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THE FIGHT ON

THE STANDING STONE

BY FRANCIS LYNDE

THE CRUISE OF THE CUTTLEFISH
THE GOLDEN SPIDER
DICE AND LARRY, FRESHMEN
THE DONOVAN CHANCE

THE FIGHT ON THE STANDING STONE
PIRATES' HOPE
THE FIRE BRINGERS
THE GIRL, A HORSE AND A DOG
THE WRECKERS
DAVID VALLORY
BRANDED
STRANDED IN ARCADY
AFTER THE MANNER OF MEN
THE CITY OF NUMBERED DAYS
THE HONORABLE SENATOR SAGEBRUSH
THE PRICE
A ROMANCE IN TRANSIT

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

**THE FIGHT ON
THE STANDING STONE**

BY

FRANCIS LYNDE



NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1925

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Printed in the United States of America

TO MR. CHARLES AGNEW MACLEAN

Friend of many years, and through whose good offices this tale of a man's conflict and victory received its initial *imprimatur* this book is affectionately inscribed

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**THE FIGHT ON THE
STANDING STONE**

THE BEAR HUNTERS

The sun, poising for its early autumn afternoon plunge behind the snow balds on high Buckskin, was doing its best to idealize in a golden glow of color the commissary, the bunk shanties, the long strings of material cars, and the other bare utilities of Travois, the end-of-track construction camp. Beyond the camp with its gridironing of railroad tracks the Standing Stone, clear, snow-cold and sparkling, caught the suffusing tint in the spray flung up by the boulders in its tortuous bed; and even the black smoke belching from the stacks of the two big "camel-back" locomotives in the yard turned to a pearl gray with pink undertones as it rose to diffuse itself in the upper effulgences.

Over a great gash scoring the nearer shoulder of the Buckskin like a fresh wound a dull yellow mist hung in mid air; and as Stannard came out of the camp telegraph shack with a tissue copy of a telegram crumpled viciously in his fist, the rumbling grunt of the dynamite floated down from the jagged scar on Buckskin to be passed back and forth in diminishing echoes between the Dogtooth and Rock-Face, twin bulkings inclosing the Travois valley like the crooking fingers of a pair of hollowed hands.

Crossing the straggling camp street to come by the shortest path to the end-of-track yard, the stalwart young chief of construction fell afoul of Callahan and his car-repairing mate at work jacking up a steel flat to replace a broken drawbar. Because he was in the mood to snap at anything that came in his way, he stopped short and wheeled upon the two men under the flat-car.

"Who smashed that drawbar, Patsy?"

"Sure, I dunno, Sorr," returned the car-repairer. And then, loyal to his yardmates: "I'm thinking maybe 'twas done on the main line, before we'd be getting the car on the Cut-off at all."

"No, it wasn't; it was done right here in this yard! Write out a report of it and give the number of the shift that turned it over to you. I'm going to make an example of some of these clock-watchers that are too lazy to ride a kick-off and set the brakes. Have you seen Mr. Roddy since he came down from the tunnel?"

"I did, Sorr. 'Twas him I saw going across the thracks to the river wid his fishin'-pole, not twinty minut's ago."

Stannard faced about and strode away in the direction indicated, still gripping the tissue telegram. Callahan winked slyly at his mate. "'Tis bad news the boss has been getting," he commented. "I'd not like to be Misther Jackson Roddy to be caught wid a fishin'-pole in me hand before quittin' time."

"You're batty!" scoffed the helper, "Them things don't count with the bosses. And anyway, Mr. Roddy is off his shift when he comes down from the tunnel."

"'Tis bad news, all the same," Callahan insisted. "Misther Stannard is a foine upshtandin' young man whin he's at himself, but whin his mad's up I'd sooner be findin' tin dollars on the dump than to have the b'y hit out at me wid annything less than a feather bed between the two av us. 'Tis a twinty-horse-power mule kick he'd put behind thim two fishties av his, this minut!"

True to the Irishman's characterization, Stannard gave a very fair imitation of a young giant ferociously angry when he had crossed the tracks to come upon his assistant wading knee-deep in the icy waters of the Standing Stone and skilfully playing a fine mountain trout in the boiling eddies.

"Get out of that mill-tail and come and listen to this, Jackson!" he called from the bank, bellowing to make himself heard above the drumming of the torrent.

Roddy, a small man with baby-blue eyes and the jaw of a bulldog, waded ashore obediently, playing the fish as he came and deftly slipping the landing-net under it when the fight ended in the shallows.

"What's eating you now?" he grumbled. At altitude five thousand feet in the short-grass hills the distinctions of rank and file fall easily into the scrap-heap with the other purely ornamental traditions.

"Get on to this," rasped the chief; and thereupon he smoothed the crumpled telegram and read it aloud. "'President Merriam's private car *Egeria*, and extra Pullman, with hunting party from New York will run special, Brinker, conductor, Gaffney, engineman, Yellow Medicine to Travois, leaving here four-fifteen. Mr. Westervelt, in charge of party, wants you to arrange side-track accommodation for *Egeria* and extra best place in Travois yard where ladies won't be annoyed. Pennoyer, Agent.' Do you get that, Jackson? Wouldn't that make you let out a yell and break for the timber! 'Ladies'—that's what he says—'Ladies!'—in this God-forsaken, howling wilderness of a man's camp. Wah!"

Roddy grinned. He had unjointed his fly rod and was picking up the creel which already held trout enough for the mess supper-table.

"That reminds me of the story of the fellow who saw one of your brother Missourians at a bar and remarked that he'd give a thousand dollars for a thirst like that. Woman, lovely woman, doesn't appeal to me that way. I wish she did."

The athletic young chief of staff growled like a dog.

"Come down to earth, Jacksie, and look this thing in the eye for a minute. What in thunder are we going to do with a junketing picnic party right in the thick of this latest mix-up—with the hard-rock men threatening to strike on us, and the Overland Northern building three miles a day to cut us out of Standing Stone Canyon? Silas Westervelt is one of our directors, and he ought to have known better than to throw in a handicap like this."

"You know Mr. Westervelt then, do you?"

"I've met him," said Stannard shortly. "He was on the G. L. & P. Securities Board last year when I went to New York to fight this Cut-off scheme to a finish."

The assistant nodded. In common with the other members of the engineering staff he knew the story of the Cut-off scheme; how Stannard, serving his apprenticeship as a division engineer on the Yellow Medicine district of the main line, had evolved the great idea of the short cut across the Yellow Desert and the tunnel under Buckskin whereby eighty miles of distance and a thousand feet of grades could be eliminated; how the young Missourian had fought his idea up through the various official threshings and winnowings and had finally been permitted to lay his plan before the board of directors in New York; and how, after many bucketings of cold water from an over-cautious minority, the vote for a bond issue had carried, and Stannard, with his commission as chief engineer of the project in his pocket, had come back to the Standing Stone country to translate the great idea into steel-rail and hard-rock facts.

There had been difficulties from the outset. With an eager demand for labor on other and less isolated projects, the grade contractors had been able to secure only the sweepings of the market-place. With orders booked far in advance at the mills the deliveries of steel and other material had been exasperatingly delayed, and the newly promoted chief of construction had literally fought for every day's progress over the forty-five miles of sage-brush desert lying between Yellow Medicine and the Dogtooth Hills.

In the hills, and with the tunnel workings begun at both ends, a new obstacle had developed. In order to obtain the grade for the eastern tunnel approach, Stannard had carried his line in a great hair-pin loop up one side of the canyon of the Standing Stone and back on the other; the canyon being a precipitous gulch intersecting the Travois basin at right angles from the south, and lying between the western cliffs of the Dogtooth and the eastern shoulders of the Buckskin range.

With the first shatterings of the dynamite on the ten-mile loop in the canyon the new trouble began. An old survey of the Overland Northern, the Great Lakes & Pacific's chief competitor, ran through the Standing Stone canyon, and a formal notice, which was in effect a mandatory warning to "keep off the grass," had been promptly served upon the G. L. & P.

Stannard, acting under advice which he had fairly bullied out of his own company's lawyers, had ignored the notice to quit; was still ignoring it in spite of the fact that the Overland people were rushing a branch line across the desert from Lodge Butte with the avowed intention of occupying the canyon on the old survey, and of passing through it to a tapping of the rich mining district served by the G. L. & P. main line in the southern Buckskins. This rapid-fire advance of the enemy was the common gossip of the Travois camp, and Roddy's tone was gruffly sympathetic when he pushed his inquiry a little farther.

"Westervelt is also a heavy stockholder in Overland Northern, isn't he?" he queried.

"He is said to be, though nobody seems to know definitely," Stannard returned. "But there is one thing sure; he fought this Cut-off scheme of mine from start to finish in the various meetings of the board, and gave up only when he was outvoted two to one. I don't like this hunting-party interference a little bit, Jackson, coming at this particular minute."

By this time the two men had dodged between the shifting trains in the yard and were crossing to the double log cabin which served as the staff headquarters.

"Meaning that we are likely to go up against a situation in which the innocent bystander might be in the way?" queried Roddy.

"Just that. I don't know how far the Overland Northern people will carry their bluff for a right-of-way which doesn't belong to them any more than it does to the Dalai Lama of Lhasa. Greer is their chief of construction, and they say he's a scrapper. I've been looking for their locating squad to come through here any day, and when that happens there'll be blood on the moon. Nice, pleasant prospect for Mr. Westervelt and his carload of 'ladies!'"

Roddy captured a water boy and sent him around to the cook house with the creel of fish before he followed his chief into the big working-room of the headquarters cabin. He was perched on a high stool in front of one of the mapping trestles when he began again on the sore subject.

"Four-fifteen out of Yellow Medicine; that will bring them here about supper time. You'd ought to 've let me catch another mess of trout, Claiborne."

"Not much! We'll give 'em track room because we've got to, but we don't feed 'em on delicacies. Tell you what I'd do, Jackson, if it wasn't for the women; I'd shove that blamed private car out on the Standing Stone spur at the mouth of the canyon where it would get a liberal dusting of rocks now and then from the blasting in the big cut. I've a good mind to do it anyway. I haven't much use for Mr. Silas Westervelt, or for any kind of a crowd he'd pick out to bring with him."

At this the assistant with the baby-blue eyes and the bad jaw began to scent animosities other than those which had been advertised by the gossip of the camp.

"Merely because he opposed your scheme?" he suggested, with the subtlety of an elephant trying to pick up a pin.

"No; that part of it was straight business, and he didn't see the thing as I did. I don't know as I've told you, but a number of the board meetings last summer were held in the library of Mr. Westervelt's country house out on the Sound shore. Mr. Westervelt went out of his way to rub it into me that I was only a paid servant of the railroad company."

"Oh!" said Roddy, with a leer which went better with the bad jaw than with the child-like eyes. "So there was a girl mixed up in it, eh?"

"How the devil did you know that?" growled the modest giant, tilting in the only chair the field office could boast.

"Guessed it," said the assistant shortly. "It's a safe bet. When it isn't business, it's just naturally bound to be a girl."

"You've hit it," admitted the giant morosely. "There was a house party going on at the Westervelt mansion, and one of the guests was Miss Anitra Westervelt—Banker Silas's niece. I didn't see that the fact of my being there on business barred me from saying good-morning or good-evening to Miss Anitra, but Mr. Westervelt seemed to think it did."

"Suffering Scott!" breathed Roddy, with well simulated astonishment; "did he have the nerve to say that to a man of your size?"

"Oh, no; not in so many words, of course. But I got the gist of his meaning one morning after I had been down to the beach with the crowd to give Miss Anitra a swimming lesson. The members of the Securities committee happened to come out on an earlier train that morning, and what Mr. Westervelt said about my not being on hand will keep until I have a chance to pass it back to him."

Roddy chuckled. "Any little old ordinary prophet could foretell that you're due to have the time of your life, Clay," he said. "I wouldn't be in your shoes for a deed-of-gift to the pick of the half-dozen Ozark apple orchards you are said to own."

"Blame the apple orchards!" growled Stannard, with sour irrelevance. "That was the way Mr. Westervelt introduced me to Miss Anitra and a bunch of her friends—as 'the well-known young apple king of the Ozarks.' Wouldn't that jar your back teeth loose?"

"Well, you are, aren't you?" said Roddy maliciously; "or you were until you got the engineering bee in your bonnet, and came out here to wear the brass collar of a soulless corporation."

"The apples were Dad's," said the Missourian, half moodily. "He spent a few thousand barrels of them, more or less, to give me the kind of an education I wanted. Good old Daddy. I wish he were alive now to enjoy the trees that he set out with his own hands when I was a barefooted young cub. God forgive me, Jackson, but for one little minute when Mr. Westervelt was rubbing them in I was ashamed of the apple-trees and of the old, big-knuckled hands that had set them out! Then I felt like going away somewhere and kicking myself."

This time Jackson Roddy's chuckle was completely sympathetic. "And the girl—how did she take it?"

Stannard was silent for a full minute, and when he spoke again it was to say, "Miss Anitra Westervelt is a law unto herself, Jackson. She says—and does—the first thing that comes into the back part of her mighty pretty little head. Sometimes that first thing is conventional, but a heap of other times it's—well, let's call it original; original enough to make your blood run cold—or warm, as you happen to be constituted. No, I didn't fall in love with her, if that's what you're wriggling your ugly jaw about, but I guess the only reason was because I'm not enough of an acrobat to fall in seventeen different directions at once."

Roddy was stuffing his short pipe with a rubbed up handful of cut plug. "We're dodging," he objected, as he felt in his pocket for a match. "You're mighty whistling right about the awkwardness of this butt-in of the bear hunters, or whatever they are. It's coming at the wrong time, good and plenty. Do you know what I did last night after the hard-rock gophers gave me their ultimatum? I wired a good friend of mine in Denver to buy up a few cases of Winchesters quietly, and gave him shipping directions to Yellow Medicine. I have pretty good assurances that we can depend upon the Irish track-layers if it comes to a free fight to keep the rock gophers from blowing up our tunnel, and I didn't want to be caught with my hands in the dough."

"And you did this on your own responsibility?" snapped the chief.

"I did. You couldn't afford to be mixed up in anything as brash as that, and I wanted you to be able to swear out a clean bill of health for yourself in case anything serious came of it."

Stannard shot a quick look at the percher from beneath his heavy black brows.

"As a dust-thrower you are not a very remarkable success, Jackson," he said quietly. "Do you suppose I am thick-headed enough to fall for anything as child-like as that story about the hard-rock men? I know very well what you want those guns for."

"Name it," said the assistant between gentle little puffs at the short pipe.

"Gallagher, that new steel foreman you imported from Arizona, named it for me this morning when I was coming down the canyon. I saw two of his men climbing up the back of the Stone and I wanted to know what they were doing. He said they were wiring the flash-light signal as you had ordered them to. What do you know—more than I do—Jackson?"

"I know this: I worked under Judson Greer, your Overland Northern fighting man, for the better part of three years, and I savvy him up one side and down the other," said the blue-eyed assistant slowly. "As I said a minute ago, we're not going to be caught with our hands in the dough. As the big boss on this job, Clay, that's all you need to know; I guess maybe it's more than you ought to know."

THE ENGINEERS' MESS

Owing to the deep shadowing of the inclosing mountains the dusk falls in the Travois while yet the peaks and shoulderings of the main range lie bathed in an upper ambience shot through and through with the afterglow of the sunset. The locomotives in the yard had blown the shift-changing signal, and down the steep incline leading from the Buckskin gash and the tunnel's mouth a string of mine-cars was descending, cable lowered, and laden with the men of the off-shift. In the construction yard the masthead electrics were twinkling on by twos and threes, as the cut-ins were made on the different circuits from the small power plant at the dam on the upper Standing Stone; and along the grade from the loop, Gallagher's day-shift of steel men and shovelers was straggling into camp.

Stannard, returning from a brittle little conference with Bailey, his yard-master, in the lower yard, heard the whistle of the bear-hunters' special as the train shrilled around the curve of approach. He had been giving Bailey the order for the placing of the private cars, and directing with malice aforethought that they be shunted in ahead of a half-dozen empty steel flats on the siding farthest removed from the camp and his own headquarters.

Determined to regard the "picnic party," as he was still calling it, in the light of an interference, he did not go down the yard to welcome Mr. Westervelt and his guests when the two-car train halted at the "limits" switch to let Bailey climb to the engine cab. Nevertheless, he had a passing glimpse of the train as it went rocketing up to the western switches from whence it was to be kicked in on the riverbank siding. The private car was a heavy hotel-Pullman, with a deeply recessed observation platform at the rear. By the light of the nearest masthead, Stannard saw that the platform was well-filled, and that there were women in the group—four or five of them. Also, through the lighted windows of the spacious central compartment, he saw two white-jacketed waiters laying the table for dinner.

The young engineer had a sharp return of the grouch when he faced about to climb to his headquarters office on the mesa bench above the camp. Bear-hunting in a Pullman palace car was all very modern and luxurious—and incongruous; most incongruous with the hunting halt made in a railroad construction camp. The Broad Street money lord should have known better than to project a junketing party, with women in it, into a working camp where it could only be in the way and serve as a stumbling-block to discipline and the speeding-up of the job. Stannard had the men of his own staff in mind when he swore that he would put the screws on and work them so hard that they wouldn't have time to kill time with any of the picnicking young women; and since Black Sam had not yet drubbed out the mess supper call on his Chinese gong, the young chief turned aside into the empty working-room and squared himself at his desk to plan for the disciplinary activities.

Under such conditions, and with the virus of acute ill-humor working in his blood, the athletic young Missourian was not very good company for anybody when he took his place at the head of the engineers' mess table a little later. Roddy, having had his pointer, held his tongue; but Markley, the snappy, red-headed young man-driver who had charge of the tunnel boring on the other side of the mountain, was of those who rush in blindly.

"They tell me you've invited a bunch of your New York friends out here to see us do the great act, Stannard," was the way the red-headed one broke in. "I want to get my picture in the Kodaks, and I'm going to hit you for a transfer to this side of the Buckskin."

Bartley Pearson, big, black-whiskered, and as good-natured at heart as he was saturnine in appearance, grunted his appreciation. Driving the eastern drift of the great bore, Pearson had but one ambition in life, namely, to make two feet of advance to Markley's one; and anything which promised to make the red-headed little hustler careless of hard-rock results was to be welcomed.

Stannard, who had been conspicuously silent, took his face out of his plate long enough to read the riot act.

"You'll get a transfer to the location work on the Kicking Deer if you let that private-car party mix and mingle with your job, Markley," he said. Then he went on to clear the situation definitely and once for all. "Mr. Silas Westervelt, who is one of our directors, has seen fit to bring a party of his friends out here on a bear-hunting expedition. Why in the name of common sense he wanted to dump his bunch of play-people down here in the middle of a hot construction fight is more than I know; but I want to say this: The job goes on just the same as if that private car wasn't here." "Oho! keep off the grass, eh?" murmured Markley, helping himself to another plateful of Roddy's trout; and Patterson, the purple-faced giant who was manhandling the grade and track men on the approach loop in the Standing Stone canyon, chuckled hoarsely, while Eddie Brant, boyish, fair-haired and cherubic—the staff's draftsman and map-maker—looked up to inquire innocently, "Didn't I hear somebody say that there are ladies with the party?"

"Feed your face, Eddie-boy, and never mind what you heard," laughed Pearson. "Stannard says they're play-people, so the ladies, if there are any, are only play-ladies, you know."

A sense of humor is a precious gift, and Stannard smiled good-naturedly when he saw the grin spreading upon the faces of the five who in any real need would have gone through fire and water to prove their loyalty to him and to the job.

"You fellows can have your joke, if you'll only take it out on me," he told the five. "When Yellow Medicine wired this afternoon that this private-car crowd was coming here to camp down on us, I was hot. We don't need any distractions just now, with matters in their present shape, and you all know what I mean when I say that. Any day in the week we are liable to have to do something that wouldn't listen very well if Mr. Westervelt should get up in a directors' meeting in New York and tell about it—not to mention what he might try to say or do right here on the ground."

"That being the case?"—cut in Patterson.

"That being the case, I shall do everything I can think of to discourage the bear-hunters, and I am banking on you fellows to back me up. If anybody should ask you, you've never seen or heard of any bears in the Buckskin country. Are you with me?"

"Why not?" mumbled Pearson, with his mouth full. "Capital's business is to put up the money and then go away and let things alone. If it wasn't for the women, we could mighty soon run a bunch of New York dickie-gentlemen out o' camp."

Stannard nodded. "If Mr. Westervelt had any special object in landing down on us with the intention of staying and getting himself well used while he does stay, you'd call it a pretty foxy move—bringing the women along. Just the same, I don't despair of discouraging him. He'll be sending for me pretty soon, I expect, and when I get a whack at him I'll tell him a few of the things he ought to know without the telling."

"Like fits you will," Pearson chuckled, the retort showing how little Stannard's discipline hampered the pure man-to-man relations. And then: "Can't you ring us in some way? There ain't a man of us who wouldn't walk a mile in a blizzard to see you set a multi-millionaire back an inch or two."

"Clay'll give him his orders," snapped Markley; then, imitating and grossly exaggerating Stannard's tempered Missouri drawl: "'Misto' Westervelt, yo' take yo' foot in yo' hand and pile out o' here! I think I hear you saying it, just like that—not!"

The young chief's grin was only half appreciative when he said: "That's all right. Go on and have your fun out of it, you bullies; but don't let me catch the first man of you giving that mob any encouragement to stay here—just salt that down and keep it to chew on."

"You hear that, Eddie?" said Patterson, turning upon the curly-haired map-maker. "That means you. You're the only man in the gang that'll be likely to get a second look-in at the ladies."

Eddie Brant took his medicine patiently. It was the prescription that the outdoor men had been administering in liberal doses from the first. "I know," he returned, striking back in the only way that occurred to him; "it's a terrible handicap for a man to be as pretty as I am. I'm doing my level best to live it down, Jamie."

"Score one for Eddie-boy," chanted Roddy, breaking into the joking give-and-take for the first time. Then he switched the talk abruptly. "Heard anything more from the hard-rock men, Pearson?"

"Same old song," grumbled the east-end tunnel boss.

"We'll work like min eight hours a day,
And all we want is a little more pay."

There'll be nothing doing till the next pay-day drunk, and by that time I'll have found the ring-leaders, if I have to sift the lot of 'em through a wire sand-screen."

"There's something curious about this kick," Stannard put in. "Our gophers are getting better pay and working under better conditions than have ever been given on a job like this, and they know it. Sometimes I've been tempted to wonder if the Overland Northern hasn't sent us a few trouble makers."

"There's more in that than might appear on the surface of the puddle," Markley put in. "I've got my eye on two or three fellows over on my end of the job, and if I get a pinch on 'em, you'll hear something drop."

"Fire 'em!" said Stannard crisply. "And that applies to you, too, Pearson. I'm looking to you two fellows to spot the right men. When you find 'em, cut 'em out, and I'll see to it that they don't hang around very long in the Travois."

"You won't have any trouble with my contingent," Markley qualified, with a ferocious grin. "There's a good bit of tall timber over on my side of the range, and that's what they'll take to after I get through with 'em."

By this time the mess-table squad was comfortably forgetting the private-car party marooned on the opposite side of the construction yard. But now a reminder, in the shape of a natty young negro in uniform with a gold-lettered "*Egeria*" on his cap, intruded itself.

"Take off that cap!" roared Stannard, before the negro was well within the open door of the mess shack, and the negro went a shade lighter in color and obeyed.

"Y-y-yas, suh," he stammered. "I—I's lookin' for de boss-man. Misteh Weste'velt, he say,—"

"We're all bosses here," said the chief gruffly. "Out with it; what do you want?"

"Misteh Weste'velt, he say fo' Misteh Stanna'd please come oveh to de cyah."

Because the message had the savor of a mandatory order from a superior to an underling, a grin went around the mess table; and in deference to the grin Stannard scowled at the messenger and said: "Tell Mr. Westervelt I'm busy now; I'll be over after a while." And to make the small defiance good, he left the table and crossed to the working-room to put in a full hour over the blue-prints on his desk before he rose and struggled into his coat and went to obey the great man's summons.



SPARKS ON THE ANVIL

On the way across the electric-lighted railroad yard Stannard was telling himself in sardonic humor that the delay in answering the banker-director's summons might be made to figure as something less than an open hostility, since it had doubtless given Mr. Westervelt time to finish his dinner. Reaching the river-bank spur-track, he found that the private car and its extra had been pushed down to a coupling touch with the string of empty steel flats. The lights were turned low in the central compartment, and under the darkened balcony formed by the "umbrella roof" of the rear platform there were lounging figures; among them somebody with a musical ear and a rich baritone voice who was humming a song to the twanking time-beat of a banjo accompaniment.

Determined to dodge the social hazard effectively, Stannard went to the forward vestibule, was admitted by the coffee-colored porter and had himself shown to the private compartment where a large-bodied gentleman, shrewd-eyed, with thin hair graying reluctantly at his temples, and wearing a metallic smile in permanence on a face which in spite of the smile figured as a dry desert of inscrutability, was working his way through the market record in a bundle of New York newspapers picked up from the passing Fast Mail at Yellow Medicine.

At the door-opening the waiting magnate laid his newspapers aside, looking up in a way which gave the young engineer the impression that the cold eyes were taking in every detail of his working-clothes unrepresentability, down to the missing button on the shapeless khaki coat.

"Ah, Mr. Stannard; you're here at last, are you?" was the colorless greeting. "Sit down, if you please. I didn't know but you had forgotten."

Stannard found a seat on the narrow single-berth divan, wishing heartily that he had been really able to carry the ignoring process to the actual point of forgetting the banker's summons.

"This is a pretty busy camp, Mr. Westervelt," he returned, clipping the words to make them fit his resentment. And then: "I'm here because you sent for me, but I hope you're not going to ask anything in the way of entertainment for your party in the Travois."

"Oh, no," rejoined the banker-director dryly; "we were not expecting to be entertained. All we thought of asking of you was a little common, ordinary hospitality."

Here was the opening which Stannard had determined that he would make for himself if it should not be offered by the chief invader and he took instant advantage of it.

"Hospitality is a large word, when a man has neither time nor the means at hand to make it a workable possibility, Mr. Westervelt."

"Ah?" said the banker mildly. "Frankly, then you don't want us here. Is that what you are trying to tell me?"

"I should have wired you yesterday that we had no room in the Travois yards for a pleasure party, if it hadn't been for that fact that you are, in a certain sense, my superior officer—a director in our company," retorted Stannard, taking his courage in both hands. "It is strictly a matter of business. As you must know, we are pushing the work on the Cut-off, practically night and day. If we don't get the grading and steel-laying up to the tunnel before snow flies, we shall be unable to move material, and the tunnel-driving will have to be held up until next spring, heavily increasing the cost."

"True; very true," was the toneless comment. "But what, if I may ask, has all this to do with the few feet of track space which we may occupy in your construction yard for a week or so?"

Stannard frowned and bit his lip, finding himself helplessly caught in the trap which is always set for the unwary one who takes refuge in the half-truth. It was manifestly impossible to tell the whole-truth, that the Travois camp might shortly become a scene of a fierce labor battle with the hard-rock men; or that he was living in daily anticipation of a clash with the on-coming Overland Northern construction force.

"It isn't the track room, altogether," he began; "it's the—well, it's the incongruity of dropping a junketing party down here in the midst of things. You'd have to be a workingman yourself to understand how much of a disturbing influence a car-load of play-people will exert, in the circumstances."

The metallic smile was broadening upon the banker's dry-desert face, but it did not rise to the level of the calculating eyes.

"I think you are always a little impractical on what you doubtless call your practical side, Mr. Stannard," he said, letting the smile soften the criticism as it might; "at least I found you so last summer, under conditions which were much more favorable than the present. I can understand your impatience of any interruptions in your work, and I think I can promise that the interruptions shall be judiciously minimized. A little information to begin with, and later, perhaps, permission to replenish our kitchen stores from your commissary—"

Stannard threw up his hand in a quick gesture of surrender.

"I've said all I'm going to say, and it was perhaps more than any G. L. & P. hired man has a right to say to a member of his own board of directors. Let it go, and tell me what I can do for you."

Again the fine-grained smile reached its high-water mark just beneath the stony eyes. "You make me the victim of misplaced confidence, Mr. Stannard; you do, indeed. It was in my mind that a small and, so to speak, momentary, admixture of the social element in your strenuous life out here at the end-of-track might serve as a pleasant relaxation for you and the young men of your staff. But if you insist upon regarding it as an intrusion—"

"When you talk that way, I'm not insisting upon anything," said Stannard, anxious now only to make his escape while the escaping was good.

"As I have said, we are not asking much beyond a little friendly tolerance and advice. To-morrow, at your leisure, we should like to be put in touch with some one who can furnish guides and horses for the bear hunt. And by the way, while I think of it, are there any bears to be found in the Buckskin region?"

Stannard's suspicions, acutely alert on general principles, caught quickly at this tacit admission that the bear-hunting phase of the expedition was secondary to some other object. "I saw a few last year, when I was out with the locating parties," he replied guardedly, adding; "naturally there wouldn't be much game to be found in the neighborhood of a camp as big as ours."

"No, I supposed not," said the banker, quite coolly. And then, in the vein of subtle irony which fitted the permanent smile: "For your true city-bred sportsman, Mr. Stannard, it is the hunting that counts, rather than the size of the game-bag. I suppose we may assume that the hunting is good, even in the neighborhood of a camp as big as yours?"

Stannard's grin was a tribute to the audacity of the joke which this cold-blooded money lord was apparently playing upon his guests.

"Oh, yes; there will be good hunting—plenty of rough work and hard riding, if that's what you're looking for. And as for the guides and horses, I'll send word in the morning to Crumley, who has a cattle ranch in the valley on the other side of Rock Face. He'll give you the pick of his cow ponies, and a cow-puncher or two to make it look real, I guess."

"Good!" said the banker. "As for the rest, we shall get on well enough, I dare say. As I have intimated, we sha'n't ask much beyond the standing-room for the *Egeria*. That, and a little neighborliness, perhaps, for those of us who may be minded to stay behind after the cow ponies have been paraded."

There was a stir in the other part of the car advertising the return of the rear-platform loungers, or some of them, and presently the notes of a piano began to chord with the twanging of the banjo. Still sourly determined to dodge the social entanglement, Stannard got upon his feet.

"If there is nothing else, I'll go back to my job," he said shortly.

"Nothing more at present, I think—unless you would like to meet the other members of the party," was the suave rejoinder.

"Not to-night," Stannard refused, almost curtly; and a moment later he had left the presence and was groping his way through the narrow side corridor to the forward vestibule.

ENTERING WEDGES

Not wishing to jump from the frying-pan into the fire, Stannard took the precaution of reconnoitering before showing himself under the light of the mast-heads. The coast was clear, and, dropping to the ground, he crossed the gridironing of tracks quickly and climbed the slope to his log-built headquarters. Somewhere down among the bunk shacks a gang of Italian graders was singing around their night fire, carrying the note of incongruity which the arrival of the private-car party had struck to a still higher pitch in a measurably faultless rendering of a Verdi chorus, and the young chief, a music-lover to his finger-tips, stopped to listen for a moment. Then he turned shortly and entered the open door of the office-workroom; rather, let us say, he took the entering step over the threshold, only to fall back as if he had seen a ghost in the lighted interior.

The ghost was not only quite substantial; it was an exceedingly charming ghost, and it was sitting at ease in the engineer's desk chair, quietly nibbling the end of a pen-staff. "Come in and make yourself at home, Mr. Stannard," it said, with cheerful hospitality; this while the young chief of construction was hanging to either jamb of the door and striving as he might to get his feet once more upon the solid earth.

"You?" he managed to say, after a time. "For heaven's sake, how did you get here?"

"In my uncle's car, most of the way, and the rest of it on my own two little feet. Won't you come in and sit down?"

Stannard got in far enough to be able to put his back against the wall. In his wildest imaginings it had never occurred to him that Miss Anitra Westervelt might be a member of the private-car party, and he was making a desperate effort to readjust the imaginings as he stood looking down upon her.

There was a year and more lying between this night of astoundment and the days when he had neglected the committee meetings to play tennis with her on the country house lawn or to give her swimming lessons on the Sound shore, but the lapse of time had wrought no change save to make her more irresistibly attractive and alluring. Even the absurd little pot hat of the moment which covered her thick coils of copper-gold hair borrowed grace from her wearing of it; and the laughing brown eyes, the curve of the wilful lips, and the upthrust of the pretty chin were the same.

"You don't seem to be so very effervescently glad to see me," she remarked, after he had been dumb long enough to warrant another pin-prick. "I thought you would be, you know. That's why I made Eggie bring me over here. He has gone down to the Italians' camp with the others to hear the singing. I didn't want to hear it for fear it would make me homesick."

"Who is 'Eggie'?" Stannard demanded.

"When he's at home they call him the Honorable Egbert Adelbert Edward Montjoy, because he happens to be one of the several sons of Lord Earlingham. But over here we call him Eggie—just plain Eggie—and he rather likes it, I think. Why don't you sit down?"

Since she had the only chair in the room, he was obliged to perch himself upon Eddie Brant's high three-legged stool, and it put him at a gross disadvantage.

"I'm beginning to come to, a little," he laughed. "I hadn't the faintest idea that I was going to have you to reckon with in that private-car bunch over yonder."

"To reckon with'?" she echoed. "Are we *Egerians* the kind of people who have to be 'reckoned with'?"

"I am afraid you are, in the present instance," he affirmed. "I've just been over to the car, having an interview with your honored and respected uncle. We didn't exactly come to blows, but—"

"I knew you wouldn't want us," she interrupted quite coolly. "I tried to get a bet out of Doc Billy, but he didn't have the courage of his convictions."

"And who might Doc Billy be?"

"If you are going to say 'who' like an owl every time I mention anybody—"

"That's because I haven't been introduced," he hastened to say. "How many of you are there?"

"Take us as we come, and I'll introduce you," was the prompt rejoinder. "First, there is Mrs. Grantham—Aunt Jeannette, we all call her, and she really is aunt to two of us. Mr. Vallory, who likes to say spiteful things, says she is

fair, fat and fifty; but she's a dear just the same."

"We'll check off Mrs. Chaperone Grantham," said Stannard, doubling one little finger for the tally and wondering in the back part of his mind where and how and why his fit of bad temper had vanished so suddenly.

"Then there are the two Wetmore girls, Mrs. Grantham's nieces, you know. Una admits twenty-two but she's twenty-four if she's a day. If you like tall, willowy, graceful girls with nice hair and perfectly lovely gray eyes, and can put up with a good bit of refined contempt for everything west of the Allegheny Mountains, you'll fall in love with Una at first sight."

"Check," called Stannard, doubling another finger and adding: "I'm much too busy to fall in love with willowy people just at present. Who's next?"

"Una's sister Gladys. She says eighteen, but I happen to know to a certainty that it ought to be twenty-one. Did you ever see a real, sure-enough French *bisque*, Mr. Stannard? If you have, you'll know Gladys the moment you set eyes on her; china-blue eyes, hair like spun flax, peachy complexion and all that, you know—just the kind of girl that most men, at some time or other in their lives, fancy they'd like to play at housekeeping with."

"Not for mine," chuckled the stool-percher, reckless now of what the chaperone or Mr. Silas Westervelt or anybody else might think of this most unconventional tête-à-tête. "Any more eligible young ladies?"

"Not a single, solitary one, unless you want to count me in. We're a little shy in that respect, being only a crowd of amateur bear hunters; but we have plenty of men."

"I'm interested in men," Stannard averred. "Do we get Doc Billy first?"

"Not if we pay any attention to the Noble Order of the Self-important," was the mocking reply. "Monty Carroll easily heads that kind of a list. He is a rising young impressionist who does things in 'atmosphere' and has had two years in the Beaux Arts. If he could paint as well as he thinks he can, he'd be a second Corot."

"Say, I'm glad I'm not in your list," Stannard laughed happily, turning down a forefinger for the artist. "Who is the next man?"

"Make Eggie the thumb. He is charmingly British, big, handsome, and good-natured, and there isn't anybody in the world who enjoys a joke as he does—after it has been explained to him so that he can understand it. I suspect he's over here to marry money—Una's money, for example; or possibly mine, if he can't find any with a less formidable encumbrance."

Stannard winced a little at this. His acquaintance with Miss Anitra, while it had thriven like the weeds in a worn-out garden patch, had been all too brief. She had a level-eyed way of saying the most startling things, and he could never be quite sure of the point at which cool mockery ended and sober earnest began. Moreover, he had a feeling that, in the summer of committee meetings she had suffered him to climb to the place of familiarity chiefly for the reason that he was only an incident in her life, and that when he should move on and go about his legitimate business of building railroads there would be no awkward after-meetings or anti-climaxes. He was trying to figure himself as merely incidental to her again when he said:

"We'll pass up the hands-across-the-sea gentleman and shift to the other set of fingers. Have we reached Doc Billy yet?"

"Not yet. Mr. Adam Vansutter Padgett, being a member of the Stock Exchange, has a long lead over the medical profession. Roly-poly, round-faced, good-natured, hair thinning a little over the place where he thinks out his coups and corners. Gives you the impression that he is the sort of person who would tell you, upon the slightest provocation, the complete story of his life in one instalment. He wouldn't, though; that's only his pose. Down under the roly-poly *bonhomie* there is an exceedingly capable man of business. Past that, he happens to be the only man in the party who has ever killed big game."

Stannard craned his neck to get a glimpse campward through the open door. The Italians were still singing, and he hoped they would keep it up indefinitely.

"Now, I'm sure we must have reached Doc Billy," he suggested. "Let's see how near I can come to him on a chance shot: he is tall, thin and sort of hungry-looking; strokes his face and ponders you professionally when you ask him a simple little thing like 'Why is a woman?' or something of that sort: wears his hair long, and—"

Her laugh, silvery and almost boyish in its unrestraint, cut him short.

"How perfectly ridiculous!" she gasped; and then: "That's the traditional doctor you're describing, and Doctor William Pangborn Kitts smashes all the traditions into little tiny shards. He is as big and hard-muscled as you are; he played football on his college team, and is a man's man in every sense of the word—which is only another way of saying that most women fall in love with him at sight. He doesn't know what it is to be 'professional,' and when he laughs you'd think the roof was falling in."

"I've a hunch that I'm going to like Doc Billy," said Stannard. "Married or single?"

"Very much married, indeed. They're on their honeymoon—Doc Billy and his wife—and that brings us to the one other young woman, who isn't eligible merely because Doc Billy saw her first. Dolly Kitts is little and brown-eyed and quiet, and she thinks the sun rises and sets in William Pangborn. She has lots of money of her own, and she makes a haloed hero out of Billy because he won't give up his profession and be an idler. She isn't a little bit in love with the bear-hunting phase of things, but she makes believe she is merely because her husband is such a raving maniac on the outdoor life."

"Check for number seven," said Stannard. "Anybody else?"

"Nobody," was the short reply.

"Aha! my memory is better than yours. Didn't you speak of a Mr. Vallory who was fond of saying cynical things about nice old ladies? I used to know a man named Vallory once; he was in the class ahead of me at Illinois—a fellow who was capable enough to loaf through his college course and come out at the top, and still have time to mix up in more outside activities than you could count."

"If I made any mention of our Mr. Vallory, you may forget it, because I'm tired of cataloguing. Tell me about yourself. What have you been doing all these months and years?"

"It's only one year, and a part of another," Stannard corrected. "And as for doings, you rode over a good bit of them on the way here from Yellow Medicine. To-morrow, with the help of a little daylight, I can show you some of the others, if you care to see them."

"And the one altogether lovely?—has she been found yet?"

The young Missourian slid from his perch on the stool to stand with his back against the drawing table.

"Didn't I tell you a few minutes ago that I am too busy to fall in love?"

"You did, and it went in one ear and out the other. A man is never too busy to fall in love."

"You're quite sure of that, are you?"

"Perfectly sure. People tell us that sentiment is the whole of a woman's life, but only an incident in a man's. The part about a woman isn't necessarily true, but the other part is."

"Well, then: the one altogether lovely has been found and lost again. It was a sort of 'iridescent dream,' I guess. Anyhow, it wasn't even a possibility."

"So you woke up and rubbed your eyes and forgot it?"

"That's what I've been trying to make myself believe. It's the sensible thing, at least."

"There'll be a second choice some day," she asserted, half mockingly. "Wait until you have met Gladys Wetmore. She is the most adaptable person you ever saw."

Stannard drew out his watch and glanced at it surreptitiously under cover of his coat lapel. It was half-past nine, and the singing in the graders' camp had stopped. Through the open door he saw a straggling procession making its way across tracks toward the private-car. It was evident that Miss Anitra's companions had either forgotten her or had concluded that she had returned to the *Egeria* without them. There are times when the conventions, even for an Ozark mountaineer, die hard; and Stannard had a disquieting fear that Pearson or Patterson or somebody else might drift in and find them alone together.

"It's time you were going to bed," he announced abruptly. "Your people have all gone back to the car. I'll walk across the yard with you."

"So good of you, I'm sure," was the demure response, and as she rose to go with him: "It's years and years since anybody has been brave enough to tell me to stop talking and go to bed."

The young man who fancied he was responsible grinned broadly.

"I'm the boss in this camp, and what I say goes as it lies. But I'm not quite as brave as I ought to be. If I were, I should promptly couple an engine to your uncle's hotel-wagon over yonder and toddle it out of the Travois and back to Yellow Medicine."

"Why?" she demanded shortly.

"The reason I gave your uncle a little while ago when he sent for me was good enough: I told him that a working camp is no place for a picnic party."

She turned upon him with a flash of the brown eyes and a lift of the wilful chin. "That wasn't the real reason," she shot back smartly.

"Mr. Westervelt's reason for coming here and my reason for wishing him to go away may or may not be first cousins. Just the same, if I could think of any way to discourage him, I'd be glad."

"I like that," was the tart rejoinder. "Perhaps you imagine I am going to help you think of the way."

The young man laughed good-naturedly.

"I don't imagine for a moment that you would do anything you didn't want to do."

"I never do; at least not without knowing why I am supposed to be doing it."

They were out of the headquarters shack now and walking together down the slope toward the railroad tracks. There was no moonlight, but electric arcs are not such a bad substitute when the sentimental soil has been judiciously prepared beforehand.

"I don't want you to go away, and I am afraid to have you stay; that's the long and short of it," was the admission which the substitute moonlight finally wrung out of the young engineer.

The young woman at his side looked up quickly. "You are doing, or you are going to do, something that you don't want Uncle Silas to find out?" she queried.

"Oh, no; it's hardly that. But there is trouble ahead—trouble of the kind that might make it very unpleasant for a—for a picnic party. We are working a pretty rough lot of laborers, grade men and hard-rock 'gophers,' and any little jangle about pay, or hours, or anything of that sort, in a railroad camp is likely to mean rioting and violence. You see what I mean. The fellow whose job it is to have to man-handle such things any old day in the week is apt to be impatient of handicaps."

"I see," she said, with a touch of the Westervelt detachment. "You want me to tell Uncle Silas that I'm sick of the wilderness, and get the others to tell him so."

"When I am in my right mind that is exactly what I want."

"Are you in your right mind now?" she inquired innocently.

"No; I'm just foolish enough to feel like taking a chance and letting things rock along."

"I see," she nodded again. "You are discounting all the mean little things I've been saying about Gladys—or perhaps it's Una—and wondering if the time hasn't come for you to be thinking a little more pointedly about that second choice."

"Oh, am I?" he laughed; and then, the false moonlight getting in its work again: "There isn't going to be any second choice."

"Don't you believe it! There always is; and if the man would try half as hard the first time as he does the second—but never mind; do you really want me to work on Uncle Silas's sympathies?—he hasn't very many, you know." And then, breaking off suddenly; "Oh, look up there! What is that?"

They had crossed the gridironing of vacant tracks and were standing at the steps of the *Egeria*. Stannard wheeled quickly and saw that she was looking up at the sharply defined summit of the Standing Stone, the curiously detached and spire-like monolith in which the Dogtooth ended and which marked the entrance to the canyon and gave its name to the river. On the summit of the Stone a bright light was alternately flashing and disappearing.

Whatever explanation Stannard might have made was lost in a rather violent interruption. While they were still watching the mysterious signal flashings a big, black whiskered man, swearing under his breath and fiercely hurried, came tumbling out of the vestibule of the private car and narrowly missed falling upon them. It was Pearson, and he began on Stannard with no apparent regard for Stannard's companion.

"Been hunting all over the lot for you," he growled impatiently. "The tunnel roof's down again in the east heading, and this time we'll have a dead man for breakfast. The gophers are all out and swearing by all that's holy that they won't go back into the drift again with Truman as dynamite boss. Three or four of us had to fight like the devil to keep 'em from hanging Truman the first dash out o' the box!"

"Ring off, you fool!" gritted Stannard, out of the corner of his mouth. Then he turned and lifted the young woman, who had been listening, wide-eyed and shaken, to the vestibule step. "Don't let it tremble you up that way," he whispered. "It's only an accident, and they have to happen every once in so often on a job as big as this," and bidding her good-night, he joined Pearson in a swift run across the yard to the engine which the tunnel-driver had ordered out to rush them to the foot of the great mountain.



FIRE IN THE ROCK

As it came about, Stannard was destined to meet one other member of the private-car party sooner than he expected. After the potential riot at the tunnel mouth had been quelled, and the one man injured by the falling roof had been carried down to the valley level and rushed into camp on a hand-car, Stannard found a frank-faced, square-shouldered young stranger waiting in the yard for the arrival of the makeshift ambulance.

"My name's Kitts, and I'm licensed to saw your leg off," was the way in which the stalwart one introduced himself, clinching the introduction by showing an ominous-looking black bag. "Miss Anitra was telling us you'd had an accident, and I didn't know how well fixed you might be for surgical help."

"We're not fixed at all," said Stannard. "I've been yelping for six months to get the company to send me a camp doctor. When a man gets half killed we have to finish him by sending him down to the main line."

"Then I may take hold?" inquired the volunteer.

"Sure you may. I'm afraid it's a hopeless case, but the whole camp and everything in it is yours. Shoot out your orders and we'll obey them."

At that, Stannard was given to see a thing which stirs keen joy in the heart of any skilled workman; namely, the way in which another workman and a master of his craft brings things to pass. Kitts snapped out directions to the ambulance crew, and in an incredibly short space of time the crushed tunnel-driver was transferred to the shack which served as the camp emergency hospital. The young surgeon whipped out of his coat and went to work at once with Stannard for his assistant.

The Missourian had seen human repair jobs before, a gruesome number of them in the industrial field, but never anything to compare with the rapid mastercraft of the volunteer from the *Egeria*. The instant stripping of the injured man and the swift examination and diagnosis were like the dexterous passes in a sleight-of-hand trick.

"Broken bones until you can't rest," was the verdict, "but that seems to be the worst of it. We'll patch him up, all right. Put your knee right here and brace yourself—that's the ticket. Now hand me that roll of adhesive; and, say—couple of you fellows get busy whittling splints for this leg. J'ever see a careful mother gluing up the baby's broken doll, Stannard? This'll remind you of it."

Stannard was reminded of many things during the next few minutes, but chiefly of the strides which modern surgery has made in the hands of men like the adept who, with the corded muscles of a prize-fighter and the gentle touch of a woman, was giving a manipulation clinic, with the crushed and broken hard-rock man for a subject. After the clinic was over, he took Kitts to his own room in the headquarters cabin to give him a chance to wash up; and when he tried to show his appreciation he had the grateful experience of having his thanks cut short by the breezy young fellow who was scrubbing his hands in the wash-bucket.

"Cut that out—cut it all out, Stannard, old man. It's all in the day's work. The fellows on the football squad used to say that I broke more bones than I'd ever have a chance to mend, if I lived to be a hundred years old, so I'm only trying to be fair about it and catch up with my record."

"The man would have died before we could have chased him across the desert to Yellow Medicine."

"Don't you believe it! That kind is pretty hard to kill," laughed the bone-mender, skilfully catching the towel that Stannard tossed to him. And then: "I feel like smoking a pipe; if it isn't too late, and you're not too sleepy—"

Stannard protested that neither objection obtained. Kitts had his own briar, but he filled it out of the engineer's buckskin pouch of cut plug; after which they went out to sit on the rough slab bench beside the workroom door with the black, star-punctured September night sky for a canopy and the winking arc-lights of the yard to outline the shanties and tents of the sleeping camp and to bulk in the somber backgrounds of the surrounding mountains.

Two men, as likely to find each other congenial as the young Missourian and the upstanding, outspoken young surgeon, easily alight upon the common ground of friendly confidence. For a time the talk was desultory and reminiscent, harking readily back to college days which were but shallowly buried in the past for both. Farther along, it came down to the September night and to Stannard's problem, which—as he stated—was to get his railroad up to and through the mountain barrier before the snows came.

"You're going to make it all right, aren't you?" said Kitts.

"Barring too much bad luck, we ought to make it with a margin to spare," was the reply which lacked confidence only in the tone.

"Accidents?—like this one to-night, you mean?"

"Yes; accidents just like this one to-night," said Stannard gravely.

"I got the particulars only as Anitra Westervelt gave them," said the expert in human repairing. "It was a roof-slump in the tunnel, wasn't it?"

"Yes, we've got a bad proposition on our hands in the tunnel. In the nature of things, we couldn't make many preliminary test borings to determine the geological make-up of the mountain. By all the surface indications we should have found porphyry and solid granite. Instead, we've got into a mixed mass of loose stuff which requires the carefullest kind of work and pretty constant timbering. That is why we are rushing the approach track so frantically up the canyon. We've got to have it to transport the concreting material; and every day's delay means just so many more hollow teeth to plug up with the concrete arching."

"Then your 'overhead' is unsafe?"

"Yes, it has been unsafe all the way along, and to-night Fitzgerald, the heading boss, was getting ready to blow this particular soft spot down before it became dangerous to the men working under it. The dynamite went off prematurely."

"Of course, it was accidental?"

"I wish I could be sure of that, Kitts. But I can't be sure of it. There have been too many similar 'accidents.'"

"Good Lord! But you don't mean to say that you're letting it go without investigation."

"There isn't much left to investigate, after forty or fifty tons of rock have fallen in to bury all the evidences. But I did pry around as well as I could while Pearson was driving the 'muckers' on the job of getting the poor devil you've just been patching up out of his ready-made grave. What happened to-night has happened at least twice before. The dynamite was placed, and the wire connections were made; ready for the firing of the shot. After the firing wires are cut in, the 'dynamite boss,' as he is called, is supposed to stand over his plunger machine until the heading boss notifies him in person that the men are out and the drills have been dragged back. I don't know that I'm making it very clear."

"Yes, you are. I know the mining stunt like a book; I put in part of my apprenticeship as company surgeon in the anthracite field. Go on with your story."

"To-night, as on two other occasions, Truman, the dynamite boss, was called away from his machine after the wires had been coupled in on the fuses. Somebody that he couldn't see or identify in the darkness yelled to him that his wires were crossed. He says he threw the safety-switch and went to investigate. Before he had taken ten steps the charge exploded."

"My heavens!" ejaculated the listener. "But why—why in the name of conscience would anybody want to do such a thing as that?"

Stannard pulled at his pipe in sober silence for a full minute before he replied. Being neither more nor less secretive than other young men of his temperament and training, he was not given to talking loosely to comparative strangers. But the frank, open-eyed young surgeon was an exception, and his sympathy and interest were unmistakably sincere. Stannard began at the beginning, giving Kitts a brief outline of a situation which was likely to climax in a right-of-way war for the possession of Standing Stone Canyon.

"Now you know why we're rushing and why we are suspicious of anything that makes for delay," he ended. "Greer, the chief of construction on the Overland Northern, is an unscrupulous fighter, and he wouldn't hesitate to load us up with trouble-makers from his own camps if he thought he could hold us back."

Kitts held his peace for a little while before he said: "I'm only an innocent bystander, and these matters are miles out of my line; but honestly, Stannard, the thing doesn't seem to hold together. You say that the Overland Northern people will fight you for a right-of-way up the Standing Stone. As you explained it, the Overland Northern scheme is merely to parallel or confiscate your road through some four or five miles of your approach canyon. What's that got to do with your tunnel? How can they hope to further their scheme by holding you up on a part of your job that doesn't concern them?"

"Frankly, Kitts, I don't know. As I've said, Greer is an unscrupulous fighter. He'd hit out wherever he thought he could hit hardest. The Overland is our strongest competitor on transcontinental business, and if this tunnel of mine should

turn out to be a failure it would cripple us badly in the money market, and make us just that much weaker in the business fight."

"I see; but still the motive seems rather indirect; too indirect to warrant this dynamite business in your tunnel." Kitts paused to relight his pipe, and when he went on he had taken the other necessary step which brought him into the field of frank partizanship. "If I were you, Stannard, I should dig a bit deeper and ask myself if the fact that the *Egeria* is camping out over yonder on that side-track has any bearing upon the puzzle."

"We can hardly discuss that," said the Missourian. "You are Mr. Westervelt's guest."

"Not altogether," was the quick reply. "I am Mrs. Grantham's family physician. It pleases her to believe that she has fatty degeneration of the heart,—which she hasn't,—and she wouldn't come along unless Dolly and I could come, too—afraid of the altitude. It was all right; I have a staving good office partner, and though we've been married a couple of months, Dolly and I hadn't had any wedding trip. So I turned the practice over to Bentley and told Mrs. Grantham we were It."

"In that case, I am taking all the pointers I can get. What's your notion?"

"I don't know that I have any. But we're a queerly assorted bunch for a pleasure party, and it strikes me that we've come to a mighty curious place to hunt bears. If you'll take it from me, there'll be more to follow. Some of us—the women, the Englishman, the painter-man and yours truly—are merely fill-ins. Cancel us out, and you have remaining a Wall Street money king, a mighty smooth stock broker who has turned a dozen little bull-and-bear tricks for Mr. Westervelt, and a clubman hanger-on who has been known to fetch and carry for Mr. Westervelt in some of these same little quiet shearings of the woolly lambs. That's gossip, pure and simple, and now I've got it out of my system, I'll trot along and go to bed."

For a long half-hour after the square-shouldered figure of Doctor Billy had disappeared among the yard shadows, Stannard kept his place on the bench, smoking in solitary silence and brooding thoughtfully over the possibilities which might be involved in the private-car invasion.

That Kitts should have been able to throw new light on the situation was not singular. The bystander in any game can always see many moves that the players fail to see. But, granting the young surgeon's hint that bigger game than the hypothetical brown bears was afoot, what was Westervelt's object? If it were merely an interference in behalf of the Overland Northern, why was he taking such a roundabout way of interposing it, and why had he encumbered himself with a car-load of non-combatants whose presence might easily obstruct the obstructionist?

The young Missourian was still puzzling over these answerless questions when he finally got up to go and turn in, the one clear conclusion arising out of the yeasty turmoil being a troubled conviction that he had been seriously underrating the resources of Judson Greer and his associates in the advancing Overland Northern army of dispossession.

At the door of the work-room he met Roddy. The assistant's clothes were dusty, and he looked hollow-eyed and weary.

"Hello!" said the young chief. "I thought you had turned in hours ago, Jacksie. Where have you been?"

"I've been taking a little hike for my health. Got a wireless and had to go and answer it."

"A wireless? Was that your contrivance that I saw working on top of the Stone, a couple of hours ago?"

"That's her," was the laconic reply. "I sent Stedman up there with a good glass this afternoon. What you saw was his wig-wag report to me. He's been seeing things."

"What did he see?"

"He saw what I've just seen—at a good bit closer range. Greer has moved up one step nearer. His new grade camp is now within five miles of the Travois, and he's working a night gang. I wanted to make sure, so I took a tramp in the dark. To-morrow, or the next day at farthest, we'll be hearing his dynamite. Now you see why I wanted those Winchester. Good-night: I'm dead on my feet and I'm going to bunk in."

THE TIME-KILLERS

Bully Gallagher, despot of track-layers, whose voice was as the grating of a rusty hinge, and whose scepter of authority was a pick-handle, had been driving his gang to the tune of an Irish quick-step for two full hours of the matchless September morning; and the steel, clanging musically into place on the cross-ties to be spiked home under the showering blows of the maul men, was now within a short half-mile of the big rock-cutting on the lower leg of the loop of the tunnel approach.

Looking down toward the canyon's mouth, where the uncertain and wavering lines of the new track bent themselves around the base of the Standing Stone, Gallagher, contemplative for the moment, saw a sight to make him lift his voice in imprecations in comparison with which his brow-beatings of the gang were but as love-whispers.

"Holy Tacks!" he rasped, when the volcanic eruption of objurgation had exhausted itself. And then to O'Hara, his understudy: "For the love o' Gawd, Patsy, look what's comin' to us—an' me widout me dress-suit and me eye-glasses!"

What Gallagher saw was sufficiently distressing to a man driving a track-gang at speed, the more so since the gang boss was of those who are firmly convinced that industrial speed bestirs itself only at the behest of many bull-bellowings and much profanity. Stannard, shortly after his morning's conference with Bailey and the material handlers in the Travois yard, had been set upon, just as he was leaving for the canyon battlefield, by eight-elevenths of the complement of the *Egeria*, the missing members of the party being only Mr. Westervelt, the chaperone, and the man who had been named to him as Vallory.

The bear hunters, waiting perforce until the guides and horses could be procured from Crumley's ranch, were reduced to the necessity of killing time. Wouldn't Mr. Stannard take them over the grade of the new line and show them the tunnel?

If any one save Anitra Westervelt had made the beseeching, Stannard's answer would have been a flat refusal. And how was he to know that Kitts, anticipating the refusal, had put Anitra forward to do the talking? With an inward groan and a wordless malediction broad enough to include at least seven of the would-be sight-seers, the Missourian dissembled his reluctance and fell into line, hoping that the newly laid canyon track, rough and hard to walk upon, would shortly discourage some one—the willowy Miss Wetmore, for example.

They had covered the half-mile intervening between the camp and the spire-like mass of granite guarding the mouth of the canyon when Gallagher first caught sight of them. After making her plea, Miss Westervelt had dexterously attached herself to the big boyish-looking Englishman, while the younger Miss Wetmore, whose mood of the moment was artistic, clung prettily to the arm of the landscape painter. Stannard saw teasing malice in this arrangement, which made him responsible for the pleasure and entertainment of the rather chilling young woman with the gray eyes and nice hair, and he made sure that at least three members of the party, Anitra, Kitts and the round-bodied, full-faced little broker who came stumbling on behind, were keenly enjoying his discomfiture.

"As I was saying, Mr. Stannard, everything out here seems so dreadfully crude and banal that I should think one would never get used to it," resumed the gray-eyed Miss Wetmore, after Padgett had broken in to ask the height of the cathedral-spired Standing Stone.

"Oh, but I say!" interposed the Honorable Eggie, "you wouldn't expect to find all the comforts of home in such a magnificent wilderness as this, don't you know. Directly we come to those carriages on ahead we can sit down and rest a bit."

Since the "carriages" referred to were the flats of the steel-laying train, Stannard swallowed his emotions with a gulp and tried to interest his unimpressionable companion in the torrent leaping and tossing its spray man-head high in its boulder-strewn bed at the foot of the narrow embankment.

"Oh, yes," was the lack-luster rejoinder; "of course, it's very fine and impressive, but it is also very noisy and very wet."

The young chief heard a sound behind him which, voicing itself in any throat less musical than Anitra Westervelt's, he would have compared to a chicken choking, and it prompted him to say: "Oh, no, Miss Wetmore, that is a mistaken idea that many Eastern people have. The water at this altitude is never what you might call really wet. If you will stay here long enough you will see our men working in it for days at a time without the slightest inconvenience."

Doctor Billy's comment on this remarkable piece of information was an explosive chortling, and Miss Una's perfectly penciled eyebrows went up in austere inquiry.

"Was that a joke, Mr. Stannard?"

"Mr. Stannard's jokes are like the Cubists' pictures; you have to be able to feel them," put in the sprightly younger sister, and again Kitts exploded.

"Really, though," bubbled the Honorable Eggie, adjusting his eye-glass for a better appraisal of Stannard's job, "this is a deucedly clever bit of engineering, what? Fancy tucking a railway line into such a place as this!" And then: "I say, Mr. Padgett, could you figure this all out in dollars?"

"Mr. Padgett is busy walking the ties; please don't interrupt him," pleaded Anitra. Then to Kitts: "Why don't you and Dolly laugh at that, too?"

Doctor Billy did, and the brown-eyed young bride hanging on his arm smiled seraphically in harmony with her haloed hero. Padgett stopped to light a cigar and then stumbled on to pass the fat and well-filled Morocco-leather case to the other men of the party.

"I'm game," he puffed. "So far, I've only turned my ankle twice and knocked the cap off one knee with the other. How much do we get of this, Stannard?"

"Ten miles,—if we walk the grade to the tunnel mouth."

Miss Una shrieked decorously, and Carroll stopped to take out his handkerchief and flick the dust from his patent-leathers.

"You don't mean to say that you're going to tramp us ten miles to get to your blooming hole in the ground, do you, Mr. Stannard?" he demanded.

"Sure," laughed the Missourian, equal now to anything. "After you have ridden one of Crumley's cow-ponies over two or three counties, you'll enjoy a little hike like this. Besides, when we come to the 'carriages,' as Mr. Montjoy calls them, we can stop and rest."

Once more the stalwart young doctor snorted; and Carroll said: "You can count me out on the ten-mile tramp. I wouldn't walk that far over a railroad grade for a farm in Paradise."

"There weren't any farms in Paradise; nothing but apple-orchards," Miss Westervelt put in, adding with the accent malicious, "Ask Mr. Stannard. He knows."

"You make me extremely tired, all of you," sighed the younger Miss Wetmore. "How any one can make wretched jokes and talk such vapid nonsense, with this glorious scenery making its silent appeal to all that is highest and best _____"

Stannard excused himself abruptly and tramped on ahead. It had suddenly occurred to him that Gallagher might not have noticed the coming invasion; in which case the big foreman might be helplessly surprised in the midst of one of his prayerful appeals to his men. The precautionary measure was not without its effect. When the lagging time-killers came up, Gallagher was sweetly adjuring the track-gang, as thus:

"Now, thin, gentlemin—aisy wid that bit av steel, lest ye'd be breakin' ut. Shquint ut into pla-ace, Mither O'Hara, if ye plaze. Right ye are. Shpikes! but don't be hittin' thim too har-rd lest ye'd be hurtin' their poor little feelin's. 'Tis a foine day, Mither Stannard, an' 'twas a grand thing f'r ye to be bringin' yer friends up to see us puttin' the nate little pieces av steel to bed on the cross-ties. Mither Bannagher"—to the man who was spacing the rails—"that thrack-gauge is ornamental, to be sure, but 'tis also mint to be used. Tim Grogan, ye shouldn't shpit on yer hands in the presence av the ladies—'tis an onpleasant habit ye have."

"Isn't it the truth that there is no gentleman quite like the Irish gentleman, wherever you find him," remarked the younger Miss Wetmore, in an aside to any who cared to hear.

Carroll had unlimbered his sketching kit and was preparing to make a study of the strenuous activities, with the Standing Stone and the forested shoulderings of the Buckskin for a background. Stannard drew a little aside, hoping that the pause would not outlast Gallagher's ability to sit on the safety valve. Miss Westervelt joined him when the others had gathered around the impressionist's easel.

"Are you really going to punish us by making us walk ten dreadful miles around the grade?" she asked.

"Of course not," he returned. "The rock men are working in the cut just above here and we couldn't very well pass them without climbing the Dogtooth. We'll turn back when you're quite sure you have seen enough."

"You must punish Doc Billy," she said airily. "He dared me to ask you, and you said, last night, that you'd show me what you are doing. I know you are just too busy to breathe, and you're hating us all like poison for taking your time. If I say that I am sorry, will that make up for it?"

"Amplly," said Stannard; and further to show his magnanimity he walked her on up the grade and over a climbing path among the red firs which brought them out upon the brink of the great rock-cutting where they could look down into the gash which was growing slowly under the gnawings of the drills and the dynamite.

When they first looked down, the noise of the battering air-drills was deafening. But a little later the clamor and fusillade stopped and there was a hurried placing of iron shields over the machinery and a scattering of the small army of rock-men.

"They are getting ready to shoot," Stannard explained; and then: "Perhaps we'd better give them a little more distance."

"You mean that they are going to blast the rock?"

"Yes."

"That is something I've always wanted to see. Won't it be safe if we stay here?"

Stannard measured the hazard with a calculating eye. There was only one chance in a hundred that any of the fragments would be blown as far as their brink of observation. None the less, he was unwilling to take even the small risk.

"It will be safer farther back among the trees," he demurred.

Miss Westervelt put her back against the bole of a great fir and the pretty lips took on the curve of wilfulness. "But I want to stay right here, where I can see it," she insisted.

Since the risk was so small as to be all but negligible, Stannard yielded, and together they watched the men attaching the wires of the firing machine. The young engineer almost changed his mind when he counted the number of shots in the battery. There were eight of them and the blast promised to be a miniature earthquake. Unhappily there was no time for reopening the argument with his companion. The foreman was running back to give the signal to the firing boss, and the great gash in the river-fronting cliff was already emptied of every one else.

"Put your hands over your ears!" called Stannard sharply, and as he spoke the cutting below them was filled with a spurting eruption of dust and hurtling rocks, and the surrounding mountain sides echoed to a rumbling crash of mimic thunder.

Stannard could never explain to his own satisfaction afterward just how the untoward thing happened. Out of the spouting dust-cloud they both saw a fragment of stone no larger than a man's fist rise in a curving trajectory to the level of their cliff-edge to hurl itself among the trees. An instant later Stannard heard the stone strike something, and the next instant he saw it bounding leisurely toward them with its force so nearly spent as to make it improbable that it would cover half the distance.

When it became evident that the leisurely boundings were deceptive, he took the alarm; but then it was too late. The small stone, rolling almost to its stop, changed its course again to drop accurately at the butt of Miss Westervelt's tree, and with a cry of pain the girl collapsed in a stricken little heap.

"For heaven's sake!" gasped Stannard, dropping down beside her. "Where did it hit you?"

"It's my ankle," she faltered, setting her pretty teeth against a groan.

In a twinkling he had the dainty outing boot off and was feeling for broken bones. "It's my fault!" he protested in keen self-reproach. "I should have taken you to a safer distance. Does it hurt much?"

"Yes, it hurts like everything! But if you'll put my shoe on again, I'll try to walk. We must get back to the others, some way."

Stannard replaced the small tan boot, awkwardly enough, to be sure, but very gently. She told him she couldn't stand it to have it laced, so he tied it loosely and lifted her to let her make the essay at walking. The attempt was a failure, even with the help of his supporting arm, and one glance at her face decided him. Gathering her up as if she had been a child and telling her to put her arms around his neck and hang on, he stumbled back to the path and down the hillside, and it was thus that they made their reappearance on the track-laying scene.

Naturally, there was sympathy in abundance for the injured one, and Kitts took over the case and made a swift examination.

"It's only a bruise, but a pretty bad one," was his announcement, and then there arose the question of transportation to the Travois yard. Stannard solved that problem at once, to the crass delaying of the work and the speechless disgust of Bully Gallagher, by taking the construction engine and one of the steel flats for a special train. More than that, he took up a collection of coats from the track-layers and made a couch of them on the flat-car for Miss Westervelt.

A few minutes at the heels of the big locomotive sufficed for the making of the short journey to the camp yard, and Stannard, directing the movements of the emergency train from the engine cab, had the hospital car drawn in beside the *Egeria*. Yielding his place to no one, he put the Englishman aside at the stop, told Kitts gruffly that he didn't need any help, and once more taking Anitra in his arms, carried her into the private car.

Here, while he was putting the victim of the catapulting stone on the lounge in the open compartment, he had a chance to get acquainted with a gray-haired, motherly looking lady who was trying not to be too greatly flustered by the freshly added anxiety, but he scamped the chance, or so much of it as he could, hurrying out again to send the work engine back to Gallagher.

With this abrupt breaking up of the sight-seeing expedition, the harassed and still self-reproachful young chief of construction was free to go once more about his business of railroad building, and he did it, spending the greater portion of the day with Markley and Pearson in the tunnel drifts and coming back to the Travois camp only when Pearson's day-shift knocked off at late supper time.

Reaching the big yard on the engine of the laborers' train just as the masthead arc-lights were fizzing and sputtering into being, he meant to make it his first duty to go over to the *Egeria* to inquire about the bruised ankle. But before he had crossed the first of the intervening tracks, Roddy overtook him.

"You're wanted at the office 'phone, Clay," rasped the small man with the baby-blue eyes and the bad jaw. "Markley's at the wire. Ten minutes after you left him to cross the mountain this afternoon, his gang, hard-rocks and muckers to a man, walked out on him. Worse than that, they've taken possession of the works and they're swearing that they'll burn the tunnel timbering before they'll let you send in a bunch of strike-breakers to take their places."



JUDSON GREER

Taking time only to snatch a hasty bite of supper at the cook-house door, and telephoning Markley that he and Roddy would cross the mountain at once to confer with the striking rock-men, Stannard set out for the tramp in the dark with Roddy at his heels.

An hour later, when the two mountain climbers were breasting the steep slopes of the trail connecting the eastern and western tunnel workings, and the younger members of the private-car party had gathered, with Carroll and his banjo for a nucleus, in an after-dinner grouping on the observation platform, Silas Westervelt, passing a word to the colored porter, retreated to the privacy of his office-stateroom.

As on the previous evening, Mr. Westervelt found the financial pages of his New York newspapers sufficiently interesting as an after-dinner recreation; but he had scarcely begun on them before the cat-footed porter tapped at the door and opened it to admit a small dark-faced man, bearded and uniformed in neatly fitting working clothes of brown duck, with leggings and shoes to match. Between jobs, when Mr. Judson Greer haunted the engineering clubs in Chicago or New York, he was inclined to be slightly foppish in matters of dress, and even in the field the tendency expressed itself in a certain jaunty fitness which went well with his snappy manner of speech and his unquestioned ability as a master railroad builder.

"Ah, Greer," said the money lord, laying his papers aside precisely as he had postponed them for Stannard's benefit twenty-four hours earlier; "I rather looked for you last night."

"I knew you were here, but we were moving up with the grading outfit, and I thought it wouldn't do any harm to let you get settled a bit," said the Overland Northern man, seating himself on the narrow divan and crossing his legs.

"Oh, no; there was no special hurry," was the magnate's rejoinder. "We didn't have the facts up to date."

"But you have them now?"

"Fairly well. Vallory has had the day, and he has improved it. Stannard is the key to the situation. It was he who bullied Merriam and the others into financing this Cut-off scheme, and the financial end of it is working out precisely as was to be expected. The bond issue was barely large enough to cover the actual cost of construction with no margin for bad luck. And there has already been considerable bad luck."

Greer's smile showed his mouthful of fine, even teeth under the closely cropped mustache.

"Stannard's young," he remarked, clipping the words to the highest point of efficiency. Then: "Has he any idea of what's in the wind?"

"Vallory thinks not. Of course, he's looking for trouble in the right-of-way matter in Standing Stone Canyon, and he is pushing the work vigorously to forestall you there."

"But he still thinks that we are intending to build on through the canyon to the Buckskin mining camps?"

"So far as Vallory has been able to find out by chumming with one or two of the members of Stannard's staff, that is the situation at present. Our young man takes it for granted that you are meaning to make trouble for him in the canyon and so delay his track-building to the tunnel. Under existing conditions, those ten miles of approach track are vitally necessary, as you know. Without them Stannard cannot transport the material for his tunnel arching, save at a prohibitive cost; and without the arching the tunnel will not stand through the winter. I understand it has been caving very badly."

Again Greer made the teeth-baring smile. "I've heard that, too," he cut in. "If it doesn't stand?"

"If for any reason Stannard should be unable to go on and finish his job before winter sets in, there would have to be another bond issue; in other words, our young man would have his battle to fight all over again with the Securities Committee."

"That's about the way I had it stacked up. The question is, could he make the fight successfully?"

Mr. Westervelt's smile wrinkled like a miniature sand ripple on the dry-desert face. "Not without knocking the bottom out of the market on G. L. & P., I'm afraid."

"I don't suppose our people on the Overland would shed many tears if that were to happen," said Greer.

"No, I suppose not," returned the banker-director dryly.

Greer moved uneasily on the divan, uncrossed his legs and crossed them the other way.

"I'll have to admit that I don't see just where you're coming in on this, Mr. Westervelt," he ventured.

The New Yorker fixed his cold eyes upon the engineer. "Perhaps it isn't altogether necessary that you should see, Mr. Greer. Your compensation——"

"I know; I'm only a hired hand, as you might say. Still, I like to work intelligently, when I can."

"You shall," was the even-toned reply. "There are a few of us in the G. L. & P. directory who believe that this Cut-off scheme is ill-advised. I may go so far as to say that we should be glad to see it dropped right where it is, even at this late day."

"Of course," Greer assented; "I understood that. What I don't understand is how you and your friends can stand for the loss. But that's none of my business. I'm here under instructions from our president to co-operate with you. Also, I have been given to understand that the building of our extension through the Standing Stone Canyon to the Buckskin camps is a bluff. If you'll excuse the slang, what's the dope?"

Again the great captain of finance permitted the permanent smile to rise to its highwater mark beneath his eyes.

"We might put the case hypothetically, Mr. Greer. It is an axiom of trade that anything with a property value may be acquired by the buyer if the price is right. You are a man of intelligence and discretion; suppose I should tell you that we have found a prospective purchaser for the tunnel site and the uncompleted tunnel through the range—a property which we are already finding burdensome, even in its period of construction."

Greer winked twice, which was his only outward manifestation of the inward shock of instant understanding. He knew well enough that there is no such thing as sentiment in business. In some manner, as yet unexplained, Banker Westervelt and whatever interests he represented stood to make a profit on the killing of the G. L. & P. short-cut scheme, and a transfer of its rights to some other company—doubtless the Overland Northern.

Greer did not know how the profit was to be made, but that did not especially concern him. Neither did it surprise him to learn that Westervelt and his associates were on the "bear" side of the market in the field of their own securities. He had been in the railroad service long enough to know that there are two kinds of railroading; the real thing, which is the building and operating of a line for the possible profit there may be in the carrying business; and the Wall Street kind which resembles more nearly the humble occupation of sheep-shearing.

"I am beginning to see the hole through the millstone, Mr. Westervelt. President Guthrie has probably told you how much or how little I am to be trusted. You may go as far as you like."

The banker waved a deprecatory hand.

"Briefly, Mr. Greer, it has been thought advisable by a conservative minority of our stockholders to abandon this Cut-off scheme entirely. This costly tunnel can never be profitable to us——"

—"But it may be to somebody else," put in the engineer quickly.

"Exactly," said Mr. Westervelt, matching the tips of his fingers accurately and rocking gently in his pivot chair. "Unfortunately, we have been unable thus far to convince Mr. Merriam and his friends that the proper thing to do is to dispose of our white elephant before we are confronted with the necessity of another bond issue. As I remarked a few moments ago, Mr. Stannard is the key to that situation. If we could persuade him to go to Mr. Merriam with the frank admission that the tunnel costs are going to be very largely in excess of his original estimates, the difficulties would vanish."

"I don't know Stannard," Greer demurred shortly. "But if he's like most men in his profession and mine he would sooner cut off an arm and hand it to you. Am I to understand that you mean to give him his chance first—before we force the fighting?"

"It would be better on all accounts if Mr. Stannard could be made to see the futility of his undertaking. We have not abandoned the hope that he may yet be made to see it."

Greer's laugh was hidden; so well buried that it did not manifest itself even in the teeth-baring smile. He knew the hyperbole of business; knew that Stannard was to be either bought or bullied. But again he told himself that it was none of his affair; at least, that if he should be required to figure in it, his part would probably have to do only with the bullying.

Up to the present he had had no belligerent instructions from his own superiors authorizing him to carry his point by force if necessary, though Stannard's suspicion that the Overland Northern chief of construction had been supplying him with labor trouble makers was well founded. Greer had gone thus far on a hint from his own management to the effect that delay in the tunnel boring might be a point gained in the right-of-way fight. But this was a matter apart from the bigger deal, the existence of which he had been merely suspecting.

"As I have said, I have instructions to take orders from you," he went on, after the reflective pause. "We are less than five miles away with the grading force. Do I understand that we are to mark time until you give the word?"

"Not exactly that. If other means fail, it may be necessary to give Mr. Stannard an object lesson; in other words, to show him the entire impracticability of completing his tunnel approach, if you should dispute the right-of-way in the canyon with him."

"I see," was Greer's terse comment. "If it comes to the right-of-way scrap, we can put the brakes on hard enough to make the wheels skid. Our original location runs across the head of the Travois at an elevation which would put us at least a hundred feet higher than Stannard's line on the canyon slope. Unless your people should get out an injunction against us——"

"There will be no appeal to the courts," said the banker definitely.

"In that case the spoil from our cutting a hundred feet higher up the slope in the canyon would be apt to give Stannard a good bit of trouble."

"Something of that sort was in my mind," was the magnate's half absent rejoinder. "Of course, it need be nothing more than what the army people would call a 'reconnaissance in force'; a sort of last-resort argument to convince Mr. Merriam and his friends that they were wrong and we were right. I'm hoping it won't come to that, but it is only the part of prudence to be prepared. You say you are within five miles of the Travois now?"

"With the grading force—yes."

"Is there any heavy work yet to be done?"

"Very little of it. We are entering the hill country on an easy grade and there are no rock-cuttings. Our survey runs along the opposite side of the river at the foot of Rock Face Mountain, within a pistol shot of your car here, and it does not interfere with Stannard's construction yard at all; will not interfere until we begin making the fill to cross his tracks at the head of the valley."

"Then here is my suggestion: push your work right along until you reach the base of operations here in the Travois. By that time the negotiations to which I have referred may have progressed to a satisfactory point."

Greer nodded. The inference, so far as his own part in the deal was concerned, was quite plain. The Overland Northern construction force was to be held as an argument in reserve to be used only when diplomacy should fail. He had a natural curiosity to know what form the diplomacy would take; whether the battle was to be fought out in the financial arena of the Street, or whether the attack was to concentrate itself upon Stannard. Greer knew the young Missourian only by repute, and it was that repute which made him say:

"I'm afraid you're going to have to show Stannard, Mr. Westervelt. He's from Missouri, you know."

The smile on the face of the host of the bear-hunting party was as expressionless as the stone calm of a Buddha.

"Human nature is much the same the world over, Mr. Greer. Some one has summed it up rather baldly in the saying that every man has his price. It would be more accurate to say that every man's success depends upon his willingness to yield to constraining influences."

"It sounds better, anyhow," was Greer's bitten-off comment, and the cynicism in the remark was thinly veiled. Then he added: "They say Stannard doesn't especially need money."

"Everybody needs money." Mr. Westervelt said it with the manner of one repeating an axiom. "If you have none, the need shouts itself from the house-top. If you have a little, the need for more may not be quite so apparent, but it is precisely as real."

The Overland Northern chief of construction got upon his feet and buttoned his coat.

"What Stannard is needing at the present moment is some argument that he can use upon a lot of discontented

workmen," he ventured. "He has a strike on his hands. Did you know that?"

"No."

"It's a fact. It was pulled off at the shift-changing hour over at the west end of the tunnel this evening. Stannard and Roddy have gone over to see what there is to be done about it."

"Ah; that means more delay, I suppose?"

"That is what it is meant to mean."

The banker stood up to shake hands with his departing visitor. "You are a man of resources, Mr. Greer, and we are fortunate to have you with us. I hope there will be no violence."

"There won't be, unless Stannard brings it on by trying to fight the strikers with strike-breakers. He will hardly be able to do that, however. The labor markets are pretty well skinned just now." And at this the engineer went his way, leaving the *Egeria* and the construction yard as he had come—with a due regard for secrecy.



THE LED-CAPTAIN

Stannard's victory over the striking rock-men at the western tunnel-working was easier than he had any right to expect it would be. After holding out behind their barricade in the mouth of the tunnel for twenty-four hours, the strikers capitulated and consented to go back to work, the easy surrender being due chiefly to the fact that, owing to Markley's prompt precautions, there was no whiskey to be had.

The labor trouble settled, for the time being, at least, Roddy remained with Markley at the west end, and Stannard crossed the mountain alone, reaching his Travois headquarters after the east-end night-shifts had gone to work. Over in the yard he could see the lights of the *Egeria*, and his thoughts reverted, as they had many times during the twenty-four-hour interval, to the young woman with the bruised ankle.

In justice to his job, not less than in deference to the eternal fitness of things, the level-headed young captain of industry had been trying for two days to keep the sentimental avalanche from getting the fatal start which might overwhelm him. In common with many young men of a generation which takes its romance vicariously out of a novel hastily skimmed through, or contents itself with the still more ephemeral substitute of the modern drama, Stannard esteemed himself a bachelor by force of circumstance. Now and then there had been day-dreams of a future in which, having safely made his mark in his profession, he might be able to marry and settle down; but the desire to fill in the details of the picture had lain harmlessly dormant up to his first meeting with Anitra Westervelt.

That meeting had been productive of a fresh series of day-dreams which, when he had been able to push them into some short perspective of time, became mere matter for ribald self-ridicule. He had learned enough of Miss Westervelt to know that she was the spoiled darling of a social set which he had neither the opportunity nor the inclination to enter; that she was an only child and an orphan, independently wealthy in her own right, and the heiress presumptive of her banker uncle.

The young Ozark mountaineer had no false ideas about the classes and the masses, but he did have a keen sense of proportion, and was both sane enough and sensible enough to admit the social incongruities. Also, he owned sufficient poverty-pride to make him fiercely intolerant of the distinctions which build themselves upon the figures of a bank-account; and, as not infrequently happens, the intolerance took the form of a deeply-rooted prejudice against the money-marriers of either sex.

It was the recurring jolt of the incongruities that stopped him when he would have gone across the railroad yard to inquire about the stone bruise; that and a sudden weariness accenting itself in a huge reluctance at the thought that he might be required to stay and be talked to by the other members of the car party.

But he was not to escape the social infliction entirely. When he turned back, and had climbed the mesa slope to the headquarters cabin, he found a clean-shaven, carefully groomed man sitting on the door-flanking bench and smoking cigarettes. The young man got up and held out his hand as Stannard approached, saying, "They told me you'd be back sooner or later, and I thought I'd wait. I suppose you don't remember me, Claiborne? There isn't any especially good reason why you should."

Stannard took the proffered hand and gripped it mechanically, finding it cold and rather clammy in his grasp. Then recognition came with a little shock.

"Vallory!" he exclaimed. "Austin Vallory!" and then: "I'd heard your name mentioned—as the name of the only man of Mr. Westervelt's party that I hadn't met—and I thought it was only a coincidence."

"It was, and it wasn't," said Vallory, sitting down again and lighting a fresh cigarette. "I'm hardly the same Austin Vallory you used to know in college."

The light from the nearest masthead arc included the headquarters in its radius, and there was enough of it to show the Missourian a face deeply lined and almost haggard—the face of a man prematurely aged by the hastening process of burning the candle at both ends.

"You have changed a good bit; that's a fact," he commented, sitting down to fill his pipe. "I'm not sure that I should have known you if the identity of names hadn't paved the way. How do you happen to be out here turning the trick with the bear hunters?"

"Ask the man," laughed Vallory, with acrid humor. "Perhaps he'll tell you that I'm along to represent the ultimate

consumer. I believe I have a little G. L. & P. stock somewhere among the leavings."

Stannard recalled what he had known of Vallory in the college period and found that it could be compressed into a few statements of facts and a little hearsay. Vallory had entered the western university as a second-year man, having been "rusticated" for cause—so the campus gossip said—from a great eastern university where he had spent his Freshman year. Beyond this it was known that he was a brilliant student when he chose to be, and that he was the son of a wealthy New York broker.

There were other items, but they were rather hazy in Stannard's mind. Vaguely he remembered hearing that Vallory's father had died shortly after the son's graduation. Also, now that he was trying to gather up the recollections, he recalled that some one had told him later that young Vallory, having come into his money too suddenly for his own good, was going all the gaits.

Their talk for a time was purely reminiscent because they had no other common ground. Stannard remembered that, together with a good many others in the big western university, he had been boyishly dazzled by Vallory's brilliance. What had figured as brilliance in the youth had become sardonic egoism in the man. Quite early in the talk it developed that Vallory had made ducks and drakes of the inherited fortune, or at least of the major portion of it, and by his own confession he had become a mere book-maker in the life race, keeping in the social running for the sake of the tips he could pick up.

"Money talks, in this world, Claiborne, and everything else barely whispers," was his summing up of the philosophy of life. "And that brings us back to the original question. You asked me how I managed to get this far from New York; you can put it in four words—I had a hunch."

Stannard did not press for explanations. As a matter of fact, he was tired enough to hope that Vallory would presently go back to the *Egeria* and so give him a chance to go to bed. But the clubman made the explanation without encouragement.

"Westervelt has some sort of a deal on, and it occurred to me that I might grab hold of his coat-tails and get myself pulled ashore on some little island of prosperity if I should come along," Vallory went on, adding: "Of course, I didn't take any stock in the bear hunt. That was too transparent to fool anybody except the bear hunters themselves."

"And they are?"—

"Practically all the men in the party, save and excepting Uncle Silas and your humble servant. If you should ask me, I couldn't tell you why the women are along, unless it is because they are the victims of circumstances—or rather, of one circumstance."

"Yes?"

Vallory nodded, tossing away an empty cigarette carton and opening another.

"Anitra was the compelling circumstance. At the last moment she decided to come along, and to use one of your Western phrases, what Anitra Westervelt says, goes as it lies. Of course, that made a chaperone necessary. In her turn, Mrs. Grantham accounts for the two Wetmore girls and for her family physician, and Kitts and his wife are too saccharinely one to be separated."

"But the women can't hunt bears," Stannard interposed.

"Oh, no; but they can go on a woodsy picnic into the foot-hills and make believe hunt bears as successfully as the men. Westervelt needed an excuse for making the Travois his headquarters, and he has it. That's all he wants."

"You are talking in riddles and I guess I'm too sleepy to dig them out," was Stannard's rejoinder.

"Money's the key-word, Claiborne—big money and easy money," said Vallory; and then: "You're pretty well at the top in your trade, so they tell me. Have you ever figured out how many years it'll take you to save up a stake out of your salary?"

A material train was pulling in from the desert, and for a time the night silence was torn and rent by strident noises and clamorings. When the train came to rest with a jangling of drawbars, and the locomotive had gone clattering down the yard to the coal chutes at the temporary repair shop, Stannard answered the question.

"To tell the truth, Austin, I've been too busy to think much about the stake. I've always been able to get the three square meals and a place to sleep."

"A common ordinary yellow dog can do that," was the half cynical comment. "Don't you want more money than that asks for?"

Under normal conditions, Vallory—the Vallory of college memories, or this newer and even less likable egoist—was the last man in the world in whom Stannard would have chosen to confide. But the conditions are never wholly normal when an unattainable object of desire has been lately dangling itself before the eyes of longing.

"For just one reason, Vallory, I should like to have more—a good bit more," he admitted.

"Well then, why don't you get it?" was the cool query.

Stannard laughed. "The means don't readily suggest themselves. I'm neither a trader nor a grafter."

"Everybody grafts, more or less," declared the clubman oracularly, adding: "But that's a piker's alternative in most cases. I suppose, for example, you might hold out ten thousand a year, or such a matter, in rake-offs on your supply and material bills on a job like this, and possibly another ten on your sub-contracts. That's what a piker would do, not having the ability to see anything bigger." Then without warning: "It occurs to me, Claiborne, that you are about to be handed the chance of your life. Are you man enough to grab it if it should come in your way?"

"As I told you a few minutes ago, Austin, I'm no good at the riddles to-night. You'll have to put it in words of one syllable."

"I can give you only a hint. Silas Westervelt is stringing the wires for a killing of some sort connected with this jerk-water railroad of yours. That much I'm sure of. I'm giving it out cold that I'm going to make him drag me in on the hand-out. Figuring solely on the probabilities, it's only fair to say that your chance in the game looks a thousand times better than mine."

"I don't see either the chance or the game," the Missourian thrust in obtusely.

"Neither do I, for that matter, at the present moment; I'm not far enough on the inside. But I've been wondering if—well, never mind that part of it; it'll probably say itself a little later." Vallory got up and yawned, stretching his arms over his head. "It's getting along into the shank of the evening, and you must be about all in. I oughtn't to have kept you up. If Westervelt hadn't said what he did—"

Stannard was thoroughly awake now, and the skilful spreading of the veil of mystery changed his indifference into quickened interest—as it was meant to.

"Come back here and sit down and tell me what you've got on your mind, Austin," he broke in. "You'll sleep better if you get it out of your system."

Vallory thrust his hands into his pockets and began to pace back and forth, three steps and a turn, as one hesitating. When he stopped and stood with one foot on the bench, his thin lips were parting in a mirthless smile.

"There isn't any reason in the world why I should butt into your game, Clay. The friendly mile-posts have been passed so far and so long ago that I've forgotten what they look like. I'm on my own, as Montjoy would put it, and you can take it from me that I'd cut your throat in a minute if you stood in my way. I'm saying this so that you'll understand there's no personal end to be served."

"Go on," said Stannard.

"Let me begin by asking a question: How well do you know Mr. Silas Westervelt?"

"I know what the newspapers print about him—and possibly a little more."

"You scrapped with him a year ago when you were trying to fight this Cut-off scheme through, didn't you?"

"Hardly that. He was on one side, and I was on the other. Sometimes I thought he went out of his way to land on me, but perhaps he didn't."

"Westervelt is a peculiar man in some respects," Vallory went on, speaking slowly. "They will tell you in New York that he is a man without friends, cold-blooded and a sort of first cousin to Shylock when he gets the other fellow into a corner where he can shave off the pound of flesh. Yet those who are nearest to him—Anitra, for example—might tell you that he has another side; that he is really capable of forming likings and dislikings."

"We're not getting anywhere yet," Stannard suggested mildly. "Where do I come in?"

"At the front door, unless I am very greatly mistaken," Vallory asserted impressively. "Westervelt likes you, chiefly, I think, because you are one man in a thousand who has fought him to a finish. You did, you know; and you beat him—in a small way. That is the surest road to his favor."

"I'll have to take your word for the liking, Vallory," said Stannard shortly. "I should have put it the other way around."

"Because he tried to choke you off on this short-line scheme? You shouldn't jump at conclusions, Clay. Possibly Westervelt had the longer look ahead and saw developments that you couldn't see. I know this much, anyway; he is willing to be your friend—at least to the extent of helping you to get something more than the piker's start you've got now."

Stannard shook his head. "You are taking me at a disadvantage, Austin; throwing a thing like that at me when I am too tired to be able to see straight. Why should Mr. Westervelt interest himself in me?"

The clubman laughed and took his foot from the bench.

"You are more than usually thick-headed to-night, Clay," he remarked. "There can be only one reason on top of earth why Silas Westervelt might wish to give you a boost—apart from the fact that he likes you a little for the way in which you did him up with the Securities Committee a year ago."

"You'll have to give it a name," said Stannard stubbornly.

"It has a name, and a very pretty one. See here, Clay; were you asleep a few minutes ago when I told you that Anitra Westervelt changed her mind at the last moment about going to Europe with the Van Pelts and insisted on turning this bear-hunting party into a co-ed picnic?"

The young Missourian struggled to his feet, rather stiffly because the tired muscles had been given time to harden into knots.

"You've said too much, or too little, Austin. If you're talking through your hat—"

Vallory laughed again and tossed the last of the series of cigarettes aside. It fell upon the path leading down to the railroad yard and lay like a tiny red eye looking up at the two men.

"No; you couldn't squeeze any more out of me if you should run me through a cheese press, Claiborne. But I can see as far into a mill-stone as the next fellow. You're in luck, old man—the biggest kind of luck; at least, that is how it would appeal to me if I were standing in your shoes. Now go to bed and sleep—if you can; I'm through with you for to-night."

Five minutes later the clubman, admitted by the porter on guard in the forward vestibule of the *Egeria*, made his way through the corridor, tapped on the door of the banker-director's state-room, and was admitted. Silas Westervelt was lying on the lounge and he did not get up at the noiseless door-opening and closing.

"Well?" he inquired.

"I've put the hook into him," was the crisp rejoinder. "It strikes me that you're going to find him pretty easy."

The man on the lounge made no comment, and when he spoke again it was about another matter.

"What have you heard about the horses and guides?"

"Crumley has been over from his ranch, and Padgett and Kitts have made a dicker with him. The ranchman has a round-up shack about ten miles back in the hills, and he will fit it up as a camp. The start is to be made early to-morrow morning. Crumley furnishes a camp cook, and there will be a buckboard for the women."

"Anitra can't go," said the banker. "Her ankle isn't well enough." Then he added: "Padgett mustn't get too far out of reach. I may need him at any moment. How about the telegraph operator?"

"He's fixed," said Vallory. "He'll take our messages and give them the right of way over everything. I had to do a little judicious lying there and tell the young man that, for business reasons, his chief didn't care to know anything about your use of the wire. Then I gave him Padgett's first batch of cipher copy with a ten dollar bill rolled up in it."

"And the deliveries? how about those?"

"I have arranged for them. Messages for you or Padgett will be delivered here at the car by the operator in person."

The big-bodied man on the couch sat up and ran his hands through the thinning hair.

"How did you go at Stannard?" he asked.

Vallory laughed. "I gave him what the box-fighters call the heart punch. For the purposes of this particular killing he has been led to believe that a certain young woman in this party would not be sorry to see him come in for a piece of money."

Silas Westervelt looked up quickly.

"Vallory, you are playing with fire. Besides, you had no authority to involve Anitra, even by implication. Why couldn't you be man enough to put it on a business basis at once? We need Stannard's services and we are willing to pay for them."

The thin lips of the led-captain parted in a sardonic smile. "With all due respect to you, you don't know Stannard as well as I do," he retorted. "If I had gone at him with a straight money proposition, it would have been a good bit like sticking a match into a barrel of gunpowder. More than that, we should have been missing our one best bet by not taking advantage of his principal weakness. He was batty about Anitra a year ago last summer. It was the joke of the season, though it probably wasn't passed on to you. You let me manage this thing in my own way and I'll have the apple-picker eating out of your hand—and without committing or involving anybody."

The banker frowned thoughtfully.

"I won't have Anitra involved—understand that; and I still think it is a blunder on your part to take that line," he said with brittle emphasis. "With all her good hard common sense, Anitra is more or less romantic—all girls are. If she should find out what you are doing, I wouldn't answer for anything she might say or do."

"She won't have time to find out," said the go-between, with his hand on the door-knob. "I'm counting on this hunting business to keep them apart until after we have made the turn."

"That is where you are making another blunder," cut in the great man, with a degree of testiness which was quite out of keeping with his usual attitude of bland impassivity. "She can't go with the others, as I have told you. The only thing to do now is to push the matter with Stannard, and push it quickly. Send George Washington in as you go out, and tell him I'm ready to go to bed."

WHOM THE GODS DESTROY

With Vallory's parting words to banish all thoughts of sleep and weariness, Stannard filled his pipe again after the clubman had left him and tramped off aimlessly into the night, craving solitude and the chance to wrestle with the incredible thing to which Vallory's hint had pointed.

He was not quite fatuous enough to take the hint at its face value. He told himself that Anitra Westervelt had doubtless joined the bear-hunting party very pointedly because she wished to, and for no other reason whatever. None the less, it warmed him deliciously to believe that a thought for him had added its urgings. He remembered how she had improved the earliest opportunity to seek him out on the evening of the *Egeria's* arrival, and an added touch of imagination made it easily conceivable that she had tried to warn him not to take the bear-hunting excuse for the private-car invasion too literally.

But quite apart from this, Vallory must have had some basis for the hint. Stannard gave manly modesty a free hand and tried not to be a conceited ass. Yet the ecstatic possibility would not suffer itself to be entirely sat upon and extinguished. The athletic young chief of construction jammed his fists into the pockets of his working coat and went plodding on westward through the railroad yard, following the line of the recently laid track skirting the base of the Standing Stone. In the back part of his head there was a grim determination to walk the ecstatic possibility off, if the thing could be done, and he did not realize where he was going or how far he had gone until he found himself stumbling over the cross-ties on the curve of the canyon approach.

By this time the masthead arc-lights in the construction yard were left well behind and his eyes had become accustomed to the darkness. Since the track-layers were now able to keep up by working only the day shift, the canyon at his left was deserted, though he could see the reflection of the electric flares lighting the great rock cutting beyond the end-of-track, and could hear the rapid-fire volleying of the air drills.

Directly in front of him the steep wooded shoulder of the Buckskin cut off the view to the westward, and at his right the river, issuing from the canyon on a line parallel with the foot of the Buckskin, cut straight across the head of the Travois before making its right-angled turn to the eastward along the mountain barrier of the Rock Face.

Finding himself no nearer a sane conclusion about Vallory's hint than he had been when he left the construction camp, he was turning to retrace his steps when a curiously recurring phenomenon brought him alertly awake to the time, place, and surroundings. On the right bank of the river, and apparently about half-way across from the canyon mouth to the elbow bend at the foot of Rock Face, a small bright light was alternately appearing and disappearing like the winking lamp of an overgrown firefly.

Owing his nativity to a region in which there are swamps as well as mountains, Stannard's first thought was of the jack-o'-lanterns of his boyhood. But apart from the fact that there are no masses of decaying vegetation in the high altitudes, the light was far too dazzling to owe its origin to marsh-gas. Sober second thought named it an electric flash-lamp in some human hand, and wondering what member of his staff might be picking his way across the great valley at that time and place, Stannard made his way down the yielding slope of the new embankment to the margin of the stream and began to stalk the curious phenomenon.

There was a thick growth of small aspens fringing the bank of the Standing Stone, and with the trees for cover and the noise of the river to drown his footsteps he was able to make his approach without being discovered by the two men who were moving back and forth on a north and south line parallel with the river. For a little while their movements puzzled the engineer. One of them would stand statue-like while the other paced off a short distance to the southward. Then the one in advance would stop, snapping his flash-light rapidly. Following this, the rear man would close up and the light would show again, glowing steadily for a few seconds as if one were holding it to enable the other to read or write something in a small book.

Familiar as he was with the routine work of his own trade, Stannard did not realize what the men were doing until the starlight showed him an engineer's transit instrument dimly outlined on a slight elevation against the black background of the eastern sky. At that, however, the puzzle solved itself instantly. He knew that the old location of the canyon-threading Overland Northern survey ran across the head of the Travois paralleling the river, and the conclusion was obvious. The two men were engineers from Judson Greer's force, and they were secretly verifying the notes of the old preliminary survey.

The originality of the move appealed instantly to the craftsman in the young Missourian. Never before had he seen an

attempt made to take instrument readings at night with only the help of a pocket flashlight. Drawing nearer in the shadow of the aspens, he saw how the thing was done. The rodman went ahead, placed his staff, and showed the light at the level of the target until the instrument man had found it with his telescope. That done, the reading was taken by turning the light on the target itself.

Under other conditions, or rather, in some calmer frame of mind, Stannard might not have interfered. Legally, Greer was entirely within his rights in sending his men to verify the old survey. It would be only at the point of track-crossing on the G. L. & P. right-of-way that the Overland Northern would become a trespasser. But Stannard had been too lately stirred up by the talk with Vallory to be able to weigh and measure the nicer distinctions.

Climbing the river bank to the high-water gravel bar where the two men were running their line, he broke in upon them with a challenging demand.

"Say, I'd like to know what you two fellows think you're doing here!"

Now Stannard was unarmed, but the smaller of the two men prudently made sure of the fact by running his flashlight quickly over the figure of the intruder. Following the flash, Stannard found himself looking into the muzzle of an army service revolver in the hands of the bigger of the two, a loose-bodied giant half a head taller than he had any right to be.

"What we happen to be doing is none of your blank-dashed business," grated the giant, strengthening the uncivil phrase in the retort with a grouping of adjectives which would have made Bully Gallagher turn green with envy.

"I'm making it some of my business," Stannard snapped back. "Put up that gun, or I'll take it away from you and pitch it into the creek!"

The big man stepped from behind his instrument and made as if he would thrust the revolver into Stannard's face.

"You make your get-away right now, before I start a lead mine in you bigger than any you ever saw in Missouri, Mr. Claiborne Stannard!" he barked. And then: "Put up your hands!"

It was the small added fact that Stannard found himself recognized, and still defied, that dropped the spark into the tinder box of a temper which was ordinarily rather slow to ignite. Ducking cleverly to dodge the weapon, he closed with the transit man in a mad-bull rush, twisting the gun from the hand of threatenings, and throwing the loose-bodied giant with a skilful back-lock and an open-handed push under the chin.

"Now get up and fight like a man!" he panted, and stepped back to give the fallen one a chance to rise.

The bit of decent fairness came near costing him his life. A shot from an automatic pocket-pistol smacked upon the still night air, and the dodging ray of the flash-lamp showed Stannard the smaller man with his weapon out and coolly taking pot-shots at him by the help of the little spot-light.

After that, there was nothing for it but a fight to a finish, and the Missourian went about it systematically. Baseball had been his safety-valve in college, and he had been known as the outfielder with the swiftest and most deadly "wing" of any man on the team. Catching up a stone, he hurled it at the little man, who straight-way doubled up, dropped his automatic and the flashlight, and withdrew from the scene, rolling out of sight among the fringing aspens and making strange noises as he disappeared.

By this time the big-bodied one was up and gamely trying to hold his own against Stannard's rushes. Twice the Missourian closed for a moment of savage in-fighting, and both times the big man went down among the worn boulders of the old high-water torrent wash. At the third knock-out, discretion got the better of the transit man's valor. Leaping up in the recovery, he hurdled away over the boulder heaps, with Stannard in hot pursuit. The chase was not a long one, and it ended when the fugitive splashed through the shallows of the Standing Stone and gained the thick cover on the opposite bank.

Balked of his prey, the Missourian raced back to the battlefield and made hostile search for the second man. Failing to discover him, for the good and sufficient reason that he, too, had taken flight, Stannard found the flash-light and by its help made spoils of war of the two weapons and the surveying instruments.

It was the unreasoning madness of the slow-to-anger type that made him deliberately smash the transit and target staff and fling them, together with the pistols, into the river.

After which he was content to tramp back to the bunk-house at the headquarters, breathing rageful threatenings for the first half-mile, and beyond that, when the reaction had set in, gibbeting himself satirically as a hot-tempered idiot who

had gone a very considerable distance out of his way to get on the wrong side of an argument, and to make a pair of enemies who would doubtless bide their time to even the account.

MAHOMET WESTERVELT

A telephoned report from Pearson of another slump in the east-end tunnel-working—this time happily without loss of life or limb—got Stannard out of bed in the graying dawn of the morning following the fight with Greer's pioneers and sent him in hot haste up the mountain to the scene of the fresh disaster.

The black-bearded assistant met his chief in the clay cutting of the tunnel approach. He had already organized his force for the removal of the débris and had called in as many of Patterson's graders as could be used in the limited working space.

"It's a bad one this time," was Pearson's confirmation of the wired report. "Fifty feet of the timbering gone, and what's left of the roof is so rotten that I don't believe anything but steel or concrete will hold."

"Some more premature shot-firing?" Stannard queried.

"No; not this time. It was a shake-down right on the heels of a blast in the heading. I'd been watching it, and I ordered the men all the way out before the heading shots were fired. As it happened, it wouldn't have hurt anybody. The slump is three or four hundred feet this side of the farthest point of the present run-back. What we need is concrete."

Stannard nodded.

"One more kick to keep us hustling. Everything asks for the rushing of this loop track. We can't get the concreting material until we have a track, and we can't have a track until we get the grade. I'd plant men three feet apart all the way up the ten miles if I could get them; but I simply can't get them, Bartley. They're not to be had for love or money. More than that, we're not even holding our own; can't keep the gangs full from day to day."

"I know," agreed the tunnel engineer; "they quit us and chase over to Greer's camps. Patterson told me yesterday he was losing pick-and-shovel men out of his squads in bunches of five and ten at a crack. We can't stand for that, can we?"

The young chief frowned impatiently.

"There's only one way to square an account of that kind; to give the other fellow a dose of his own medicine. I don't like to do it; I've never done it yet on any job where I had the say-so, and I don't want to begin now."

Pearson's smile was sour. "A man has no business to have a conscience in these days, Stannard. I used to have one, but I wrapped it up in cotton wool and put it away before I came out here. In this day and generation you've got to reach out and take what you want wherever you can find it. If you don't, the other fellow will."

"I hate to believe that, Bartley. It makes pirates of us all, and what isn't good for the swarm isn't good for the bee. There oughtn't to be any reason why a man should be honest in his personal relations and a buccaneer and a highbinder in business. Let's go inside and see just how bad a jolt we've got this time."

When the inspection was concluded, the sun was still no more than half an hour high above the Yellow Desert stretching away in the eastward vista between the Dogtooth and Rock Face. Pearson walked with his chief out to the mouth of the clay cutting to the point where the path to the valley began. From the high viewpoint the Travois lay like a map in the foreground, with the camp buildings, the yard tracks and the long strings of material cars delicately minimized by the distance.

Over on the river spur the Westervelt private Pullmans were measurably isolated. A stir at the platform end of the *Egeria*, a dotting of saddle horses and the still more unusual spectacle of two buckboard teams in a railroad yard, advertised the outset of the bear-hunters. Pearson pointed with a rocking motion of his thumb.

"So the city folks are sure-enough going to beard the savage honey-eater in his den, are they?" he said.

"They are going picnicking in the hills at the Back of Crumley's upper range," Stannard qualified. "Possibly the Englishman and one or two of the others still believe in the bears."

"Are they all going?" inquired the tunnel driver.

"I suppose not. Mrs. Grantham, the chaperone, will hardly care to camp out, and I fancy nothing is farther from Mr. Westervelt's purpose."

Pearson turned short upon his superior. "What's he here for, Stannard?"

Stannard shook his head. "I wish I knew definitely. It would simplify matters somewhat."

The black-whiskered one grunted.

"I don't want to know any more about it than you want to tell me," he said gruffly.

"There isn't anything to tell—not as yet. From two or three sources I have been given to understand that Mr. Westervelt's real object in coming to the Travois is not pleasure—it's business; some business connected with the railroad."

"That means the Wall Street end of some business connected with the railroad, I take it," was Pearson's curt comment.

"Naturally. It's a pretty safe bet that Mr. Westervelt's interest in any corporation with which he is associated concerns itself altogether with speculative values."

"That has been the curse of western railroading ever since I've known anything about it, Clay," growled the tunnel engineer. "I put in ten years on one transcontinental line, and during that time there were three changes of control, all in Wall Street, and all for the purpose of making money out of the stock speculations. The physical thing itself—the railroad that was carrying the passengers and freight and earning the money—was a mere pawn in the game; the carcass that was picked and picked again until there was nothing left but the bare bones."

"I know," Stannard agreed. "It's one part of the game, and it's lucky for us that we've got a man like Mr. Merriam on our side in the G. L. & P."

Pearson was wagging his big head dubiously. "You never can tell," he rejoined. "It's the money that talks, and the big money is always in the dickering and buying and selling. The men at the top expect us to be loyal to them and to the railroad as a railroad. But they reserve the right to be loyal only to their own bank-accounts. I don't blame 'em. If anybody should show me how to make a pot of money suddenly, I reckon I'd jump at the chance—and so would you."

"Would I?" said Stannard; and he was asking himself the same question in many forms as he strode down the mountain and across the valley, pointing for the mess shack and the breakfast which he had missed.

It was after he had taken his seat in solitary state at the head of a table long since deserted by the other members of the staff that Eddie Brant came in with a telegram.

"It's marked 'Rush,' but I didn't think you'd want me to go chasing out on the hill after you," said the draftsman.

Stannard said no, and after Brant had gone, opened the freshly sealed envelope. The telegram was from New York, and it was signed by the president.

"Rumors in circulation here that tunnel costs are likely to double on your estimates and necessitate another bond issue. Wire fully present condition of work and authoritative denial of rumor over your signature. Mr. Westervelt is somewhere in your neighborhood with a hunting party. If you can reach him, it might be well for you to confer with him."

Stannard read the message twice and was going thoughtfully over it for the third time when Vallory strolled in with the inevitable cigarette held loosely between his thin lips.

"Breakfasting at eight o'clock?—and you call yourself a workingman? I am astonished!" said the loungee in mock reproach.

Stannard folded the portentous telegram and slipped it into his pocket.

"Overlook it this time, and we won't let it occur again," he laughed; and then: "Draw up a stool and have a cup of camp coffee with me, won't you?"

"Not in a thousand years!" protested the clubman. "There are two things that I'm mighty careful of—my reputation and my digestion. Besides, I breakfasted ages ago. The bear hunters got away at a most ungodly hour, and of course I had to get up and see them do it. By the way, is that a black eye you're sporting? or is it merely a gentle hint that the plumbing in the camp bath-room is out of order?"

"Call it the bath-room," said Stannard, with his face in his plate; and then with a sudden return to straightforwardness: "No, you needn't do that either. You named it right in the beginning. I had a little disagreement with a

fellow last night, and was awkward enough to let him hit me."

"Was that after I left you?" Vallory queried.

"Yes; a little while after. Does it show up much?"

"No; I was only joshing you. Forget it and let's talk about something else. Are those crazy people of ours going to get any bears out in the foot-hills?"

"They'll probably get plenty of hunting," was the qualified rejoinder. "Did they all go?"

Vallory laughed. "I'm not quite the sole survivor; Mrs. Grantham and Uncle Silas are still with me. And that reminds me; I've 'come an errand,' as Montjoy would say. Westervelt wants to see you."

"Did he send you after me?" Stannard inquired shortly.

"Oh, not exactly that. He said if I happened to run across you I was to ask you to drop around. It wasn't an order, if that's what you mean."

"That is exactly what I meant," answered the Missourian, absently double-sweetening his coffee. Then he added, "I've a good bit of office work to do this morning, and if you'll take my excuses to Mr. Westervelt, I'll be much obliged."

Vallory was tilting his three-legged stool against the wall of the shack and regarding the breakfaster through half-closed eyelids.

"In other words," he said half-jocularly, "you'd cut off your nose to spite your face. Is that it?"

"I don't know why you should say that."

"I say it because you are so evidently prejudiced against a man whose only crime, so far as I can see, is the harboring of rather a kindly feeling for you. If I were in your place, Clay, and a man of Westervelt's money and influence showed a disposition to want to take care of me—"

"Once more, Austin, I don't know what you're talking about," said the breakfaster, firmly determined, in the light of this new day, resolutely to ignore the conversation of the night before.

Vallory shot a new element into the argument in a single shrewd question. "Don't you want to hold on to your job?"

"Naturally."

"Then take a fool's advice and go and have a talk with Uncle Silas. Do more than that—tell him anything he may want to know. I'm advising you as I'd advise myself."

Stannard pushed his stool back from the trestle-board table and squared his shoulders against the wall.

"You are beating the bushes again, as you did last night," he said, breaking his own resolution. "Come out flat-footed and say what you mean. What does Mr. Westervelt want of me?"

"He doesn't want to throw his niece at your head, if that's what you're afraid of," said the clubman with a smile that was more than half a leer. Then more placably: "It's business—straight business, Clay; and you can climb in or stay out, just as you please; it won't make the slightest difference in the world to anybody but yourself. Blame me, if you feel like it. I was the one who suggested that you might be a man of sense and not a hypersensitive ass."

"Then you are on the inside now, are you? You know you intimated last night that you weren't—that you were merely intending to be."

"I'm inside far enough to smell easy money, and to know that some of it will come your way if you don't insist upon turning it down. That's as far as I can go. If you don't see fit to confer with one of the biggest individual stockholders in your own company when he requests it, it is very pointedly your own affair."

Stannard scowled up at the ceiling, which was not a ceiling but only the under side of the corrugated iron roofing of the mess shack. Stubbornness was one of his failings, though those who set him hard tasks were wont to call it his chief virtue, since it was the quality which drove him through to accomplishment when other men were beaten back and crowded to the wall.

"I told you the plain truth a minute or so ago, Vallory; I have a bunch of estimates to check up and get off on the first train of empties that goes out to Yellow Medicine. Estimates mean pay-roll money, and if that isn't forthcoming—"

Vallory was laughing again; a slow laugh that trickled from the thin lips in little ripples of exhaled cigarette smoke.

"Perhaps Westervelt will be willing to break even with you and wait until your precious estimates are checked," he suggested; and with that he got up and lounged out, as one who, having had a boresome duty to perform, has performed it to his complete and entire satisfaction.

Stannard set it down as one of the curious lapses to which the sanest mind is occasionally subject that he had not remembered once, during the talk with Vallory, the wording of the president's telegram; this though he had been reading it thoughtfully for the third time when the clubman came in. In the light of the president's suggestion that he should find Silas Westervelt and confer with him, his late refusal to walk across the tracks to the *Egeria* became at once absurd and quite indefensible. None the less, he made one more small concession to the invincible obstinacy. An hour or so of delay could make little difference; and so determining, he went to his office in the headquarters cabin, stripped off his coat and plunged doggedly into the estimate checking.

An hour later he had occasion to send Eddie Brant out to the contractors' office with one of the estimate reports to have some corrections made. The draftsman had been gone less than a minute when the doorway was darkened by an ample figure in tailor-made tweeds, and Stannard looked up to find the banker-director taking in the details of the scantily furnished work-room in an all-inclusive glance of the calculating eyes. Since the mountain would not go to Mahomet, Mahomet had to come to the mountain.



QUOD ERAT DEMONSTRANDUM

Stannard tried to make himself believe it was only decent respect for a man older than himself, and no sort of ubiquitous kowtowing to the man's wealth and position, that made him get up and offer Silas Westervelt the only chair. The banker thanked him and sat down; and the engineer braced himself for another bucketing of the cold displeasure which had greeted him on that first-evening visit to the *Egeria*.

Oddly enough, the coldness did not materialize. On the contrary, the great man sniffed the odor of the black pipe which Stannard had just put aside, and said, almost genially: "Mr. Stannard, you can't imagine how vividly the smell of that pipe brings back the old undergraduate days at Yale. We didn't smoke briars in my time; we stuck to the good old long-stemmed clays. You don't happen to have a clay pipe and a bit of dry tobacco, do you?"

Half doubting the evidence of his own senses, Stannard excused himself and went across to the mess bunk-room to rummage in Pearson's kit box. The tunnel-driver smoked a clay pipe sometimes in the evenings, and since it was his fad not to use one for more than a single sitting, he usually kept a supply of them in his box. With his search rewarded, the young chief went back to the work-room and tendered the stolen pipe and a confiscated buckskin sack of Virginia leaf tobacco. Whereupon the magnate stuffed and lighted the clay, and sat back to enjoy what was doubtless the severest infraction of habit he had permitted himself in many years.

"Fill up and join me, Mr. Stannard," he said, after a whiff or two.

Stannard, speechless as yet, obeyed the order in silence. With his pipe alight, he perched himself upon Brant's drawing stool. Then the banker began to talk, quite humanly and between leisurely puffs at the clay pipe.

"A year ago last summer we were on opposite sides of a discussion in which personal interest cut so large a figure that we couldn't very well get together, Mr. Stannard. You were quite naturally and properly enthusiastic over an engineering project which owed itself largely, if not wholly, to your own professional genius; while I, and some other members of the committee, took the longer look ahead and saw the possible financial difficulties. Do I state it fairly?"

"Quite fairly," said Stannard, still wondering.

"Very good. Those financial difficulties have arisen. Your tunnel costs are exceeding your estimates week by week. Isn't that true?"

"Unfortunately, it is true. But if you have been reading my detailed reports to the Executive Committee, you will know that the increased costs are due to conditions which could not possibly be foreseen."

Mr. Westervelt waved the explanation aside with a gesture of the pipe-nursing hand. "I am not criticizing, Mr. Stannard—far from it. I am merely stating the fact. Tell me frankly; do you see any likelihood of getting the tunnel through without another bond issue?"

"There would be if the Overland Northern would keep hands off," Stannard shot back.

"You are intimating that there have been interferences?"

"Many small ones, and there is a threat of a still bigger one. With the Overland camps only a few miles away, we are unable to keep our laborers from drifting, and though I can't prove it, I am morally certain that Greer, the O. N. chief of construction, is over-bidding us on wages, and has been sending us trouble-makers—men who have signed on with us for the sole purpose of fomenting strikes and promoting accidents."

"H'm," said the banker. "That is a pretty serious charge, isn't it?"

"I'm not making it as a charge, because, as I say, I can't prove it; but the fact remains."

"You spoke of a threat which might have still more serious consequences than these labor troubles. Do you refer to a possible conflict over the right-of-way in Standing Stone Canyon?"

"That is what I meant; yes. Unless we can beat him to it, Greer will make it cost us a mint of money. Without the loop line to use as a material track, we shall be obliged to abandon the tunnel work for the winter, after the snows come. The abandonment is not to be thought of. We've got to keep on boring, putting in the sustaining arch as we go, or we won't have any tunnel left. I've treated these matters very fully in my reports, as you have doubtless seen."

Mr. Westervelt was nodding slowly.

"If the conservative few of us were disposed to be critical, Mr. Stannard, we might say that you, or circumstances, have gotten us into a pretty bad box. But we don't say anything of the kind. We know that the present conditions couldn't possibly have been foreseen, as you say, and we are anxious now only to save the G. L. & P. company from disaster. You will probably say that this comparatively modest shortening project of yours is a small thing to precipitate a crisis in the affairs of a great transcontinental railway. But the stock market is a law unto itself, and the smallest adverse condition, a mere flutter, will sometimes serve to break the market for the strongest corporation."

"I'm following you," said Stannard soberly. "I've lost a good many nights' sleep over this thing, I can assure you. Since we are talking as man to man, I may say that I had a telegram from Mr. Merriam this morning. He says that reports of our bad luck have already reached the Street, and asks me to deny them."

The banker-director was shaking his head rather sadly when he said, "Merriam is one of the finest fellows in the world, but he is such a confirmed optimist that he is very hard to convince, at times. Have you sent the denial?"

"No; and in the face of the facts, I don't quite see how I can, Mr. Westervelt. Do you?"

"Most certainly not. You owe it to yourself, and to the company, to take a very different course. Let me ask you something; Mr. Merriam has been your friend all along, as we all know: how far would you go in an effort to save him and his associates on the board and in the Executive Committee from a very serious loss—in money and prestige?"

Stannard took time to think about it, and a picture of the bluff, jovial, large-hearted Middle-Western millionaire who had fought his way to the front in the great market place of the Street, generously dragging his friends up with him, struck itself out clearly in the mental vista. In his patient struggle to get recognition for the short-cut plan, President Merriam was the man who had reached down to him, lifting him out of the tangle of official disinterest and cold-shoulderings and giving him his chance to plead his cause before the Securities Committee.

For the man who had thus befriended him, and who had finally become his strongest partizan and backer, Stannard felt that he would go to any length. Westervelt sat back in his chair and smoked quietly, with the mask of false geniality fitting like a second skin over the dry-desert features and veiling the calculating eyes. How was Stannard to know that the war of the market place sometimes breeds enmities bitter and lasting, or that there was a score reaching backward to a loss of many millions lying between John P. Merriam and the tweeded gentleman who was calmly smoking the long-stemmed pipe raided from Pearson's kit-box?

"Mr. Merriam has been my friend, as you say," was the beginning of Stannard's deferred answer. "I'm little more than a number on the G. L. & P. payrolls, Mr. Westervelt; but if there is anything I can do to get between Mr. Merriam and this loss you speak of, I am more than ready."

"It may cost you something, temporarily at least," warned the great man, adding: "Professionally, I mean. But let us begin at the beginning. What reply are you going to make to Merriam's telegram? You have intimated that you can't conscientiously deny this report which is threatening to break the price of our stock. Doesn't it occur to you that the situation is rather critical, Mr. Stannard?"

Stannard confessed his helplessness in so many words. "To tell the truth, I don't know just what to say to Mr. Merriam."

The high-water smile came and sat upon the impassive face of the great capitalist.

"In other words, you are a railroad builder and not a promoter. I consistently opposed the financing of this Cut-off project, as you know: the time was not ripe for it. The event is proving that my judgment was right. We are confronting a crisis which is far more serious than Merriam and his friends are willing to concede. Do you follow me, Mr. Stannard?"

"I'm trying to," said Stannard, passing his hand over his brow to shut out the gaze of the stone-gray eyes which seemed to be half hypnotizing him.

"Let me tell you what will happen a little later on. When these reports of our failure get themselves properly exaggerated, our stock will be hammered down in the open market, and the Merriam management will be discredited. There are some of us who are not particularly concerned about what may become of the present management, but are very pointedly concerned about the safety of our own investment. As for yourself, you have no invested money to lose, but you don't want to see Merriam get the worst of it. Isn't that your position?"

Stannard fought against the hypnotic effect of the cold eyes as the hard-rock man caught under the falling tunnel roof had fought for breath. Difficulties there had been from the outset, but if any one had tried to tell him in any former stage

of them that his cherished project was not only hopeless, but a menace to the financial integrity of the G. L. & P. company, he would have refused to listen. Now, however, he was constrained to listen.

"Are you trying to tell me that I ought to be the scapegoat, Mr. Westervelt?" he asked, after a time.

Again the high-water smile came and went.

"I wouldn't put it quite so strong as that," was the even-toned reply; "but I do think you owe it to Merriam, and to the company, to come to the rescue. You are the one man who can do it most easily and effectively because Merriam will take your word as an engineer against the sworn testimony of a board of experts. If the G. L. & P. stockholders could know the situation as you and I know it, a vote to drop this project right where it is would be all but unanimous. Don't you agree with me?"

"You make it look that way; though I'll be frank enough to say that it hasn't looked that way to me up to this morning. If the company will back me I can put that tunnel through in spite of hell!"

"I admire your courage, Mr. Stannard," said the magnate in a fresh access of kindness. "You are a born fighter, and I couldn't help admiring that quality in you a year ago last summer. But you see it isn't altogether a matter of courage, or of the company backing you. A few points decline in G. L. & P. stock would easily swallow the earnings, or the savings, of this short-line Cut-off of yours for the next fifty years to come. It is a wise man who knows when to let go, and our friend Merriam is not gifted with that particular kind of wisdom."

"But what can I do—more than I have done?" pleaded the beleaguered young technician. "I haven't been hiding anything from our people. My reports to New York have been as exactly truthful as I have known how to make them."

"Ah, yes; but you will admit that your point of view has been like Merriam's—enthusiastically optimistic. You have encountered difficulties, but you have never admitted for a moment that they might in the end prove insurmountable. Pardon me—let me finish, if you please. I'm not criticizing your optimism; it is a fine thing in a young man. Without it this old world of ours would too often stand still and merely mark time. But there are crises, like the present, when the older and cooler heads are needed. You stand at the parting of the ways, Mr. Stannard. If you are the narrow technician, seeing success only in pushing your project to completion at any or all costs, well and good—we shall have to suffer. But if you are broad enough to consider the ultimate good of all concerned—"

"One moment," Stannard interposed, striving once more to reassert himself. "You are putting this up to me as if I were the whole thing."

"You are, in a sense," was the calm rejoinder. "As I have said, you are the one man who can convince the Merriam management of the inadvisability of continuing this losing fight against Nature in Buckskin Mountain."

Stannard gasped, and his heart skipped a beat.

"You mean—you mean that we ought to lie down on the job?—throw up our hands after we've spent millions on a betterment that will be absolutely worthless unless we finish it?" he stammered.

Again the banker-director waved the clay pipe in gentle deprecation.

"There is your one-sided point of view again," he asserted. "You can see the loss which would accrue from an abandonment of your work, but you fail to see the greater loss in the shrinkage of values which will certainly follow these panicky reports that are already in the air."

The young Missourian turned to the drawing-table and propped his head in his hands. Somewhere in this specious argument there was a false note; he knew it—felt it in every fiber of him. But he could not find it; he could only grope blindly for it.

"Have patience with me a little longer," he begged, finally. "I can't see, for the life of me, what difference it will make whether we go ahead and fail, or stop and fail."

This time the smile on the Sahara face was leniently superior.

"That workingman's point of view of yours is still getting in the way, Mr. Stannard. I wonder if you would consent to an experiment aimed at its removal?"

"A surgical operation?" suggested Stannard, catching desperately at the straw of humor.

Silas Westervelt drew himself up to the desk and took a fat collection of papers and envelopes, letters, blanks and

other matters, from his pocket. Then, tapping the papers gently with the stem of the pipe, "Let us try an experiment, calling it a laboratory test, if you please. I am a heavy stockholder in G. L. & P. A shrinkage of say ten dollars a share from the present market price would cost me something over a million dollars. Very good. I am a business man, Mr. Stannard, and the good business man never hesitates to spend one dollar to save ten. That is a fair statement?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well; let us say that this ten per cent salvage fund can be spent most judiciously in buying an enlightened point of view for the person who controls the situation. We might put it upon the basis of an expense account; money spent for the purpose of obtaining an expert and unbiased opinion. Now then, just to illustrate my point. Assuming the need, the good business man would search for the readiest expedient"—the banker was running through his pocket papers, suiting the action to the word—"and having found it"—he had drawn out and unfolded a stiff sheet of parchment paper, green-backed and gilt-lettered, and was writing rapidly on the back of it with Stannard's desk pen—"and having found it, he would promptly make his salvage investment something like this."

Stannard took the freshly blotted square of cunningly engraved bank-note parchment merely because it was thrust upon him. It was a certificate for one thousand shares of preferred stock of the G. L. & P. Railway Company, made out in the name of Silas Westervelt. On the back the banker had filled in the blank transfer to Claiborne Stannard.

"I don't see the point," Stannard said bluntly, returning the certificate.

"Don't you?" was the suave query. "For the purposes of the experiment in changing viewpoints, Mr. Stannard, we will say that you are now no longer 'a number on the pay-roll,' as you phrased it a few minutes ago. You are the owner in fee simple of one thousand shares of G. L. & P. common which, at the market, is worth something over one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and your opinion is not now biased by the workingman's point of view. In other words, you, have become an investor whose interest as a stockholder is more important than his interest as a salaried employé of the company. The constructing engineer wishes to complete his undertaking; but the stockholder knows that a raid on his securities will mean the loss, overnight, so to speak, of more money than the engineer could earn in a goodly number of years."

Again Stannard propped his head in his hands and frowned thoughtfully down upon Eddie Brant's exquisitely drawn map of the loop line thumb-tacked upon the drawing-board. Taking Mr. Westervelt's object-lesson merely as a clever hypothesis, intended only as an illustration of the point in question, its effect was still subtly potent. Almost before he knew it, the young construction chief was drifting. One hundred and fifty thousand dollars, added to his modest patrimony in the Ozarks, would make him a small capitalist, and with such a start the vista of possibilities widened magically. As if reading his inmost thoughts the banker went on smoothly.

"Your engineer, who has now become a capitalist, is concerned, not only about the value of his securities, but also about the future which is bound up in them. He is young and able. If he is so fortunate as to have a friendly adviser or two he can nurse his little capital, turning and multiplying it until he, too, has become a power in the land. There is practically no limit to what a courageous young man, with a fair knowledge of the world and of other men, can accomplish with a working capital of, say, one hundred thousand dollars, which would be the present borrowing value of this bit of paper. Coming suddenly into the possession of the means, a young man of intelligence and perspicacity would see new worlds opening out before him. He would—"

The young Missourian wheeled quickly upon the gray clothed figure in the desk chair.

"Let's get back to earth again, Mr. Westervelt," he said shortly. "Your object-lesson may stand for what it is worth as an illustration. I can see the other side now, as I couldn't a few minutes ago. What do you want me to do?"

"Only what your own good judgment—your later judgment—tells you what you ought to do. You will consider the best good, in the broader sense, of the company in which you have, for the past few minutes, been a part owner. You will —"

"Specifically, I mean," Stannard broke in. "Admitting for the sake of the argument, that I am taking the broader point of view, what can I do? Failure is failure, isn't it? What difference will it make to the market whether we stop voluntarily or are forced to stop?"

"If we handle it skilfully, it will make all the difference in the world. Suppose you wire Merriam that it is your honest conviction that the prosecution of the Cut-off project, and the construction of the tunnel under these unforeseen adverse conditions which will so greatly increase its cost, will not be a paying investment for the company? Suppose

you add that you understand the tunnel rights and site can be disposed of to a good advantage to another company, and that you advise the sale?"

"*What!*" Stannard tried to keep from shouting the demand, but the effort was a failure.

The dry-faced gentleman in the desk chair resumed his pipe for a final whiff.

"I wouldn't have you quote me as your authority, of course. But as a banker in touch with all these things, I happen to know that such overtures have been made to our Executive Committee in New York. There is no need for half confidences between us, Mr. Stannard. The Overland Northern is not spending money like water merely to build a local line to the Southern Buckskin mining camps. It is searching for a pass through the mountains by which it can eventually build on to the southern Pacific Coast. Why should we not take advantage of its necessity and recoup some portion of our loss by the sale of the tunnel?"

The thing was too big to be grasped in its entirety at the mere hearing of the words. Stannard slipped from his stool and stood with folded arms, staring unseeingly through the small square window over the desk at the busy scene in the construction yard. Since his rôle had hitherto been that of a fighting field captain, the idea of compromising with the enemy sent the blood to his brain and set a small war-pulse hammering insistently on the edge of his square jaw. While the tumultuous wave of militancy was still submerging him, the man of money went on purringly.

"You are doubtless wondering why we have arrived at this point this morning,—you and I,—Mr. Stannard. Quite possibly you are asking yourself why I have come so far out of my way to enlist the services of a man on the firing line. There are several reasons. For one, I have felt that something was due you as the originator of this project. Under present industrial conditions capital too often ignores the claims of exceptional ability in the working staff. Another reason was less altruistic and more practical, and I have already stated it. John P. Merriam will take your decision and advice as final." The great man rose and laid the borrowed pipe carefully aside. "You'll need a little time to think about it, of course. I can understand that it comes to you as a bolt from the blue. Just wire Merriam that you will give him particulars in a day or two, and let it rest at that for the present."

When Stannard broke his absent-minded eye-hold upon the yard activities, he was alone in the bare working-room. Dropping into the chair so recently vacated by the banker-director, he reached mechanically for the roll of estimates. In the act something crackled stiffly under his hand and a folded paper fell to the floor. He stooped to pick it up, and sat staring at it with another tumultuous wave of mingled emotions overwhelming him. The paper was the transferred stock certificate.

THE ROOT OF EVIL

Austin Vallory, in answering Stannard's question about the stay-behinds in the *Egeria*, had craftily omitted any mention of Miss Westervelt. None the less, her uncle's prediction of the night before had been verified; she had been unable to go, and the middle of the forenoon following the departure of the bear hunters found an exceedingly discontented young woman yawning over a book on the recessed observation platform of the private car.

Over in the yard the day crews were shifting the material trains back and forth, smashing the silence of the windless autumn day with stertorous locomotive snortings and the crashings of drawbars. In the interval when the trains were out of the way, the discontented one could look across to the shacks and tents of the great camp, deserted now by all save the cooks and the commissary clerks. Farther away, a thickly clustering gang of trackmen was laying the rails of a new siding, and the ringing blows of the spike-mauls made cheerful music when the train noises permitted them to be heard.

To her inner self, which was ever her closest confidante, Miss Westervelt admitted that she was in a vile temper. Caring little or nothing for the doubtful pleasure of the sham bear hunt, she had a reason of her own for not wishing to be left behind. Though it was her mental habit to name things accurately, she was content to let the reason take the form of a huge distaste for solitude, and with Mrs. Grantham dozing peacefully in the biggest wicker-chair planted solidly in the middle of the open compartment, and her uncle and Vallory invisible, Miss Anitra's solitude was a fact incontrovertible.

Some little time after she had finally abandoned the book as impossible, she saw Stannard coming across the railroad yard, and began, after the manner of her kind, to put a rod in pickle for the young construction chief. He had treated her shamefully. It was two full days since she had been hurt, and he had not thought it worth while to walk across the tracks to ask about her. "Bear!" she said to herself, and then again, "Bear, *Bear!*"

It was thus that Stannard's welcome was formulating itself when he swung up to the deck of the adjacent flat-car and put a leg over the brass railing of the *Egeria*. Because of Vallory's craft, he had supposed, of course, that Anitra had gone with the others, and his little shock of surprise leaving him defenseless for the moment, the moment was instantly improved. Miss Westervelt looked up from the book which she was not reading, with malice in her eye, to say inhospitably, "If you are looking for Uncle Silas, you won't find him. He has gone away."

"I'm looking for you, now that I know you're here," said Stannard, drawing up a camp-stool and straight-way forgetting his errand, which was to return the illustrative stock certificate left behind by the banker in the headquarters office. "You don't mean to tell me that the sore ankle has kept you from going with the others?"

"Much you care about the sore ankle," she retorted with the accent resentful, and then: "In my part of the United States gentlemen take off their hats under certain well understood conditions. Now then swear at me, if you feel like it; I know that's what you're aching to do."

Stannard removed his worn cloth working-hat and stared into it thoughtfully.

"I guess I needed that little slap," he remarked, with imperturbable good-nature. "A man gets to be frightfully careless of the little decencies, living a life like mine. And I owe you a lot of apologies about that ankle, too. This is the first day I've been in camp for any length of time since you were hurt. Isn't it getting better?"

It was; it was so nearly well that only Doctor Billy's prohibition kept her quiet, but she wouldn't admit it.

"No; it's quite possible that I am going to be a cripple for life, and it's all your fault. And you wouldn't even come over to the car to say you were sorry!"

"But I have come; and if I could believe you mean what you say, 'sorry' wouldn't be the word. Is it really serious?"

"I'm here," she asserted, "and all the others have gone off to have a good time in the hills. Isn't that enough?"

"You wanted to go?" he asked.

"Why shouldn't I want to go? Didn't we come out here to hunt bears?"

"No," said Stannard shortly. "At least, that isn't your uncle's purpose—unless you choose to call me a bear. He's been hunting me."

"Business?" she queried, a little less spitefully.

"Yes; business." And then, merely because he had reached a point at which a listening ear had become a vital

necessity: "He wants me to discharge myself."

"Well?"—with carefully frozen disinterest—"why don't you do it? I should think you would want to do it. What can you find attractive in a life that makes you work night and day and wear old clothes and live with your hat on, with only a lot of rough men under you to bully and browbeat?"

"Surely, you don't mean that," he protested. In the other summer which was gone and could never be recalled, she had been deliciously enthusiastic over his choice of a profession; she had said it was so free, so broadening, so lacking in temptation and all that.

"Why shouldn't I mean it?" she demanded. "What can you ever hope to be or do in an environment like this? Will you ever see the time, for example, when you can gather up a party of your friends and take them in your own, or somebody else's, private car on a bear-hunting expedition of two or three thousand miles?"

"Oh; if it's money you mean," he began.

"Of course it's money. What else is there worth living for in such a world as this?" She made herself look very austere and complacently mercenary lying back in the small wicker easy-chair with the lame foot on a hassock, and there was a scornful curve to the pretty lips that sent the honest workman's blood climbing in a dull flush to deepen the sunburn on Stannard's hard-muscled face.

"Excuse me," he said. "Don't you know, I really thought you looked at it the other way around—a year ago last summer."

"Maybe I did—then. I can't be held accountable for what I may have said so long ago as that."

"No, of course not," he agreed. "I tried to tell myself then that it was only a fad—that is, that you were only——"

"That I was talking merely because I was so charmed and delighted to listen to the sound of my own voice," she broke in flippantly. "But I'm savagely in earnest now. How any man with ambitions above those of the people over yonder who are nailing down those rails can be content to—but what is the use of talking about it? Some day, when that wonderful second choice of yours has been discovered, I suppose you will settle down to love in a cottage—or a grade shanty—and never know what you are missing."

"Does it really mean that much?—the money?" he questioned.

"Doesn't it mean everything on earth that is worth while?" she flashed back.

"In times past I have been glad to believe that it didn't."

"But now you have changed your mind?"

He smiled sourly.

"I have been listening to some good advice. First it was Vallory's; then it was your uncle's; and now it is yours."

"Certainly," she nodded, with an air of complete conviction. "Everybody will advise you to get money—honestly if you can; the other way, if you must."

He looked away to the distant slope of the Buckskin, where the graders were making a thin line of the yellow clay show through the trees on the side-cutting of the approach.

"I have just been given my chance," he announced gravely. "If I choose to take it, I have your uncle's word for it that I can be a rich man in a few years."

"If you choose to take it?" she repeated, with a lift of the wilful chin. "You don't mean to say that you are hesitating!"

"If I am, it is only because some of those old beliefs I spoke of are dying rather hard."

"But if Uncle Silas pointed the way for you——"

"I know what you would say," he interposed hastily. "It's honest enough, as honesty goes nowadays—business honesty, at least. More than that, it has been made to appear that I shall be doing the man who has been my strongest friend a service—only I'm afraid he may not see it in exactly that light."

"You are rich enough even now to afford the other conscience—the business conscience—aren't you?" She smiled across at him so sweetly at this that he forgot the social barriers—or most of them; forgot, also, his own clean code of

the single standard for all men under all conditions. Then she went on. "For the young man of to-day there are two roads to fortune; to make money, or to marry it. Too much conscience is a handicap in either race, isn't it?"

He looked at her curiously.

"I wonder how old you are," he said reflectively.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you know too much."

"I haven't had anything to do but to learn. There are only two kinds of men in the world—infants and the others."

"And you think I am one of the infants, and that it is time I was growing up?"

Her shoulders went up in a small shrug of indifference real or most artfully simulated.

"You want money, don't you? Not just a little, but a great deal. If you do, you mustn't look too closely at the means of getting it. That is the way of the world. Of course, you might marry it; that is the easy way. But Miss Money-Bags might not be even the second choice, and that would be sad."

"I wish I knew how much in earnest you are," he broke out half impatiently. "Do you really believe that a man would be justified in throwing a lot of half-way decent ideals overboard for the sake of stuffing his bank account? I can do it, you know. As I have said, the chance has been given me within the last hour."

"By Uncle Silas, you said, didn't you?"

He made the sign of assent.

"He doesn't ask you to knock anybody down or rob a bank or anything of that sort, does he?" she asked.

"No; he merely asks me to turn my back upon a bunch of things that I have been taught to believe were more or less necessary in the make-up of an honest man."

"That is your class conscience again, isn't it? If you haven't the courage, the other way is still open; you can always marry the money, you know. Some men will tell you that it's much safer than to get down among the animals and fight for it."

The dull flush had crept up under Stannard's suntan until it was settling under his eyes and making them uncomfortably hot.

"Say, little girl," he burst out, breaking all the conventions at a single blow, "that's the sore spot, and you've hammered on it until it hurts! Do you remember what you made me tell you the other night over yonder in the headquarters shack—about the 'one altogether lovely,' as you called her?"

"Yes, I can remember that far back."

"Well, it was her money that made the notion only a pipe-dream for me. She belongs to another world, but the chief difference between her world and mine is the money and what it stands for."

Anitra's lip-curl this time was of pure amusement.

"And you have a kind of hazy idea that you might bridge this terrible gap by getting rich yourself?" she queried, laughing at him.

"It isn't in the least hazy," he countered.

"Perhaps the money—your money—wouldn't make so much difference to her, after all," she suggested.

"I think enough of her to believe it wouldn't. But it would make a lot of difference to me."

"Doc Billy doesn't feel that way," she remarked. "If he has lost any self-respect, it would take a chemical analysis to discover it. And really, I believe he loves Dolly just as much as he would if she had only pennies instead of millions."

"Of course he does," was the prompt agreement. "Kitts is a man in every inch of him, and his wife, if her face doesn't belie her, is second cousin to an angel. But that is a combination that doesn't happen more than once in a blue moon."

"Money is a great comfort; I'm very sure I should never have the courage to give mine up," said the young woman in the wicker chair, half absently and with seeming irrelevance. Then she added: "If I cared particularly about the things

that you and Doc Billy and Dolly care for, I might have to give it up some day."

"Why might you?" Stannard asked quickly.

"Because I'm so badly spoiled that I can't be trusted. I am a—a ward in chancery: is that what you call it when one has to have a guardian?"

"I don't understand," said Stannard.

"I didn't suppose you would," she returned coolly. "For further particulars you may consider yourself referred to Uncle Silas. How is your work going on?"

"My own part of it is marking time just at this moment," he said, rising to go, with a half disappointed feeling that she was dismissing him. "You say your uncle is not in the car?"

"No; he went away with Mr. Vallory just before you came. They walked down the track that way"—pointing toward the desert entrance to the Travois.

The young Missourian hung reluctantly upon his leave-taking. "I'm sorry you were not able to go to the hills with the others," he said, going back to the safer topic.

"So am I," was the prompt return. "Perhaps I may be able to go to-morrow or next day. Doc Billy said something about driving back in one of the buckboards. It's dreadfully lonesome here, and I've been promising myself all along that I was going to learn to ride a bucking bronco before I go home."

Stannard had swung himself over the platform railing, but still he did not go.

"You like excitement?" he inquired.

"It is the breath of my life," she told him calmly.

"Yesterday there seemed to be a fair prospect of your seeing enough of it right here in the Travois. Do you see that little black smudge away out yonder on the desert horizon?"

"Yes: I've been watching it all morning; what is it?"

"It is the advance guard of another railroad, building at the rate of several miles a day to reach this valley. It has been a race, and I had the good luck to beat the other fellow by the few weeks we needed. In the natural order of things there was a scrap in prospect. We are building pretty nearly on the other railroad's right-of-way in Standing Stone Canyon."

"You're putting it all in the past tense. Won't there be any fight now?"

He was looking away toward the slope on high Buckskin again when he said: "Not if I conclude to take a chance in the get-rich-quick game. That was what your uncle came out here for—to stop the fight and to give me my chance."

"And this chance—what does it involve?" She asked it eagerly.

"I have told you in part. As a preliminary, it means the giving up of all this"—his arm-sweep included camp and yard, high-mountain gash and the yellow clay trail among the firs on distant Buckskin.

"But the reward is proportionately great," she cut in.

"The reward is—money. I shall need it, too, for when the commercial transaction is closed, and I have played my part, I shall most probably never be given a chance to build another railroad."

"You don't care? You want money more than anything else, don't you?"

"I should be something more or less than human if I didn't care. But I shall be only yielding to the inevitable. With or without me the commercial gods will win out; and Vallory says, and your uncle says, and now you have said, in effect, that I shall be foolish if I don't make a running jump and get over on the money side."

"Oh, very foolish, indeed!" she protested, with the brown eyes opened wide. "You should take all you can get and expect more. Only you mustn't deceive yourself—about the motive, you know. In the back part of your brain you are trying to make yourself believe that it's for her sake—the dream-girl's; that the money will fill up the chasm so that you can safely cross it to her. You mustn't do that."

"Why mustn't I?"

"In the first place, because it isn't true. You are like other men, and you want the chance Uncle Silas will give you because you want it, and that's enough."

"And in the second place?" he queried.

"In the second place you may be disappointed. Dream-girls are always disappointing. The one you've been dreaming about may not want you at all when you come with money in your hand. That won't matter, though; there are plenty of others. Gladys, for example. You are really missing something by not cultivating Gladys. She is so adaptable. Any little sudden change of front you might wish to make, overnight——"

"Now you are joshing me, and I must go to work," he broke in laughing. "I hope your ankle will be well enough to let you do what you want to do by to-morrow or next day. Good-by."

"Good-by, Mr. Get-Rich-Quick Stannard!" she called to him, as he dropped from the steel-flat. "'Put money in thy purse and all men—and most women—will speak well of thee.' And don't try too hard to make yourself believe it's purely for the sake of the dream-person—it isn't, you know."

Two small results, unmarked of any outsider, came of this small bickering clash on the observation platform of the *Egeria* in the dead calm of the autumn morning. Stannard, plodding across to his office to finish the checking of the estimate sheets, still had the transferred stock certificate in his pocket, though he might easily have left the sealed envelope containing it with Anitra for delivery to her uncle on his return.

This was one result, and the other was quite as inexplicable. After Stannard had disappeared among the shifting material trains, the young woman in the platform wicker-chair stared at the smoky blur on the distant desert horizon until the brown eyes, overstrained, one would say, filled with a quick rush of tears. Then she put her face in her hands, and gave way to a sudden tempest of emotion that shook her like the grasp of a rough hand reaching out of the calm autumn-morning immensities.



BALANCING

The checking of the estimates finished, Stannard put on his coat and set out to walk up the grade to see what progress the quarrymen were making in the big rock-cutting in the canyon; this though it was near enough dinner-time to warrant a postponement of the trip if he had been able to put his mind upon anything so commonplace as the daily camp routine.

As he swung along over the unsurfaced track and came upon Gallagher and his men busily lining it up; saw this and heard the shoutings of the grade gangs on the opposite mountain dominated now and then by the hoarse rumble of the dynamite or the rapid-fire clatter of the air-drills; it seemed incredible that within a few days all these strenuous activities might stop as a man stops when he is stricken down in the full flush of life.

The crude waste of it was appalling. Once before, while he had been serving his engineering apprenticeship in the South, he had seen a paralleling line built at a cost of millions, only to be abandoned when it was ready for the steel; and the wasted labor still appealed to him as the memory of a crime. And now he was called upon to be the chief factor in a similar tragedy of futility. Surely something was wrong when industrial or financial ends could be reached only through such reckless squanderings of human toil and effort. Measured by any standard, the world must be the poorer for the misdirected effort.

In the depressive undertow of this thought, the young engineer was glad that Westervelt had taken pains to show him that there was another side to the problem. How much the stiff bit of stock paper crackling in his pocket as he walked had to do with the broadened point of view, he did not suspect, as yet. None the less, in the endeavor to bring himself to some point of decision and action, he was already beginning to find it increasingly impossible to ignore the effect of the decision upon his own future.

He had passed the farthest outposts of Gallagher's track-lining gang, and was well on his way up the canyon to the rock-cutting, before the banker's real meaning smashed in upon the train of thought, stopping him as suddenly as if the realization had been a blow from an invisible fist. In an illuminating flash he understood that the stock transfer had not been merely an illustration; it was a bribe, premeditated and prepared for. That was why Westervelt had left the certificate on the desk at his departure.

At first the young Missourian was conscious only of a sharp attack of moral nausea. Stumbling on over the cross-ties in the grip of the soul-sickness, he could think of nothing but the gross indignity which had been put upon him. But little by little the huge temptation fought its way to the front and the flood tide of repulsion began to subside.

By what modern standard would he be condemned if the only wrong lay in the mere fact that in the process of readjustment some small portion of the reward fell to him? In a twinkling he saw the situation precisely as the banker had intended he should see it. The Overland Northern would make the fight for the right-of-way, and winning or losing, the result in the real battle-field—that of the Stock Exchange—would be the same. War would be declared upon the G. L. & P. securities, and President Merriam's telegram was a sufficient indication that the war would be disastrous.

At the same time, Stannard knew well the temper of the man who had made the Great Lakes & Pacific a financial possibility after it had been for years a plaything of the Street. He would fight to the last gasp, if only for the reason that his sheerest strength lay in fighting. That the battle would be a losing one for the younger and weaker line Stannard could not doubt. The strength and resources of its great competitor on the north were too well known to admit the factor of uncertainty. Twenty-four hours earlier, Stannard would not have admitted this; but now he saw, or thought he saw, more clearly.

Mixed with the purely selfish promptings of the moment there was also another motive; his plain duty to Merriam which the banker had not failed to emphasize. Disaster to the G. L. & P. meant still more crushing disaster for the Merriam management. The young engineer had a very clear-sighted view of what would befall him professionally if he should take the part of the soldier in the ranks who turns traitor for the sake of saving his commanding officer. Put in possession of all the facts, Mr. Merriam might decline to be "saved" in any such arbitrary way, but did that make it any less necessary that the salvage should be effected?

Stannard had not come to any real weighing of the purely ethical question by the time he reached the great rock-cutting; or rather, he had come to it and had dismissed it with the half-impatient and wholly cynical conclusion that the standard of a past generation could not be applied to the problems of the present. He was well assured that, potentially, if not actually, Anitra Westervelt understood his dilemma, and had she not urged him to put money in his purse?

Just beyond the rock-cutting, where the clatter of the air-drills was a little less than deafening, he met Roddy walking the line from the eastern tunnel approach. The assistant's report of the situation at the west end was encouraging. There had been no more trouble with the hard-rock men, and Markley had caught his stride again and was pushing the drift at top speed.

"All of which goes to show that we got the trouble-makers in that last sift-out," said Roddy, with a snap of the baby-blue eyes and the hardening of the bad jaw. "That twenty-four-hour strike was about the best thing that could have happened to us."

Stannard stood dumb before the honest little man whose heart and soul were in the pushing of the great job. How was he to tell Roddy that all this fine enthusiasm was presently to be blown out like a candle in a gust of wind?

"Markley's all right," he commented. "He can put more enthusiasm into a gang of gophers than any man I've ever known. Did you see Pearson as you came by?"

The assistant nodded. "Yes; and he gave me a word for you. Greer's men are in the valley. Pearson saw them a little while ago through his field-glass. They are running a line on the north side of the river at the foot of Rock Face. That's what made me walk down the grade. I took the chance of picking you up on the way."

"Well?" said the chief; "that is what we've been expecting, isn't it?"

"Yes; I suppose so. But I thought you'd like to know."

"I found out last night," was the sober rejoinder. "Two of Greer's advance men were feeling their way across the head of the Travois to a connection with the old survey in the canyon."

"In the dark?" queried Roddy.

"Yes; they were using a couple of flash-lights. That's how I came to discover them."

"I like the nerve of it!" rasped the small fighting man. And then: "There'll be a crossing fight first, I suppose. Where do they hit us?"

"At the base of the Standing Stone. I don't know their levels as they have decided upon them now, but the old preliminary survey carries their line about eight feet above ours at the crossing point."

"That won't do," said Roddy quickly. "They'll have to raise or lower."

"Yes; or make us raise or lower."

"Not by a damned sight! We got there first!" was the militant retort. "I have a hundred and fifty perfectly good Winchester rifles hidden away in the commissary, and every last one of them says that we don't move our grade an inch!"

Stannard was shaking his head.

"We can't fight, Jacksie, if it comes to a show-down," he objected soberly. "We might make a bluff at it, but it wouldn't do any good."

"Why wouldn't it?"

"Some time—a little later on—I'll tell you why it wouldn't."

"Tell me now, Clay. I've just had a snack out of Pearson's dinner basket, and I can stand it now as well as I ever can. Have you been 'seeing things'?"

Stannard sat down on a stone beside the grade and pulled out his pipe. "You've got to know it sooner or later, Jackson, and I guess there isn't any reason why you shouldn't know it now," he said slowly. Then he told the story of the banker's visit, suppressing nothing save the incident of the stock transfer.

Roddy was walking back and forth, three steps and a turn, before the story was concluded; and at the end of it he stopped short to say: "I hope you told him to go straight to the devil, Clay."

"I don't deny that I wanted to at first. It was a facer. You can see my position. If Mr. Westervelt was telling the truth—and there isn't much reason to doubt that part of it—we are in a pretty deep hole. I know, and you know, that Greer can make a spiteful fight here in the canyon—can probably keep us from reaching the tunnel this fall. If he succeeds in doing that, we won't have any tunnel by spring."

"Yes; but my God, Clay, look at the alternative for a minute! If you tell Mr. Merriam that the project is a failure he'll believe you, and look where it leaves you! You'll be a broken man!"

"Sure enough; but isn't it my duty to tell him anyway?—in common justice to him and his management?"

"Unquestionably," snapped the assistant, "if you've lost your fighting nerve. No man in this world ever went into a scrap with the idea that he was going to be licked and failed to get what was coming to him. Westervelt's hypnotized you, that's all there is to it—just plain hypnotized you!"

"No; he has simply made me see that my point of view, which is yours and every workingman's, doesn't reach far enough. A railroad is primarily a money-making undertaking. I'm just as good a fighting man as I was yesterday, Jackson—plus a little more common sense."

Roddy stooped down and picked up a boulder to hurl it spitefully into the roaring flood of the Standing Stone. Then he whirled short upon his chief.

"You haven't any more use for me, Clay. My resignation takes effect to-night."

"Oh, hold on, Jacksie; don't fly off at a tangent that way. I haven't made up my mind yet just what I shall do. I've wired Mr. Merriam in reply to his telegram of this morning telling him that I'll give him full particulars a little later."

"No; you haven't made up your mind; but you've shown me pretty clearly how you're going to make it up," was the gloomy retort. Then, mad anger blinding him, he said the thing that leaped full-grown into his brain at the instant: "How much is Westervelt going to give you for doing this, Clay?"

Stannard would have given worlds for the privilege of cramming a hot denial down the little man's throat. But he had sold his birthright and the mess of pottage was even then crumpling in the pocket of his working coat.

"There was no bribe, Jacksie," he declared, telling the first lie in what bade fair to become an endless series of lies and equivocations. "But I have a right to demand that I and the men of my staff shall be taken care of. We'll all lose out together, and Mr. Westervelt understands that it wouldn't be fair to let us bear the brunt of it."

"I thought so!" gritted the little man; which was also a lie because the charge had been wholly unpremeditated. "You can count me out on that, too. I don't take any man's blood money." Then he added the last straw of insult: "I take it you are to marry the girl after it's all over and done with."

Stannard got up off the rock slowly, but his eyes were blazing.

"Jacksie, you're forty pounds lighter than I am, and I can't beat you up as I ought to. But you've got to take that back!"

Roddy stood up to the gigantic young chief like a fighting bantam. "I will take it back if you'll say that you haven't seen the girl and talked to her."

Stannard turned and walked away. The river was perilously handy and the temptation to fling Roddy into it was growing too strong to be resisted. When he came back it was to say in effect what Westervelt had said to him.

"I'm going to forget everything you've said, Jacksie; and ask you to take a little time to think it over." Then, in an overwhelming rush of pure manliness: "I can't afford to lose your friendship, Jackson. We've stood shoulder to shoulder on this job, and I know you to the marrow. Between two men, that means a whole lot more than either one of them can put into words. Don't you know it?"

Roddy stooped and heaved another stone into the river, its hollow splash simulating a groan.

"I'm so mad I can't see straight, Clay," he confessed; "but when I get cooled off I know I shan't be able to see this thing your way. Just the same, I'm sorry I said what I did about the girl." Then suddenly: "How soon have you got to make up your mind?"

"There was no time set, but in the nature of things I can't hold off very long. Go on down to camp and get out your fishing tackle. That'll give you a clearer point of view if anything will. I'm going to walk the grade up to the tunnel." And so they parted.

It was black dark that evening before the young chief, who was far behind the returning day-shift, reached the camp and took his place at table in the deserted mess shack. The cook brought in a platter of fine mountain trout by which token Stannard knew that Roddy had taken his advice. While he was eating, the blue-eyed assistant came in, smoking his pipe.

"Feeling any better?" asked the Missourian.

"I'm feeling as if I had either been to a funeral or was just going to one," said Roddy; and then: "Those fish came out of the river a little below the bend. Greer has had a pioneer gang at work on the other bank all afternoon. Murtrie, one of his instrument men, waded across and chinned with me. I used to know him a little up in Montana."

"Well?" Stannard encouraged.

"Greer's graders will reach the Travois by to-morrow night. He's laying rails with a machine. What you do, you've got to do mighty suddenly, Clay. You can put off everything but the fight with Greer. I can tell you right here and now that that won't wait. And if you lose the first shot, you lose the game." The little man got up and lounged to the door, turning on the threshold to add: "If you fight, I'm with you to the finish; but if you don't, what I said up in the canyon goes as it lies—I'll take my time-check."

"You'll wait till you get it, won't you?" Stannard growled good-naturedly, striving to re-establish the *status quo ante bellum*. "Got anything else on your mind?"

"Yes; one little thing. You didn't tell me the whole truth about the flash-light surveying party last night. Murtrie says you beat up a couple of their men scandalously. Also, he tells me there is a warrant out for you for assault and battery."

Stannard laughed. "Does Greer tote a justice of the peace along in his outfit, too?"

"Murtrie says he does better than that," was the quiet reply. "He has the sheriff of Lodge Butte County and half a dozen deputies on his pay-roll."

"The sheriff of Lodge Butte County may go chase himself," said the Missourian shortly, and he was so little disturbed by the added item of news that he picked the bones of three more of the trout after Roddy had left him.

THE CONSPIRATORS

In the night following the flawless autumn day which Miss Westervelt had found so tiresome, the weather changed, with the wind swinging to the west to blow cloud-streamers over the crest of the Buckskin, and with a frosty tang in the early morning air to give back the clamor and clang of the railroad building industries in echoes clean cut and bell clear.

An hour beyond the breakfast for four in the *Egeria*, which was two hours and better past the turn-out of the day-shifts in Camp Travois, a buckboard drawn by a pair of grasshopper-headed broncos was making its way down the northern gulch at the head of Rock Face toward a ford in the shallows of the Standing Stone.

Doctor William Pangborn Kitts, who could turn his highly educated surgeon hand to anything from tinkering a dollar watch to setting a compound comminuted fracture of a crushed tibia, was driving the broncos, and his seatmate in the buckboard was the round-bodied broker.

"Careful, Doc, careful," warned Padgett, when one wheel of the frontier vehicle climbed a boulder as big as a water barrel. "I know you'd like to have a chance to put me in splints, but I'm pretty well satisfied with my bones just as they are."

"You couldn't break a bone if you should try," laughed the breezy young doctor. "You're too well cushioned. What I'm waiting for is a chance to sew you up after the first of the grizzlies has clawed a few slits in you."

Padgett snapped his cuff-button and bared a forearm as round and smooth as an infant's save for a striping of ghastly white scars running from elbow to wrist.

"You've been joshing me long enough. If I tell you that a grizzly did that up in the Selkirks——"

Kitts took a chance of driving with one hand while he examined the scarred arm.

"Worst job of suturing I ever saw," was his verdict; "looks as if somebody might have sewn 'em up with a sailor's needle and pack-thread." Then: "I've, never doubted your bear-hunting stories, Padgett—I've merely envied you. Which brings on more talk: are we going to find any bears in the Teton foot-hills?"

The broker grinned broadly.

"You're having a good time, aren't you? A good-looking young fellow like you wouldn't want to get all mussed up in the middle of his honeymoon. And even Carroll admits that the Teton ranch-house is an improvement on a railroad construction yard."

"Carroll's a joke," Kitts said, "and so is the Englishman. What keeps me guessing is why Mr. Westervelt brought them along—why he brought anybody but you and Vallory."

Padgett ignored the tentative bid for better information concerning Mr. Westervelt's object.

"Are you going to take Anitra back with you?" he asked.

"Can't, unless I leave you behind."

"You'll get yourself disliked if you don't take her," laughed the broker; adding: "You can't blame her very much. It's pretty slow business for her, with only Mrs. Grantham and her uncle to help her wear out the time."

"And Vallory," the doctor put in.

"Mr. Vallory doesn't count; no man counts much with a young woman after he has proposed two or three times and been turned down."

"So?" said Kitts. "I hadn't thought of Vallory as a marrying man. Just the same, I admire Anitra's good taste. Vallory's all right, but he's got too much sour dough in his cosmos. Line him up beside a man like—well, like young Stannard, for example, and he doesn't stack very high."

"Yet they have one thing in common—Stannard and Vallory; they both need money," Padgett qualified sagely.

The broncos were picking their way through the shallows of the ford, and a little later the buckboard went bouncing over the yard tracks to be drawn up beside the *Egeria*. One of Crumley's ranchmen was waiting to take the team, and Kitts gave the return order for the middle of the afternoon, the delay hingeing upon Padgett's request for time in which to wire his New York office and get a reply.

In strict keeping with his *métier*, which was athletic, Kitts swung himself in a high vault to the observation platform where Mrs. Grantham was sniffing the keen morning air and trying to make herself believe that she liked it. Left to his own devices, Padgett went to the other end of the car and had himself admitted by the porter. Silas Westervelt was alone in his state-room when the broker entered.

"It's rather early in the game for me to show up, but Kitts was coming anyway, so I took a chance," was the way in which the broker accounted for his presence. Then he sat down and went rapidly over the file of wire correspondence which the magnate gave him without comment.

With the reading of the latest of the messages, Padgett nodded briskly.

"It's coming along all right," he approved. "We've got 'em on the run, and all we need to do now is to keep 'em going. Has Stannard driven his little nail in the wall yet?"

"Apparently not—from those telegrams," said the banker.

"You've put it up to him?" Padgett questioned, and Westervelt made the sign of assent.

"Yesterday morning, shortly after you left," he replied, timing the event for the broker. "I didn't hurry him because his nail-driving will serve a better purpose if it is delayed a little."

"He'll fall for it?"

"I think so. The only danger lies in the fact that he may talk too much over the wires to Merriam before he gets around to the saying of the thing he is paid to say."

"That point ought to be covered carefully," Padgett advised.

"It is fairly well covered. Vallory has taken care of the operator, and there is only one telegraph office. Stannard has sent but one message, thus far, and I have a copy of it. It is worded strictly in accordance with my suggestion made to him in the talk yesterday morning—a stand-off."

"Cost much?" queried the round-bodied one with a lift of the reddish brown eyebrows.

The banker-director's hard-bitted smile came and went like a flash of heat lightning on a summer night.

"I have never believed in the policy of sending a boy to mill, Padgett."

"You made it in stock?"

The magnate inclined his head. "A little later it may be necessary for you to try to buy it back. He knows the market quotation, and if you should go to him with a premium bid, and a story that you are sweeping the corners to help out a customer who has gone short on G. L. & P., it might tip the balance."

"Then you're not altogether sure of him?"

"My dear Padgett, you haven't been buying and selling in the Street all these years without learning that you are never sure of anything until you have it right here"—holding up a thumb and fore-finger tightly pinched together. "Stannard is human and he wants money. That is a majority vote in most cases; but there are exceptions enough to warrant a reasonable doubt."

"You say he wants money: do you mean just the general human hunger, or a particular case of individual famine?"

This time Mr. Westervelt's smile was wintry.

"I suspect Stannard's realization of his lack dates back to a year ago last summer, at which time he had the good or the ill-luck, as you choose to look at it, to meet a certain young woman whose money—among other things—put her rather hopelessly out of his reach."

Padgett jerked his round head in a one-sided nod, which was his way of expressing complete comprehension.

"And the young woman?" he said; "she was disposed to be a little romantic, too?"

"Up to a week ago I thought not. Now, however, I am not quite so certain, Padgett."

The broker set elbow to knee and nursed his double chin in the palm of one hand, as a man working out the result of a difficult equation.

"If you think there is any doubt about swinging Stannard into line on the business basis, it occurs to me that you are missing your one best bet," he offered at length.

Silas Westervelt did not pretend to misunderstand.

"Apart from the fact that it is never safe to mix women and business, Adam, I'm not quite temerarious enough to take the risk in the present instance. You know enough of our family affairs to gather my meaning?"

"I know that your brother David left a will making you his daughter's guardian and the trustee for the administration of his estate," the broker admitted.

"He did; and there was a proviso in the will which is not so generally known. Anitra has always been a spoiled child, wilful and headstrong to a degree rare even in this age of emancipated young persons. David lived in constant fear that she would make an unfitting marriage. He left his property in trust, with the provision that if Anitra married without my consent before her twenty-fifth birthday the bulk of the money should go to certain specified charities."

Padgett made a wry face.

"I don't envy you," he commented shortly.

"It has led to much bickering and ill-feeling, I regret to say," was the guardian's admission. "Anitra has had a number of excellent opportunities, any one of which I could have approved most heartily; but precisely because I could approve, I imagine, she has thrown them away. A year ago last summer this young engineer turned up, and—chiefly because I tried to keep him in his place, I fancy—the girl encouraged him openly. As I have said, I thought it was gone and forgotten. But when this hunting trip was broached a fortnight ago, Anitra suddenly gave up her plan of going to Europe with the Van Pelts and insisted upon coming along with us. She even went so far as to bully Kitts into saying that she needed a change to the higher altitude. It made me a bit suspicious, Padgett; to tell the truth, I am still suspicious. At this very moment I don't know whether her lame ankle is keeping her here or whether she has again bullied Kitts."

Once more Padgett nursed his chin and became reflective.

"When in doubt, play trumps," he counseled at the end of the reflective pause, adding: "You needn't commit yourself, you know. Let them get together a little if they want to. A small sprinkling of romance just at the present crisis may be worth money to us. I asked Kitts on the way in if he were going to take Miss Anitra back to the ranch-house with him. His answer made me suspect that it would depend somewhat upon circumstances—the circumstances being your niece's wish to go or stay."

There was no enthusiasm in the banker's reply.

"It will be leaning upon a broken reed, Padgett. Vallory suggested something of the sort and I shut him off. Up to a certain point the 'sprinkling of romance,' as you call it, might work in our favor; but beyond that point it might easily prove disastrous. You can see what I mean."

"Oh, yes; but it wouldn't have time to get that far along. I may conclude not to go back with Kitts to-day; suppose you invite your man over to the car for dinner this evening. You are willing to cultivate him socially to that extent, aren't you?"

"I doubt if he would come."

"He would if Mrs. Grantham would send him a note."

"He doesn't know Mrs. Grantham."

Padgett laughed. "In my younger days, when a young girl's chaperone sent me an invitation to dinner, I think I was always able to give credit where it belonged."

"I see," said the banker; "but what's the object?"

"For one thing, it might swing the romantic pendulum our way, and for another, it would give you an excellent opportunity to commit Stannard before the rest of us."

"H'm," said the banker reflectively; and then: "Padgett, you've a long head when it comes to the details. I'll think about it."

"There is another thing to think about, too," the broker went on meditatively. "There is always a chance that Stannard

may fail us at the last moment. We can't afford to fall down now; we've gone too far. Is Greer ready to put the screws on if they are needed?"

"His graders will be in the Travois to-night, and his advance men are setting the stakes for the forward push up the canyon. Stannard caught two of Greer's engineers running a line across the head of the valley night before last and beat them up. He has a bad temper. The Overland Northern men were entirely within their rights and were not interfering in any way with Stannard's work. There is a warrant out for our young hot-head, but it won't be served unless matters come to a pass at which it will be necessary to efface Stannard for the time being."

Again Padgett jerked his head sidewise.

"I'm on," he agreed. "If it should come to blows, we can nip the thing in the bud pretty easily by having Stannard arrested for assault and battery. As far as I can see, the ground appears to be pretty well covered at this end of the line, and it's up to our people in New York to press their advantage. I'll send a wire or two and get a straight tip on the situation. The only thing I'm afraid of now is a possible leak. Stannard has two of his surveying parties out in the Kicking Deer district, and you never can tell what may happen."

The big-bodied magnate settled himself more firmly in his chair.

"Every precaution has been taken. Rundschau and Magoffin, the two Kicking Deer prospectors, have nothing to gain by talking; and besides, they are practically under guard day and night in New York, though they may not know it. More than that, their prospect holes have been carefully filled up and made to look like abandoned claims. They are a mile off the line of Stannard's short-cut survey, and his advance parties are not looking for gold mines."

The broker felt absently in his pocket for a cigar, but when he had found one he put it back without lighting it.

"Just the same, I'd like to take the top of Stannard's head off and see what's going on inside," he said. "Of course, you had to give him some reason why the Overland Northern wants to acquire the tunnel site and rights?"

"There was a very plausible reason ready to hand. It has long been understood that the Overland would some day build a southeastern extension. Stannard believes that the line now under construction from Lodge Butte is the beginning of that extension. He knows what every western railroad builder knows, that the only practical route for a hundred miles north or south is by means of a tunnel under the Buckskin."

"Capital!" said Padgett, rubbing his fat hands together. Then he ventured a prediction. "If you'll take my advice, about the dinner and the dose of romance, Greer won't have to be called in. It will be vastly better. Merriam can be a nasty fighter if you once get him started, as you learned a few years ago to your cost. Easy as she lies, is the word. I'm going over to the camp telegraph office: anything you want to send?"

"Nothing, I believe," said the magnate, and he let Padgett go without any further assurances touching the suggested dinner invitation to one Claiborne Stannard.

M'CLARTY'S PETARD

"It's some whale of a job, Stannard, and the man who could plan it all, and set it going, and keep it going, needn't take a back seat for anybody."

Kitts, having paid his duty call upon Mrs. Grantham and Anitra at the car, had found Stannard as the engineer was setting out for the tunnel, had climbed the steep Buckskin trail with him, had been put in personal and sympathetic touch with the strenuous labor battle going on in the heart of the treacherous mountain, and was now on his way down the canyon loop-grade with the young Missourian for his pace-setter.

"There are plenty of men who can do all three," was Stannard's modest disclaimer on the credit score; "so many that the fellow who does them needn't let his head swell. Just the same, the bigness of the thing does lay hold of you. You want to see the job go through. If it doesn't go through, it's a good bit like burying your best friend."

"But you're going to make this one go through," put in the athletic young physician.

"Two days ago, Kitts, I should have said there was no doubt of it. We've had our troubles all along, and we've been running a rather frantic race against time—against the coming of winter, as I told you the other day; but we still stood an even chance of winning out—up to yesterday."

"And what happened yesterday? Has the other road given you notice to quit?"

"It's worse than that," Stannard averred soberly. "We've been expecting a scrap when the Overland Northern got on the ground; that was all in the day's work. But now Wall Street butts in with a money scare. For the reasons you have just had pointed out to you on the spot, the tunnel is costing a good bit more than we figured; the estimates were based upon solid rock and a roof that would hold itself up."

"I see. And your management has lost its nerve?"

"Not that, exactly. But a minority of the stock is running around in circles for fear the Northern is going to hit us on the floor of the Exchange."

"Uncle Silas brings you this pleasant bit of information?" suggested the doctor.

"Yes; and he puts it up to me good and strong that I ought to be the goat—that it's my duty to be the goat. If I wire our people that we're fighting a losing battle here, that will settle it. Mr. Merriam will take my word for it, the short-cut project will be abandoned, temporarily, at least, and the country—as the high financiers define it—will be saved."

"But, say!" Kitts broke in; "that would be pretty tough on you, wouldn't it? You'd lose your job."

"I stand to lose considerably more than my job. If I consent to be the goat, I shall be in the same fix that you'd be in if you should do something making it impossible for you to practice medicine any more."

"Why, Stannard!" the listener exclaimed, "that would be little less than a catastrophe! Give up your profession?"

"The profession will give me up. It has no more use for failures than yours has."

"Great Jehu! And you're talking about it as calmly as if it were a mere incident. Doesn't your calling mean any more than that to you?"

"It means as much to me as yours does to you, Kitts. I could go on being an engineer—and a poor man—all my life, and be pretty well satisfied. But that alternative is cut out in the present case. I'm in the fix of the small manufacturer who gets in the way of the trust; he can go out of business with the price of his plant in his pocket, or he can sit tight and be squeezed out."

Kitts had the good-natured, tell-tale face of an open-hearted boy, the face being maskable only when he dealt with his patients.

"For heaven's sake!" he exclaimed in honest indignation, "they're trying to bribe you?"

"Oh, I reckon you'd hardly call it that; you don't say that the little manufacturer is bribed when he sells out because he has to. Westervelt is disposed to be fair. He knows what it will mean to me in a professional way to drop this job just as it stands, and he is willing to make it up to me. He puts it on a business basis, pure and simple; says it's cheaper for him and those whom he represents to give me a chance to make good in some other way than it would be for them to take

their losses on the slump in G. L. & P."

They were turning the gulch-head where the upper leg of the loop swung in a great half-circle to cross the mountain stream and to become the lower leg, and for a time Kitts held his peace. In the fulness of time he said: "I can't help feeling as if I had just discovered that a mighty good friend of mine had developed a case of organic disease of the heart, Stannard. Has the thing gone so far that it can't be stopped?"

"It is practically out of my hands. I and my kind are merely pawns in the big game at the best, and we have to take our medicine when the high-finance gentlemen hand it out to us."

"I know," Kitts nodded. "It's a crooked old world in some parts of it. I've known you only three days, Stannard, but that's long enough to make me figure you as a fellow who wouldn't lie down until he's dead—plumb dead. Also, I've been sizing you up as a fellow to whom money doesn't mean any more than it ought to mean."

"That's where you're away off," Stannard rejoined half cynically. "Money means a lot to me."

"I know better," snapped the young doctor. "You may think it does, just now, but at the bottom it doesn't. I'm sure it doesn't. Anitra's been telling me about you. You could go back to your Ozark apple-orchards and live there in comfort without a job, couldn't you?"

"Yes, I reckon I could."

"Then you owe it to yourself a thousand times over to do it rather than to sell yourself to Silas Westervelt and his bunch. Listen to me a minute, Stannard. Back in New York, where people know him up one side and down the other, Westervelt has a reputation for making cold-blooded twists and turns that are simply fierce, even in this dollar-thirsty age. He'll skin you alive, quite without malice, and equally without mercy, if he needs your hide to hang on some financial fence that he happens to be building. You can't afford to put yourself into the hands of a man like that!"

"You can't magnify the risk any more than I have, Kitts. But Westervelt and his crowd have the whiphand. They can smash me, and what is much more serious, they can smash John P. Merriam and his management. Westervelt, while he is a director in our company, is also in deep enough with Overland Northern to have some sort of a pull. Nothing has been said to me to even hint at such a thing, but I know that the Overland's claim on the right-of-way is going to be used as a club if it's needed. Greer is practically here on the ground with a force which outnumbers ours. If I don't call the thing off voluntarily, Greer's presence means that it will be called off forcibly. Mr. Merriam doesn't want any stock complications such as would be piled in upon him if war is declared; and that is what will happen if Greer's men and ours come to blows over this right-of-way."

"I don't see it," objected the ex-football captain stubbornly.

"I didn't, at first—chiefly, I guess, because I didn't want to see it. But it is the cold fact. Apart from the flurry the fight would doubtless kick up in the money market, we might lose out to the tune of a good many millions by getting licked. Look up on that hillside to the right; do you see that cleared streak through the timber paralleling our grade?"

"Yes."

"That's the Overland's location. Imagine a small army of laborers up there, blasting and shoveling and dumping, firing their spoil down on us faster than we could shovel it off, and you've got the situation. Greer couldn't stop us entirely, maybe; but he might easily delay us. You've seen the tunnel, and you can guess what a prolonged delay will mean for us in that rotten hole."

"I see," Kitts said. "It may mean that the whole business will tumble in and destroy all your work. Great Cats! but it's hard, Stannard; to think that your only alternative is to sell out to Uncle Silas. Are you going to do it?"

"I'm tempted, Kitts; tempted as I never supposed a man with decent upbringings could be," the Missourian confessed baldly. "On one hand there's safety for Mr. Merriam, safety for the company—as Mr. Westervelt puts it—and for me a chance to get in right with the money-making crowd. I could make good in the money-wrestle; I'm just egotistical enough to believe that I could, if I should make it the be-all and end-all. While I don't care much for money, as money, I'm caring a whole lot, right now, for something that money won't buy, but for which I can't get even a look-in without money."

"That's one side of it," said Doctor Billy. "What's the other?"

"I reckon there isn't any other," said Stannard, after a dejected little pause. "Or if there is, it can be summed up in sheer professional pride; a stubborn disgust for the quitter in any game."

Kitts took a few more strides in silence and then he said: "What does the girl say about it?"

Stannard laughed good-naturedly. It was impossible to take offense at anything Kitts could say.

"How do you know there is a girl?" he demanded.

"I took it for granted; there always is."

The young Missourian laughed again and, feeling perfectly safe because his secret had not been shared, even with Anitra, he said:

"The last time I saw and talked with her she told me to get money; honestly if I could, and the other way if I had to."

The straightforward young doctor was plainly shocked.

"That's rather dreadful, Stannard! I can't imagine your falling in love with a woman who could say a thing like that—meaning it."

"Perhaps she didn't mean it, though I wouldn't put it beyond her," was the half-absent qualification. "Money spells luxury for most women, and the one I'm speaking of has never known anything but luxury."

A curve in the grade had brought them to the big rock cut, and the clamor of the air-drills shrilled suddenly louder, making anything less than a shout inaudible. Standing to look on at the head of the cutting, Stannard saw M'Clarty, the big Irish foreman, coming across the river on the foot-log bridge which gave access to the powder magazine hidden away, for safety's sake, under the opposite canyon cliff.

The Irishman had a small yellow cylinder in his hands to which he appeared to be attaching a bit of blackened string, and it was evident that he had not yet observed the approach of his chief. When he reached the right-hand river bank, both of the onlookers saw him strike a match on his overalls. A moment later he climbed to the top of a hillock of broken stone and sent the small yellow cylinder, trailing a thin line of blue smoke behind it, high among the firs on the slope above the cutting. Instantly there was a crashing explosion on the forested hillside and a shower of dry earth and pebbles came pouring over the cliff-like lip of the excavation.

What followed came like the sudden rebound of a steel spring. While the dust and pebbles were still rattling down the face of the cliff, a man in cow-boy overalls, blue shirt, and flapping hat, and with a cartridge-belted weapon sagging at his right hip, appeared on the high cliff brink. Deliberately, and yet so swiftly that the movement seemed a part of the lounging walk, he whipped the weapon from its holster and snapped it at M'Clarty.

With a yell that made itself heard above the clamor of the drills, the foreman crumpled like a spineless marionette and rolled down the side of the small stone heap from which he had hurled his missile. At the cry the drills were stopped, and the rock-men came running from both ends of the cutting.

"Come on!" Kitts shouted to his pace-setter; "the man's shot!" and together they sprinted down the grade to be among the first to reach M'Clarty.

Knowing better than any one the value of prompt first-aid, the young surgeon pushed the workmen aside and took hold with his hands. The foreman's wound was in the leg, a clean downward-ranging puncture which had missed the thigh-bone but had cut an artery.

"A handkerchief—one of you fellows—quick—a big bandanna!" snapped Kitts; and he was instantly given his choice of a half-dozen. Knotting swiftly the first that came to hand, he contrived a makeshift tourniquet, twisting it with a bit of a stick until the wounded man yelled again. Setting one of the drillers to hold the stick, the emergency surgeon sprang up and dragged Stannard aside.

"It's a severed artery, and I've got to get that fellow on the table in a little less than no time!" he announced hastily. "Luckily, I left a few of my tools in the private car. How will you get him to camp?"

Stannard's answer expressed itself in competent action. Under his orders M'Clarty was carried quickly to the end-of-track and put on a push-car. Room was made for the doctor and the boss, and a bee-swarm of the men rushed the car down the grade and around the great curve into the Travois. Five minutes after the arrival at the camp, the foreman was strapped upon the rude table in the hospital shack, a light-footed quarryman had raced across to the *Egeria* and was on hand with the instruments, and Kitts stripped his coat and went to work.

Stannard did not stay to help. Anxious to forestall further violence, he hurried into the yard, captured one of the

construction locomotives, and had the crew take him back up the line, at the best speed the newly laid track would stand, to the scene of the shooting. The rock cutting was deserted, as he was afraid it would be. The score and more of drillers and muckers who had been left behind had armed themselves with drill-ends, pick-handles, anything they could find, and were beating the forest above the cutting in a hot search for M'Clarty's assailant.

The beaters came straggling in by twos and threes shortly after the young chief got upon the ground. They had found nothing on the slope above save a few freshly driven stakes; but these served to identify the intruders. As to that, however, one of the returning quarrymen supplied better information.

"There was a gang of 'um," the man told Stannard; "min wid transits and some wid axes. Sure, it'll be a dom sorry day for thim, do they be showin' up here again," and he went on to tell the chief how the quarrel had begun.

Stannard listened, investigated and, after seeing the work resumed in the cutting, returned to his headquarters. A little later Kitts came up to beg the loan of the engineer's wash-bucket and towels. He looked like a butcher and said he felt like one. After he had washed he came back to the work-room and swung himself up to a seat on Brant's drawing-board.

"Oh, yes; he'll live, all right," he said, in answer to Stannard's questioning brow-lift. "But it was a close call. The chances are about a hundred to one that he would have bled to death if we hadn't happened along just as we did. If you've got your breath, pitch out and tell me what it all means."

"It means another move in the game—the game we were talking about as we came down the grade. A gang of Greer's pioneers was re-locating the old Overland survey on the slope above the cutting. Carelessly or purposely, somebody in the gang started a rolling rock; it fell into the cutting and barely missed smashing one of our drilling squads. Some few compliments were passed back and forth, then M'Clarty went over to the magazine and made an impromptu bomb out of a stick of dynamite. That was what we saw him throw up among the trees."

"Well, they handed it back to him pretty suddenly, anyhow," Kitts commented; then he added, with the slow closing of an eye: "Rather savage state of affairs, isn't it? Back east we'd call it war. What are you going to do about it?"

"It's an added argument on the other side, don't you think?" Stannard queried. "What we've just seen is an earnest of what will follow on a vastly bigger scale if I stick to my job and refuse to take the advice of the one-man peace tribunal over in the *Egeria*. I am game for it, myself, Kitts, but the bigger question has been thrusting itself upon me in the last hour or so. My men, or a good many of them, will fight at the drop of the hat if I give the word. How much right have I to shove them into the breach? It's a pretty heavy responsibility, first and last."

The young surgeon laughed and slipped down from the drawing-board seat.

"I'm no good at that end of it, Stannard. You'll have to figure the responsibility out for yourself. But I'll venture a small guess; if I've sized you up anywhere near right, these scrappers are taking precisely the surest way to put the trouble-pot on the fire. Did you catch the fellow who did the shooting?"

The Missourian shook his head. "No; the quarry-men turned out, after we left with M'Clarty, and ransacked the woods, but they didn't find anybody. Which is lucky, I guess, since we mean to keep the peace."

Kitts grinned knowingly.

"You don't mean to keep the peace, Stannard; I can see it in your eye. You resemble some other people I know. You like to dally with temptation, and go through all the motions of chasing it up one hill and down another, knowing all the time precisely what you're going to do and how you are going to do it."

Stannard got out of his chair and walked the length of the room twice with his head down and his hands in his pockets before he turned to say: "You're dead right, Kitts; I do know what I'm going to do! I'm going to show Judson Greer and the money people that we can put that tunnel through in spite of the devil. That business at the rock-cutting this afternoon turned the scale. If they had been content to toll me along easy——But they were not, and now, by heavens, they can take it as it comes!"

Kitts stuck out his hand. "I like you better that way, old man. Now I'll trot along and see if Anitra has changed her mind once more about going to the bear camp with me this evening. If you were a ladies' man, I'd like to bet you a brand-new ten-dollar bill that she has." And at that he went away.

Half an hour after Doctor Billy had gone back to the *Egeria*, Eddie Brant came in from the lower yard where he had been checking off a fresh consignment of steel. Stannard had some instructions to give the map-maker about his latest plotting of the canyon curve, and he was bending over the drawing board with Brant when the yellow porter who had

figured indifferently as platform guard, second waiter, and valet-in-ordinary to Mr. Silas Westervelt, came in with a note for the young chief. The envelope exhaled a faint perfume of violets, and the inclosure, written in the stiff upright scrawl of the up-to-date penwoman, ran thus:

"DEAR MR. STANNARD:

"Mrs. Grantham wishes me to say that she will be greatly pleased to have you join us at dinner in the *Egeria* this evening—informally, of course. I have told her that I am sure you won't do anything so purely human as to come.

"A. WESTERVELT."

THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER

Between the reading of Anitra's note and the hour when he might be expected to put in an appearance at the private car, Stannard changed his mind a dozen times. Setting mere social kindness aside as the unlikeliest of the reasons for the dinner invitation, it was not difficult to trace Anitra's note back through Mrs. Grantham to Mr. Westervelt. To go and hobnob with the millionaire over the dinner-table, after he had definitely decided to refuse to fall in with the millionaire's plans, cut crosswise through the straightforward grain of the young Missourian. None the less, when the time came he changed from khaki soiled to khaki clean, and without saying anything to the mess-room squad, made his way across the yard to the *Egeria*.

Though he was not especially early, he found only Anitra in the open compartment of the car. He was glad to see that she walked without limping when she got up to welcome him.

"Oh, dear, I've lost out," she lamented, giving him a wry little smile. "Doc Billy was just leaving when I wrote the note for Aunt Jeannette, and I bet him a bright red tie against a box of civilized chocolates that you wouldn't come. What made you come?"

"You did. I couldn't miss the happy chance of sitting at table with you at least once more. Did Mr. Padgett go back with Kitts?"

"He did not. He stayed to tell us bear stories over the canned soup. Won't you sit down?"

"After you," he grinned. "I have had one lesson in manners lately and I'm not needing another."

She laughed and sat down on the wide leather-covered lounge, making room for him beside her. He ignored the wordless invitation and drew up a chair so that he might sit facing her.

"How is the sore ankle by this time?" he asked.

"It's well," she returned calmly, and he grinned again.

"Kitts wanted to bet me that you had changed your mind one other time about joining the bear hunters. I turned him down and saved my money," he told her.

"Are all Missourians so cautiously thrifty?" she inquired mockingly.

"It stands them in hand to be. We haven't any Wall Street in our metropolis. One can't well take a flyer in little red apples, you know."

The two waiters were laying the shortened table for six and Vallory and Padgett had come in from the other end of the car. Shortly afterward Mrs. Grantham made her appearance, and Stannard was presented in due form.

"So good of you to come to us, Mr. Stannard," gurgled the motherly lady, sinking into the biggest of the wicker-chairs and fanning herself purely from force of habit. "You are so busy—you must be so dreadfully busy——"

"Mr. Stannard is never too busy to be polite," put in the younger woman. "He has the Missouri manner,—not manners, but manner, you know—and he has only to be shown."

"Really, Mr. Stannard, you mustn't mind anything that Anitra says," murmured the chaperone, apologizing vicariously for the covert impertinence. "She is a spoiled child, sadly spoiled, I'm afraid."

"I like children," Stannard laughed; "I was raised with a houseful of them."

"You never told me that you had brothers and sisters," Miss Westervelt protested, with the air of one who has been denied a confidence.

"I hadn't; they were cousins—my uncle Jasper's children. They came to live with us after their mother died," he explained; and while he was doing it, Silas Westervelt, massively complacent and leisurely, came down the compartment.

"Glad to see you, Stannard—glad you're giving us a chance to be hospitable," he said, with his nearest approach to cordiality; and before he could say any more the dinner was announced.

In the seating at table Stannard found himself at Mr. Westervelt's left, with Vallory opposite and Anitra beside him, facing the broker. From the beginning the talk was general, turning easily at first upon the bear-hunting expedition, and a

little later coming around, or being cleverly brought around by the banker-director, to the railroad-building project.

The tunnel-driving topic fairly afoot, the host, heartily companionable to a degree which Stannard had thought impossible, openly declared his continued opposition, though he made it easy for the guest by praising the geniusful intention of the plan.

"You were all right in pushing it, Stannard; I'm not blaming you at all," he said, with large lenience. "You were merely a few years ahead of your times, as all the great innovators have been. That is the point I tried to make when the matter came up for discussion a year ago. The eastern roads have set us the example of shortening and straightening, and it's a good one; but we are prone to forget that the great eastern companies are old and well established, with an assured earning power and abundant resources."

"That's the idea," Padgett cut in; "it's the American mania—not to be able to wait for results. We capitalize the future right along."

"Pernicious activity," said Vallory, making an epigram to fit the mania. "Something doing all the time. Isn't that about it, Stannard? We've made a fetish of the 'get busy' idea."

Stannard had been keeping his face in his plate, chiefly because, having made up his mind to complete his undertaking at all costs, the Westervelt dinner-table seemed scarcely the proper place at which to fling down the gauntlet of defiance. So he was careful not to commit himself.

"As a general proposition, I presume we are all a little too eager to see the wheels go round," he returned evasively, adding: "and I suppose that is especially true of the men on the firing line. It's an American trait to want to push a fight just a little harder when there is determined opposition or added difficulties and obstacles."

He was looking at Anitra as he said this, and he saw her lips move in a soundless whisper. The whisper said: "So among other things, you are a coward!" at least, that was Stannard's translation of it, and the dull flush which her taunt of the day before had evoked came again to make him warm and uncomfortable.

"Sober second thought is always a pretty good thing," the broker put in smoothly. Then he added that which made Stannard suspect that he, too, had seen and translated the wordless whisper: "It sometimes requires a finer brand of courage to stop and turn back than it does to go on. I don't own any G. L. & P. stock, but if I did, I should be scared to death. I climbed that terrible mountain of yours this afternoon, and had a look-in at your tunnel, Stannard. Your man Pearson did the honors, and you won't take it amiss if I say that to a man up a tree, it looks like a financial frost."

"Stannard knows the frostiness of the situation better than any of us," the banker commented suavely. "As an engineer he would like to go on and finish the project at all hazards; that is only natural. But as a stockholder in the company, I think I may venture to say that he is willing to be judiciously conservative. Isn't that so, Stannard?"

The blow was so sudden and so cleverly driven home that it left the Missourian gasping. The simple retort would have been a prompt denial of the stock-owning implication, but in the circumstances this was obviously impossible. The bribe had been tendered, and, from Mr. Westervelt's point of view, had apparently been accepted. At least it had not been specifically refused. Technically he was a stockholder; and the *Egerian* dinner-table was no better place for explanations than it was for defiances.

Nevertheless, his hand went mechanically to the inner pocket of his coat. He had a half-vague, half-rageful idea that he was going to hand the stock certificate back to Silas Westervelt before the tableful of witnesses, thus driving the nail of honesty and clinching it beyond any possibility of withdrawal. But in the act he remembered that he had changed his clothes, and that the bribe had been left in the pocket of the cast-off coat. Betrayed thus by his own carelessness, he sought to turn the accusation aside as a joke.

"I am not a stockholder of record," he asserted, and he tried to say it lightly. "You'll have to produce the books, Mr. Westervelt, before you can drag me into it that way."

For the first time in Stannard's knowing of him, Mr. Westervelt let the permanent smile vocalize itself in a bantering laugh.

"There are a good many stockholders in every company who do not find it advisable to become 'of record' on the transfer books until just before dividend day," he said meaningly. Then: "You are among friends here, my dear fellow. Nobody is going to run to President Merriam with the story that his chief of construction has been taking a quiet little flyer in the company's stock."

Padgett looked up quickly and struck in before Stannard could reply.

"Have you really got a block of G. L. & P.?" he inquired. "If you have, I don't know but I shall be chasing you. I've been sweeping the corners for a customer of ours who has been careless enough to sell more of it than he can deliver."

"Mr. Westervelt says I have, and since he is in some sense my superior officer, I can't very well contradict him," laughed Stannard, still trying to turn the desperate situation into a jest.

Vallory's thin lips curled in a half cynical smile.

"Did you mortgage the apple orchards to get the money to buy G. L. & P., Clay?" he asked, with carefully calculated malice.

"Of course," said the Missourian; "what else could I do?" He was looking Vallory straight in the eyes, but this was because he did not dare to look at Anitra. The sixth sense, however, told him that she had pushed her small coffee cup aside and was regarding him curiously, as she might have looked at a new and rather unpleasant cage-beast in the Central Park exhibit.

Mr. Westervelt had timed his attack judiciously. Before anything more could be said, Mrs. Grantham had risen and the table party was broken up. Stannard saw his opportunity for any straightforward unwinding of the tangle vanish when Mr. Westervelt asked Padgett and Vallory to go with him to his state-room.

"Stannard will excuse us, I'm sure," he said; and then to the engineer: "It's a little matter of business, stirred up by some New York telegrams which came just before dinner. We'll leave you to the tender mercies of the ladies, and join you later. You'll find cigars in that humidor, and I hope Mrs. Grantham and Anitra will be charitable enough to let you smoke."

Stannard did not trouble to investigate the contents of the cigar cabinet. A fierce and thirsty desire to set himself right with Anitra was consuming him, and he was mortally afraid that the motherly chaperone was going to come between. But the fear was unfounded. Mrs. Grantham let him place the easiest of the easy chairs for her under a shaded reading-light and settled herself comfortably with a magazine. When he joined Anitra the young woman was standing before the plate-glass rear door, looking out upon the electric-lighted construction yard.

"Well?" she said shortly, as if he had begun to say something and had failed to finish saying it. And then: "Did you enjoy your dinner?"

"No," he returned bluntly, "you know I didn't."

"So much for our small attempt at hospitality!" she laughed, with a touch of scorn, real or most cleverly simulated. "I'm afraid you are hard to please, Mr. Claiborne Stannard."

"I shall be easily pleased if you'll let me take you out on the platform where I can say a few things that are needing to be said."

"It is cold out there," she objected.

"The weather is changing again, and if you'll tell me where to find it, I'll get you a wrap."

She left him abruptly and went to her state-room, returning almost immediately with a coat. "I'm going out on the platform with Mr. Stannard," she told the motherly lady in passing; and then she let Stannard hold the coat while she put it on.

"You got an entirely wrong impression of things at the dinner-table," he began abruptly, when he had dragged out one of the wicker chairs for her and had found a camp-stool for himself.

"Oh, I'm sure I didn't!" she retorted. "I gave you some good advice the other day, and you have taken it. I suppose I ought to feel highly complimented."

"Just a moment," he pleaded; "you don't begin to understand."

"Oh, yes, I do," she broke in. "Uncle Silas is going to make your fortune, and you're going to let him. Why shouldn't you?"

The Missourian's jaw came up with a click that was plainly audible.

"Money," he frowned; "always money! I've been hoping you didn't mean what you said yesterday morning."

"Why shouldn't I mean it? Isn't money the greatest thing in the world?—the thing that makes all other things possible? Don't preach at me, please! Is there anything it won't buy? Men sell themselves for it, and so do women."

The words cut like the flick of a whip. They seemed so strangely out of harmony with the soft voice and the ripe lips and the eyes which were like brown velvet stars in the half-light of the hood-globe. Also, they were entirely out of keeping with the care-free, generous-hearted girl-woman of the house-party summer interlude who had seen that her uncle was making it socially hard for a young man out of the West, and had striven—so Stannard believed—to make it up to him.

"Tell me plainly," he said; "did you gather from the talk at the table that I had actually gone so far as to sell myself to your uncle?" Another man might have put it less baldly, but he was too deeply stirred to consider the conventional amenities.

"I didn't 'gather'; I *know*," she flashed back. "But again I ask, why shouldn't you? Do you think it is something to be ashamed of, that you try to cover it up and hide it? What have you done, more than any other man in your place would do? Isn't it a mere business decision, whichever way you make it? If you say 'yes' to whatever Uncle Silas wants you to do, one set of men will make—or lose—some money; if you say 'no,' another set of men may make or lose. You have been wise enough to choose what seems to you to be the winning side, that's all—the side that will win for itself and let you win."

The young engineer's voice shook a little when he said: "I'm obliged to believe that you mean what you say—even if you don't know what it means to me. I thought—I hoped you would let me explain."

"What is there to explain?"

"Nothing, I suppose."

"Of course there isn't," she mocked; and then, with the hard ring in her voice which had been coming and going as she talked: "I hope you got enough to make it worth while."

"Your uncle's offer was enough to turn any man's head—any poor man's head."

"That isn't the point," she insisted. "It must be enough to promise you the chance to get more. You'll need more before you can ask the 'one altogether' to marry you won't you?"

"Yes, a great deal more."

"I thought so. And if she is foolish enough to say that she doesn't want you, with your money, you will have just that much wider field in which to look for the second choice."

"My money won't make her say she doesn't want me," he asserted grimly.

"How do you know it won't?"

"I have her own word for it."

"Oh," she said, with a toss of the pretty head. "I didn't know it had gone that far."

"It has gone far enough to make me understand exactly what I've got to do," he returned.

Now it so happened that in drawing up the camp-stool to face Anitra's wicker chair, Stannard had turned his back upon the near-by torrent of the Standing Stone and the forested buttressings of the Rock Face looming darkly beyond the brawling stream. From the beginning of the platform *tête-à-tête* he had been dimly conscious of a subdued medley of sounds coming from nowhere in particular, the grumble and chuck of wagon-wheels, minimized shouts, a stir as of a straggling army on the march. In the little pause for which the young woman was responsible, a man came along the yard-facing side of the private car and stopped at the platform railing. It was Patterson, and seeing his chief, he looked relieved.

"The boys are all out hunting for you," he broke in, apparently ignoring Stannard's companion. "Can you come, right away?"

"If I'm needed," was the rather brittle reply.

"I reckon you're needed, all right," said the grade engineer, and then he considerately turned his back and moved away.

Stannard got up reluctantly. "You'll excuse me, won't you?" he said to the one who had been ignored. "I'm at everybody's beck and call, as you see. I'll go in and thank Mrs. Grantham."

Miss Westervelt twisted her head and looked through the full-length window behind her chair.

"Don't bother to do that," she said quickly. "I'll absolve you and make your excuses. Besides, Aunt Jeannette is asleep."

Stannard said "Good-night" much more abruptly than he had meant to, swung himself over the railing and hastened to join Patterson.

"What is it?" he asked, when he had caught step with his summoner.

"You must have been deaf," Patterson growled. "Greer has been moving up for the last three hours—in the dark. Don't you hear 'em over on the other side of the river?"

"I do now, yes. But that was what we were expecting."

"It's something that we wasn't expecting that made us all turn out to hunt you," was the gruff rejoinder. "The first thing Greer did, while we were all at supper, was to shove a big gang across the Standing Stone at the upper ford. It was after the night shift had gone up to the tunnel, and if little Jack Bannagher hadn't been torch-fishing at the mouth of the canyon we might not have known what was happening till morning."

"What was happening?" queried Stannard with a shade of impatience in his tone.

"Greer had sent his big gang to hit the hillside just beyond the point where the old Overland survey crosses our line. There's eight feet of difference between the grade levels, as you know, and when little Jack brought the news, and I rushed Gallagher and a bunch of his track-layers up there, we found those cusses building an eight-foot dump smack across our track, cutting into the hill and using the spoil to make their fill. They had us pretty well buried by the time we got there."

"What did you do?"

Patterson grunted. "There was a free fight and Greer's crowd got the worst of it. We ran 'em off and heaved their tools after 'em. Gallagher's up there now with his bunch, clearing the track. Roddy's found some guns, somewhere, and he's served out a few to Bully's Irishmen and set 'em to patrolling our right-of-way. Then he shucked us all out to chase for you."

The yard-crossing had been made, and Stannard turned short upon the big, red-faced assistant.

"I'll drill along with you in a little bit," he said, "but I'm going to the telegraph office first. Wait for me up at the headquarters shack."

Notwithstanding this announcement, Stannard did not go directly to the wire-office, a cramped little shelter, half cabin and half tent, which for the convenience of the yard crews had been placed midway between the commissary and the temporary repair-shop. Instead, he turned aside after he had passed the bunk-house and sat down on a pile of cross-ties and filled and lighted his pipe.

Though he was loath to admit it, he knew that the time had come for a final decision, and he strove desperately for the clear-sighted view which would enable him to decide wisely. It was inevitable that the constraining influences should refuse to be set aside. Grapple with them as he might, the princely bribe, with all it might stand for in the future, blocked the path to any fair-minded weighing of the real issues. Deep in his inner consciousness he was beginning to feel that Westervelt's urging, or at least that part of it which made the averting of a smash and the rescue of the Merriam management a sufficient excuse for the seeming disloyalty, was insincere. But even so, the stubborn fact remained: the project could be defeated in any event, with or without his help; he had only to choose between being driven out empty-handed, and going out of his own free will with the road to fortune lying fair before him.

In this crucial struggle he refused to consider the clamoring of desire—or thought he did. There had been little in the after-dinner talk with Anitra Westervelt to fan the flame of passion. Yet he knew in his heart that this wilful young woman with the winsome face and laughing eyes and bitter tongue stood for him as the pattern of all that was most alluring in womanhood; that for her sake he could batter down barriers good or evil if he might hope to win her in the end. And she—he could shut his eyes and see again the curl of the pretty upper lip and hear her say, "Why shouldn't I mean it? Isn't money the greatest thing in the world?"

All at once he remembered a thing that he had heard while he was a business sojourner under the Westervelt roof during the summer of committee meetings. One of the house-party guests, a married woman with a loose tongue in her head, had told him that Anitra's fortune was held in trust; that she would lose it if she should marry against her uncle's wishes. He had tossed the story out of his mind as a bit of idle gossip at the time; but now it came back to send the blood galloping through his veins. Was this the kernel at the heart of the girl's half-bitter urgings? Did she mean that the money to make love possible must be his because she would have none of her own?

The ecstatic suggestion was dinning in his ears when he sprang up from his seat on the cross-ties and walked quickly to the wire office. Hempstead, the operator, was lying in his bunk, reading a paper-backed novel when his chief came in and sat down at the packing-box which served as a table, took out his code-book, and began to write a telegram. What Stannard presently handed to the operator, with a brief command to "rush it," was a cipher and was thus unintelligible to Hempstead, who cast the worn novel aside and sat down to his key. But the original, which the chief was thrusting into his pocket as he went in search of Patterson, was a sufficient indication of the direction in which the tree of decision had fallen.

To JOHN P. MERRIAM, President,
The Waldorf-Astoria,
New York.

Situation very serious. O. N. grading force reached Travois to-day, and interference has already begun. See no possibility of completing tunnel approach before O. N. will be in position to obstruct and delay work in canyon. Tunnel still giving trouble. Prospect exceedingly discouraging.

C. STANNARD,
Chief of Construction.

FLINT AND STEEL

Banker Westervelt's plea of business as an excuse for leaving Stannard at the dinner-table was merely an excuse. As a matter of fact, the retreat of the three men split itself as soon as it had passed the door of the forward corridor, doing so on Westervelt's suggestion to Vallory.

"You'd better smoke your cigar on the outside, Austin, and be ready to intercept Greer. He is pretty sure to come over, and it won't do to take the risk of these two scrappers getting together." Thus the suggestion; and Vallory went out through the forward vestibule, leaving Westervelt and Padgett to kill time as they might in the privacy of the banker's state-room.

"You played it pretty fine," was the broker's comment punctuating the cigar-lighting behind the closed door of the office-state-room. "Stannard was going to back down and quit us cold. I saw it in his eye. Greer's to blame."

"How is that?" queried the magnate.

"Judson is pushing things too spitefully. It's a word and a blow with him, and the blow usually comes first. There was a fight up in the canyon this afternoon, and one of Stannard's men got shot in the leg."

The banker asked for the details, and Padgett gave them as they had been given to him by one of the commissary clerks.

"That is bad—worse than that, it's a blunder!" was the arch plotter's frowning comment. "Greer may be a good railroad builder, but he is sadly lacking when it comes to handling a delicate situation involving a knowledge of men. A little injudicious fighting just now——"

"Of course," said Padgett. "Stannard is precisely the kind of young hot-head to be thrown over by any attempt to drive him. Greer ought to know that."

"Greer ought to obey orders, at least. I have told him definitely and positively what to do and what not to do," fumed the great man, with a touch of impatience. "You say one of Stannard's men was shot; will he die?"

"No; Kitts and Stannard were walking down the grade and they happened along in the nick of time. The man was rushed down to the camp, and Kitts tied up the cut artery."

From this the talk went on to a further discussion of ways and means. Being a capitalist, and hence a man of peace, the banker leaned more and more heavily toward the expedient which seemed to promise a blood-less victory. Tacitly, though for a time neither of them spoke of it, both of the plotters understood that Stannard's decision hung in a delicate balance which might be tipped either way by the featherweight of sentiment. By the careful removal of the obstacles, sentiment had been given its chance, but that chance might be irretrievably spoiled by the caprice of a certain wilful young woman. Padgett bottled his impatience on this score until it finally blew the cork.

"We're not above making blunders ourselves, Westervelt," he broke out, at the lighting of his third cigar. "A preliminary word from you to your niece might have taken a good deal of the uncertainty out of this dinner-party business."

The banker's smile was grimly sardonic.

"If you knew David's daughter as well as I do, you wouldn't say that, Padgett," he objected.

"I've known her ever since she wore pinafores. She is all the things you can say of her, and then some; but down underneath them all she's a woman. Sometimes you seem to forget that."

"I don't see the application," said the magnate, and his manner was that of one who would rather not see.

"You're thinking that an attempt to enlist Anitra on our side would be the surest way to make her do the other thing," laughed the broker. "That's so; if you should go at it in any heavy-handed fashion, she'd probably fly the track in a minute. But a little diplomacy might make the turn."

"Give your idea a name," was the brief command.

"It's merely a suggestion based on the supposition that she has taken at least a passing fancy to Stannard. You intimated that there was a possibility, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And you have given her to understand by your attitude toward Stannard that you considered him definitely and positively the chief of the ineligibles, haven't you?"

"I have."

"Well, suppose you take the other side for a few moments. Snatch an early opportunity to tell her what a fine young man Stannard is,—which is the truth,—and what a pity it is that he isn't in her class, and so on. You get the idea?"

Westervelt nodded slowly. "Again I'll pay you the compliment of saying that you have an exceedingly long head, Padgett," he said. And then, abruptly: "Vallory wants to marry her. Did you know that?"

Being a florid man by nature, Padgett could flush without showing it. As the banker's right hand and lieutenant in many a fiercely fought business battle, the broker thought he knew his principal by length and by breadth. But the simple statement and its tagged query revealed an unscrupulous depth which Padgett had not hitherto suspected, and the revelation touched a hidden spring of generous revulsion in the round-bodied little man of business. He knew now why Vallory had been brought along on the sham bear-hunting expedition. It was because his college comradeship gave him a hold upon Stannard—and his reward was to be the uncle's encouragement of his suit—for whatever such encouragement might be worth.

"Vallory's a pretty poor stick; you wouldn't back him up in trying to break into the family, would you, Westervelt?" said the broker, forgetting that he himself had just been suggesting an unholy mixture of the sacred wine of sentiment with the beer of business.

"Oh, I don't know. Vallory comes of good stock."

"Yes; but it's good stock gone to seed, and, as the fellow says in somebody's story, 'It's damned poor seed!'" The broker was going on to enlarge upon the quality of the seed, but at that moment the door opened and Vallory came in, bearing tidings.

"That fellow Greer has fumbled the ball again," was the clubman's announcement. "There's been a big row up along somewhere, and Stannard was sent for. He's just gone."

Padgett chewed the stump of the third cigar thoughtfully, and the banker said a hard word.

"Greer will have to be called down," he rasped. "Guthrie ought to have known better than to handicap us with such a firebrand!"

Vallory's smile showed his fine even teeth.

"We may need the firebrand a little later," he offered, and then pointedly to the magnate: "I'm afraid you overdid the matter a little at the dinner-table to-night. I know Stannard pretty well, and you've got to play him with a mighty light hand. He was fighting mad when he went away just now."

"You ought to have gone with him," snapped the great man, rising from his chair. "Since you didn't, you'd better go and find Greer and tell him I want to see him at once—to-night." Then, still more impatiently: "What's the matter with that telegraph boy? We ought to have had the closing quotations hours ago. Padgett, suppose you go over and wake him up."

Left to himself, Mr. Westervelt went in search of the opportunity which Padgett had advised him to snatch. With the blundering complications piling in one on top of another, it had become highly necessary to act promptly. The door of Anitra's state-room was open and the room empty. The banker passed on into the open compartment and found Mrs. Grantham asleep under the reading light. The observation platform remained, and a moment later Anitra looked up to see her uncle standing beside her.

"Enjoying the fine night, are you, Nitra?" he said, placing the camp-stool, recently vacated by Stannard, in the corner of the platform rail so that he might rest his back against the brass. Then: "Stannard's gone, has he?"

"Yes; some one came after him a few minutes ago."

"He's a fine fellow," remarked the uncle, with the air of one who has made a discovery. "I'm beginning to suspect that I didn't more than half appreciate him when he and I were quarreling over this shortening project of his a year ago last summer."

"I appreciated him," said the girl shortly.

"I've often wondered if you did, or if you were only trying to make me believe you did," was the genial counter retort. "Of course, he was only an incident to you—something different. I supposed you would have forgotten him by this time."

"Mr. Stannard is not the kind of man to be forgotten so easily; at least, I thought he wasn't a year ago."

"But now you have changed your mind?"

"Decidedly."

"Just what does that mean?" queried the guardian uncle.

"It means that he isn't 'something different,' as you put it. He is like all the others."

"That is rather a large generalization, isn't it?"

"Perhaps."

"You couldn't particularize?"

"Easily. Money is the key-word. Doc Billy married it, Monty Carroll means to marry it, and Eggie Montjoy had no other reason for coming to America."

"And you think Stannard wants to marry it, too?"

"He wants to marry me," was the calm reply.

The guardian uncle's sudden start made the flimsy camp-stool creak.

"Hah!" he said; and then: "He certainly doesn't believe in the policy of delay. How many times have you seen him since we came out here?"

The young woman counted upon her fingers. "Four times, including this evening."

"H'm; rather swift work, I should say," the uncle commented.

"Oh, he hasn't asked me—yet. But I know. There was only one thing to stop him—the lack of money, and you are doing your best to remove that."

"You are certainly taking a great deal for granted, Nitra—as you usually do."

"Maybe; but I don't often have to go back and rub out the mistakes. While we are speaking of it, perhaps you won't mind my saying that I don't thank you for spoiling him for me, Uncle Silas."

"Now you are absurd—which is also as usual. I suppose it wouldn't be worth while to ask you to explain just what you mean?"

"Oh, yes, it would; and if you like, I'll consider myself asked. A year ago, or a little more, Mr. Stannard was quite capable of marrying a woman merely because he was in love with her. Now he wouldn't think of doing such a thing."

"What would he think of?"

"Money; his own money first, and after that the young woman's. He wasn't that way before, and you've made him that way now."

"Again you are talking absurdities. What have I had to do with the making or unmaking of Stannard?"

The young woman in the wicker easy-chair sat up quickly. "Do you really want me to tell you, Uncle Silas?" she asked, with a dangerous softness in her voice.

"Not unless you can put it in some logical and believable form. And you know you can't do that."

"But I can," she flashed out. "You have made him believe that money is the only thing in the world worth having, and when that was done you bribed him with money—No, don't deny it, please. You are my father's brother, and I want to keep on remembering that, if I can."

"Stannard told you all this, did he?" was the harsh assumption.

"No; he didn't think he was telling me anything. But I know. Why is it that the men of your generation persist in clinging to the idea that the women of mine are children? I've been here in Mr. Stannard's railroad camp as long as you have, and I have eyes and ears. You told us all at the table this evening in just so many words that you had given Mr. Stannard a block of the railroad company's stock. And you and Mr. Padgett together made the reason for the gift very plain."

Mr. Silas Westervelt was a patient man, mainly because he had usually found that patience and immobility are the winning cards in any game. But there were limits.

"One thing which your generation hasn't learned is a decent respect for your elders, Nitra! I came out here a few minutes ago with the best of intentions, and you met me with a slap in the face. Do you wonder that I still regard you as a child—a badly spoiled child, at that?"

Here was a rebuke to bring the most hardened young outlaw to her knees. But the young woman showed no sign of yielding.

"I can judge of a person's intentions only by his acts. You took particular pains to humiliate Mr. Stannard a year ago last summer when he was, constructively at least, a guest in your own house. When I tried to make it a little easier for him, you took occasion to tell me that if I chose to 'encourage' him, as you put it, I would do it at my peril—the peril of losing the money that my father left me."

"Exactly," said the guardian, regaining some portion of his own peculiar brand of composure. "It was a plain duty to you and to your father's memory. I knew nothing about Stannard at the time; nothing more than that he was not in your class, and was most probably quite willing to become a fortune-hunter if some inconsiderate young woman with money should give him the chance."

"And you thought I was giving him the chance?" she asked, again with the dangerous softness in her tone.

"You seemed to be," was the cold rejoinder. "I was not the only one who thought so. But that is neither here nor there. I don't think you'll want to marry Stannard after you know him better; but this, too, is a matter of indifference. What I wish to say is this: if you find any pleasure in cultivating him, you are entirely free to do it, so far as I am concerned."

Miss Anitra's thrusting arm was not yet weary. "You think if you withdraw your objections it will be the surest way of turning me against him, don't you?" she charged; adding: "Perhaps it will—that is the attitude you have always forced me to take." She stood up and laid a hand on the door-knob. "Is that all? If it is, I think I shall have to ask your permission to go to bed. I'm tired and sleepy."

The guardian uncle had risen with her, and he was beaming down upon her with the frozen smile once more in permanence.

"You are so absolutely and unspeakably childish that it is impossible to be angry with you for more than a passing moment, Nitra. If you had been my own daughter, I could hardly have been more watchful of your interests or more careful for your future, and I am sure you will realize this when you allow yourself to think calmly about it. As I started to say a moment ago, all these harsh things you have been saying are entirely unmerited. I merely wanted to—"

"You want me to do something for you. What is it?" she demanded shortly.

Silas Westervelt could be as direct as the bullet from a gun when he chose to be.

"While the present situation continues, I shall be glad if you will make Stannard feel at home with us when he comes to the *Egeria*. It is a small thing to ask, and possibly I don't need to ask it; but—"

"I'm sorry; but I can't help you to make Mr. Stannard any more of a money-maniac than he has already shown himself to be. I'm going out to the Teton camp to-morrow—if Doc Billy comes in for me."

And at that she turned and left him.

Silas Westervelt gave his niece plenty of time to disappear before he went back through the open compartment to his own office-stateroom. Letting himself in, he found Padgett busy with pencil and paper at the desk. At the door opening the broker flung down the pencil and made a triumphant clucking with his tongue in his cheek.

"We've got him!" he announced, flourishing the sheet of paper upon which he had been writing. "When I went over to the wire office, Stannard was just going in, and I killed time on the outside for a few minutes. After the coast was clear, I got a grip on young Hempstead and made him give me a copy of the message he had just sent for Stannard to John P. It's a

cipher, and I've just figured it out. Read it and then tell me that money doesn't talk!"



THE KICKING DEER

Stannard had little to say to Patterson, the gruff-voiced second assistant, on the half-mile walk to the scene of the recent crossing fight. His silence was partly due to the fact that he had now fairly committed himself in the telegram to the president, but mainly it was chargeable to a small incident which occurred at the outset from the headquarters.

The incident was a word with Bailey, the yard-master, who had come up, boiling with wrath, to report that the Overland Northern track force was laying a siding apparently designed to connect with the G. L. & P. yard tracks at the lower end of the Travois.

The young chief had listened to the report and had told Bailey to sit tight and say nothing. None the less, the high-handed and arbitrary way in which Greer was forcing the fighting was provocative of silence and the stirring of promptings which Stannard had assured himself had been put safely to sleep.

Reaching the crossing, he found the situation much as Patterson had described it. A rough gash had been dug in the clay-slide talus of the Dogtooth above the newly laid track of the canyon approach, and the point of obstruction had been cleverly chosen. Gallagher's men had cleared the buried track by the simple process of shoveling the heap of clay and broken rock on across the track to the other side of the embankment. The clearing was completed before the chief and the grade engineer came up, and the track-layers, armed with the repeating rifles, were scattered up and down the line, guarding it.

Moodily viewing the battle-field by the light of the gasoline flare-torches left behind by the retreating obstructionists, Stannard put Patterson in command and called Roddy to return to the camp with him. They had covered a good half of the half-mile before the assistant broke the stubborn silence to say, "You're taking me back to give me my time-check?"

"No," Stannard denied briefly.

Another interval of the track-walking silence intervened, and again it was Roddy who broke it irritably.

"You're not going to fire me, but you think you ought to," he snapped. "Is that it?"

"You did exactly what you were hired to do, Jacksie," was the sober reply.

"But you don't approve it?"

"Yes, I do," was the brittle agreement. "It may be necessary for us to lie down, Roddy; as I see it now, it is necessary. But the man doesn't live who is going to make us lie down with a club! You did exactly right—precisely what I should have done if I had been on deck at the time."

Roddy, wise in his generation, let the matter rest at this, and a few hundred yards farther along they came within the radius of the masthead arcs. At the yard limits Stannard said: "How many more guns have you, Jackson?"

"Plenty," was the laconic answer.

The young chief stopped and shaded his eyes from the glare of the electrics.

"I suppose we ought to picket the yards," he growled thoughtfully. "Greer seems to be the sort of thug that doesn't stop for anything short of a knock-out." Then with a quick eye-sweep of the empty yard: "There are two fellows dodging about over there by the *Egeria* now. Go and see who they are and what they want."

Roddy went part way across the tracks. Before he could reach the two intruders they disappeared in the vestibule of the private car. But an intervening arc-light had shown the assistant what he needed to see.

"Speak of the devil, and you hear the clatter of his hoofs," he said, rejoining Stannard. "One of the men was your friend Vallory, and the other was Mr. Judson Greer, himself."

For a moment Stannard saw red. Then he crushed back the rising tide of unreasoning rage and tried to think it out calmly. The effort helped a little. Westervelt had made no secret of the fact that the Overland Northern wished to buy the uncompleted tunnel. But the fact that the banker had so far taken his own acquiescence for granted as to open negotiations with the Overland chief of construction rankled like a barbed thorn in an angry wound.

In the headquarters work-room the lights were turned on, and when the Missourian went in, Roddy followed him and took his accustomed seat on Brant's drawing stool.

"We've come to the jumping-off place, Clay, and you've got to tell me where you stand," he began abruptly. "Greer's confabbing with Mr. Westervelt over yonder in the private car; Vallory was sent out to find him and bring him in. What better evidence do you want that there is crooked work going on?"

Stannard dropped heavily into the desk-chair, and then got up again to strip off his coat and fling it aside.

"As I tried to tell you day before yesterday, Jacksie, I don't know the ins and outs of this deal much better than you do. Mr. Westervelt has made it appear that if we fight, things will go to smash for the G. L. & P. company on the Stock Exchange, and Mr. Merriam and his crowd will lose out. On the other hand, he assures me that if we come down easy, the smash will be averted and the Merriam management will be able to pull through. I have already told you that he has put it up to me; not because he wants to, I think, but because he can't very well help it. Mr. Merriam will take my word as chief of construction. He will say, very justly, that I am here on the ground, and ought to know what I am talking about. If I advise him to quit and sell out while he has the chance—"

"He'll take the advice?—not John P. Merriam!" Roddy broke in. "He's got more sand than you have, Clay."

"That doesn't cut any figure; I mustn't let it cut any figure. My duty to Mr. Merriam and the management is pretty clear. If I wire Mr. Merriam the exact facts as they stand to-night—"

Roddy pointed an accusing finger at his chief. "Clay, you have already done it, and by the Lord Harry, you were hired to do it!"

Stannard, leaning back in his chair, went livid under his tan and for a pounding heart-beat or two knew; the impotent rage of the fighting man who has deliberately tied his own hands.

"Don't go too far with me, Jacksie," he cautioned, and his tongue was thick in his mouth. "I've had enough to-night to make a murderer of an ordinary man, and if this thing goes much farther, I shall certainly hurt somebody!"

"You can begin on me, if you like," Roddy offered, and the baby-blue eyes were snapping. "If you want another punch, I'll remind you that you haven't denied anything."

Stannard sprang out of his chair and bolted through the door and across the passage to his sleeping-room without a word. When he came back, he was drawing a big envelope from the pocket of his working-coat. Dashing the coat aside he tore the envelope open and thrust the stock certificate at Roddy.

"Look at it—read it, and then turn it over and see what's written on the back," he rapped out; and when Roddy had obeyed, glancing at the bribe and handing it back with an exclamation that was less an oath than prayer for justice upon the banker-director, Stannard slammed it upon his desk, snatched up a pen and, crossed out the incriminating transfer, scoring it again and again until his own name was hidden under a blur of ink.

"Now then," he gritted; "that's out of the way once for all, and maybe I can talk to you without choking! It *was* a bribe. Westervelt pretended to use it as an illustration. He said he was going to make me a stockholder for a minute or two, to see if it wouldn't change my point of view. When he went away he left this thing on the desk, and I thought he had merely forgotten it. I took it over to the car and he wasn't there. Then the devil got hold of me, Jacksie, and I began to see it the way Westervelt had meant to make me see it: I had been given a chance to butt in—I was to be paid for butting in—on a game in which the cards could be just as easily stacked without my help. And I wanted the money, Roddy; God only knows how badly I wanted it just at that minute!"

"I know you did—and I know why," cut in the blue-eyed little man in instant sympathy.

"It was rotten, and I knew it; but my rottenness has nothing to do with the facts in the case. The tunnel's a failure if we don't get it arched this fall; and if I don't advise our people to drop it, Greer can get in the way and make us drop it. Whether Westervelt's been honest with me, or not, those are the stubborn facts."

The assistant nodded. Then he said: "I want to ask you one question, Clay, and if it hits you cross-ways you can haul off and land me one. Have you any reason to believe that Westervelt would like to make it possible for you to marry his niece?"

"Good Lord, no! I have every reason to believe that he doesn't want to make it possible!"

"Yet he gives you a hundred thousand dollars' worth of stock which was last week selling around one-fifty, and intimates that he will put you in the way of making more. There's a nigger in the wood-pile, somewhere, Clay, as sure as the devil's a hog! Silas Westervelt isn't handing out money that way unless there is some mighty good reason for it."

"You mean?—"

"I mean that what you're asked to do—what I'm afraid you've already done—was a move in some big stock-jobbing game; a move that couldn't be made, any other way; that Greer's bluff is only a bluff, and your voluntary lie-down is the real thing—the one absolutely indispensable and needful thing."

Stannard sat staring at the blank log wall over his desk with a thoughtful frown furrowing itself between his level-set eyes.

"I can't see it that way, yet," he objected finally. "The Merriam management is in trouble—that much is plain from Mr. Merriam's telegram—and the president is asking for the plain truth. I couldn't do any less than give it to him."

Roddy brought his fist down upon the drawing-board with a crash that made Brant's ink-bottle fall and roll across the floor, leaving a black trail across the rough slabs as it went.

"But what you've given him isn't the truth!" he exploded—"not the truth as you believed it to be before Westervelt came over here and hypnotized you. You say the bribe's out of it now, and I believe you, Clay: take the one other necessary step and tell Westervelt to go to the devil—tell him you won't quit until Mr. Merriam orders you to quit!"

Again Stannard stared at the blank wall, but before he could reply there were footsteps in the passage and Vallory came in, followed by a small, dark-faced man with a Vandyked beard and mustaches and sharp roving eyes that instantly took in every detail of the bare work-room.

Roddy got down from his stool, and the bad jaw which was so curiously out of keeping with the child-like blue eyes was thrust out aggressively when he nodded a brusque recognition. Vallory was lighting a cigarette, and he took time to pinch the match out carefully before he said, "This is Mr. Greer, Stannard. I've come over with him to see that you don't cripple him before he has a chance to square himself. Roddy, shake hands with Mr. Greer—and don't go; there's nothing private about this late-bedtime drop-in."

Stannard stood up and put his back against the wall. He knew Greer by sight only; the Overland construction chief had been pointed out to him one time in the University Club in Chicago.

Greer followed up the introduction rather snappishly, for a man who had come to square himself.

"There was a mistake made this evening, Mr. Stannard," he began. "One of my sub-contractors took matters into his own hands and opened up a crossing interference on your right-of-way. It was unauthorized, and I was sending Murtrie over to call him down when your men ran him off. That crossing business can be arranged amicably, I'm sure. We needn't come to blows over it."

"It seems that we have already come to blows," said the Missourian, not too placably. "I wasn't on the ground, as it happened; but if I had been—"

"I know," Greer put in quickly. "If you had been, you would have chased Duffey out. I'm not kicking. I'll be frank with you. I've just come from Mr. Westervelt, who is a director in your company and a bondholder in ours. He says there's a compromise deal on and asks us to keep the peace. More than that, he gives me a hint that you're a coming man in G. L. & P., and tells me that I don't want to get in bad with you right on the jump."

Roddy, standing behind his stool and leaning upon it with propped elbows, said: "What difference would it make if you should, Greer? Since when have the G. L. & P. and the Overland Northern been bunking in the same bed?"

"Oh, I don't pretend to know anything about the Wall Street end of it," said Greer carelessly. "The two roads may be figuring on a consolidation, for all I know to the contrary. But that's neither here nor there. Mr. Westervelt, who, as an investor heavily interested in both companies, ranks us both, wants us to keep the peace, and I'm ready to do my part."

"Mr. Greer came over to make an explanation," Vallory cut in smoothly, "and he has made it. Of course, there is always a chance for more or less ill-feeling when two construction outfits get to mixing and messing over a disputed right-of-way. But there is no occasion for the ill-feeling in the present case."

Roddy was determined that the angel of peace should not rustle its wings too prematurely.

"We are working under orders from our own management, and we haven't been given authority to make terms with anybody," he snapped.

Greer turned upon the assistant with an angry glint in his eyes. "I was under the impression that Mr. Stannard was the

chief of construction on this job," he struck back with a sneer.

Roddy had shot his small arrow, and could go no farther without backing. But Stannard did not withhold the backing.

"Mr. Roddy has stated the fact very clearly," he said. "Mr. Westervelt has made a proposal which I shall submit to our people in New York. Pending an answer from Mr. Merriam, I shall be glad enough to keep the peace. But it may as well be distinctly understood that our work goes on during the interval. If there is any interference, it will be resisted."

It was just here that Mr. Judson Greer, past master in the gentle art of breaking records in rushing a railroad line through to completion, made the capital mistake of entering the field of diplomacy.

"It will be altogether better if we agree right here, Stannard,—you and I,—to suspend operations until we have definite instructions from headquarters. I don't know how much Mr. Westervelt has told you, but really, you know, it's all over but the shouting. The courts have decided that our original right-of-way in Standing Stone Canyon holds good, and I don't need to tell as good a man as you are that you can't complete your tunnel approach if we insist upon our rights."

"That remains to be seen," said Stannard dryly.

"Oh, of course, I grant you that," was the ready response. "I suppose we two could scrap it out and waste a lot of money for our respective companies; but in the end you'd have to get down and out. The Overland is going to be the first railroad into the Kicking Deer district; that's written in the books."

The effect of this remarkable statement upon the three listeners was a striking commentary upon that Scripture which characterizes the human tongue as an unruly member. Vallory turned aside, and his half audible oath was poorly hidden in a choking cigarette-smoke cough, forced for the occasion. Roddy straightened up with a flash of blue fire in the child-like eyes. A cool wind was sliding down from the high snow balds of the Buckskin and blowing in through the open window of the office-workroom. Stannard reached for the nearest of the two cast-off coats and put it on.

"I've said all that I need to say, Mr. Greer," he remarked quietly. "If you want to mark time pending the clearing up of the situation from New York, that is your own affair, of course. But I shall neither discharge my force nor lay it off. Was there anything else?"

There might have been many things else if Vallory's presence of mind had not come to the rescue.

"You're working all-night shifts over here, Clay," he laughed, dragging out his watch; "but even at that, I suppose you have to sleep a little once in a while. Come on, Greer; let's give these fellows a chance to turn in. They'll be doing the somnambulist act with us, and talking in their sleep if we stay any longer." And he locked arms with Greer and took him away.

Stannard walked the floor of the work-room with his hands behind him for five full minutes after the departure of the clubman and the engineer. As at an earlier period in the evening, Roddy was the one to break the silence.

"Well?" he said, tentatively.

Stannard stopped and began to arrange the papers on his desk. "I am clothed and in my right mind again, Jacksie," he asserted soberly. "What I do now will be done without tangling itself up with anything that may happen to me personally. This bribe goes back to Mr. Westervelt in the morning, and that lets me out. Just the same, I've got to take care of Mr. Merriam's interests and not let all this double-dealing and chicanery make a hot-headed fool of me."

"You are still believing that Mr. Westervelt is telling the truth about the Wall Street situation and the calamities that are going to befall if we don't sell out to the Overland?" queried Roddy.

"I am going to give Mr. Merriam a chance to duck, if he wants the chance."

"But you've already advised him to duck, haven't you?"

"What I wired him an hour or so ago may fairly be taken as an offset to some of the optimistic things that I have signed my name to since we began hitting the bad luck. I didn't advise him; I merely told him that the outlook was plenty discouraging; and it is, Roddy—you'll have to admit it is."

"Also you gave him to understand that you wanted to lie down, didn't you?"

Stannard sat on the edge of the desk and tried to be perfectly fair and straightforward with his ruthless questioner.

"It might be taken that way," he admitted.

"I thought so. It's getting along towards midnight; but it's up to you to chase this wire of yours with another before you go to bed, Clay. Make it plain to Mr. Merriam that you are willing to fight to the last gasp, if that's what he wants you to do. I'll back you—every man on the force will back you. Great Heavens! Didn't you hear what Greer said?"

"I heard him make his brag about swallowing us whole, if that's what you mean."

"You heard him say that the Overland was going to be the first railroad to enter the Kicking Deer district, and you saw your friend Vallory turn away and come mighty near choking to death to keep from cursing Greer for letting the cat out of the bag."

"What's that?" exploded the Missourian.

"Oh; you are catching on at last, are you? I don't know any more than you do what's going to happen in the Kicking Deer district; but if there's any reason why the Overland wants to get there first, you'll admit that it's a still bigger reason for us."

Stannard made no further comment. "Come on down to the telegraph office with me, Jacksie," he said; and they went out together. As they were passing the commissary, the potential recanter suddenly changed his mind. "On second thought, perhaps you'd better get busy another way, Roddy," he advised. "Go back to the office and call up Patterson on the working phone. Tell him to pick out half a dozen good men from his picketing squad and send them down here to patrol the yard. I wish to the Lord we could get that private car out of the way; or, failing in that, get the two women that are left in it over to that camp in the Teton foot-hills!"

The blue-eyed assistant laughed shrewdly as he turned away.

"Mr. Westervelt meant to make you keep the peace, whether you wanted to or not," he said. "That is the reason why he brought the women along. Go and send your wire—and make it stout and man-sized. I'll see to the guard-mounting."

Roddy went back to the headquarters and picked up Patterson on one of the field 'phones in the canyon. Transmitting the chief's order, and getting Patterson's assurance that a guard squad would be sent down at once, the assistant changed the switch plugs and rang up the west end of the tunnel. Markley's night man answered, and Roddy asked for Markley himself. When he had the red-headed tunnel driver at the other end of the wire:

"That you, Charlie?—all right; this is Roddy. Want to take a little hike for your health?"

"Hike be damned! I'm driving tunnel!" was the indignant retort that came back over the wire.

"Never mind about that. Put that big Cornish head-driller of yours in charge for the night, and one of us will be over in the morning to start the day shift. Get that?"

"Sure. What's broke loose?"

"That's just what we want you to find out, and you're the man to do it, if anybody can. Make you a blanket roll and pitch out down the mountain to Castleman's horse ranch. Take a pine torch if you can't find your way in the dark. At Castleman's get the best mountain-climbing bronc' he'll let you have, and make a straight shoot for the Kicking Deer."

"All right; say I'm watering the bronc' in the Kicking Deer—what next?"

"That's what I can't tell you, Markley—it's what you've got to find out for yourself. Prospectors have been finding float gold in the hills a mile or two north of the Deer any time during the past twenty years but nothing that would pay to work. Turn prospector yourself and see if there has been anything doing in that neck of woods lately. If you turn up anything new and startling, climb your bronc' and burn the wind to get the news on the wire. That's all. Go to it, and bring back the money!"

"I'm It!" snapped the red-headed one, and the click in the receiver told Roddy that his one-man scouting expedition had as good as taken the field.

IN WHICH THE CAT CAME BACK

The morning following the clash of the two rival construction forces near the mouth of Standing Stone Canyon saw a return of the delightful autumn weather, clear and cool enough to be bracing, but with a windless air, and sunshine that was like the golden glow of the Italian October.

To the casual observer the passing of the night had changed nothing in the aspect of the end-of-track construction camp. The yard crews, with the two big "camel-backs" for switching engines, were sorting the trains of material which had come in during the night; gangs of laborers were unloading cross-ties and rails; a few trackmen were laying a "cut-in" from a new siding to the main line; and in the lower yard, Bailey, with a road crew and its engine, was making up trains of empty cars to be taken back to Yellow Medicine.

If the yard gangs were larger, and the activities a little more strenuous than usual, the increase in numbers and the quickened pace were not significant enough to evoke more than a passing comment on the part of the two men who stood on the railed-in rear platform of the *Egeria*. Though it was still early, the banker-director and his business lieutenant had already breakfasted. What was even more remarkable, they had been out on the platform before breakfast at the hour of shift changing; had seen the night men from the tunnel come down to make a hungry assault upon the big mess tent back of the commissary, and had looked on while Patterson loaded his pick-and-shovel army on the work train preparatory to a resumption of the daily grading drive among the firs on the high shoulder of the Buckskin.

Not having the deductive gifts of a Vidocq or a Holmes, the round-bodied broker and his principal missed some of the details of the stirring scene which was staging itself in shuttling trains, in the hurrying crews, in the clangor and slide of the steel as the loading gangs, heaving and shouting in unison, shot it skilfully from car to storage stack.

For one of the missed details, each of the "camel-backs" carried a third man in the cab—a man whose sawed-off gun lay on the cushion at his feet, and whose most onerous duty seemed to consist in hanging from the cab window to chaff with the various working squads as the engine passed them. For another, there were idlers in each of the working gangs; men who, upon closer inspection, would have been identified as members of Gallagher's track-laying army, each with a short repeating rifle carried at ease in the crook of his arm.

Over on the bare mesa knoll behind the log-built headquarters there was a third of the missed details figuring as one of the commissary clerks with a field-glass which he focused from time to time upon the distant Rock Face with the new camp rising at its foot, or upon a point a mile or more up the valley where Greer's bridge gang was busily at work throwing a trestle across the Standing Stone.

Neither the banker nor his companion on the *Egeria's* platform noted any of these small significances; but Mr. Westervelt had marked the activities of the Overland Northern bridge gang, and he commented impatiently upon them.

"Greer is proving exceedingly hard to hold down," was the form the comment took. "After that blunder of last night and its consequences, he ought to know better than to go on baiting Stannard at the most critical moment in the entire undertaking!"

"Greer has some reason on his side," Padgett interposed. "You remember he told you last night that though he would make the proposal to Stannard because you insisted upon it, he couldn't afford to stand still; that a halt would disorganize his force and make him lose just that much distance in a hard-fought race. He believes—as I've been inclined to believe all along—that Stannard will have to be knocked into line with a club."

"You change your mind every few minutes, Padgett!" said the magnate, irritably critical. "Last night, after you had translated that message of Stannard's to Merriam, you said we had him."

"It did look that way. But, on second thought, it's just as Vallory says: the message doesn't say anything that can't be taken back. Merriam's reply will be the turning point; and Stannard has fixed things now so that we may have a good bit of trouble in finding out what Merriam says."

"How is that?"

"Didn't Vallory tell you? Some time during the night, or early this morning, Stannard had his telegraph office moved up to his headquarters, where he can have young Hempstead right under his eye."

Mr. Westervelt shook his head. "That looks bad, Padgett," he commented. "It looks as if Hempstead might be under suspicion. Have you seen the boy this morning?"

"No; I was over there before breakfast with a message and that blue-eyed, steel-trap little chap—Roddy—took it in. He shut me off pretty short; said the wire was very busy, but he'd get my telegram off as soon as he could."

The banker drew up a camp-stool and sat down astride of it, squaring his arms on the polished brass railing.

"This is settling day," he said. "That wire you brought me last night was from Sawtelle. He's got Merriam right where he wants him, and if Merriam doesn't come to terms by noon, a break will be made in G. L. & P. on the floor of the Exchange. Stannard's wire will help out, but it wasn't strong enough. He must send another this morning."

Padgett waved a fat hand in acceptance of the necessity.

"You say he must; but will he?—with Greer slapping him in the face with that trestle-building up yonder? I'm afraid we missed a bet by letting Greer get in here before Stannard was definitely committed."

"But Stannard *is* committed," persisted the magnate. "He has accepted his retainer."

"You mean he has not as yet refused to accept it. There's a good bit of difference in that distinction, don't you think?"

It was at this precise moment, as if the broker's query had evoked him, that handsome Eddie Brant dropped from a string of moving cars on a near-by siding and came across to the *Egeria*. "Letter from Mr. Stannard," he said, handing an official envelope up through the railing to the sitting millionaire; and he was gone before Mr. Westervelt could run his finger under the freshly gummed flap.

There were two enclosures, and the banker held one of them, face down, upon his knee while he read the other. As more than once before, since he had projected himself into this unwonted region of things unfettered and elemental, Mr. Silas Westervelt swore picturesquely.

"Listen to this, Padgett!" he grated. "It's from Stannard. He says, 'I am returning herewith stock certificate Number 1663, for 1,000 shares of G. L. & P. common, which—doubtless through an oversight—you left lying on the desk when you were in my office the other day. In order to guard against possible accidents, I have crossed out the endorsement on the back of the certificate, as you will see.'"

The banker-director paused and swore again; and Padgett asked, "Is that all? Doesn't he say what he is going to do?"

"Of course he doesn't—he doesn't need to say!" the great man rapped out angrily. Then: "Where's Vallory? I want him to go and find Greer! I told you all that hustling over yonder meant something! Hurry up and send one of the colored boys after Vallory; or, better still, go after him yourself. He's over there somewhere, trying to keep tab on Stannard."

It was possibly five minutes before this episode of the letter-reading that Miss Anitra Westervelt, rising much later than her uncle and his two subalterns, had entered the open compartment, meaning to get her morning breath of fresh air on the rear platform while the waiter was laying the breakfast plates for herself and Mrs. Grantham.

The shades were drawn in the two full-length rear windows, and she did not know that the platform was occupied until she stood with the knob of the half-opened door in her hand. When her uncle laid his mandatory commands upon Padgett, she was thankful for the qualifying change which sent the broker over the railing instead of back through the car in search of a messenger. It gave her the short reprieve that was needed; and a moment later, when Mr. Westervelt passed through the car on his way to shut himself into his office-stateroom, the plate-laying waiter was the only occupant of the open compartment.

THE FLANKING COLUMN

The cheap little alarm clock on Stannard's desk had measured off an hour or more beyond the despatching of Eddie Brant on the errand which had proved so disturbing to Mr. Silas Westervelt. Like a good general alertly aware of the approaching conflict, the young chief of construction, sitting at his desk and directing the activities, was thoughtfully making his dispositions for the battle which now seemed inevitable.

That Mr. Westervelt would pass the fighting word to Greer was hardly to be doubted. In the little time which yet remained to him Stannard was striving anxiously to cover the weak points and to out-manuever the enemy. The prime necessity was to keep the interferers out of the canyon of the Standing Stone until the rails of the approach track could be laid around the gulch-head curve and up to safety on the high shoulder of the Buckskin. To accomplish this, the excavating force in the great rock-cutting had been doubled, and a cordon of Gallagher's men, armed with the smuggled Winchesters and commanded by Gallagher himself, had been thrown across the mouth of the canyon, with orders to hold the intruders back, peaceably if possible, but by force if no other alternative offered.

With the canyon mouth guarded, and with Patterson driving the work in the cutting and on the grade at heart-breaking speed, Stannard had organized a swift but orderly campaign of preparation at his base of supplies. All morning, at his new desk in the farther corner of the long work-room, Hempstead, the novel-reading telegraph operator, had been kept busy rattling his key on hurry messages to the despatchers and division superintendents on the main line—wire appeals in which Stannard rang all the changes from coaxings to curses to expedite the forwarding of his material still in transit.

In the yard the preparation hustle was going forward on lines of efficiency laid down by the young chief and his first assistant in the small hours of the morning. Cross-ties and rails were being shifted into rankings of easy accessibility, so that they might be loaded and rushed to the front without delay; and a steam wrecking-crane, borrowed from the Yellow Medicine headquarters a week earlier to pick up a derailed locomotive in the Travois yard, was pressed into service to help in the quick transferring of the heavier material.

At all points, in the yard as well as on the grade, Stannard was maintaining the guard of the loyal track-layers, not so much to forestall a possible attack as to keep his laborers from deserting. This was Roddy's idea, and Roddy knew Greer. "About the first thing Judson will do will be to send walking delegates over here to stampede our crowd," Roddy suggested; and thereupon the guard had been established as a sort of emergency constabulary, with orders to arrest stragglers or strangers promptly.

Past these workmanlike preparations, Stannard had taken another leaf out of the good general's book by turning his commissary clerks and staff helpers into a scouting corps. It was one of these who was posted on the little hill behind the headquarters building to keep watch with his field-glass and to report from time to time on the progress of Greer's work in the upper valley. Others were stationed at various points in the danger zone under Roddy's direction; and the importance of this precaution was demonstrated when a young chainman came across from his hiding-place near the *Egeria* with the word that Padgett had hurriedly sought and found Vallory, and that Vallory had immediately set out for the valley head, "Pikin' out like he was goin' for a doctor," in the scouting chain-man's phrase.

Taking all these preliminary steps with the vigor of an undaunted fighting man, Stannard was still sweating under an uncertainty that was little short of paralyzing. As yet there had been no reply from the president to either of his messages of the previous night. Again and again he made Hempstead break the sending of the "hurry orders" to ask Yellow Medicine if there were anything from New York; and the reply was always the same, "O fm Nw. Yk."

He had just fallen upon the operator again, with the same disappointing result, when Roddy, completing a scouting round which had included a trip to the east-end tunnel workings and a hand-car flight to the end-of-track in the canyon, came in.

"I was just beginning to wonder if Greer had sand-bagged you," was the young chief's greeting. "What do you know?"

"We are hanging on by our eyebrows, but we're still alive," said Roddy. "Weatherby has just reported in from his verifying trip down the South Fork of the Deer. He got me on Pearson's phone from the west end of the tunnel, and I told him to stay where he is and take Markley's place."

"Markley's? What's the matter with Markley?"

"Didn't I tell you? He wanted to lay off for a day or so, and I let him go," said the assistant coolly. "I had him on the wire last night while you were down at Hempstead's shack."

"Wanted a lay-off?" Stannard exclaimed. "That's a little queer, isn't it? I didn't think Markley was the sort of man who would ask leave to go fishing in the hot middle of a fight."

"Oh, that's all right," said the granter of lay-offs, nonchalantly. "He'll be back in a day or two, and Weatherby can drive tunnel as well as anybody we've got." Then he switched abruptly. "Pearson's holding his breath. Another section of his roof is threatening to tumble down. I did my best to 'hope him up.' One day more in the big rock cut will give us room to get by with the ties and rails; and Patterson says he's in shape to surface for us now as fast as we want to push him with the steel."

"Which means that we may possibly be able to shoot Pearson's concreting material up to him in time to save his roof—if Mr. Merriam doesn't call us down," was the young chief's half discouraged rejoinder.

"No telegram yet?" queried Roddy.

"Not a word. I've been worrying the life out of those poor devils at Yellow Medicine all morning. I don't understand it, Jacksie. It isn't like Mr. Merriam to crawl into a hole and pull the hole in after him."

"No, it isn't," agreed the little man, and then he switched again. "What have you done about the private car?"

"Nothing. Mr. Westervelt may stay if he wants to. But I have sent Crowley out to the camp in the Tetons with a note asking Kitts to come in after Mrs. Grantham and Miss Anitra. He'll do it."

Roddy slid down from Brant's stool and walked to the window behind Stannard's chair.

"He has already done it," he remarked casually. "He is coming across the yard now—with Miss Westervelt. That's my cue to drop out, I reckon."

"It's nothing of the sort!" growled the Missouriian. "Kitts may be coming to see me, but Miss Westervelt isn't. Stay where you are."

Roddy obeyed the order so literally that he was still looking out of the window when the athletic young surgeon came in and turned to hold an imaginary portière aside for his companion. For a little time the talk was strictly frivolous; with Kitts asserting that he had brought Miss Westervelt over to say good-by, since he was going to take her and the chaperone back with him, and Miss Westervelt protesting vigorously that she didn't mean to be dragged off to any place more primitive and barbarous than the Travois construction camp.

Stannard never knew whether it was Kitts or Roddy who was responsible for the shift which presently left him alone at his end of the long room with Anitra, but the thing was done when one or the other of them suggested that M'Clarty's wound ought to be seen to, and they left the work-room together.

"I'm glad they've gone," said Stannard, seating his remaining visitor in the one chair and planting himself on the desk end. "I want to talk seriously to you, and Kitts makes a joke of everything. You didn't mean it when you said you were not going back with him?"

"I haven't made up my mind yet," was the flippant rejoinder.

"Then I'll make it up for you: you go; you've got to go, and take Mrs. Grantham with you."

"Why have I got to go?" she demanded, with an uptilt of the pretty chin.

"Because I say you must."

Her laugh was a delicious little ripple of defiance.

"This is positively refreshing!" she mocked. And then, "I'm *not* going; n-o-t, not. Now what are you going to do about it, Mr. Sublime Porte Stannard?"

Stannard's heavy brows went together in a frown.

"What I shall be obliged to do will add a little more pepper to a stew which is already hot enough. I shall have to send the *Egeria* back to Yellow Medicine—without waiting for the other members of your party to rejoin it."

"Mercy!" she gasped, and if her astoundment were an affectation it was a triumph in its way. Then: "Something dreadful must have happened since last night. Wouldn't Uncle Silas give you enough money?"

It was just at this juncture that Hempstead got up from his table in the far corner of the room and went out. With a clear field, Stannard braced himself and smashed his way through the conventional barriers.

"You've given me the chance that I've been aching for all morning," he broke out. "You've had every reason to believe that I was about to turn grafter, haven't you?"

"I don't think we have mentioned any such dreadful word as that," she returned. "You were simply going to be like other men and get all the money you could, weren't you?"

"No!" he denied roughly. "I was tempted—I'll admit that. But I think there was never a moment when I really meant to take your uncle's bribe. That's what it was, you know; just a plain, shameless bribe!"

He was looking her fairly in the eyes when he said it, and the wide-open brown depths were glowing like velvet stars as they had on that other occasion when he had been brutally self-assertive with her. Then she took his breath away.

"I know the bribe was given you, and I also know that you have proved yourself the impossible hundredth man by returning it," she said quite calmly; adding: "That is why I made Doc Billy bring me over here, don't you see?"

"No; I don't see," he objected blindly.

"Then I'll make it quite plain," she went on as blandly as if she were discussing the weather. "When we first met, a year ago last summer, I liked you because I thought you were different. I've been thinking of you that way ever since, and it simply made me furious when I found out, or thought I found out, that you were going to be just like all the others."

Stannard gripped the edge of the desk until he could feel his heartbeats in his finger-ends.

"Then you didn't mean what you were saying when you told me—"

"Not one single word of it. But I was just spiteful enough not to say one word that would stop you. Being a man, I suppose you can't understand that—but any woman would know."

Stannard was well out of his depth now and floundering helplessly.

"You wanted me to refuse, and yet you talked money to me until I couldn't think of anything else?" he exploded.

She nodded brightly, adding: "You needn't shout at me that way. Be a good lion, like the one in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' and roar me gently."

The little quip broke the strain, and he laughed with her.

"There never was another woman like you in all the world," he exulted. "Now I can tell you why you must go with Kitts, and take Mrs. Grantham. There is going to be the biggest kind of a row right here in this valley—if my president doesn't call me down—and I'm going to ask you to be disloyal enough to your uncle to go away."

"Disloyal?" she queried.

"Yes. He brought you and the other women along so that I couldn't fight, even if I should want to. That is one of the meanings of this picnic party."

She made a charming little face at him.

"You couldn't drive me away with a stick now," she told him, sweetly obstinate. "The idea! just when something really worth while is going to happen!"

"All right, then; I shall have to order the *Egeria* out of the danger zone."

"You do it, and I'll go over to the other side!" she struck back.

"Do you mean to say that you are on my side, as it is?"

"Of course I am. Why else would I have made Doc Billy bring me over here? I wanted to tell you that Uncle Silas is fairly hopping. He has sent for this Greer person, and—oh, dear! I had forgotten! Now you won't have any money and you can never tell the 'one altogether' that *her* money doesn't make any difference!"

"My money wouldn't make any difference to her," he put in hastily. "It was a pipe-dream—as I told you a few evenings ago. She liked me a little once, just as you did—because she thought I was different—but that's all. She can marry an Italian Count, if she wants to—and pay all his debts. So you can see I'm not in it; not even in the outer edges of it. You say your uncle has sent for Greer?"

"I did; but I sha'n't say it again unless you'll promise not to send the *Egeria* away."

Stannard took time to consider. Her sudden change of front was sweeping him off his feet. In the lilting exaltation of the moment he felt as other men have felt since the world began—that with the chosen woman looking on he could smash his way to success through anything and everything. Then he remembered that story he had heard and tossed out of his mind; how she would be disinherited if she should marry against her uncle's wishes. He would have nothing but the apple-trees to offer her to make up for the lost fortune; and, as matters stood, Mr. Silas Westervelt's opposition was a thing already earned.

"I wish you didn't have a dollar to your name," he said, which was as near as he came to making the required promise about the moving of the private car.

Her laugh was a tonic for overstrained nerves and a troubled mind.

"That means that you are going to let the car stay here," she approved. "Now I'll be good and help you. Uncle Silas read your note, and he—he simply *coruscated!* I didn't mean to listen, but I couldn't very well help it. Then he hurried Mr. Padgett off to find Austin Vallory, and Austin Vallory was to hurry, hurry, hurry and find the Greer person. What will the Greer person do to you?"

"He will try to make me do what your uncle tried to hire me to do; quit, go away, lie down on the job."

"Can he do it?"

"Not in a month of Sundays—unless Mr. Merriam tells me I've got to."

"Then you haven't heard from Mr. Merriam?"

"No. I'm looking for a telegram any minute."

She got out of her chair and went to stand for a moment at the little square window commanding the camp and the yard.

"Doc Billy and Mr. Roddy are coming back," she said quickly. And then, still more hurriedly: "There is something behind all this: I don't know what it is, but I heard just a whisper of it in New York before we started. There is a great deal of money involved, some way, and—and Uncle Silas hates Mr. Merriam. I haven't tried to find out; but now I *am* going to try. That's the reason you mustn't drive me away. You won't, will you?"

He was trying to assure her in some burbling fashion that he and the entire Travois camp were hers to play skittles with, if she so desired, when Kitts and Roddy came in and the conventional side-scenes shifted quickly into place again. Stannard watched for his opportunity, and farther along when Roddy made it for him by taking Miss Westervelt to the door to show her the "snow veil" blowing over the sharp, high-pitched summit of Bald Mountain, he backed Kitts into a corner.

"Miss Anitra has changed her mind about going with you," said the Missourian, without preface. "She wants to stay and see the scrimmage, and what she says goes as it lies. I'll see to it that the *Egeria* is kept out of the way of any bombardment—and——"

"So you're going to make the fight?" Kitts broke in. "I knew you would! By Jove, I'm going to be here to see it!"

"You can do me a good turn by herding the others away from it," said Stannard quickly. "That's what I wanted to ask you to do."

Kitts laughed.

"Are you of the same mind that you were a few days ago? putting it up that Uncle Silas brought us along to force you to keep the peace? Because if you are, you can bet high that his first move will be to call us all in. He couldn't embarrass you any more effectually than by turning the lot of us loose on you right in the middle of things, and if war has been declared, that is just about what he'll do."

"If he does, I'll trundle the whole bunch of you out on the desert and leave you there," said the young chief, with a grim laugh; but after Kitts had taken his charge back across the tracks to the *Egeria*, Stannard remembered his compact with his new ally, and never doubting for an instant the ally's sincerity, he could not help wondering if her coming had not been part of a deeply buried move of Silas Westervelt's with a further tying of a fighting man's hands as its object.

Coming back to business after the visitors were gone, Roddy was quick to remark that Hempstead's chair at the telegraph table was still vacant. While he was asking what had become of the operator, Eddie Brant loafed in, hot, dusty,

and with fine fire of excitement blazing in his boyish eyes.

"I'm the sweet little Sherlock Holmes of this outfit!" he bragged, climbing to a seat on his high stool and fanning himself with his hat. "When I get through telling you where I've been, you're going to get me the Carnegie medal!"

"I'm going to dock you for staying away so long," growled the chief. "What have you been doing?"

"Butting in," said the map-maker briefly. "I gave your letter to His Nibs in the *Egeria* and on the way back I stopped at the commissary. Boligee, the engineer who came in with the last train of material before daylight, was there, buying a plug of tobacco. I got to talking with him, and he asked me what in Sam Hill we'd been building a wagon road for across our track about four miles back in the desert."

"What's that?" Stannard demanded.

"A wagon road. I fell on him like a thousand of brick. His engine was standing on the coal track, and I got him to take me down the line and show me. The wagon road was there, all right; crossing planks all in and everything shipshape. More than that, it looked as if all the teams in the round world had been using it—right recently."

"Cut out the frills!" snapped Roddy. "You didn't stop at that?"

"You bet I didn't! I sent Boligee back to camp and piked out to follow the road to the south. When I got into the hills it looked like a sure thing—and it was, and is. When I came out on top of the south spur of the Dogtooth, which was where the tote-road took me, I could hear the Standing Stone pounding among the boulders a good three-quarters of a mile straight down in the canyon."

Again Roddy broke in with a fierce: "Cut it short and get to the nib of the thing, can't you!"

"I'm there, right now. On a ledge in the woods above our rock-cutting I saw the end of my tote-road, and what the road had been made for. There's a big grade camp on that ledge in the woods, with a couple of hundred men sitting around doing nothing—waiting for orders, I suppose. While we've been watching the mouth of the canyon, Greer's gone all around Robin Hood's barn and outflanked us. When that big bunch on the Dogtooth ledge drills its first set of holes and touches 'em off, we'll have to take a magnifying-glass along when we go to hunt for our rock-cut! Now don't I get that medal?"

THE STOP-SIGNAL

Eddie Brant's startling announcement was followed by a dramatic pause into which the tappings of the telegraph sounder at the farther end of the room broke with magnified clamorings. Then the blue-eyed assistant swore painstakingly and fervently, and Stannard sprang from his chair to go to the telephone, his first thought being for the workmen in the big rock-cutting whose lives would be imperiled if Greer's grading force should begin blasting and excavating on the mountain above them.

Before he could reach the 'phone he was confronted by a big man in work-stained khaki who had walked in unannounced. Stannard instantly recognized the intruder as his rough-and-tumble antagonist in the night fight on the Standing Stone gravel-bar.

"Flag o' truce," said the gigantic transit-man, grinning. "Mr. Greer sent me over with a message. I'll deliver it peaceably, if you'll let me."

"Turn it loose," said Stannard shortly.

"We've got a big rock-cut to make on our right-of-way in the canyon, and we don't want to kill any of you folks unless we have to," the emissary began. "Mr. Greer says if you want to play safe, you'll take your men out of that cutting you're making just below us."

"You go back and tell Mr. Greer that we are entirely within our rights in the canyon, and he will endanger the lives of our men at his peril!" snapped the Missourian.

"Just as you say," the big man acquiesced, grinning again: and with that he turned and went away with as little ceremony as he had come.

Another interval of silence followed and Roddy was the first to break it.

"We're up against it, good and hard, Clay!" he gritted. "Greer's put us where we've got to take the initiative—which is exactly what he meant to make us do. Unless we mean to hang up and go out of business, we've got to drive that bunch of his out of the Dogtooth timber, and he's daring us to do it. When we do it, we shall put ourselves on the wrong side of the law."

"Yes, and I'll bet he has brought the law machinery right along with him," put in Brant. "When we make the break, there'll be warrants out for every last one of us. I saw it done that way last year up in the Cœur d'Alenes."

Stannard took a turn up and down the room with his hands in his pockets. His fighting blood was up, now, but the president's silence was hampering him cruelly. Try as he might to overcome it, there was always a lingering fear that Silas Westervelt's story might be true, after all; that a plunge into violence might be precisely the thing which would precipitate the stock-market disaster which Westervelt had predicted.

Still, something must be done; and it was too late to turn back. If Greer's flanking force could not be driven out of the Dogtooth stronghold, the battle was as good as lost. Brant had not exaggerated in saying that the dynamiting of the high ledge would send an avalanche of earth and broken rock down completely to extinguish the quarried foothold which was the weakest point in the tunnel approach.

It was Brant who finally came to the rescue. While Stannard was tramping back and forth, the map-maker had been sitting with his elbows on the drawing-board and his fingers buried in his curly hair. Suddenly he looked up to say:

"If you'll give me a free hand, Stannard, I'll get those fellows out of the woods—and I'll do it without killing anybody. What do you say?"

"It's your say," said the young chief, wheeling short upon the draftsman. "What do you mean by 'a free hand'?"

"Leave of absence for a few hours, and an order to Bailey giving me the use of one of those road engines on the coal track."

"Where do you want to go?"

"To Yellow Medicine. I'll be back by supper-time, if I have any kind of luck."

"Go ahead—and tell Bailey you have my authority," said Stannard, who was still wrestling with the greater problem; and when Brant disappeared, Roddy broke in.

"If that kid can do what he says he can, I'll resign and give him my job." And then, seeing that Stannard was in sore need of a diversion of some sort: "Come down to the loading platform with me and look over those concrete mixers that Canby's unloading. Pearson will want to know how to install them; if we're lucky enough to be able to get them up to him before his roof falls in."

A few minutes after the work-room had been deserted by the two engineers, a young fellow with sleepy eyes and a loosely hanging lower lip dodged in through the open door, made a quick reconnaissance of the mesa path in passing the square window, and went to the telegraph table. Sitting down to the worn-out typewriter upon which he took his messages, he thrust a receiving blank between the rolls and began to write, referring from time to time to a few scrawled signs and pot-hooks on the back of a visiting card which he had drawn from his pocket.

When he took the sheet from the machine he folded it methodically, enclosed it in an envelope, and returned the scribbled card to his pocket. Five minutes later he was handing the sealed envelope to Stannard on the loading platform below the bunk shacks; delivering it and turning away to tramp back to the headquarters.

"This is where we find out whether we live or die, Jacksie," Stannard jested grimly, tearing the envelope across. Then, as he read the enclosure, the bright autumn sunshine went out in a glare of red for him, and his explosive outburst made the two freight-handlers who were unloading the mixing machine drop their pinch-bars and duck for safety.

Roddy took the freshly delivered telegram his chief was thrusting at him and glanced at the typewritten lines. The message bore a New York date line and it had evidently been delayed in transmission, since the date line gave the sending time as eight-thirty.

To C. STANNARD,
Chief of Construction,
Travois Camp.

Mr. Merriam sick and confined to his room. Directs me to tell you that Appellate Court has decided against us in claim of Overland Northern as prior locator of right-of-way and tunnel site, and injunction will be issued. Stop all work at once and confer with Mr. Westervelt.

C. CARDIGAN,
Secretary.

Exactly coincident with Roddy's reading of this peremptory stop-order, the coffee-colored serving man was laying the plates for the midday meal in the *Egeria*, and Vallory was swinging himself up to the recessed observation platform where Mr. Westervelt was sitting quietly in the shade of the umbrella roof and apparently waiting for him. In the body of the car, Kitts, delaying his return to the foot-hills until afternoon, was laughing and joking with Anitra and the chaperone. The door was ajar, and Vallory silently closed it and stood with his back to it.

"It's pulled off," he reported. "Stannard will be over before long, ready to eat from your hand. When he comes, you want to strike quick and hard; shove him out and shove Greer in, in a hurry. Padgett's got New York over Greer's construction wire, and he wanted me to tell you that there is merry hell to pay in the Street—it began with the opening of the market this morning. Get a strangle hold on Stannard when he shows up, and remember that time is the one thing we can neither borrow nor buy."

The magnate nodded slowly.

"I don't know what you've done, Austin, and I don't want to know," he declared, taking refuge in the time-honored assumption that the master may not be called to account for the overzealous forth-pushings of his followers. Then he added. "I hope it isn't anything that will land you in the penitentiary when Merriam sets the dogs on you."

Vallory's smile showed his fine, even rows of teeth.

"I can take care of myself," he asserted; adding: "but so far as that is concerned, there is no trail for the dogs to follow. Stannard has just been handed a wire which will do the business for us. I can't quote it *verbatim*, but it's a stop-order, all right." And then the door opened behind him and the waiter announced luncheon.

IN WHICH A CIGAR-CASE TURNS UP

Contrary to Vallory's confident prediction, Stannard did not break his neck in the effort to hand in his submission to the banker-director at the earliest possible moment. So far from it, after the first burst of angry disappointment he turned the camp activities over to Roddy, filled his pockets with crackers at the commissary and set out to walk the line toward the canyon, munching the makeshift luncheon as he went.

More than at any other crisis in the heart-breaking struggle for accomplishment, he craved solitude and a chance to think. With Westervelt's urgings, and Greer menacing and out-maneuvering him at every turn; with the rotten tunnel roof threatening, and with his New York backing practically withdrawn, submission seemed to be the only alternative. Yet the very depth of the ditch into which his undertaking had fallen was breeding a fine frenzy of forlorn-hope determination as he tramped moodily along over the cross-ties of the unsurfaced track.

"For just one word from anybody who cares a tinker's damn what becomes of this job, I'd fight Judson Greer to a stand-still and put the thing through yet!" he told himself grittingly in the desperate gropings for some outlet which would be a little less than annihilative. Then he caught at the one small ray of hope in the maddening order from New York. "That wire says Mr. Merriam is sick: if he were up and able to fight for his own hand, I don't believe for a single minute that he'd let this buccaneering outfit shove him to the wall!"

It was some measure of the struggle which this uncertain ray of hope was making for a hearing, that in the tramping progress up the line he dropped no word of discouragement among the gang bosses and foremen as he went along. Quite to the contrary, the passed word was rather that of the fighting field captain, and the loyal responses evoked went some little way toward strengthening the forlorn-hope determination which was growing and taking shape in the stubborn part of his brain. There were many nationalities represented in the big construction force, but the fighting leaven was Irish and American and Scandinavian—loyal to the core, as Stannard was finding out, and entirely unafraid.

"'Tis a leather medal we'd ought to have, Misther Stannard, fr lettin' thim hoboos fr'm Greer's camp get to the back av us," said Gallagher, when the tramping chief came to the guard line thrown across the mouth of the canyon.

"Brant told you about it, did he?"

"He did that same. I was fr takin' our b'ys up the hill an' dhrivin' thim out, but the orders was to stay here an'——"

"That was right. Brant says there are a couple of hundred of them, and you haven't men enough to divide. You've had no trouble here this morning?"

"Divil a wan bit av throuble, at all. To be sure, a bunch av thim Overland stake-dhrivers did be coming over here a while back, an' we took 'em in. But there's been divil a bit av throuble."

"Took them in?" queried Stannard. "What did you do with them?"

"Dipped 'em in the Stone wance 'r twice—they was that dhirty and dishreputable that you'd be thinking they's never seen soap 'r wather—and sint thim back wid our compliments t' Misther Greer."

"They'll be arresting you next, Bully. I understand they have a squad of deputy sheriffs along."

Gallagher tapped the cased field-glass with which Roddy had provided him.

"'Tis a great little thrick—this shpy-glass Misther Roddy was after givin' me. The man wid a gun on him that gets near enough t' read anny law-papers t' me——"

Stannard was turning away to go up the canyon, and he had quite forgotten the New York stop-signal telegram when he said, "That's right, Bully, don't let them snipe you or rush you. We'll try to relieve you before night, and if we can't, we'll put a search-light up here."

At the great rock-cutting, where the doubled force was rushing the work within a stone's-throw of the concealed enemy on the timbered bench above, Stannard drew Olesen, the big Swede who had taken M'Clarty's place as foreman, aside out of the drill-clamor.

"You know what's up yonder in the timber, don't you, Jan?" he asked, with a jerk of his thumb to indicate the hidden menace.

"Mester Brant, he bane telling me 'bout dat. Ve ent bane carin' much 'bout dem fallers."

"I think you are safe to work the day-shift through," said Stannard. "To-night we may try to drive them out."

"Ve fix for dem fallers," said the foreman, with a child-like smile spreading itself over his impassive face. "Ven Mester Brant he bane tailing us, ve plant som' dannamite en dot teember. Hae tank som't'ing vill go off bang! *fon* dem fallers tank dey will make us som' troubles, *ja*?"

Stannard did not deprecate this violent precautionary measure. Instead, he repeated the word of encouragement given to Gallagher.

"Hold your own, if you can, Jan; and remember that this cut of yours is the only thing that is stopping us now. We'll put a hundred steel-layers in here to rush the track through the minute you can give us ten feet of space between the cliff and the river,"

Half-way up the upper leg of the hair-pin loop, upon which Patterson's graders and surfacers were thickly scattered, the young Missourian came upon the red-faced grade engineer energetically driving his mixed army of shovelers.

"How is she looking to you, by this time?" growled Patterson, priding himself, as he had reason, on the fine, carefully aligned and leveled succession of cuts, and fills and curves winding through the forest of the Buckskin slope.

Stannard ignored the question.

"Jamie, you were the man who told us the most about this old right-of-way surveyed by the Overland Northern five years ago. Where did you get your information?"

The expatriated Dumfriesshire man made a clucking noise in his throat.

"I got it right here, on the spot. I was working for the O. N. that summer and helped run the line."

"It was assumed, in the court proceedings, that the extension was aiming to reach the Rhyolite district in the southern Buckskins. Was that so?"

"Nobody in the locating party except Barbuck, the chief, seemed to know. The line came across the head of the Travois, about where Greer is planning to cross, then up the canyon just above our location, and then over the divide to the south. Besides that, Barbuck had us run a lot of preliminary lines around here; one of them doubled back along this side of the canyon and stopped about where our tunnel enters. Some of us thought he was feeling for a way to climb the range, but that was only a guess. Barbuck never talked."

Stannard threw up his hand in a gesture of impatience.

"That accounts for it, then," he said. "They are not only claiming the canyon right-of-way, now; they are claiming the tunnel site, as well."

"Huh!" Patterson grunted. "Why don't they ask our people to give them the whole Cut-off, while they're about it!"

Stannard turned to resume his tramping inspection trip, and again his parting word ignored the New York stop-order.

"Keep 'em moving, Jamie, and sort your force over to pick out a man here and there who could be trusted with a gun and cartridge-belt at a pinch," he directed; and then, briefly and without comment, he told Patterson of the flanking party which had gained a foothold on the opposite mountain side; told the story and left it to sink into Patterson's mind as it might.

It was five o'clock, or thereabouts, when the young chief reached the V-shaped clay cutting which formed the eastern entrance to the tunnel, and in the mouth of the cut he came suddenly upon Pearson, mud-stained and begrimed, walking out with two visitors who had evidently been exploring the threatening depths with the tunnel-driver for a guide. Stannard had to look twice before he could believe his eyes; for the two sight-seers were Miss Anitra and the athletic young surgeon.

Putting his astonishment into words, he found that they had started out to walk only to the foot of the Buckskin—to test the recovery of the bruised ankle, so Kitts said. Reaching the river and the foot-log, they had crossed; and by the simple process of putting one foot before the other, had climbed to the tunnel mouth.

It was shortly after Stannard's upcoming that Kitts felt hurriedly in his pockets and claimed to have lost his cigar-case.

"That's funny," he said; "I had it a few minutes ago, just before we came out, and was going to offer you a smoke, Mr.

Pearson. Would you mind going back with me? I—that is, my wife gave me the case, and I wouldn't take a pretty for it."

Pearson went willingly, and the departure of the two left Miss Westervelt smiling sweetly up at the young Missourian and saying, "Isn't it remarkable how people walk off and leave us alone together? It's coming to be a habit."

"I am still wondering what Kitts could be thinking of to walk you all the way up here from the camp," Stannard protested warmly.

"Doc Billy wasn't thinking of it; he was thinking—and talking—very pointedly of making me go back from each and every one of our resting places."

"You wanted to come?"

"I wanted to see you, and Mr. Roddy said you were probably up here. I've been eavesdropping again, and I suppose I ought to be ashamed of it—but I'm not. I was lying down in my state-room after luncheon and they talked so that I couldn't help hearing them. The ventilator was open between my room and Uncle Silas's." She stopped to take breath and then went on hurriedly: "I didn't open the ventilator. If you think I did, I sha'n't say another word!"

Stannard's manhood came quickly to the front in a chivalric prompting to save the woman he loved from the consequences of any rash impulse.

"You mustn't tell me anything that you ought not to tell me," he interposed gently.

"You think I ought to be loyal to my uncle rather than to—rather than to anybody else? That's little and narrow. If I should see Uncle Silas picking your pocket, would it be right for me to turn my back and say nothing?"

"Go ahead," he said shortly. "I was just a little bit afraid you might not realize exactly what you are doing."

"Then I may tell you?"—with a swift glance over her shoulder to make sure that Kitts and Pearson were not yet in sight.

"If you think I ought to know."

"It was this way: there were three of them—Uncle Silas and Austin Vallory and a strange man, whose voice I didn't recognize. They were talking about you and your railroad. The strange man said something that I didn't understand—something about having just come from kicking a deer, or being kicked by a deer—and that things wouldn't wait; that what was going to be done must be done at once, because the news was already started and it was going to spread like wild-fire."

Stannard caught eagerly at the mysterious reference, translating it instantly into some mention of the Kicking Deer district on the western slopes of the Buckskin.

"Was that all?" he asked.

"No. Uncle Silas said it was all right; that you had had orders from New York and were going to stop work at once. Then he explained that this Greer person would go on and finish the tunnel, working day and night until it was done. I knew that wasn't so—about your giving up. You're not going to give up, are you? Don't you owe it to yourself not to give up?"

"I'm beginning to wonder if I don't owe it to you not to give up," he flashed back. And then: "But your uncle was right; an order came this morning to stop the work."

"How did it come?"

"By wire."

She was grinding a small heel into the marl of the clay cutting.

"You haven't stopped yet," she asserted.

"No, not yet. I was ordered to confer with your uncle, and it made me so hot under the collar that I had to take a little time to cool off."

"Have you cooled off now?" she inquired, half mockingly.

"No."

"But you are going to see Uncle Silas, aren't you?"

"Mr. Merriam's private secretary tells me I've got to."

"Then your orders were not from Mr. Merriam himself?" she asked quickly.

"No; he is sick, so that wire says."

Pearson and Kitts were coming back, and the young surgeon had the lost and found cigar-case in his hand. The girl was standing with her back to them, but she heard them.

"Listen," she said in a half whisper. "I saw Austin Vallory and that young man who works in your telegraph office together in the little grove of trees just beyond the *Egeria* this morning—not very long after Doc Billy and I came back from your headquarters. Did you get your message from New York before that time, or after it?"

"After; it came just before noon. And the wire was delayed—the date-line showed it!" Stannard exclaimed, beginning to see a little daylight through the thick fog of mystery.

She took a step nearer and laid a hand on his arm. "Then take the word from me and *don't give up!*" she urged. "That's what I came up here to say to you. If you have to be beaten, don't, for pity's sake, let them smother you to death with feathers; make them fight for what they get and fight hard! Last night, at the dinner-table, Uncle Silas shamed you before us all—show him that he has a man to reckon with; a man whom he can't buy or bully or hoodwink!"

The interruption was upon them, and the young Missourian had time only for an impulsive rush of blood to the head—or heart—and a momentary imprisonment of the small hand on his arm; for these and for the low-spoken word, "That's all I've been needing, little girl! You just climb up into the grand-stand and watch us while we——"

It was just here that Kitts broke in with a wink and a laugh which Stannard understood, if Pearson didn't.

"Some men are born lucky and others have the luck jammed down their throats," he said. "The cigar-case wasn't lost, after all; I had merely put it in another pocket!"

A BLOODLESS BATTLE

Stannard walked down the steep path with the two tunnel explorers, and Doctor William Pangborn Kitts found himself entirely unnecessary as an escort when it came to helping Miss Anitra over the rough places. At the foot of the mountain Stannard made the two sit down while he went to the nearest field 'phone and ordered one of the "camel-backs" up from the yard. "You're not going to walk any more on that ankle," he told Anitra; and when the engine came, the remainder of the return was made at the company's expense.

The masthead lights were on in the yard when the engine stop was made in front of the headquarters. Stannard lifted his charge down from the high gangway of the "camel-back," turned her over to Kitts, and with an abrupt "Good-night" left them to make their way across to the private car. There was reason for the crisp leave-taking. On the short turn down the new track Stannard had seen the headlight of an approaching locomotive on the desert horizon; a token, as he hoped, pointing to Eddie Brant's return.

The hope was presently fulfilled. Shortly after the "camel-back" had clattered down the yard, a road engine, running light, pulled in from the desert and was shunted upon the coal tracks. Five minutes later Brant came up.

"I've got the dope, and it was simply the biggest piece of luck that ever happened," he said shortly. "Do I still have the free hand?"

"It's up to you," Stannard avouched. "If you can chase that gang out of the woods up on Dogtooth without landing us all at the end of a rope, you'll be the prize-winner."

"I'm the bright-eyed little chaser; but there's no special hurry—we don't want to be too early, or too late. Let's go and eat supper."

The meal in the iron-roofed mess shack was a silent one for the better part, with only the chief, Roddy, and the map-maker to gather at one end of the trestle-board table. Though the night-shift had already gone up to the tunnel, Pearson had not come down; and Patterson had called up from the high grade to say that he was going to work his surfacing army by flare-light until nine o'clock.

Eating like a hungry scout, Brant got through first and disappeared. After he was gone Roddy opened up on the subject of the stop-order.

"I take it you haven't been over to see Mr. Westervelt yet, Clay," he said quietly, loading the sugar into a third cup of Black Sam's unapproachable coffee.

"No; and I'm not going," was the curt rejoinder.

"Isn't it an order?"

"Maybe; but for the next twenty-four hours or so I'm going to disregard it."

"That reminds me of what Lincoln said to the man who complained that General Grant was a drunkard—about wishing he knew Grant's brand of whiskey so that it might be more widely used. Where did you get your liquor, Clay?"

"Perhaps I can tell you a little later, Jacksie. At present, I'll say only this: there is something behind all this monkey-motioning and scheming—some whale of a big thing that hasn't stuck its head up high enough yet to let us see what it looks like. I'm going to take a long chance and go on just as if that telegram had never come. It may cost me my job and send me to jail for contempt of court, but I'll have the satisfaction of bluffing Greer—and Mr. Judas Westervelt—just one more time before I'm knocked out." Then he shifted abruptly to Brant and his mysterious project. "Have you any notion of what Eddie has in mind?"

"Not any very clear notion; no. But whatever it is, he'll pull it off. If you're through, we'll go and dig him up."

They found Brant in the headquarters work-room. He had just come up from the lower yard with something in a gunny-sack. Roddy stooped and untied the string. With a little straw for packing there were a dozen or more pint bottles in the sack—flat pocket flasks, tightly corked, and each bearing the label of a famous Yellow Medicine saloon certifying the contents as pure Deep Spring whiskey.

"Suffering Scott!" was Roddy's comment as he held one of the bottles up to the light. "Are you going to get 'em all drunk, Eddie?"

Brant laughed.

"Right you are; it's my treat to-night, and I'm going to get them all drunk."

"You'll have to take a cork-screw along," said Stannard, taking the bottle that Roddy handed him and noting that the cork was pressed in level with the neck and sealed with paraffin. Then: "If this is whiskey, it's 'moonshine'; it's as clear as water."

Roddy had straightened up and was sniffing suspiciously.

"Say, Clay, we need an office cat. There's a dead rat around here somewhere; I've been noticing it for two or three days."

Brant laughed again. "If you had named the cat to me, I might have brought one up from Yellow Medicine."

Stannard felt in the sack and counted the bottles. "Eighteen pints, Eddie? You don't hope to get two hundred men drunk on eighteen pints of whisky, do you?"

"That is an extra fine brand of bug-juice, warranted to knock you out at a hundred yards—no cure, no pay," said the map-maker. Then he went to the 'phone, set the plugs and rang the alarm until he got Gallagher at the canyon mouth. The wire conversation was brief and to the point.

"That you, Bully? This is Brant. Say, Bully; after a while, if you hear a crowd of drunks tumbling over each other to get out of the canyon, just open your line and let 'em go through: no shooting, you understand—they won't need it. Get that? All right."

Hanging up the receiver, Brant turned upon Stannard: "I'm going to clear the canyon for you, but it'll be up to you to think out some scheme for holding it after it is cleared. What'll you do?"

Stannard's answer expressed itself in prompt action. Going to the 'phone, he tried several of the field stations on the Buckskin grade, plugging first one and then another until he got Patterson. To the grade engineer he gave a brief order.

"Roddy tells me that you can free at least half of your men by nine o'clock. Pick out fifty or sixty of the best of them, of the kind I was talking about this afternoon, and send them down the mountain to Gallagher's guard line at the Standing Stone. Gallagher will have guns and ammunition for them, and they are to report——" Stannard turned quickly to Brant—"Where are they to report, Eddie?"

The map-maker thought a moment. "I guess Roddy had better meet the Patterson crowd at the canyon with the guns and ammunition, and hold them until I've finished my little stunt," he said. And then to Roddy: "After the rush passes you, march your men up the west side of the river and turn the gulch head above our bridge. It'll be a whole lot pleasanter going that way."

Stannard finished giving the order to Patterson in accordance with Brant's directions, after which Roddy went out to arrange for his part of the undertaking, while Stannard and Brant left the headquarters together, Brant leading the way with the sack of bottles over his shoulder.

Leaving the camp, the map-maker struck off up the slope of the Dogtooth, plunging into the timber and picking his way by the help of a pocket flash-light. Zigzagging and climbing, the pair came out an hour later on the bare summit of the low range at a point a few hundred yards from the sheer gash which separated the main mountain from the needle-like peak of the Standing Stone. From the treeless ridge summit they could look down upon the starring electrics in the Travois yard a thousand feet below, and across to the gasoline flares lighting the new camp under Rock Face. Farther west there were more of the flares, with intermittent spark spoutings from the stack of a big steam-shovel—evidence sufficient to prove that Greer also was working night shifts.

Bearing sharply to the south, Brant led the way along the crest of the ridge, and a half-hour more of the silent progress brought the two men out upon a rocky cliff overlooking the upper canyon of the mountain torrent. Above the hoarse roar and rumble of the Standing Stone in its boulder bed, they could hear the distance-diminished jar and clatter of the air-drills in the deep cutting; and in the caverned darkness just below their cliff of espial—a darkness made impenetrable by a backgrounding of thick forest—there was a dotting of camp-fires, the night fires of Greer's flanking column.

"Here's where we press the button," said Brant, easing his burden to the ground. Then: "You've got more beef and a better throwing arm than I have. Let's see how near you can come to hitting one of those camp-fires with a bottle of this

bug-juice. Don't drop it, for heaven's sake!" he pleaded, when the ex-fielder began to grope for his missile.

It was a pretty long throw. Though the camp seemed to lie fairly below their cliff, downward distances are deceptive. Stannard took off his coat, and fitting one of the pint flasks into his hand with a pitcher's finger-lock, he sent it spinning out into the darkness. After what seemed like a long minute there was a faint tinkling crash from below.

"Give 'em another!" said Brant quickly. "Send 'em in just as fast as you can! You've got eighteen chances to get your man at the plate—keep 'em going!"

One after another in quick succession the pint bottles went sailing across the black void; but before the third one had crashed among the rocks at the forest edge the camp was alive and buzzing like a swarm of angry bees. Shouts, curses and mad gaspings floated up on the gentle breeze slipping across from the Buckskin, and when the fourth missile broke near one of the fires there was a sudden blue flare to light up a scene that was little short of pandemonium. Dark figures were bursting frantically out of the tents and shack-shelters, stumbling to fall headlong and springing up again to rush blindly in frenzied efforts to dodge the rain of whiskey flasks. Brant sat down on the cliff edge and rocked back and forth in agonies of hilarious mirth.

"Give it to 'em, Clay; you'll put the whole team out if you don't get a Charley horse!" he gasped.

Stannard groped for another bottle and sniffed at the light breeze which was lifting the mad-house clamor to the cliff-edge. Then he got a whiff from below, and burst out chokingly: "For the love of Mike, Eddie, what is this stuff we're handing out to 'em? Shades of all the dead cats! Whoof!"

As Brant had foreseen, the frantic rush to escape was made down the canyon, no man of the crowd being brave enough to take the mountain-climbing road in the face of the deadly bombardment. The map-maker caught up the half-emptied gunny-sack and led the way along the ridge.

"Keep up with 'em!" he yelled to Stannard. "Keep even with them and keep 'em going!"

Thereupon ensued a retreat growing speedily into a panic-stricken rout when the fugitives discovered that the unseen enemy was still keeping within striking distance. Some of the missiles went wide of the mark in the darkness, but others sped true and a fresh series of the choking yells and polyglot curses marked the hits.

At the canyon mouth a locomotive was standing on the curve, and its electric head-lamp flung a broad glare of white light across the head of the Travois. Far out of throwing range now, the pair on the Dogtooth summit saw a frantic mob burst into the lighted area to continue its flight across the valley; and high up among the Buckskin firs flare torches were waving and fierce yells of triumph and derision from Patterson's graders greeted the fleeing mob as it revealed itself in dashing through the field of the engine headlight.

It was a full hour later when Stannard and Brant reached the construction camp. Stannard's first care was to search the field 'phones for Roddy. After a time an answer came from the canyon head. Roddy had posted his guards to prevent another invasion from the rear, but his language was picturesquely emphatic when Stannard suggested that the canyon itself should be picketed.

"Like hell you say!" snapped the field commander, over the wire. "You couldn't drive a dog out of a tan-yard into that canyon until after the wind has blown through it! I don't know what you fellows turned loose up here, but the Chinese stink-pots couldn't hold a candle to it. We'll hold the ground around the outer edges. That's all any human being with a nose on him can do, just now."

Stannard hung up the 'phone and dropped into his chair. Eddie Brant had flung himself full length on the floor plentifully wearied.

"Can you give it a name, Eddie? or are you too tired?" queried the chief.

"It names easy; it was carbon disulphide. They use it in the apple orchards down in Granite Valley to kill the woolly aphids in the ground. I happened to remember that Conley, the Granite Valley apple man, came up to Yellow Medicine last spring to order some of it, and I also remembered that he got a good bit more than he needed."

"And you went all the way out to Granite Valley?" said Stannard.

"Sure; Smithy drove me in his chug-wagon. The stuff was in sealed cans and we had to have something that would break so I went up to the Magnolia and got the whiskey bottles. When do I get that Carnegie medal?"

THE FORLORN HOPE

On the morning following the rout of the Overland Northern flanking column the Great Lakes & Pacific building activities took a fresh and vigorous leap forward. At the earliest graying of the dawn, material trains were rushing to the front, and shortly afterward the chattering of the air-drills in the great rock-cutting gave place to the clang of the steel and the ringing rhythm of the spike-mauls.

True to his promise, Olesen had widened the cutting sufficiently during the night to admit of the passage of the track; and Patterson, dividing his force a second time, brought half of his small army of laborers down to help in the track-laying. With the coming of daylight Roddy had weeded out his guarding force, cutting it down to a quick-moving efficiency basis and sending every man he could spare to increase Patterson's working army.

Stannard and Eddie Brant were snatching a hasty breakfast in the mess shack when the porter from the *Egeria* came over with a word from Mr. Westervelt. Once more the chief engineer of the Cut-off was summoned to meet the banker-director. Stannard's return message was curt to the point of incivility.

"Go back and tell Mr. Westervelt that this is my busy day. If he wants to see me, he'll have to come over here, and be reasonably quick about it," he told the messenger, and the man went away to do it.

This peremptory refusal did not bring Mr. Westervelt as Stannard had feared it might; but it did bring a substitute in the person of the New York clubman. Stannard was in the work-room, making ready to join Patterson at the front, when Vallory lounged in, lighting a cigarette.

"Going somewhere, Clay?" he asked, dropping lazily into the desk-chair.

"Yes; I'm going to the front. Say what you've come to say, and say it suddenly, Austin. Your time may not be worth anything, but mine is."

"Mr. Westervelt wants to see you. Didn't the nigger bring the word straight?"

"He did."

"And you're not going over to the car?"

"Not this morning."

Vallory took a deep inhalation of cigarette smoke and let it ooze gently from his nostrils and his mouth as he spoke. "What's the matter with you, Clay? Don't you want money?"

"Not a dollar of Mr. Westervelt's money. Go and tell him so, if you like."

"So that part of it is off?"

"Definitely off."

"All right; then we'll come down to the brass-tacks plane. You're simply making a fool of yourself, Clay, and you know it. For the sake of carrying your engineering job through, you are upsetting all sorts of things, smashing your company, standing to make Mr. Westervelt and his friends lose a pot of money, and beyond all that, going directly contrary to the orders of your own superiors. I used to think you were a pretty sane sort of fellow, but now you seem to have gone utterly daffy."

"So you bought Hempstead and got him to show you that message from Cardigan yesterday morning, did you?" Stannard rapped out.

"The boy had sense enough to know which side his bread was buttered on—which is more than I can say for you. Let me tell you a thing or two, Clay. We have a wire of our own now on the other side of the river. It's eight o'clock—which means that it is ten o'clock in New York. Within the next two hours the smash will come on the Exchange. You can stand it off if you will authorize us to say that you have stopped work on the Cut-off."

"You'll have to show me," insisted the stubborn one, lighting his short pipe in the hope that it would kill the smell of the cigarette.

"I could do that easily enough if you ever got a newspaper in this God-forsaken wilderness of yours. The Street has been wild for two days over the sudden slump in G. L. & P."

"You're wasting your time and mine," was the only reply this elicited.

"I have one more shot in the locker, Clay. Don't you want to marry Anitra Westervelt?"

"That, my dear boy, is none of your damned business," said the Missourian pleasantly.

"Possibly not," was the cool rejoinder. "Nevertheless, I'm more or less interested. I suppose you know that the biggest salary you are ever likely to earn wouldn't keep her in pin-money."

"And you think I ought to graft a little so as to be able to give her more?" said Stannard. "Luckily for me, she doesn't look at it that way."

Vallory dropped his cigarette and set his heel on it, and there was a sort of smoky flare in his dark eyes when he said: "Clay, I should have married that girl a year ago myself, if it hadn't been for you." Then he added a lie: "We are as good as engaged now, and if she has been giving you reason to think otherwise during the last few days, you must remember that she is Silas Westervelt's niece, and that blood is thicker than water."

"I'm not very good at subtleties," said the badgered one, with a dangerous gentleness in his tone. "Are you trying to tell me that Miss Westervelt has been kind to me for the purpose of furthering this scheme of her uncle's?"

Vallory's thin lip curled. "You were always a good bit of an ass about women in the old days," he remarked; "and you don't seem to have improved much with age. I don't deny that you made some sort of a mark on Anitra a year ago. It didn't amount to anything. You hadn't any money then, and you haven't any now, and the man who marries her without her uncle's consent will need money because in that case she won't have any of her own."

Stannard slung the strap of his note-book case over his shoulder.

"As I intimated a moment ago, Austin, you are wasting your ammunition. For the sake of the old days, I'm not going to tell you what I think of you for dragging Miss Westervelt's name into this dirty business of stock-jobbing or whatever it is. I happen to know on the best possible evidence that what you are trying to make me believe is a lie cut out of the whole cloth. Miss Westervelt has never allowed herself to be used for a single minute as a cat's-paw for her uncle. I don't know what Silas Westervelt is paying you for your part in the deal, but whatever it is, it isn't enough to square you for the use you've made of an old college friendship."

It was at this summarizing climax that Eddie Brant came in, red-faced and gasping. He was evidently bursting with news, but at sight of Vallory he checked himself and went on to the telegraph table, dropping into Hempstead's chair, which had been empty all morning. Vallory got upon his feet at the passing of the map-maker and calmly lighted another of the gold-stamped and monogrammed cigarettes.

"You've made your bed, Clay, but I'm afraid you're not going to be able to lie on it very long," he said quite dispassionately. "I'm not much of a prophet, but I'll venture to predict that you are going to fall down both ways: you won't finish your railroad, and you won't get the girl." And with that he went away.

He was hardly out of the door before Brant, who was clumsily rattling the telegraph key, beckoned frantically to his chief.

"Come here, quick!" he called. "Yellow Medicine's got a New York wire for us, and I don't know Morse well enough to take it!"

Stannard ran down the long room, slid into the chair which Brant vacated for him and cut in on the wire. "Write it down as I call it off to you," he ordered; and Brant grabbed for a pencil and a pad. Snappily the sounder clicked out the words which Brant wrote out as Stannard called them.

To C. S.
Travois Camp.

Why no reply to my two telegrams yesterday? Disregard any overtures made by Overland Northern and push work on Cut-off at all speed. Injunction notice served on us *in re* Stettinger whose mining claim we cross in canyon. We now hold Stettinger's written release, and you will be protected in ignoring any interference by officers of local courts. Rush work and spare neither men nor money. Answer quick.

MERRIAM.

Eddie Brant, flushed and breathless at the beginning of his job of transcribing, was pale and shaky when he scrawled the signature.

"It's too late," he stuttered. "I've run five miles through the woods to bring the news. Greer has outflanked us again. Sometime in the night he sent a big gang up over the Buckskin slope and this morning Roddy was taken by surprise while he was watching the tote-road over the hills. There was a sheriff's posse along, and they've arrested everybody in authority, Pearson, Patterson, Roddy, Bully Gallagher, and even the foremen and gang bosses. I dodged into the underbrush because Roddy made me. They're herding our folks down the canyon, and they're going to take 'em over Greer's construction line to the county seat at Lodge Butte!"

Stannard sat back in his chair with his jaw outthrust.

"Is that all, Eddie?" he asked quietly.

"No; by Jove! There's a bunch of deputies on the way down here, right now, to pick up the yard bosses and to snipe you! That's why I hurried. If you don't light out they'll get you, and then there won't be anybody left!"

Stannard smiled grimly.

"It was your dead-cat business last night that did it, Eddie. Some of those fellows carried the smell back to the camp with them, and Greer couldn't stand for that."

Brant ran across to the window to snatch an anxious look up the yard. The threatened raid was not yet in sight, but in the nature of things it could not be long delayed.

"You'd better go," he urged. "They'll get you, sure, and if this big force of ours is left without anybody to boss it—"

The break came upon an impatient skirling of the telephone alarm.

"Answer it," said Stannard shortly to the map-maker, and Brant hurried to lift the receiver from its hook.

What he heard seemed to affect him like a series of twitching electric shocks, but Stannard was not looking. He had picked up the dropped pencil and was slowly writing out a telegram to the president. He had got no farther than the date line and address before Brant, leaving the receiver dangling by its cord, came plunging down the room.

"It's Markley," he choked thickly. "Roddy sent him down to the Kicking Deer and he's back now—at the west end of the tunnel. There's—there's a big gold strike on the Deer—another Tonopah, he says, and people are pouring in across the range on foot from Caliente on the Overland Northern! That's one thing he says, and the other is that his hard-rock men have just fired the final battery that carries them through into Pearson's drift. Now we know why Greer is stealing our right-of-way and the tunnel!"

Stannard turned calmly back to the telegraph table and finished writing his message to the president. It was brief and to the point.

TO JOHN P. MERRIAM,
G. L. & P. General Offices,
New York.

See newspaper bulletins from Kicking Deer. East and west tunnel drifts connected this morning. I may have to kill a man or two, but Cut-off will be completed and G. L. & P. will be first railroad into new gold district.

STANNARD.

At the signing of his name the young Missourian snapped an order at the single remaining member of his staff.

"Go to the window and keep a lookout for me while I send this, Eddie," he said; and when Brant obeyed he squared himself at the table and clicked the militant answer over the wires without a break.

"We're still alive, are we, Eddie?" he questioned, rising from the table when Yellow Medicine acknowledged the "rush," and thrusting a pencil copy of the telegram into his pocket.

"Nothing doing yet. Perhaps they're trying to get Bailey to send an engine up for them."

Stannard went to his desk and pulling open a bottom drawer, took from it a holstered revolver of gigantic proportions, buckled it on and looked to the loading of the weapon.

"I'm going to leave you to keep house for a little while, Eddie," he said, still speaking quietly. "If the sheriff's people come, you can either duck or throw up your hands, whichever seems safest. If you duck, and if I don't come back, it'll be up to you to get a message to Mr. Merriam telling him that I'm a liar and a failure."

THE VISE NIP

Leaving his office to take the field which seemed to have been already swept victoriously by the enemy, Stannard was telling himself that Silas Westervelt was the key to the situation, and was striving manfully to think up some way of bringing the banker-director to terms—some less crude expedient than that of clapping a gun to his head and compelling him to intervene.

Since the alarm had not yet reached the camp, the yard activities were still in full blast, and Stannard had to dodge his way among the moving material trains to reach the isolated siding on the bank of the Standing Stone. The dodging progress brought him out some little distance below the private car. The deep rear platform was empty, evidence sufficient that the bear-hunters had not yet returned, and a car-length short of the *Egeria* he saw Miss Westervelt. She was standing on the siding embankment, trying to focus a tiny opera-glass upon the Overland Northern advance at the head of the valley.

Stannard realized that his time for the as yet uninvited expedient was cruelly short. None the less, he stopped and went across to the embankment edge. Miss Anitra's flippant greeting was for the conspicuous cartridge belt and holstered weapon.

"Mercy me, how warlike we are this morning!" she exclaimed. "Are you going to play train-robber and make me hold up my hands?"

Stannard tried to meet the flippancy on equal terms and made a failure of it. "I can't play anything with you this morning; I'm up against it good and hard, little girl."

Her mood changed instantly. "Tell me," she commanded; and he did it with shot-like directness, beginning with the carbon disulphide incident and winding up with the reply to Mr. Merriam and his final word to Brant.

"So you buckled on your pistol and started out—to do what?" she asked.

"I wish I knew!" he gritted. "Your uncle is the man—if I only knew some way to get at him."

"He *is* the man," she agreed quietly; "and to a greater extent than you imagine. If I could only forget for a moment that he is my father's brother—"

"I don't want you to forget anything that you ought to remember," he said quickly.

"I am not sure that I ought to remember. You will understand when I tell you that Uncle Silas has spent the better part of the last two years trying to devise some way of getting rid of me without having to account for the money that my father left in trust for me." Then her eyes filled quickly. "Dear old daddy! He didn't know what he was doing when he turned me over to the tender mercies of Uncle Silas, and I hope he doesn't know now."

Stannard was looking momentarily for the appearance of the sheriff's posse, but if he had been an escaped criminal with the gallows waiting for him he would have forgotten it.

"Some gossip told me a year ago that you couldn't marry without your uncle's consent," he said.

"It's true," she nodded. "And Uncle Silas has been searching high and low for a man who would take me without making a fuss about the fortune which would not be forthcoming as my dowry. He has found the man now, and that is at the bottom of a good many other things."

"I know," Stannard broke in; "the man's name is Austin Vallory."

She nodded again, and went on rather bitterly: "Yes; Austin Vallory would take a few millions of the twenty-five or thirty that my father left me and call it square. But this isn't helping you. You are on your way to see Uncle Silas. What can you say to him to make him stop this wretched money-getting fight?"

"That is just what I can't quite dig out. So far as anybody knows, your uncle is here representing the G. L. & P. He is one of our directors and is supposed to be working in our interests. I'm not sure that he could call Greer off, if he wanted to."

"I can help you there," she said coolly. "Just before we left New York an old friend—the man who was for many years my father's broker and confidential adviser—told me two things. One was that Uncle Silas had been quietly unloading his G. L. & P. stock for months, and the other was that he had just been secretly elected first vice-president of

the Overland Northern."

"Great Land!" Stannard almost shouted; and then: "I wonder if you know what you've done—and if you meant to do it?"

"Does it help?" she queried.

"It does, indeed!"

"Very well; then I can give you something else to go with it. I am almost sure that Uncle Silas had himself made vice-president and came out here merely to spite Mr. Merriam."

"But in two of the three messages I've had from Mr. Merriam lately, he has told me to confer with your uncle—and the *Egeria* is Mr. Merriam's private car!"

"Uncle Silas could borrow the car easily enough," she suggested. "And about the telegrams—you mustn't forget that your young man over there—I can't remember his name, but he's the telegraph operator—has probably been bribed. It is altogether likely that Mr. Merriam was trying to tell you *not* to consult Uncle Silas."

The crack of a single rifle-shot from the upper end of the valley echoing and re-echoing from the cliffs of Rock Face brought Stannard to a realization of the priceless value of time.

"I've got enough to go on, now," he said hastily. "They're coming to blows up yonder, and somebody's due to get killed!"

She caught at him as he was turning away.

"You will find Uncle Silas alone in his office," she said rather breathlessly. "Please don't forget that, after all is said, he is still my father's brother!"

"I sha'n't," he promised; and a moment later he was swinging up to the vestibule step of the private car. The door of the banker's room was ajar, and he entered without knocking. The magnate was sitting at his desk, running thoughtfully through a file of telegrams, upon some of which the ink was scarcely dry, but he put the file aside at the door opening and closing.

"So you changed your mind about coming over, did you?" was his greeting to Stannard. "I thought you would—after you had heard the news." Then coldly: "You've lost your chance to hedge, but I'm still willing to intercede for you and your law-breaking accomplices with the Overland Northern people if you'll lay down your arms, discharge your force at once, and—"

"Hold up," Stannard broke in soberly. "Let's keep the shoe on the foot it was made for. I'm not here to listen to terms, I'm here to dictate them. You sent word to me by Vallory a little while ago that you had a New York wire of your own: I'll hand that back to you. I've got one too, now, and the operator you bribed is no longer on the job. I've just had a telegram from headquarters—one which you and Padgett and Vallory haven't had a chance to rewrite."

"Well?" said the great man crisply.

"I have supposed all along that I was dealing with a director of our own company."

"You are," was the brusque retort.

"Not appreciably," snapped Stannard. "You have recently been elected first vice-president of the Overland Northern, and if you haven't been dropped from the G. L. & P. board, you will be as soon as the other members learn that you have unloaded practically all of your stock!"

"Without specifically admitting either charge, I am still willing to give you a chance to say what you have come to say," said the banker calmly.

"Oh, I'll say it fast enough. From the day you hit this valley you've been moving heaven and earth to find some way in which the canyon right-of-way and tunnel could be stolen and turned over bodily to the Overland. You've bribed my operator and falsified my telegrams and tried to bribe me. And on top of it all you've been backing Greer and shoving him into a fight which, for all you know or care, may cost scores of lives!"

The dry-desert face made little response to this heated accusation, but there was a narrowing of the cold eyes to go with the banker's, "Well, go on."

"As a mere investor in either or both companies, I couldn't get at you. But now I can. You are a responsible officer of the Overland and I've got the evidence against you. Perhaps we couldn't make it stick in a criminal indictment, but we can make it cost you a dollar or two for damages in a Federal court."

"And the alternative?" suggested the big man in the pivot chair.

"Is for you to go with me, right now, to the head of the valley and stop this bare-faced move to steal our railroad! A word from you will do it. I suppose I don't need to tell you that Greer's private army of deputy sheriffs has arrested a lot of my men on a trumped-up charge. I want those men released."

Silas Westervelt took sixty even-paced seconds in which to consider. Then he said: "When you're older and more experienced, Stannard, you won't show your whole hand in the beginning of a game as big as this. You remarked a moment ago that a criminal indictment probably wouldn't stick, and that is entirely true; but a little thought would have convinced you that any damages we may have to pay at the end of years of litigation in a civil suit would be more than overbalanced by the maintaining of our claim to your right-of-way and tunnel. You see, I am taking for granted that you know why the Overland Northern wishes to be the first railroad in the Kicking Deer district."

"I know all about that," was the curt rejoinder. Then Stannard went on with a stubborn fighter's disregard for the crippling and woundings: "You say I have shown my hand; I have one more card up my sleeve, Mr. Westervelt, and you force me to play it. Within the next few hours, if I'm still alive, I'm going to ask your niece to marry me. If she says 'yes,' may I count upon your approval?"

For the first time in the interview the big-bodied man in the swing chair sat bolt upright, and a deeper sallow tinge spread itself over the hard-lined face.

"No!" he said; and his saying of it came short of profanity only in the form of the word.

"I took that much for granted," said Stannard coolly. "None the less, if she is good enough to say the word, we shall be married—hold on, let me finish; I don't want her money; I wouldn't touch a penny of it if I were starving. Just the same, you'll have to account to me, as her husband, for the disposition, you have made of it. You can't do that, you know; your one best bet was to marry her to a man who would sell his right to question you for some small portion of the millions that you've embezzled."

It was a pretty wild shot in the dark, but it went home. Slowly, and by almost imperceptible degrees, the big man in the chair shrunk and collapsed; his lips turned blue and his eyes lost their calculating stare and became fixed and glassy. Stannard sprang up quickly, drew a glass of ice-water from the bulkhead cooler and handed it to the man who was gasping for breath. The banker took it, and his teeth rattled against the glass as he drank. With returning composure, or some little measure of it, he tried to say that it was a lie; that the trust fund would be accounted for to the final penny; but Stannard had no mind to lose the hard-won advantage.

"You know it can't be accounted for; and you also know that it must be accounted for if you are required to turn it over to the various charities in accordance with your brother's will. As I have said, you've been thinking that your best bet was to force Anitra to marry some man whose silence could be bought; it isn't—it will be better to give her to a man of her own choosing; some half-way decent fellow who would love her well enough to let her deal with you in the money matter as her own generous heart might dictate."

The big man turned his chair slowly to the open window and drank in deep breaths of the cool, life-giving breeze slipping down from the snow balds of the Buckskin. For the moment the clashing and jangling of cars in the yard had stopped. Breaking into the silence came a single rifle shot followed by an irregular dropping fusillade. Again Stannard sprang to his feet.

"They're trying to kill each other up there," he said quickly. "It's up to you to stop it, Mr. Westervelt. If all they say of you is true, you've got a good bit to answer for as it stands. Can you afford to add even one human life to the score?"

The great man got up stiffly, and it was a measure of his perturbation that he overlooked the hat lying on the roll-top desk and fitted a silk skull cap tightly over the reluctantly graying hair. "Get me up there as quickly as you can," he said, in a hoarse whisper; and because he seemed suddenly to have grown old and feeble, Stannard gave him an arm through the corridor and down the steps of the car.

By the time the short journey to the open air had been made, the dropping shots had become spiteful volleys. Stannard went quickly into action. One of the "camel-backs" was clattering through the yard, empty, and he flagged it

down. The engineer jammed on the air; and the fireman, seeing what was wanted, swung off to lend Stannard a hand in boosting the big-bodied magnate up to the foot-plate. Stannard's order was given while the big engine was still cramping under the sudden clip of the brakes.

"Get the main line, Duggan!" he barked; and at the word the great engine shot away up the yard, its whistle shrieking the switch call for the open track.

It was on the curve rounding the base of the sentinel Standing Stone that they came in sight of the battle-field. The sheriff's posse, with Roddy, Pearson, and Patterson and a score or more of the picked up foremen, had apparently emerged from the canyon only to find a thin line of Gallagher's Irish track-layers, leaderless but spoiling for a fight, intrenched in shallow rifle-pits in the open and disputing the crossing to Greer's camp with the sheriff's party. Being Western to a man, the deputies had promptly sought cover, making a rampart of the railroad embankment and firing across it at the intrenched track-layers.

As the up-coming engine slowed to a stand barely out of range, the fire of the attacking party stopped suddenly. Stannard was out of the cab and off and helping Westervelt to the ground before he saw and heard the yelling mob that was sweeping across from the newly built Overland Northern trestle, to take the track-layers in the rear. Using high-powered rifles, the sheriff's men had stopped firing to keep from over-shooting the enemy and killing their own reinforcements.

For a moment Stannard thought his hard-won ally was going to fail him. It was as much as any man's life was worth to break in as a peacemaker on the firing line. Silas Westervelt slipped and fell heavily as Stannard hurried him down the slope of the embankment, but the fall was an accident rather than any attempt to hang back.

"Hurry, man!—for God's sake hurry and stop them—" he panted hoarsely, when Stannard dragged him to his feet; and together they lurched and stumbled over the intervening ground, cutting in diagonally behind the line of rifle-pits to get in front of the charging mob from the trestle crossing.

They made it, with a hundred yards to spare, and the firing from the fighting Irishmen stopped in obedience to Stannard's fluttered handkerchief. Greer, blind-mad and furious, was leading the rescue charge, and he stopped only when Stannard got in the way and stopped him.

"Just a moment, Greer," said the square-shouldered young Missourian brusquely. "Your boss wants to speak to you."

"I'm my own boss on this job!" was the yelped-out defiance. "I've backed and filled and whip-sawed and monkeyed around at somebody's beck and call all I'm going to! The Overland Northern Railroad Company pays my salary, and by ___"

The gray-faced man in the skull cap straightened himself with a visible effort and turned to Stannard.

"You won't reconsider?" he questioned thickly. "It is not too late, even now."

Stannard cut him off with a fierce gesture. "Do what you've got to do!" he burst out savagely; and at that the banker took Greer aside.

The colloquy, low-toned and decisive on the banker's part, and angrily rebellious on Greer's, was short. Stannard stood back out of ear-shot, alertly ready to intervene if the hostilities should break out again. The charging mob, a hastily gathered multitude of the foreign laborers armed with pick-handles, drill-ends, and other hurriedly caught-up weapons, had fallen back a little at the halting of its leader. In the shallow rifle-pits the Irish track-layers were laughing and joking one another; and on the embankment the sheriff's men were climbing into view and Bully Gallagher was shouting across to his men—shouting and chanting uproariously:

"The Irish and the Dutch, oh, they don't amount to much;
But hooray for the Scandihoovia-a-n!"

At the end of the short colloquy, Greer wheeled and threw up his hands to his men as one heading a stampede. The banker, staggering as if the weakness of the battling moment had suddenly gripped him again, came back to the young Missourian. "It's done," he said, with a curious rattling in his throat. And then: "Stannard, give me your arm back to that engine; and if you can find a man and a horse, send for Kitts. I'm not well."

It was well past the evening dinner hour in the *Egeria* on the day of climaxings. At the upper end of the yard one of the big shifting-engines was clearing the way for the light eight-wheeler which would presently back down to couple on to the private car and its accompanying Pullman for the night run across the desert to Yellow Medicine and the main line.

The returned bear-hunters, flocking in an after-dinner group on the deep observation platform, were idling industriously. Carroll was picking the strings of his banjo, and the Englishman and the younger Wetmore sister were humming the refrain of the bit of ragtime.

On the sandy river-bank beside the car a broad-shouldered young athlete in work-stained khaki was pacing slowly back and forth with a straight-figured, low-voiced young woman for his companion.

"You will be able to succeed now, won't you?—before the snow comes?" the young woman was saying.

"Oh, yes; easily. Greer is discharging three of his camps, and we are hiring the men as fast as they come over. Patterson already has his rails half-way up the upper leg of the approach, and by to-morrow night or the next morning we'll be delivering concrete material to Pearson at the tunnel. The snow isn't going to overtake us, but something else will."

"What is that?"

"You remember what you told me you overheard about somebody having kicked a deer or being kicked by a deer? Kicking Deer is the name of a river on the other side of the range. A second Goldfield discovery has been made over there, and the news of it is already on the wires. Inside of a week we shall be absolutely swamped in the rush which will come pouring in here over our line from Yellow Medicine, and over Greer's from Lodge Butte. I haven't the slightest notion of how we shall handle the rush or what we shall do with it, but we'll manage it some way—and earn some money out of it, too."

"Money," she said half impatiently. "It's always money! Did Uncle Silas know of the gold strike before we came out here?"

"He did. That was the chief reason why, as vice-president of the Overland Northern, he was so anxious to get his own line over there first."

"You haven't told me yet how you made him stop the fight."

Stannard ignored the tentative question and asked one of his own.

"What do you think of a man who doesn't keep his word?" he wanted to know.

"If the word were a promise—" she began; and he broke in abruptly.

"It was a promise of a sort; and I guess I've got to keep it, no matter what it costs."

"Is it going to cost money?" she queried.

"No; one way around it may cost me something I value more than all the money in the world. But the other way around it may cost somebody else a deal of money. You see, I couldn't scare your uncle with any threat of what we'd do to him for trying to steal our railroad, so I had to do the other thing."

"And that was?—"

"I told him that within the next few hours I was going to ask you to be my wife; and if you were good enough to say 'yes,' and he would be generous enough to turn my railroad loose, he wouldn't have anybody but you to deal with in the embezzlement matter."

For two of the slow-paced sentry-beats, with their appropriate turns, she let him stifle. Then she said: "Are you just keeping your promise to Uncle Silas, or—"

The break had come at the unpeopled end of the sentry-beat, and there was no one to look on when the two figures melted quickly into one.

Five minutes later, Engine Number 1063, with Engineer Boligee hanging from the cab window to measure his

distance, backed slowly down the river-bank siding to make a touch coupling with the private-car train. Boligee, having night-eyes like a cat, saw a curiously shaped figure at the car step suddenly resolve itself into two, but the hissing of the steam in the cylinder cocks kept him from hearing the low-spoken words of parting.

"You'll come to New York?" whispered the half of the curious figure which the other half was lifting to the car step.

"The minute my job's done; and if you think I need any bigger hurry-order than the one you've just given me—"

Engineer Boligee turned morosely to his fireman. "Shut your fire-door, Billy, and pull the bell. We're gone."

THE END.

[The end of *The Fight on the Standing Stone* by Francis Lynde]