyes.

"Children of Yezid," she said, her voice lifting clearly through the hall, "it is known to all of you that I am named the White Pearl, and you have been told that Melek Taus, whom you worship, has sent me to be the bride of your chief. Is this not so?"

A murmur of assent passed through the gathering. All eyes were fastened upon her in fascination and curious wonderment. She smiled slightly.

"Whether Melek Taus has sent me, I do not know," she went on, a sudden note of bitterness in her voice, "but if that be so, then he has no love for you. I say this, because I am not come here of my own will, and because I am not minded to marry any man—least of all, that Al Hudr yonder. Look at this, all of you! Know you what it is?"

So saying, she placed upon the peacock's head the brazen image of Melek Taus.

AN instant of silence followed; then, as the thing was recognized, a low breath of awe and wonder stirred through the crowd. Al Hudr, staring at Sefid from incredulous eyes, uttered a hoarse cry which put into words the murmur of the others.

"It is Melek Taus—the sacred image—"

"Aye!" cried out Sefid, her voice ringing shrill and high as she came to her feet. "It is Melek Taus, who comes to warn you of danger and death—"

"*Na'lat Shaitan! Accursed be Satan!*" pealed forth a wild cry. In the center of the hall uprose one of the men of Sulai-

manieh; his knife flamed high, and was buried in the throat of the nearest Yezidi.

Al Hudr leaped forth, but a man tripped him. Another plunged at him as he fell, striving to thrust keen steel through the Persian's chain-mail. From the doors pierced the death-shriek of a guard, and a rifle-shot banged out.

Then, when it was thought that Al Hudr was slain, wild terror rushed through the hall. None knew what had happened or what enemy had come, and as one by one men struck down the hanging lamps, all that place became a seething whirlpool of horror, in which every man fought against his neighbor and strove to escape. Nor, though presently the voice of Al Hudr rose again, did terror cease, for by now the lights were dashed away and darkness and death ruled hideously.

In vain men strove to burst through the doors; they had been barred from outside. There was fighting outside, also—certain of the Sulaimanieh men had scattered to spread fire and death in the outer city ere they themselves were slain. Within the palace every man smote out into the blindness around him, and mad panic sent the hot reek of blood drifting in air.

When he saw Sefid come leaping to her feet, Bob Fraser had sprung forward to gain her side. He had a brief glimpse of Winkler at his heels, and of the two Hamavand men striking out at those around, when he joined her. Sefid, clutching his hand, swiftly cried to follow her, and plunged into the doorway behind the peacock throne.

"None will follow yet," she panted out, as the curtains fell upon the frightful place behind them. "The Hamavands will hold the doorway—come quickly! We will meet no one this way—we must seize upon Al Hudr's tower and hold it until they come to help—"

Entirely at a loss to guess the meaning of her words, but pausing for no questions, Fraser found himself hard put to it to keep the pace she set. Swift as a deer she ran, with sure knowledge of the way, and in a moment more Fraser found that they were out of the building and in the gardens.

"There, Winkler?" he called over his shoulder.

"Right behind, sir," came the answer.

"Faster!" breathed Sefid, quickening her pace.

Fraser sprinted, marveling at her swiftness. Down the garden paths she ran, as

though she knew every inch of them—so indeed she did, for this had been her study during the past days!—and behind them died out the clamor from the palace. Yet Fraser was aware of a new clamor farther away, and a murky glare that was flickering in the night. He laughed harshly as he caught up with Sefid.

"The Sulaimanians have fired the city!" he panted exultantly. "I told them—if there was trouble—to fire everything possible—"

"Good!" she answered, with a tinkle of laughter that was vibrant with excitement. "We are almost at the tower, now—there it looms ahead! There is no guard. You must get a light quickly, and find rifles—"

BEFORE them grew up blackly a queer structure; Fraser remembered to have seen it from his own secluded corner of the gardens, but its purpose he did not know. It was a small, perfectly round tower that now seemed to be of tremendously massive structure, rising thirty feet in air. All around it, for the space of a hundred yards or more, the garden was given over to a network of shallow basins filled with water from a fountain before the door.

Fraser was about to plunge directly at the tower, water or not, when Sefid sharply restrained him.

"Follow me! There is a path—"

She darted ahead, running between the winding curvatures of the water, pursuing some unseen pathway which led to the doorway of the tower. The door proved to be a massive affair of iron, propped open by an iron bar.

"Do not touch it!" cried the girl, as Fraser paused. "When that is removed, the door will close of itself; wait until the others join us—"

"Matches, Winkler?" demanded Fraser, coming to a halt. "I've none."

"Here are some, sir," said Winkler, the imperturbable. "Perhaps I'd better remain here, sir, to keep watch—"

"Light the lamps inside!" commanded Sefid. "Hurry!"

Fraser headed into the obscurity, struck a match, and glanced around. Directly before him he saw a large brass lamp set upon a standard. Sefid snatched it open, and he brought the match to the wick; it proved to be full of oil, for the wick burned steadily. When Sefid clashed the door of the lamp shut, Fraser saw that it was cunningly contrived to light the room

around yet to leave the doorway in darkness.

"This is Al Hudr's tower," said the girl quickly. "He built it for himself as a place of refuge—or rather, rebuilt it, for it was an ancient structure before he came here. Here he keeps rifles and arms of all kinds. There is a secret passage leading to it from the palace, but I broke the lock of the secret door before I went to the feast, and he cannot use it. The pools of water are all around so that men cannot get up to the walls very quickly—"

Fraser was already getting rifles from the racks which ranged one side of the wall. With each rifle was a filled bandolier of cartridges.

"There are food and water stored in the room above," went on the girl, "and I think another passage leads off somewhere among the gardens—but I am not sure—"

Her voice failed.

Fraser turned quickly to her, thinking she was about to faint, but she shook her head and smiled slightly. She was very pale.

"No, I'm all right—it's just that—that—oh, so many men are dying this minute! But I had to do it; there was no other way—and if Al Hudr is killed I can make them obey me with this—"

She snatched the brazen peacock from her bosom, and threw it down, shuddering as she did so.

CHAPTER XV

"A hurricane of fire and sword will I bring upon the idolaters, who shall be swallowed up by their own wickedness."—*The Koran.*

THEY wanted to assassinate him, but I would not allow it," said Sefid more quietly. "He is too brave a man for that—and yet, unless he dies by their steel, we are lost! Shaik Nuri's men will cause much blood and fire this night, and few of them will escape; few of them want to escape, after having denied their faith! But I hope the two Hamavand men reach here safely—"

She broke off and glided to the doorway. Fraser joined her there, wondering at the brave soul within her which had revolted against the bloodshed, yet which had carried through the plan unflinchingly—the soul which based all hopes on the death of Al Hudr, yet which could not stoop to his assassination.

"Allah be good to you, Sefid!" he said softly, catching her hand and drawing it to his lips. "You are a true daughter of Tahir Beg—ah! I wonder if he is close enough to see this fire and to take advantage of it!"

As Sefid turned to him in surprise, he swiftly related the news borne by Winkler. Even now, it might be, Tahir Beg and his riders were waiting to drop out of the hills upon the doomed city of the Shaitan parasts!

"It may be, it may be!" exclaimed Sefid, excitement blazing in her face. "Remember, my father is an Aorami—he knows these mountains and all the folk in them, and the hidden trails! If Al Hudr is slain, then the Yezidis will obey me—"

"Obey you?" questioned Fraser.

"Yes—because the brazen peacock is their god, and is here with me! Al Hudr would guess that I had a hand in the plot, yonder; the Yezidis would think otherwise—did I not tell them that I had come to give them warning? They are so full of superstition that if Al Hudr is dead I can make them believe anything I say. But he has many secret ways about the palace, and I am afraid that he will escape—"

Fraser glanced about the tower chamber. A ladder ran to the room above and to the roof; the stone walls were solid, without a break—yet he remembered what Sefid had said about the secret passages.

"If there are hidden ways of reaching here," he reflected, Al Hudr will use them to overpower us—"

"Certainly," was her calm response. "But we must hold the room above, and the roof, which is built for defense! The whole hope of my plot was that Al Hudr might be killed and that I might then, occupying this place, bend the foolish Yezidis to my wishes. Now that the Jaf men and the Hamavands are coming, now that Tahir Beg is somewhere near, we must hold the place until they arrive. Al Hudr will not want to harm me, therefore he may wait to starve us out. We shall see!"

Curiously enough, thought Fraser, she spoke as though convinced that the Persian would escape from the deathtrap, yonder!

BY this time the fire in the outer city had broadened to a deep glare that lighted the walls and the sky redly. Within the gardens was a closer and more awful conflagration; the wooden palace, alight as though fired in a dozen places, was

shooting upward in blazing fury. Amid the crackling roar of the flames all lesser sounds were lost; only here and again came a shot, or some thin, keen yell of "Allah!" to tell of strife.

The men of Sulaimanieh could not, of course, hope for more than to die like warriors, sword in hand. To effect more than a mad slaughter of the infidels, was not their aim; they could not escape, nor did they want to escape. The wild fanaticism of the *muslim*, the "enlightened," had seized upon them, and they were running amuck like rabid dogs, hoping to atone for their own past and to win Paradise by dying greatly.

"I must go out and be ready to guide them through the pools, if any escape and reach here," said Sefid quietly. "No, do not come; remain here, both of you, and have your rifles ready! You may serve better by staying here to cover my return."

Out across the maze of shallow pools whose water glinted scarlet, she passed, her slender white figure gleaming eerily in the mounting light of the fire that was now slaverling its red tongue over all things and bringing day into the black night. On the far side of the water she paused and stood there in the open, waiting; none who arrived from the palace could fail to see her. Fraser clenched his hands at thought of her danger, as he stood there motionless, searching the empty gardens for any sign of peril to her. Then he felt Winkler touch his arm, and he turned.

"Upon my word, sir, she's marvelous!" Winkler was staring wide-eyed after the girl. "Just the mere beauty of her, Mr. Robert—it shines through her, like a flame inside—and just as cool as you and I are! I don't know when I've seen so remarkable a young woman, sir—"

"Thank you, Winkler," and Fraser chuckled as he clapped the other on the back. "I knew you'd come around to my viewpoint when you'd met her."

Winkler gave him a startled look, choked back a sudden comprehending expostulation, and then slowly smiled.

"Yes, sir; I congratulate you very heartily, Mr. Robert. I only hope," he added slyly, "that your father does also."

"I hope he does—for his own sake," said

Fraser. "Ah! There's someone coming—see here, suppose you get up to the roof of this place! Take a couple of extra rifles and be ready to use 'em if I shout."

Winkler vanished inside the tower.

The palace had now become a roaring pinnacle of fire; the whole building must have caught like a vast torch, for every corner of it seemed in flames, soaring in a great burst of almost smokeless scarlet light, transforming the whole sky into crimson. Bright as day were the gardens under this terrible light, and Fraser had discerned a running figure that approached the tower. He saw Sefid watching the figure also, her hands upraised to shield her face from the fierce heat of the conflagration.

Then he saw her beckon to the man, turn, and start toward the tower. He lowered his rifle, recognizing one of the two Hamavands.

"It was kind of Al Hudr to provide this neat little place for us," he reflected. "Attackers could get through these pools, of course, but they would be delayed—and we could decimate them in the attempt! The tower itself hasn't an opening that I've seen; the door would have to be battered away or a hole blown through the walls—and Al Hudr is not going to take ~~any~~ chances on killing Sefid. Well, here's one of our friends; no more are in sight, poor devils! The Sulaimanians certainly served us well tonight—Shaik Nuri showed them how to die, and they learned the lesson."

SEFID reached him, and behind her stumbled the Hamavand, who greeted Fraser with a hoarse cry of wild exultation and halted.

"Greeting, brother! Praise be to Allah, we have struck the infidel a blow this night. However, Al Hudr has escaped; I think his armor saved him. How the man fought! Idolater or not, he is a lion—"

"You're alone?" demanded Fraser. "Did none of the others escape—"

"None, so far as I know," returned the Hamavand coolly. "My comrade was slain, and the Yezidis are running down the men of Sulaimanieh like wolves." A laugh broke harshly from him. "Al Hudr, may his grave be desecrated, is still seeking Sefid in the bonfire yonder; but he will be searching the gardens soon enough. A rifle for me? Good!"

The mountaineer was unhurt, by a miracle.

"True enough," said Sefid. "They will be searching the gardens. Let us wait a moment or two more—if none of the Su-

laimanians come, we can go into the tower and shut the door."

They waited; a nervous, tense time wherein the minutes dragged into hours. The palace fire was at its height—a vast crackling uproar of flames, so close that the heat was blistering.

Then, suddenly, they perceived on either hand hordes of running figures. A startled yell from Winkler, up above, reached them in warning. Yezidis these, enemies all!

"In!" cried Sefid. "Close the door—thrust out upon the bar and it closes itself!"

Fraser, who had given his rifle to the Hamavand, watched them enter, then bent above the iron bar that propped the door ajar. It was hot to the touch, so hot that he recoiled with a startled exclamation; but, spurred by a rifle-shot and the whine of a bullet flying from the stones of the tower, he gripped the bar of iron and threw his weight on it. For a space it did not move. The door, a great slab of iron seven feet by four hung at an angle, responded no whit to his effort.

"The bar! Throw it outward!" came the voice of Sefid.

Fraser gathered himself desperately, flung his weight against the iron bar with a savage intensity. This time it gave—unexpectedly. Carried off his balance by the sudden give, he staggered for an instant, and that instant was fatal. The pivoted door swung down and in; Fraser tried to spring backward, and failed. The great slab of iron struck him glancingly and hurled him, stunned, a dozen feet away. Fraser heard the harsh, reverberant clang as it clashed shut—then all the flaming sky went black for him.

PARTIES of the Yezidis came dashing forward, having seen the figure of Sefid and knowing that here was the woman they had been sent to find. As they closed in about the tower, however, they were suddenly halted by the shallow pools of water, among which they slipped and stumbled in panic, fearing some unknown trap.

And, stumbling thus, bullets began to drive among them. Two rifles spoke from the roof of the tower—two riflemen shooting as fast as they could use the loaded weapons that lay ready to their hands. With shouts of dismay the attackers broke, gave way, plunged back to shelter. Before their eyes that tower had suddenly closed tightly, and they suspected magic in it.

They ran to the edge of the clearing, then formed in groups. Suddenly amazement and fear seized upon them, at sight of a white figure which appeared on the parapet of the tower, standing erect before them and upholding in her hands the brazen peacock! In that brilliant firelight every detail stood out plainly; words could not be heard for the roaring of the flames, but none were needed. She stood thus for a moment, then vanished.

The Yezidis paused, irresolute, their ranks constantly swelled by new arrivals. They dared not attack, because of the bullets which had strewn their dead among the shallow pools of water, and because Al Hudr had issued stern orders that Sefid be unharmed. While they stood thus hesitant, before their eyes the great iron door of the tower slowly swung open; it was swung outward by two men, and in the opening they saw Sefid, still bearing that brazen peacock. The woman, no less than the sacred image, struck awe into them.

Then, before them all, Sefid suddenly ran forth, stooped above the figure of Fraser, and pulled him back to safety. The two men with her held open the door, obviously with tremendous effort; Sefid had rejoined them before a man of the enemy could move, and as she vanished, dragging Fraser behind her, the door came shut again with a clang. To those who looked on in awe, the tower stood bare and unapproachable. Al Hudr had been sent for, but he came not. Instead, came orders from him bidding the Yezidis remain where they were and to attempt no attack.

So, fearing him, they remained at the edge of the clearing about the tower, and waited. The great blast of the conflagration was over; the palace was reduced to flaming pinnacles; dying grandeur, amid which its ancient stone portions remained incandescent, white-hot. Yet there was no lack of light. An area of the outer city was still blazing, and many of the Yezidis now withdrew outside the palace grounds; from the outer city, too, was rising a great clamor and a strident shouting, punctuated by rattling shots, so that it seemed some riot had burst forth. More and more of the crowd about the tower slipped away.

Upon regaining the shelter of the tower in safety—no little to their surprise—Winkler and the Hamavand were ordered to the roof by Sefid.

"Up with you!" she cried impatiently, standing above the senseless figure of Bob

CHAPTER XVI

Fraser. "I can attend to him—you must be on the roof lest they try to scale the walls!"

"There is sense to that," growled the Hamavand, and Winkler reluctantly abandoned Fraser to the care of Sefid, and ascended with the Kurd to the roof to await developments.

THE rifles reloaded, they crouched behind the parapet and awaited the attack—which did not materialize. Not a Yezidi stirred to approach the tower, not a shot was directed toward the two defenders; the dark groups clustering about the edge of the garden clearing seemed to be awaiting some event in silence.

"Sheep without a leader!" spat the Hamavand expressively. "Wait till Al Hudr comes!"

Waiting was nervous work, however, and the chieftain did not appear. Gradually the two men realized that instead of the groups about the tower being augmented, they were rapidly lessening in numbers. Nor was the cause far to seek.

"There is fighting in the city," observed the Kurd, listening, "and the fire-glare is widening. Those Sulaimanians must not be all dead yet—hark to the shots!—and doubtless Al Hudr is there. Ask the lady Sefid to come up here, brother."

Winkler went to the ladder top and called Sefid. Obtaining no answer, he descended through the upper room to the lower chamber; he stood there at the foot of the ladder, staring around in petrified astonishment. Bob Fraser and Sefid had vanished bodily!

The great iron door was closed. Winkler had been watching from the roof, and knew that they had not left the tower. Yet—they were not here! He called frantically, and obtained no answer. The Hamavand above, hearing his voice and conjecturing that something was wrong, came down the ladder—and stood staring blankly. Then a sudden furious oath burst from him.

"Al Hudr—may he roast in hell!—slipped in here by some secret passage and carried them both away—see! Here is proof, by Allah!"

Stooping, the Kurd picked up a torn white scrap—a bit of Sefid's dress. But Winkler stared at the blank stones around him, utter despair in his eyes; and in his heart he echoed the blazing imprecations of his comrade.

"None shall live in this world longer than the time set by me."—*The Black Book.*

BOB FRASER awakened to a sense of suffocation, which proceeded from cloths wound about his head. He found that he was bound hand and foot; also, he presently realized that he was being carried—he could feel hands upon him, and could hear the grunting of those who bore him. He lay quiet, and tried to think out what had happened.

His last memory was of the iron door knocking him sprawling. It abode with him sharply, for his head was dizzy and ached abominably. Knowing nothing of his rescue, he concluded that he had been carried off a prisoner by the Yezidis. A moment later he was confirmed in this belief by hearing the voice of Al Hudr, which he recognized instantly.

"Set down the Nazarene and see if he is dead. Give me a cup of wine—the White Pearl has fainted. Drink if you will, brethren; there is no further need for silence. How many of those fools were on the roof of the tower, I know not—let them stay there until they starve!"

Upon hearing the name of Sefid, Fraser started with sudden fear. Then he felt himself dropped on the earth, and the cloth was jerked away from about his head. He did not open his eyes, however, but lay motionless.

"He is not dead, lord," said a Kurdish voice, "but he is senseless."

"Then disturb him not," answered Al Hudr with a short laugh. "Let him sleep until he is crucified, the infidel dog! Two of you go back outside and bring down here four eunuchs from the harem building, which has escaped the fire. Know you where the opening lies?"

"No, lord," answered a voice. "We have never known its secret, until tonight, and you summoned us in such haste that we took small note of the way—"

"Very well," snapped the chieftain impatiently. "Go back the way we came, and the opening will bring you out to the left of the shrine, among the trees. Note well the entrance and bring back the eunuchs at once. Here is my ring, to be your authority."

Fraser opened his eyes cautiously, and by degrees became aware of what place he was in; some underground chamber, he had guessed from the talk. So Sefid was here!

What had happened at the tower, he could only conjecture.

He found himself lying on the ground, fast bound. Above and behind him, out of his range of vision, men were drinking and discussing the events of the night; he guessed, from the voices, that there were but two remaining, and they were of Al Hudr's mercenaries. A lamp was hanging overhead. Wine jars stood along the walls. Evidently, then, this was the wine-cellar of the palace, or some chamber along a secret passage that had been stored for Al Hudr's use.

TWENTY feet distant, Fraser beheld the figure of Sefid lying on a divan, while above her stooped Al Hudr, a wine-cup in his hand. The chieftain was attempting to revive the girl, and an instant later the attempt was more successful than he had thought, evidently.

Without warning, Sefid's hand flashed a knife from her bosom and struck. An exclamation broke from Al Hudr, then he had caught her hand and was laughing.

"So, White Pearl!" he mocked her gently. "This is the measure of your love for me, eh?"

He twisted the knife from her hand and tossed it into a corner. Sefid sat up, then rose.

"Love?" she repeated scathingly. "Think not that you will ever have love from me, idolater!"

"Others have said the same, but have changed their minds," and Al Hudr laughed. Admiration gleamed in his stern eyes as he watched her. "What a woman you are, White Pearl! Did you think that I would hold anger against you for this night's work? Nay! It was a shrewd blow, but no great harm is done. A palace is destroyed—another can be rebuilt! Those traitors of Sulaimanieh slew a few of my men—and by this time they are dead, save for those who held the tower with you. And I can kill them if I so desire, or starve them.

"Your rescue of this Nazarene was a bold deed, Sefid, and I love you for it! Aye, I was watching from the secret passage, and I saw you pull into the tower as your men held open the door. A brave deed—although it might have ended otherwise had I not ordered my men to do you no hurt! And now it is all over, Sefid; the Sulaimanians are dead, the fires are being quenched, you are in hand again, and ere

dawn the Nazarene shall be gasping on a cross at the gates. And with me is Melek Taus—"

As he spoke, Al Hudr gestured toward the brazen peacock, which he had brought from the tower and had set upon a wine-jar close at hand.

"Agha Fraser fooled me well," he continued, his face darkening. "I thought that he was getting the image from Tahir Beg—and all the while, you had it! Well, it was a clever game, but I am the winner of it; and the Nazarene shall be nailed to beams in payment. Thanks be to Azazil that there was no wind this night, else had all the inner buildings gone up in flames!"

"Would that they had," retorted Sefid bitterly, "and you with them!"

Al Hudr smiled. Then, as he saw the girl's eyes leap to Bob Fraser, he wheeled suddenly and realized that the American was awake. The conversation had made clear to Fraser what had taken place, and he knew that there was now no mercy to be expected.

"It's too bad you came through the affray unhurt, Al Hudr," he said. "You're more of a fool than I thought you were—a fool for luck, goes the proverb."

The chieftain snarled at him.

"We shall see how bravely you are talking after sunrise, Nazarene—a few hours of hanging on the nails lays bare the soul of a man! But where are those accursed eunuchs? Go out into the passage, one of you, and call."

One of the two Kurds swaggered past Al Hudr to a curtained entrance, passed into a dark passage beyond, and shouted. He returned, shaking his head.

"I heard no answer, lord—and the way is dark."

"Hell swallow the fools!" snapped Al Hudr.

FOR a moment he stood in frowning thought, then strode to Sefid in sudden decision and grasped her wrists. She fought against him, but vainly.

"Come hither and tie her arms!" Al Hudr commanded the grinning men. They obeyed, and Sefid stood raging but helpless. "I will go ahead, with her; do you carry the Nazarene and follow. There is work to be done up above, and I have no time to be lingering here in talk. Those black devils shall shriek under whips tomorrow!"

Thus swore Al Hudr, not knowing that

his two messengers had been slain, and the eunuchs with them, and that the sword had entered into Penjivan, the unconquered!

Thrusting the brazen peacock beneath his waistcloth, Al Hudr took in one hand the bound wrists of Sefid, and in the other the hanging lamp; he urged the girl forward, and the two Kurds quickly picked up Fraser and followed. Then one of them, grumbling, got out his knife and slashed at the bonds around Fraser's ankles.

"Are we camels, to carry this infidel," growled the man. "Let him walk—and hold a knife to his back, brother!"

To all this Al Hudr made no objection, but led the way along a narrow passage that was plainly a relic of ancient times, for it was floored and walled with hewn stones. Sefid, knowing that all resistance was futile, offered none, but walked along as proudly as though she had won her bold game, instead of having lost it utterly—and herself with it! Fraser, his wrists still bound, was helpless in the grip of his two guards.

The passageway seemed to wind and twist interminably; nor, indeed, was it any short distance that the tunnel covered. When at last Al Hudr came to a halt, Fraser saw that before the party was a door of heavy beams. This Al Hudr swung open. Beyond appeared stone steps leading upward, and in the light of the lamp that the chieftain carried, a trap door appeared overhead.

Al Hudr paused, and summoned one of the Kurds to lift this door. The man pushed past and applied his weight; the door swung upward and fell away.

The party left the secret passage behind, and Fraser saw that they had emerged in a corner of the gardens, cloaked with trees, between the harem buildings and the shrine of the Yezidis. From Al Hudr came a startled word, as he pressed forward.

"What is this—there is fighting in the city! Are those Sulaimanians not yet dead?"

Fighting there was, indeed, as the babel of shouts and clamorings and shots bore full witness. The blazing pyre of the palace had burned itself nearly out, yet there was a broad glare of fire across the sky, and with visible haste and uneasiness Al Hudr led his party from among the trees, dashing down the lamp as he went.

They emerged suddenly in a wide area of light—they had come out upon the

opening before the shrine. And here, in blank amazement, all paused.

The inner city seemed filled with confusion; on all sides rifles were spitting, men were running and fighting and slaying, and above the uproar rang out wild yells of "Allahu!" Al Hudr and his two men were stricken aghast by the spectacle, for the night was turned into day by the glare from the burning city. Fraser, however, awoke to mad realization of what it all meant.

"Take this dog to the gates and crucify him!" snapped Al Hudr. "This—"

"Tahir Beg!" The shout broke from Fraser and lifted through the din. "Tahir Beg! To the rescue, Hamavands! Tahir Beg!"

CURSING, one of the guards smote Fraser across the mouth; he reeled, laughing under the blow—laughing in wild exultation. Al Hudr loosed his hold on Sefid and sprang away—too late did he realize the truth, too late did he comprehend the dread fate that had come upon him and his city!

Before Al Hudr could take two steps, a wild mob of men was surging down upon the party. The two mercenaries clutched at the rifles slung over their shoulders—they were caught in the swirling mob and went down to death. All about him Fraser saw the fierce faces of Jafs and Hamavands; fighting to reach Sefid, he glimpsed Al Hudr, scimitar in hand, clearing a little space around him. The chieftain had become a madman, frothing at the lips, insensate under this blow of fate that had stricken him so terribly!

And then, suddenly, a roar sounded above the shouts and clamor, and the crowd fell back from Al Hudr. Through their ranks leaped Tahir Beg, revolver in hand; with but a glance toward Sefid and Fraser, who now stood together, the great Kurd planted himself before Al Hudr.

"Ho, Idolater!" he bellowed furiously. "Ho, ravisher of maidens, mocker of hospitality! Pray now to your false god!"

Al Hudr, who was unarmed except for that terrible sword of his, cast one quick glance around and saw that there was no escape. He drew himself erect, with a proud gesture.

"Shoot, then," he said simply.

Tahir Beg hurled the revolver away, with a great laugh of delight.

"By the right of the lord of the faith-

ful, I am no butcher!" he swore. "Give me a blade like his, some of you—hasten! Did I not say that some day I would measure weapons with you, Persian? Well, I am here!"

Already Fraser and Sefid had been freed of their bonds by the Hamavands who pressed about them. Tahir Beg, bareheaded, took the curved blade that one of his men passed into his hand, and shook it at Al Hudr joyfully. The Persian had lost his green mantle, and his helmet with it; he was clad only in his chain-mail that enveloped his body to the knees.

"Room!" shouted Tahir Beg. "Room, in the name of Allah! Now, Persian, let us see whether God or Shaitan be stronger—"

"Azazil!" yelled Al Hudr, and leaped to the attack.

The watching circle of men fell silent. With every moment others were joining the crowd, and these also became silent as they watched the two figures in the center; Fraser, with Sefid's hands in his, felt her fingers clench convulsively.

AL HUDR was upon the great Kurd like a falcon—striking, evading, darting in and out with the swiftness of light; no less agile was Tahir Beg, and no less master of his weapon. They had come up, these twain, from the old days when swords ruled the hills and rifles were rare in the land, and with them they had brought a skill with the blade that few men could match today.

Before them, between them, over them, the scimitars whirled like scarlet brands in the light of the conflagration. Steel struck on steel, sparks glimmered from the meeting of the blades, blow followed blow with the rapidity of light; yet the two were untouched. Each of them a fighting man by birth, by divine grace, they fought not alone with muscles and brute strength, but with the sixth sense that only such men possess.

Upon the swelling crowd abode a death-like silence. Above them, unheeded, floated the canopy of flames from the outer city, the clamor and shots and uproar. Here was only a dread stillness, through which sounded the hoarse breathing of the fighters, the stamping of their feet on the stone flags, the clash and ring of the scimitars. With Tahir Beg was the fierce craving for vengeance; with Al Hudr, the utter ferocity of the trapped animal. Death

hovered above them visibly in the reeking skies. No voice was raised to urge Tahir Beg onward, and none was needed; yet, in the silence, Al Hudr could not but feel the enmity that ringed him in, the deep hatred gleaming from every eye. He was cooler now, his frothing rage mastered, and he fought venomously.

Like lightning were his blows, but Tahir Beg laughed as his blade circled and parried them, and swung hissing back at Al Hudr. Then, suddenly, the Kurd staggered and reeled backward; from all the crowd broke a low gasping breath, and Al Hudr sprang forward to cut terribly—but the cut was parried. Tahir Beg lifted his left hand and wiped a red smear from his eyes as it trickled downward.

"Allahui!" he croaked, and plunged at the chieftain.

Now a new figure pushed forward amid the crowd—a tall, broad-shouldered figure. Bob Fraser did not see it, for his gaze was riveted to the fighters; but Al Hudr saw it, saw the grim, implacable countenance of Howard Z. Frazer there looking on silently, and his teeth bared in a dreadful snarl.

"You next—after—this jackal!" he cried hoarsely. Few knew to whom he referred, for no eye was lifted from the battle to seek new arrivals, but Tahir Beg guessed aright, and laughed hoarsely.

"The jackal bites!" he uttered, and his blade rang against the chain-mail of Al Hudr—reached it for the first time, although it slid harmlessly from the mail. He struck again with terrible strength. Al Hudr countered the blow, but with a clash and clang his jeweled scimitar flew shattered into gleaming shreds of steel.

Tahir Beg checked himself, drew back swiftly.

"Give the dog another weapon!"

Al Hudr, standing empty-handed, spat a curse and seized the nearest weapon of those extended to him. Again he rushed at the Kurd, again the blades curved and glimmered and bit in the red glare.

From the crowd leaped forth a gasping cry—blood sprang suddenly to the chain-mail of Al Hudr, a thin trickle of red where Tahir Beg's point had ripped. But it was no mortal hurt, and the sting of it redoubled the furious energy of the chieftain.

THEY were wearying now, wearying fast both of them. Sweat dripped from their faces, and again Tahir Beg wiped the

crimson smear from his brow. Their breath came from clenched teeth, sharp and hoarse and panting. No longer could the crowd bear that frightful tensi in silence; cries began to rise from all sides in wild incoherence: "Allah upon him!" "May Shaitan seize his feet!" "Strike, in the name of God!" "Weaken, infidel, weaken!"

The blows became more furious as both men felt the strain. Al Hudr's point ripped at the shoulder of Tahir, but at this the great Kurd plunged forward madly, ferociously. His scimeter whined down and again down in a tempest of clashing strokes, nor could Al Hudr altogether meet that storm with his whirling steel. He began to give ground, he began to dodge, he began to shrink from the onslaught. The end was not far.

Al Hudr slipped. He fell forward and came to his knees, and, knowing that he could not rise in time, he remained thus, his hands flung out before him, the breath bursting from his lungs in great gasps. It seemed that in his raging shame of defeat he could not face his enemies again, but Tahir Beg, withholding his arm, spat at him in scorn.

"Up, idolater! Up, and pray to your false god!"

Finding that there was no stroke to bring death so easily, Al Hudr rose. Now upon him burst the Kurd with a hurricane of clanging strokes, pressing him backward, driving him among the circle of men who gave ground in wild confusion. To this side and that roved the desperate, hollow eyes of Al Hudr, and found no escape. He struck at his enemy again, desperately, gathered all his strength and struck in a terrible effort to break through the gleaming circle of steel and find the life of the Kurd.

His blows failed—and as they failed, as the arm of Al Hudr drooped in an instant of desperate weariness, Tahir Beg flashed down his scimeter. Al Hudr tried to meet that lightning sweep, but his blade was dashed away; the steel drove at his neck above the edge of the chain-mail, drove down and bit deep into his breast. He threw out his arms and reeled backward.

"Allah!" gasped Tahir Beg. He stood as though dazed, his eyes fiercely alight, his nostrils quivering with great breaths. Then, as the crowd began to surge forward, he lifted his weapon above the dead body of Al Hudr, and wiped the blood from it with his sleeve.

"The fate of every man is written in his forehead," he exclaimed. "Praise be to Allah!"

Bob Fraser drew a deep breath—and turned to meet the eyes of his father.

CHAPTER XVII

FINIS CORONAT OPUS

THE downtown offices which housed the many and varied financial activities of Howard Z. Fraser, looked forward to his return with a unanimous lack of joy. The morning newspapers had carried a brief account of the arrival of his yacht in quarantine, and the officers knew that he could be expected to descend upon them at any minute.

Nor could the underlings who acknowledged his sway of iron be greatly blamed for this joyless prospect. During the past three years their master had become known among them as "The Boss Grouch"; and their freedom from his attention in the past few months had been as a glorious vacation to all who served him.

"Gee, aint it fierce?" mourned the office boy. "He'll stomp in an' growl some-thin' under his breath, and stomp on into his own office—an' there'll be hell to pay all down the line! It'll be just like he hadn't been away more'n a day!"

Thus, when a stenographer from one of the front offices spread the information that his well-known limousine was drawing up in the street outside, something like a groan ascended from everyone. The noon hour had just concluded.

When Howard Z. Fraser crossed the threshold of his offices and paused there, however, his appearance was hailed with a general gasp of amazement; every eye was fastened upon him in unconcealed wonder. Here was not the man they had known—here was a new man! Here was a man ten years younger, whose eye sparkled with vitality and the joy of life—a man come home again as though he had found the Fountain of Youth!

"Hello, everybody!" shouted Howard Z. Fraser with a joyous lack of dignity. "How's everything? Where's Smithers?"

Smithers, the general manager, came rushing forward through astounded ranks. The Boss Grouch seized his hand and shook it vigorously, beamingly.

"Well, well, if it isn't great to be back!"

Fraser shook hands delightedly with

everyone, and when Smithers nervously mentioned certain affairs of business, Fraser positively brushed him aside.

"Business? Nothing doing today, Smithers—nothing today! I have more important affairs on hand. I came down to get that jewel case out of my safe; get it for me, will you, old man?"

SMITHERS staggered off to get the jewel case that had reposed for years in the private safe in the inner office. Fraser continued his hand-shaking, beaming with delight and showering cordiality on every hand.

The Fraser mansion, meantime, was being hurriedly turned inside out by a frantic corps of servants under directions from Winkler, who was the only cool and self-possessed person on the premises. At three-thirty a car delivered a somewhat flustered clerical gentleman, who was promptly ushered into the private library of Howard Z. Fraser; after ushering in the clergyman, Winkler closed the door and stood at attention.

"Here, Doctor—you remember Bob?" exclaimed Fraser. "Sefid, allow me to present the Reverend Doctor Jones—we decided at the last minute, Doctor, to have a private ceremony here in this room, for personal reasons. Hope we haven't rushed you—and this is my old friend Gholam Ali Tahir Beg Aorami—he isn't a Christian, Doctor, although Miss de Montfort has decided to embrace that faith—"

"God bless my soul!" murmured the dazed cleric, staring from the blushing, happy face of Sefid to the laughing Bob Fraser, and from the exuberant Howard Z. Fraser to the hugely mustached features of Tahir Beg. The great Kurd was clad in frock-coat and all the accompaniment thereof; the garments were not comfortable to him, but being a gentleman he wore them with a grand air.

"We'll have it all over by four," hastened on Howard Z. Fraser, "and then we'll hold the reception, and— Winkler! You and Tahir Beg are to be the witnesses, so stand out! All ready, Doctor."

The reverend gentleman found his prayer-book thrust into his hand by Bob Fraser, and then stood motionless for a moment. At length he directed his gaze downward, with a perceptible sniffing. Beneath his feet was the ancient and incredible dirty Kurdish rug.

"Don't mind it," and Howard Z. Fraser clapped him on the shoulder. "It's a good smell when you get used to it, Doctor—why, Tahir Beg will sit there all day long and dream that he's back in Kurdistan!"

WITH a helpless look around, Doctor Jones, probably feeling that this general levity was most indecorous and out of place, opened his book and proceeded to earn the fat fee that was in readiness for him. He was to receive another shock when Tahir Beg affixed his signature as witness in flowing Persian characters.

At four o'clock most of the guests had assembled and with them newspaper men from every sheet in the city—admitted by express invitation of the host. Flowers decked the great rooms, buffets groaned beneath the weight of caterers' delicacies, and more than one jaded business man brightened visibly when ice-frosted buckets of silver became visible, and it proved evident that prohibition had not affected the Fraser cellars.

The door of the private library opened, and Howard Z. Fraser promptly introduced his son and daughter to his assembled guests *en masse*. Then, leaving Bob to do the explaining, he rushed away on an important errand.

The nature of this errand was made clear when Winkler opened the dining room doors and exposed to view the table bearing a huge bride-cake. Beside it stood Howard Z. Fraser, who lifted his hand for attention and then indicated the cake.

"Here, my friends," he exclaimed, "is a slight surprise for the bride and groom—this object which you see adorning the cake is a historic symbol which is supposed to represent a peacock. It has been vitally connected with certain experiences we have had in Kurdistan, and it has brought the best luck in the world to me and to my son. Sefid, my dear! Come here and cut the cake—and make the brazen peacock bring you the best of luck in years to come!"

Howard Z. Fraser admitted afterward that he had intended to tell exactly what the brazen peacock was—but upon meeting the eye of the Reverend Doctor Jones his nerve had failed him. However, the clerical gentleman read all about the image of Melek Taus in the next morning's papers; and if he was shocked, he said nothing of it.

Man to Man

A Story of the American Legion



Frederick
Tierney

EDDY MARTIN, manager of the Howard Mercantile Company, faced his superintendent across the managerial desk for the third time in a week. And for the third time there was a complaint on his lips.

"Look here, Sanderson!" Martin's usually cheery countenance was set and stern. "I hate to be continually finding fault. But frankly, you're not making good."

The superintendent smiled slightly.

"You've narrowed it down to me?"

"Why not? I can't go to each man individually. You're the one in direct contact—and something's radically wrong."

"Decidedly so. But—"

"You know yourself that we're employing more men right now than we ever have had on the pay-roll before. And what are we getting out of it? Slipshod work, mistakes which nobody seems to care about, lack of loyalty, and everything else that goes to wreck the morale of an institution. And as far as I can see, the whole thing is flatly up to you."

Again the superintendent smiled. "You're absolutely sure of that?"

"As sure as I can be of anything. You're over the foremen, and the foremen are over the men. You know their troubles if they have any, and you're supposed to be able to find a remedy for them, or to explain them in such a way that I or some one higher up can find a remedy. But you've done nothing."

"Perhaps there's nothing to do."

Eddy Martin's first hit the desk.

"Nothing to do? You admit, don't you, that things are in bad shape here?"

"Exactly."

"You admit that it's your duty to find out what the trouble is, so that it can be rectified?"

"Certainly."

"Then why one earth, man, don't you do it?"

A moment of silence. Then: "Perhaps I have."

"Then why—"

A SUDDEN change that had come over the actions of the superintendent caused Martin to halt and to wait. Sanderson had swung about in his chair and was leaning over the desk.

"I suppose," he said quietly, "that my job depends on my telling the cause of the trouble here?"

"You naturally couldn't expect much else, could you, Sanderson?"

"Frankly, I couldn't. But—and he smiled again—"I'm between the devil and the deep sea. From what I've heard, if I do tell the cause, I'll be out of a job anyway. So it's six of one and a half a dozen of the other. Do you really want to know why the men aren't working here? Do you want to know why they're malicious and half-hearted and disloyal? Do you?"

"I've asked you three times in a week."

"But suppose that information hurts?"

"I guess I could stand it."

Sanderson stared hard into the reflections of the glass-topped desk. Then he looked up sharply.

"Well, Mr. Martin, seeing that I'm slated to go either way, I might as well tell you straight. The trouble isn't with the men. It isn't with the foreman, and it isn't with the superintendent. It's with somebody higher up."

"Who?"

"Yourself!"

"I?" Martin laughed in an uncertain manner. "I? What's the idea?"

Sanderson, talking now with the assurance of one who knows his fate and who no longer must conceal his feelings to protect himself, hunched forward in his chair and pointed a finger at the manager.

"You're the one, and no one else, Mr. Martin. The foreman can't do anything with the men when those men haven't faith in the management. And the foremen haven't faith, either. What's more, neither have I."

"But—but—what have I done?" Martin, driven to cover by the sudden accusation, was stammering. Sanderson shook his head.

"We don't like you; that's all. We've heard just one story about you; that's enough. You were in the army, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"You were a top kicker."

"Yes, first sergeant."

"And now that you're back in civvies again, you're adjutant of the Kenneth Carson post of the American Legion, aren't you?"

"Yes." Martin now was on the defensive, without knowing why. Sanderson went on:

"How many ex-service men are there in your employ?"

"Here? As many as I can get. I've made it a rule to hire ex-service men whenever I could get them."

"True. And how many of these men are members of your post of the Legion?"

"Why—I don't know. I've never given that much thought. I've simply taken it for granted—"

"As you've taken everything else for granted. As you've taken it for granted that you were liked here and that it was not your fault that things were slipping.

As you've taken it for granted that I should be fired for something that wasn't my fault. Now, Mr. Martin, I want you to examine the membership-books of your post tonight. And I've got a good deal of money that says you won't find the name of a Howard Company employee on it—besides your own."

"But—"

"And what's more, if anybody around this place had enough faith in you to tell the truth, you'd find that a lot of men are staying out of the Legion just because you're in it. And if there isn't any other way to find out, you might go around sometime and ask Bill Harris why he doesn't join the Legion. He's got the grit to tell you."

"Bill Harris?" Martin stared. "Why, he's the first man I gave a job to. I made an opening for him. I—"

"So?" Sanderson arched his eyebrows. Martin leaned forward.

"You don't mean to tell me that he's against me too?"

The only answer was a shrug of the shoulders.

Martin stared harder than ever. "Why, Sanderson, he and I were kids together."

"So I've heard."

"We fished out of the same stream together; we dug our caves and went red-haw hunting together. Why—"

"I've heard that too."

"Why, we were even in the same company in France."

"He told me."

"And you mean to say that he's not my friend? Something's wrong with you, Sanderson."

THE superintendent rose. "I've been expecting that, Mr. Martin. That's what I thought you'd say when I started out to tell you all this. I suppose my departure from this company begins from this minute? If you'll have my time made out—"

"Your time?" Martin smiled again.

"Don't be so hasty. Sit down."

The superintendent obeyed. Martin leaned forward.

"I don't know what the secret of this thing is, but I'm going to find out. You're not fired—unless you've lied to me. And in that case, I believe you will agree with me that I would be doing right."

"Exactly."

"Very well. Go back to your work. I'm going to make investigations, and just remember this: that you are not the man on trial. I am the person who's on the griddle, and I'm going to find out what's wrong. And I hope I will be the sort of judge and jury that will be prejudiced against my case from the beginning, so that if there is the slightest thing that's bad, it will be wiped out. And if there is, I'll be the first man to confess it. So take up your job again. If you're wrong, you're fired. If you're right your pay's raised. And if you can give me anything that will act as a clue, I'll appreciate it."

It was Sanderson's turn to stare.

"That's fair, Mr. Martin," he said at last. "I—I didn't expect it. If I'd known you were—"

"Can you give me a clue?"

Sanderson raised his hands and stared at them. "It isn't for me to say, Mr. Martin. I'd only be repeating something that's been told me. I admit that it turned me against you, just as it turned every other man in the place against you. But it isn't my place to tell it—that belongs to Harris."

"Harris?" Martin's eyes narrowed. Then he whistled softly. "I wonder—" came at last. Then: "All right, Sanderson. I've told you what I'll do, and you know what to expect. And until I find out differently, I'm going to believe you."

The superintendent rose and went back to his work. For a while Martin fingered the various papers on his desk somewhat vaguely. Then he too rose, and went out into the plant.

HERE and there he walked, into the packing-rooms, the shipping-rooms, out on the docks where the gangs of men were unloading the carload shipments of goods which kept the great mercantile establishment alive, into the order-departments and through the office. Many times before he had made these trips, but never with the attitude that he now held. Then he had merely walked through, with a cursory interest in the work that was being carried on. Now he sought to gain, from the glances of the men, from their actions, the truth or untruth of Sanderson's statement—and aided by imagination, it was not difficult.

There was something in the manner of the men as they spoke to him that did

not breed trust. Once or twice, as he walked on, he believed he heard soft-spoken remarks, passing from one to the other. Suddenly he veered and made his way toward the small white-painted inclosure which served as an office for the receiving clerk. Harris was within, checking his receipts. He did not look up when Martin opened the door.

"How's everything?" the manager began. "Getting along all right?"

"So-so, Mr. Martin." The answer was cursory, Eddy thought. Certainly, in the old days, Harris had never put an appellation before his name.

"Shipments coming in O. K.?"

"Very well."

"Haven't gotten a chance to talk to you much since you got home, Bill," Martin went on, forcing the conversation. "I've meant to drop around some night and see you. Where are you living now?"

"Brownleigh Court."

"You wouldn't object?"

"Me? Oh, no. It would be a delight."

There was sarcasm in the tone—sarcasm which Martin could not help but perceive. He went on, back to the office upstairs and to his work, while Harris, the receiving clerk, still labored over his receipts.

Uncertainty was in the heart of Eddy Martin, the uncertainty bred by an accusation which was neither proven nor refuted. All afternoon he sought to find a reason for it all—only to stop again and again, to whistle softly and to stare into the far-away, as with some thought he did not care to face. Closing time came, then evening—and it found him in the office of the Kenneth Carson Post of the American Legion.

The membership books were before him. Carefully he studied every name; slowly he ran through the columns of members. Sanderson had been right. In all the list of the largest Legion post in the city, there was not a single name which denoted an employee of the Howard Mercantile Company, not a single man of the great number to whom he had given jobs and in whom, he had thought, he possessed friendship.

The information was biting—it hurt. For just a moment Eddy Martin, late of the A. E. F., sat there grim and thoughtful. Then he closed the books with a snap, restored them to the little safe and hurried downstairs. A taxicab was drawing to the curb. He hailed it.

"Brownleigh Court," he ordered; and ten minutes later he knocked on the door of the small apartment which bore the name of Bill Harris, his boyhood comrade.

A SMILE that was almost a sneer greeted him. Martin pretended not to see. A moment of random conversation; then Harris, far the bigger man of the two, seemed to square himself.

"Well?" he asked. "Why this unexpected pleasure?"

[Martin's eyes searched his. The answer that came to his lips was stifled, while in its place came:

"Bill, you happen to know, I suppose, that I'm the adjutant of Kenneth Carson Post of the Legion?"

"Yes."

"You and I were together in the A. E. F."

"I remember very well."

"And I was wondering, Bill, why you couldn't come into the Legion with me? I'd like to have you there."

"No thanks!" There was a snarl in the voice.

"But you're an ex-service man."

"To my sorrow!"

"You've got a clear record, Bill."

"It wasn't anybody's fault but my own."

Then it was that Martin veered from his superficial conversation. Things were beginning to focus; there was a look in Bill Harris' eyes that was menacing, almost threatening. Martin stepped forward—until they were face to face—and his voice hardened.

"Look here, Bill," he said quietly. "You and I were kids together. We had our scraps, and we got over them. I thought we were lifelong friends. I've been busy since we got back—I haven't had much time to talk to you. I thought that the same cause kept you from coming around to see me. I found out today that there was a different reason. Now, you've got a good deal more heft to you than I have—but that doesn't worry me. You can hit an awful wallop—but I've got a bit of one myself. And I've never been afraid of you a single day of my life—in spite of the fact that you've licked me every time we've fought, and—"

"The next time I lick you, you'll remember it," had come surlily.

Martin smiled coldly. "Perhaps. But if you're not a coward and a sneak and a dirty low-down cur, you'll tell me first what it's all about!"

"Taking advantage of your size, aren't you?"

"I'm not taking advantage of anything. You can roll up your sleeves and wade in any time you want to. I asked you just now why you wouldn't join the Legion. You sneered against it and you were sarcastic about our service in the A. E. F."

BUT a glowering face and flaming eyes shut him off. The mouth of Bill Harris worked a moment in silent rage. Then, streaming, torrential, the words came:

"Don't you talk to anybody about being a low-down cur! Don't you even hint at the word you—you snake! You did your best to kill me, and you know you did! And now that it's all over and I came out of it alive, you sneak around here and call me a coward because I hate the Legion and the army and everything that's connected with it."

"Why?" the query had come coolly. Harris glared at him.

"Why? You know! Stenay!"

There was a moment of silence. Then:

"I thought that was it, Bill. I've heard down at the plant that ugly stories have been told about me. So that was it—and you've told that story."

"Why shouldn't I? Huh?" Harris leaned threateningly toward him. "Why shouldn't I tell that story? You were my pal, my kidhood chum, as you so delight in speaking of our—our friendship. Yes, you were! But you remember what happened at Stenay, don't you?"

"Very clearly." Martin's voice had become icy now. "And just so that you will know whether I have it straight or not, I'll repeat it. It was the next to last day of fighting. The rumors of the armistice were going round, and you couldn't wait. You went A. W. O. L. when you knew an attack was coming off. You showed up late. There wasn't anything I could do but follow orders."

"Tell what you did!" the other man commanded hoarsely. "Are you ashamed of it? You took your old boyhood friend, your chum, your pal, and you stripped him of his gun and his ammunition and his bayonet, and sent him out into the lines without a single weapon. That's what you did!" The voice was high-pitched, raging. "You sent that old kidhood friend out into the darkness of a night attack across the Meuse, without a single thing to fight with!"

"Those were my orders, Bill."

"You knew it was *vin rouge* that kept me out, not a yellow streak."

"And you ought to know," came the icy answer, "that no matter what the cause might have been, what you did was a technical desertion under fire!"

"I didn't desert at Vaux or Soissons or St. Mihiel. I went through the Argonne all right, didn't I?"

"I told you that it was a technical desertion. And for a technical desertion, you could have been stood up against the wall and shot. But—"

"But kind-hearted old pal of mine that you were, you contented yourself with taking my equipment away from me and sending me up into the line in the darkness without anything. You sent me up there where I didn't have a chance in the world to come out whole—and I wouldn't have, either, if some one hadn't shoved an automatic into my hand along there somewhere. It wasn't a minute afterward that a Boche jumped me, and I got him—" He pulled open his shirt and showed a ragged, red scar. "That's where his bayonet caught me as he fell. And you, dear old pal that you were—you sent me into that!"

"I admit it, Bill. But I didn't make the orders."

"You carried them out."

"That's a soldier's duty."

"You stripped me of everything I possessed and sent me out into the darkness to fight with nothing! You can't get away from that."

"And you can't get away from the fact that if I hadn't done it, some other sergeant would have. You can't get away from the fact that you were A. W. O. L. in a time of danger to the regiment."

"What of it? Nearly everybody went A. W. O. L. at one time or another."

"True—but not during or just before a battle. It became something else, then, Bill. It was desertion, and my orders—"

The other man snarled and gestured heatedly.

"Orders, hell!" he snapped. "Whoever issued orders like that? Produce them! That's all I want you to do. You've been talking about orders—now I want you to show 'em to me. You can't do it—and neither can any other man that ever served in the A. E. F. Because there weren't any such orders!"

Eddy Martin smiled thinly.

"I thought you had more sense than

that, Bill. I'll admit that you can't find them. Instead you'll find the same old thing about desertion under fire being punishable by death. But if you're the keen person I've always thought you to be, you'll know that the commander of a division did a good many things that were dictated by circumstances and not by cut and dried orders. The Old Man made up his mind that there should be no desertions from our division, technical or otherwise. The man who went A. W. O. L. when he absolutely knew that an attack was coming off was a technical deserter. It was overlooked for a while and the usual excuses taken. But there came the time when it couldn't be overlooked any longer. And that was when you were unlucky enough to get caught in the net. You can't get away from the fact, Bill, that the Old Man's system at least gave a man a chance, whether it was in conformance with general orders from G. H. Q. or not. And you can't escape the fact that men *did* desert and that it was an impossibility to tell the difference between those and the men who were A. W. O. L. Can you, Bill? Lord, man, that way out was invented to save just such fools as you and give you a fighting chance to redeem yourself without a blot on your record."

"That's enough! It wasn't the 'unwritten order' that saved me. It was the buddy who slipped me a gun in the dark. I'm through with your preaching. I've been through with you since that night, and I'll tell you here and now that I'll injure you at every chance I get; I'll work against you and slave against you and fight against you with every atom of strength and hate and malice that I've got in my body. I'll—"

"Against me. But not against the Howard Mercantile Company!"

A ROAR of rage! A coat was stripped from the heavy shoulders of Bill Harris. His great muscles flexed. His hands clenched.

"All right! We'll have it that way. Against you—and you alone. I'll leave the plant tomorrow—but when I go, they'll know why. They'll take one look at you and see the reason! Get off that coat there—hear me? Get off that coat. These rooms don't let out much sound—we can go to it as far as we please. And we're going the whole road!"

He moved his arms viciously as though

to loosen the great muscles. "I couldn't do this in the army—they'd have had me in the guardhouse for it. But now we're man to man—and there aren't any regulations to protect you. There—"

Then he stopped. Before him, Eddy Martin, smaller, far less muscular, was waiting, his coat and collar stripped—waiting again to be beaten as he had been beaten in their every fight since childhood.

A moment of circling defense, each seeking for the advantage of a momentarily lull in the guard. A few sparring blows, which touched lightly. Then a rush by the bigger man which forced Eddy Martin far into a corner of the room, and from which he escaped only after a bruising blow had crashed against a cheek. It dazed him slightly, but he forced a smile, and dodged a blow aimed for his jaw. The other man came grimly on, mumbling as he watched his chance.

"You took away my gun!" he snarled. "You sent me out to get killed. But it didn't work! Things'll square up a bit after this—you haven't got any shavetail and any captain and any major behind you now! You've—"

Then he stopped. Eddy Martin had gone under his guard to send a crackling blow against his jaw. It brought a rush from the other man and a tangle of blows—then the crouching defense again, each man watching the other, each set of arms milling slowly, each sinuous body twisting about the room, waiting warily for the first opening, the first chance—

A crash. Bill Harris' fist had shot forth and found flesh, sending Martin toppling half across the room. But the smaller man straightened and came into the fight again, while the larger smiled grimly with the vengeance that was his.

"That was for the bandolier of cartridges you took off me!" he said slowly. "You're going to get paid back for everything."

Again a rush, but this time Martin evaded him. A second later, the smaller man, gliding under his guard, pelted blow after blow upon the larger man's body, seeking in vain for some vulnerable spot. Panting, he dropped back into his defense again, only to find that defense suddenly broken and the great fists of Bill Harris crashing in upon him, forcing him to retreat and to cover.

"And that's for the rifle and for the bayonet!" The bigger man's voice was

louder now. "Straighten up there and fight—hear me—I'm not going to pound you to pieces without—"

"I'm fighting," came the answer. "I'm fighting!"

AND Martin proved it. With every bit of his strength he leaped forward and sent forth his fists in a torrent of blows that the slower-working machine before him could not guard against. Time and again the smacking crackle of fist against flesh sounded as the smaller man sent blow after blow into the face and neck and body of his antagonist. Crossing and recrossing, uppercutting and slashing, Martin was fighting with all the reserve power he could summon, seeking by the very ferocity of his attack to beat down the other man, to break his attack before that strength vanished. Blood came, flowing from a long cut over Harris' eye, and from the ragged fringes of his lips, where the tight clenched fists of Eddy Martin had struck them. Then a quick, snapping sound, a wincing expression of pain on Martin's face, and his attack ceased.

But Harris did not see that expression. Harris did not notice that one hand no longer was clenched. Harris did not stop to investigate why the guarding arm of Eddy Martin continually was the same. The world was red to Bill Harris now, red with hate and long pent-up malice, red with the surge of conflict and with the thin trickle of blood which flowed from his forehead. Out lashed his heavy fists, sending Martin reeling before him—again and again, while his voice thundered.

"And that's for the darkness you sent me into! That's for the guns that were trying to kill me—that's for the man who wouldn't protect a friend! That's—"

Then he stopped. A careening, weaving figure showed before him, staggering dazedly around the room. Then it dropped, limp, inanimate. The old, old story had been told once more. Eddy Martin, fighting as he had always fought against the greater odds of the other's strength, had been whipped again.

For just a second Bill Harris stood over his victim, panting, wiping the blood from his face. Then as the man on the floor stirred weakly, the bigger man forced forward a hand:

"Here!" he ordered surlily. "Get up! You're whipped! I guess that evens things up a little."

Slowly a hand was raised, then dropped. "Take the other," came weakly. "That one's broken."

"Broken?" Harris asked the question in a new tone. "Since when?"

"Oh, it doesn't make much difference. Eddy Martin had forced a grin. "It was when I was trying to knock you for goal. It didn't work."

"I didn't know." Some of the churlishness was gone from Harris' voice. "You could have yelled quits. I don't have to fight a man with a broken hand to even up my scores. I can wait."

"Even?" Eddie Martin was on his feet now and staggering dizzily around the room. "Who said we were even?"

"Do you want more?"

"No thanks!" The smaller man grinned again. "But we're not even, Bill. What'd you ever do with that forty-five?"

"That gun? I saved it. It was the only thing—"

"Then for the love of Mike get it and give it back to me. You'll find three little notches in the stock if you don't believe me—the three boche I got at Vaux."

"You—you?" Bill Harris was staring

blankly. "You slipped it to me out there—you?"

"Why not?" Eddy was really grinning now. "There wasn't any regulation against that, was there?"

THE eyes of Bill Harris blinked in a dazed, almost non-understanding manner. For a long time he stalked silently about the room, stopping now and then to stare in bewildered fashion at the floor. Then with a quick motion he reached into a pocket and brought forth a knife. A moment more and he had dragged an army revolver from a drawer and was busily nicking at the stock. Then he straightened and turned toward the old friend of his boyhood, a new look in his eyes, a new smile on his lips.

"I've—I've put a couple more notches in it, Eddy," he said huskily, "One for the boche I got and—and the other for a sore-head who—who's gone for good."

Then again a long silence, followed by the laughter of two happy men—and a voice in sudden pain.

"Ouch! Gosh, Bill, I forgot. Shake the other one. This one's broken!"

The Profiteer Plunderers

The Sporting Finish

By W. Douglas Newton

THE three plunderers of profiteers had many quiet months before Cyprian Xystus was devoured with desire for the Gillard rubies.

For several reasons they had neither robbed nor talked of robbing the men made rich at other people's cost. The first was that their successful business of plundering had given each enough money to assure them a good income in the future. At the same time Boyd Muir the musician was now at the top of the tree in his profession and well beyond the need of stealing to maintain himself, as well as far too busy in his honest trade to afford much time for his criminal profession. But lastly

and perhaps, really, it was firstly with Boyd he had a growing fear and distaste for the danger Thecla Xystus was running in their dark calling. She had ceased to be one who could take part in a rather exciting and profitable adventure, and had become, for Boyd, some one who needed protecting from the horrors of imprisonment. The fact that the dapper detective Max Conrad had shown that the authorities had suspicion of the doings of the trio filled the musician with a thrill of alarm. Certainly they seemed to have thrown Max off the scent, but the mere fact that he had been on it was enough to make Boyd tremble.

He had been hoping that Cyprian and Thecla were sharing his attitude, since they made no attempt to plan a robbery, when Cyprian mentioned the Gillard rubies.

"They are the finest in the world, my child," said the gay young dandy of a burglar. "They are gems of the purest water, and that confirmed dyspeptic Gillard is master of them. It is a crime. He hasn't a wife or a child, nor kith nor kin—nobody to wear those lovely things; yet he has them. They are locked away in his stuffy old country house in an iron-grated showcase, and nobody sees them: they bring pleasure to none."

"Well, what about them?" asked Boyd, turning uneasily from his piano.

"I think it is our duty to release them from that old skinflint and place them in the care of people more worthy. I don't know of anybody more worthy than ourselves. Do you?"

"I thought we'd let looting people slide?" said Boyd ruefully.

"Yes, haven't we, my infant!" said Cyprian with exasperating coolness. "We'll be getting sadly out of practice, if we go on like this."

"Is it worth it?" asked Boyd, looking at Thecla.

"In money? Those rubies are worth every penny of nineteen thousand pounds," answered Cyprian.

"Haven't we enough money to carry on?" asked Boyd.

"Money—oh yes. But I was only giving you their estimated value; I wasn't thinking of them in money terms. I want them for themselves alone. I want to make a present of them. Thecla would look ripping in rubies."

"Why Thecla?" said the astonished Boyd.

"Oh, I thought perhaps you'd know why," chuckled Thecla's irresponsible brother. "I had an idea that probably there could arise an occasion for giving Thecla a present soon."

Boyd colored at the palpable hit, for certainly he and Thecla were beginning to understand each other very well. Thecla herself showed a lovely confusion, and said to Cyprian: "Don't be silly. And wouldn't your present be a useful one! The first policeman who saw me in those rubies would recognize them; I should be in custody in half an hour."

"Not so fast, my child," cried Cyprian. "You forget that rubies are very like each

other. The setting of the Gillard rubies is unique, but I fear we would have to dispense with that setting. Recut, even only a little, by our Chinese servant, and put into a new setting, I defy anybody to name them as the Gillard gems. They will be the Xystus rubies—unless, of course, Thecla changes her name from Xystus to—well, some other."

They looked at the chuckling young man for a moment. Boyd, gaining heart from Thecla's suggestion that any policeman might recognize the rubies, felt that she too was no longer inclined toward the daring and dangerous life they had been leading.

"My dear Cyprian," he cried, "is this worth the risk?" He expected a laughing snub from the young daredevil, and was surprised to hear him say: "Well, perhaps it isn't. But hang it, my child, I hate to finish off our career as plunderers in tame comfort. It demands one last and dramatic fling, and I think the rubies will give us that. To take just one last thing as a present to Thecla—that will be fitting."

"And that will end our escapades?"

"I suppose so," said Cyprian with a note of regret in his voice. "When comfort and a good income fly in at the window, the love of risk and adventure goes out by the door, my children."

"HOW are we going to set about getting these jewels?" asked Thecla.

"Very simply and easily," answered Cyprian. "Gillard lives in an old worm-eaten, half-tumbled-down house called 'Less-daunt.' It stands in a lonely place in the country, and most of its windows wouldn't defy an amateur. Moreover, Gillard lives more or less alone. His rooms are in the main buildings; those of his servants are in a remote wing built apart from the main structure in such a way as to cut him off completely from their aid. Next Wednesday, too, most of his servants will be away for the night at a fair ten miles distant. The rubies are kept in a case, a glass case covered with strong wire netting, in a big old hall that Henry VIII was supposed to have dined in, on the ground floor. There are windows with steel shutters to this hall, but we can get in quite comfortably through a smoking-room window. Rich people are like that; they turn one room into a sort of vault or dungeon, and yet fail to stop up other avenues to the place. The job should not be difficult to us."

"You've got all your facts down pat; how did you find them out?"

"I went down for three days a week ago, to spy out the land. I tipped the butler and was shown the famous collection of rubies, and the rest—the public is allowed to see 'em. For the other facts I have to thank a sporting fisherman, who had a grudge against old Gillard because he was a bear about a stream that ran through his grounds."

"Where did you meet the talkative sportsman?" asked Thecla, with, Boyd thought, a touch of suspicion.

"Oh, in the local inn. We were both staying there and exchanged views on trout-flies and such things in the coffee room after dinner. It was a bit of luck meeting this fellow. He came down by the same train; I saw him on the platform just before we left town. He saw me too, and that gave us a sort of bond of sympathy. He was an asset. He always fishes in the district, and knows all the local news."

"What sort of man was he?" demanded Thecla.

"Not like anyone we know, my child," laughed her brother, "so you need not get nervous. A big burly chap, red-faced and whiskered, and with about ten thoughts only outside the topic of the rod and line."

That seemed to satisfy Thecla, and there was a pause, broken at length, by Boyd.

"How do we set about this job?"

"Again, quite simply. We motor down suitably disguised, leave our car in a wood, get in through the smoking-room window, go along the passage until we get to the oak-and-iron door of the room where the jewels are. We can break through that door—easily. After that—"

EVERYTHING went as Cyprian had promised. They went straight ahead until they came to the iron door sheathed in oak. With a special tool inserted in the keyhole, which automatically found the register of the lock and enabled them to click the bolt back, they let themselves into the room, and closed the door softly.

Directly the door was closed, there was a snap in the room, and an oil lamp lit the place with a brilliant radiance. They sprang round. There stood a big burly man, red of face, and whiskered. It was evident he had been standing behind the door when they opened it. He held two pistols in his hands, with which he made a sign that there was no mistaking.

"Put your hands up," he commanded "and remember you are covered. Understand, I know exactly how clever you three are, and I'm not going to risk any tricks."

At the sound of his voice the three started, but Cyprian more than the others. For the voice he heard was not the voice that should have come from the whiskered fisherman he knew and rather despised, but the voice of one he knew and feared. But he managed to control himself and say as coolly as ever.

"Would you mind taking off some of that hair on your face? It is ugly anyhow, and then I should like to know who you are."

"You don't need an introduction to me, Cyprian Xystus," said the hairy sportsman.

"Max Conrad!" Thecla gasped. Cyprian followed with:

"The dapper and jolly, little detective man! You used to be more pleasant to look at, but I admit you've fooled me pretty thoroughly."

"I meant to, Xystus," said the detective. He plucked off his whiskers, and under the red paint of his disguise showed that he was indeed the jolly and rather boyish detective Max Conrad. "I meant to fool you, and I took no chances. I had to be perfect in my disguise. I've been waiting to get you for some time. I didn't mean to slip up this time."

"You couldn't have made so good a change in the train," said Cyprian coolly. "Would you mind telling me how you managed it? As an expert in these things myself I'd like to know."

"Certainly I didn't change in the train," said the detective. "And I'm only too glad to tell a sportsman like yourself how it was done. I fixed my suspicions on you three as the bright people who were looting the profiteers and since then I haven't let you out of my sight. You haven't given me much to catch hold of but you made a slip when you came down to reconnoiter Gillard's place. You bought your ticket the evening before. My confidential man was on the spot and saw you do it, and heard you inquire for trains the next day. All I had to do was, to effect my disguise and wait about in the station. I saw you get out, and I took a room at the same inn."

"But you seemed to know old Gillard's movements pretty well."

"While you were spying out old Gillard's house, I was gathering information from the innkeeper, villagers and such. From

them I learnt of Gillard's greediness about his fishing rights, the situation of his own and the servants' bedrooms, and more to the purpose, that his servants would be away tonight because of the big fair at Hendyke, ten miles away—everybody in the village goes there. That suited me, because I knew it would suit you. It fixed the date you would make an attempt on the jewels. Both of us could make adequate preparations for the event."

"Yours seems to have been the more adequate; I must say," said Cyprian.

"*Seem* is not the word; they have been. I have *you*." The detective's pride ran a little away with him here, as Cyprian had meant it to do, for that was his purpose underlying this strange dialogue. "I've got you. I've got the smartest gang of thieves of the age. And I've done it all off my own bat."

"Single-handed jobs are rather dangerous," smiled Cyprian.

"Not this one; I have the drop on you," chuckled Max Conrad, and then, too late, he corrected himself: "You are jumping at conclusions if you think this is single-handed. I warn you not to bank on that fact because—"

He stopped speaking, gave a low groan and fell to the floor.

The tiny pistol in Cyprian's hand had spoken.

Boyd Muir knew that pistol well. It was a tiny automatic that could be concealed quite easily in the palm of the hand. Cyprian always carried it on his adventures. He had a theory that it was the one chance a man had when he was in the otherwise hopeless position of having to put up his hands. A neat attachment to his finger ring enabled him to hold the pistol in his palm when his hands were aloft, and he always turned the back of his hands to his opponent when he raised them. He had practiced shooting from this position until he had attained a deadly accuracy; and this, and the fact that the detective was perfectly certain that he was helpless, brought about Conrad's downfall.

The little bullet from this pistol does not kill unless it strikes straight into the eye or some other vulnerable part. But the crash of the projectile against the hard bone of Conrad's temple knocked him out completely, and he fell unconscious like a limp sack. He dropped with a thud on his own lamp and for a moment the room was plunged in blackness.

But only for a moment! The three flash-lamps in the hands of the plunderers were switched on at once, and there was light in the room. Cyprian was all activity.

"We must get out of this," he snapped out. "The sound of the pistol will awaken the house. Besides, he'll recover consciousness soon. Quick, sling Conrad's body out of the way and get the door open—and then for the car."

They dragged the detective's body out of the puddle of oil in which the wick of his lamp faintly fluttered in a feeble flame, and pulled it to a far corner, so that any people coming down into the room would not discover the man quickly; then they wrenched open the door, flung through it and slammed it behind them. Its automatic lock crashed home. They fled through the smoking-room window, and out of the house.

THERE was a flurried movement of people stirring in the house as they ran, but they got clear. It was only when they reached the car in the thin wood and began to crank it that they looked back at the house standing stark in the clear moonlight.

As they looked they saw breaking away from it several black and thick puffs of smoke. They stood and stared aghast. Cyprian voiced their thoughts.

"My God!" he said. "The house is on fire! Conrad's lamp has set it on fire. That tomb with the iron door and shutters is burning and Conrad is in that tomb!"

For a moment they stood gazing at the burning building with mixed emotions. All of them felt the personal significance of this happening. They recognized that with Conrad dead they were safe. He had, as he said, played off his own bat entirely. With him out of the way, there would be no one who knew of their crimes. But with this thought was also a feeling of horror and decency. To let a good man die pent up in that tomb was a ghastly thing! Thecla burst out.

"We can't! We can't allow it!" Boyd caught her hand and pressed it. Cyprian said in his own manner. "Of course not, Thecla. We're burglars, but we're not beasts." Then he added: "Stay by the car, Thecla. Boyd, get that tool-case from under the seat. Good! Now come along sharp."

They dashed into the open again and made straight for the house. There was

nobody to see them. Gillard and the two women servants who remained with him that night had made their escape by the front (they afterwards learned), but they knew already that they had been awakened and would escape. The villagers had not yet realized the house was on fire.

The plunderers had the rear of the house to themselves as they raced toward it. They went straight to the steel windows of the hall, and in his careful yet rapid manner Cyprian examined them. Boyd opened the tool-case. He picked out a crowbar which seemed to him to be the best tool to vanquish the strong shutters swiftly. Cyprian waved those aside.

"The nitro-gelatin," he ordered, and reached for the phial.

"Noisy and dangerous," Boyd cautioned.

"It can't be helped; there's no time for caution; this house is nothing more than a tinder box—it will blaze like one!"

With a strong chisel he was hacking a slot in the window frame, and in a few seconds, he had fixed the charge and tamped it with a special rubber and iron tamp; then he and Boyd ran backward into a ditch unrolling the electric firing-wire as they went. In less than ten seconds there was a sharp, tearing explosion; part of the side of the house was torn out, and the steel shutters crumpled. A great gush of black smoke poured out of the hole, and behind the smoke they could see the lurid, blood-red flames.

Both young men ran to the opening. Boyd got there first, pushed his head and shoulders in and fell back choking. For once Cyprian was second. Boyd with smarting eyes was able to see why. He had unwrapped his big motoring scarf from his throat and was binding it round his mouth. He touched the musician on the shoulder, and then keeping as low as he could, crept through the opening.

Boyd waited in agony for what seemed an eternity. He watched the smoke, and it grew terribly dense. At one moment it gushed out in an awful billow, and he saw the reflection of a fresh upshooting of flames behind it. Something had fallen in somewhere! It had engulfed—what? Cyprian as well as Conrad? Boyd knew a terrible fear.

The fear was growing on Boyd at the wait, and he was just about to unroll his own neck-wrap when he saw a movement in the smoke. A pair of boots appeared in the gap in the wall, and with a throb of

joy he caught hold of them and began to tug. He tugged with a will, and in a short moment the unconscious body of the detective was on the ground beside him. As he bent over the body, he heard Cyprian shout:

"Take him back to the car; get him aboard. You and Thecla look after him."

Boyd lifted the body and staggered across the garden to the wood in which the car was hidden. Conrad was not a light man; and the journey was made with many halts and rests. Cyprian, Boyd recognized, was probably not in a condition to lend a hand, but all the same he could trust that alert and capable young man to take care of himself.

It was when he reached the car that he experienced a shock. Thecla and he had no sooner hoisted the detective into the rear seat than they turned and found Cyprian was not with them. It was an ugly moment. They had a vision of Cyprian, having completed his rescue, falling down overcome by the smoke and fumes. He was lying unconscious in that furnace; even now the flames might have reached him. Boyd turned and ran back toward the house.

As he ran, he tore his scarf from his neck and wound it about his face. He was ready to plunge into the smoke when he reached the house, and he lost no time.

It was not easy to find Cyprian. Boyd had heard his voice close to the wall, and was certain that he must have fallen near it. But he had to crawl through the smoke many yards before his hand touched the prone body. For some reason Cyprian had gone back into the heart of the room. Here, with dense volumes of smoke above him and the fierce and snapping flames terribly near, he had fallen. Boyd, scorched and suffocated, his mouth bitter with the smoke, his eyes streaming and inflamed, his body weak with the awful heat, had a terrible struggle to get the unconscious man clear. It was an agony to get him along to the car, and only by the dint of homeric exertions that he succeeded. Even then he had to drive off, leaving Thecla to deal with the two unconscious men in the back of the car.

THE three plunderers sat in the bright room of their Kensington house, looking at Max Conrad the detective, tired but now fully recovered. He was smiling at them a little ruefully.

"It's an odd situation," he said. "Here we are, the captor and the captives, sitting comfortably in the latter's house, talking things over and deciding what we shall do."

"I suggest," said Cyprian quietly, "that you just change your remark about a little. Call it, my infant, the captors and their captive. Don't forget it is our house, and that we are in the majority."

"That means nothing," said Conrad. "I am your prisoner for the moment, but only for the moment. Oh, I know you can keep me tied up until you make good your escape, and all that, but in the end I am the man with the pistol in my hand. I know you. I know all about you. I know for whom I have to hunt. I've got you marked down wherever you are."

"You're delightfully candid," said Cyprian. "We'll be candid, too. Doesn't it occur to you that we might quietly and without fuss do away with you?"

"It doesn't," said Conrad cheerfully. "I have already received confirmation of what I already knew, and that is that you are not the dirty and murdering sort. I knew all along you were sportsmen, and that's the difficulty."

"Why is it a difficulty?" asked Boyd.

"This: to all intents and purposes it was that sporting and decent spirit in you that put the handcuffs so to speak, on your wrists. Oh, I know what I'm talking about. You see, I played this case as a lone hand, and I know you knew I did. Xystus got that out of me in that room. I was so certain I had you that I let you know. Well, then, though I was the fellow who had all the facts, the only one who could bring a case against you, you were too clean not to remove me, though twice you had an absolutely certain chance."

"Twice?" said Boyd.

"Xystus could have pinked me through the eye or heart with that cunning little

pistol," said the detective, "but he simply stunned me with it instead. And then I recovered consciousness just after the room had got well alight from that oil lamp, and I tried to get out through those infernal steel shutters and the door before the smoke and fumes sent me under again. I knew I was done unless—unless some sportsman got me out. And sportsmen got me out."

"Almost anybody would have done the same," said Cyprian.

"Not on your life!" said the detective heartily. "Nine out of ten would have seen in that accident a heaven-sent chance. With me out, they would have had a clean bill; they could go secure."

He paused thoughtfully for a moment, and then stood up.

"I guess," he said cheerfully, "that's the answer to the difficulty. That fire squares us. We must take it as the others would take it. It has wiped out all evidence of your crime; we are as we were before it. We'll cry quits, and begin again." He turned to the three with a grim twinge under his smile. "But understand, we begin again. Next time I'll get you sure, and there'll be no mercy about it."

"There isn't going to be a next time," said Boyd. "We've finished."

"All the better," said Conrad, smiling genially. "You were sports all through, and I should have hated to lag you, and after all, there was a certain justice in your getting even with profiteers."

With a smile, he left them; and when he had gone, Cyprian said dreamily.

"Yes, I felt that that fire would wipe out everything, so I thought that if I went back for a souvenir, nobody would miss it. So I went back. Here's your present Thecla—a wedding present, I suppose."

He threw into his sister's lap the Gillard rubies.

"The Helpfulness of Horace"

HE was a canny sailor-man, was Horace, and he sought to snarl the bonds of matrimony in a bowline bight. It is all very joyous—for the reader! You'll find "The Helpfulness of Horace" most divertingly described by F. Morton Howard in the next, the November, issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

Exploits of an Honest Grafter



Jen for Joe



William O. Grenolds

SATURDAY on a circus means long lines in front of the treasury-wagon. The Mighty Maxwell was like other circuses: Saturday meant pay-day. Maxwell sat at the window which faced the razorbacks, the roughnecks, the animals and "punks," while at the other, paying off the performers, was Honest John Barker, "fixer" and stockholder. It was the first pay-day of the spring, following the opening of the circus a week before, and the index-cards showed many entries. Finally Honest John smiled down at the boyish, grinning young man who awaited his pay-envelope.

"Joe," he said cordially, "I knew when I signed you up that you were the world's worst clown. But I didn't know you were this bad. Three fines in one week. That's going some!"

The young man chuckled.

"Not bad for a poor boy trying to get along. But then—"

Whereupon he closed one eye and nodded toward the back of old man Maxwell at the other side of the cage. Honest John grinned and passed him out the remainder of his salary. Joe Bainter, the clown, went whistling away, giving evidence that the infliction of three fines during the first week of his engagement had not affected him in the slightest. Honest John continued at his work of doling out the cash.

Card after card passed through his hands

as the performers came and went. Then John blinked again and leaned out of his window to stare down into the pretty face of Jennie Maxwell, of the high wire—the old man's daughter.

"What have you been doing?" he whispered as a smile twitched at the corner of his lips.

"I?" She looked at him curiously.

"Nothing. Why?"

"Your dad's marked three fines against you."

A small foot stamped angrily.

"Yes! The mean old thing!"

Honest John wagged a finger.

"Look out, there, Jen! He's your dad!"

"I don't care. He's a mean old thing and—"

"What's that?" It was a voice from behind. The fixer turned hurriedly, with a stage grin.

"Just making Jen apologize. She got mad at me yesterday, and I wouldn't give her any money today until she told me she didn't mean a thing."

"Oughtn't to have it, anyhow, the way she's been carrying on!" The paternal growl carried the piqued displeasure that only a parent can know. Honest John leaned far out the window and whispered:

"Beat it!"

The girl departed hastily. The dis-bursing of the pay-roll went wearily on,

finally to cease. Honest John leaned back in his chair and dusted a few cigar-ashes from his otherwise immaculate clothing.

"Boss," he inquired casually, as Maxwell turned at last from his window and reached for his dead cigar, "I've figured up that account."

"What account?"

"My expense money for last year: entertainment of officials, new hats for sheriffs, dresses for constables' wives and so forth. It runs just nine thousand, four hundred dollars."

"Huh?" The old man turned all the way in his chair and shifted the cigar-stub to a corner of his mouth. "You don't expect me to pay that, do you?"

"I sure do."

"Well, you ain't going to get it!"

"I spent it, didn't I?" Honest John, toying with his lion's-claw watchcharm, was staring at the paneled ceiling.

"I didn't tell you to."

"Sure not. I'm supposed to use my own judgment to make money for the show."

"Yeh, and money for yourself. You own thirty per cent of the stock."

"That's right."

"Then shut up. I suppose I'm going to take money out of my own pocket to—"

"Wait a minute!" Honest John waved a hand over his head. "Don't get excited about it. I just thought I'd ask."

Maxwell growled.

"You found out."

"I sure did."

THE fixer grinned and shrugged his shoulders. Downtown he went, to a complacent dinner. Two hours later, just as the shadows were deepening about the circus lot and its spreading tents, he picked his way over the ropes and stakes surrounding the big top, and stopped a few feet from the pad-room entrance. He called softly, and a figure, headed toward the dressing-tent, changed its course. A moment later Honest John Barker and Joe Bainter, the clown, had ducked under the sidewall of the big top and stood grinning at each other in the dim light beneath the reserved seats.

"What's the big excitement?" Honest John asked the question, and Joe Bainter grinned.

"He caught us talking together."

"And fined you each time?"

"That isn't all. The first time he fired me cold, told me to get off the show and

never show up again—that he'd suspected something of the kind all the time. That brought on the fireworks from Jen, and she said she'd never speak to him again, that he was a cruel, unkind father and other warranted remarks of that kind, and he shut up. Then, in a very paternal way, he pulled the rules of the show on us about girls and men from the troupe going out together, and informed us with tears in his eyes that he'd have to fine us both."

"Going to run you off the show, by fining you to death, huh?"

"Yep." Joe Bainter grinned again. Then suddenly he became serious. "Look here, Mr. Barker," he said quietly, "I've put myself in your hands. I love Jen, and I love her with all the sincerity in the world. What's more, she'll marry me—she's told me so. And I don't see why I shouldn't go to Maxwell and—"

"Listen, kid. The minute you go to Maxwell, you kill your little game as dead as a doornail. Not that there's anything objectionable about you—as far as I know, you're as fine a kid as I ever saw. But you've got to admit that even I don't know anything about you—except that you've got a million and want to marry the old man's little girl. You could talk to him until you were black in the face, and it would only get you into trouble. He doesn't want Jen to marry anybody. . . . How much do you love Jen?"

"As much as any man possibly could."

"That's easy to say. Somehow or other, after you've been in the fixing game awhile, you get so you don't pay much attention to words. The real thing that counts is action. Do you love her enough to—lose her?"

The young man gasped. "To—to what?"

"To lose her." Honest John laid a kindly hand on the other man's shoulder. "Look here, Joe; Jennie's only a girl yet. This is the first real love-affair she's ever had. And a girl sometimes lets infatuation get the better of her judgment. It's all been very romantic and story-booky—you with your millions, and me fixing things so you could come on the show as a clown and not telling Papa and all that sort of thing—and it may have hit harder than we supposed. So, isn't it fair to her, and fair to her father and fair to yourself, to give her a chance to wake up? You've intimated to me that you are a regular he-man. Now prove it!"

THERE was silence for a moment; then:
"How?"

"I think Jen ought to go away."

"Away?" There was a note of sudden fright in the voice. "For how long?"

"Until I decide that it's time for her to come back."

"But I can write to her?"

"Nope. Not a line."

"Nor she to me?"

"That's a different matter. I can't prevent her doing that—if she wants to."

"But I can't write to her?"

"No. And you can't explain why you're not writing. It's a real test—are you game for it?" The sound of breath whistling through clenched teeth was the only answer. Honest John tightened his grip on the young man's shoulder. "Listen, Joe: she's only a little kid—remember that. We're never sorry for a little anguish if it leads to the right sort of thing. Suppose you should argue Jen into running away some night and marrying you—and suppose she should find out a few months later that she didn't really love you? That'd be fine, wouldn't it? Or suppose you should come to the same conclusion yourself? How'd you like it? Nope. Joe, you're the right sort of a fellow—at least, I think you are. And if you really are, you'll pick a quarrel with Jen tomorrow!"

"But—"

"That's the whole story, Joe. The rest of it's got to be up to me—and to yourselves. I don't know how it's going to turn out, and I can't promise one solitary thing. But I know this: I'm a fixer by trade, and if the love's still there and the faith's still there, some way, somehow, I'll live up to my reputation. Are you game?"

The silence this time was longer than ever, but at last came the young man's voice, husky and strained:

"I guess I love her—even enough to do that, Mr. Barker."

"Fine! See that you do it—and good luck!"

A slap on the back, a clasp of the hand; then Honest John shoved the clown out under the sidewall and turned in the opposite direction. Late that night, just as the second section was pulling out for the long run to the next town, he came casually into Maxwell's office in the managerial car, a bundle of magazines under one arm, and slumped into a wicker chair. The old man looked over his shoulder and grunted. Honest John grinned cheerily.

"Haven't changed your mind yet about that expense-account?"

"Nope."

"Oh, all right. Just thought I'd ask."

He leaned back in his chair and turned to the advertising pages. Magazine after magazine he consumed, while the train thumped along on its twenty-mile-an-hour pace over a rough roadbed. At last, the final periodical poised in one hand, he looked quizzically up at Maxwell.

"Boss," he asked casually, "which do you think is the best school for young women, Briarlake or Westercote?"

"For what?"

"For a sort of finishing touch, you know, the final polish and all that sort of thing?"

The old man, his cigar jammed tight in a corner of his mouth, turned peevishly.

"How in—what're you asking me about it for?"

"Well, I just thought you'd be interested."

"Me?" A heavy hand fanned aimlessly. "What've I got to do with girls' schools?" Honest John regarded his lion's claw.

"Nothing, I guess. Only, I know, if I was a father, I'd at least be interested in the school my daughter was going to."

"Huh? What's that? Is she—"

"There's been some talk about it," Honest John agreed truthfully, "and since she's been kind of interested in this pet clown of mine, I rather thought—"

A banging fist on the desk interrupted. Maxwell whirled in his chair.

"Gad! I'll give a hundred to the bird who can work it!"

"Couldn't O. K. that little expense-account?"

"Shut up!"

Honest John shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if that's the case, I won't fool around with a measly hundred. I'd rather work it for nothing. But listen—not a cheep out of you until she springs it herself. Get me? Then you're the surprised but indulgent father."

"I'm anything just so—"

"You don't have to pay me that expense-account. Meanwhile—I'm going to bed."

TROUBLE was distinctly present, bag, bird-cage and baggage, when Honest John strolled on to the circus lot just after the arrival of the parade the next morning, to find a nervous Joe Bainter pacing the sawdust in front of the marquee. His face was white, his hands clenched tight behind

his back. Honest John blocked his path, and stared genially down at him.

"Well, have you pulled it already?"

"Me?" the millionaire clown gasped. "I didn't have a chance! She beat me to it!"

"She?" It was Honest John's turn to blink now. Bainter went on.

"Jealousy! Just plain jealousy! She wanted to know who I met under the reserved seats last night! Can you beat it?"

"Saw us go under, eh?"

"She said she saw me turn away when somebody called to me and thought she saw a woman in the shadows!"

"Gosh!" Honest John grinned. "They sure must have been deep shadows—if I looked like a woman. What'd you say?"

"Me? I told her the truth—that is, not all of it; but I said I was talking to you, and that I could prove it!"

"Foolish boy! Because I'm going to tell her another story!"

"What?"

Then Honest John's tone changed.

"You promised, Joe!"

The young man's lips went grim. His hands clenched tighter than ever.

"I didn't think then that it'd be a real quarrel."

"You're not going to play the quitter?"

"I—I don't think I'm built that way. I gave you my promise. I'll keep it."

"Thanks, kid. I'm almost tempted to—but I won't. You're off for today. Go down to the cars, or a picture-show, anywhere, just so you don't stay around this circus lot playing tag with temptation. It'll be a different story tomorrow. We'll be a hundred miles away, and she'll be gone. I'll see to that. Be game, kid. So long until later."

Honest John gripped the clown's arm and purposely did not hear the stumbling words which came from his lips. Then for a moment he stood watching the dejected figure as it moved from the lot. He sighed, then straightened.

"The bitterest medicine's usually the best," he mused as he started for the dressing tent. There old Molly, the wardrobe woman, who had always taken a motherly interest in Jennie, signaled him.

"'Tis a devil's own time I'm havin'," she confided, "wit' little Jinnie. She's in there crying out her heart, and if her fayerther finds it out—"

"Forget it." Honest John patted her shoulder. "Forget it, Molly, and lead me to her."

A MOMENT later Honest John and Jennie Maxwell were sitting in close conversation within the wardrobe woman's little partition of the dressing-tent. And Honest John was exceedingly busy with his watchcharm.

"Yep," came in answer to the inevitable question, "I've seen Joe. He asked me to tell you something."

"About last night?" There was hope in the voice. Honest John nodded very seriously.

"Yes—something about us being together."

"Well—"

"Listen, Jennie: don't you think you ought to take a little trip—somewhere?"

"But I want to know about last night. Were you with him—was that you who called to him?"

Honest John still twirled his watchcharm.

"Look here, Jennie," he said at last, "I'm a truthful man. But I wouldn't tell you now—if I'd been with him. Honest I wouldn't. I'm not going to say either way. If I was with him, then you're all to blame, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself for being jealous. And if I wasn't with him, it might have been some other man, and—well, so I'm not going to say anything, except that—you're going away."

"I?" she gasped slightly. "Where—why?"

"Because I think it best."

"You mean—it's something about Joe?"

Honest John nodded. A new outburst of tears streamed down the girl's cheeks. Honest John gritted his teeth and inwardly called himself names. But he persisted.

"Yes, it's about Joe. I guess you two had better try the climate away from each other."

"Then there was something wrong?" The girlish anger returned. "I knew it all the time. I knew—"

"I told you before," the quiet voice of Honest John interrupted, "that I wouldn't be the one to break the news, no matter what it was. I'm just giving you a little suggestion. Your father and you are going to take a little trip tonight. When he comes back, you're going to stay behind. I'm thinking, Jen, that you've never had quite enough schooling—you know, the finishing touches. And about a year down at Briar-lake ought to work wonders. And who can tell? This other thing may turn out all

right. Then, of course, it may turn out all wrong—but if it is going to do anything like that, it's better to have it over with as quickly as possible.

"And listen,—" he poked a finger at her,—"I'm the fixer for all this. I'll handle your father, understand? I'm going to make him believe that this is something that you and I've been cooking up for some time. See? That'll take all the unpleasantness away from it—he won't know you've had a quarrel with Joe or that there's anything disagreeable at all. Get me? So put a cold cloth or a hot cloth, or whatever you use, on those eyes, and take the swelling out of 'em. I never liked to see a pretty girl cry, anyway. And look for your dad and myself back here in a couple of hours."

BUT if Honest John had figured that to be the end of the conversation, he was mistaken. It was only the beginning; and it was not until a long hour later that he emerged from the dressing-tent, to hunt up Maxwell and tell him that his daughter had taken a sudden resolution toward schooling. Nor was it until the train pulled out that night, bearing Maxwell and a lip-biting daughter away to Briarlake, that Honest John felt at all comfortable. Had he overplayed his hand?

The next day Joe Bainter sought him out.

"Have you heard anything?" Joe's face was slightly paler than usual.

Honest John shook his head. "Sorry, old kid, but I can't give you any information."

"But you can at least tell me where you took her?"

"No. You might let temptation get away from you. I don't want any letters going there."

The young man turned and walked slowly away. And Honest John again called himself names.

Three days went by and Maxwell came back grinning and happy. A certain little eventuality which had been troubling him seemed far in the distance now. He was even civil—which was saying a great deal for the old man. Honest John sought the circus postman.

"Anything for Joe Bainter?"

The postman pulled out a fat letter. Honest John looked at the writing and smiled, then whispered to the postman. The postman grinned understandingly.

"It isn't exactly according to rules, but if it's for the best—" he wavered.

"You can take my word for that." Honest John dropped the letter into his pocket and went to the cars. There he again took it forth, looked at the writing on the envelope and smiled in a quizzical way. "I hope I'm playing the right cards," he reflected as he laid the letter carefully away.

THE next day Honest John met the postman again, but the man shook his head. And again the next—and for days afterward. Honest John squinted, then ambled in the direction of Clown Alley. There he singled out Joe Bainter and sidled to him. His eyes became accusing.

"You've been hearing from Jen!"

The man stared.

"If I only had! But I haven't! I hoped—honestly, I thought that she'd write to me and tell me she was sorry, but nothing came! I guess she meant it when she said she'd never have anything to do with me again. I—"

"How about you?"

"Me? There's nothing, except that I'm sorry—for everything, if that'll do any good. It wasn't my fault, but—I'm sorry. I'm—"

"But I'm afraid that won't help. Nope, Joe, you've got to wait. And if waiting won't help, then it's better all the way round to find it out now and to have your suffering before the real trouble sets in."

Following which Honest John walked away—but there was a little look of worry in his eyes as he did so, a look which intensified as a week passed, a week in which Honest John met the mail-carrier each morning, only to receive a negative reply.

Two months passed by. Honest John developed a glorious case of insomnia. Then one afternoon, as he sought vainly to nap, there came a knock on his door, and the admission call brought in Joe Bainter. Joe was thin now; his cheeks were sunken. There was something about the man which caused Honest John to turn his head and to grit his teeth. For Honest John knew in his heart that he had been the cause. The fixer extended a hand.

"Bainter," he said slowly, "I'm sorry. I thought things would turn out differently; honest, I did."

"Then you've not heard anything, either?"

"Not a word. She was spunkier than I

thought she was. I fully believed, Joe, that there would be a deluge of letters for both of us and that everything would be lovely. But it's better as it is, kid—if this thing was going to develop later. She's only a child, you might say—nineteen's not so very old. You've never had a line—on your word of honor?"

"Not a line."

"Did you ever get any telegrams?"

"Not one, Mr. Barker. I—I don't think I'd be looking like this if I had."

Honest John rose and laid a hand on the young man's shoulder.

"You've at least got the satisfaction of knowing that you've played a man's game and that you've made a friend who'll never forget you—if that'll do any good."

"Well," and Joe Bainter's voice was husky, "that isn't exactly what I've been wishing for. I appreciate it just the same."

"And you still love her, Joe?"

"More than ever."

Honest John paced the small confines of his stateroom.

"I—I thought it was going to be different. Joe, I—I—" He looked toward the desk which sheltered that lone letter, received shortly after Jen's departure, and his lips almost framed a confession. "No. I was going to tell you something—but I won't now. It wouldn't do much good, and it might do a lot of harm." For the thought had come suddenly into Honest John's brain that the envelope in his desk might contain something far different from what he had believed when he had taken it from the postman. "I'm afraid, Joe, that she woke up."

"You mean that she decided that she didn't love me, after all?"

"Just about, Joe."

"Well," the young man sighed, "I guess you were right—that it's better to know it now than after we'd done something foolish, that we couldn't undo without a lot more heartaches. My business at home has been running pretty much to seed, Mr. Barker. I guess—"

"That you'd better go back?"

"Yes."

"It's beginning to look that way, Joe. But we'll wait a while longer, and see what turns up. I thought she'd write to me,"—he was talking in the jerky sentences of a disappointed man,—"but she's never even written a line, not a—"

He stopped suddenly. Outside the car some one was calling his name excit-

edly. A moment more, and a workman had hurried into the room.

"Mr. Barker! The old man wants you up at the lot right away. The chariot turned over in the races and jimmied up three men!"

"Badly hurt?"

"One of 'em is. The other two are just skinned up. The old man says to get up there and square up their accounts for them so that they can either be left behind or sent home."

Honest John reached for his memorandum book.

"Got their names?"

"Yes sir. Bill Edward, Harry Layton and Joe Masters."

"Thanks." Honest John was scribbling.

"Tell Mr. Maxwell I'll be up there in a few minutes."

TWO hours later Honest John stood at the marquee of the circus tent, breathing easy after his work of "squaring." A messenger-boy scrambled through the small crowd in front of the side-show and handed him a message. Quietly Honest John read it, then walked into the menagerie.

"Seen Joe Bainter?" he queried of a fellow-clown.

"Yes sir. Just left him."

"Get him and tell him I want to see him."

A wait of five minutes, then a whispered conversation. Joe Bainter hurried away. Honest John strolled through the menagerie, stood watching for a moment as the chandelier men adjusted the lights for the night, then turned toward the cars. Fifteen minutes later he roamed into Maxwell's office and easing himself into a chair, puffed contentedly at his cigar. At last he yawned and leaned forward.

"Going to be minus a good clown tomorrow."

"Who?" The old man was busy at his books.

"Joe Bainter."

"So? Where's he going?"

"Leaving the show tonight. Paid him off an hour or so ago. He was in a hurry, so I gave him money out of my own pocket. He's going to get married."

"Who to?"

"Your daughter."

"What the—who the—how the—where do you get that stuff?" The old man had turned and was making a double windmill

of his arms. "He's not going to do any such thing! Where's a timetable around here? I've got ten thousand dollars that says he isn't going to marry my daughter! Found that timetable yet?"

"What'd you say about ten thousand?"

Honest John continued to puff amiably.

"Where's that timetable?"

"I'd be pretty near willing to bet that he's going to pull it off. I—"

"What're you trying to do? Stall me? Gi' me that timetable. Where's—"

"Looking for the time of a train to Briar-lake? It leaves at eight o'clock. I heard Joe say so."

"Is he taking it?"

"Couldn't prove it by me!"

"Well, I'll be on it! I'll—" The old man was fussing about the office, talking to himself. "Ten thousand dollars says that he doesn't marry any daughter of mine. Get me a telegraph blank so I can wire to the chief of police at Briarlake to choke off the marriage license and to tip off everybody. Ten thousand dollars—"

"Well, put up or shut up!" exclaimed Honest John in an exasperated voice as he shoved the telegraph-pad into Maxwell's hands. "I'd lose ten thousand just to know you'd stopped raving!"

The old man was scribbling hastily.

"It's up!" he snapped. "My word's good. Now tear out and get me a ticket and berth to Briarlake. And make it snappy! I haven't got much time."

"Just forty-five minutes," said Honest John as he looked at his watch. "Want me to send that telegram too?"

"Yeh. And give the operator a five-dollar bill for rushing it! Now put on the speed!"

OUT went Honest John. Thirty minutes later the old man followed. They met on the station platform. The train pulled in. A form hurried forward and boarded it almost before it stopped—Joe Bainter. The old man gave one look, then jabbed forth a hand excitedly.

"So long, John. Watch after things for me while I'm gone. I'm going to stop that marriage if I—"

"Board-d-d-d-d!"

A wild scramble forward, and the old man crawled up the steps of the train, entirely failing to notice that a young man dropped off the back end and moved hurriedly away. Honest John waved a hand.

"Good luck!" he shouted.

The train moved on. So did Honest John—back to his work of the circus lot, back to the task of getting the show out of town and on its journey to the next stand. Next morning he was at a railroad station again. To its roaring stop came a passenger train, while Honest John, suddenly craning his neck, waved a welcoming hand and ran forward.

"Hello, Jen! Bless you!" he exclaimed as a white-faced girl came out of a vestibule. "Let's hurry. Look here! Why didn't you write that boy?"

"Write?" She straightened proudly. "I did—the first thing, and asked him to forgive me. And he didn't answer. He couldn't expect me to write after that, could he? No matter how much I loved him!"

Then with a sudden anxiety:

"How is he? Is he seriously injured?"

"Injured?" Honest John stared. "Who said he was injured?"

"Well, isn't he?"

"Of course not."

"But—but" she fished in her bag—"didn't you send me this telegram?"

Honest John looked at the piece of paper and read the word aloud:

"Joe very much hurt. Needs you. Wire if you can come at once—but don't come unless you still love him and are willing to marry him. John Barker!"

Carefully the fixer folded the message and handed it back to her.

"Sure, I sent the telegram. But I always was bad about using ambiguous words. I didn't mean he was injured, but just what I said—that he was hurt. His feelings, you know. See? Now, here—come back here—I'll explain the whole thing. Jen, do you hear me? Come back here this minute. That boy's all right, and—" He beamed as she came again to his side, smiling and happy. "That's a good girl!"

Thirty-six hours later, Honest John again sat in Maxwell's office, looking at a check for ten thousand dollars.

"Reconciled yet?" he asked of the grumpy individual at the desk.

"Nope!"

"Not even with a millionaire son-in-law and a personal guarantee from your fixer that he's the best of the best?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Not even with a clear conscience about paying your principal stockholder an amount of money you really owed him?"

"Get out of here!"

But the old man smiled when he said it.

Free Lances in Diplomacy

When England Began to Wake Up



Clarence
Herbert
New

IN that portion of the Speaker's Gallery at the south end of the House of Commons which is reserved for visiting peers, a dozen or more distinguished noblemen had come in from the upper house to hear Sir Templeton Bramville's speech on the Polish crisis and the Government policies. In the group were a duke and two marquesses; but the men to whose opinions the others appeared to defer, because of their wide experience in international affairs during the war, were Lord Trevor, Earl of Dyvnaint, and his friend for many years Viscount Lammerford of St. Ives. Lammerford had been formerly associated with the Foreign Office as Dean of the King's Messengers and was said to know more people in public life than any other man living. The Earl had a magnificent record for hazardous details as rear admiral, under secret orders from the Admiralty, and had done a great deal of spectacular work in aviation—and had been also prominent in the adjustment of labor troubles since the Armistice. But neither, though generally classed as "statesmen" from their wide knowledge of public affairs, was really supposed to be active in the Government itself. The group were discussing a vague rumor which had been creeping about Westminster that afternoon.

"I say, Trevor! Do you fancy there might be anything in it—eh? Bramville's a bit late with his speech, even now! Of course, he's not the sort to be intimidated—no fear! But—eh? Might consider it advisable to modify a bit—what?"

"Faith, if he does that, he would better not go into the matter at all! Situation's this: We're understood to back Poland an' Roumania with money, munitions an' supplies against any aggression upon the part of Russia or Germany. France, the same. But if the Soviet armies appear likely to wipe Poland out altogether or reduce her to something like vassalage, it's a menace to the civilized world that'll require a deal more than passive resistance—unless checked, it'll set the whole world on fire again! Well, we have now a tacit agreement from Moscow to call off their armies from the Polish border if we renew commercial relations with 'em. We've threatened to blockade 'em if they break this agreem'nt. Suppose they do—eh? One can't trust that crew even while they're signin' agreem'nts. What then? Blockade 'em. Aye! But if they keep on eatin' into Poland—eh? Well—that's Sir Templeton's point, d'ye see. An' he's been warned by anonymous letter not to bring it up on the floor of the House. Threats, d'ye see! What?"

A MEMBER rose from the second tier of the Opposition benches on the east side of the House and talked for ten minutes or so in a stammering, hesitating way, in favor of nationalizing all the coal-mines and railway-systems—getting a demonstration of agreement with his views as he sat down again, much to the surprise of the noblemen in the Speaker's Gallery.

"I say, Lammerford. You're by way of knowin' pretty much everybody. Who's the chap on the Opposition side?"

"Simon Clapp—new member, just returned from one of the Manchester boroughs. Laborite, of course. Serious point, to me, is the amount of backin' his ideas are getting. Looks as if there were incessant propaganda along those lines, and that it has begun to affect men with some thinkin' capacity—men who know better when they're not swept off their feet an' common sense by glittering theories an' generalities. I fancy Bramville's been workin' up to this point all through his public career; he's spent a lot of thought on this speech in order to present Government's views, not only upon the Polish question as they see it, but upon the fallacy of nationalized industries in a democracy as well. . . . Ah! The member from Manchester was evidently his cue—the opening he'd been waiting for. See? That's Sir Templeton, getting up from the Ministerial benches! Now we'll have it!"

It was quite evident that the Baronet's presentation of the Government's position had been most carefully prepared, that the moment was one of the greatest in his political life. Bramville was admittedly skilled in debate—an easy and convincing talker, with a magnetic personality. As he proceeded with his orderly summing up of the European situation, there was at first some heckling from the Opposition benches—but this presently subsided in the absorbing interest of his speech. When he finally sat down, there was a general tribute to his personality and parliamentary ability; but in it there was an undercurrent of disagreement with the Government's views. Some one moved the question of a test division,—not necessarily final, but as the basis of arbitration with the Opposition,—and the members filed out into the east and west lobbies to be counted. (Members supporting the Government adjourn to the lobby immediately back of the Government benches on the west side; those of the Opposition go into a similar lobby back of

the east-side benches—to be counted, after a division.) As they filed out, Earl Trevor gave a sharp exclamation of disgust:

"Lammerford is right, gentlemen! There must have been a deal of poisonous propaganda among the very men we most naturally trust! There's an influence at work which must be combatted with all our available force an' intelligence, or we'll go to pieces from the inside—as a certain Continental state would jolly well like to have us do! Bramville's motion has failed on this test division! Glance at the crowd goin' out with the Opposition! Countin' 'em is a mere farce! We're not yet committed to nationalization of the mines and industries, an' we've not openly said we'll permit Soviet Russia to obliterate Poland an' Roumania! But that's what may happen unless we get to the root of all this an' stamp it out!

"More than that: I caught a word or two from the floor—(through this dictaphone I was using)—which makes me fancy that Sir Templeton may be in personal danger! It was a masterly speech, which the members will mull over for days to come—likely enough to change a good many of the present views an' votes after they reconsider it. . . . I say! Lammerford, an' one or two of you, come along with me an' join Bramville as he goes out! I'll feel better to see him as far as his town residence, at all events—the news-sheets will be on the streets with his speech in a few moments! Come along!"

WITH three others Earl Trevor and Lammerford hurried down through Westminster Hall and the members' exit opening upon New Palace Yard, but Sir Templeton Bramville was some little distance ahead of them with two of the Government whips, who left him in front of St. Margaret's Church. After that, he proceeded down the Broad Sanctuary in the direction of Victoria Street alone. One of the five remembered hearing that Bramville was dining with some of the Government party at the Westminster Palace Hotel that evening. They were increasing their pace to catch up with the statesman when they saw him pause near the north-west corner of the Abbey and partly raise his left arm as if trying to ward off a blow. There was no other person within a hundred feet of him as it happened. Quick glances in every direction failed to discover anyone making a threatening mo-

tion toward the man—there was no report of rifle or pistol that Trevor or his companions heard. Subconsciously they fancied that somebody coughed in the immediate vicinity as if from a bronchial cold—but they never thought of trying to locate him. Their attention was concentrated upon Bramville—who had stopped short and was swaying on his feet, as if ill. In another moment he crumpled down upon the pavement.

Trevor, who was the first to reach him, saw a spreading stain upon Bramville's waistcoat and a slowly increasing pool upon the pavement. With Trevor's usual grasp of the situation in emergencies, he saw that the wound was a dangerous one—that prompt action alone could save the Baronet's life. But it was Lammerford who began to suspect a further complication which had not occurred to the Earl. Bending down until he could sniff at the bloody waistcoat, it seemed to the Viscount that he noticed a faint, peculiar odor.

"My word! The scoundrels fully intended any wound to be fatal in this case, whether it happened to be in a vital place or not! I fancy there'll be little question that the bullet was poisoned!"

"If that's the case," declared Trevor, "there's but one man in London who may save him! Sir Pelham Curran—the surgeon who specializes in toxic wounds and gets a hundred guineas for a mere examination. Will one of you step to the nearest phone and have them put you on to his house? He'll be either at home or at the Savage, I fancy—has a lot of friends among the writers. Your Grace, if that was your landaulet parked near the Yard, it will serve us better than waiting for an ambulance! Curran's private hospital is over yon, in Berkeley Street—we can make it in ten minutes! Your car is a particularly easy-riding one!"

LAYING the statesman upon the wide rear seat of the Duke's landaulet, they got him to Sir Pelham Curran's small but famous operating hospital with very little jolting and without entire loss of consciousness. A numbness had succeeded the first shock of the wound—but Trevor knew from its location that he would be suffering horribly in half an hour. The celebrated surgeon had been found at the Savage Club, and when informed over the wire that the Earl of Dyvnaint was specially requesting his services, promptly agreed to

come at once. Reaching his hospital within a few minutes after them, he hurried up to the operating-room, where his assistant—summoned by phone—was already preparing to anesthetize the patient.

As Bramville was still suffering no pain, though strangely weak and faint, Sir Templeton nervously begged them to wait a little while before taking any definite action. The sight of the attendant nurses, the surgeon and the anesthetician—the lower part of their faces masked in antiseptic gauze, and long sterilized aprons covering their clothing completely—gave him a feeling of helpless horror that he had never experienced in the trenches during the war. But a few words from Sir Curran, though pleasant and soothing, were apparently final—and he made no further resistance when the cone was placed over his nose and mouth.

"As far as one may judge from the position of your wound, Sir Templeton, it's in a particularly dangerous locality. If you wish to live,—as we assume that you do,—it is necessary to find where that bullet has lodged, get it out and sterilize every portion of the tissue it has touched. Under ether, this will not disturb you in the least—though, naturally, there will be more or less pain when you recover consciousness. Now—if you will just relax comfortably on the table and breathe naturally, the sensation will be merely that of dropping off into a pleasant sleep. Then I will do everything that science has taught me to remedy your misfortune. Incidentally, I wish to express my very great appreciation of your masterly summing-up for Government on the floor of the House an hour ago. It cannot fail to have a far-reaching influence!"

This tribute to the great effort of his political life so pleased Bramville that he forgot for an instant or two his dangerous condition, and lost consciousness before he realized what was happening. For the next hour and a half, the great surgeon and his assistant—himself a rising specialist—worked in tense silence, broken only by occasional muttered instructions to the nurses.

ON the second floor Earl Trevor and his friends waited in the room which two other nurses were preparing for the wounded statesman—speculating upon his chances for recovery and the political enemy which had prompted such a dastardly

attempt upon his life. At the end of two hours, which dragged until they seemed more like six, they heard the elevator descending from the operating-room. It stopped at the second floor, and the cart was trundled out with a motionless, sheet-covered form which the nurses very carefully lifted off upon the white-iron bed, which had been prepared with rubber and draw-sheets. For several moments they were busy over the slowly breathing, unconscious man; then they left the room as Sir Pelham came down, and closed the door after he had entered. There was a tense silence—the noblemen glancing at the great surgeon, questioningly.

"Well, gentlemen, he may have about one chance in three! If His Lordship of Dyvnaint hadn't fetched him here at once, he'd have been gone before this. The mushroom bullet, from a Mauser, was coated with the same chemical poison used by the boches at second Ypres. It was lodged in the gall-bladder—which I removed, together with a small portion of the liver and some of the tissue along the course of the bullet. I've given three hypodermics of a solution calculated to counteract the spread of the poison through the circulation. If I was in time,—and succeed in checking the thing before it reaches the heart,—he will be in no more dangerous condition than anyone undergoing such an operation. Who shot him?"

"That's what nobody is likely to know unless he recovers and can tell us what it was he saw just before he was hit. There was no sound of a shot—no powder-smoke anywhere in sight that we could discover. Which, of course, indicates the use of a silencer upon the muzzle of the Mauser. From his position at the moment, the shot could have come from some window in Westminster Abbey or the Royal Aquarium—possibly from a window at the extreme point of the Westminster Palace Hotel, though I'd eliminate that as most improbable. There was a rumor going about this afternoon that he had received threatening anonymous letters warning him against any suggestion of assisting Poland or Roumania—opposition to the scheme for nationalizing mines and railways, any sort of opposition to Irish independence. In order to catch every word distinctly in the Speaker's Gallery, where we were sitting, I used a pocket dictaphone, and when the members went out for the division, I caught a few muttered threats against Bramville. His

speech was so masterly a summin' up for Government on all those questions, d'ye see, that I fancy they feared its effect throughout the country.

"You think Bramville may have seen the man who shot him?"

"Quite positive! He was going at a brisk walk toward the hotel, where he was dining this evening, when he almost stopped and raised his left arm as if warding off a blow. Must have been hit a second or two afterward. Of course, with nobody in sight who appeared to be acting suspiciously, there was no attempt made to run down the assassin—could be none! The scoundrel got safely away. But if Bramville describes him, and his position at the moment, the chance of catching him is by no means hopeless."

"He may do that even if we can't save him. In about an hour he'll be coming out of the anesthetic—though he'll be quite too ill for clear thinking tonight. In the morning, unless the temperature goes up dangerously, he may recognize the importance of telling us what he can."

"You think he'll not drop out before that?"

"Unless the poison spreads through the circulation—no."

"H-m-m—on the chance of things going wrong with him, I fancy that Lammerford and I had best stay the night. But it's unnecessary to keep His Grace and Lord Garford; we can give them an account of whatever happens, later. Eh?"

THE Duke and Garford recognized the seriousness of the affair and were of half a mind to stay, but upon second thought had the uneasy impression that Bramville's taking-off was likely to be a deucedly unpleasant nervous strain if it should prove that he had to go, after all. So they inwardly welcomed Trevor's suggestion, and left the hospital.

At the end of another hour a faint moan of pain came from the bed. They saw that Bramville's eyes were partly open, but the change in his appearance shocked even men who had gone through the hell of the German War. Bramville's eyelids and the flesh surrounding them were congested—dark red in color. The eyes themselves had an expression of unutterable physical torment. The air of the room was reeking with an impalpable fog of ether, through which the man was struggling for a consciousness which brought with it unbearable

able pain. Sir Pelham stood by the bedside with his fingers upon the patient's wrist—speaking in low tones, over his shoulder, to the others.

"In most cases there is a great deal of nausea from the ether when they come out of it—due, largely, to their fighting against the anesthetic when taken, and getting some into the stomach. If Bramville has much of it, we'll not save him—the retching will produce inflammation, considering the toxic conditions along the course of the bullet. But he went under very quietly—I'm hoping we may get through without that."

Presently the statesman began to moan: "I'm very ill—oh, frightfully ill!"

Trevor bent down close to the pillow with a few quiet words—assurances that the pain would decrease somewhat within the next few hours—and asked if the wounded man recognized him.

"Oh, I know Your Lordship right enough! With me—just after—it happened! But—I'm so—frightfully—ill!"

"Shall we send for Lady Bramville? We've telephoned her every hour."

"Oh—h—h—not yet! No use! Can't talk! Too beastly ill to think! Suffering horribly Trevor! What had I ever done to that bounder—with the silly beard all over his face! Aimin' as deliberately as if he were stalkin' deer! Up there in one of the Abbey windows! Knew I'd be comin' that way! Spark of sun reflected from his glasses—drew my attention! Ah—h—h—but I'm suffering so! Thought I knew what pain was—when I got it in the arm—over you! But—nothing to—this!"

"Was that bounder some one you knew? Ever see him before?"

"Ill! So horribly ill! The man? Yes! Familiar face—something professional, I fancy! Not personal—acquaintance! But vaguely—familiar! Fellow one might see occasionally—somewhere. Ah—h—h—*Doctor!* Can't you give me something? Stop—suffering?"

"Aye—but not altogether. Nature's effort to repair the damage. If we deaden it too much, the damage gains over nature, and we lose what we've worked for so hard. Morphine or anesthetics slow down the heart-action—mustn't go too far with that!"

Stepping to the door, Sir Pelham called a nurse and instructed her to give the patient a hypodermic from a certain formula of his own—then beckoned the two peers out into the hall.

"He'll not be fully out from under the effects of the anesthetic for another twenty hours, and will then have no recollection of your having been in the room with him or anything he has just said. Subconsciously his mind may be clear enough at this moment to remember details of the shooting. On the other hand, it may be pure imagination stimulated by the anesthetic. You must decide for yourselves how much reliance is to be placed upon what is said—how much of probability there may be in it from your own impressions of the moment. I'm a bit more hopeful, now, of pulling him through—though it's still a toss-up. You'll get nothing more from him tonight, I fancy—so perhaps it may be as well to go home, and come again tomorrow afternoon. Eh?"

It was now after ten in the evening. Earl Trevor had sent for one of his own cars after dismissing that of the Duke—and hesitated a moment as they were about stepping into it, before the hospital. There was that about the afternoon's occurrence which stamped it both in his and Lamerford's minds as something more than isolated outrage; it had more the appearance of carefully-planned terrorism with assassination as the alternative.

"Lammy," said Trevor, "I fancy we're thinkin' along the same lines concernin' this affair—thinking it may be only a single incident in something a deal more far-reaching. If that suspicion is well-founded, such a campaign might overturn the British Government unless something is promptly done to counteract it. Basically, of course, we believe the nation has too firm a foundation of common sense to be stamped into anything like the Russian chaos; yet, d'ye see, if the leaders at the head of our Governm't *should* be killed off, one after another, or intimidated until they lose their nerve, it would produce months of utter confusion in which almost anything might happen. If there's more at the bottom of this, we should be able to pick up a trace or two in other places before morning—eh? Question is—where are the most likely spots to look for them?"

"Lady Forrestier's reception an' dance in Portman Square, for one. A number of the Members are sure to be there with their wives—an' Curzon spoke of droppin' in. This may prove more a Foreign Office matter than anything in the Home Secretary's departm't."

They were driven in a few moments to a mansion on Portman Square where several hundred of the more prominent men and women were dancing or chatting as if there were no longer any serious affairs to harass the nation. As both were immensely popular, the Earl and Lammerford had no trouble in picking up partners; but had one been more than casually observant, it might have been noticed that both ladies were the wives of members who had voted with the opposition that afternoon, though usually on the side of Government. Bits of fragmentary talk between the Earl and his partner would have been even more illuminating.

"Er—rather surprised at Belden's goin' over to the Opposition, don't you know! Fancied him a strong supporter of the Ministerial policies—what?"

"I'll assume the blame for that, if Your Lordship pleases! Two of my brothers were killed in the Argonne—and my father, in the first Belgian actions. Yesterday my husband received a typed anonymous letter assuring him that he certainly would be killed if he voted for Sir Templeton's motion this afternoon—and I gave him no peace until he promised to vote against it. How much would you ask of English women, anyway! Haven't we sacrificed enough, as it is? What real difference does a paltry vote make in time of peace!"

"In this case, my friend, it might easily tip the balance an' plunge us into another European war—or utter chaos at home! I see your point, of course; on the surface, it is well taken. God knows you English-women have sacrificed everything you hold dear—and yet—? Well, d'y'e see, one couldn't imagine Lady Nan of Dyvnaint makin' me promise to vote against my principles or honest convictions! One fancies that her position would be: 'Vote what you consider the best policy for the country—if you're shot for it the next moment!' Threats of that sort always defeat themselves. Two or three valuable men may be killed, I grant you—but the people soon get sufficiently stirred up to avenge them an' protect the others. As a rule, 'threatened men live long.' At all events, one doesn't permit himself to be intimidated by scum of that sort—an' Belden's quite sure to reverse his vote upon reconsideration. He's not really a coward, you know—rather not! In fact, I'll wager that you'll tell him to do so tomorrow!"

AN hour later the Earl came upon England's Foreign Secretary in a corner of the big library, talking with Viscount Lammerford, and briefly outlined his conclusions from the affairs of the afternoon and evening. His Excellency had been of the opinion that Bramville's shooting was purely a matter for Scotland Yard until his attention was drawn to the attempted intimidation of at least thirty prominent members of Parliament—and Bramville's semiconscious description of the assassin who had wounded him.

"Hmph! As you put it, Trevor, we're in for trouble—at a most unfortunate time, too! Affairs at home are frightfully unsettled—the conferences at Spa are anything but satisfactory. After the defeat of Bramville's motion this afternoon, our foreign policy is up in the air! Have you any suggestion to make concerning this affair?"

"Aye—that to say, I've at least one method of procedure fairly well blocked out. Deuced pity we've not half a dozen first-class men available in your department! I could use 'em within the next few days!"

"Isn't Your Lordship unjustifiably severe? I fancied we had a number of really first-chop men in the Foreign Office—second to none in the world!"

"Er—quite so. But, d'y'e see, they're scattered among all of the world's capitals, where they're jolly well needed. But here in London, just the moment, it would be difficult to find even two of the sort I could use to advantage! Stop a bit! You've one man in Downing Street who might show exceptional ability in this affair. Young Sir Reginald Whittlesey—"

"Hmph! He's had but a clerical berth with us since he was invalidated home."

"Aye. Because the chap has positive genius for filing-systems, an' a memory that amazes one! It's quite likely you've not been sufficiently int'rested in his record to learn that he was one of the best Intelligence officers on the Western Front. H-m-m! I say, old chap! An idea occurs to me which might be worth tryin' out in your department—because it would show a number of your 'juniors' what the qualifications really are for serious work in the Intelligence Department, an' start 'em perfectin' themselves to qualify along those lines. Suppose tomorrow morning you turn over to me, in one of the more secluded Downing Street rooms, some of the

men whom you consider promising material. I'll talk to them about the Service, an' then make a few tests which I'll wager not more than one or two of the lot will meet. I'll also wager that your file-clerk, Reggie Whittlesey, will make a better showing than any of the others. Eh? Are you on? Ponies—if you wish!"

Something in His Lordship's manner and suggestion intrigued the Foreign Secretary. He recognized the gravity of Bramville's shooting and the campaign of intimidation, if the Earl's suspicions proved to be well founded. Also, the criticism of the men available for home duty rankled a good deal. . . . He accepted the wager.

WHEN Trevor reached Downing Street next morning, he found nine of the Foreign Office attachés waiting for him in an upper chamber, where an equal number of blackboards had been placed along the wall behind his chair—quite like a provincial schoolroom. Adjoining this was a smaller room in which one of his Afghan household waited to assist him with several changes of clothing.

He began at once by impressing upon each man the fact that his life and safety would frequently depend upon the extent to which he had cultivated his power of observation—also his ability to think and plan quickly in emergencies. To illustrate these points, the Earl said that he proposed giving them one or two impersonations which he wished them to describe minutely upon the blackboards.

"Everyone in England or the Colonies has done his bit in private theatricals at house-parties, of course—we British rather fancy ourselves at that sort of thing, an' they tell me I'm passably good at it. So I'll step into the next room presently an' make up in different types of character. Before doing this, however, I wish to make a simpler test. I've been talking to you, now, for possibly twenty minutes—ample time for close observation. Well, when I step out of the room, you will all come up to these blackboards an' write a short description of my personal appearance with any peculiarities you may notice—leaving space upon the boards for a couple more descriptions underneath. Eh? You follow me?"

He was gone so quickly that some of them had not fully grasped his request before he disappeared, and it was at least two or three minutes before all were writ-

ing at the blackboards. Somehow, the apparently simple test presented difficulties. They had been giving the closest possible attention to what he said—not the clothes he wore or how he looked. They had seen him hundreds of times; each had talked with him more than once. Offhand, they would unhesitatingly have described him to another person, with confidence that they were right in every essential particular. Now, however, they were by no means sure. When he returned, five minutes later, some of them were still at the boards and had written very little. Standing by the first board, he turned and faced them—motioning for a comparison between his appearance and what had been written on it. The result was amazing. In no single particular had the F. O. man hit it right; it seemed impossible that he could have looked at His Lordship and formed so completely erroneous a mental picture.

On the next board he was described as smoothly shaven—blue eyes—height about five feet ten—wearing a black cut-away coat, with trousers a shade lighter. The smooth face was the only detail correct. At the third board, however, His Lordship paused. His features were described in detail with considerable accuracy—his costume as a navy-blue sack coat and trousers, with tan spats and shoes. The name signed at the top of the board was that of an irrepressible young fellow, under thirty, who apparently had been paying scant attention to what the Earl said, and had whispered a good deal to his neighbor on the left. The seventh board was that of Sir Reginald Whittlesey; and it differed from the other only in a more careful description of real height, features and the color of the suit, which he stated to be a dark bluish-green. As the clothes were unquestionably navy-blue in the excellent light from the windows and as the Earl was so perfectly proportioned that none of them took him for an inch over five feet ten, it seemed obvious that Whittlesey also had failed in some essential particulars—but to their amazement he said:

"I fancy my description of Your Lordship's clothes was correct, though you are now wearing navy blue. By actual measurement, you stand a bit over six feet in your socks—possibly a half-inch."

"You stick to those points, do you, Whittlesey?"

"I certainly do, sir! May be mistaken, of course—but I fancy not."

"What do you say, Canning?"—turning to the irrepressible who had been so nearly right.

"As you are now, sir, my description would fit—but I'm inclined to think Captain Whittlesey was right. You changed your suit while we were writing on the boards. He's also nearer the mark than I on your height—now that I look at you more closely, with other objects about the room for comparison."

"You're both quite sure about these points?"

"Aye, sir—positive as one can be in the circumstances. Quite sure, Your Lordship!"

"Very good! I congratulate you both—particularly as the test came most unexpectedly. Fancy that was what flooded you other chaps—though I'll admit that I purposely distracted your attention. Now I'll go out again an' return in possibly ten minutes, made up as a different type altogether. Will give you two minutes in which to study my appearance carefully. That may be a long time,—or very short, depending upon your amount of concentration. Put the subject out of your minds while I am gone, but assume that your lives may depend upon your being alert when I come in."

A LITTLE more than ten minutes later the door opened. A man stepped partly into the room to inquire if the Earl of Dyvnaint was there. Being told that the Earl would return presently, he said he would wait—and remained standing at the front end of the room. Although he had spoken with no perceptible accent, his appearance was that of a middle-class German—the shopkeeping sort. His clothes were baggy, his manner and person slovenly, his beard ragged, his hair close-cropped, his eyes small and piercing, his linen noticeably soiled—fingernails ditto. Ordinarily, they would have told him the room was being used for a private conference—but as His Lordship would quickly get rid of the bouncer when he returned, they paid little attention to him. At the end of two minutes, however, he drew out a cheap silver watch, glanced at the time, said that he couldn't wait any longer. Would they please tell the Earl that he had called? Just as he was closing the door, he said:

"Pe sure you wass describe me so as der Earl he know who wass here! *Ja?*"

Berhaps you petter write him on der plack-boards—shust how I look—undt t'ese clo's, how t'ey look. *Ja!*"

In stupefaction they stared at each other. Then Canning, the seemingly inattentive one, jumped for one of the blackboards with the remark:

"I say, you chaps! That was pretty good advice! Take the tip—don't lose a second! His Lordship is likely to come in before you're ready, as it is!"

In their disgust at the stranger's disreputable appearance they had noted most of the objectionable details without appearing to stare at him, and so were able to write out pretty accurate descriptions. And after glancing at what the other two had written they congratulated themselves upon scoring over Whittlesey and Canning this time. For neither had written a word of detailed description. On Canning's board was merely the comment:

Impersonation of some German recently prominent in public life, who has been featured in German weeklies and our own gazettes. Cannot recall the name—but would recognize the man, anywhere.

Sir Reggie had written:

A perfectly astounding impersonation of Herr Schminnes, German mine-owner and newspaper millionaire. All the more remarkable from the difference in height—which must be nearly three inches, but which not one acquaintance in fifty would have noticed.

EVEN after reading this the other men in the room would not believe that the supposed German had been the Earl himself. In another fifteen minutes, a tall and sparely built man came in with the explanation that he had been sent by His Lordship to examine and pass upon the descriptions which had been written of the German upon the blackboards—and proceeded to do this, paying no further attention to them, but making notes in a small memorandum-book. At a snap estimate they would have placed his height at somewhere around six feet two inches—with a weight of not over nine stone, probably nearer eight. His clothing was not particularly well fitting, but carefully brushed and noticeably snug in the legs and arms. The hair was much longer than Englishmen consider trim or in good taste, the black beard carelessly trimmed. Yet the man's appearance was rather neat than

otherwise, a habit of daily bathing indicated, and there was an expression of intellectuality in the eyes which peered myopically through spectacles with thick lenses. The general impression was that of a scholar, a pedagogue. His examination of the blackboards carried a further one of daily habit.

When he had finished jotting down percentages against the list of names in his notebook, he bowed to them in a curious foreign manner and went out. This time the men went to the blackboards instinctively—writing down the closest description they could of the person who had just left. But again Whittlesey and Canning—joined this time by another bright young fellow—refused to consider details. The last recruit merely said:

This man—apparently Russian—was showing a friend the points of interest in Westminster Abbey yesterday afternoon. Face vaguely familiar as that of one seen occasionally about the city or in some particular section of it. Would recognize him again in any part of the world—day or night.

Canning had written:

Impersonation of a foreign professor in one of the universities—presumably in or near London, as I have seen him more than once. Nationality, Russian or Polish. As I recall the man, the impersonation is very nearly perfect.

Whittlesey was the most definite of all.

Another marvelous character-study—this time, of Professor Stefan Tosschanoff, who has the chair of Applied Chemistry, London Institute Branch, University of London—a Russian from Kiev. While there may have been small details accidentally noticeable to one who sees the Professor day by day, it is almost certain that the impersonator would pass unsuspected in the man's own home—indeinitely.

THIS time His Lordship kept them waiting but a few minutes and came in looking as when they had first seen him that morning. Glancing carefully over each blackboard, he finally turned to them with a courteous smile which took the sting out of what he had to say.

"Gentlemen, I hope this test has been as interesting to you as it has to me. It was made this morning because Government, at this moment, is desperately in need of a few Intelligence officers who possess that 'something more' which enables them to run down the causes of inexplicable occurrences, get positive evidence, assume

momentous responsibility, where other men neither see nor hear anything at all. Two of you possess these requirements to a most unusual degree—and a third has cultivated the power of observation until he may be trusted to build upon it with intuition. I shall ask Lord Curzon to have them detailed under my orders for the next few weeks—on His Majesty's Service.

"Whittlesey—Canning—Jeffries! I shall need to go over your immediate instructions at once if you are disengaged. Will you accompany me in my car to Park Lane after I have shown His Excellency these boards and attended to the formalities?"

THE three Foreign Office men lunched with the Earl and Countess at their famous Jacobean mansion with considerable inward gratification—after which Viscount Lammerford arrived with one of the best-known cabinet ministers, and the party adjourned to the big library for coffee and cigars. It was, however, a most serious conference upon a matter of State; the Earl wasted no time in idle pleasantries. Briefly running over the events of the previous afternoon and evening, he turned to Captain Whittlesey with a question:

"Sir Reginald, you recognized in my make-up this morning an impersonation of Professor Stefan Tosschanoff, of the University. How did you happen to know him so well? Any evidence against him?"

"I'd not go so far as that, sir—I've seen him lecturing at the University in South Kensington once or twice. More recently I've seen him at restaurants with two men whom I knew, in Paris, to be Russian bolsheviks.

"Have you shadowed him or his house, under orders from Downing Street?"

"No sir. They took a fancy to my system of filing, at the F. O.—and my duties there have been entirely clerical since I came home."

The Earl made a gesture of impatient disgust. "We shall have to overhaul the Foreign Office methods of examination. Makin' a clerk out of a first-chop Intelligence officer! Tryin' to use a lot of wooden men in that capacity! Of course they hit it right occasionally—but it's law of average rather than intelligent selection! Jeffries! You said in your description that you had seen a man resembling my make-up in Westminster Abbey yesterday afternoon—and that you'd recognize him again anywhere? Seen such a man before?"

"Yes sir—coming out of a Mayfair house which sets back from the street a bit in its own grounds. And your make-up was something more than a resemblance, sir! For a second or two I'd have sworn you were the man I saw yesterday in the Abbey!"

"Very good! Our little demonstration in observin' things this morning appears to have rooted out some most amazin' evidence—far more than I even hoped to obtain for several days at least! Let me connect three bits of it an' see how it strikes you all. First—Leftenant Jeffries is positive about seein' my double yesterday afternoon in Westminster Abbey. Captain Whittlesey swears I was impersonatin' Professor Tesschanoff—a Russian originally from Kiev, but resident in London for many years. Both of these gentlemen say I'd have deceived intimate friends of the other man. Last night—when beginning to come out of the ether after his frightful operation, an' not responsible for what he said, according to Sir Pelham Curran—Sir Templeton Bramville told us he was shot by a man in an upper window of Westminster Abbey, with a rifle which had a silencer on its muzzle. And in the few words he gasped out during intervals of less pain he described Tesschanoff's face exactly."

"Might not the description apply to other men equally well?"

"If they had unkempt black beards, wore spectacles, were of unmistakable Russian type, yet personally neat as to clothes and linen—yes! But how many men answering that description were in the vicinity of Westminster Abbey yesterday afternoon? We happen to know that Tesschanoff himself was there at just about that time, or a little before. Men have been hanged upon less circumstantial evidence than this!"

"However—let me add more. When the Polish an' Roumanian envoys made their secret visit to London, we naturally expected attempts upon their lives from Russian agents. Tesschanoff, another professor and two women artists in St. John's Wood were known to have received at their houses a number of Russians and presumable Germans who were subsequently deported as undesirable aliens. But there was no evidence of any sort against those four; their records for the past ten or fifteen years were absolutely straight and respectable. Of course, they had a perfect

right to receive acquaintances from among their fellow-countrymen if ignorant of their dangerous activities.

"Well—I had no real belief in their ignorance or innocence. In the past ten years I've picked up hundreds of secret recognition-signs an' passwords used by the old Wilhelmstrasse, the bolshevists, the I. W. W. and various political organizations in diff'rent countries—enough of them to take an occasional chance of passin' as a member of such organizations. As a fellow Russian professor who had been working in the United States an' was going back to Moscow by way of London, I gained a good deal of Tesschanoff's confidence—but not all of it—until I purposely had him jailed on an enemy charge an' worked a lot of mysterious influence to set him free next morning. Since then he volunteers for my benefit any bit of information which may turn up, considers me a tried an' proved bolshevist like himself."

"Then—you've actual proof that he is one?"

TREVOR nodded. "Absolute proof that he is the chief soviet representative in England, that his house is used as a rendezvous for the more recent arrivals and that, while all plans and orders originate in Moscow, his suggestions carry a good deal of weight and many of the executive details are worked out in his house."

"Then—why in the name of wonder isn't he in the Tower and his house occupied by agents of the Government?"

"Because that would destroy our best clue to Red activities here. Those four have no suspicion that they are watched; they fancy their former records completely protect them. As stool-pigeons they're of immense value to Governm't—both English an' French."

"Yet by using them as such and not interfering with their activities, you permit a Government leader to be shot upon the street in broad daylight! You permit members of Parliament to be intimidated by anonymous letters until our entire system of government is in a way of being overturned!"

"I'll wager, Your Excellency, that it will be practically impossible to connect by direct evidence Professor Tesschanoff or either of the other three with the shooting of Bramville or the sending of those letters, which may have been written in some East

End lodging-house at the other side of London—unless we make them convict themselves by word of mouth! And this is where I expect these bright chaps from Downing Street to help me! Here, Whittlesey, are data giving the location of every burglar-alarm contact in Tesschanoff's house—a cleverly worked-out system of them, I assure you, connected with a little buzzer and dial on his desk, also in his sleeping-room. I wish you and Canning to gain access to the house at night—Scotland Yard will be warned not to see you. Install a dictaphone in Tesschanoff's library—wires leading to adjoining house on the left, which I've managed to have vacant, just now. You'll relieve each other at that dictaphone in two-hour tricks, day an' night. I also wish photographic descriptions of every person the Professor talks with—in his house or elsewhere. Jeffries will make up as a Russian—he speaks the language well enough to pass among them—an' take lodgings in a certain pub down near the Albert Dock, reporting to me every Russian, Austrian, Scandinavian or German who comes there, and with whom they spend their time."

A DETAILED account of the Earl's trap and how it was sprung would make a story by itself. Space in this one permits but a brief touching upon the main points. Impersonating the supposed Russian, Professor Wladowitch, Trevor unexpectedly turned up at Tesschanoff's house after a complete disappearance of several weeks, and more by implication than direct statements, led the Professor to infer what his recent activities had been. Casually, during the conversation, he referred to the shooting of Sir Templeton Bramville as a perfectly understood action, cautioning Tesschanoff that he had been seen in the Abbey by some one who almost guessed his identity. Some intuition, of that marvelous sort which made Trevor the genius he was led him to mention the anonymous letter to members of Parliament as likely to work out in a very satisfactory way for Herr Schminnes of the German Reichstag, and Tesschanoff carelessly admitted that they were doing all that Schminnes had hoped from them. Trevor—as Wladowitch—then hinted that it was about time for Schminnes to visit England. And the Professor said that he looked for him during the following week, following adjournment of the Spa Conference, at which he had been present.

A subsequent transcript of what came over the dictaphone-wires to a room in the adjoining house would have hanged Tesschanoff, unquestionably, had he not been much more valuable, alive, to the Intelligence Department. And for the next ten days, every port was under surveillance of Foreign Office men looking for a middle-class German of slovenly, disreputable appearance who was, none the less, a billionaire and the greatest commercial force that Germany had yet produced.

EVENTUALLY, a man answering this description landed at Queensboro from a Flushing boat, and went to a second-rate hotel patronized by aliens, not far from St. Paul's. For a week, his business appeared to be almost entirely with bankers, stock-brokers, shipping-agents, and the like—entirely legitimate and unobjectionable on the face of it. Tesschanoff lunched with him twice at a restaurant in Holborn where they occupied a private dining-room with another Russian and a Swede. But when the door was opened unexpectedly by a strange waiter, they were absorbedly playing pinochle and smoking pipes with porcelain bowls. Schminnes did not once go near the Professor's house—or—apparently—have interviews with any of the bolsheviks then in London. At the end of the week, however, the Earl decided that he had enough evidence to order the man's arrest and detention upon a charge of conspiracy against the British Government. He was taken after leaving his hotel one evening, and conveyed to the Tower—where he laughed in the chief warden's face.

"Look you, Herr Offizier! Some one of der Britisch schwells—maype de bolice—maype a Duke—haf orderdt my arrest. For why, I know nodt—undt I don'd gif a tamn! Keep me here if you choos—I make no fuss! But what happens if no chudge will holdt me—for pecause I am Member of der Reichstag? T'ose who cause my arrest iss in pad position—maype remove' from office. Wouldt it nod pe der petter, der more adwisable way, to call up mit der telephone dot man way-up who gif der orichinal order—undt say he petter haf me sendt where I talk mit him undt some of der Gofernment? In his own house iss petter—maype. T'en t'ere wass no bublicity—undt he save his face when he gonclude it iss petter as he don'd holdt me in brison. Nein! What you t'ink? Eh?"

The warden had been told who his prisoner was. His telephone-bells had rung incessantly—some of the most influential bankers in London protesting against the arrest of Schminnes as an official blunder upon some one's part. After some little thought, he called up the Earl's Park Lane mansion and repeated verbatim what the German had said. Dining with the Earl at that moment, there happened to be the Foreign Secretary—the Lord President of the Council—another Cabinet minister and two influential members of Parliament. Answering Trevor's question as he turned from the phone, they all agreed upon the advisability of having the man brought there for a private examination which, by reason of their official positions, would amount practically to a Government Court with full powers. In twenty minutes, Herr Schminnes was brought into the big library by an officer of the Tower Guard—and, without a trace of uneasiness or embarrassment, seated himself in their circle. Turning to Earl Trevor, who, as master of the house, he intuitively felt to be the person responsible for his arrest, the German looked him over calmly from head to foot. Then—

"You are t're person who haf me arrested? Me—Johann Schminnes? Well—broceed! For why—if you please?" (Trevor's voice sometimes conveyed the sensation of icicles trickling down one's back—when absolutely sure of his facts and feeling the necessity for being merciless.)

"Schminnes—commercially, you are said to be the biggest man in Germany. You own mines, steamships, newspapers and various other industries. Just now, you were delegate to a conference of world-wide importance and were said to control your confreres absolutely. One would suppose that you were fully occupied with your affairs at home. Yet you come to London—conspire with bolshevists and anarchists—cause anonymous letters to be sent to Members of Parliament, terrorizing them with threats of assassination if they do not vote for policies which would completely overturn the British Government—and are deliberately buying up through dummy syndicates some of the most valuable properties in England. All of which, according to British law, comes under the head—in time of peace—of conspiracy against His Majesty's Government, and is punishable by a long term of imprisonment at hard labor!"

THE slovenly individual in the big chair who looked so entirely out of place in such company and surroundings deliberately helped himself to a cigar from the box on the big table—lighted it, took a few meditative puffs.

"Vell—suppose I say somet'ings on der ot'er side. Ja? Der Allies say Chermanny mus' pay a pig indemnity. T'ey try to crush her—surroundt her mit buffer shtates—make her schmall weak nation. Put t'ey couldt nodt do t'at in a t'ousand years! Nein! We shall increase—expandt—dominate der worldt! For why? Because we iss schmarter—more efficient as anybody else. T'is fighting foolishness of der last life years wass a mistake—it wass der schwell't headt! Albert Ballin toldt t'em so! I told t'em so! Ballin, mit his shteamship enterbrises undt foreign trade wass conquering t'e worldt mitoudt no fuss. In twenty years, we wouldt haf ruled die eart'—not'ing couldt haf schtopped us! Ballin—he see t'e work of his lifetime come down in ruins undt he get so disgusted mit such foolishness t'at he shoot himself.

"But me—I am a younger man, undt I don'd go crazy. I buy der iron-mines in Luxembourg—I buy more as twenty t'ousand acres of coal in England—I buy schteamships unter six diff'rent flags. Undt t'en, I buy more as seventy newspapers for to explain mit der beople how t'ey mus' vote—what t'ey mus' do. Der Pritish Empire, she interfere mit our developement—so she mus' be hampered—weakened as a competitor. Lenine would estaplish der soviets here. Vell—dot blays Chermanny's game—we do nodt obchect. You say I send der t'reatening letters to der Memper of Parliament. Well—dot wass a mistake—but I suggest him, so let it go at t'at. If der Mengers vote for nationalization of der coal-mines, der owners git scared undt sell t'em to my syndigates—quick—pefore t'ey lose money by t'em!

"If Englandt wass efficient nation—mit pig efficient men—I could nodt do t'at. But you wass careless—asleep at der switch—so I take advantage for Chermanny, naturally. In Chermanny, efery industry iss now a trust mit a super-trust ofer all—according to der mos' excellent blan of Von Moellendorff. T'is year—we increase der broduction more as double ofer nineteen-thirteen. Englandt increase der taxes—mit only half der output! Which mus' win?

"Now—as for myself. My business af-

fairs—all my bropties undt industries—iss arranchd for der next ten years—twenty years—mit capable executives. Der blans all vorked oudt. You cannot chanche t'em a hair's-breadt'. T'ey vill go on—undt on—establishing Cherman trade eferywhere in blace of Englisch—American—French—Italian. If you sendt me to brison, in two mont's time I organize dot brison—make der lapor of der convicts more efficient—make der estaplishment self-supporting. Undt t'en, I make you der broposition for managing him while I shtay t'ere. It makes no diff'rence to me—one blace iss as goodt as anot'er. Vell? You get me? Do you sendt me to der brison—oder wass you open der front door undt tell me to go oudt?"

FOR perhaps two full minutes, there was dead silence in the room. Neither the Cabinet Ministers nor the others had missed the force of the German's remarks. Imprisoning such a man as a remedy for the international situation was too farcical to consider. Presently, the Earl touched a push-button on the edge of the big table—summoning his tall Afghan khansamah.

"Sabub! Show this man out! And—er—Sabub! When he is on the porch, outside, you may kick him—once. I fancy you'll enjoy that. It will be also an expression of British opinion, in a way."

When the two had disappeared, there was another silence—during which the Cabinet Ministers were absorbed in reflection upon some of the things which had been said. After a while, Trevor spoke—with his famous, inimitable drawl:

"Rather severe arraignment—what? An' some points were so near actual fact that they should be branded into the skull of every Englishman the world over! We are trifling an' workin' to little purpose while the house burns! Never a doubt of it. We're afraid of doin' the unprecedented thing. We lack the daring to impose efficiency—system—constructive planning—upon the country by force, regardless of labor an' socialistic howling! But we're going to wake up, Gentlemen—and the process will start tomorrow morning, when practically every Briton will read in his morning paper what Schminnes and the bolshevists did to our Members of Parliament an' what that middle-class bounder just told us to our faces! Let's see if we're as rotten as he claims! I rather fancy—not!"



Marshall Scull

HENRY GANNON had no idea that five minutes would determine for him an interesting problem, and yet the briefest review of his family fortunes might have prepared his mind for swift alterations. Gannon, grandfather, in cotton overalls, had sown wheat for his life in Pennsylvania clay; Gannon, father, in a silk shirt, walked for mere pride among his Alabama cotton-bolls; Gannon, Henry Clifford, in his khaki clothes, was shooting wild animals for pleasure on the uplands of East Africa.

Henry stood motionless, with rifle ready to raise in both hands, his helmeted head slightly bent forward, staring over the tall yellow grass into a fringe of green trees that marked a thirsty river-bank. A waterbuck was in those trees thirty rods away, and he wanted to learn just where. Five paces behind him and also statesque, Mustafa the black gunbearer was searching with skilled eyes for the same antelope. And neither man knew of a fourth fateful presence.

One yard to the right of Henry Gannon lay hidden in the grass the stubby tail of a puff-adder. Away from him extended the flabby breadth of its body, and the forward half of it, drawn like the letter S, had a yellow-and-black heart-shaped head. Buff and brown chevrons on its back were partly powdered with dust. A very sluggish snake, the puff-adder: not given to

The Puff-Adder



pursuing an enemy, not accustomed to avoiding unpleasantness. Sane beasts and men gave it room. Otherwise, a sidewise flash of its ugly head removed the annoyance promptly—a man, for instance, in half an hour. The deadliest reptile of East Africa was flattened and still, with staring eyes, and looked like a strip of old carpet charged with malevolent infections.

But since this thing was hidden, Henry could not know that the next few minutes were to decide whether he remained a man or became something less.

For the present he was a tall, slender youth, with the pride of wealth in his dark eyes and a conscious self-esteem in the culture of his neat mustache. Even here on the broad plains under the equator he did himself well, as though ready to meet inspection of the sophisticated. Each morning he shaved, and every night took the warm bath which custom decreed in the land. Under the hive-shaped cork helmet his wavy black hair lay cleanly parted down the middle by a white rift. The nails of his long fingers showed scrupulous care. The girls of languorous Mobile, by the Gulf of Mexico, had regarded Henry Gannon with watchful expectation and threw about him a soft air of respect which he did not forget in the wild ends of the earth. They thought him very good-looking: he had a clear skin, straight nose, firm chin, and lips that were suitable.

These lips he was now pressing together in concentrated attention. He had seen the waterbuck go leisurely out of the open fields into the band of trees when the mounting sun beat too hotly on its shaggy brown coat; and after infinite caution he had come to this point of his stalk. Two minutes ago the following black man hissed a warning to stand still. Now they would hold their positions like immovable plants till the timid eyes of the quarry turned once more away. Henry, however, did not make out where the waterbuck stood, and was annoyed.

Another than him this might not have bothered; but Gannon was sensitive to gross racial influences. He was compounded of Northern ancestry and Southern surroundings, and the instinct of superiority was strong in him. Since his family was not of the traditional old South, Henry tried in vain to shake off a certain self-consciousness in dealing with the negroes. He could not flow gently into the world where black and white mingled as separate atoms of life everywhere and yet kept apart by impalpable films of understanding. The inherited ease of relationship between whites and blacks, prescribing subtly where contact began and finished, was not exquisite in him—probably because of its even more rudimentary existence in his own father, the vigorous successful planter, and the consequent home environment. So Henry maintained the correct attitude of his social place with elaborate care. He was willing to have the dark men serve him, provided that the border of familiarity was never crossed, and of course he could never do a menial act for one of them. Always he was the gentleman among his equals and the considerate master of his subordinates.

Outwardly, it should be said! For occasional trials of spirit were bound to occur. This one, for example: Mustafa was an excellent gunbearer, whose chief duty was to carry the big double-barreled rifle and give it to the Master at a critical moment. He had spare cartridges for both guns in his pocket, the water-can and cup, and the lunch in a bag. His ragged felt hat covered a big woolly head, as Henry well knew without looking around, and beyond doubt the whites of his eyes were now visible in the excitement of his quest for the game before them. "He's as sharp as I am," growled Gannon, recalling many a scene of their tramps together. Often Mus-

tafa had pointed for minutes at the motionless form of an animal before his employer could see it behind a bit of brush. Now and then he told him how to approach and get a close shot, sometimes he restrained him from a false step which would spoil the stalk; and once, worst of all, he had shown impatience when the white man missed an easy chance at a kudu. It was a gradual succession of small rubbings that chafed. Mustafa was one of the best native hunters, and it galled Henry Gannon to admit that in even one particular the black was his better. Mustafa, at his back directing the Master what to do and not to do, was an irritant.

"I'm a fool," he said to himself, "to get mad at Mustafa, seein' how I hired him almost guaranteed to show me the fine points of huntin'." He tried to dwell on the man's good qualities, which were many. What else than appreciation had caused him to give Mustafa his own pair of ten-inch boots? They were too heavy for comfortable walking, and Henry preferred the ankle-high shoes which he had on. But a glimpse of the gunbearer's worn-out sandals had made his master fear that he might pick up a thorn or even be bitten by a snake, and so he had given him these good ones. Mustafa was delighted and wore them all the time. "Snakes might be anywhere," Henry thought; "that's a chance you run, and you sure can't be always watchin' for them." He had on spiral puttees. "I wonder if they'd stop a snake-bite," he had occasionally mused. Pressing his left arm to the side pocket, he felt the small bottle of permanganate crystals and reassured himself. "No remedy is certain, but this gives a spare chance."

HAVING thus in parade the momentary pageant of his mind, Henry Gannon stood almost within the precinct of fate. For the puff-adder lay motionless and invisible to him under a veil of dust and grass. The back of its head contained acidulous stuff in a font from which tubes ran to the base of two hollow folding fangs at the forward corners of its upper jaw. When the mouth opened wide, the fangs stood nearly inch-long on their bases. Near to the point of each curved weapon a small hole marked the poison-vent. The snake was ready to dart its head like an open hand at an enemy and pierce him with the fangs. A slight muscular contraction back of its eyes would leave sufficient venom

deep below the surface of the body. The circulation of the victim's blood would do the rest. That was the puff-adder's method, and for many thousands of years it had been entirely satisfactory. Small wonder that the viper lay quiet and contented in the grass. At the instant of striking it would probably make a hiss of anger, but then the warning would not matter.

No intimation, however, came at this moment to Henry Gannon. The thought of a possible accident went through and out of his mind, and he studied how to shoot the waterbuck which should be in the greenery of the river bank. That was his business here. If he had arrived without stepping on a snake, here he was. There were too many surprises on the African plateau for a man to worry about the next that might happen. You could always be sure of surprises. A few months had taught him at least that. Now the thing was the waterbuck.

"A triflin' bit farther to the right, and I ought to see him," Henry said to himself, and began to put his foot in that direction.

"Hsss!" came strongly to his ears from Mustafa, and whispered word: "Don't move, Master; he will see you."

Henry checked his step; but to be reminded by his servant that immobility was the price of winning the antelope annoyed him. Wasn't it his affair if he frightened the waterbuck? And wasn't Mustafa the paid gunbearer? "His job's to hand me the big gun, when I want it sure 'nough."

That the black man behind him should direct his moving or standing was intolerable. It upset all his acquired ideas of the proper relation between the two races. "I'd show the fellow if I had him at home," Henry thought. "He'd see where he was, right 'nough." Yet he had to acknowledge that years of practice in seeing and stalking the animals gave Mustafa authority. "Well, it's only in the actual work of huntin' that he can talk to me. Passin' that, he takes my orders, and not I his."

Ignoring, now, the directions of his attendant, he judged it good to shift his stand a trifle, in the hope of catching a clear sight of the waterbuck which baffled them. He distinguished one large tree that prevented a view into part of the grove, and thought, if he moved sufficiently to bring the trunk aside, he might make out the antelope.

"I'm goin' to walk slowly this side," he said, for the gunbearer to hear.

"Wait, Master," replied Mustafa hoarsely; "I see him." The man quivered with excitement. "Wait," he said again; "I come up behind you." Stooping behind Henry as a screen, keeping his eyes fixed straight ahead, he came close and with a careful hand pointed over the white man's shoulder and past his face. "See that flower the color of blood? One yard above is his left horn."²

"Yes, I see," said Henry Gannon, bringing up the rifle slowly. "Gimme room."

MUSTAFA stepped to the right. The sound of a whistling breath in the grass! Two taps in rapid succession! Mustafa gave a frightful scream and sprang high in the air. He knew what it was. He began to jump at the first tap, but the second struck before he jumped: one on the heel and the other on the ankle of his leather boot. He was jumping when the third caught him higher: on the calf of the leg. Between the time that his foot-nerve signaled to his brain, "Something is striking at me!" and the time that his brain telegraphed back to his foot muscles the order, "Jump!" the thing struck him a second and third time. So quick as that was it. The third made no tap, because it landed on the soft woollen puttees, and the fangs of the open mouth sank deep in the flesh. The snake dangled from his leg and then fell.

Mustafa, raging, shot both barrels of the elephant-gun into the mottled strip of old Turkish rug that Henry saw at his feet and blew it to pieces. He dashed away a few yards, sat down where the grass was thin and tore off the spiral band which covered his leg. Henry ran and helped.

Into his mind as he ran after Mustafa leaped the words, "Ligature, cutting, suction, antiseptic." Then a racing lot of old advice came back to him: "Stop the blood from carrying the poison through the body, gash the bite to the bottom, get most of the poison out, and put in permanganate of potassium to neutralize the rest of the venom." These simple directions he had learned as part of his elementary education when he came out to Africa. And they told him that it was a matter of minutes, if not of seconds, in saving a man's life from a puff-adder. "You can rub in the crystals and then suck the stuff out, if you want to," they said, "and the quicker you do both the better. After that, you've got to wash the wound constantly with a

solution of the permanganate, and if you were slow at first, you'll have to keep him alive with stimulants and jolly well nurse him for a couple of weeks."

NOT pausing to look at the bite, Mustafa passed the thin tape-end of the puttee several times loosely about his leg below the knee and thrust the gun-barrel through the stuff and twisted it round and round till he squeezed the tape into his brown skin.

"Medicine, Master," he panted. Henry had the bottle ready in his hand. He put a pinch of the purple-black crystals into the drinking-cup that he took from the man's belt and poured on them water from the canteen.

Mustafa whipped out his skinning knife. He doubled his right leg up so that he could see the two little holes and slashed them savagely. He cut across the two holes an inch deep and criss-crossed the cuts without wincing. Fluid began to come, but it was weak watery blood. Mustafa squeezed the place hard with both hands, working in a frenzy of haste. He knew that his life was a question of minutes. "Medicine, Master," he said again.

Henry sifted more pulverized crystals out of the bottle into his palm and put them into the wound with his fingers and rubbed till they disappeared. Their tendency was to make the venom insoluble and neutralize its power. But still it remained beneath the surface of Mustafa's flesh. Still it was trying to spread through the blood vessels and lymph glands and destroy them.

Most if not all of the injection Henry knew that he must get out of the system at once, or the man would die. He picked the cup from the ground aimlessly and shook it till all was a purple liquid within. He himself felt sickish. He set the cup down again.

Mustafa was trying to bend and reach the leg with his mouth. The bite was on the outer side of his calf and he could not get to it. He pulled desperately upward on the foot, and bent his head down, but there was a wide gap that he could not span. "Master," he cried, "push down my head." Henry placed his hands on the man's shoulders and tried to force his body into a shape that nature would not let it take. He put his whole weight on the neck and yet the head would not reach the spot. Mustafa's lips protruded eagerly, to find

and suck out of his leg the deadly venom. But they could not.

Minutes were ticking away. Presently the black man's leg would swell, and he would get dizzy, while the venom was corrupting his tissues. His heart would jump a beat now and then, the skin would get clammy, his eyes would dilate, and he would be sick. After a while he would die.

HENRY thought of all this. The only hope clutched insistently at his throat. There was only one thing that anybody could do, and he must do it, because Mustafa could not. It was precisely the one thing that he could not imagine himself doing for anyone who had a black skin. It was to apply his own lips to the nasty wound in Mustafa's leg and suck out the poison. His soul revolted at the thought. That was the one impossible act for Henry Gannon to do. If he had been the son of an old Southern family, in whom tenderness and affection for the negroes were traditions, perhaps he might have been willing to perform this abasement. But he was of Northern stock and really Southern only in one generation.

Nor did Mustafa ask him. Not once did the native apparently suppose that his master would lower himself to save the life which was so cheap compared with his daintiness. Mustafa sought his help only to break his head down so that he could reach the place with his own lips. When that failed, he fell to squeezing and kneading the leg, and the white man watched futilely.

Henry Gannon understood in a general way that the venom of vipers took effect only through the blood. Messengers of science ran to his mind, telling him again what he knew. Venom was not usually absorbed into the system through the mucous membrane of the mouth.

"Well," he reasoned, "if a fella washed out his mouth with the permanganate solution, it would be some sorta safeguard." His sense of duty was driving his instinct and selfishness till they cringed. "If the chemical beats the poison in the flesh, it oughta do the same in the mouth." He must spit out draught upon draught till the clean red blood came. At the very idea he spat. He felt that if he did this thing and lived, he would be spitting out of his mouth till the end of time. Besides, the blood and the poison would remain a taste which he could never spit out.

Mustafa groaned despairingly. Henry looked at him and asked: "Feel bad?"

"It hurts, Master; I am going to die."

"Poison was wasted on your boot. How much coulda got into your leg?"

"Oh, Master, it is strong," Mustafa cried. "Two drop, and a man is dead. If I could only get my mouth there!"

Gannon looked this way and that, into the immense loneliness. Five miles from camp. Not a living witness of the accident. He could not be blamed if this man was bitten by a puff-adder. Whatever he did, or whatever risk he took in trying to save him, might be in vain. The hyenas could readily have two bodies to rend, instead of one, when night shrouded their ghastly procedure.

For the humble African waited possibly an unknown and indifferent mother or girl, accustomed to men's precarious hold of life, and she would not unduly bewail an ever-expected loss.

For Henry Gannon, on the other side of the world, were exuberant uses: sweet mouths of women, delicate food, soft words, memorable stories.

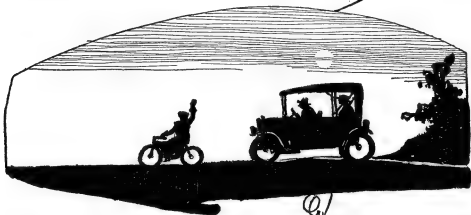
Memorable stories! If he now saved his lips for such pastime, there would be one deed to which they would not eagerly give sound. Always there would be in memory this irresolute refusal of a bitter cup. A tossed and scattered whiteness of bones would forever remind him of one inaction, forgotten on the breast of a dark continent, secret from all men but himself; which would make false and rotten every pretense that his pure lips could utter.

To withhold from a man, white or black, looking with brave eyes into the face of death, any part of the help that he might be able to give him, was to become contemptible in his own sight. He, Henry Clifford Gannon, the fine gentleman, would not even remain a man: he would become something less.

Sweat broke out on his face, and for an instant the world made a half-turn before his dimmed eyes. One end of the horizon tilted up and the other end down. Then he found himself and flung away fear and vanity and shouted: "God help me! I'll do what I can!"

He dropped his head and took Mustafa's black leg. A radiant thankfulness on the gunbearer's face brightened and shamed out the old inhumanity and poured into Henry a new manhood. He shut his eyes and gave his nice lips to the vile service.

A Wild Night in Gary



By
Frances A.
Ludwig

TIM DONOVAN is a sort of super-mechanic attached to Sol Machin's garage and repair shop, over on the avenue. He wears greasy overalls and is smeared to his grizzled eyebrows with oil and grime, but is a man of substance and his word is authority at Sol Machin's.

Years ago Tim and I got our pay-envelopes every other Tuesday from the same cashier. Because of the memory of those years Tim comes over and fixes my little motorcar, on off-days and after hours, that I may not be at the mercy of "that thief of the world, mintoning no names, and what he don't know wont hurt him."

"Is there much the matter with her?" I asked Tim one evening.

"I can't tell yit,"—as he lifted the hood. "For one thing, you've got a cracked porcelain and the plugs are all dirty. You cuddn't start her, y' say?" He went around and dug under the seat. "Small wonder! You've corrosion enough on your battery to frost a Christmas cake. And she's choked wit' carbon—don't she knock somethin' fierce goin' up hill?"

"I don't remember. We haven't been going up hill. Last Sunday we drove out to Gary."

"Wit' th' strikes and the uprising and everything, Gary's a great place," observed Tim. "And thim little roads around it, wid' the trees thick on each side, my but

they're dark at night! Was ye iver on thim, then?"

"No," I answered.

Tim smiled reminiscently. "I was wance near arristed out there, just before the ind of the war. I was on some adventure, that night!"

"For speeding, Tim?"

"No, indeed. For bein' drunk and disorderly, havin' no lights on, and on suspicion of bein' a German spy. You've heard of Mike O'Doyle, maybe? He was wance a big gun in pollytics on the West Side. He's gettin' old now, but he's niver got over his free-handed way of giving and taking, and in consequence there's been more than wance his fri'nds have had to keep him from bein' set in the street. Such things is wearin' on fri'ndship, y' know. Poor Mike, to think what pollytics has brought him to, and he used to be treatin' his fri'nds to champagne in *kegs*."

"He married Nora Carney, who he met at a grand ball given by the Fourth Ward Democratic Club, and she's second cousin to me on me mother's side. That's how I happened to be mixed up in this affair."

TWAS near nine o'clock in the evenin' "I pursued Tim, "when Nora O'Doyle called me up; she was in a terrible stew, and I finally managed to make out that Mike had been took bad inside of him and wud die before mornin' unless he was took

right to the hospital for an operation. And that the doctor wuddn't perform the operation nor indeed wud they let him into the hospital widout cash payment down. Which sounds cruel, I'll say, but at that, Mike's pretty well known.

"Well, I wondered, did she think I had several hundred dollars on me, and I was explainin' that wid the best intentions in the world I cuddn't get into the bank before morning, but it seemed that wasn't what she was after. Wud I come wid a car as quick as God would let me, and take her out to Gary?"

"'Gary, woman,' said I. 'This time of night! Are ye mad?'"

"And she wint on like she'd lost her mind pleadin' for the love of the Virgin not to stop to ask questions, but to beg or steal a car and come and get her, and Father Kelly wud stay wid Mike till we got back, for there wasn't a soul in the neighborhood that she'd ask a favor of, wid their hearts of fiends; and that if she cuddn't get to Gary and back by midnight, Mike would die.

"Sure, she had me so excited that I didn't know what I was about meself. Sol had gone home and there wasn't a thing loose in the garage exceptin' a 1913 five-passenger flivver that young Sidney Machin does be using to deliver fresh country eggs and butter straight from South Water Street to a selected list of patrons. The cap of the radiator was lost off, and it was plugged up wid a cork tied up in a rag, like you'd stopper a vinegar jug. A rear fender was danglin' broken, and iv'ry bolt in her rattled; but I stopped for nothin' but to stick a measurin' rod in the gasoline tank, and I was off.

"I took side streets and wint like blazes, and Nora was ready waitin' for me on the steps. She did a flyin' leap up beside me that wud have done credit to a college athlete, and away we wint, wid the broken fender rattlin' and some tunes a-playin' inside that I didn't like the sound of, but had no time to stop and investigate. The wind whistled past our ears, and she yelled at me between blasts, explainin' things. We wasn't bound for Gary, exactly, but for the Liberty Powder works, which, as you know, are situated about a mile beyond, though they're not runnin' now. A man named Con McGillicuddy worked there and it seemed he was under eternal obligations to Mike for some past favor—somethin' that happened when Mike was in

pollytics—I think 'twas bein' released from the penitentiary or some little thing like that. This McGillicuddy was makin' big wages and always carried his money on him; he wud be havin' a thousand or two in his clothes and cud slip Mike five hundred as aisy as you'd blow the foam from a glass of beer—in the good days that's past and gone. And all day long she had been tryin' to reach him by long-distance tiliphone, but niver an answer or a word of satisfaction was she able to get. And then what the doctor had said again—and all the rest of it.

"WELL, we was clippin' along a road as black as the inside of a tunnel, but nearin' the place, for on up ahead was a big high light a -burnin', whin above our own rattlin' I hear the roar of a motorcycle exhaust and then a *sput-sput* tearin' along, and somebody yells: 'Halt!'"

"I kep' right on, figurin' we was decent, law-bidin' people and 'twas not us was mint.

"Then the machine blazed up alongside of us and a little man on it in a rubber coat yells: 'Why don't ye halt whin you're ordered by the law? Halt, I say!'"

"Wid that I saw his officer's star, and I slowed down. 'We're in a tearin' hurry,' I said. 'What is it, please?' I was not lookin' for trouble, so I resisted the temptation to pull the little scut off his machine and baste him one.

"He was a little red-faced Turk swelled fit to bust wid his own importance and indignation. 'Do you know what road this is?' says he. 'Explain your prinsine here.'

"'We was under the impression it led to the powdher works; and as that's our destination, will you kindly let us by,' I says, nudgin' Nora to keep still and not demean herself by explainin' her business to this overbearin' little rooster.

"'Don't be impident to me, or you'll pay for it,' says he. 'Show me your pass from headquarters.'

"'Will they bar us out for want of a pass?' whispers Nora and begins to wring her hands. 'Oh, me poor Mike!'"

"I thought, meself, the game was up, but I put on a bold front and began to fumble in me pocket.

"'Bedad, I've left it home in me other clothes,' says I. 'But all we ask is a minute's speech wid a frind who's on night shift. If you'll but let me speak wid the doortender or the timekeeper—'

"'Nothin' doin'," says the little officer; and at that, up comes a couple of young soldier-boys wid guns on their shoulders.

"'Here's a chap that's come to call on a frind at the powdher-works,' says the officer, turnin' to him. 'He has his nerve right wid him, but has left his pass at home. And I don't like his looks,' he said again, lower, but not so low that I didn't hear him.

"I'd a mind to tell him he was no Venus himself, but held still for the sake of Nora, who was beginnin' to get hysteriky.

"'Oh, please let us see this man, Mr. Officer,' she cries. 'It's a matter of life and death.'

"Just then, back of us, there rolls up a big limousine. 'What's the trouble?' asks a woman's voice, and I see she was alone and drivin'."

"The soldier-boys waited while the policeman addressed her, and in a minute I made out from the conversation that she was the superintendent's wife come to bring him a late lunch or the like. I nudged Nora. 'Do you go over and talk with her,' I whispered.

"Nora climbed down, and in about three minutes I knew by the way they had their heads together iv'rything was all right. Prinsintly the woman said: 'I'll take this lady to the timekeeper and be responsible for her, boys. I promise you I'll stay right by.'

"The soldiers and the little cop whispered together, and then they saluted again and said, 'If ye say so, Mrs. Gordon,' and the little cop gives a contemptuous snort and sput-sputs away in the dark. The superintendent's wife drives down the road slow, wid Nora; and I sat waitin'."

"But I thought you said you were arrested," I complained.

Tim grinned. "Have patience, Miss Fanny. Remimber the night was young."

"BY and by Nora comes trudgin' back, a sintro on each side of her. She was in a terrible state. 'He's not there,' she said. 'He's off shift. And the mutton-headed omadahau of a timekeeper cuddin't give me his address—all he has is his "nixt of kin"—to where they sind the suspender buttons, if anny are left, in case of an accident. His name is Murphy, and his address is the Gates Hotel in Gary, and there's where we'll go. 'Tis aisy to see this is a man-run concern,' says Nora, spit-tin' mad. 'All this hullabaloo about leavin'

us get as far as the gate and then not havin' the address of their own employees! Wastin' me time, and me poor Mike lyin' there—Mother of mercy, what are ye doin'?' Start the thing!"

"I made allowances for her state of mind and said nothing. Prinsintly we were off, and I noticed a new note in the tunes the flivver was playin', and I saw that she was runnin' on three cylinders; but thinks I, 'We'll fetch Gary, annyhow.' And after several false moves we located the Gates Hotel, which was a bohunk boardin'-house.

"There was oilcloth on the floor and a dozen or fifteen speckled spittoons ranged in rows along the sides. The air was blue wid tobacco-smoke and a phonygraf in one corner, wid the muffler off, was screechin' out 'Pretty Baby.' And loungin' about was a dozen or so hunkeys, pickin' their teeth and holdin' fast to their dinner-pails, waitin' to go on shift at the mills or the powder works, and others was comin' in. 'Twas a real classy boardin'-house.

"The proprietor's wife came out to see what we wanted. She had a face like a plate and was built like a movin'-van. We asked her was there a man stoppin' there by the name of Murphy. She said, 'Ya-h-h, but he is to bedt,' and she wasn't a woman you'd start an argymint wid: I had a hunch and slipped her a dollar I found in me clothes, and then she said she wud call him, and wint upstairs. Prinsintly she came back, towin' a meek little man wid spectacles ridin' his nose, lopsided, and lookin' as if he'd been sleepin' in his clothes. Says he, blinkin': 'Is it the message I told ye to call me for?'

"'Nah,' says the woman. 'These people wandt to see you.'

"I had a misgivin' we'd took a wrong turn, but I braced him wid 'Good evenin' to you, sir. Be you nixt of kin to Con McGillicuddy?'

"His eyes bulged out, and he began to look mad. 'I haven't the pleasure of the gentleman's acquaintance,' said he, 'and I don't know what you're talkin' about. And I'd like to know what license you have to rout a man out—'

"'Oh, plase excuse us, sir,' broke in Nora, and then she started to explain, and the little chap got over his peeve and begun to look interested. 'That's a sad state of affairs,' says he, 'and I'm sorry I'm not the chap that's wanted. I'm from the East,' says he, 'and I was sint here to take subscriptions for the *Gentlewoman's Guide*,

and I'm frank to say this is not a fruitful field for that kind of work. To put it stronger, it's an absolute desert, and so I've been reduced to this in the interim of waitin' for ixpinse money to be tiligraphed to me.'

"Well, I was sorry for his troubles, but had plinty of me own, and Nora was gettin' hysteriky again, so I started to bid him good-by, but he stopped me wid:

"Wait, maybe I can be of assistance. Will some of yez shut off that devil's contraption in the corner,' he yells, speaking to the hunkeys and meanin' the phonny-graf. 'There, that's better; a man can hear himself think. Now, does anny of ye know a man named McGillicuddy at the powdher works,' he says. 'Did ye say he was in the acid room?'—to me.

"Not a hunkey moved. 'Well, thin, do anny of y' know a man named Murphy? Or was there a man used to board here by that name?'—turnin' to the proprietor's wife, who had just lumbered in again.

"Then a hunkey had a brainstorm and rose to his feet, excited. 'Me know Red Morphee. Big man. He room by Cosy Rest.'

"Yah-h,' says the lady movin'-van, waggin' her head violent. 'Red Morphee. He get boss job at powd' works. He no good.'

"Write it down, Tim,' says Nora.

"Then another hunkey got agitated. 'Joe Morphee me know. He live by Pasinsky's house. Other side of powd' works.'

"Write it down,' says Nora.

"Just then in comes a scrap of a messenger-boy—that shud have been wrapped in the innocent dreams of a child at that hour—but he switches his cigarette around and calls out: 'Wire for Mr. Murphy.'

"The little man grabs the tiligram and reads it over twice, careful; then he straightens up wid a grunt and says: 'Me money's at the office waitin' for me at last, thank Heaven! Now, this Red Murphy, might he not be your man? Tell us all you know about him,'—to the proprietor's wife.

"Twas little enough she cud tell, but the little man nods like he's satisfied, and folds up the tiligram and puts it careful in his pocket. All this time Nora was twitchin' me coat wid impatience, and I made to start again, but the little man ducks for the stairs and cries: 'Wait, wait till I get me coat and I'll go along. I'll welcome divar-

sion for the rest of the night, and if you'll think what it's mint to be stuck in this Gehenna for three weeks, you'll not deny me it.'

"You can come and welcome,' says Nora. 'On'y there's no time to spare, and for the love of Mary, crank up and be movin', Tim! Oh, me poor, poor Mikel! What will you think I'm doin' all this while?'

"WE hurrooshed around to the Cosy Rest and 'twas like the Gates Hotel as much as two peas in a pod, on'y a little more so, wid a bunch settin' around that looked like they'd just broke jail. The proprietor was a broken-nosed 'Uffisky' that gargled his words like he had a fishbone in his throat. Faith, I was glad I had the little man Murphy wid me, for I did not fancy the look of the place at all.

"But we found our man and it was lucky he'd just come in and was not in bed, for I'd hate to be the one that disturbed *his* beauty sleep—take it from me! He was six foot high and had red hair and a prize-fighter's reach. And he had a beautiful brogue—not like mine, but continuous and logical, the very spit of a tarrier just over. On'y his eyes were mean and little. But he was no nixt of kin to Con McGillicuddy, though he said the name had a grand ring to it and he'd 'a been proud to oblige us.

"Why not invite him to come along wid us,' says the little Murphy man aside to me. 'For the nights are long and 'tis an awful thing whin grown men are reduced to ice-cream sodys and piksher shows for divar-sion. And besides, he'd be a good one to have wid us in case of trouble, which we may run up against.'

"So I asked the big man wud he like to join us as there was room in the car and the night was young. And the little man chipped in a word or two, and he had a way wid him that was very persuasive. And the moon had come up, and the stars were out, and the cool of the night was timpting alongside of the place we were in where you cud have shoveled out the air in chunks. So the big man says he will be glad to go along for an hour or two, but must get back in time to get his sleep, for he goes on shift in the morning. And he gave us the names of a couple more Murphys which he recalled, and I wrote them down.

"Now, you'll wonder why I did such a fool thing as to take these people along

wid me whin I was on a life-and-death matter, as you might say, but there was some-thin' about the little man that hypnotized me. And I thought the both of thim, knowin' Gary so much better than we did, we might need their help. And the little man was as cheerful as if he was goin' to a party, and he tells Nora to keep good heart and we'll find the Murphy that's nixt of kin if we have to roust out iv'ry bohunk between the steel-mills and the powdher works. And he says not to take the doctor's decision as final, as often they're wrong, and he cud tell her of a case he knew where a man was given two hours to live and that night he was able to sit up to liver and onions, and was now workin' in a coal-yard. And he jollied her along until pretty soon she was all cheered up.

"Then he turned his attention to the Red Murphy and got chummy wid him, tellin' him of the turrible time he'd been havin' tryin' to sell the *Gentlewoman's Guide* in Gary, and relatin' some of his experiences which was fit to split your sides. And the Red Murphy grew more cheerful too, and prisintly I heard the little man sympathizin' wid him on the terrible calamity that had come upon the State wid the last election, and droppin' his voice to a whisper, and I strained me ears, and 'twas not long before I heard a mite of a gurgle, and almost at wance the red man got very cheerful indeed.

"Me scalp began to prickle and cold chills run down me back as I thought to meself: 'They've a bottle uncorked between thim, and God knows what will come now. Heaven forgive me! What have I let meself and this poor innocent woman in for?' But we was bangin' along, makin' a noise like an army truck loaded wid tin-ware, and whin I took heed of the sounds of distriss comin' from under the hood, I knew 'twas beyond reason that we cud run much longer, and there wud not be time for thim to get very drunk before we had to stop for good.

"WE were all this time callin' on Murphys, of which we had gathered a list half as long as your arm, for each place we stopped we learned of one or two more. And was Murphy a favorit' name wid thim honest sons of toil? I'll say it was! But they was more remarkable for variety even than number. There was blonde and brunette and albino Murphys, colored and wop and Lithuanian Murphys,

and Murphys wid a Scotch burr to their talk—which was about the on'y ones that had a right to the name. There was anny number of Murphys that carried the thought of sauerkraut and Limburger right wid thim—you did not have to wait till they opened their mouths. And we found one Chineese Murphy. The little magazine Murphy man said that manny of thim fur-eigners whose names sounded like an internment camp had tried to camouflage themselves by adoptin' a family monicker more along the lines of popular taste, just then. He was probably right.

"But with all our exertions and trouble we were no nearer gettin' a line on the next-of-kin Murphy than we'd been at first, and time was goin'. Poor Nora was wailing that she'd never see Mike again—God rest his soul!—and now that he was gone, wud he forgive her for leavin' him this way, and that her one consolation was that Father Kelly had been wid' him in the last hours, and may the blight of Heaven fall foriver on those that might have saved him before it was too late, achone, achone!

"The big man begun to fidget around restless, and prisintly he said: 'Look here, I've got to be gettin' back and have me sleep. Turn her around.'

"'What, you wud leave a lady in distriss like this?' says the little man. 'It can't be. I haven't sized you up that way, and I'm seldom mistaken in me man,' says he, givin' him a slap on the shoulder.

"'Well and good,' says the big man, 'but this is not my funeral. I have other matters to attind to,' says he, 'and I've spent all the time I can spare, gallopin' over these roads wid these two lunatics.'

"'Tch,' says the little man. 'We have not gone to Pasinsky's yet. Drive there.'

"'But that's beyond the powdher-works,' says the big man. 'Not for me! Drive me back, I say.'

"I had stopped for a minute to change a spark-plug in spite of the protestin' of Nora, for the engine was fair meltin', and I'd no mind to be sued for damages by anny of the Machin tribe. The little man was holdin' an electric torch for me to see by, and he took out his watch and looked at it. 'Tis bare one-thirty,' says he, 'and we are not quitters to give up the chase at this early hour. No, indeed! We will l'ave no stone unturned to be of aid to this poor afflicted woman. We can take a cross-cut road to Pasinsky's and get into Gary that way in no time. Let's go.'

"'Well, make it snappy,' growls the big man. 'I thought it was later.' He dragged his words a little, and I knew at wance that his wits were not as keen as they might be, and I remembered the gurglin' I had heard a while back. And, wakin' up, as you might say, I took heed of more: that as the evenin' and other influences had progressed, the red man's beautiful brogue had grown less, as if at times he forgot it entirely. And in the nature of things, y' know, it shud have been just vicersey.

"I CRANKED her up, and we started again, and we reached the crossroad where the bushes were thick and growin' close to the edge of the macadam. You know how it is out there: a regular wilderness but a couple of miles from town. We were in the middle of one of these roads and whooping along, when the flivver stopped dead still.

"'I knew it!' says I.

"'What's wrong?' asked the little man, and Nora weeps wid fresh anguish: 'We'll be here the night! I see it. 'Tis the ind of it all!'

"'There's iv'rything wrong,' says I, 'but I think the immejiate cause of our stoppin' is a short circuit in the timer wires. Have either of you a bit of tape about ye? If not, we may as well make ourselves comfortable till mornin'.'

"Then the little Murphy man, who was most resourceful, produced a roll from his pocket, and says he'll hold the torch again and maybe I can fix the trouble. And he looks at his watch again, and I see he is kind of listenin', and I also see he is keepin' close watch of the big Murphy man.

"Him, the big red Murphy, was rumblin' and sizzlin' inside of him something tremenjous, and then he explodes into language the kind you'll find indicated wid stars and exclamation points when you come upon it in the magazines. Nora cried, 'Oh!' and clapped her hands to her ears.

"'That's not pretty talk,' says the little man. 'Stop it.'

"'Stop it, will I?' roars the big man. 'Who'll make me? I see I must walk three miles, but as you're to blame for it, I'll take time to wring your fool neck before I start.' And he climbs out of the machine.

"'Oh, no,' says the little man, gently, and at the same time steppin' to the side of the road. 'You will ride back nice and peaceable, I assure you. And as you're

forgettin' yourself in the prisence of a lady, 'twill pain me to have to—'

"The big man cut off his words wid a lunge at him, and the little man dances around in front as quick as a flash, and yells: 'Throw up your hands!' And there in the moonlight he stood wid a magazine gat in each fist so close they was almost touchin' the big man's chest.

"There was not a sound from the machine, and Nora was paralyzed wid fright.

"'Frisk him,' says the little man to me. 'Go round behind him and get his gun. Don't be afraid. I can shoot wid me left as straight as me right, and I wuddn't ask a better target.'

"I did not know was it a hold up or what, but I did not think the time was opportune for makin' inquiries.

"'Ah-h!' says the little man, as I pulled an ugly, bull-nosed forty-five from the big man's hip. 'Now, keep it pointed at him and sidle around here and reach your other hand in me side pocket. Put the whistle you'll find there between me lips.'

"At this the big man gives a jerk, but the little man yells, 'Steady!' and he stood still again.

"The little Murphy man blew a blast that wud have waked the dead, and at that same minute from the direction of the powder-works comes a regular hurricane of pistol shots, then the noise of shoutin'.

"'Ah-h,' says the little man again, 'they've got thim!'

"The big man was pantin' like a cornered steer, and of a sudden he made a jump for the brush. But he must have caught his foot, for he wint sprawling, and the little man fired two shots just to quiet him, and the big man sat up mournful and held up his hands again.

"Then I cud hear, quite a ways down the road, the sput-sput of motorcycles coming.

"'We've been shadowing you these months, Corky Schultz,' says the little man. 'They've got your number in Washington, and you wont be hatchin' anny more plots like this for one while, you measly spy! The likes of you to profane a name like Murphy! The brogue comes aisy to him,' he says to me, 'for his mother was an Irishwoman. To think that wid even a drop of that blood in his veins he shud be what he is!'

"I BEGUN to see light. 'You're wid the Secret Service?' said I.

"'I am. And Murphy's me rightful

name. I'm sorry to have caused you and the lady this agitation, but you're little excursion fitted into my plans beautiful. I knew the attempt would be made to blow up the powder-works tonight, and I had the boys ready. And I got orders to take Schultz. He wud have made his get-away at daybreak, but I cud not arrist him too soon and give the others warnin', so I thought to get him off quiet and wait—

"Then up comes three motorcycle police wid' the smell of gunpowdher on thim."

"Did you get thim all?" cries the little man Murphy.

"We did that. 'Twas a grand haul. And in the very act of plantin' a fuse."

"Then snap the bracelets on Mr. Schultz, the brains of the party," says the little man; and the deed was done.

"If you'll wait here a bit," says the little Murphy man to me, "I'll sind out a man wid gasoline, for I opened your pet cock on the road awhile back, and 'tis not the short circuit on your wires that stopped you, though there may be one, but because you're dry. I had planned to stop about here where the boys wud be on the job and in call at this time, and I cud not take chances on a miscue. I'm only sorry that we did not find your man."

"Wid that a little squib of a cop steps up and says: 'Who is this? Why, 'tis the same chap that wanted to get in the powder-works early this evenin' and had no pass. He is probably mixed up in this thing, and the woman too. I will arrist thim both as accomplices.'"

"Then I see it was the little shrimp of an officer who was so chesty wid us in the shank of the evenin'."

"You're wrong, Barney," says the little Murphy man. "These people are O. K. And they've rendered me a great service. We will treat them kindly and sind them home."

"Indeed, and we will not," says the little cop, waggin' his head. "They've been tearin' up and down the road disturbin' the peace and honest people's sleep. Their lights are out, which is against rules, and beyond all that, I think I smell liquor on thim. There are charges to be preferred, even if they had no hand in the powder-works job, so we will take thim along."

"The little Murphy man makes a sound between a snort and a chuckle, and begins persuasive: 'Now, Barney, listen to me—'

"At that Nora, who cud stand no more, comes down from the machine and steps

beside us. Her eyes were wild. 'Arrist us and be done wid it,' she cried. 'I wish they had blown up the powder-works! I wud dance on the ashes! For if the place was run right and they'd had Con McGillicuddy's address, I cud have found him in time to save me husband. I wud not be a widow tonight!'

"Con McGillicuddy," says the little cop, stupid. 'What is she talkin' about? What does she want wid him?'

"We've spint the night lookin' for him or his nixt of kin, Murphy," says I.

"Con McGillicuddy is me cousin and lives wid us on Yates Avenue," says the little cop. "Me name is Murphy. Why did you not—"

"Nora had grabbed him. 'The saints in heaven be praised! Oh, maybe it's not too late! Tell us where we can find him.'"

"An' I niver heard him called anything but Barney!" says the little Murphy man, his jaw droppin'.

"Con came home at six and changed his clothes," says the little cop, "and took the seven-thirty for Chicago. He said as how he was after havin' a long-distance telephone call— Now, glory be! what ails the woman? Grab her, quick!"

"'Twas too much. Nora flops dead away and it took us all the best of an hour to bring her to. . . . You see, they cud neither read nor write at the powder-works. 'Twas Yates Avenue, not *Gates Hotel*."

TIM straightened up and knocked the ashes off his pipe. "There was a little in the paper, but not much, for they was suppressin' those things. Of course, I niver knew all the details. I'll leave it to you if that wasn't adventure enough for one night."

"But finish the story," I said.

"Sure, I have, Miss Fanny."

"You have not! Did Mike get well or die, or what?"

"Oh, that! Sure, whin we got back the nixt morning, after they'd fixed us up wid breakfast and gasoline and the like, iv'ry-thing was over and Mike had come out of the chloroform beautiful and had had a night's sleep, and was raisin' Cain wid the hospital people because they wuddn't give him a drink. McGillicuddy got there about ten minutes after we'd gone. Mike alive? I'll say he's alive! He borrowed twenty dollars off me on'y yestiddy mornin'."

The Man Who Knew



CHAPTER I

A PASSER-BY

FOUR years later Bob Hale was to remember passing Randolph Templeton that night in the rain—remember it first as merely a coincidence, scarcely worth noting. But in less than another year, not five in all after Templeton splashed by, that trifling incident took its place in a tremendous tragedy, a thing that threatened to crush Hale, that destroyed Templeton, and condemned Hale's companion of the night, Dean Hazard, to his doom.

That Hale and Hazard had recognized Templeton at all was because the wind was at his back and their own umbrella had been lifted, at the cost of additional dampness, to reduce the dangers of steering a course along the sidewalk of the South Shore village. It was halfway from the trolley stop to the Willis house that Templeton loomed in the dark. Their wind-tossed "Hello!" brought him abruptly out of his thoughts. His lips moved mechanically, although his response was lost in a swirl of rain. That was all there actually was of an incident that less than five years later was etched in lines of fire on Bob Hale's mind.

And Hazard's laughing comment, "Templeton looks as if he were carrying the cares of the world instead of merely the State legislature!" Later Hale remembered that too. How characteristic it had been of our blindness! A joke at Templeton's serious aspect. And yet how prophetic of their perils! Truly Templeton walked that night with the future—his own, Hale's, Hazard's—walked with thoughts that were to upset the world for them, and others.

EARLY that afternoon a fog had rolled in from the sea, and on toward evening Hale and Hazard, consulting in the Drive apartment they shared, had decided that the gray murk that clung clammy to the windows overlooking the river would make an automobile more of a nuisance than a convenience in getting out on Long Island.

"Let's not take the car," they had remarked, almost simultaneously.

A queer expression came over Hale's face as he looked toward Hazard. There was a faint suggestion of a smile about Hazard's thin lips and in the lines about the corners of his gray eyes, but all trace of it was lost in the eyes themselves. They studied him coldly, steadily, seeming to look right into him.

A Complete Novelette



Charles K. Van Riper

"You're at it again," Hale complained nervously.

"We did seem to hit on it that time," agreed Hazard, and added tormentingly: "But it could have been your reading my thoughts as easily as me reading yours. Who knows?"

"You know!" said Hale quickly. "You've done just that thing time and again deliberately." Then he saw Hazard was laughing, a quiet, good-humored and altogether disarming laugh. "And—well," Hale finished lamely, "I wish you wouldn't."

"I promise," laughed Hazard, tapping a cigarette against his silver case. Then he speculated gravely: "But seriously, Bob, it might be that you're reading my thoughts."

"There isn't a chance of it—" Hale had begun earnestly before he perceived Hazard's insincerity. "Confound it, anyway!" he exclaimed in chagrin that was deeper than he showed. He really had known some uneasy moments because of the increasingly frequent occasions on which Hazard had spoken the precise thought that was in his mind. Sometimes, as in the suggestion of abandoning the idea of making the trip by automobile, they had voiced the thought at the same instant. But there

were other times when Hazard had put Hale's thoughts into words before Hale himself could do it. At first it had been amusing, bizarre; afterward it had excited a semi-scientific curiosity about thought-transference; but latterly it had irritated Hale. He found himself wondering if Hazard could really read his thoughts with any regularity, if there weren't moments when they were alone in which the other had made himself privy to things he had not mentioned, intimate things, perhaps too delicate for discussion. The possibility made Hale uncomfortable. Each fresh manifestation of the other's uncanny power stripped him of his poise while in Hazard's presence, and now he was distinctly ill at ease.

HAZARD, his cigarette lighted, chose to make amends.

"Your idea about motoring down is capital," he declared. "Personally I'm anything but keen about driving in a fog. I'd much rather trust to tracks than to my imagination." Hale was resentful, wary. "At sea," continued Hazard, "where there are no telegraph poles and ditches, a man may get by in a fog on dead reckoning, but ashore it would be just reckoning the dead." Hazard did not refer again to his

excursion into Hale's thoughts, and by the time they dismissed their taxis at the Long Island entrance of the Pennsylvania Terminal it was forgotten—had become in Hale part of that subconscious force which loyalty to the other would not let him identify as distrust.

The train was well filled when Hale and Hazard boarded it, and the aisle halves of seats opposite each other was the best they could do. Hale sat in with a youth who shrank toward the window without looking up from the magazine he was reading; Hazard's seat-mate was a hulking, ugly-looking negro who only hitched over when Hazard sat down, and even then without yielding much of the seat. The train started almost immediately, the roar in the tunnel discouraging any idea of conversation; and by the time the train was again traveling above-ground, Hazard seemed so intent on some subject of absorbing thought that Hale did not disturb him.

For a minute Hale studied the negro beside the opposite window. There was an old scar on the fellow's right cheek; his eyes were small and the whites bloodshot, the nose flat, with wide nostrils, and the lips unusually thick, even for a negro. "A tough customer," thought Hale; and drawing an evening paper from his pocket, he began to browse through it in an effort to kill time.

Halfway to their destination the youth beside Hale rose, and still absorbed in his reading, moved down the aisle—to be hurled against the back of a seat, knocking a fat man's hat over his eyes as the train stopped for his station. Hale moved over to make room for Hazard, and through the window he saw that the fog had lifted and that it was raining.

"We might have known it," he remarked to Hazard in reporting the discovery. "We could have come in the car as easily as not."

"We're in luck that we didn't," answered Hazard. It seemed to Hale that there was something enigmatic in the reply. He would have pursued it further, but his companion was staring straight ahead in an intense, fascinated way peculiar to his periods of deep abstraction. Instead of questioning, Hale looked again at the negro, now peering out of the window, and then settled once more to his perusal of the paper as the train worked its way along the South Shore.

"BOB," began Hazard some time later.

Hale looked up inquiringly. "Well?" But apparently Hazard had reconsidered his purpose for he muttered, "Oh, nothing," and drew the folds of his thoughts about him.

When Hale, at the trainman's announcement, remarked: "Here's where we get out," Hazard started violently, with a surprised: "Eh? Oh, yes, our stop!" Hale noticed the negro watching with clumsily concealed curiosity as they rose.

The departing train left them in a wet, windy desolation. A swaying arc-light at the highway crossing showed the diagonal streaks of rain and brought a dull gleam to the windows of the closed shops opposite the depot. They were the only passengers set down by the train, now distantly whistling its ghostly dirge for the next station. The village's historic hack was no where in sight. The situation was saved by the arrival of a less picturesque but more persevering conveyance.

A trolley-car came rumbling up through the night and stopped long enough on the farther side of the railroad crossing for the two travelers to get aboard. As they seated themselves for the brief ride to the street on which the Willises lived, Hale exclaimed: "Say, but wasn't that negro an ugly looking brute? I'm glad he didn't get off with us."

"He's going to the next station," said Hazard quickly.

"You talked to him?" asked Hale in surprise, then closed his teeth over his lower lip and avoided looking at Hazard. There was an awkward silence. Hale was certain that the other had not spoken to the negro, that any information he had concerning the black man had come in a subtler way than speech, had come noiselessly, on the silent wings of thought. Hale's own uneasiness returned. The tension was broken by the conductor's complaining reminder: "Fares!"

Afterward Hazard talked along lightly, railing at Long Island, insisting that its semi-liquid consistency was proof that Long Island hadn't been an island long enough and was too recently risen from the sea. Hale, however, could not shake off the uncomfortable feeling that the two experiences with Hazard's strange power had given him. It was not until they had left the car and were literally launched on the walk of two blocks to the Willis house that other interests crowded out Hale's

alarm over the disturbing circumstances. They were valiantly steering their course by the bleary street-lamp across the way from the Willis house when Templeton passed. And Hale, who had been so upset by Hazard's mental wizardry, so fearful of its consequences, remembered later the utter unconcern with which he brushed by that other man who was to be so sinister a figure in the pattern of the future.

CHAPTER II

THE WILLIS GIRLS

NAN WILLIS was seated at the piano. No one with any appreciation of the artistic would have had her sitting anywhere else; and Nan—slim, dark, with the girlishness of less than twenty and the womanliness of more than nineteen—was appreciative. Nan's was an aristocratically oval face under an abundance of dusky hair, a face with well-set eyes, and lips that gave the illusion of just being about to curve in a whimsical smile.

Drifting over the keys, her fingers recalled "Absent," a sweetly wistful, melancholy little thing she loved. She was singing softly:

"Sometimes between long shadows on the grass
The little truant waves of sunshine pass—"

From the hall doorway came her sister's voice: "That will win him, Nan."

The music stopped. Nan swung around on the piano-bench to face her sister. Catherine Willis was not the striking type of the girl at the piano. Nan's hair was dark, hers was an intermediate brown. The most remarkable of Catherine's features was not found except in searching for some quality in her face that from the first was haunting, elusive. Her mouth was sensitive, her nose finely patrician, her ears, where they peeped out from under the soft luster of her hair, were delicate. Her eyes—that was it! Catherine's eyes were green, strange gray-green eyes, with golden flecks in them. Nan was a flower, perfection in itself; Catherine's was the beauty of the clouds, shifting, somber, savage, serene—endless possibilities.

And Catherine was all woman. Less than four years older than her sister, she was nevertheless without any of the girlishness apparent in the other. This difference

may have been accentuated by Catherine's dress of jade velvet.

"You look wonderful, Catherine!" Nan exclaimed.

Catherine laughed, stepping into the room. "You can't bribe me with flattery. But even at that I don't believe I'll tell him."

"Who?" demanded Nan. "Who are you talking about?"

"Why, your nice Bobby Hale, of course," Catherine retorted, undertaking to rearrange a profusion of marigolds in their shallow bronze bowl on the center-table.

"I don't see why you should tease me about Bob," observed Nan. "Didn't he introduce you to Dean Hazard?" And then:

"Catherine," she asked curiously, "who came when I thought it was the boys?"

Catherine paused in arranging the flowers with one golden flower uplifted. "Oh," she replied carelessly, "a man trying to call on some one of our neighbors—turned in at the wrong house."

"I wondered," sighed Nan. "I thought it was Bob and Dean, but then I knew I could recognize Bob's voice, and I didn't. You rushed past me so fast on the stairs I didn't have a chance to ask you. Catherine, I've got a notion you like Dean Hazard."

Catherine became very busy with the marigolds. "Silly! What makes you think that?"

"I don't exactly know," Nan reflected. "The way you act when he's around, I guess, or when you get a letter from him."

Catherine, rather disinterestedly, asked: "Do I act differently?"

"Seems to me you do," declared Nan. "You're not like that with Bert Edsall or Cranston Williams. I used to think you rather liked Randolph Templeton that winter in California. Templeton is nice enough, I suppose, and if he is kind of conceited, he has sort of an excuse, for he really has been splendid in the Legislature. But Dean Hazard is a perfect peach! Don't you think he's nice?"

Catherine tweaked her sister's cheek, exclaiming: "Miss Inquisitive!" Then:

"I hear steps on the porch."

SHE went into the hall and opened the door for Bob Hale and Dean Hazard.

"Hello!" called Bob. "This weather is a fright."

"Isn't it?" Catherine agreed, and sug-

gested: "Leave your umbrella there, if you will. I'll take your coats."

"How have you been?" asked Hazard.

"Never better," she confessed. "Except that both our maids have left."

"Not the new colored girl?" asked Hazard quickly.

"Yes," was the reply. "What made you ask?" The tone of the inquiry had surprised her.

"Just that you had such a time to get her," Hazard explained lamely.

"Hello, Nan!" cried Hale, as the younger sister appeared in the doorway. Nan rather pointedly ignored him to smile on Hazard and give him a pleasant "Hello, Dean." Her recognition of Hale was a disinterested—"and Bob," that came as a sort of afterthought.

"Awfully glad you came," she said, smiling on Hazard. "Fearful weather, isn't it?"

But Bob was not to be denied. "Say, but I was disappointed when you couldn't come into the theater the other night," he broke in.

"I was too," Nan answered. Then in a changed tone she added: "It's the strangest thing, but I'd been thinking of you all that day."

"What were you thinking?" asked Hale hopefully.

"Nothing definite—just sort of vaguely," continued Nan. "It wasn't until four o'clock I promised Alice Lawrence to be at her dinner-party. And sure enough, at half past four you called up."

"Thought-transference," ventured Hazard with an amused glance at his discomfited companion. "Telepathy—or whatever you want to call it."

"Those things are awfully interesting. It happens so often that you'll be thinking of some one and then get a letter from or about them. And people really have premonitions about things. Catherine had the strangest experience when Mother died. Tell Dean about it."

"I was at boarding school," said Catherine, lowering her eyes; "my first year there. One night early in February as I was sleeping, my mother came and passed her hand over my forehead—that is, I dreamed she did. But it was so real I've always felt as if it actually happened, though she was in Florida and I was at school in Ossining. I woke all a-shiver and couldn't get to sleep again for some time. When I looked at my watch, it was

twenty-five minutes after three. After a while I dozed off, but in the morning when I woke, it was the first thing I thought of—it made me feel cold and creepy. I could see Mother standing there. I scarcely ate any breakfast. When I went to recitations I began to laugh at myself for being so silly—but before the first class was over Miss Stapleton came to the door and asked me to step into the hall. She closed the door and put her arm around me and handed me a telegram. Mother had died at quarter past three that morning."

Nan added quietly: "She hadn't any idea that Mother was ill. It was sudden—heart-failure. She was all right, apparently, when she went to bed, about midnight, but at three o'clock the attack came on and she died in fifteen minutes."

THERE was a silence. At length Catherine rose. "Do you want to play some bridge?" she asked.

"Fine!" applauded Hazard. "I owe you a beating for the one you gave me last time."

"And the time before that," added Catherine, rummaging through a drawer. "What's more, I don't think you can beat me tonight."

"Difference of opinion," recited Hazard, "is what makes horse-races and politics. By the way, you've rather a distinguished fellow-townsmen in Randolph Templeton. Considering the double handicap of coming from Long Island and being a reformer, he's creating quite a sensation in the Legislature."

"He's to speak at our Thursday Morning Club," Catherine explained.

"Let's play in the dining-room," said Nan. "I hate dinky little tables."

"So do I," agreed Hale.

"I say, can't we stick to this room or the library?" objected Hazard concernedly.

"The dining-room," Hale insisted.

"You seem to be outnumbered, Dean," remarked Catherine, starting for the double doors.

"On to the dining room!" called Hale as he caught Nan's arm and started away with her.

"Oh, Bob!" interposed Hazard.

Nan and Hale paused, turning. "Yes?" said Hale. Catherine, entering the dining-room, called: "Come on!"

"Will you excuse us for a minute, Nan?" asked Hazard.

"Surely," she said, and followed her sister.

HALE, somewhat mystified, retraced his steps. "What is it?" he inquired.

"You remember that darky who sat in the seat with me on the train coming out?" Hazard began excitedly. Hale's startled expression was answer enough, and Hazard went on: "Bob, that fellow intends to rob this house." There flashed before Hale the picture of a hulking black man with a scarred cheek, and a blue-black, drooping under lip. He recalled Hazard's confident statement that the fellow was going to get off at the next station.

As if picking up the thread of Hale's thought with certain fingers, Hazard explained: "He was riding to the next town to cover his tracks here."

Hale's reaction to this reading of his thoughts was surprising, even to himself. He rose in sudden rebellion against Hazard's superior power. "It's all tommy-rot!" he blurted. "You can't read my thoughts, any more than I can yours. It's just your imagination; you've let it run away with you."

Hazard smiled tolerantly, and Hale wondered if the mind back of those piercing gray eyes, Hazard's mind with its penetrating sixth sense, had seen through the pretense of ridicule. "Perhaps," said Hazard, and moved swiftly to where the parted curtains hung before the French windows. He looked out into the night; the lips that were parted in expectancy tightening into a thin line. Hazard stepped back.

"Bob," he said in a low voice, "would you recognize that fellow through the rain the width of the street away?"

Hale stepped nervously toward the window.

"Don't let him see you," cautioned Hazard.

Peering breathlessly past the edge of the draped velvet, Hale could just make out an indistinct figure moving in the deeper shadows beyond the street lamp across the roadway—a figure that, blurred as it was, resembled that of the evil-looking black man.

Hale shuddered as he drew back. "What'll we do?" he asked in a hushed voice.

"There's a wall safe in this room," explained Hazard. "He won't dare try anything while we're here."

Nan's voice came in protest from the

dining-room: "Aren't you ever coming, Bob?"

"Go in there," directed Hazard, "and make some excuse for playing the game in here."

Hale looked at Hazard with an expression that was almost awe; then, without a word, he turned and left the room.

CHAPTER III

WHAT THE CARDS SHOWED

WITH the same soft chime as the first, the eleventh stroke drifted from the old clock in the Willis hallway, floated through the silence and melted away in the dim spaces of the house. A gust of wind swept a swirl of rain against the French windows toward the street, but there was not a sound from the four who sat intently at the little card-table in the living-room. It was Hazard's lead.

Catherine Willis, both hands closed over her cards, was holding them against the jade velvet at her breast. Bob Hale, who was dummy, scowled darkly at the lamp on the center table. Nan, her lips pressed tightly together, was leaning forward slightly toward Hazard, her partner, who frowned intently at a spot on the table over the upper edge of a fan of four cards he held in his hand. Hale lifted his eyes and stared at the strip of mirror over the mantel. But the others did not move. The silence continued. Then Hazard gave a short gasp, and with his eyes on Nan's, laid the seven of spades on the board.

"We win," cried Nan triumphantly. "The rest are mine." And the cards she laid down proved her claim.

Hazard, smiling, demanded: "What do you say now, Catherine?" Of course she could say nothing; for Hale, rather disgruntled, looked up from the score he completed to announce: "Their game and rubber. Two out of three."

"Wasn't it exciting!" exclaimed Nan enthusiastically. "I was just praying you'd play a spade. It was our only chance, but from the way I'd played, you couldn't have guessed it. I remembered our mentioning telepathy and wondered if you could get my thought. I concentrated on that card so hard that it hurt." She drew her fingers over her temples.

"That's what I imagined you'd be up to," confessed Hazard. "So I let my mind

go to see if I could get the impression of what you were thinking."

"You did, all right," exulted Nan. "That's surely telepathy. Isn't it wonderful!"

THE cards had been put away after Hazard had given another exhibition of his uncanny power, by naming one chosen secretly by Nan—and had failed at the same trick with Catherine.

Hazard and Catherine were talking tête-à-tête.

Nan's breathless exclamation "Bob!" caused them to face about.

"What?" asked Catherine; but Hazard, his face darkening, exclaimed: "You shouldn't have told her, Bob!" Nan was saying to her sister: "Bob says a burglar is coming here tonight!"

"A burglar!" echoed Catherine.

Hazard undertook to explain. "Coming out on the train, I sat next to a negro. In taking the seat I bumped against him and felt what I'm sure was a revolver in his coat pocket. Telepathy has been a hobby with me, and I've had some success with it; so I decided to try to find out what he was thinking about. The first impression that came to me was of a wall-safe. You have one here, I believe. He seemed familiar with it all. One of your servants was colored."

"You made a queer remark about her when you first came," Catherine recalled.

"This explains it," Hazard answered, adding: "Bob and I are going to waylay this fellow outside the house and muss up his plans."

"You mean things!" scolded Nan. "You wouldn't have told us a thing about it, and we'd have missed all the excitement. I've never seen a real burglar."

"You shouldn't have mentioned it, Bob!" Hazard rebuked his companion crisply.

"We can't miss this chance, Catherine!" exclaimed Nan. "A real burglar. We'll help you catch him."

"No," said Hazard, resolutely shaking his head. "You couldn't help. If he saw you leave the house with us—"

"Why leave the house?" demanded Nan. "Can't we all wait for him here? If you caught him outside, you wouldn't be able to prove anything against him. Trap him here in the house, and you'll have a clear case. Catherine and I can watch."

"But this fellow is a bad one," objected Hazard. "And he has a gun."

"He won't use it," Hale stated authoritatively. "Those fellows carry guns for a bluff. They value their necks too much to use them."

Hale winced when Nan observed quickly: "I read that too." But the remark was quite unconscious. Nan continued her urging: "Come on, Catherine!" It will be exciting!"

"And dangerous," added Catherine.

"Too dangerous," declared Hazard.

"I don't think so," Hale asserted. "But we could arrange it, Dean, so the girls could see without being in any danger. I rather think the fact that we're waiting for him will be such a surprise that he'll forget about everything else."

"It will be thrilling!" exulted Nan. "Let's try it, Catherine!"

CATHERINE considered, her strange eyes narrowed, long oval pools of smoky green. When she spoke, her tone was low, decisive. "I'm willing," she announced, then asked Hazard: "When will he be here?"

"If you really want to go through with this thing," he faltered nervously, "you'll have to do exactly as I say."

"All right," was Nan's answer, supported by Catherine's: "That's agreeable."

"Your father won't be home early?" asked Hazard.

"Wasn't intending to come home," said Catherine. "He's in town at the club, board of governors' meeting."

"I suppose this fellow knew that before he started," muttered Hazard, moving over toward the French windows and pausing before them. "Now," he explained "he's going to come in this way." In resting his hand upon the velvet hangings, Hazard observed that the rain had stopped.

"My plan is this," he continued: "Bob and I will go, make lots of noise about it. After a minute, turn out this light. One of you go upstairs and light the light in your room. The other open the back door for Bob and me. When we leave, we'll go down the street and turn the corner as if on our way to the station. Instead we'll come down the next street, across the back lawn and in the rear way. That won't give him enough time to try anything before we get back. You two keep the lights burning as if you were getting ready for bed. When you hear Bob and me come in, turn out the lights. Bob will come upstairs for

you. Now, where can you watch without being seen?"

"The room across the hall," suggested Catherine; "we can watch him in there." She indicated the mirror above the mantel. "And he won't be able to see us."

"Go in there and try it," instructed Hazard, turning to Nan. "See if you can make out the center-table."

Nan swayed almost imperceptibly, then commanded: "Come on, Bob."

"Why the center-table?" asked Hale, as he was going out with Nan.

"That's where he's going to stop," Hazard said with assurance, to which Hale replied with a shrug of the shoulders. Nan and her escort disappeared.

"Can you see?" asked Hazard when his reconnoitering party had taken up its position in the other room.

"Uh-huh!" Nan replied.

"Good!" was Hazard's comment, and going back to the card-table, he picked it up, exclaiming: "We'll want this out of the way." He started from the room with it.

"I'll get your coats," offered Catherine, going with him, and speculated: "Suppose it doesn't work out as you say?"

"It will," said Hazard, and a moment later Hale and he were struggling into their coats. Hale interrupted the loud-spoken good-bys to whisper in a worried way: "Look here, Dean, is this to be a regular fond farewell?"

"Time for that later," laughed Hazard. "We have to hurry now. Come on." And calling good night, he dragged Hale from the doorway.

CHAPTER IV

THE SILENT INVADER

ALONE and back in the living-room, Nan Willis, twisting her fingers in the edge of her coral scarf, faced her sister. "Catherine," she confessed, "I'm frightened."

"So am I," the other admitted. "We shouldn't have agreed to it."

Nan caught her breath. "But Bob will be back," she consoled herself. Catherine paused in going over to the table. "Bob!" she echoed scornfully. "Nan, you're hopeless!" Then she reached for the beaded chain to switch out the table lamp.

"Oh!" cried Nan. "Wait till I get started upstairs." She scurried for the hall

and from the foot of the stairs called "All right!" Catherine darkened the lamp. In the house, echoing with a rising wind that had followed the rain, there was only the dim illumination of the low-burning light in the hallway. Between the parted velvet curtains at the windows was a ghostly phosphorescence of pale moonlight. "It's terribly creepy!" complained Nan.

"Bob will be back!" taunted Catherine as she reached the doorway into the hall. Nan was scooting upstairs and Catherine went methodically to the switch that controlled the light in the hallway.

"Don't!" cried Nan in alarm from the head of the stairs. "Don't switch off that light. It might be wrong. If they'd wanted it done, they'd have told us."

"They don't know everything," replied Catherine serenely. "Go into our room and turn on the lights. I'll open the back door." She switched off the hall light.

A faint, frightened "Don't be long, Catherine!" was prelude to the slamming of an upstairs door. Catherine passed along the hall, crossed the kitchen, turned the key and drew back a bolt. The back door stood open. A cold draft flowed around her as she stood looking out at familiar objects gleaming palely under the light from a moon struggling through breaking clouds. After a moment Catherine turned and left the door, through which two silent figures entered a moment later.

Hazard and Hale made their way along the dark corridor to the living-room and stopped near the table.

"I knew Nan would think about the hall light!" exclaimed Hale.

"We're idiots!" breathed Hazard, swinging out of his coat. "Get these things out of sight. If your friend saw them, he'd be wise in no time." Without a word Hale took the coat, and as he was disposing of the outer garments Hazard drew his cigarette-case from his pocket, opened it and laid it on the table. Next he removed the ash-tray and match-holder from the center-table to the mantel. Then he surveyed his ground, and had just moved to the window when Hale came back. Hazard was peering around the edge of the velvet hangings.

"Come here, Bob," he called softly, without looking around; and lifting the curtain slightly he said as Hale came alongside: "The black devil has put out the street light."

"Do you suppose we ought to have gone into this?" asked Hale nervously as they drew back from the window.

Instead of answering, Hazard tersely directed: "Hurry and get the girls."

AS Hale left him, Hazard bent above the table. Where the faint moonlight crossed the glossed mahogany lay an ivory-handled paperknife. He picked it up, examining it critically, testing its weight, and at length slipped it into his pocket. Then, as footfalls sounded on the stairs, he stepped over to the doorway.

"I'll get hysterical or scream or something," said Nan breathlessly as she reached the foot of the flight.

"Don't you dare!" warned Hale, and put his arm around her, drawing her into the other room. Catherine paused to whisper: "Bob told us about the street-lamp. It looks as if you're right."

"It's beginning to," said Hazard grimly. "How long have the upstairs' lights been out?"

"Five minutes—" began Catherine, but Hazard cut her short with a warning "S-s-s-h!" Then he motioned her into the other room and himself glided toward the window, flattening himself against the curtain. In the drip of the rain from the eaves he caught the sound of some one crossing the veranda, followed by a scraping sound against the window-frame. The moon made enough brightness between the curtains for Hazard to see reflected in the mirror above the mantel a towering black shape silhouetted against the sickly light. He heard a quick wrenching and splintering, and a swoop of wind swung the long windows inward.

Into the room stepped the hulking intruder—the jacket buttoned tightly over his broad chest soaked with rain, his cap plastered damply to his pointed skull, his trousers streaked with water and his shoes squishing ooily. But for all his bulk and soggy, he advanced lightly as a tiger, noiselessly procured a light chair, and turning it on its side, propped it against a section of the French window to prevent it from closing and blocking his get-away. That done, he drew together the velvet hangings, and stepping back, lifted his electric flash.

The cone of light that the negro turned on the curtains revealed nothing but their dull blue expanse. It had been a breathless business, but Hazard had managed to slip

behind the folds of velvet as the burglar obtained the chair. His ears attuned to an incredible keenness, he heard the stealthy steps of the negro moving toward the center of the room.

Hazard dared to look around the corner of the curtain. He could see the negro's flash spraying the table, center on the cigarette-case, and a heavy hand reaching for the silver case. Abruptly the negro straightened up.

HAZARD dodged back in time, for, although the flash was turned on the velvet hangings, the housebreaker apparently attributed the movement that had alarmed him to the draft from the opened window that was now swaying the curtains gently. But after that Hazard kept cover. The negro was not using his flash now; Hazard could tell that by glancing along the wall against which he was flattened. Again he caught the catlike movement of the man, this time toward the mantel and, Hazard was sure, the matches. The scrape of a safety match against its box verified his surmise and brought a startling sequel.

Rising through the stillness of the house was a strident shriek of horror, a hysterical screech from Nan in the other room. Hazard glided noiselessly from his hiding-place in time to see the face of the negro reflected in the mirror by the light of the match, a swart, ugly face, flat-nosed, the eyes rolled in terror toward the sound as they showed the bloodshot whites. It was only for an instant; then the negro dashed the match to the hearth and with the house still ringing with the scream, plunged the room into darkness.

Springing back from the betraying glass, the burglar collided with the advancing Hazard; and quickly as he had drawn his revolver, it was knocked from his grasp. Hazard drove his knee against the small of the black man's back, crooked an arm around his throat and with a quick, twisting heave floored him before he could resist. The negro fell heavily, and the panting Hazard's pinioning of his arms and planting of his knee at the pit of the other's stomach was a quite unnecessary precaution.

HALE had run in and switched on the lights, and the girls stood in the doorway, Nan shrinking against Catherine. "Get the gun, Bob," directed Hazard, inclining his head to where the automatic lay.

Nan gasped and Catherine caught her breath as Hale darted over and picked up the weapon. "Aim it at him," Hazard instructed. Then rising, he said to the negro: "Get up!"

Sullenly the burglar sat up, rubbing his back where Hazard's knee had hit it, and grunting, lifted his ponderous bulk. "Put up your hands!" ordered Hale. The black man obeyed, shuffling his feet and looking around him. When he saw the sisters standing in the doorway, he grinned.

"What's your name?" demanded Hazard.

"Dunstan, sir; Paul Dunstan," he replied in a surprisingly smooth, musical voice. Without further words Hazard advanced and began to go through the man's pockets. One produced a pair of dice, a rabbit's foot and Hazard's own cigarette-case.

"Thanks!" Hazard remarked ironically as he slipped the case into his own pocket. The other side of the coat yielded a burglar's jimmy fashioned out of a short cold-chisel bent at one end with a flat lip to fit under a window-sash. There was also a razor and a baby's shoe. Hazard felt of the man's hip pockets and was about to place the confiscated articles beside the others on the table when his attention was attracted to the outside breast pocket of the coat. His exploring fingers closed on and brought forth a small medicine-vial filled with white powder.

"Cocaine," Hazard pronounced it, holding up the bottle. A frightened look came into Dunstan's eyes. Don't take it away from me, boss!" he whined, and stretched out his hand for it.

"Keep your hands over your head!" snapped Hale.

"Don't take it!" pleaded Dunstan, jerking up his hands. "Gimme a blow of it. Just one blow before you turn me over to the police." The black man dropped to his knees. "Jest a little—go ahn, boss. They'll send me away for a long trick. Go ahn, boss."

Hazard shook his head, and putting it on the table with the other things, said disgustedly: "Get up off your knees." Then he added: "Where'd you learn to use it?"

"In prison," sniveled the giant negro, rising.

"You're lying," Hazard told him.

"No, ah aint."

"You are," said Hazard. "Where did you learn?"

"Around Harlem," Dunstan confessed.

"Why did you say you learned in prison?" demanded Hazard. "You can't get it there."

"That's what gives Templeton and the other reformers a foundation for their claims," said Hale. "Of course he didn't learn in prison."

"You aint never been in prison," said Dunstan, his eyes longingly on the vial.

"Friends give it to you?" Hazard asked.

"They aint friends, and they don't give it to us," corrected the black man. "They's keepers, and they sells—"

"Bob," said Hazard abruptly, "phone for the police."

"Let's not do that, Dean," interposed Catherine. "Let him go."

"Let him go?" repeated Hazard.

"I think so, too," whispered Nan; and Hale, taking that as his cue, argued: "Yes, Dean, let's turn him loose. If we have him arrested, they'll be dragging us down to police headquarters and the courts and continually running after us with subpoenas."

"I don't think it would be as exciting as I imagined," acknowledged Nan. "It would have been different if he had been a gentleman burglar."

"Gentleman!" ejaculated Dunstan in surprise. "Why, Ah aint no lady burglar!"

The others laughed; and Hazard, pointing to the window said: "Clear out, Dunstan. Get out of here. If I ever see you again, I'll have you arrested on the spot."

The black man, who had entered with the shiftiness of a panther, shuffled toward the window, hesitated and turned, his gaze resting on the treasures on the table. "Boss," he said, "kin Ah have mah good luck?"

"Good luck?" repeated Hazard, mystified.

"Yes, sir," explained Dunstan, "that baby's shoe and the rabbit's foot."

"Let him," Catherine interceded, and Hazard said: "Come and get it, and be smart about it." Dunstan shuffled over to the table and gathered in the furry foot and bootie in a huge paw that he left lying on the table as he rolled his eyes toward Hazard and suggested hopefully: "And the dice?"

"He might as well," ventured Catherine, and with Hazard's nod the black man drew the dice in with the charms, and in lifting them made a deft sweep that also gave him

the vial of cocaine. "Drop that!" ordered Hale before Dunstan could lift his retrieved goods from the table, and the negro glanced up to find the automatic pistol close to his face. He considered the muzzle with a sickly expression, reluctantly letting go of the cocaine.

"Get out!" snapped Hazard, and Dunstan scuttled across the room to the window. There he paused, but Hazard checked any renewed appeal with an abrupt: "Clear out!" The negro turned, swung through the window and disappeared.

"Poor fellow!" said Catherine pityingly. "Wasn't that awful! Seeing his face in the mirror!" exclaimed Nan, the horror of it filling her eyes.

Hazard was inspecting the cocaine, turning the vial between his thumb and forefinger. "Rotten stuff," he muttered and flung the bottle into the fireplace.

"Better lock that back door, hadn't we?" proposed Hale, who had moved toward the hall doorway. "Yes," said Nan, quickly, catching up to him. "He'll be coming back that way." And slipping her hand under Hale's arm, she started off along the hall with him.

Hazard drew out his rescued cigarette-case. "Well," he said, "you see I guessed the right card."

"It seems so," agreed Catherine, and paused uneasily. Then she suggested: "Sit down, Dean; they won't be back for a while." Catherine chose a chair beside the table; and Dean, leaning against the edge of the mahogany, asked: "Why were you so quiet tonight?" He had lighted his cigarette before Catherine parried: "Was I quiet?"

"You know you were, Catherine," insisted Hazard, flicking the match into the fireplace. "You made me feel blue too."

"I'm sorry, Dean," she said, and then rallied: "But you know repartee is what you think of after you get home or after your guests have gone."

"That's more like you," laughed Hazard; then suddenly serious, he said: "Catherine, there's something I want to ask you."

The gray-green eyes darted swiftly to a distant corner of the room before they were raised inquiringly to Hazard's penetrating gray ones. "Not my age, I hope!" she temporized.

"Hardly," Hazard replied, "but since you've mentioned it, how old are you?"

"Oh, Dean, you're hopeless," protested Catherine. "Don't you know that a woman who will tell her age will tell anything?"

Hazard bent toward her. "That's what I want you to do," he breathed. "Tell me everything, tell me—"

"Don't, Dean!" she checked him with a frightened catch in her voice.

"You know what I'm going to ask?"

Catherine nodded. "Yes," she said chokily.

HAZARD flung his cigarette to the hearth and seated himself on the arm of her chair. "I suppose you do," he began, and rushed on recklessly: "I've been dead in love with you, Catherine, for—forever, it seems. I don't believe you or anyone else could help but see it. Will you—?"

"Don't!" she gasped.

"Why do you put me off, Catherine?" he asked. "You know—"

"You can't tell me this!" she protested desperately.

"I want you to be my wife."

"No, Dean, I can't." Her head was back, her eyes half closed.

"Can't! Why?" he demanded, catching her hands in his. "Don't you love me?"

"Yes," she whispered, then contradicting herself furiously as she freed her hands: "No, no, I don't."

Hazard rose. "Is there some one else?" he asked.

"Don't," she pleaded.

"Who is it?" he insisted, and as she was silent named: "Edsall? Williams? Gordon?"

"None of them." There was a hysterical quaver in Catherine's tone.

"Not," began Hazard, "not—" He paused, at loss for a name.

"Don't look at me like that!" Catherine screamed. "I'm afraid of you!"

"Wh-why!" stammered Hazard.

"Don't! Don't!" begged the girl, rising unsteadily. "Don't look at me!" Hazard tried to catch her by the shoulders, but she drew back, gasping: "Don't touch me! Don't look at me! I'm afraid of you—afraid of you!" She was retreating step by step, leaving Hazard standing stupefied in astonishment.

"You can read the cards!" cried Catherine. "You knew that man was coming. You're worse than that man who came through the window. You're a thief too."

She was backing toward the door. "You come to steal my thoughts. Go away from me. You'll find out." At the doorway she paused, her hands to her head in frenzied fear, the fingers loosening strands of her hair.

"You knew—you'll find out—I'm afraid!" she wailed. "Don't look at me—I won't let you find out." Then, flinging her arms over her head, she shrilled defiantly: "You're not going to find out." Catherine swayed, caught herself, and swinging around, staggered dizzily toward the foot of the stairs. A glance over her shoulder showed Hazard approaching. She cowered, crouched behind the newest-post and sobbed passionately: "Don't look at me. You can't steal my thoughts. Go—go! I never want to see you again. I'm afraid!" She had begun to crawl up the stairs, but stumbled to her feet and with a hysterical laugh rushed up the rest of the way.

Just as Hazard, utterly at a loss to account for all this, arrived at the doorway, Nan and Hale reached it from the rear part of the house. "What's wrong? What's the matter?" they demanded, and Nan, without waiting an answer, ran up the stairs calling: "*Catherine! Catherine!*"

"What is it, old man?" asked Hale.

"Reaction after the excitement," lied Hazard; then he suggested dazedly: "Come, Bob! We'd better be going."

CHAPTER V

FOUR YEARS LATER

JUNIUS was puttering around in the lounge of the De Soto Club. Junius always puttered. Doubtless some African ancestor had spent an entire afternoon arranging and rearranging seven not dissimilar cocoanuts to get them in order of size. But however he came by it, Junius puttered. For the last ten years he had been doing his puttering in the livery of the De Soto Club and, although it was not generally known, in the vineyard of the Lord. In conjunction with his service at the club he held forth on the Sabbath in the pulpit of one of the unknown metropolitan churches, exhorting a dusky but devoted flock to forsake evil and contribute to the hymn-book fund.

The table beside which Junius was standing was of an age that made its commoner wood more precious than ebony or

teakwood. Around it the De Soto Club's imposing board of governors gathered monthly in this room of dark paneling with its cavernous fireplace. The chairs of the directorate stood around the table, but there were other chairs, luxurious leather ones, placed at random about the room for those who might care to lounge there on evenings when the board did not require its quarters.

It was from the cross-street that Patrolman Michael McQuade came into the De Soto. He stuck his head around the edge of the door without attracting the negro's attention, and seeing that the uniformed colored man was the only occupant of the apartment asked: "Are you the janitor?"

Junius straightened up and wheeled around. "Janitor!" exclaimed Junius indignantly, and haughtily supplied the information: "I'm one of the Club's boys."

"Boys!" the policeman repeated, taking into account the traces of gray in the kinky hair. "Maybe you were, but that's a long time ago." Then advancing into the room, McQuade asked: "Have you a phone a man can use? The call-box on the corner is out of order."

Before replying, Junius passed the policeman and stepping out into the corridor, pointed along it and said: "Jes' down the hallway there."

In turning to follow the directions, McQuade noticed a small table in a corner of the room with a hand telephone on it. He stopped, asking: "What's the matter with this one?"

"Jes' down the hallway," Junius repeated, but in vain, for the bluecoat had advanced toward the telephone in the corner. "I'll try my luck here."

"That's special for the governors," Junius protested impressively.

"The governor's, eh!" puffed McQuade. "Didn't know he was away from Albany long enough to have a private line here. Well, the big mogul's not around."

"Boh'd of governors," Junius said faintly, breathless at the sacrilege.

"Boards here, does he!" exclaimed the twice-mistaken McQuade, picking up the phone. "Well, it's a swell lay-out." Junius showed a disposition to hover in the doorway. McQuade waved him away. "You're excused, shine," he informed him. "Me and the loo-tenant don't like people listening in on our conversation." And as Junius still hesitated, the officer added gruffly: "Beat it!"

JUNIUS left, and McQuade, after craning his neck to see that he really was alone, addressed himself to the puzzle presented by the telephone, a black bar with mouth-piece at one end and ear-piece at the other with never a way of knowing which was which. After considerable twisting and turning of the instrument, the policeman looked less exasperated and feeling sufficiently encouraged said guardedly: "Give me Bryant 1870 Bryant 18 Oh, you got it. Well, you're supposed to."

"Hello," he resumed presently. "This the Rialto Novelty Shop? This you, Abe? This is Mike. . . . Put Miss Rafferty on the phone, will you."

"Hello, Angela Rafferty? Guess who this is? How'd you know? Say, Angela, I'm in a swell dump—down to the De Soto Club. Class to me, eh? How'd I get in? Walked. . . . Listen, Angela. I called up to let you know I'd be around tonight when you're closing up. The Benevolent Association meeting is called off. Good? I should say it is good. . . . All right, see you later. . . . Good-by!"

As he set down the phone, Patrolman McQuade regarded it fondly and sighed: "An-ge-lah!" Turning slowly, he went to the door and looking down the corridor, saw Junius watching the doorway with a worried look. "Hey, shine!" he called; and when the slave of the room came up, he settled his hat with all the rakishness the department would stand for and announced: "The governor can have his room. I'm through with it."

"Boh'd of governors," muttered Junius as McQuade swaggered off toward the street door. Junius was silently visiting a voodoo vengeance on the departing blue-coat's broad back, when a voice behind him asked: "What's the trouble, Junius? Don't tell me that the club has been raided?"

Junius knew without looking around that the speaker was Robert Hale, and as he turned, assured him earnestly: "Oh, no sir, Mr. Hale." And with a mercurial change of attitude toward the offending McQuade, he explained blandly: "The officer's a friend of mine. It seems, sir, like the police alarm is out of order, and knowing me, he naturally felt he could jes' step in here and telephone to the station-house." Junius had followed Hale into the room and busied himself with a non-existent spot of dust on the great glass dome of the

table lamp. "The officer was jes' a friend of mine."

Hale settled wearily in one of the easy chairs. "Is Mr. Gaffney here, Junius?" he asked.

"Mr. Gaffney of Tammany Hall, sir, the gentleman who was here to see you-all week before last?" asked the negro, and as Hale nodded, said: "I haven't seen him, sir."

"You would have seen him if he'd come in?" Hale inquired.

"Well, sir, I might miss him," began the colored man sagely. "But Mr. Gaffney, he aint never missed nobody. These politicians never miss no one. Course they don't come right up and say 'Hello, Junius!' and start in talkin'. They seem so busy sorting out Presidents and Congressmen and governors all the time that the man who gets nodded to thinks it's a right nice favor, special for him. . . ."

Hale laughed appreciatively. "Junius," he asked, "what's your last name?"

"Fenner, sir," the negro replied, "Reverend Junius Fenner."

"Well, well, that's new to me," confessed Hale. "Are there any more ministers working around the club?"

"None that you might call parsons, sir, but that tall yellow ducky, Wellington, he's a deacon; and the coat-room boy, he's an elder of my congregation."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Hale. "I suppose you get around among the members of your church. How do they stand on the election for governor? Do they like Mr. Baker?"

"Mr. Baker, the man you-all and Mr. Gaffney is backing?" Junius repeated. "I should say they do, sir, emphatically."

"You think he'll get their votes?" asked Hale.

"Some of them—although Mr. Templeton, being what you might call a local man, has his supporters. . . . But personally I'm for Mr. Baker."

"And your views carry some weight with your congregation. You wouldn't mind saying a word or so for Mr. Baker, would you?"

"Glad to do it, Mr. Hale, glad to do it."

"And perhaps you can arrange a smoker?" suggested Hale.

"Just as easy as nothing at all, sir," said Junius confidently.

"Your expenses?" Hale inquired.

"Well," faltered Junius, "—twenty-five dollars—"

Hale's hand went into his pocket. "Don't go short," he cautioned. Then drawing out a roll of bills and counting off five tens, handed them to him. "Here's fifty."

"Thank you, sir, thank you!" muttered Junius, bowing obsequiously; then he announced as if it were an inspired revelation: "I know Mr. Baker is going to be Governor."

"Don't mention it," was Hale's disclaimer. Then he added: "I saw some one who looked like Mr. Gaffney pass the door. See if you can find him."

"Yes sir," said Junius, and started toward the door with a spryness that his years belied. He all but collided with a portly person, chewing a cigar, carrying a newspaper, and wrapped in glum silence. Junius backed away, bowing and proclaiming: "I beg pardon, Mr. Sandford!"

THE stoutish man thus addressed grumbled something unintelligible and entered the room as Junius turned along the hall. To the newcomer's dispirited, "Evening, Hale," Bob from his chair replied: "Hello, Sandford. Wont you sit down?" Sandford silently drew up a chair and lowered himself into it, laying the unfolded paper over the arm. "What's the good word?" Hale pursued.

"None."

"You're looking down in the mouth," Hale observed.

"I ought to."

"Street?"

"Hit me an awful kick."

"So! What went wrong?" asked Bob. "Since this political game has gotten so warm, I haven't had time to keep up."

"Scuttled for one hundred thousand dollars," sighed Sandford. "And I wasn't the hardest hit."

"What was it?" asked Hale quickly.

"O. K. Copper," Sandford replied without outward emotion.

"I sold the last of mine two weeks ago," remarked Bob.

Sandford shot a swift glance at him. "To Hazard?"

"Yes," Hale was surprised, curious.

"And he came to town today—" began Sandford bitterly.

"Hazard did!" broke in Bob. "How much did he clean up?"

"About half a million."

"Wow!" ejaculated Bob. "That's the seventh time in the last year he's put it

over. Not as big as the others, though. There was Central—"

"Don't go over them," Sandford interrupted irritably. "I was in on three. What I'd like to know is how the devil he knew it. When he got your stock, we planned to get him. He got us. But damned if I know how. It was a closed deal—five of us. We'd all been stung and were laying for him. No one could have tipped him off. . . . Say, what do you know about Hazard?"

"Not a great deal," replied Hale.

"You used to live with him," snapped Sandford.

"That was four years ago," Bob explained. "Since then I've had very little to do with him. Business once or twice. The O. K. transaction two weeks ago was the first I'd seen him in more than a year." Hale shivered.

"Do you believe—" Sandford began awkwardly. "You don't think—" Then he asked bluntly: "How about this mind-reading business?"

HALE was evasively silent, and Sandford went on: "Remember that story in the papers about a writer who produced a manuscript and witnesses to prove that six months before it appeared he had written word for word the poem that was printed over Hazard's name. That was a queer affair, and I've heard rumors—" For a moment Sandford gnawed his cigar in silence, then demanded directly: "Is there anything in this talk of telepathic power?"

"That's why I left him," Hale confessed, studying the reflection of the lamplight on the oak table top. "But I don't like to talk of it." He shrugged his shoulders. "And I seldom have."

"That's all right, Hale," reasoned Sandford. "But here I've dropped about four hundred and fifty thousand dollars to this fellow. I don't think I'm asking a great deal when I ask what you know about him—and that nasty habit of his of putting it across." Sandford viciously hurled his cigar across the room and into the fireplace. "Have a cigar?" he asked, fumbling in his pocket.

"Thanks," said Bob, accepting. He drew out a match, shared it with Sandford, and having blown out the flame, continued blowing on the charred stick before he said: "I tell you frankly, Sandford, I don't know a great deal about Hazard."

"But you—" Sandford began to protest.

"Yes, I know I lived with him," Hale admitted. "He was in my fraternity at Amherst. He was always rather a peculiar sort. He was quarterback on the eleven and caught for the ball-team. You remember the write-ups he used to get on the sporting pages for his quick thinking? He seemed to size up situations almost intuitively. But he was a quiet fellow and studious, they tell me. He was a senior when I was a freshman, and it wasn't until we were both out of college that I got to know him well. I say 'know' him, but I doubt if anyone has ever really known Hazard. I met him here at the Alumni Club in the city, and we took an apartment together, lived on the Drive for a time. Got along first-rate, too. I don't know when this telepathy thing struck him, but all of a sudden he began answering my questions before I could ask them.

"There's one night I will never forget," Hale went on. "Hazard used to go with me when I called on Nan—my wife now. She has a sister, Catherine—perhaps you know her?" Hale then narrated the incidents of the night they had captured the negro burglar. "We caught the burglar," Hale concluded, "and then Nan—no one could deny her anything; I've been married three years and haven't yet—asked us to let him go. We did. Afterward Hazard and Catherine were alone. Suddenly Nan and I heard Catherine shriek. It was the most frightened cry I've ever heard. Hazard never explained it: Neither did Catherine.

"After that Hazard and I lived together for about four months. He got morose, bitter—and almost fiendish in the way he could tell what I was thinking. Before long I had the feeling that he knew everything that was in my mind. It was a frightful sensation. I can't imagine anything more horrible. Not long after I left Hazard, he cleaned up his first one hundred thousand dollars in the market. I met him later and asked him how he had done it.

"Vandegrift tipped me off," he said, to my immense surprise. 'Didn't know you knew him,' I remarked. Hazard grinned in a devilish way. 'Never spoke to the man in my life,' he said. 'Just happened to be alone with him in a Pullman club-car early one morning, and he was thinking.'

"Why, the beggar practically admits that he used telepathy!" exclaimed Sandford. "Unless it's just a pose. I wonder if there's anything in it?"

"There was a half-million in it for him today, according to you," Hale pointed out.

"There couldn't have been any other way," agreed Sandford, his newspaper sliding unnoticed to the floor as he rose. "It gives me the creeps."

"Imagine what it was living with him!" Hale rose too. "Haven't seen Gaffney?" he asked, and when Sandford shook his head, he suggested, "Come along and help me look for him."

TOGETHER they left the room and were a short distance along the corridor when Randolph Templeton stepped from a telephone booth. Templeton was a tall man with black hair combed back smoothly, brown eyes, and a way of walking that made it seem as if he was always conscious that he was in the public eye.

"Governor Templeton!" Sandford greeted him, holding out his hand.

"I hope so." Templeton laughed a little too casually. "But friend Hale may have something to say about that." He released Sandford's hand to give Bob's the briefest of clasps.

"The people, you mean," retorted Hale.

"More power to them!" Templeton said it as if he suspected it might be stenographically transmitted to the body politic, then added: "You know, Hale, I'm sorry your father made his money as a brewer. If he had been thoughtful enough to have done it in some other way, his son might have been busy boosting my campaign instead of getting his amusement out of politics by fighting me."

"And my father might not have made his money," was Bob's answer. "It would have been a simpler solution if you had refrained from being a reformer—carrying the prohibition fight down to a generation that is dry. How are things going?"

"I think I'll win." Templeton's confidence verged on a boast.

"I don't," declared Hale. "But we won't quarrel. I'm taking Sandford to the grill to get him some coffee, and since it's your kind that's responsible for it being *only* coffee, I'll be hanged if I ask you to come along."

They parted, Sandford and Hale proceeding leisurely toward the club's denatured bar.

CHAPTER VI

BROKEN BARRIERS

PARTING from Sandford and Hale, Templeton was continuing down the corridor when he saw Junius about to turn in at the room where he so diligently did nothing. "Oh, Junius," he hailed.

The colored man stopped in the doorway and with a gleaming smile and scraping bow murmured: "Yes, Mr. Templeton."

"You were about to ask me something when I was called to the phone," remarked Templeton, coming up to the door.

"Not exactly ask you, sir," explained Junius. "I was aiming to tell you that we had a most satisfactory prayer-meeting last Wednesday."

"Yes?" Templeton was one of the few who had been aware of the colored man's place in the clergy, but he was puzzled as to the pertinence of this information.

"Yes sir," continued the dandy, "and from the talk my flock likes the looks of you-all for governor."

"I'm glad to hear that," expanded Templeton.

"That is, sir, all but a few, sir," Junius went on to say. "There are some that kind of favors Mr. Baker. But I was thinking, sir, that might be made all right if there was some kind of a smoker, or since the ladies have the privilege of the ballot, say a sociable, so the sisters could join in."

"If you'd like me to come and speak," broke in Templeton, "—with the election so close, I'm afraid—"

"It wasn't that, sir," interrupted Junius, rather caught off his stride. Then he boldly suggested: "But the expenses—"

"Ah!" exclaimed the reform candidate, "I think I see what you mean. But you know, Junius, the election-law doesn't allow—"

TEMPLETON became suddenly silent, looked past the negro's shoulder, stiffened, and turning, abruptly walked away in the direction Sandford and Hale had taken. Junius gasped in astonishment at this strange behavior; then with a squeamish sensation he glanced around. What he saw sent him swiftly into the room with the pretense of busying himself. He picked up Sandford's deserted newspaper, hoping that the danger would pass. When, after an interval, he dared glance around, his worst fears were realized.

Regarding him silently from the doorway was a terrifying figure, a man who might have come from the tomb, with dead-white skin that made his face a chalky mask in which were set eyes that were alarmingly alive, as if they were looking back upon life out of the misty gloom of the Beyond. They were gray eyes, keen as points of tempered steel; and looking at them gave the singular impression that they forced the unwilling body to further functioning in order that they might continue in the existence for which the rest of the man had little liking—indeed, even a decided distaste.

There were indications of age about the man that could not, however, hide completely marks of unmistakable youth. If the flesh was pallid, it was, nevertheless, without flaccidity. There were lines in his face, but closer inspection would have showed that they had been brought by unseasonable sorrow and care and were not the inevitable creases of time. And the shoulders, while stooped slightly, were broad, their strength not spent, but suspended. Altogether it gave him an uncanny appearance of agelessness, an illusion that he was of a world apart, projected into the earthly order of things, and not subservient to the natural laws of the, to him, strange state-of-being.

To Junius this creature of incongruous aspect was a startling apparition. The fact that he had known the Dean Hazard who four years before had been as debonair as any younger member of the De Soto—this in no way lessened the terrifying effect of his appearance. The colored man struggled to avoid meeting the weird gray eyes. Hazard picked his way toward a chair beside the fireplace and reached it as Junius, after a series of maneuvers, was about to bolt from the door.

The man in the chair checked him: "Junius, let me have that paper."

"Yes sir," the servant answered huskily, and fetched the paper, asking uneasily: "Anything else, sir?"

"Just a minute," said Hazard, looking straight into the negro's eyes. Then Hazard said slowly, as if reading from a printed page: "No, Junius, I don't think there'd be any great harm in cutting down on the expenses for the smoker and saving some of the fifty dollars for the hymn-book fund."

The negro's eyes expanded in terror; his body quaked; he reeled around dizzily and

with an inarticulate cry dashed for the door.

For an instant there was in Hazard's eyes a faint suggestion of amusement in contemplation of the colored man's roguery. But it quickly gave way to a haggard, haunted expression. He stared for a time into the cold black recess of the fireplace, then lifted the paper that Sandford had abandoned and began to read.

SOMETIME later Sandford returned to the room. The back of Hazard's chair was toward him, and he could not identify its occupant; nor, in point of fact, did he attempt to. Deep in thought, he chose another chair, settled himself to think and puff his cigar, quite unconscious of Hazard's proximity. A fluttering of the paper as a page was turned apprised the stock-transaction victim of the other's presence. As he realized the identity of his neighbor, Sandford glared at the back of the head that was all but concealed by the chair. Hazard lowered the paper with a suddenness that made Sandford start fearfully.

The paper was dashed to the floor, and Hazard leaped to his feet, strode across the room and stood over Sandford.

"Take that back!" he panted.

"What?" gasped Sandford, sinking into his chair; then he stammered weakly: "I didn't say— Good God!"

"No, you didn't say anything, Mr. Sandford," agreed Hazard brokenly, stepping back and brushing the back of his hand across his forehead. "You didn't say anything. I beg your pardon."

Sandford looked wildly at his recanting accuser, then gasped in a suffocating consciousness of guilt in thought that was technically innocence because it had not been spoken. He struggled up from his chair, lurched heavily past Hazard and fled.

The gray eyes were filled with the shadows of care as Hazard walked unsteadily to the fireplace. Steps sounded outside the doorway, and turning, Hazard discovered Junius standing there, beside him a blonde, pasty-faced fellow who seemed of Swedish ancestry.

"There he is," gulped Junius, nodding toward Hazard and instantly disappearing.

ALONE in the doorway, the Swede seemed to gather himself. "Mr. Hazard?" he asked in excitement he was barely able to repress.

"Yes," replied Hazard, and as the other came toward him, repeated rapidly impressions that preceded the uncontrollable tempest of accusation that was about to burst the barriers of the other's silence.

"The Triplex Motor?" announced Hazard. "You say I stole it? You invented it?"

The advancing man was momentarily staggered by this reading of his mind. He hesitated, but his anger carried him on. "You stole it!" he cried. "Stole it! You thief! You're admitting it. Triplex, bah! It's the Carlstrom motor, my motor, mine, Oscar Carlstrom's! Ten years I worked to make it."

As the accuser advanced step by step, two other men appeared in the doorway. One was James J. Gaffney, political boss, and his companion was Ed Thomas, a useful lieutenant.

"Ten years I worked to make it!" stormed Carlstrom as he had declared himself. "Ten years! Two years I have saved to get the money; then I go to patent it; and you—you have stolen it."

Hazard backed away from the man now almost upon him, and as he retired, exclaimed: "Don't yell! What do you want? To kill!" This last Hazard himself all but yelled. There was a movement of the man's hand toward his hip, Gaffney's warning "Get that gun!" the glint of steel, a tangle of figures with Carlstrom's voice like a chant of vengeance shouting as he fought: "Twelve years of my life! You take my life! I worked, and you stole. I'll make you pay, pay for every year, pay—pay!"

Carlstrom's tirade broke off short with a grunt, and he thudded to the floor, Thomas straddling him and possessed of the pistol. "Now, what do you want?" demanded Gaffney. Thomas stepped clear of the prostrate man and forced him to his feet.

"I invented a motor, mine, all mine; and," gasped the swaying Swede, pointing at Hazard, "he stole it!"

"What about it, Hazard?" asked Gaffney.

"The fellow's crazy," was the reply.

"He stole it, patented it!" insisted Carlstrom.

"Have you patented a motor?" Gaffney asked.

"Last month—the Triplex—new system of valves," explained Hazard.

"He robbed me!" Carlstrom moaned bitterly.

"Stop your whining," ordered Gaffney. "Did you ever see this gentleman before?"

"No, but he took it," muttered Carlstrom.

GAFFNEY turned to Hazard. "The motor was your own invention?" he asked politely. "You didn't buy it from anyone?"

"It was my own," was the answer, "—a new arrangement of the valves." Hazard remembered the moment the idea had come to him, crossing to the Lackawanna terminal on a crowded tube train.

"It's mine!" insisted Carlstrom.

"How is it you accuse Mr. Hazard?" Gaffney demanded.

"His name was on the patent grant."

"Come, Gaffney," objected Hazard, "don't you think we've had enough of this?" He drew out his card-case and extracted a square of pasteboard from it. "He can come to my office tomorrow if he wants to talk about it. I'll listen then to what he has to say."

Thomas took the card and handed it to Carlstrom. "See him tomorrow," he explained. The Swede blinked at the card for a moment, then lifting his eyes, glared at the man he believed responsible for his wrong. "I'll make him pay," he began again, but Thomas, taking him by the shoulders, propelled him toward the door, reiterating: "He says come to his office tomorrow." And still muttering, the man was pushed through the doorway.

Hazard, outwardly calm, was in a seething tumult. The idea for the motor he had been sure had originated with him. Perfunctorily he took leave of Gaffney and his lieutenant and then moved to the door and down the corridor.

He had been sure the Triplex Motor had been the product of his own brain, his own mental processes leading to a fresh inspiration. And yet—perhaps this blonde madman was right. It might be that in that crowded tube-train the idea had come to him from some one else—Carlstrom. But how could he be sure? Tomorrow, if the fellow came, he might be better able to judge. But could he be certain? He had reduced the last barrier between himself and those around him. Their minds were unvalled fortresses into which he could walk unchallenged; their thoughts were his without conscious effort. How was he to know what was theirs, what was his? Where would it end?

CHAPTER VII

SICILIAN VESPERS

ED THOMAS' observation, as he sank down into a chair beside his chief, was: "The fellow's crazy."

"Which one?" asked Gaffney.

"The Swede."

"Humph!" sniffed Gaffney. "They both are." Jim Gaffney's way of saying things with finality was one of the things that made him secure at the head of an invisible government which in spite of outward vicissitudes had lost surprisingly little of its strength in a rule of more than two generations. In appearance Gaffney might have been a moderately well-to-do merchant.

"Where's our amateur politician?" asked Thomas.

"We'll soon see," promised Gaffney, and looking around, added: "Press that call-bell by the door, Ed."

"Pretty good annex to headquarters, Chief," ventured Thomas as he performed the suggested task. "But it aint as private as Joe's place. The opposition ought to know we're hard pushed when we get down to calling on contributors to the fund." Thomas resumed his chair. "What are you going to tell him?"

Gaffney delayed his answer to direct Junius, who appeared in the doorway: "Call Mr. Robert Hale." And as Junius went off, Gaffney confessed: "Why, I don't exactly know, Ed. I wish we were riding Templeton instead of Baker."

"He's clean, and no mistake," commented Thomas, "—the first our outfit has failed to get something on. . . ."

"There's two weeks yet," prophesied Gaffney.

"Good record in the Legislature back of him," ruminated Thomas.

"Yes," said Gaffney, "I've given up trying to turn up anything against him politically. Of course, the traction interests are back of him, but we can't make people believe it. He doesn't even know it himself."

"And there's no mud," declared Thomas. "I've talked with the gang in the district, and they've never even heard of him. Do we give it up?"

"With Templeton in," exclaimed Gaffney, "we couldn't get a thing. As long as there's a chance of putting Baker across, we're fighting for him."

"But we haven't a chance, Chief," ar-

gued Thomas. "I haven't said so till now, but I've known it for two weeks. There's nothing against Templeton, political or personal. No muck, no mud. You couldn't dig up anything in his record; I couldn't dig up anything in his family, or him."

"You didn't look in the right place," protested Gaffney. "There's just as much—things just as interesting to us in evening dresses and stiff shirts as there are in kimonos and ready-made suits."

THOMAS looked up as Hale appeared in the doorway and whispered to Gaffney: "Here he is now."

"Hello, Bob," said Gaffney cordially, with a barely perceptible gesture warning Thomas to silence.

"Howdy, Jim—and Thomas," Hale greeted them. Then he observed to Gaffney: "You wanted to see me?"

"That's why I'm here," Gaffney acknowledged.

Hale drew up a chair, but before he sat down, asked: "How are things going?"

"Bad!" replied Gaffney.

"We're not going to be beaten?" was Bob's anxious inquiry.

"Oh, not as bad as that," Gaffney assured him. "I still figure Baker a winner. Maybe it won't even be close. But then again, it may."

"That story in the paper about—about—" faltered Hale.

"About your father," Gaffney finished.

"Yes, that hurt a little. That's why I say it *may* be close."

"And we can't even take a chance on that," declared Bob, seating himself.

"That's my idea," exclaimed Gaffney.

"We've got to win."

"How's the money holding out?" was Hale's next question.

"Money's all right."

"What then?"

"The man," said Gaffney.

"Not our man, not Baker?" Hale asked.

"Baker!" Gaffney laughed. "Nothing wrong there. It's Templeton."

"What about him?" Hale was puzzled.

Gaffney affected a burst of frankness. "Say, Bob, what do you know about him?"

"I know he's too full of theories, isn't practical—" Hale began innocently. Gaffney cut him short. "Yes, but personally."

"He's a good sort, a bit conceited."

Then the import of Gaffney's question struck him. "Now, look here, Jim," he

protested, "when I went in on this, we agreed there'd be no personalities, no mud-slinging—"

"Sure we did," Gaffney soothed him. "And there won't be."

"Well, then—" faltered Hale. "What you wanted me to tell you was whether I knew any scandal about Templeton. What's the idea?"

"You've got me wrong," pleaded Gaffney.

"Then just what do you mean by 'knowing' anything about him personally?" demanded Hale.

"It's this way," Gaffney explained; "we've looked over everything he did in the Legislature, both assembly and senate, and we couldn't find a thing."

"That's all right," asserted Hale. "Then people can choose strictly on the platforms, on what we promise them."

"Past performances win, boy," observed Gaffney. "And all those of Templeton that show are good."

"But maybe there's something covered up," objected Hale.

"Which gets right back where I started from," declared Gaffney. "There probably is a lot covered up. Now, you know and I know that he's tied up with the traction people. Breckenridge owns him heart and soul, hand and mouth. But he's covered up that connection so that nothing shows against him. He was in on the prison investigation grab too, but he's left no traces, and he's actually talking about reforming the penal code and abolishing the death-penalty. We know these things but we can't *prove* 'em. If we tried to tell the public without producing the proof, we'd be laughed at; and what's more, we'd deserve it, for you know as well as I do that it's ridiculous to make an assertion and then expect people to swallow it without evidence to back it up. We can't show a thing against Templeton politically."

"And so you want to make it personal," Hale remarked. "Well, I'm through the minute you start."

"Can you turn up anything in his record?" challenged Gaffney.

"I haven't tried," was Hale's answer.

"Well, Thomas and I have," Gaffney retorted rather impatiently, "and we couldn't." Thomas nodded his assent and added: "Not a thing."

"Well, I guess I couldn't, then," Hale admitted. "But personalities don't belong in politics."

"The idea sounds good," declared Gaffney, "but it's a mistaken one. When a man goes after public office, the people have a right to know something about him, all about him, public and private. If there are personal things he doesn't want known, he doesn't have to. He isn't forced to run for office. Now, you're Templeton's kind. Your folks know his folks; you know him, and how he's known—"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Hale sharply.

Gaffney's blue eyes fixed the other's. He said slowly: "A man is known by the woman he keeps."

HALE rose, white and angry. "Gaffney, that's raw!" he exploded. "You promised you'd be on the level in this fight. You are, aren't you?" he scoffed. "When I went in, I knew I couldn't bring about clean politics, but I did think I could make them cleaner. Your line is the dirtiest kind of thing; in plain terms, it's blackmail."

"You're wrong," asserted Gaffney.

"Not for a minute," Hale insisted indignantly. "You'll get the name of some woman and link it with his, then publish it in the filthy newspapers that are looking for your patronage—"

"You're wrong," maintained Gaffney. "That's rough stuff; we don't pull it. Get this straight: Templeton's a strong horse. You have to ride a strong horse with a curb. We want the curb. Nothing in the papers—just go to him quietly and let him guess what we know. There's a weak spot in every one of us. Templeton has his, and about the only thing left for it to be is a woman."

Bob's chin was squared determinedly. He said through clenched teeth: "If you're expecting me to find out who it is, you've got the wrong man."

"You want to win, don't you?" taunted Gaffney.

"Not that way," Hale flung at him.

"You don't want all this bunch around here to laugh at you?" asked the other, leaning forward in his chair.

"I don't care," replied Hale. "If it's on the level—"

"Is there anything that isn't on the level in the way I suggest?" demanded Gaffney. "Nobody knows but you and me and Thomas and Templeton. What is there dirty about that? Politics is no child's game. If Templeton had anything he didn't want known, he had no right to get

into it. You're fighting him now. It isn't Baker against Templeton, or Gaffney against Templeton, but Hale against Templeton. They're watching you, boy; you've got to win."

"But not that way," snapped Hale.

"Do you know what it means to be a loser?" asked Gaffney significantly.

"I don't know anything about Templeton, anyway," Hale declared.

"I didn't suppose you did, Bob," Gaffney employed a mollifying tone. "You're not the kind to go prying into things and spreading scandal. But you may know some one who is— It isn't the loss that will count; it's the precedent it will make. Once a loser, always a loser. It's a hard job to get on the winning side if you don't start there. And don't think for a minute that Templeton's crowd would have scruples about blasting a few reputations to win." Bob Hale tensed suddenly.

"Look at the story about your father they turned loose in the papers yesterday," continued Gaffney in an insistent whisper. "Brewer, grafter—there wasn't a thing they didn't call him. They even drag back the dead."

"But that was a lie," cried Hale, unable to keep silent. "All lies! No, Gaffney, you can't twist me around. I won't have anything to do with it. If I play straight and clean and lose, all right. I want to go down into the dirt to win. . . . Good night!" Hale turned on his heel and started toward the door.

"And you're going to let them get by with that about your father?" said Gaffney scornfully as Thomas and he rose.

Hale wheeled. "That wasn't true!" he retorted angrily.

"Oh, wasn't it?" asked Gaffney owlishly, and put his tongue in his cheek.

AT this Hale took a threatening step toward the older man. Jim Gaffney's ethics may have been questionable, but his fighting qualities were not to be doubted. He had unsuccessfully tried his wiles on Hale; but he wasn't beaten, was only just beginning to fight. Stepping forward to meet the other, he demanded bullily: "Say, young fellow, how does it happen you're with us?"

"Because my father was one of the party's leaders," Hale answered steadily, "—sentiment, more than anything else."

"Sure, that was the reason you wanted to be taken in," growled Gaffney. "But

why were we willing? You're pretty close to the organization, you know."

"Because I'm not close with my money, I guess," Hale replied.

"Well, your money has been a help," sneered Gaffney, "but if you had five times as much, it wouldn't have been safe to have taken you in unless we knew you and were sure of you, or—"

"You knew me, all right!" laughed Hale bitterly. "Wanting me to make the mud-puddle for you to get ammunition to sling at Templeton! You *knew* me, all right!"

"You interrupted," broke in Gaffney. "I was saying, unless we knew you or something about you or your people."

"Just what are you driving at?" asked Hale.

"You saw the paper," bullied Gaffney.

"I said I did."

"Well—" Gaffney's pause invited the other to draw his own conclusions.

"Gaffney, you—you mean that's the truth?" stammered Bob.

"About half of it," observed Gaffney blandly. "There's more besides, lots more. And now I'll tell you why I wanted to see you. I know the whole story, a yarn that would make your hair curl—billions in boodle. I know it all, and any time I'm of a mind to turn penitent, I can get my price for it. Son, I was letting you down easy before; this time I'll tell it to you straight: Templeton's got us beat unless we can get him, and get him quick. I've gone my limit, and I don't propose to be a loser. I'm right ready now to get out from under, go over to the other side with enough weight to bury Baker deep as last year's leaves. And if I tell the story, your father—"

"You can't bully me!" flared Hale.

"Who's trying to," Gaffney snarled. "I just wanted to give you fair notice." With Thomas following, Gaffney started from the room, passing Hale and reaching the door before he turned.

"As I say," he repeated, "I'm just giving you fair warning. If we get something about Templeton, something good, we can still put Baker over. It's up to you."

"Gaffney, I can't go through with it," Hale declared miserably. "I hardly know what kind of stuff you want, and I certainly wouldn't know how to go about getting it if I did."

"Then find out!" sneered Gaffney; and taking Thomas' arm, he added: "I'm beginning to feel penitent. —Eh, Ed!"

CHAPTER VIII

A SHOT IN THE DARK

LEFT alone, Bob Hale, shaken by Gaffney's veiled disclosure, retraced the steps with which he had started to leave the room and sank down in the chair before the fireplace. There he sat, fumbling with the golden flower pinned to his coat, and going over Gaffney's proposal, his attempt at persuasion, and finally the crude threat. There was something sickening about it all. His father? Hale was wondering about it when a voice began to whisper in his ear, repeating his very thoughts.

"You don't know whether it's true about your father?"

The suddenness of it paralyzed Hale. He knew the voice was Hazard's, and even as he turned, exclaimed: "Dean!" the friend of four years before was smiling cynically. Then he began to repeat his impressions of Hale's thoughts.

"True? I can find out for you. Where's Gaffney? . . . Don't know. Don't want me to try. All right, I won't. . . . You remember your father taking you to see Gaffney. Of course you do. So he wants you to get Templeton. . . . *Of course I could find out.* Five minutes with him alone and his thoughts—"

"For God's sake, Dean, go away. You make me cold all over."

Hazard's thin lips formed a twisted smile as he continued: "So I make you nervous now. Sorry, Bob, sorry! And we used to be such good friends."

Hale shot up from his chair, unnerved by the other's reading of his thoughts. "Keep quiet!" he cried desperately. "I've got to talk. Go ahead and read what I'm thinking, but don't repeat it like that. It's too ghastly. I've got to speak. Yes, Gaffney wants me to get Templeton—says if I don't, he'll drag my father's name through a scandal that will rock the State. What'll I do, Dean? For old times' sake—"

"Old times' sake!" echoed Hazard bitterly. "And you shudder at the sight of me. Remember, Bob, I know you by what you think, not what you speak. It's all here, now!" Hazard tapped his head. "Nothing here!"—with a flick of his fingers over his heart. "No sentiment, all reason, cold, hard, ugly logic. By the way, Bob, are you sure you haven't some feeling about being a loser. Confound it, yes,

you're right, you're only human. . . . How would you go about finding out? . . . Oh, you don't want to! I believe you don't want to. . . . But if you did."

"I don't," protested Hale, "I don't!"

HAZARD stepped close to the other, his nervous hands clutching the sleeve of Bob's dinner-coat, his fingers twining in the cloth. "But if you wanted to know?" he argued. "You don't!" (That was pronouncing Hale's decision.) "But if you did I know a way. . . . I've never failed."

Abruptly Hazard stopped, his eyes on the marigold in Hale's buttonhole, Catherine's favorite flower! "Catherine?" he asked in a voice strangely changed, subdued. "Tell me about her, Bob. . . . I—I love her."

"Oh, Catherine's all right," stammered Hale awkwardly.

"I love her, Bob," Hazard ran on. "That night was the crossroads: Life or—or this hell that I've gotten myself into. I said it had never failed, but it failed there, Bob, and that was failing in everything. This thing—this thing that's got me, has given me everything—money, power, everything, Bob; but it's lost me her. And only a few minutes ago, Bob, I found I had lost myself. I can't tell any more what thoughts are mine and what are those of the people around me. I've lost Catherine, lost myself. . . . Her eyes—are they still—"

Hale was anxious to get away, but did not know how.

"Her eyes?" pleaded Hazard.

"Still gray-green, with those gold flecks in them," Hale answered uneasily.

"Catherine is the only person I've wanted, Bob," said Hazard brokenly. "And she's the only one who's beyond me. My heart's stronger than my head. Remember that night, the cards? I couldn't tell the ones she held. That's because of what's here." His hand was pressed against his breast. "She was the only one who ever put me out of balance. The cards and the other business. Fool! And she was afraid of me; Catherine was afraid of me! Now everyone's afraid of me, hates me. . . . You're afraid of me. I have no friends, not a friend. I'm a leper—alone!"

Suddenly Hazard began pawing at the marigold. Hale, with repugnance, held off his hand and contrived to unfasten the flower. "Here," he said, "take it!"

Hazard grasped the flower greedily, and

sobbed: "Catherine!" Then in a burst of passion he cried: "Templeton can't beat you, Bob! Damn him—I'll tear it out of him! Five minutes alone with him, and I'll tell you all you want to know!"

"I don't want to know anything!" Hale burst out angrily. "Thank God I'm through with that!" He rushed to the doorway, paused as if to speak, but said nothing and stumbled off along the corridor.

FOR a time Hazard stood fondling the golden flower, a sad brightness in his eyes. Then his face settled again into its sinister lines, and his eyes snapped with dark determination. He walked swiftly to the doorway and pushed the call-bell. When the answering Junius appeared, Hazard directed: "Tell Mr. Templeton some one wants to see him—here."

"Yes sir," said Junius, and started to go.

"Don't say who it is," warned Hazard.

"I won't, sir," the colored man assured him.

Hazard moved stealthily around the room. He tested the double doors to the corridor to see that they swung freely and smiled with grim satisfaction as he found the key in one of them. Hazard closed one half of the door, and as he caught the sound of some one approaching along the hall, slipped behind the other. Templeton stopped at the doorway.

"In here?" he called back to Junius, and as the reformer looked around the room lighted only by the lamp on the table, the negro from a distance replied in the affirmative.

"There's no one here," objected Templeton, then added: "Perhaps he stepped out for a moment."

"Most likely, sir," Junius agreed faintly; and Templeton, entering, crossed the room to the chair by the fireplace and sat down. Hazard slowly began the noiseless closing of the door and turned the key.

As the key grated in the lock, Templeton turned curiously. And at the sight of Hazard, he sprang to his feet.

"What's this?" demanded Templeton.

Hazard had glided across the room to the opposite side of the oaken table from the other.

"What do you want?" asked Templeton nervously.

"What you're afraid I want," was Hazard's jerky reply.

Standing there in the lamplight, with

his eyes on Templeton, Hazard seemed to have a fascination for the other. Templeton took a half dozen uncertain steps toward the table.

"I want to know what you don't want me or anyone else to know," said Hazard. Templeton's hands were on the back of one of the director's chairs drawn up to the table. Hazard started to seat himself on the other side, at the same time saying: "Sit down, Templeton; your knees are shaking."

Like a man under a spell, Templeton lowered himself into a chair opposite Hazard, who continued:

"Yes, that's it. The story about the woman—girl, was she?—and you. You were young then, but it was you just the same, the same you that wants to be governor. Try to keep it from me, conceal it; the harder you try, the more you think of it and the easier it makes it for me to read." Templeton's face was white, strained, moist.

"California," Hazard went on relentlessly, "a dance . . . concentrate, Templeton; try to keep it from me—that's the way. . . . Oh, this is fine! Moonlight, music, the girl—then an automobile ride along the coast—the California night—the beat of the music."

"You devil!" breathed Templeton. "You can't find out."

"Don't be a fool, Templeton; you know I can."

WITH a swift movement Templeton drew a gun. "Now clear out," he said icily.

"Templeton, you're insane," laughed Hazard harshly. "You can't pull the trigger. Against the death-penalty in our prisons and pointing a gun. Even if it didn't mean murder, what would happen at the election? Put it down, Templeton; that's right, put it down."

Templeton let the gun slip from his hand to the table.

"I wasn't the one who was saying that," gloated Hazard. "It was what you were thinking."

"I'm not afraid of you," blurted Templeton in shaky defiance. "Your mind-reading stunts don't impress me. Try them out."

"You're a fool, Templeton. You know you're afraid. I know you're afraid. You know I'm going to find out." Hazard laughed again. "Don't tell me; it makes

it easier. Words snarl things up; thoughts come straight. It's clear now: the music, the night, the ride, and then—you're a frail lily, Templeton. Now, the girl's name? Her name was— Try to keep it from me, Templeton. Her name—her name—" The marigold fell from his twitching fingers to the table-top.

Hazard seemed baffled, and as he kept muttering, Templeton lifted himself by the arms of his chair. "Her name—the girl—why can't I get it?" raged Hazard. "Her name was—"

A hand darted across the table for the revolver; another tried to knock it away. The lamp toppled to the floor with a jangle of glass, dashing the room into darkness. A chair was overturned . . . hard breathing—a gasp—then a shot.

There was the thud of a body falling heavily, the clang of the revolver against the pedestal of the upset lamp, and the sound of running footfalls in the direction of the window. The curtain was yanked aside.

Clutching the edge of the curtain in a blood-stained hand stood Hazard, ghostly in the indirect light from a street-lamp; and in the pale gleam the lifted curtain admitted to the room lay Templeton, face down, cheek against the floor, mouth open, and a dark splotch spreading on the carpet. There was a banging at the locked doors to the corridor.

HAZARD leaned toward the window, but people in the street outside were standing still, seemed to be looking right at him. In the babel beyond the doors he could catch his name and Templeton's. Then a deeper voice commanded: "Stand back, all of yez." Hazard shrank from the window. There was a heavy impact against the doors to the hallway; they rocked and burst open, catapulting a streak of blue into the room.

It was Patrolman McQuade, who had entered the club earlier on very different business. In three strides he had clapped a heavy hand on the bewildered Hazard.

"Keep back, all of yez!" ordered McQuade, knotting his hand in Hazard's collar. "Don't be coming in here disturbing things." To Hazard he announced exultingly: "I've got you, me bucko!" There was a momentary pause; then Hazard spoke.

"Yes," he said, "Angela Rafferty will be proud of you."

"Mother of God!" gasped McQuade, releasing his grasp, "how did you—"

Hazard made a break for the window overlooking the street, passed between the portières, kicked out the glass with his feet and dodged behind the hangings. McQuade, plunging in pursuit and shouting, "He's gone! To the sidewalk, some of yez!" crashed through the shattered window and leaped into the street.

The policeman eluded, Hazard swung back into the room, colliding with Sandford and others, who poured in at the doorway. Junius, keeping discreetly distant switched on the ceiling-light as two of the crowd seized Hazard.

In the blaze of light Hazard saw the marigold on the table. With a tremendous effort he fought clear of the men holding him and stumbled toward the golden flower. His fingers caught the fragile stem and held onto it, although he crashed to the floor under the onrush of his captors.

CHAPTER IX

THE DISTANT SHORE

TOWARD daybreak on a morning of the following March Keeper Blodgett, standing watch outside a door in the death-house at Sing Sing prison, turned to greet a person approaching: "Good morning, chaplain."

"How is Hazard?" inquired Chaplain Fairfield, nodding toward the cell door.

"He was sleeping when I came on watch," said Blodgett, "and still is."

"Good!" exclaimed Fairfield softly.

There was a pause; then the keeper asked: "Any word about the Fowler Bill?"

"The newspaper boys here on the Hazard story tell me their offices say it's a close fight," related the chaplain. "The Legislature has been in session all night, and Governor Herrick is at his office in the State House ready to sign the bill and make it instantly a law."

"And it will keep Hazard out of the chair?" inquired Blodgett.

"Positively," was the chaplain's answer. "The way the bill is drafted not only prohibits the sentencing of a man to pay the death-penalty for crime, but forbids legal execution. Even if it wouldn't automatically stop proceedings here, I understand that the Supreme Court has prepared stays in all cases of executions pending, to

become effective, in event of the capital-punishment bill becoming a law. I haven't any doubt that Hazard would escape.

"Life terms would be all right; but I'll tell you, chaplain," Blodgett complained, "I'd hate to have this fellow Hazard as a steady thing. It gave me the willies on my first trick of standing watch last night to have him in there repeating every blasted thought that ran through my head."

"An unusual case," remarked Fairfield, more to himself than to the keeper, "both the man and the situation. I don't remember anything that has caused a bigger furore from the first. Templeton, running for governor and advocating prison-reform and doing away with the death-penalty, shot and killed by this—I hardly know what to call him."

"I've said from the first he was crazy," commented Blodgett. "No motive."

"THAT was my idea in the beginning," admitted the chaplain; "a crank assassin. But now that I know the man, I can't say that. And I certainly don't believe he was in the Baker-Gaffney ring's game. He knew young Hale, but Hale made a clean breast of the thing at the trial; and still it was mystifying. Hale told of Gaffney's wanting him to pry out something about Templeton's private affairs, told of repeating this to Hazard, or rather, of Hazard reading it from his thoughts. Then there's a lost link. Hale declares he had no agreement with Hazard to attempt Templeton's secret, if he had any. It doesn't connect up."

"I'll never forget that election," said the keeper, shaking his head slowly at the thought of it, "how Milo Herrick stepped into Templeton's place and licked the stuffing out of Baker."

"With the Templeton murder as a background!" chimed in the chaplain. "But to me the most exciting part of it wasn't the election, but Hazard's trial."

"That's right," observed Blodgett. "You went to the city while it was on."

"No one who was there can ever forget it," declared Fairfield. "Nor can they think Hazard was crazy. Insanity consists of delusions; we all have them, more or less. But Hazard has none. He sat there before his judge and jurors and looked into their minds as you or I might look into shop-windows. He saw their prejudices, accused them of them in a way that in any other case would have constituted the

most flagrant contempt of court. But Hazard completely upset things. It was different from any other case in the whole history of the law. If it was like any at all, it was like the witch courts—ignorance sitting in judgment on knowledge; for the fact is, that compared to his keenness, his power of perceiving thoughts where others must wait for their expression in words, the men around him were dull minds indeed."

"They never proved where he got the pistol," remarked Blodgett.

"Hazard claimed to the last that it was Templeton's," replied the chaplain, "and he never retreated from the contention that Templeton shot himself. What's more, the state never proved that he wasn't telling the truth. You should have seen the attorney-general, acting as special prosecutor, sweat when he was cross-examining Hazard, trying to trip him up, when Hazard could go back of the spoken question and see the trick in the other's mind. No, there were lots of things they didn't prove."

"But they convicted him," said Blodgett smugly.

"Ignorance always condemns what it can't understand," observed the chaplain.

The keeper, starting suddenly with a warning "S-s-h!" peered through the grated door. "I thought I heard him moving," explained Blodgett as he turned back to the chaplain. "But I was wrong. Maybe not as a general thing, but in this case I wouldn't mind if the chair did its work."

"Not in any case," said the chaplain firmly.

"Doesn't the Bible say: 'The wages of sin is death?'"

"Death is the wages of other things as well," observed Fairfield, "including virtue. Good or bad, we're all paid in that coin. The death that's meant isn't the death Hazard's going to at daybreak, the death that's coming to you and me. It is a different death that is the wage of sin: the death of happiness, health, hope." From behind the grating of the door came a hollow voice, adding:

"It's what I've been through: Life without any illusions, a gray earth without the green of self-deceit, stark trees without the leaves of dreams, light without sunshine, night without the merciful dark."

CHAPLAIN FAIRFIELD nodded to Blodgett, who withdrew to some little distance.

"We cry for truth," went on Hazard, "but if we knew all of it, we would be eternally damned. Truth destroys dreams, hopes. A star is a shining mystery in the night, but science, truth, takes us to it and shows us a clod of dirt like this on which we live. Truth is as much misery as contentment, as much the ugly as the beautiful. If we knew all, it would cramp us like this cell. Only where truth is at a distance are we free. Our course is that we seek to know when it should be enough to feel." The echo of Hazard's voice lost itself in the prison of stone and steel.

"Hazard," said the chaplain gently, "you are about to die."

"And you think it will be merciful!" Hazard caught up the other's thought quickly. "You're right. Anything is better than knowing the truth."

"My office is to comfort you," began Fairfield.

"But you realize that you can't!" added Hazard, voicing the chaplain's thought.

"I only know that you have revealed a gift strange and appalling."

"You're right in being glad you haven't had to go through with what I have," murmured Hazard, still busy with the other's thoughts.

"Take what you will from my mind," said the clergyman. "There will then be no need for me to tell you that my sorrow is sincere. If there is anything to be thankful for, it is that your hideous certainty of things will end with life—that you do not know what is beyond."

"Nor you," said Hazard. Then he asked: "Remember that Bible you gave me?" Hazard left the grated door, reappearing almost instantly with a small thick book and saying as he opened it: "I've used it."

"I'm glad," remarked Fairfield.

"Used it for this." Hazard's hand was extended between the bars, holding a flower pressed flat, a marigold, now brown, where it had been golden. Fairfield knew the story of the flower, from the time Hazard had torn himself away from his captors to snatch it from the table over the lifeless body of Templeton. Through the trial in the grim courtroom Hazard had held the fading golden flower, a fantastic touch wholly unrelated to the case. A flower that must have fallen from Hale's coat, that witness had testified, and that Hazard said on the stand he had picked up from the floor just before Templeton walked into that room and to his death. And now, in

the Valley of the Shadow at the brink of the Abyss, Hazard jealously displayed the withered flower for an instant and then gently folded it again in the Book of the Christian God.

"I'm not going to talk to you of my beliefs," said Fairfield after Hazard had returned the book to his cot and was back again at the door. Then, taking the hymnal from his pocket, he explained: "From something you said, I think you may like to hear—"

"Lead Kindly Light," finished Hazard, before the chaplain could say it.

"You know it?" asked Fairfield.

"No," replied Hazard. "You were about to say it. I just anticipated your words."

"Here," said the clergyman as he found the hymn in leafing over the pages.

"Lead, Kindly Light, amid—" began Hazard. Faintly there penetrated into the depths of the prison the rumble of thunder.

"Would you rather read it yourself?" asked the chaplain, extending the hymnal.

"I don't need the book," Hazard replied. "If you'll just follow silently along the page, I'll read it from—from—"

"From my mind?" Even in the performance of his office the clergyman found a fascination in the power of this strange man. He lowered his eyes to the book. Hazard recited aloud:

Lead, Kindly Light, amid th' encircling
gloom,
Lead Thou me on.
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet, I do not ask to see
The distant shore.

Hazard stopped abruptly. Fairfield looked up questioningly.

"The distant shore," Hazard repeated slowly, "that's it, chaplain; that's what's wrong with all of us. We keep clamoring to see—to know. We lose the present in reaching for the future. To see, to know! They don't realize the destruction that they tempt. I've known—known every last mean, foul, unhealthy thought of those I've lived among. I've known their selfish cruelty, their conceit, their lust. I've known things about them that they have refused to recognize in themselves. I've known the present as perhaps none other has ever known it, and I know as no other can what hell it would be to see the winding path of life ahead and know its end." There was another dull echoing of thunder.

"One Man," continued Hazard, "the Man you serve, knew the cup he would drink, and it was bitterest before it touched his lips. The great ordeal was in Gethsemane, not on Calvary. Blind, we're pitiful enough, but seeing, knowing! Who is there could carry through life the cross of his Fate? If there is a future life, chaplain, I will not ask to see—just to be a child again; a child to whom everything is wonderful. 'The distant shore;' I like that, chaplain." Hazard stopped with a twisted smile.

"But it's not so distant now," he pursued after a moment. "Suppose when I was twenty I had known about this, this death-house, that little door that swings only one way? Could I have gone on? Four years ago, chaplain, a little more than four years ago I dreamed of a different shore. If I had seen this, this one on which I am about to step!"

SUDDENLY the prison whistle broke the stillness like the wail of the wind sweeping across some moonstruck heath.

"A prisoner escaped!" exclaimed Fairfield nervously alert.

Behind the grated door, Hazard was smiling. "It's a black man named Dunstan—a burglar," he said. "He started planning the break more than a month ago."

The chaplain looked in a startled way at this interpreter of things unseen. The prison whistle was a bloodhound already baying at the heels of the fugitive, leaping in unerring pursuit whatever the direction its quarry fled and instantly overtaking him. And as it echoed in the ears of the man making the furious flight for freedom, the wild alarm of the whistle was calling up a cordon of vigilantes to close around him on the countryside and throw themselves into the man-hunt.

Blodgett strode up rapidly.

"It's that big buck negro Dunstan," he told the chaplain, repeating the word that had been passed along from a distant part of the prison. Fairfield nodded, and Blodgett hurried back down the corridor. The baying of the whistle continued.

For a space Hazard was silent; then he said: "This prison, chaplain: People think of us here as being penned in. They imagine that we're caged up with all the world around us. It isn't that way at all, chaplain. It's as if these walls were around the world and we couldn't get at it."

He broke abruptly, then asked: "Is it near daybreak?"

"Very near," was the quiet answer.

"But it's dark beyond the window." There was thunder, loud enough to startle Hazard. "What's that?" he asked quickly.

"There's a heavy storm coming down on us," explained the chaplain. "I watched it as I dressed."

"Then there won't be any light?" The whistle was wailing.

The chaplain shook his head, watching Hazard with his eyes a trifle misty. And as he looked, the man behind the grated door tensed with a convulsive tremor and screamed: "Some one's talking about me. Some one says I'm innocent. I am innocent. Templeton shot himself. That's right? He did! He did!"

Blodgett came rushing up.

CHAPTER X

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR

Governor HERRICK was fumbling nervously with the phone on the desk in his office in the State capitol. He was alone in the big room with windows looking out to the east. The shades at the window were drawn, and the doors, at opposite ends of the room were closed. The one led into a private hallway which gave the Governor egress from the building, and beyond the other was the anteroom and the desk of his secretary. From behind that door there came a clicking of typewriter keys.

The electric bulbs burned wanly, as if all but worn out by their night-long work, and there were dark rings under the Governor's eyes and an ashiness to his face that told of hours of suspense. Pushing back the phone, he scowled at his watch. It was ten minutes of five. The Governor went to the windows and raised the shade. It was pitch black beyond. He turned away and restlessly returned to his desk, again consulting his watch. He pressed a button that buzzed for Beggs, his secretary. The clatter of the typewriter ceased and Beggs appeared in the doorway.

"Have you finished the formal notice to the warden?" asked the Governor.

"Just through with it," Beggs replied. "Are they any nearer a vote on the death-penalty proposition?"

"Don't know!" muttered the Governor. "Haven't heard a word from Gallatin's of-

fice." Again he drew out his watch and this time asked: "Say, Jim, what time is it?"

"Five after five," announced Beggs, glancing at his own timepiece.

"Five after!" exploded Herrick. "Damn this watch! I'm fifteen minutes slow. Sure you're right?"

"Positive."

"We can't afford to wait another minute," declared the Governor, rising abruptly. "Hazard dies at daybreak. Not that we give a hoot about him personally, but—"

Beggs was studying his watch. "He goes to the chair in about twenty to twenty-five minutes."

"It's beyond me why they chose Gallatin floor-leader!" stormed Herrick. "Fowler himself would have been a better man. Gallatin is a procrastinator. Listen, Jim, get down there as fast as you can and tell Gallatin to get a ballot on the bill."

Beggs was already moving toward the door.

"Stay there," the Governor called after him, "and bring back word of what happens. Get to Gallatin and make it strong. It's the biggest chance we could have." Beggs disappeared, closing the door behind him.

THE Governor began to pace the room.

Taking out his watch he viciously set it back, muttering as he adjusted it. Crossing to the door into the anteroom, he passed through it and returned with a paper, fumbling for his nose-glasses. As he straightened out his arm to untangle the ribbon to which the glasses were fastened, the silk fabric broke at the catch and the glasses flew out of his hand, smashing against a corner of the desk. Striding over to where the shattered bits lay, Herrick wrathfully surveyed the wreck. When he was calmer, he lifted the sheet of paper, squinted at it, scowled at it, and shaking his head hopelessly, tossed it to the desk. The telephone rang imperatively. Governor Herrick caught it up.

"Yes, this is the Governor," he said. "Gallatin's office. Well, it's about time! How is it going? Ready to ask for a vote! Hang it, it ought to have been done an hour ago."

"Oh," exclaimed the Governor mincingly after he had lectured a moment. "Brady's been blocking it, has he? Opposition obstructing a vote!" Then he roared into the

phone: "Well, you tell Gallatin for me that he's got to get this thing through or—there'll be another floor leader."

The Governor hung up the receiver with a bang, frowned at it for a moment, then took a turn across the room and back, ending beside the lifted shade at the window. The night had grayed slightly. The phone on his desk began to ring again, and Herrick hurried over to it.

"He's speaking," snapped the Governor. "A woman in the gallery fainted? This is the Governor's office, not an emergency ward. Oh, she does, eh! Well, tell her she can't see me. Tell her I'm home in bed." He snorted as he hung up the phone and again began striding back and forth. He stopped as the door from the anteroom was flung open.

"It's all off!" announced Beggs, entering.

"You mean they didn't pass the bill?"

"The Legislature has adjourned until ten o'clock in the morning."

"Whose work is that?" Herrick demanded angrily.

"Comstock's."

"The stubborn fool!" seethed the Governor. "That piece of business may tear up our program for the entire session. He's let bitterness against Hazard—"

"Hazard's name wasn't mentioned," explained Beggs.

"Why mention it!" fumed the Governor. "You know Comstock and his little set of radicals. They're with us on this capital punishment question. You know that, Beggs, as well as I do. But they couldn't see that the important thing was to carry the bill before daybreak today. I thought we'd gotten them into line. Why, if it had gone through, if we'd saved Hazard, we had the world in front of us. It was the foundation of our whole plan: by revoking the death-penalty pronounced on the man who murdered Templeton, our party's leader, our administration could have commanded the public confidence as in no other way. But no! Adjourned until ten o'clock. And Hazard will die at daybreak. Damn Comstock!"

THE telephone rang.

"See who it is, Jim," directed Herrick.

Beggs answered the phone. "Yes," he said, and covering the mouthpiece with his hand, whispered: "It's Gallatin."

"The pompous idiot!" exploded Herrick. "Tell him to go to blazes!"

Removing his hand, Beggs said suavely: "Sorry, Senator, the Governor just left—I thought I could catch him—yes, we heard the result. Good night."

"The infernal fool!" stormed the Governor. "That man's ruined ninety-nine per cent of the effect the Fowler Bill possessed, the only feature that made it more than a comparatively unimportant measure. The Reform Party being big enough to forget its bitterness at the loss of a leader was a thing to be respected. The Reform Party swallowing the camel and straining at the gnat, doing away with capital punishment, but letting Hazard go to his death, will be open to the old charges of petty methods and narrow-mindedness."

"Can't you hold up the execution?" asked Beggs. The lights were paling before the lifting of the black pall beyond the window.

"You know I can't!" retorted the Governor testily. "The man's guilty, without a doubt. He has been convicted by the courts and sentence passed upon him in a proper manner. I can't usurp the power of the courts. The only power I can exercise is in an emergency. And there's no emergency—no emergency except party expediency. I have no feeling in the case personally, but it was a golden opportunity. As for public emergency, however, there is none. Hazard isn't being wronged by society. He will die at daybreak, and no one will be the worse for it."

"Not even him, poor devil!" Beggs agreed.

"Poor Templeton!" murmured Herrick, moving toward the window and gazing over the city, just beginning to take shape in the darkness. Surveying the faint stars, he remarked: "That storm seems to have gone around us." The secretary, going to the door, paused and nodded. "Anything more just now, Governor?" he asked.

"No," replied Herrick, without looking around. For some time after the door closed behind Beggs he remained at the window, lost in thought. He had just turned away and was ruefully viewing the wrecked eyeglasses when Beggs again entered. The Governor looked up expectantly.

"There's a woman to see you—" Beggs began.

"I can't see her now," objected the Governor. "I suppose it's the woman who fainted in the gallery. Can't see her, Jim." He gathered up his hat and coat. "I'm on my way home."

HE moved toward the door of the private hall, and his hand was on the knob when the door across the office opened and a woman dressed in dark gray emerged from the ante-room.

"Governor Herrick!" The voice was hushed, breathless.

"Ah—er—" stammered the Governor as the woman quickly crossed the room. She was veiled and in her hand was a small black book.

"May I speak to you about—" faltered the woman, then nodded nervously toward Beggs, and appealed to the Governor: "May I talk to you alone?" It had grown considerably lighter beyond the windows. Governor Herrick reluctantly closed the door through which he hoped to escape this interview, hesitated, and depositing his hat and coat on a chair, bade the visitor be seated and nodded for Beggs to withdraw.

As the secretary left the room, the Governor sat down at his desk, swinging his chair so he faced the woman and suggested: "Please be as brief as possible."

In answer the veil was lifted, and the Governor, starting in surprise, exclaimed: "Miss Willis!" No one who had ever seen those gray-green eyes could mistake them.

"I wasn't sure you'd remember me—" began Catherine.

"Indeed I do!" the Governor assured her heartily. "Don't think I can ever forget the work you did for me in the election and only in the last few months in bringing public sentiment behind the movement to do away with the death-penalty."

"There's something—very important," faltered Catherine, "that I want to ask you about—about the Hazard case."

"Yes," agreed the Governor.

"He's to be electrocuted this morning?"

"At daybreak."

Catherine glanced toward the windows, shuddered. The east was brightening. "Nothing has happened to delay the—the—" she stammered.

"Nothing," said the Governor. "If the Fowler Bill had passed—"

"But it didn't!" cried Catherine. "I was out there. There is no other way?"

Governor Herrick shook his head. "Hazard is a doomed man."

CATHERINE rose to her feet. "He can't die!" she protested vehemently. "It's wrong."

"Miss Willis," said the Governor, ris-

ing, "you've done wonderful work for the cause." He placed his hands on her shoulders. "But don't let your nerves get the better of you. We've had a set-back, but in the end we're bound to win."

"He can't die," cried Catherine, "can't, I tell you!"

"There's no way to prevent it," the Governor told her. "And we must admit, Miss Willis, that if ever anyone deserved to pay the extreme price it is Hazard!"

Catherine drew away from him. "That's not so!" she flamed.

The Governor shrugged his shoulders. "Well," he said, and from his expression it was easy to see he wished himself out of the interview.

"He can't die!" insisted Catherine.

"Miss Willis, listen—" began the Governor rather impatiently.

"Listen to me!" she cried, flaring up. "Hazard is innocent!"

"Innocent!" gasped the Governor.

"Yes, innocent," she rushed on. "Templeton killed himself!"

"Why—ah—" The Governor was staggered.

"He killed himself, I tell you!" insisted Catherine.

"How do you know?" demanded Herrick.

"It's here, in this book!" she declared, thrusting the black-bound volume toward him to support her words. Herrick made no attempt to take it. "If this is so—" he began.

"It is so!" insisted Catherine. "I knew it twelve hours after Templeton was shot!"

"Then why?" The Governor was aghast, speechless.

"That's it! Why—why?" wailed Catherine. "Why have I waited? It's because I've been a coward. I hoped Hazard would be cleared in the courts. Then there was the hope of the death-penalty being wiped out. I saw that from the first, and worked for your election, worked and prayed and loathed myself. When Hazard was convicted, I should have spoken. But I was afraid—a coward. I told myself it would all come out right in the end. And I worked harder to take the electric chair out of our prisons. When I saw how things were being delayed, I should have spoken. But I was afraid—fool—afraid! I saw the danger of delay, but the other way—I was afraid to speak. Why, why did he give me the secret, the power of his life over another man? It was like him, like Temple-

ton? I hated him; I told him so; told him it was hopeless; that everything was ended. . . . But he persisted. . . . It wasn't enough that he made a woman of me when I still should have been a girl. . . . He dragged me into this!"

"You mean—" faltered the Governor in disbelief.

"I mean that when I was young Randolph Templeton—" gasped Catherine.

"There was a night—"

"You loved Templeton?" asked Herrick.

"Loved him! No, I was a fool!"

"But what I'm trying to get at—"

"I was eighteen," Catherine went on, disregarding him. "The family was in California. I met Templeton there; he was older than I, perhaps eight years older."

"It was a love-affair?" asked Herrick.

"**W**HY must it always be 'love' with women?" demanded Catherine. "You've given us the vote; you deal with us in business, but you're blind. Women aren't marble—are't even clay; they're flesh and blood and breath. I was that when with Randolph Templeton. It was madness, the madness of music, pagan wildness, midnight. We were dancing. He whispered something about running away in the motor. The ride through the rushing wind. On one side dark pines and dim mountains, on the other the dunes in the starlight, the open sea, rocks rising from white water. . . . My senses were drunk with it all. And Templeton—"

Catherine tossed her head. "It just happened to be Templeton."

"And after?" the Governor pursued.

"He begged me to marry him. But I didn't want to. At eighteen I wasn't sure I wanted to marry anyone, and I certainly didn't want to marry him. As for what happened—I don't believe I ever would have regretted it—it seemed so much like a dream. But he, Templeton, persisted in reminding me of it by eternally dunning me to marry him. Then I met Dean Hazard." Catherine paused.

"I loved him," she continued softly. "Perhaps I— Then one night that strange power of his—I was afraid, afraid he could see into my thoughts, turn back the pages of my mind to that night—the affair with Templeton. I wanted Dean—oh, how much I wanted him! But I was proud. And I was afraid. I told him I never wanted to see him again, told him that

night more than four years ago. And he went away. You must save him!"

With that despairing cry Catherine fumbled with the leaves of the black book. "I've told you all this," she said, "so you— This is Templeton's book. He too was afraid of Hazard." She pressed the book into the Governor's hands. "Read and see!"

"But—" Herrick began to protest, peering blindly at the book.

"It was brought to me by Templeton's old colored man," said Catherine, "the darky who came north with Templeton's mother from the Randolph place in Virginia. He said that his master had told him that if anything happened he was to at once bring it to me. Read it!"

"But I can't," objected the Governor. "My glasses—"

Catherine snatched the book from his hands, breathlessly explaining: "The thing's a diary, kept apparently to prove he had been faithful to me. He never could understand it was hopeless. This is the important part: It begins about the middle of September." She read:

"Today I saw Dean Hazard. I understand that he has strong telepathic powers, can read thoughts. Only such a man as he could get our secret from me. It will never pass my lips." Catherine passed on down the page and resumed: "Then on another day he writes: 'The thought of Hazard fascinates me. What a power the man has!'"

"And again," said Catherine, and read: "I saw Hazard again today. He was with young Hale." You remember," Catherine reminded the Governor, "my brother-in-law testified to having a stock-transaction with Hazard about two weeks before Templeton was killed. The date in the diary corresponds to that.

"From that point on," she explained, "the diary is filled with talk of Hazard: first Templeton's speculations, then his fears. He writes: 'What if Hale was planning with Hazard to corner me and get our secret? It would be a tremendous scandal. It's the only place they touch me, politically or personally.' You see his interest wasn't wholly unselfish." Catherine's trembling finger traced down the page, then stopped.

"Here's another place," she continued: "'Hazard has become an obsession with me. What if the man should try! He could move like a ghost through the secret

gardens of my thoughts.' That was written a week before Templeton died; then this, the following day: 'There is a way. I have found it.'

"Now, listen!" cried Catherine. "Two days before Templeton was shot, he wrote this: 'The thing that might destroy us both can never happen. Let Hazard come; I am ready. It will mean death. But the other way it would be disgrace and defeat—disgrace for you and disgrace and defeat for me. Today I procured a revolver from my storeroom. It is with me now. Let Hazard come. We are safe. Death is a seal he cannot break!'"

"The day before the shooting," Catherine rushed on, "he wrote: 'I would rather die than be broken. If anything happens to me, this record will be delivered to you. You will know that my part of the secret died with me, that it is yours and yours alone.'" Catherine faced the Governor. "Is that enough?" she demanded.

HERRICK started as if roused from a daze. "Enough!" he shouted. "Great God, yes!"

"Then do something!" cried Catherine. "Save him!"

"Jim—Jim!" cried the Governor, surging toward the door. Catherine was walking the floor, moaning. Beggs burst into the doorway.

"Get the prison on the phone!" shouted Herrick and the secretary, dodging back into the anteroom, caught up the extension on his own desk. The Governor, pacing the room, drew out his own watch. Not more than two minutes at most! He groaned.

"The warden's office, Sing Sing," Beggs was calling into the phone.

"What—what hour was set?" asked Catherine huskily.

The Governor paused. "Custom," he said, "makes it daybreak."

Catherine stood horror-stricken before the window. A faint flush was creeping up in the east.

"I've got them, Governor," shouted Beggs from the other room. "Your phone is switched in." Herrick rushed to his desk and sliding into his chair snatched up the phone.

"Hello—Hello!" he snapped. Catherine had stumbled to the desk and bent over it with her hands gripping the edge.

"Hello—hello!" gasped the Governor, then burst out: "Something's wrong, Jim!"

"I had the connection," explained Beggs, rushing into the office, and as he reached the desk, the Governor gave over giggling the hook and muttering "Hello!" to explode: "There's no one there now."

Beggs took the phone. "Hello!" he said. "Hello . . . operator? . . . But we had the connection!"

Catherine and the Governor hung over him tensely. There was a period of silence.

"Oh," said Beggs, then turned to explain: "She says the connection went out just after she got it. The wire chief at Peekskill reports that the wires are down between there and the prison. There's a heavy storm down the river."

Catherine trembled in terror, and slowly turned to the awful fascination of the windows. In the east was the orange haze of the spreading dawn. Hands brought quickly to her face stifled a scream, and she sank to her knees, sobbing.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN THE WIRES FAILED

IN the warden's office at Sing Sing, the assistant, Ludlow, sat at his superior's desk complacently puffing a cigar. Outside there was the blaze of lightning and crash of thunder, but Ludlow was not disturbed. The cigar was a good one.

As the assistant was removing the cigar-band, which he slipped on his little finger, Keeper Blodgett entered with the announcement: "Well, they've taken him in."

"Yeh!" Ludlow studied the flowing feather of blue smoke that rose from his cigar.

"And I, for one," said Blodgett, settling in a chair, "was glad to see him pass through that door. He just gave the chaplain and me the worst quarter of an hour I've ever had."

"Uh-huh!" This time Ludlow's attention was fixed on a possible break in the wrapper.

"He insisted that people were talking about him," continued the keeper; "said one was Governor Herrick and the other a woman—couldn't say at all who the woman was. Sometimes he would be clear, and then again all muddled up. Maybe it was some of his mind-reading business, but to me—well, I think he just broke down under it and went crazy—stark mad, I call it." Blodgett, not by nature exactly a nervous man, shivered and added: "Well,

it will soon be over. I see the skipper is true to tradition." There was a heavy crash of thunder.

"Yes, he's over in the village," drawled Ludlow. "I notify him when it's over, and he notifies the Governor."

"It's a great life for you assistant wardens," sighed Blodgett.

"Not bad," admitted Ludlow, and opening a drawer of the desk, lifted a box of cigars from it. The telephone rang.

The assistant glanced balefully at the instrument on the desk and tendered the cigars to Blodgett with a casual: "Have one?"

"Word about the Fowler Bill?" asked the keeper as he rose and helped himself from the extended box of cigars with a glance at the ringing phone.

"That's all settled," replied Ludlow. "The clerk's office called up ten minutes ago to tell us it had been beaten by an adjournment." He closed down the lid on the cigars. The bell kept up its tattoo. "Hold your horses!" growled Ludlow as he replaced the cigars in the desk.

"One of the chief's?" asked the keeper over the noise of the telephone bell as he appraised the cigar.

"With my compliments," laughed Ludlow, pushing the drawer shut. Leisurely he leaned over and drew the phone toward him as the ringing died away. "Now then," he wheezed and lifted the receiver in a bored way. "Hello. . . . Yes, the warden's office. . . . Hello. . . . Hello!" There was a booming roar of thunder, so loud that Blodgett, lighting a match, jumped so that the flame was jerked out. "Heh! Drop that phone!" he shouted.

Jiggling the hook, Ludlow looked across at him in a deprecating way. "That's bunk about getting a shock from a telephone in a thunderstorm," he declared. "Hello. . . . Hello. . . . The damn thing's gone dead." He disgustedly hung up the receiver.

"That was a whang-dinger of a crash," observed Blodgett, out of the corner of his mouth not occupied by the cigar. "It hit pretty close. Bet that's what's the matter with the phone."

"I wonder who it was," mused Ludlow; then, dismissing the question as he flicked the ash from his cigar, he remarked: "These are good smokes, aren't they?"

At that Blodgett discovered that his cigar was dry. "Forgot to light mine," he confessed. "That man Hazard has got me all on edge." There was another crash of

thunder as he set to work to make good the oversight. The telephone rang again.

"Keep away from it!" warned Blodgett.

"Shucks!" scoffed Ludlow, and picked up the phone. "Hello," he said. "Yes.

. . . Say, did you try to get me before? . . . You didn't, eh? . . . All right; what is it? Yes. . . . Yes. . . . He's in there now. . . . No. Hazard isn't dead yet; will be in a minute or so. . . . Yes." There was a crash of thunder. "A little storm. Sure, it's all right. He's as good as dead. . . . Two or three minutes. Last words? How do I know; I don't have my office in the death-chamber. . . . Yes, I heard about it; forced an adjournment. . . . Uh-huh! No, I don't mind telling him if I can reach him. . . . Don't mention it." He hung up.

"It was the World," the assistant informed Blodgett. "They asked if I'd let their man know about the Fowler Bill's being beaten. Are you acquainted with him—little chap with sandy hair. . . . See if you can reach him." A clap of thunder seemed to shake the solid stone of the prison.

"Yeh," said Blodgett rising and moving toward the door.

"Tell him," instructed the assistant warden, "that the radicals jammed through a motion for adjournment before they could get a vote. The chief will be wild when he hears it!"

BLODGETT, in passing through the door, all but collided with the chaplain, rushing up out of breath. Fairfield brushed past without paying any attention to Blodgett, who continued on his way. The chaplain dashed up to the desk and demanded excitedly: "Have you had a telephone-call?"

"Well—er—" began Ludlow. "A message from Albany?" continued Fairfield.

"No," drawled Ludlow. "Well, Hazard says," burst out the chaplain, "that Governor Herrick is trying to stay the execution."

"He's crazy," sneered the assistant. "I don't think so," asserted Fairfield. "You haven't called on the telephone?"

"The New York World just rang up," yawned Ludlow.

"And that was all?" demanded the chaplain. "Say, Ludlow, you wouldn't think this man was crazy if you seen him standing there in the death-chamber as if his

eyes were seeing just what he was talking about. There was no other call?" Another bursting crash of thunder roared through the room.

"Yes, there was another call," admitted Ludlow with a frown. "I don't know who it was from. They asked if this was the warden's office."

"And then were cut off!" gasped the chaplain breathlessly.

Ludlow looked at him in alarm. "How did you know?"

"That's it!" cried Fairfield. "That's just what Hazard described. The Governor trying and the phone-connection broken."

Ludlow lurched to his feet. "The devil you say!" he exploded.

"It's just what he said happened!" cried the chaplain. "What can we do?"

"Nothing," replied Ludlow.

"Something—anything!" gasped Fairfield. "We've got to save him. I believe the man's right!"

"But there's nothing to be done!" objected the assistant, glowering at the window, beyond which lightning crackled a prelude to tremendous thunder.

"They're strapping him into the chair," pleaded the chaplain.

"I can't accept his statement!" expostulated Ludlow. "I can't take his word for it that the Governor is trying to get us; not on your life."

"But look how it fits into the facts!" argued Fairfield. "He couldn't have known that there was a phone-call to the prison in which the connection was broken. I believe he's right. I tell you!"

"This mind-reading business is too flimsy," protested Ludlow with an impatient gesture. "No one ever heard of such a thing."

"That's no sign it can't be!" declared the chaplain in ringing conviction.

"But in my place?" growled the assistant. "What can I do?"

"Stop it!" cried Fairfield. "I'm convinced the man has strange powers, and standing in the shadow of death, those powers might be intensified to an astounding degree."

"I wish—" muttered the assistant, tugging at his watch.

THERE was a blinding, sizzling flash in the room, an illusion of a whirling blue core of light darting in a jagged course; then a tidal wave of angry sound came

crashing down as if the rock-walled prison itself were tumbling in. The chaplain's lips were moving in prayer. Silenced by the stupendous thunderstroke, they were supplicating: "Save him! Save him!"

Ludlow frowned at his watch, sniffing at the pungent after-odor of lightning as order emerged out of the mad maelstrom of noise. "No use, chaplain," said the assistant without looking up from his watch. For a moment Chaplain Fairfield studied fearfully the other's expression, then echoed faintly: "No use—"

The assistant warden shook his head, whispering: "The current was turned on more than a minute ago." The chaplain's chin sank to the black broadcloth that curved over his chest. Ludlow returned his watch mechanically and scowled at his cigar. The ringing of the telephone made the assistant shudder. Fairfield did not even glance up, standing with closed eyes and drawing deep, uneven breaths as Ludlow lifted the receiver.

"Yes," said the assistant into the phone, then ejaculated: "The Governor!" The chaplain looked up quickly, horrified. There was the boom and crash of thunder.

"It's too late, your excellency," said Ludlow leadenly, "Hazard is dead."

Fairfield quivered. The irony of it! The utter tragedy of salvation came too late. And Hazard had known, had gone to his death knowing that it had been decreed that he should not die, had given up his life because the jailers to whom he had been delivered could not comprehend powers greater than their own, powers that, after all, were so pitifully small. They had not understood, had refused to put faith in the thing that was new, beyond their own petty understanding. "He was right," the chaplain whispered huskily.

"Yes sir," Ludlow was saying. "The phone rang and some one asked if this was the warden's office. . . . Then the phone connection was broken." What followed, the assistant repeated so Fairfield could hear. "You got us by roundabout wire to New York and then up the river. . . . It is a tragedy."

Keeper Blodgett burst through the door, crying in a fanatical voice: "It wasn't meant to happen; that's all!"

"What?" demanded the chaplain, while Ludlow, his eyes on the keeper, said into the phone: "Just a minute, Governor." Then he asked: "What's wrong, Blodgett?"

"It's all off!" exclaimed Blodgett, scarcely coherent in his excitement.

"What is?" snapped Ludlow.

"Lightning!" gasped Blodgett, waving his arms wildly. "Hit the power plant." There was a dull smashing of thunder.

"And Hazard?" cried the chaplain.

"Alive as ever!" the keeper shouted. "The chair was harmless as a cradle."

"Thank God!" breathed the chaplain.

"And he's happy as a boy!" blurted Blodgett. "Says the Governor is talking over the prison phone now."

The assistant warden swayed in his chair and with awe-stricken eyes stared at the telephone he was holding.

CHAPTER XII

MARIGOLDS

THE late sun of an April afternoon was streaming in the long French windows of the Willis living-room warming the rich red luster of the piano, touching the curve of a shallow bronze bowl with inlaid silver tracery on the center-table, and bathing the pages of a magazine that held the attention of Bob Hale. He paused in turning a page, lowered the magazine, and looked around as Nan came into the room.

"Dean should be coming any minute, shouldn't he?" his wife asked.

"Hazard? Yes," Bob replied.

"You know," said Nan, "although it's five years now, and so much has happened, it seems the natural thing to call him Dean."

"Where is Catherine?" Bob asked.

"My dear, she's actually fussing up!" exclaimed Nan enthusiastically. "I haven't ever seen her so excited."

"Fine!" Bob declared.

"You should see her, Bob; she looks simply wonderful."

"Runs in the family!" asserted Bob, gazing in admiration at the picture his wife made in her dress of white net and the filmy scarf of Chinese blue thrown over her shoulders and touching the black loveliness of her hair. Nan rewarded him by leaving her seat and settling on the arm of his chair, running her hands through his hair. "I was always fond of Dean," she said. "I wish we could go back to that night we all were here and have things happen differently."

"Why, that was the night I proposed," objected Bob.

"One of the nights," corrected Nan. "It was the night I was willing."

"The night you admitted it," Bob teased her.

"What I meant," said Nan seriously, "was that things had turned out differently for Catherine and Dean. I knew even then that she liked him better than any other man she had ever known. She must have had to fight to keep from showing it. I've another surprise for her."

"What?" Bob asked the question the pause invited.

"Marigolds," announced Nan, "for that bowl on the table. I must get them."

"She hasn't had any marigolds," Bob reflected, "since the night Templeton— You know my testimony that the flower must have fallen from my coat and he must have reclaimed it from the floor?"

"Yes."

"I perjured myself," he said. "He begged me to give it to him, begged because it was Catherine's flower. I wanted to keep Catherine's name out of the business. . . . Strange, isn't it, after what happened."

"And Dean told the same story you did," added Nan. "You don't think he suspected?"

"He says not," Bob replied. "Says he never knew until just before the re-trial with the new evidence. In speaking of it, he reminded me that at the very first, here in the house that night, he couldn't tell the cards she was holding. He never knew the name Templeton was keeping back. Even at the last he couldn't identify her as the woman who was talking to the Governor. It was some freak of his mind. Dean told me that night in the club that it was because in the case of Catherine his heart was stronger than his head, his emotions more powerful than his mind."

"Do you really think—" faltered Nan. "Can Dean read thoughts any more?"

"It's a question," admitted Bob. "The doctors have had him for two weeks—from the time of the acquittal."

"They were so confident in their first report," sighed Nan.

"And it seemed plausible, too," agreed Bob. "The reaction from the shock of the experience might easily have destroyed the telepathic susceptibility of his mind."

"Think of being strapped in the death-chair," said Nan in a subdued voice. "The switch actually being thrown—and yet escaping."

"Sitting there with the death-cap over his head," added Bob, "and reading the thoughts of a man more than one hundred miles away! But then, the Governor's concentration was intense, and Dean's mental receptivity must have been tremendous."

"It's quite a commentary on our pride of achievement," declared Nan. "The telephone crippled by a broken wire, the prison wireless useless with the power-plant out of commission, and yet a message being transmitted with the equipment given the first man."

"I wonder how Catherine will be," mused Bob.

Nan did not reply; and when, after an interval, she spoke, it was to remark: "Wasn't it odd that to the very last Dean couldn't identify her as the woman in the case!"

"At least," said Bob, "there's one person who can be comfortable while he's around—one whose thoughts he can't read."

"S-s-s-h!" cautioned Nan. "She's coming."

"You're glorious!" was Bob's tribute as Catherine appeared in a soft, trailing dress of deep amethyst.

"I'm glad," said Catherine quietly, going over to the table and looking down at the empty bronze bowl. The golden flecks danced in the gray-green of her eyes as she faced the others and exclaimed: "I'm really happy!" Then as she sat down, asked Bob: "How was Dean looking when you saw him?"

"Surprisingly well," said Bob, as Nan, careful not to let Catherine see, noiselessly lifted the bowl from the table and went out. "Of course," Bob was saying, "he's aged considerably."

"How much he's been through!" Catherine broke in.

A motor stopped in front of the house.

"It's Dean!" exclaimed Catherine, rising. Bob was beside her, and together they went to the door. Hazard was coming up the veranda steps as they opened it.

"Catherine!" he cried.

"Dean!" she said chokily as their hands touched.

Bob greeted Dean heartily, then, with an excuse, vanished.

"You're wonderful!" breathed Hazard, as he led her to a chair and dropped to

one knee by her side. Then he reached into an inner pocket and drew out two bits of cardboard fastened face to face with elastics. He dropped it to her lap, deftly twisted off the taut bands and lifted the upper cardboard. Beneath it was the pressed, dry marigold. "You see this flower," he began.

"I know," Catherine checked him.

"Kept it always," he said. "It's brown, withered, but . . . perhaps there may be more marigolds—fresh marigolds." He lifted the faded flower to the table, and catching her other hand, breathed: "Catherine, dearest, do you love me?"

"Yes," she said simply and so absorbed were they in each other that they did not see Nan come in with a bowl brimming with marigolds. She was about to set it down on the table when she saw the pathetic pressed flower. Nan knew its story. Gently replacing the fragile talisman between the cardboards, she covered it with the bowlful of fresh flowers.

"Catherine, the doctors tell me that there's a chance for freedom from this thing—that if I fight it, I may win.

"I know a place in the north woods," he went on, his eyes narrowing as if they looked out on it, "a place in Canada, north of Quebec. A day's ride by stage at the end of the railroad, another day in the saddle due north; and there, near the head of the valley is a camp, a big, comfortable camp. Just beyond, to the north, the valley is closed by a sheer forest wall, the beginning of the big timber that stretches to the tundras. There I can get away from things, people—a few half-savage natives; that's all. It's a big country, a wild country, and there one must be strong or perish. I'm going there, Catherine, to fight it out—alone."

"Alone?" she whispered. He looked at her in dazed uncertainty for a moment, then his arms were around her, his lips on hers, one of her hands against his cheek. After that kiss, she rested her head on his shoulder. It was as she lifted it again she saw the flowers Nan had put on the table. Her eyes went wide with wonder. She gasped. "Marigolds!"

Hazard turned his head and, in each other's arms they stood looking at the golden garden of hope that glowed where they had left the frail brown flower of memory.



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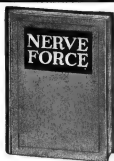
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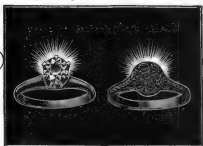
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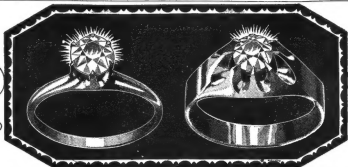
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Try this new way of teeth cleaning. The test is free. It has brought to millions whiter, safer teeth. Leading dentists everywhere advise it.

See the results, then learn what they mean to you.

What ruins teeth

Teeth are ruined by a film. You can feel it—that viscous coat. It clings to teeth, gets between the teeth and stays. And most tooth troubles are now traced to it.

It is this film-coat that discolors—not the teeth. Film is the basis of tartar. It holds food substance which ferments and forms acid. It holds the acid in contact with the teeth to cause decay.

Millions of germs breed in it. They, with tartar, are the chief cause of pyorrhea.

Brushed in the usual way, much of that film is left. And very few people have escaped the troubles that it causes.

Now we combat it

Dental science has in late years found a way to fight film, day by day. High authorities have proved it by many careful tests.

Millions of people have adopted it, largely by dental advice. To careful people it is bringing a new era in teeth cleaning.

These new methods are all embodied in a dentifrice called Pepsodent. And you are urged to prove it by a pleasant ten-day test.

Five important effects

Pepsodent has five effects, all of them essential to cleaner, safer teeth. One ingredient is pepsin. One multiplies the starch digestant in the saliva to combat starch deposits that cling. One multiplies the alkalinity of the saliva to neutralize mouth acids.

In two ways it attacks the film directly. Then it keeps the teeth so highly polished that film cannot easily cling.

It differs vastly from the old-time tooth pastes, which dentists now know were wrong.

Send the coupon for a 10-Day Tube. Note how clean the teeth feel after using. Mark the absence of the viscous film. See how teeth whiten as the film-coat disappears.

Within a week you will know that your teeth are protected as they never were before. And you will always want your teeth to look and feel like that. Cut out the coupon now.

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The Green Book has come to be known for the many biographies of this type which it publishes. In the current September issue, for instance, there are six remarkable fact stories of this type, together with an unusual article on the fur business by Agnes Laut; a striking presentation of the motherhood problem for employed women; and—besides other notable articles—delightful novels and short stories by George Gibbs, Berta Ruck, Phyllis Duganne, Henry Payson Dowst, Jeanne Judson and others. All in the September issue of—

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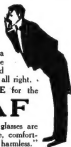
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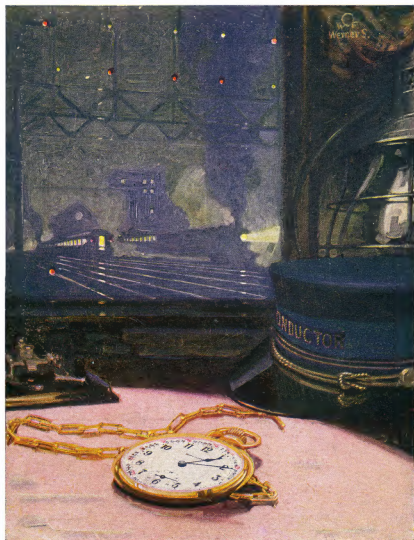
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