NEDL TRANSFER
HN 1KZ2 C

WHAT HE LEAST EXPECTE

HOLWORTHY HALL

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

KD 16010

THE CAMP LIBRARIES

GIVEN THROUGH

THE FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY

WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS

Gift of The People of the United States
Through the Victory Book Campaign
(A. L. A. — A. R. C. — U. S. O.)
To the Armed Forces and Merchant Marine

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Jennie J. Sullivan.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Ballin's Cousin

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

HAT HE LEAST EXPECTED

BY

HOLWORTHY HALL

Author of

MY MOST INTERESTING PATIENTS

Illustrated by

FREDERIC DORR STEELE

INDIANAPOLIS

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

WHAT HE LEAST EXPECTED

By

HOLWORTHY HALL

Author of

MY NEXT IMITATION; HENRY OF NAVARRE, OHIO; PEPPER, ETC.

Illustrated by

FREDERIC DORR STEELE

INDIANAPOLIS

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

WHAT HE LEAST EXPECTED

By

HOLWORTHY HALL

Author of

MY NEXT IMITATION; HENRY OF NAVARRE, OHIO; PEPPER, ETC.

Illustrated by

FREDERIC DORR STEELE

INDIANAPOLIS

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

KD 16010

COPYRIGHT BY COLLIER'S WEEKLY
UNDER THE TITLE HELP WANTED

COPYRIGHT 1917
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

PRESS OF
BRAUNWORTH & CO.
BOOK MANUFACTURERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

Digitized by Google
Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

TO

JOHN LORENZO HEFFRON

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

WHAT HE LEAST EXPECTED

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

WHAT HE LEAST EXPECTED

I

AFTER the two young men, motionless, had stared at each other across the crimson-shaded table for a certain time, Hollister, who was the more sensitive, was all at once self-conscious. Instinctively, at the climax of his narrative, he had leaned far forward and gestured vigorously and brought his fist down among the minutiæ of the coffee-service; and as he had done this, he had caught and held Ballin's eyes with his own; and so they had stared unflinchingly. Then, in a twinkling, Hollister was confounded and overwhelmed with a species of shame—not because he had spoken, but because he had the necessity to speak. His eloquence reacted like a boomerang, and took him unawares from behind. He felt abased and mortified,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

as one whose intentional dramatic effect has met with lukewarm interest and cool analysis. A high spot of color glowed above his cheek-bones; he withdrew his hand from the table, and fumbled nervously for his cigarette case; and at this breaking of the tension, his friend Ballin relaxed somewhat, and with a heavy exhalation which implied both solicitude and impotence, reached for the coffee-pot and poured out the last viscous drops.

Hollister, through the mechanics of opening his silk and leather case and striking a match and lighting his cigarette, watched his friend sidewise. He knew that he had presented the facts to Ballin disconnectedly and crudely; he cherished the hope that he had stated them forcibly and persuasively. And yet, while he fed that hope on the sustenance he got from Ballin's evident concern—and that was almost as poor refreshment, in its way, as Ballin's coffee—he realized that upon Ballin he enjoyed no claim whatsoever save that of friendliness; and he had long since learned that it was safer to trust his friends for that relationship alone, and not to tempt fortune by adulterating it with commercial transactions. His appeal had been based rather upon primitive logic; and Ballin, stirring his tepid coffee, and sipping it meditatively, wore the expression of a

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

man who has heard that same specious argument too many times before to be vividly impressed by it.

Hollister, sick at heart at the exigency of the conversation, and still unwilling—even in his unwillingness to protract it further—to omit any presumptive evidence, which might bear weight and gain consideration, leaned forward again.

"And if you don't believe it," he said, a trifle breathlessly, "all you've got to do is to ask any one of fifty men right in this room! I tell you, this is *temporary*. It can't last! It's a repetition—infinitely worse, of course—of just what happened to us in '98. Everybody was scared to death, and everybody pulled in his horns and played close to his chest, and then the McKinley bull market was one of the biggest smashing recoveries the Street ever saw. It's absolutely *sure* to come back the same way, Ned—"

"That's only your guess," doubted Ballin, setting down his cup. "The Exchange didn't close in '98,—as I recall it." The afterthought was naturally to be taken with reservations;—in '98 Ballin had worn knickerbockers, and planned to join *Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World* at the earliest opportunity. "It's only closed once before, and that was in '73."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"But—why, this *must* be temporary, Ned! They've shut down simply to stop wild speculation, and maybe a panic. It's a matter of a couple of months—three or four at the most—and probably less. This country has got to furnish rifles and artillery and shell and cartridges and metals and clothing and foodstuffs and Heaven knows what—and the Exchange will reopen just as soon as the public sees we're going to profit by the war, and not lose! Big business is coming back, Ned! Six months from now it'll be whooping. We're going to hold the bag for the whole world! But right now every executive's scared stiff—you ask the fellows around the club! It's just a hysterical condition. It'll pass over. But to-day I know ten-thousand-dollar men willing to take forty a week; and I know forty-a-week men praying for jobs at twenty! Nobody's pessimistic down-town—not for the *future!* To-day's pretty black, I will admit, but—"

Ballin partnered the fingers of one hand against the fingers of the other, and permitted his forehead to show a series of minute corrugations.

"I've heard a lot of talk about that sort of thing, Phil—my private opinion is that it's more or less bunk. It's nothing but a darned plausible alibi. This doesn't apply to you, of course, but in general

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

a good man can get a good place any day he wants to."

Hollister was impatient.

"It's lucky for you you're not in my shoes, Ned. You'd change your mind about that. Besides, I'm a pretty good customer's man myself—and *I* can't get a good place; I can't even get a bad place! The closest relative I've got in the world is in the biggest advertising agency in the country, and if *he* can't work a pull for me, I don't see how anybody else can. You talk to some of the other boys—don't take *my* word for it! There's more than fifteen thousand men, well educated and well trained, hunting for work in New York City. There aren't any good jobs vacant. And until Wall Street sits up on its hind legs again, this club is going to feel about as joyous as an undertaker's front parlor! Look at the bulletin board—over four hundred members posted for house-charges. That's abnormal, isn't it? Who are they? Practically all from bond and brokerage houses and banks. I simply won't listen to any debate, Ned—I know what I'm talking about. And I want to tell you now that the only reason I don't try to get over and join the Foreign Legion is because I *am* broke. I'd love to get in that scrap, but I'll be hanged if I'll do it simply because I can't

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

do anything else. I'd feel too cheap. Let's get back to the original proposition. If you can conveniently lend me a thousand dollars—"

Ballin raised his hand in protest.

"Just a second. I don't exactly understand why you need so much. Hadn't you saved anything?"

"I've spent it," said Hollister. "I've been a good deal like the fool grasshopper, Ned. I've spent it, and I want so much because I *don't* want to have to come back to you a second time, and I don't want to have to go to anybody else on the same errand. I don't want to owe several different people, and I do want to have a safe margin. I want to be able to keep a decent balance in the bank. If I asked you for a hundred—and that's ninety-eight more than I've got now—I might be in the same hole later, and I'd either have to strike you again, or send form letters out to a mailing list."

"You're assuming that you're not going to work?" Hollister beckoned to the cigar-boy.

"I'm assuming that I'm not worth so much as a dollar a day to anybody but a broker—and nine out of ten brokers have virtually suspended. Anyway, I'll buy the cigars." He refused to sign the proffered pink slip. "No," he told the boy. "I'm pay-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ing cash. You see," he added to Ballin, "if you take the trouble to look over that bulletin board, you'll find I'm posted, too—and my credit's stopped."

"Really? As bad as that?" Ballin was sincerely distressed.

"You don't fancy I'm a comedian, do you? I'm not joking about money these days."

Ballin decapitated his cigar, and blew through it to remove the legendary tobacco dust which pollutes the tobacco.

"And you want a thousand dollars to carry you over until your firm starts trading again?"

"That's it exactly."

"If I were in your place, Phil, I wouldn't hang around looking for a job; I'd start for France this week! It's the chance of a lifetime! If I could get away myself—"

"I told you why I won't do that. I'm crazy to do it—but I'm not going to play hero, and I'm not going to use this war to cover up! Nobody but a real partisan or a millionaire has any right to enlist."

Ballin puffed voluminously, bestowed a look of paternal approval upon the cigar and settled himself in greater comfort. He was mute for so long a period that Hollister, to assuage his mental stress, turned to survey the huge dining-room, and to nod

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

pleasantly to confrères here and there among the softly-lighted tables. During the intermission, he told himself that, after all, he had got just about what he expected. In appealing to Ballin he had constantly borne in mind the most modern of pessimistic beatitudes; which holds that blessed are they who expect naught, for they shall not be disappointed. Furthermore, in periods of financial depression, the chief characteristic of men with money is that they keep it. To be sure, he had nourished a faint confidence in Ballin, who was popularly supposed to be excessively prosperous for a man but six years out of college, and to have inherited money in addition; but Ballin, if young enough to be remarkable for his successes, was apparently old enough to be wary in his disposition of the fruits. And it wasn't a business transaction; it was pure altruism that Hollister had to rely on. Not even in college had he ever approached his friend to borrow money from him; and in college that fact had rendered him unique. He had no security to offer, no definite, tangible prospects to be discounted. He wasn't, after all, one of Ballin's closest friends. In his heart he couldn't blame Ballin for hesitating—that was the worst of it. He couldn't feel right-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

eously indignant at Ballin; on the contrary, he was inclined to admire his caution. It put Ballin in the light of a conservative, and not a crack-brained philanthropist. Furthermore, there would be greater satisfaction in prying a thousand dollars from him if it came with difficulty.

Ballin smoked abstractedly, and sent a faint smile across the table. Hollister stiffened.

"Phil!"

"Yes?"

"Honestly, I don't see how I can do it." Hollister winced.

"It's for you to say, naturally, but—"

"Well, it isn't that I *can't* do it—I haven't any *right* to do it. Ordinarily, it wouldn't seem so much, but—I've taken on a pretty big load of responsibilities lately, and the war's made some difference in my business, too—so I'm afraid I'll have to say no. Now, my advice—"

Hollister motioned to him to stop.

"Ned, for goodness' sake don't hand out any gratuitous advice! I didn't ask you for spiritual uplift—I asked for a thousand dollars. If you can't see your way clear to letting me have it, why, we'll let it go at that, but please don't advise me, Ned! That

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

won't help me stall the landlady!" His tone was bantering, but there was dead earnest behind it; and Ballin's incipient sermon was never preached.

"Well, then—if I hear of any opening, I'll drop you a line. You wouldn't be capricious, would you?"

"Capricious! I wouldn't even be careful!"

"I've been thinking over the field, Phil—I shouldn't wonder if I can put you in touch with something in a week or two. Don't count on it—it's just a thought. You get your mail here, don't you?"

"Until the House Committee cuts me off."

"Well, I certainly will let you know if I hear of anything, Phil. And I want you to realize that I'm just as much embarrassed as you are, and possibly more—because I've got to turn you down, when it must look to you like plain stinginess. Honestly, old man, it's not that. Now if anything smaller would do—"

"No, thank you—not yet."

"Twenty-five or fifty dollars—"

Hollister wavered, but his pride wouldn't let him accept a lesser amount than he had asked for—not yet. It savored too much of charity—and not enough of faith and hope.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I—hardly—think—so," he said. "As I told you, I don't care to owe half a dozen people, and on that basis I'd have to pass around the hat before long. But if nothing bobs up inside of a week, don't be frightened if you find me camping on your front door-step early some morning, waiting to sandbag the milkman. Well—forget it!"

He pushed back his chair; Ballin, after a noticeable delay, did likewise. Together they threaded their way out to the grill; Ballin glanced toward the coat-room.

"If you don't mind, I think I'll run along," he said. "I've got to meet some of our people at the Vanderbilt. I'm awfully sorry I couldn't help you out, Phil. But there's always a chance—"

"Just forget it." Hollister displayed an excellent counterfeit of blitheness. "I'll walk as far as the Avenue with you, anyway." He also requisitioned hat and coat and sauntered with his friend to the desk.

"Taxi!" said Ballin to the doorman.

"One outside now, sir. Sign, please." Hollister grinned wryly.

"Oh! I'll push along, then, Ned."

"If there's anything under the sun I can do for you, old man,—outside of this—this loan—be sure

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

to call on me. You'll do that, won't you? I really mean it. If I can swing a deal your way, you can gamble I'll do it. But—hang it all, Phil, you couldn't have come to me at a rottener time."

They were on the sidewalk; a chauffeur was holding open the door of a yellow taxicab.

"It's all right," said Hollister. "No hard feelings. It's just one more of those things. Glad to have seen you, Ned. I'll rustle along somehow. Maybe I'll enlist yet! Well—bear up!"

Ballin was in the taxicab; the wheels revolved slowly, and faster; gears meshed with the raucous grating of metal on metal; and Hollister stood forlorn on the sidewalk. Behind him a voice sounded irritably; he turned to perceive a well set-up young man, unshaven, ragged, shivering, who eyed him with unbecoming antagonism.

"I *said*," repeated this able-bodied citizen, exhibiting an amazing lack of suavity in his preliminaries, "could you spare me a dollar?"

Hollister laughed quietly. The circle of life was so very, very short.

"Why should I?" he demanded.

"Because you've got it, and I ain't."

"Is that any reason? Why don't you find a job?"

"Job? Nobody ain't hirin', they're firin'. *I* had

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

a job—in a paper warehouse. War queered it. I got laid off last Sat'day."

"So? How long have you been panhandling?"

"Half an hour. You're the first guy I had the nerve to stick up."

Hollister, buttoning his coat against the November chill, wished that Ballin were listening.

"Isn't a dollar pretty steep? Why don't you be a bit modest—and begin with a dime?"

"Because I *need* a dollar, that's the why. *I* can't bum around here all night—"

"You may have to. But it seems to me you'd get a dime from ten people a lot more easily than you'll get a dollar bill from me."

The man stood squarely on both feet and gave back a sharp retort.

"The old woman's sick, that's the answer. I gotta have that dollar *quick!* I ain't lyin'. I gotta have a *dollar.*"

Hollister and the well set-up young man regarded each other soberly.

"Now my Christian advice to you—"

"Christian advice—hell!" The shivering young man threw back his head, whirled and took a step or two in the direction of Fifth Avenue.

"Here! Wait! Come back here!" Hollister

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

clutched him by the sleeve. "If you're not lying, I guess you can make better use of this than I can." He dropped a number of silver coins into the outstretched palm.

"Thanks!" said the unshaven young man. "I'm —much obliged. I *had* to have that dollar! Thank you—sir."

Hollister, relieved that the mendicant hadn't invoked the Almighty or sniveled his gratitude, nodded curtly; then, when the shabby young man had accomplished half the distance to the corner, striding along at a tremendous pace, Hollister was suddenly seized with the realization that to-morrow was inevitably to-morrow. He made a rapid audit of the contents of his pockets, and having confirmed his fears, he set out resolutely on the trail of the unprofessional beggar, overtook him at Forty-Second Street, swung abreast and enjoyed inward amusement at the young man's exclamation.

"Nothing serious," said Hollister cheerfully. "I gave you too much, that's all. Mind if I count it?"

"You—you slipped me too much? Well—" Without alacrity, and yet without sulkiness, he produced the fistful of silver. "It's your coin. All of it. I didn't have a jitney."

"Give me back a quarter," said Hollister, retriev-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ing it. "That ought to leave you about one seventy —that's very kind of you."

"But—but what in—what's the idea?"

Hollister bowed as courteously as he would have bowed to any one else.

"We men who've lost our jobs have got to hang together," he informed the thunderstruck young man. "And it's just about as hard for me to—to stick up people indoors as it seemed to be for you outdoors. Only you're a better salesman of hard luck stories than I am." He held up the quarter significantly. "As long as you've confided in me—that's for breakfast," he added. "I'm—er—much obliged. Good night—brother!"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

II

PROMPTLY at seven the battered tin alarm clock, which Hollister, fully acquainted with its harmless eccentricities, had set at a quarter to nine, and laid tenderly on its left side, leaped into action; and as usual during the last few weeks, Hollister continued to recline at his ease, after he was thoroughly awake, and laugh at it. He reflected, as he stretched himself lazily and made faces at the faithful sentinel, that he was building up a very congenial affiliation with the world of paradox; and he chuckled again, with no perverted humor, at the best simile he could recall to support his present mood. In the past he also—who hadn't?—had gone overjoyed from the waiting-room of a tardy dentist and forgotten his acute discomfort in the delight of the stay of execution. And regardless of the gloom which was gathering over his prospects, he couldn't deny that it was an affirmative pleasure to linger there in mutiny against the intermittent alarm. He even condescended to say, aloud, just what he thought of that clock, and its malformity, and its in-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

grafted perjury, and its source and its eventual destination, where it would melt. Nevertheless, the dogged tin chronometer had hardly taken another fresh start, and entered upon its third inning, when Hollister, tingling with energy, was on his feet, satisfied with this brief demonstration of his independence, and ready now to waive his right to an additional nap, and to take up his personal obligations.

He was habitually a whistling bather and a chanting shaver; this morning he whistled in the shower and caroled to his razor as exultantly as though an unavoidable holiday hadn't been bestowed upon him by the governors of the Stock Exchange. He warbled lustily, too, as he dressed with extreme care; as he ran through his entire assortment of shirts—one of the finest amateur collections in the city—in search of the one his humor dictated for this particular occasion, as he twice knotted and unknotted his striped silk tie in order to obtain the exact metropolitan effect he desired. When he ran down the brownstone steps of his boarding house, and took in the first breaths of the diamond air, his appearance was that of a thriving young man of trade, and his demeanor wouldn't have aided his worst enemy in the diagnosis of the actual state of his exchequer.

He was still effervescent, because he couldn't help

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

it, when at the end of his brisk walk he turned into a dairy restaurant near the Grand Central Terminal, and mentioned coffee and soft-boiled eggs to a waitress whose face had long since been hammered by fortune into a mask of granite indifference. The last word he said was "please," and he said it with unction.

As a tribute to his politeness, he got a little less frost-bite with his napkin; and in consideration of his contagious spirits, he got a fleeting cracked smile with his eggs. When he left a nickel on the table as he moved up to pay the reckoning, he said jauntily to the waitress: "Bear up—maybe it isn't true!"

The girl, rooted to the tiles, watched him down the alley of tables.

"Oh, well," she consoled herself. "It's easy enough when you've got the cash!"

And Hollister, bankrupt by the wanton extravagance of breakfast, exchanged buoyant, impersonal greetings with the cashier, who had a bad complexion but a good heart, and strode over to the Harvard Club to look at the morning papers.

At this hour the vast living-room was wholly deserted; Hollister had his choice of locations, and he took a leather chair by the fireplace, kindled a vet-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

eran pipe, scarred by many campaigns of graduate and undergraduate warfare, and gave himself up to the digestion of his eggs, and of the news. By and by, as a precautionary measure, he hunted out the columns devoted to want advertisements, and scanned them without anticipation. As he had foreseen, the ratio of those who sought employees to those who sought employers was discouragingly high; and even the six or eight laconic invitations to wage-earners applied either to technical experts, or to non-union longshoremen. Hollister, lifting his shoulders slightly, was about to toss the paper away, when his attention was arrested by an island of eight-point Cheltenham bold, and he found himself gazing with cumulative interest at the display, which was so prominent and so striking that it had almost eluded him. It was set generously, yet dignifiedly, in a little sea of white space; it fascinated Hollister because, for a marvel, it was an advertisement of good omen to men with brains:

"College graduate, 25-35, wanted for engagement requiring initiative, diplomacy and tact. Business training essential; banking or brokerage connection especially desirable. Knowledge of either French or German is important; applicant speaking both languages will have pronounced advantages. Social status of candidates will also be taken into consid-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

eration. No applicant less than five feet ten inches in height or weighing less than one hundred and sixty-five pounds can possibly be engaged; nor one without strong and attractive personality.

"Duties will include traveling, but probably not to any country in the war zone. Good salary to start; increase as deserved.

"Apply by letter, stating all qualifications, to LAWYER, 361, *Sun* office."

Hollister let the paper fall into his lap, and refilled his pipe thoughtfully. Wasn't *he* suited by nature and by training for just this sort of post? He privately considered himself tactful, but he had sense enough to allow that every one else indulges in the same innocuous belief. On the other counts he was moderately sanguine. And although—because he was temperamentally a soldier of fortune—he preferred traveling in the war zone to traveling out of it, still, the advertisement was alluring. More than that, it read solidly, and respectably, and pregnantly. Hollister chuckled at the thought of claiming in cold blood that he owned and operated an attractive personality, but he contended that a due degree of egoism must be an integral part of any formal reply to this explicit manifesto, and that he wouldn't stand out distinguished for his conceit. At any rate, his time wasn't so valuable that he

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

couldn't squander enough of it to write an apostrophe to whoever lurked behind the signature of "Lawyer." He rose and crossed to the writing-desk under the smallest musk-ox head, chose a letter-size sheet in preference to a correspondence card, and began to align his adjectives.

He had finally completed his monograph, and after careful proof-reading, was about to sign and seal it, when from the dining-room there emerged an animated youth no larger than a university coxswain, who looked with favor upon the fireplace and the padded cushions of Harvard Hall. But perceiving Hollister under the shadow of the musk-ox, the newcomer became apoplectic in his delight, and hurried over to hail him.

"Hello, Phil! Cutting coupons?"

"Pete Kirby!" cried Hollister, starting up. "Why, you old pirate! Where'd *you* come from?"

The small man smote Hollister on the chest, and having performed this feat, which was his customary method of neutralizing his physique, he shook hands with a terrific attempt to achieve a mighty grip.

"Paris, mostly. I landed yesterday. Got caught in the big rush; walked to Calais, swam the Channel, bought an English battle cruiser, and came over

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

in it." His lips curved and his eyes twinkled, but his tone was ferocious. "Heard so many fairy tales lately I thought I'd spill a few myself. I *hate* these war liars! From now on, nobody beats *me!* As a matter of fact—strictly between ourselves—I hopped a train out of the *Gare du Nord,* and stood up in a corner like an umbrella, and then I got on a dirty steamer and tipped the purser twenty guineas to give up his cabin. Otherwise I'd have had to come steerage. And believe me, Phil! There were plenty of steersmen! Well, how's everything? Seen Ned lately?"

"I had dinner with him last night," said Hollister, endorsing "LAWYER, 361, *Sun*" on the envelope, and slipping it into his pocket. "Pete, why in thunder didn't you stay over there? If *I'd* been caught in Paris I'd never have tried to get out! Think of what you've missed!"

Kirby, perched on the arm of a chair, smiled through his delicate glasses. He could have stood under Hollister's laterally outstretched arm without touching it; he could have stepped on a scale regulated to an exact hundredweight, and never annoyed the beam; but in spite of his diminutive size, his total insignificance as a specimen of bone and muscle, he had that aura of absolute poise which could

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

be an indication of only two attributes. Specifically, Peter Kirby had money. It was apparent in the texture of his clothes, in the material of his strictly masculine ornaments, such as his gold cigarette case and his gold match-box and his gold watch; it was evident from his carelessness in speaking of money —not that he was boastful of his wealth, but rather that he was inured to it. It was immaterial to him. It was as much a part of him as his mustache—and of much less consequence.

Hollister, smiling companionably at this beloved pygmy who had lived next to him in Stoughton, was disgusted to have to fight down an unpremeditated impulse to borrow some of that money from him. Kirby, unconscious of his danger, glowed complacently.

"Oh, I'm not a fighter like you. I'm a peaceful guy, I am.—You're still plugging in Wall Street? Oh, I forget—you've all shut down, haven't you? So much has happened since June.—What *are* you doing?"

"Writing letters. I've written more letters in the last two weeks—"

"Belay!" said Kirby, giving the traffic signal. "I tell you, I've been more than two months where a mere superlative sounds like a feeble squeak. Don't

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

let me get started, Phil! Letters! Dear man, one day in Paris I wrote seventeen letters to the American ambassador alone. I wanted to swap a letter of credit for twenty thousand francs for a meal ticket. Of course, you're not talking about the continent, but every time I hear a war story, I make it look like a sick cat or perish in the attempt. I'm a changed man. I'm a censor of public ballyhoo. Nobody can change the subject on *me*, any more. I *hate* these war liars. Now go on."

Hollister laughed, and shook his head.

"You must have had some great experiences over there. Gosh! I'd like to be in it! Somebody was telling about it the other night—about trying to get out of Paris during the first scare. Forty-eight hours without food—"

"A mere nothing," deprecated the small man, with a fierce gesture. "At Rheims I was four days and eight nights without food, drink, light, heat, air or any other of these effete modern improvements. I got so used to it I began to put on weight. And then at Versailles I couldn't buy a picture post-card at any price—my God, how I suffered! *Nix on the war talk!* Say, where can I find Ned to-day? Any idea?"

"Why, at his office, I suppose."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"That's a bright thought," acknowledged Kirby. "A *very* bright thought. He's got a floor somewhere near the Battery, hasn't he? I thought so. Say, I can't take you down by any chance, can I? I've got a new car outside."

Hollister, remembering the letter in his pocket, welcomed the saving of an hour or two in the delivery.

"I was going down to Nassau Street, if that's not out of your way."

"Come on, then. I've got a new Mercer. Only driven the little devil once, but I can stand it if you can."

At the curb was parked a dangerous-looking runabout, long and low, and brave with glittering plate and unmarred finish. Kirby crawled under the wheel, and by that simple act he donned a ludicrous cloak of competence and reliability. As he slumped far down in the driver's seat, with his ridiculously small hands holding the enormous wheel, or straying down among the levers, his manner was that of a self-reliant engineer, whose intelligence has nothing whatsoever to do with his avoirdupois. Or—if you prefer—he appeared like a precocious child emulating Barney Oldfield.

"Ready?" he queried.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Let go their heads!" said Hollister, gripping his hat. As the heavy car darted out into the confused mass of vehicles in front of Sherry's, he ventured to touch his friend's cuff. "Don't bother to stop when you get to Park Row," he suggested. "Just slow down to forty miles an hour, and I'll jump."

Kirby grimaced at him, and swerved into the Avenue.

"I would if I could, but I can't," he alleged. "She won't go slower than fifty, except backward —then I can't throttle her lower than forty-five. The only way I can hold her down to forty is to shut off the gas, jam on the emergency and go up a long hill in deep sand. Say—how long will your errand take you?"

"Oh, not more than half a minute. I just want to leave a message."

"Why can't I wait for you, and we'll go down to see Ned together. Let's have a young reunion. We haven't been all together for six months. Sure!"

"Why, there's nothing the matter with that, except—"

Kirby avoided a cocker spaniel by the width of its whiskers, and bowed urbanely to the outraged owner.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Missed him!" he remarked genially. "Brings my average down to sixty per cent. What's your objection?"

"Why, I'm afraid I can't make it to-day, Pete. I'm tied up." He was undergoing toward Ballin that subtle change of attitude which so surely interrupts a previously uncommercial alliance. He wasn't offended with Ballin; he couldn't censure him for handling his financial affairs as he liked; but somehow he demurred to approach Ballin so soon after his request and Ballin's refusal. He knew that neither of them could quite ignore the proximate cause of last night's dinner, or the upshot of it. "No," he reiterated, "I don't see how I can make it to-day."

"All right. We'll do it later. Where's your landing? Park Row?"

"Park Row."

Kirby drove without further comment until they had passed Fourteenth Street and straightened out on Broadway.

"Some car?" he implored.

"Great!" said Hollister. "Every time I see a big car nowadays I wish I had one over there in France. Some of the fellows are talking about going to drive ambulances. Think of the excitement you'd get out

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

of it! I feel almost like a slacker because I *don't* go. Still—I suppose it's devilishness and not patriotism—for an American, I mean."

"Um!" said Kirby.

"A 1903 man was telling us about racing through the lines for a channel packet—"

"I," said Kirby belligerently, "drove eighty-one miles in eighty-one minutes out of Paris. And I had eighty-one punctures. Tonneau loaded with starving children and—and guncotton. We hit a brick wall this side of Trouville. Not a fragment of any of us was ever discovered. We were blown completely to atoms—and I'll keep right on blowing as long as any one else does. I loathe these war liars!" He extended his hand over the side as a warning. "Will this do you?"

"Just right." Cognizant of the admiration of passers-by, Hollister clambered out. "Oh, by the way, Pete, do you happen to have anything less than a century note on you? I'm shy." He accepted from Kirby a twenty-dollar bill, and thanked him as casually as he knew Kirby would like. "I'll see you up at the club soon."

"Right-o," said Kirby over his shoulder.

And the man who had been envied by passers-by for speeding down-town in a six-thousand-dollar

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

imported runabout went through to Nassau Street with the money he had borrowed, primarily for his car fare north, snuggling in lonely magnificence in his bill-book.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

HE had gladly seized the opportunity of saving a few precious hours—the difference between the speed of Kirby's motor and of the United States mail. After he had deposited his letter with the proper clerk, however, he was singularly aware that his rank as a commissioned officer in the corps of the unemployed hadn't improved appreciably. There was still the future to contemplate and to discount; there was still the urgent necessity of paying his rent and buying his food. Since he was already within walking distance of his former business quarters, he determined to run in for a moment, and to hear what the theorists had to say; accordingly, in the course of a quarter-hour, he pushed open a familiar door, and went slowly into a room grown strangely unfamiliar. At the rear of it a ruled quotation board loomed big and blank—not even the closing prices of the last day were recorded on it. Against the wall a battery of tickers stood grimly silent. Empty chairs, arranged in even rows, showed a fine film of dust on leather surfaces; the floor was swept clean of papers and litter.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

From behind the ornate bronze grills of the order clerks no faces peered out at him. The bookkeeping department was as depressing in its solitude as the customers' room. Nevertheless, Hollister could hear near by the steady hum of men's voices; he went through a dim closet which figured in the lease as another room and paused on the threshold of the cubicle in which the three partners had enjoyed incipient prostration at adjoining desks. One of the firm was there, and with him the treasurer; and as Hollister beheld them he knew without exerting himself to speak that no idle optimism could find great nourishment here. Yet he did speak, and the junior partner replied sorrowfully.

"Mr. Hollister, you're not any more keen for it than *we* are. We're keeping five branch offices open, and the cost's almost prohibitive. All our profit for the last year's wiped out already. We're beginning to figure what our net loss will be. When the Exchange will resume I don't know—nobody knows. It depends on the war. I don't mean we won't resume active trading until the war's over—but it depends. It may be three weeks or three months or three years. Personally, I think it'll be about next April, or May; so you'd better take any job you can get your grip on—and you'd better hold on tight

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

when you get it. It's pretty well agreed that the general situation's going to be a lot worse before it's any better. The Committee of Five isn't helping matters any, and the cash business over at Clearing isn't either. I'm sorry."

Hollister bowed gravely.

"Oh, well," he said, "we don't have to worry about getting off for week-end parties, anyhow."

The treasurer showed a faint appreciation of this creditable endeavor.

"We'll notify you in plenty of time," he promised. "We'll pass the good word along as soon as we have it ourselves. But right this minute—ab-so-lutely nothing doing!"

"Oh, well," said Hollister, receding into the hallway; "at least it gives our nerves a rest, doesn't it?"

Out on the Street, which was remarkably free from wayfarers, he sauntered in uncommon footlessness. Already he had called upon, or telephoned to, or written to every man of his acquaintance who might feasibly use his specialized knowledge at a living salary; and he had canvassed many corporations and individuals who couldn't use it gratis. He was developing a great sympathy with those who sometimes insist—to the vexation of editors and clergy-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

men—that work is plentiful at the discretion of the patron, and not of the aspirant. But because he was down-town, and because he always liked to see a batsman run to first base on an outfield fly, he proved that he recognized only one body of doctrine by making a missionary call or two before lunch. Afterward he evinced his sincerity and the failure of his resources by trying the newspaper sanctums; at six o'clock, when he had received not the faintest encouragement, he tramped wearily into the Harvard Club for dinner.

"Message for you just came in, Mr. Hollister," said the doorman, "marked 'rush.' A boy brought it."

"Thank you." His tone held little elation; but he proceeded to the letter-boxes and brought out the contents of the "H" compartment. At the top of the sheaf was a note superscribed to himself. He tore open the envelope and read the terse paragraph.

"Please present yourself, at your earliest convenience, at the above address, with reference to your letter of to-day to Lawyer, 361, care of the *Sun*.

"Yours very truly,

"JOSHUA W. BROWN."

He read the lines twice; then, actuated by a purely selfish motive, he shuffled through the remainder of

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the "H" mail to see if messages bearing the same identifying card on the envelope had come to others of the club—in short, to approximate what competition he had to meet. To his dejection, he found four envelopes with that same inscription: "Joshua W. Brown, Singer Building, New York." So there were similar letters to four other Harvard men whose surnames began with "H"! How many Harvard men altogether? And how many Yale and Princeton and Columbia men? Faugh! A million to one shot! He tried the "G" compartment. The first three envelopes bore the lawyer's card.

"Nothing but a damned employment agency!" snorted Hollister.

He threw the note into a waste-basket and, yielding to an inrush of recklessness, went in to dinner and commanded the table d'hôte.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

IV

ON ENTERING the elevator in the Singer Building, he had congratulated himself that he was early. He had imagined that he might have to lag in the corridor until the office boy arrived yawning with the keys; he had pictured the lawyer's gratified astonishment at learning from the stenographer that the young man had beaten her to the Singer Building by several minutes, and had been waiting patiently since nine o'clock. So that he was all the more disgruntled and self-condemnatory when he saw the neat reception-room already tenanted by a group of obvious petitioners for the berth requiring diplomacy and tact. Frowning, he gave his name to a harassed clerk, and stood alone by a window, to review and classify those who had preceded him.

They were a widely divergent lot; two of them would never have been accused, at least on Massachusetts Avenue or Chapel Street, of the bachelorhood of arts; they looked more like impecunious actors, sidewalk conversationalists. The other five

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

weren't so palpably unsuited; indeed, one bulky blond with a patrician cast was of the mold of ambassadors. Hollister estimated that in the precincts of Manhattan there must be a minimum of two thousand men who could have answered that advertisement truthfully and persuasively. He shrugged his shoulders and tried not to think of his debts.

At intervals of ten minutes the harassed clerk rushed out of concealment, indicated one of the group, and hurried him out of sight. None returned. Hollister reminded himself of the fox and the lion's den, and divined an exit to the corridor from the inner room. Slowly the earlier arrivals departed, until Hollister alone represented the indigent but intelligent collegians of the metropolis. And then the clerk was at hand. He rasped something incoherent, and Hollister, following him along a narrow passageway between high barriers of clouded glass partitions, and thinking of Alice in pursuit of the rabbit in Wonderland, was impelled into the august presence of Joshua W. Brown.

It was an impressive apartment, that of Mr. Brown; it was large and rectangular, with lofty windows on two sides, and book-shelves towering to the ceiling on the other two. The floor was cov-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ered with genuine orientals—Kazaks and Bokharas, and one sunny Baluchistan; the working equipment, uniform with the book-shelves, was of dark San Domingo mahogany. The great windows were not only curtained; they were also hung with overdrapes of rich Burgundy velours. In its entirety, the room retained the atmosphere of the master's study in a luxurious house rather than of a professional workshop in a skyscraper. It awed Hollister, because it was so unconventionally homelike.

At a glass-topped desk at the farther end of the room, an elderly gray-haired man in a gray sack suit, which suggested the art of protective coloring, was scrutinizing Hollister as he might have scrutinized a Percheron at a public auction. Not the vestige of personal interest illuminated his features; his blue-gray eyes were steady and direct and uncompromising. His voice, when he spoke, was flat and monotonous; the movement of his forearm, by which he waved Hollister to a seat hard by, was the economical action of a machine.

"Mr. Hollister?"

"Yes, Mr. Brown."

The lawyer, without changing his position by so much as a millimeter, or permitting himself the use of a superfluous muscle, or disturbing a single one

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

of the papers on his desk, took up a letter; and Hollister grinned involuntarily. The operation reminded him of the mechanical chess player at the old Eden Musée, it was so sparing of energy, and yet so marvelously accurate and efficacious.

"Philip Winthrop Hollister, a graduate of Harvard University of the class of 1908, with the degree of A. B. *cum laude.*" Mr. Brown's tone wasn't interrogative and it wasn't declarative. Hollister didn't know whether he was listening to the recital of a fact, or a reasonable doubt of it. He said: "Exactly."

The lawyer, utilizing the fewest possible sinews and tendons, turned his head. His eyes bothered Hollister; they were uncannily penetrating, and they conjured up visual surgery.

"Reply concisely, please, Mr. Hollister—regardless of the fact that you may have covered these same points in your application. What is your age?"

"Twenty-eight," said Hollister.

"Your height?"

"Five eleven and a half."

"Your weight?"

"A hundred and sixty-seven."

"Net?"

"I beg your pardon? Oh—yes, certainly—net."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Did you take part in any branch of organized athletics at college?"

"Yes, I played football."

The lawyer, part of whose machinery rested on the desk, annotated Hollister's letter by the exercise of the fingers only. Then his eyes were decomposing Hollister again, and Hollister was resisting a tendency to squirm.

"With what success?"

"Why, I was a substitute. I never made the University team—that is, as a regular. I played in some of the minor games."

"Under what system was your general physical condition determined?"

"I don't—oh, Doctor Sargent's system."

"What was the highest total of points you ever scored under that system?"

"I don't remember—eleven hundred and some."

"Can you state what comparative rank that gave you in the university strength tests?"

"It was in the first twenty, I think."

The lawyer continued to focus on Hollister's eyes; but it was several seconds before the next question came.

"You are at present at liberty?"

"Yes, Mr. Brown."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Why?"

The bruskness of this demand took Hollister by surprise. He stuttered.

"B-because when the Exchange closed my firm dismissed all but three or four men—and those were in the counting-room. None of the outside men stayed."

Mr. Brown persevered in his deadly-calm inquisition.

"Do you, or do you not, admit that your failure of employment is traceable either to your lack of diligence in searching for a situation, or to your lack of ability?"

"I don't admit it—either one," said Hollister emphatically. "I've got the best kind of recommendations, and I've nearly broken by neck trying to find something! And my old place'll be open for me as soon as—"

"How many years did you occupy your last position?"

"Six. I began the week after I graduated. It's the only one I ever had."

"You have had no commercial training except in a brokerage office?"

"None."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Of what New York clubs are you a member?"

"Only the Harvard Club; that is, unless you include—"

The lawyer threw the least intimation of displeasure into his voice.

"Of what New York clubs are you a member? Reply categorically."

"Harvard, Somerset and Stuyvesant."

"Do you speak French fluently?"

"I do."

Mr. Brown was capable of outstaring the Sphinx, and making it cringe.

"State in French the extent of your travels in and out of the United States, and your willingness or unwillingness to accept a commission which would include traveling."

Hollister spoke zealously, but got no commendation.

"Do you speak German fluently?"

"Yes, Mr. Brown."

"State in German any further facts bearing upon your social life. Dwell on the characteristics of your immediate friends, and give three references. It is imperative that these references be men of prominence, or of association with men of prominence."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Again Hollister spoke at length, naming as tentative sponsors Ballin and Kirby, and the junior partner of the brokerage firm.

"What salary were you receiving when your employment ceased?"

"Four thousand."

The lawyer regarded Hollister indefatigably. The unbending rigidness of the man, his dull intonation, his optical resemblance to both the eagle and the beagle, aroused in Hollister's breast a violent wish to poke him sharply in the ribs, and watch the explosion.

"Can you be here punctually at four o'clock this afternoon?"

"I can."

"Please keep the appointment." Mr. Brown never varied so much as an inflection. "Thank you for your frankness. Take the door to your left. Good morning."

Hollister went out limply; and from the moment he quitted the lawyer's chambers at ten o'clock until he revisited them at four, his wits were occupied chiefly with the dialogue of which he had contributed the greater part. He was indelibly impressed by the attorney. The very style of the examination impressed him; he thought to detect behind all that

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

exhaustive inquiry the outline of some momentous enterprise. The scrupulous care shown by the legal catechist could mean nothing less. His research must have its motive in the gravamen of an immense undertaking. And surely none but a captain of industry, or a prince of merchants, would ever have selected a smooth-running, soulless dynamo for his counsel. Joshua W. Brown wasn't a man to attract petty clients. He wasn't a man of picayune affairs. His library alone, thought Hollister, was an indication of his essential merit as a practitioner—it was colossal. And Joshua W. Brown's reputation, as Hollister learned and verified without the slightest difficulty, was also colossal. He was said to be the highest paid, the least known, the worst mannered and the most skilled counselor in the Southern District. And his integrity—like the rest of him—was colossal, too. All things considered, there was sufficient justification for Hollister to be five minutes ahead of time.

The lawyer was reading from a saddle-stitched manuscript of many folios, and he didn't curtail his study of it, not even when Hollister, after some very natural hesitancy, took the chair hardly a yard from the glass-topped desk. Mr. Brown went on reading, now and then creasing back a page of the manuscript

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

carefully, mechanically, until he came to the final sheet, and laid the manuscript on the blotter. Then and then only did he take heed of Hollister; and he plunged straight into discourse without the useless formality of a salutation.

"Mr. Hollister," he said, in that dry, unemotional monotone, "you are pronounced satisfactory by my client." Hollister flushed and listed forward. "Before we discuss terms, there are fundamental conditions which you should know. I shall embody them in the form of questions. Are you prepared to become an investigator for an unknown principal?"

"You mean—*I*'m not to know who he is?"

"Precisely. If you were to know his identity, and to conceal it from third parties, I should have said 'agent for an undisclosed principal.' But I myself hold that capacity. You are to be responsible to me. Your instructions and remittances are to come from me, your reports to be made to me."

"Why, I don't see why I shouldn't—"

"In one word, if you please."

"Why—yes. That is, if it's—all right."

Mr. Brown sneezed inadvertently, and looked ashamed, as though nature had played a trick on him.

"Very well. Are you prepared to accept this

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

charge under a six months' contract, verbal—but valid—which will hardly limit the scope of your duty, except to provide that nothing debasing or menial shall be required of you?"

"Why, that depends," he puzzled. "If I could have some vague idea—"

"The duties," said Mr. Brown, "correspond partly to those of a diplomat, and partly to those of a—" For the first time he refused the jump. His face betrayed his anguish. "A—a confidential agent," he finished weakly.

Hollister sat up avidly.

"Nothing—criminal, is it?"

"My practise never remotely touches upon criminal law. Neither is this a domestic matter. I may assure you that any of your exertions under this contract will be highly honorable, and creditable to yourself. Can you bring yourself to reply to the original question? Are you prepared to accept such a commission? Here is a memorandum of the terms."

Hollister took the document in longhand and ran over the ponderous sentences. As he interpreted it, the memorandum provided mainly for the control, for six months, of the social procedure of Hollister by Joshua W. Brown, in behalf of a nameless client.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

There were clauses of limitation, and clauses of elucidation; somewhere in the middle there was a clear-cut definition. Hollister was to go where he was sent, do what he was told, collect information and hold his tongue. The whole program was hazy, inconclusive; but he scented its connection with the war, however indirect, and his spirit of adventure rose powerfully.

"This means," he said quickly, "that I'm hired to get possession of news of some sort—can't you tell me if it's for an individual, or a government?"

"I can tell you nothing but what you have read."

"Well—it isn't a *spy* you want, is it?"

"No, Mr. Hollister. I think I may tell you that you will act for American interests. Not by any stretch of the imagination can your activities place you in the category you mention."

"But—it's secret work, isn't it?"

"It is; but not among unfriendly powers, not of a sort to subject you to international complications."

"That's all you can tell me?"

"That is all, Mr. Hollister. I know how unusual this is, but secrecy seems to be necessary. You have my warranty that the position is desirable."

"If—if I were your son, would you want me to take this job?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I should. And I should be proud of you."

Hollister banked on the lawyer's colossal reputation for integrity.

"I'll sign that!"

Mr. Brown's eyes flickered. In him that was equivalent to ribald laughter.

"Not so fast! There is nothing for you to sign. I was about to say that one clause has been omitted from the memorandum. We have said nothing of remuneration. Are you willing to accept a hundred dollars a week and all expenses?".

"Oh—certainly," said Hollister, subdued.

"Are you prepared to begin this service at once?"

"I certainly am."

"As I said, your references have been investigated and you are satisfactory to my client. If you will wait, I shall have a notary witness our verbal contract." He rang a buzzer and gave his orders.

Twenty minutes later, Hollister picked up his hat. The gray little lawyer surveyed him steadily.

"You realize, of course, that our agreement, in this form, is as binding as though committed to writing? Very well. I am now to advance you three hundred dollars, to be deducted pro rata from your weekly remittances. For your legitimate expenses you are to file vouchers each Monday morning. For the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

present you are to gather what personal belongings you need, sufficient to enable you to start anywhere on two hours' notice, and register as a guest at the Hotel Aspinwall under your own name. You are to conduct yourself as any ordinary man of leisure. You are to follow your own inclinations, but you are not to leave the hotel without advising the office of the probable time of your return and of any address at which you may be reached by telephone in the interim. You are to admit to no one the existence of this contract; you are never to speak my name in connection with your affairs; you are to manufacture and maintain whatever explanation of your circumstances you think logical and advisable. You are not to admit to any of the men you named as references that through their good offices you have obtained this employment. They are ignorant of the source of the inquiries I had sent to them. You are not to admit that you have any business of a confidential nature. Your instructions will come from me by telephone, or typewritten without signature, on paper of this grade—water-marked with a "B" enclosed in a circle as you see. Such instructions, if in writing, you are to destroy by fire. Finally, you are empowered to terminate this agree-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ment at any moment when, in your opinion, it is likely to bring you into disrepute or danger. Verify the amount of the money, if you please."

Hollister received a thick roll of bills, and managed, after three trials, to reach the correct total.

"I'm—I'm simply to go to the Aspinwall—and play around—and wait for further orders?"

"Precisely."

"Well—"

"There is nothing else, I think."

"No, but—suppose I want to communicate with you?"

"That will not be necessary."

Hollister gasped.

"But—but—it *might* be—"

"I shall know where you are and what you are doing. Incidentally, let me remind you that you will always be near to another of my—agents, and that I shall hear often of your progress. I shall require certain reports, and you will be told when and how to make them. Otherwise—you will hold no correspondence of any kind with this office."

Hollister wavered.

"Of course—it *must* be all right—"

"There were over five hundred responses to our

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

one advertisement," was Mr. Brown's innuendo. "And I have heretofore stated that I should be proud to have a son in your place."

Hollister revolved his hat. Now that he had committed himself he was growing dubious. Had he been too precipitate? And yet what other offer of employment had he had?

"I'll be at the Aspinwall this evening, then. And —thank you very much indeed. I hope I'll make good. Of course, I can't swear to that—but I can work hard and keep my mouth shut."

"I hope so. Good afternoon." The lawyer abruptly switched himself off one case and switched himself on to another. He took up a second saddle-stitched manuscript. The interview was over.

Hollister, waiting for the elevator, felt thrills of excitement playing cross-tag down his spine. Adventure, mystery—the boundless possibilities enchanted him. A world of dreams had suddenly engulfed him; he was bewildered, and a trifle shaken. He was a secret agent, a nomad, a man of the dark, a maker of history! This in the twentieth century —in New York! A privateer of the metropolis! A freebooter—with a job!

The elevator door clanged open and Hollister stepped into the steel car.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Deadwood Dick!" he said to himself. "Sherlock Holmes and Long John Silver! And I'm elected! Cash in advance—and hush stuff! Gee! If there's only a pretty girl in it somewhere!"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

V

IT IS now generally conceded by some Teutonic scientists who toy gently with human impulses that the character of any man can be determined by his mental reaction to cleverly chosen catchwords. The theory of the association of ideas, if practised upon a docile and responsive criminal, should eventually drag from him evidence tantamount to a confession; if applied to a normal subject, it should betray his innermost thoughts and hidden ambitions. Thus a demonstrator of the art of oblique analysis might have torn Hollister's soul to shreds.

"When I have pronounced a word, Mr. Hollister, kindly say, with as little delay as possible, the word or image it suggests to your imagination. Remember, there is no escape from justice. Are you ready? Now—*Employment!*"

"Joshua W. Brown!"

"Confidential!"

"Agent."

"Mystery!"

"Future."

"Adventure!"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Er—Luna Park."

"You hesitated four seconds. Either you must be lying, or your tastes are vulgar. Ready? *Diplomacy!*"

"Er—er—eh, yes! Diploma!"

"You are concealing something from me. Again —*Diplomacy!*"

"Essential."

"Very good. *Detective!*"

"Er—why—that is, I— Well—excitement."

"Your face is red, and you twiddle your fingers. You are now under suspicion. Try this one: *Contract!*"

"Salary."

"*Instructions!*"

"Hotel Aspinwall."

"Very remarkable. The police are concealed in the ante-room. Ready? *Romance!*"

"Girl."

"Ah! I must jot that down. Now—*Future!*"

"Excitement."

"*Mission!*"

"Er—er—private!"

"*Hope!*"

"Girl."

"That is sufficient. Science is infallible. You

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

have received unexpected employment from one Joshua W. Brown which involves your presence at the Hotel Aspinwall, where you hope to find both the excitement of prosecuting a secret mission, and the stimulation of the society of an attractive young woman. You are a man of warm impulsive emotions; you are sensitive and boyish; you still measure life by its brilliance and color; you believe in the eternal principle that the world was created solely for the benefit of youth and love and laughter. Officer, do your duty!"

And Hollister might as well have retorted: "Faith, a master logician, and a masterly deduction! But why all the hocus-pocus? I'd have told you all that in the first place, if you'd asked me!"

Indeed, for the first half-hour of his new tenure, Hollister's thoughts were colorful rather than orderly. During the journey to his up-town boarding-house, and even during the collection and appraisal of his personal property, he was dominated chiefly by the adventurous aspect of his accidental career. He hadn't yet passed the dead-line of experience beyond which the glamour of hotel life loses its charm; and he hadn't yet entered that phase of serene philosophical stability in which a pretty girl

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

appears as merely another instance of the commonest natural phenomenon, plus an unvaried assortment of features brought together and blended by sheer luck. In his youthful ardor, he saw himself already quartered magnificently at famous hostelries; he saw himself the center of a swirling mystery, whether commercial, social or political, and he instinctively blocked out a thrilling drama in which the star parts, in concord with all the ruling conventions, must unquestionably be played by himself and a young and beautiful heroine. At this point of his intellectual development, the heroine was far more vital to him than his salary, or the boundaries of the field of his probation.

He had been ordered to equip himself in readiness for directions which wouldn't allow him a wider margin than two hours for the final details; so that when he dismounted at the porte-cochère of the Aspinwall at eight o'clock, he had with him a suit-case, a Gladstone bag and a steamer trunk, and in these various pieces of luggage he had managed to stow away enough *mobilia* to outfit him for China, Newport, or the defenses around Ypres. The balance of his personalty he had left in custody of his landlady, who had wept bitterly because she thought that Hollister was going to the front. Herself, she had

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

a cousin in the Scots Grays; Hollister, actuated partly by his sense of humor and partly by a desire to conceal the truth, told her that he was undecided whether to enlist in the Prussian Blues, the Paris Greens or the Rhode Island Reds—and got away with it.

While his heart thumped agreeably under the high pressure of his spirits, he registered at the hotel and commended the location and furnishing of his room. He would have liked to celebrate his emancipation and show his newly-fledged contempt of currency by an excursion to the theater, and a supper at the Claridge; but since his engagement was so very recent that the wonder of it still enthralled him, he resolved to hold himself in loyal reserve, for at least the first evening, to see what manner of divertisement might be in store for him. Strengthened by this ambition, he descended to the mezzanine floor with the innocent intent of smoking one cigar, and consuming one tall tumbler of Scotch and seltzer, and charging both to his maintenance account; but he hadn't taken a dozen paces from the elevator when he stumbled headlong over his diminutive friend Kirby.

"Ouch!" ejaculated the smaller man, recoiling. "Get off my foot, you big brute! Glad to see you! What are you here for—got a party?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Hollister seized joyously upon the Lilliputian.

"Far from it! You have, though?"

Kirby patted his pleated shirt affectionately.

"When you see me all Kuppenheimered up like this, old top, there's just one answer. They caught me when I wasn't looking. Oh, it's not a big party —Ned Ballin, and some of his crowd. We're almost finished. Why don't you prong in?"

Hollister shook his head regretfully.

"Why, I'd like to, Pete, but I'm not dressed, and besides—"

"Objection overruled! Come on."

"Take your time! I don't want to break up your gang. You're probably talking shop, aren't you?"

Kirby laughed up at him.

"Shop? What else do women talk about but shops and shopping? Of course we are."

"Women!"

"Two portions. Cousin of Ned's, and a pal of hers. Both of 'em are—oh, Class A! Take one squint, and you're gone forever. Come on in and get all fussed—will you?"

"Well," said Hollister, brightening; "if you're sure I won't spoil anything—"

"If you don't stand here talking all night," said the little man pointedly, "you'll be right in time to

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

spoil some *biscuits Tortoni.* Music cue. Let her go, Professor!"

In another moment Hollister was bowing more or less indiscriminately to a circle of people whose names he caught imperfectly. In addition to Ballin, there were two men and two girls; when a chair was finally brought for Hollister, he found himself seated between Kirby and the girl who was apparently Ballin's cousin. Kirby's description hadn't been faulty on the side of exaggeration—she was indeed beautiful; and more than that, she had an air of exquisite graciousness which wholly captivated him. She was piquant and alert, and unafraid; at Hollister's opening sentence she looked directly at him without affectation.

"Help!" he said in an undertone. "What's the name of your friend with the furs?"

The girl smiled in quick comprehension.

"Ned's always like that when he introduces people, isn't he? He *never* speaks clearly."

"He talks like a subway guard!" said Hollister.

Again she smiled. Hollister was gone!

"Miss Rexford," she told him. "Isn't she sweet? And—did you get the others? The stout man is Mr. Hartwell—he's a lawyer; and the other is Ned's

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

She looked directly at him without affectation

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

uncle, Mr. Cloud. And now you'd better ask Mr. Kirby what *my* name is."

"Oh, I caught *that* perfectly," said Hollister, lying about it. "Well, you've made up for one of Ned's deficiencies, but the other one—" He sighed, possibly out of compassion for Ballin.

"What one is that?" she inquired, amused.

"That's something I don't see how he can explain. He never told me he had you for a cousin!"

Her eyes twinkled appreciatively, but before she could frame a reply Ballin spoke across the table.

"You'll have an ice, or something, won't you, Phil?"

"Just a demi-tasse, if I may." A waiter was hovering behind his chair; Hollister gave the order himself. "And a box of Rameses," he added.

The stout man, Mr. Hartwell, and Ballin's uncle were arguing about the war, which at this period of the world's history was yet permissible as a dinner topic.

"It's absolutely a matter of banking," proclaimed the lawyer strenuously. "It's a matter of finance—and in the long run, we've got to be the bankers for the whole universe. There's no other way out of it. And the war won't end until the average ex-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

change of one side or the other depreciates thirty per cent.—and then it'll stop, for the same reason that so many enterprises with outside backing stop—because the underwriters withdraw their support. I don't mean that this casual upset in France counts for anything; they haven't got their money on a war basis, but—"

"I know a man who was in France," said Miss Rexford, "with express checks for forty thousand francs. But they didn't help much. If it hadn't been for sheer good fortune, he'd have starved."

Kirby sat erect.

"Not to embarrass you at all," he declared, "*I* was in Paris with a letter of credit for *eighty* thousand francs. I couldn't borrow a sou on it. I was hungry. I was under police surveillance. I was suspected of being a Prussian colonel. They gave me twelve hours to get out of France, but I couldn't even get out of Paris. I tried to sell that letter for twelve guineas, gold, to get to London—nobody'd buy it. I was hungrier and hungrier. They told me I had only six hours—if they found me after that, I'd be shot at sunrise."

Mr. Cloud was visibly moved. He was a spare reticent man of middle age; and jocularity had missed him.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Extraordinary! I knew that war conditions were fearful, but—tell us what happened!"

"Well," said Kirby, "I knew they couldn't shoot me at sunrise, because I never get up that early—so that didn't bother me. But I did starve to death!"

"He's being funny," said Ballin's cousin softly to Ballin's uncle.

"Oh!" said Ballin's uncle, looking sheepish.

Mr. Hartwell addressed himself to Hollister.

"You were a classmate of Ned's, weren't you? I understand that a lot of your boys are going over to drive ambulances for the glory of it."

"Some of them are," said Hollister.

"Perhaps Mr. Hollister is going," ventured Miss Rexford.

"No," said Hollister, finishing the demi-tasse. "I'm not. I might if I weren't so busy here. And I may go yet. I'd certainly like to."

"What *is* your profession?" queried Mr. Hartwell.

"I used to be with a brokerage house, but recently I've taken on a curious—"

The fact that he had almost blurted out the truth, and that he had saved himself in the nick of time sent the blood to Hollister's cheeks, and the consciousness that he was flushing made him flush the

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

more. He realized now that only gross neglect had prevented him from concocting a plausible excuse for his present and his future deportment; as it was, he was staggered by the emergency which shouted for an impromptu. And as he sat, stunned and helpless under the mildly inquisitive eyes of the sextet, the waiter, who was a very new and a very bad waiter, offered him the check for his coffee and his cigarettes. Unheeding Ballin's protest, he signed it with his name and room number. "I—I'm loafing just now," said Hollister lamely. "My regular work is—commercial reporting."

"Living here, I take it?" asked Mr. Hartwell, who had observed the signing of the check.

"Yes—surely." He knew that Ballin was staring at him, and he didn't dare to look up. How could he justify himself for living and loafing at the Aspinwall, when two days ago he had exhibited himself to Ballin as penniless, and in dire need of funds. How could he explain to Ballin without betraying his trust? He could have throttled Kirby for dragging him into this party!

"Well," said Mr. Hartwell, "it's a nice place to live. As we were saying, Cloud—"

For the ensuing half-hour Hollister smarted in self-accusation while the rumors of war raged

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

around him; not even the girl at his right could drag him out of his mood. To be sure, these people were all friends of his, or friends of theirs; but Joshua W. Brown had enjoined him to give no cause for especial interest in his behavior. No one but Ballin, and possibly Kirby, was in a position to publish any news of startling nature with respect to his recent insolvency, and he could easily explain to Ballin and Kirby, so that they wouldn't suspect the true state of affairs. Nevertheless, a random sniper had caught him without ammunition, and he was both vexed and repentant. He was glad that he had this respite; that he could think without interruption. He couldn't have talked consistently with Ballin's cousin while he was so perturbed—and he wanted Ballin's cousin to like him. As she followed the intricacies of the discussion he could feast his eyes on her, and corroborate Kirby's judgment without her knowledge. He said to himself that she was very easy to look at; and no single item of her profile or of her lovely gown escaped him; he even noted that the sapphire and pearl bar-pin which was fastened to her frock at the base of its V in back had an insecure clasp, and he meant to tell her about it, but he forgot that courtesy in the recurring surge of self-condemnation.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The argument came to its predestined conclusion —with no one converted and every one slightly irritated at the unintelligence of the adversary; the party showed premonitory symptoms of breaking up.

"I shall see you again, I hope," said Hollister to the girl on his right.

"I hope so, too," she conceded. "And it's more than likely—Miss Rexford and I are staying here, you know."

"Here? In the hotel?"

"Yes." She turned to receive her farewell pleonasms of Kirby, and Hollister was left with his mouth vacuously ajar. Ballin said to him *sotto voce:* "Phil, somebody telephoned me to-day about you. Was it a job?"

Hollister nodded.

"See you about it later."

"Right!" Ballin moved away.

The others, too, were busied in the formalities of parting, and Hollister stood somewhat aloof and covetous. The stout Mr. Hartwell ranged alongside and touched his arm.

"Every one else seems to be going; but won't you drop down to the grill with me, Mr. Hollister? It's

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

early yet. I think a liqueur and one more cigar might not be so bad, what?"

Hollister, watching five figures in leisurely retreat, assented.

"Why, I don't mind," he said. "It *is* early, isn't it?"

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VI

IN THAT lower chamber which wears the distinction of a club lounge rather than a public café, the pair took refuge in a secluded corner. Hartwell, dignified and imposing in his ultra-fashionable evening clothes, sank into the yielding cushions with a sigh of contentment; Hollister, with the asceticism of healthy youth, commandeered a straight-backed wooden chair, and was equally comfortable. Unobtrusively a waiter malingered in the middle distance, ready to advance at the first sign, or to retreat permanently if the guests seemed minded to demand nothing of greater profit to the house than privacy.

Hollister took out his cigarette case, gave invitation by a lifting of the eyebrows, withdrew the offering, and proceeded to light his own Rameses and smoke tranquilly. The stout lawyer was smiling faintly at him—a smile of gentle cynicism and reproach. Hollister met his eyes and smiled a little also. Hartwell grounded his elbows on the table and gesticulated to the waiter.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Kümmel? Two—and a cigar, or do you prefer cigarettes? That's quite all right—every man to his taste. *One* cigar." He drummed on the mahogany with all ten fingers. "So you're a classmate of Ned's, Mr. Hollister?"

"Yes; we three lived in the same entry of Stoughton our senior year."

"So? You mean you two and Mr. Kirby?"

"Yes."

Mr. Hartwell was the least bit puzzled, and showed it by the tiniest agitation of his eyebrows.

"It struck me as odd that I never heard Ned speak of you. I happen to know Ned very well—his uncle I know much better. You roomed together—where did you say?"

"In Stoughton."

"Ah, yes—next to Thayer."

"No—*across* from Thayer," said Hollister politely.

"That's right—I'd forgotten. I'm not a Harvard man myself—I used to know Cambridge pretty well, though. Was Butler still on Massachusetts Avenue when you were in college?"

"In freshman year, yes. Later he was on Plympton Street—called his place Butler's Pantry."

"A great character, Butler. You knew my old

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

friend, Fingerblatt, I dare say—he must have been about your time, wasn't he? In the German department?"

"I knew him, but—at least in my time—he was in Comparative Philology."

"Really? I've always connected him with the German department. By the way, what was *your* specialty?"

"Modern languages, and economics."

"The last I knew, there wasn't a lecture-room big enough for some of the Ec courses. They've improved that condition, haven't they?"

"Very much," said Hollister. "They built Emerson and the New Lecture Hall. There's no trouble about sections now."

Hartwell acknowledged the serving of the twin kümmels and the fat cigar with its crimson and gold sash. Hollister also made acknowledgment; but for a different cause.

"Then you went into—banking?"

"Brokerage."

"Not much difference these days, is there? The war must have hit the Street very hard."

"It did, indeed. Nearly all the smaller houses have shut down entirely."

"For the less fortunate men," said Hartwell,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

blinking over the rim of his liqueur glass, "it must be a trying interlude. Extraordinarily trying. But for men like yourself—" He drank, and replaced the sticky glass on the table.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Why, it isn't every young man who's had the prudence and sagacity to save money. And you must have been very frugal—unless you are a luckier speculator than I am."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

Mr. Hartwell was kindness itself.

"My dear Mr. Hollister, your modesty is very refreshing—very rare. I'm merely complimenting you. When thousands of bright young men are hunting for almost any sort of work, you're sojourning at an expensive hotel, and waiting for the storm to blow over. You're inviting assault and battery. The first thing you know, you'll be a shining mark for every bond salesman there is left in the city."

Hollister said nothing; he appeared to be basking in the sunshine of flattery; as a matter of fact he was forging the links of his chain of subterfuge.

"And yet," went on Hartwell smoothly, "although I appreciate your logic—never take a lower salary than the highest you've ever had; remain idle by preference—there's no reason for a man like your-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

self to overlook a good bet. And this very minute, Mr. Hollister, while we're sitting here, a man of your peculiar make-up can earn money *so* simply—oh, with *incredible* simplicity."

"For instance?" Hollister was human enough to take a tip.

"Well, I happen to know of several crevices where you could get a foothold—one in San Francisco, one in Seattle, one in Los Angeles, one in Vancouver. Would you—as a friend of Ned Ballin's—be interested in a proposition coming from me—a friend of Ned Ballin's?"

"If it's on the coast, I'm afraid not; but it wouldn't cost me much to listen, would it?"

"No; but are you free to accept such an opportunity?"

"Well—it depends."

"That's only natural. But it depends on what?"

"On the whole proposition," said Hollister warily.

Hartwell hitched closer to him.

"Mr. Hollister, you and I don't need to talk at long range, do we? I've been sizing you up, and I guess you've been sizing me up. Let's get down to brass tacks. I know more about you than you think I do; and how much you know about me I'm sorry to say I *don't* know. Let that pass. We can

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

remedy *that* all right. Which would please you better: San Francisco, or Seattle, or Los Angeles, or Vancouver?"

"Why, I'm not panting to leave New York."

"I should expect to make it worth your while."

"I'm not sure that you could."

"Leave it to me. If you're free to start this week, there's, say twenty-five hundred in it for you—in sixty days. Can you do better than that here?"

"Really, Mr. Hartwell, I don't see—"

"Is it the price? Well, if you don't like mine, what's yours? Make a counter-proposition. *I'll* listen."

Hollister blew a smoke ring.

"That isn't the point. I honestly don't see how you can offer me anything definite when we've hardly talked ten minutes; and besides, I'm not especially wild to go anywhere."

"Are you so situated that twenty-five hundred for two months is nothing? Or are you getting more than that—oh, no, that's ridiculous!"

"It's really a very attractive amount, but—I can't think of it."

"I must have misjudged you. You're marvelously fortunate, Mr. Hollister. You can refuse to consider a handsome bonus—without even asking what you'd

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

have to do to get it." His smile gradually faded; his mouth hardened. "I'm not accustomed to repeating my offers. This is final! Don't make any mistakes—I know *facts!* I'll give you three thousand to stay west of the Rocky Mountains until the first of March. That's all I'll expect of you—stay west of the Rockies. Do what you like! Go where you like! Three thousand dollars, Mr. Hollister—and no questions asked. You know what I'm talking about. Take it or leave it. But if you *don't* take it—just bear in mind an old motto." He punctuated it with his hand on Hollister's knee. "Who seeks adventures—receives blows."

"I don't think I care to leave New York," said Hollister, breathing hard. The pretty girl had come into the game sooner than he had expected, and the mystery was at hand.

"That's your decision?"

"Yes."

"Final?"

"Yes."

"All *right,*" said Mr. Hartwell, crashing his hand down on the table, and overturning both glasses by the concussion. "Then it's fight, is it? You'll find me there, my boy!" He got up, and snarled peremptorily to the waiter. "Check here!"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I'm done with you. You're a young jackass"

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Mr. Hartwell—"

The stout man, stern of face, and forbidding, swung toward him.

"I'm done with you! You're a young jackass! You had your chance! You'll find out damned soon who you're bucking! I'm through!" Ignoring the waiter, who followed him in the futile hope of a gratuity, he stalked straight out past the bar, paused at the cashier's desk to pay his check and disappeared in the gorgeously marbled and upholstered alley. Hollister, inhaling deeply, stood for a moment in blank agitation.

"Zowie!" he breathed. "Well—" He thought of Ballin's cousin, and of the last words of the enraged barrister. "Anyway," he reflected, "whatever the blamed job is—I'm certainly off to a flying start!" He went haltingly out to the stairway, when he suddenly remembered that Hartwell had labeled him a jackass. "Oh, thunder!" said Hollister disgustedly. "Suppose I never see him again? I ought to have slammed him!"

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VII

ALTHOUGH he slept well, small things weighed on Hollister's mind in the morning. First, there was his confession to Ballin—a confession capable of serious backfire. Next, there was the strangely melodramatic manner of his employment —a verbal contract consummated before a notary— and even if Joshua Brown had pledged his word that no discredit could attach to Hollister, there was still some latitude for conjecture. War is war; and Sherman knew it. Third, there was reason to regret a slip of the tongue at last night's party—a slip which Ballin wouldn't casually pass over. Investigation would show that Hollister had suddenly become affluent enough to live at a great hotel—and Ballin would wonder, and perhaps brand Hollister as a hypocrite. Finally, there was the attitude of Mr. Hartwell.

One of Hollister's cardinal principles held it childish and wasteful to worry about either of two classes of adversity—the things which he could avoid, and those he couldn't. In the present instance he

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

couldn't retract his confession of poverty to Ballin, and he couldn't explain his sudden increase of capital. What he had said to Ballin, and later to Ballin's circle at the dinner table, must remain said. One can't unscramble an egg. On the other hand, he could at least attempt to pry further information from Joshua Brown, and he could go straight to Hartwell, and interrogate him point-blank — ask him what in thunder he meant by his silly riddles. The wisdom of these courses was entirely another matter; but the roads were open. There were, therefore, two worries to be eliminated because their basic causes were impossible to remove; and two sources of distress to be side-tracked because Hollister could probe them as far as he liked. Ergo, there was nothing for him to fret himself about.

He had cherished a brilliant yearning that he might see Ballin's cousin, and her friend, at breakfast; and to further that ecstatic contingency, he chose a seat in the main dining-room instead of in the grill, which would have been more to his personal taste. To his vast pleasure, this heroic sacrifice was in time rewarded. He hadn't half finished his Irish bacon when the two girls came through the portières, and without discovering him, took a table within easy bowing distance.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Actuated by motives of the purest strategy, he didn't vary his regular routine. Not until after he had accomplished his own breakfast did he avail himself of the clear stage; then he strolled casually out toward the door, recognized with a smile of surprise his companions of the previous evening, paused to bid them good morning, threatened to continue his outward passage, and delayed in response to their joint invitation. As a classmate and an intimate of Ballin's he was doubly welcome. He required a repetition of this assurance before he yielded to pressure. He was again by the side of the pretty cousin, and he was proud and happy to be there.

They had exchanged the usual amenities; they had confirmed the state of the weather; they had agreed that Ned Ballin was a very dear boy, and Kirby a diverting comrade. It was Miss Rexford who opened the *argumentum ad hominem*.

"Didn't you say you're in Wall Street, Mr. Hollister?" she asked irrelevantly.

"I was once," said Hollister. "But I'm not now. There isn't any such animal. It's extinct. I'm a correspondent."

"Not a *newspaper* correspondent?" It was Ballin's cousin who said this; and her voice was slightly

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

more eager than the circumstances seemed to warrant.

"No—I've nothing to do with newspapers." He gave his fictitious story its first public trial. "I'm doing special stuff—financial and economic—for a sort of syndicate."

Miss Rexford was attentive.

"How do you like it?"

"Very well indeed," said Hollister heartily.

"It must be—I should think it ought to be—profitable."

He was a trifle bewildered by the quality of her voice, just as he had been bewildered by her friend's. The remark itself, too, was sufficiently detached from the customary route of communication between almost total strangers to induce wonder. Had Ballin told all these people that three days ago Hollister had claimed to be destitute? There seemed no other origin for the general curiosity about his income.

"It is, fairly," he admitted. "Of course, all *this*"—he included the entire room—"is part of the scenery. I stay here because most of the men I want to see come here. It saves time, and it's a good background. And it puts me out of the common run of news-gatherers. I can do twice as much as though I had to wander in as a visitor whenever

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

there's some one I want to talk to—and it settles the whole problem of entertaining, and all that sort of thing." He watched carefully for the effect of his maiden recital.

"What sort of men do you have to see?" Miss Rexford was frankly fascinated by his cosmopolitan career.

"Oh, out-of-town bankers and financiers, railroad men, lawyers, capitalists."

"It ought to be a liberal education in itself," said Ballin's cousin quietly. "I'm glad you're not a newspaper reporter."

"Why?"

"I don't like reporters."

"In that case, I'll say even more—I've never written a line of anything but financial stuff in my life!"

Both girls smiled at his round declaration.

"You're here indefinitely, then?" asked Miss Rexford, busied with her finger-bowl.

"Yes—indefinitely. I may be here a month, and I may leave to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Why, I simply can't tell. I'm only a representative for some New York interests. I have to go where I'm sent." He entrenched himself skilfully.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"It might be to England, and it might be to—San Francisco."

Ballin's cousin was still sweetly composed; Miss Rexford, however, raised her head sharply, and caught his eye.

"San—Francisco?" she repeated with a noticeable break between the words.

Something impelled Hollister to complete the train of thought which his careless mention of the western city had suggested. It was a spontaneous impulse; and yet, as it seized him, he sensed a quaint connection between this conversation and that of last night with Hartwell. Somehow Miss Rexford had struck the dominant chord of that other interview.

"San Francisco, or Chicago—or it might be Vancouver or Seattle. Almost anywhere."

Ballin's cousin looked up at the wrong moment, and caught their unwavering cross-fire.

"Why, how funny you two are!" she said. "Edith!" Miss Rexford drew a deep breath, and dropped her eyes.

"I was thinking—it must be great fun to travel about—like that."

"Oh!" Ballin's cousin turned to Hollister. "Edith hasn't seen so much of this country as most people

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

have. She's wishing women had chances like yours —just to travel around and see new places—aren't you, Edith?"

Miss Rexford was singularly repressed.

"Perhaps. It just happened that you named places I've *always* wanted to see—England—and—and California."

"Well, you will," promised Ballin's cousin, releasing her napkin.

Hollister, failing to comprehend the meaning of the remark, rose hastily to draw out her chair. A waiter who had been loitering near by sprang to assist Miss Rexford. Hollister was suddenly horrified and shocked to see this waiter deliver to Miss Rexford a quick, significant, conciliatory wink; and to see Miss Rexford convey a quick, significant, highly-pleased nod to that waiter.

He apologized to Ballin's cousin for the awkwardness and undue haste with which he drew out her chair.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VIII

SMALL things, and more of them, weighed on Hollister's mind. The challenge in Miss Rexford's eyes was another mystery for him to ruminate upon; added to Hartwell's conduct it convinced him that Ballin must have given them both good occasion to suspect his status. Hartwell, of course, had erred monstrously; Hartwell had taken some crazy premise, and built up from it. That much was manifest. But Miss Rexford had peered at him as though they held a secret in partnership, and he had all but disclosed it. And besides, there was that staggering, unbelievable reciprocity of signs with a waiter!

Hollister unlocked the door of his room, and went in. The place was in disorder, but he had left it in disorder. Still, it wasn't entirely as he had left it. His suit-case, which had been lying open on a small table, was standing closed, on the floor. The kit-bag, which had been closed, on the floor, was gaping open, on a chair. The steamer trunk wasn't on a rack in a corner, it was on a rack between the windows.

He stood on the threshold, marking these evi-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

dences of unauthorized disturbance. Plainly it wasn't the official work of chambermaid or housekeeper, for the bed was still tumbled. Wrathfully, he bolted the door behind him, and went swiftly to the kit-bag. The contents were arranged as methodically as he had himself arranged them—but arranged differently, and inverted. He dumped the suit-case on the bed, and jerked it open. Here, again, the neatness was that of revision. He lifted the lid of the steamer trunk, and gazed at a jumbled heap of his belongings. A pigskin portfolio yawned wide; in it he had kept various papers of trivial worth; the papers were intact, but they had been stuffed hastily into the flap-pockets so that new crinkles appeared, and dog-ears.

Hollister stood up and whistled. He handled the portfolio reflectively; surveyed the havoc among his most intimate possessions. And then, very calmly and very purposefully, went down to the manager's office.

The manager was a youngish man, made prematurely bald, and excessively nervous, by a decade of close attention to details. Hollister accosted him impetuously.

"Good morning! While I was at breakfast my room was broken into. All my stuff is

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

upside-down. I want to know what you intend to do about it."

The manager gasped.

"Broken into! Broken *into!*"

"Come up and look at it for yourself. I've got three pieces of baggage, and every one's been tampered with!"

The manager pressed a button on the wall, and became feverish.

"That's too bad! Oh, that's most unfortunate! Tampered with? Are you *sure?* What have you lost? I'm sending for the head of the house detectives—he's coming now! Come right in, Mr. Ferguson! This gentleman says his room has been rifled!" The manager writhed alarmingly, and mopped his forehead.

Hollister shook hands with Mr. Ferguson, who was tall and sandy and saturnine.

"My name is Hollister," he said. "I'm in Room 690. When I came back from breakfast, I found my baggage had been searched, and it's all messed up."

"Ah!" The big dour Scotchman sucked in his breath. "What's missing?"

"I don't know yet. I came down to tell you—"

"You haven't told any one else?"

"No."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Please go back to your room. In a couple of minutes we'll be up. Please don't touch anything—not a thing—and go as if nothing had happened." He turned to the manager. "We'd better be safe, I think. Can you keep the maids from that room until we're through with it? You go ahead, Mr. Hollister—and we'll be there in a couple of minutes."

Hollister had paced the floor of 690 not more than a dozen turns when the manager arrived; and the two had bartered only a few incisive sentences when Ferguson, callous, efficient, joined them.

"To come singly," he explained to Hollister, "doesn't stir up any talk—and things of this sort we like to keep mum until there's something to say. Now—where's the damage?"

Hollister indicated it, and told briefly where the three pieces of luggage had been when he set out for breakfast, and where he had found them on his return. With the assistance of the two men, he went through them; at the end, he flushed angrily.

"There's nothing missing," he said, "but that doesn't alter the case! Somebody's been in here, and—well, what do you know about that!" He picked up a small tray from the table.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Ferguson was shaking his head over a pair of silver-backed military brushes.

"These are worth something. I don't understand why they weren't taken if anybody was after plunder. Oh! Anything in the passport envelope of the trunk?"

"No—nothing. My papers were all in the portfolio. But— Why, this is *bromo-seltzer!* I never ordered any."

"Maybe he had documents—or securities!" said the manager, fluttering. "Did you? Would anybody have wanted anything you've got?"

"Never mind that now. He says nothing's gone," said Ferguson. "What's that—something you hadn't ordered? Let's have a look at it. Now—I'll want the floor housekeeper directly, and anybody else that's had access to a master-key. I'll want no one to leave by the servants' entrance without my permission. And—well!—*as* I live—" He stooped, and picked from the floor, close by the wainscoting, a bar-pin, which glittered in the slanting sunlight.

"What! What!" exclaimed the manager.

Ferguson looked at Hollister.

"This isn't yours? And you say your kit-bag was *there?* On that same spot?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"My bag was there," said Hollister slowly, "right up against the wall. I remember the porter had to move the trunk-rack to put it there. I told him to. And the drop-light shines on the floor. If it had been there last night, one of us would have noticed it—"

He stopped short. The bit of jewelry in Ferguson's hand was the pin which Ballin's cousin had worn at last night's dinner, the sapphire and pearl pin with the broken clasp.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

IX

JUST when the afternoon was running into dusk so rapidly that the lighting of street-lamps was a matter of corporate discretion, Hollister climbed wearily up the steps, and passed through the swinging doors of the Harvard Club. The net result of his day's operations had been a series of impasses which galled and irritated him. He had thought to exact retribution for the unlawful rifling of his room —impasse! because of Ballin's cousin's bar-pin. He had thought to go to Joshua Brown, to wring from him a thorough synopsis of the duties specified in their contracts—impasse! because Mr. Brown wasn't in, wasn't expected in, wasn't in the city. He had tried to square matters with Ballin—impasse! because Ballin swore to him that he hadn't breathed the secret of Hollister's difficulties to a soul. He had volunteered to explain to Ballin—and Ballin insisted that no explanation was necessary; he only rejoiced that Hollister had found a plutocratic employer. He had determined to hunt out Hartwell, and to have either a battle royal or a love feast with him—

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

impasse! because Hartwell was in conference with distinguished clients, and couldn't be interrupted. He had essayed to find Ballin's cousin, and talk to her about that bar-pin—impasse! because both girls were out; not in the social sense, but physically out —out shopping.

So that it was a weary and disheartened Hollister who plucked an evening journal from the pile on the lobby bench, and seated himself with the determination to dismiss all these conundrums from his calculations. He opined that soon enough his instructions would come from Brown, and in the meantime there was no use in aggravating his dilemmas. He had money in his pocket, he had a guarantee that his expenses would be paid; he had the surety of lucrative and absorbing work in the near future. The incident of Hartwell, and the incident of Miss Rexford, and the incident of the bar-pin in his room —these were gratuitous. But what had Hartwell meant; and what had Miss Rexford meant; and how had that pin transferred itself from a pretty evening frock to a polished floor in Room 690? Hollister scowled, and wished he were Cagliostro.

He flipped open the journal at the sporting page. There was little to attract him—a few feeble comments on the distant baseball season, and a didactic

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

essay on the professionalism of college amateurs. Hollister sighed, and took an observation of the room for chance company. In the furthest angle, snug in the recesses of a massive divan, two familiar figures were head-to-head. Hollister rose, and drew near them. Startled, the two glanced up simultaneously. They were Ballin and Kirby.

"Hello, gents," said Hollister cheerfully. "Telling Ford stories?"

Ballin and Kirby looked at each other, and at Hollister.

"Oh, no—not at all—not a bit of it!" sighed Ballin. "And we were quite finished anyway—weren't we? I was just going, Phil. Sit in!"

"Sure—sit down," invited Kirby, making place for him. "Really going, Ned?"

"I'll have to," confirmed Ballin, struggling upright. "I'll have to hurry as it is. You've got my idea, haven't you?"

"By heart. See you anon?"

"Quarter past," grinned Ballin, departing.

Hollister, with the manual query of a true host, tapped the bell on a convenient stand.

"Well, Pete—I owe you something for last night," he said. "That wasn't any fraudulent advertising you did, old top!"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Thought you'd agree with me," said Kirby. "How'd you like 'em?"

"Great. Only I don't know *yet* what her name is."

"Whose?"

"Ned's cousin. Nobody's called her by it when I've been around, and I've had too much to do to go over the register."

"Why—*Cloud*. Frances Cloud."

"Oh! Well—how does the genealogy work? She's—let's see—she's a daughter of Ned's uncle —of Mr. Cloud?"

"No, she was his brother's wife."

"*Wife!*" said Hollister aghast.

"Sure—wife! Married to him, you know. This way—that Cloud man that was with us is Ned's uncle on his mother's side—get that? He had a brother—do you follow me? Brother, being a good judge of skirts, married Frances. All clear so far? Brother, having typhoid, got thoroughly defunct three years ago. *Now* are you all straight?"

Hollister, somewhat disillusioned, owned that he was all straight.

"That's pretty tough, isn't it? I wouldn't have thought she was married! And—three years ago?

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Good lord! She can't be more than twenty-three or four now!"

"She's twenty-one. Brother was a cradle-snatcher."

Hollister pondered diligently.

"Well—if she isn't married again mighty soon it won't be anybody's fault but hers."

"Brother was a hyena—ninety-nine per cent.," said Kirby. "He was a five-star, triple distilled hellion. I don't know what in thunder she married him for—he must have been forty-eight anyway. Same old idea, I suppose—she was beautiful but poor; and brother was rich and polished. Some people went so far as to call him a shine. And he was mighty fine to her until it was too late for her to renege. He just carried her off her feet. Oh, he was a fine-looking man—sort of combination of John Drew and Jess Willard—almost any girl might have fallen for him. Well, they had the devil's own time for a couple of months, and then brother kindly shuffled. She's been living in the West—Pasadena and Los Angeles. So you see she isn't really related to Ned at all."

"I see," granted Hollister. "By the way—who's this man Hartwell?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Jim Hartwell," said Kirby, "is the rosy little cherub that thinks he's going to be Number Two."

"Oh! That's bashful of him."

"It *is* bashful of him. I said he *thinks* he's going to be Number Two. When Jim Hartwell only *thinks* he can do something, he's being about as shy and retiring as a dicky-bird in a flock of bald eagles. He's a tough spade, Jim is."

"How do you mean?"

"Any way you want to take it. Knock-down and drag-out, brass knuckles, lead pipe done up in the *Tribune,* hurrah-boys, up and at 'em—that's how he practises law, and that's how he does about everything else. He's a holy terror on wheels, Jim is. I'd be sort of sorry to see him get Frances."

"You seem friendly enough with him, though."

Kirby waved his hand airily.

"Politics is politics, Phil. You've got to play the game—and there aren't any fixed rules and there isn't any umpire. I've had to do some business with him."

Hollister declined to quit this well of information until it had been pumped dry.

"Where does this Miss Rexford fit in, Pete?"

"Why—she's Frances' companion—pretty girl, don't you think?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"She certainly is—she's a pippin. A—a salaried companion, do you mean?"

"That's what I do. She's part chaperon and part secretary. She's been on the job about a month. Frances is dippy about her."

"So I gathered. Where'd *she* come from?"

"My dear boy, she materialized out of thin ether. It was like this: we all thought Frances ought to have somebody—"

" 'We' !"

"Oh, I'm an old friend of the family, that's all—sort of grandfather to the whole crowd. As I was saying, we thought Frances ought to have somebody with her when she goes beating it around the country, so we baited and pulled in Miss Rexford. I understand she was with Mrs.—oh, she was social secretary to one of the highbrows. She's a well-bred kid anyway."

"Not a doubt of it," said Hollister dryly. "The only thing I don't like about her—no, never mind; I shouldn't have said that. I—"

"Go ahead. I'm not a sieve."

"No—it's nothing. Well, what are they going to do—spend the winter in town?"

"Oh, I don't imagine they will. They'll very likely go south in a day or so."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Palm Beach?"

"Possibly. They've spoken of it. What's biting you?"

"I wish I knew," said Hollister.

The little man cocked an eye at him, and all at once was dogmatic.

"Well, *I* know! You needn't try to put the blinkers on me, Phil! I've got you, old boy! Haven't I? *Haven't* I?"

Hollister affected the utmost nonchalance.

"Do you think you have?"

"I know I have! Quit looking like a prairie-fire!"

"Shut up!" said Hollister, not too brazenly.

"Don't get so disgustingly red, then! That's a plebeian color. So *you're* in it, too, Phil. Welcome, little stranger! You're Number 16, Series of 1914!"

"I'm not in anything *I* know of! You—"

"Don't try to hedge! Little Nemo's got two eyes and a brain," declared Kirby, jubilant. "And it takes an older man than *you* are to hoodwink him! Why, if you hadn't joined the Benevolent Order of Francescan Slaves I'd call you St. Anthony and be done with it!"

Hollister's laugh was more lugubrious than merry.

"You're using up all your energy," he said. "Save your breath. I may be a simple little city lad, but I

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

don't go around losing my head about people I've met only twice, just the same."

Kirby pounced catlike on the numerical adverb.

"Twice! *Twice,* you blighter! When was the other time?"

Hollister had to succumb to the small man's levity.

"Er—at breakfast. They happened to come down—"

"Well played! And were you waiting for 'em outside or inside?"

"Darn you! I was eating my own food!"

"That's one incriminating admission I've got out of you," said Kirby serenely, "and before I've finished, I'll get more."

"I dare you to," laughed Hollister.

Nevertheless, when they parted at eight o'clock, Kirby hadn't ceased to gloat over what he was pleased to call his discovery. And Hollister, who wasn't nearly so much irritated as he pretended, was rather comfortably aware that Kirby wasn't too far wrong. Of course, it was nonsense to think that Ballin's cousin had so entranced him that his rapture had been noticeable. He had hardly spoken to her, except at the poles of the evening. Kirby was joking. Besides, even if Hollister had actually been taken captive by that youthful widow whose widow-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

hood was so difficult to believe, he shouldn't have allowed himself to own his surrender until the enigma at the Aspinwall had been solved. Hollister was beginning to take as an incontrovertible fact the absolute connection of one event with another; Hartwell had definitely accused him of something which was to Hollister still indefinite, and Hartwell, failing to bribe him, had threatened him; Miss Rexford's speech, and her eyes, had clearly revealed a mutuality of interest between herself and Hartwell; a waiter had signaled to Miss Rexford; and Hollister's room had been ransacked, and a trinket of Mrs. Cloud's found on the floor. He was glad now that he hadn't told Ferguson and the hotel manager too much. He hadn't entrusted them with any of these clues, and he hadn't betrayed the ownership of the bar-pin. Since there seemed to be a full measure of sensationalism in his career, he might as well reserve for himself whatever stimulus he could get from it; and there was no sense in making it either a police or a newspaper affair. He'd burrow down to the truth eventually—he knew he could!

At the hotel desk he stopped to inquire for mail; he was given a letter in a plain envelope. Instinct advised him that the message was from Joshua Brown; and discretion told him to read it in the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

privacy of his own room; but he was tired, and for the moment at least he was highly contemptuous of intrigue. Moreover, he intended to hold another parley with the manager before he went to bed; so that he was still standing in the lobby when he perused the first bulletin from his employer. It was without date or signature, typed in single spacing.

"Under pseudonym of John Smith, you will engage passage for Hamilton, Bermuda, on S. S. *Devonian,* sailing Thursday next, and await instructions at Hotel Hamilton under your own name. You may expect cable remittance of $200 next Monday, identification waived. Be guarded in your intercourse with strangers, and take care to incur no more enmities than you already have. Every compromise you can effect will be of permanent value. On leaving New York, say nothing whatsoever of your plans and leave no forwarding address. Merely go, and go silently."

He held the sheet to the light, recognized the determining water-mark of the B enclosed in a circle, and glanced toward the nearest fireplace. At that juncture some one spoke softly in his ear.

"Is this Mr. Hollister?"

At arm's length a young man correctly dressed for the time and place was bowing deferentially.

"Yes," owned Hollister. "That's my name."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The young man's manner became positively subjective.

"Will you be kind enough to step into the manager's office for half a minute?"

"That's exactly what I was going to do," said Hollister, crumpling the letter. He stepped to the fireplace, and laid the ball of paper squarely in the center of a mass of glowing coals. The correctly dressed young man cried out under his breath, grabbed the huge iron trident which stood among the other implements of the fire-set, and prodded frantically among the embers. He was too late; the light bond paper flared up, and roared punily; the young man looked at Hollister, and humped himself in the style popularly set down as one of the idiosyncrasies of the French nation.

"I wish you hadn't done that," he reproved. "That might make a whole lot of trouble for you."

"Look here!" said Hollister warmly, "what is it to *you* how I dispose of my personal correspondence? Who in thunder do you think you are? For two cents—"

They were so near to the portal of the managerial den that the brisk young man opened it while Hollister was in mid-sentence. With the sole design of filing a blistering comment upon the Hotel

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Aspinwall, and its staff, and the insolence of its deputies, Hollister followed that young man inside. The door closed behind him. Then there were four men in the room; these two who had entered, the still fluttering manager, and Ferguson, the chief of the house detectives, who was leaning negligently against a window-frame, smiling in sour relish; and as Hollister, unheeding, commenced fire against the manager, the brisk young man said something in an undertone, and Ferguson put up his hand in pompous warning.

"Never mind that now—we've got something very much more important for you to think about. Mr. Hollister, before we take any drastic action, we want a little confidential chat with you. I hope you'll be candid. What we want to know is this—can you give any plausible reason for the pin we discovered on the floor of your room this morning?"

Hollister, dumfounded, shook his head.

"No, I can't. But I want to complain about—"

"Let's settle one matter at a time. You dined here last night with several people, didn't you?"

"I didn't dine here, no! I met some people who were dining—"

"Was there a Mr. Hartwell in that party?"

"Yes, there was."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The big Scot moved out from the window. "Mr. Hollister, we want to know what was in the passport pocket of your trunk this morning."

"Why—nothing at all," said Hollister. "I told you it was empty."

Ferguson allowed his eyes to stray toward the manager, who was going through an elaborate system of fidgets.

"Would you take your oath to that, Mr. Hollister?"

"Yes, I would."

"You kept no—decorative jewelry of your own there?"

"No—I haven't any."

"You'd bought no gifts for your friends, perhaps?"

"No. If I had any idea what you're driving at—"

"You will," promised Ferguson. "Now—had you left any money in your room when you went down-stairs?"

"Not a cent."

"No large bills—which a man of your resources might have mislaid and forgotten?"

"No—all my loose money I had with me."

"Well, then," said Ferguson blandly, "do you

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Three rings, four pins, two watches and a bill-book"

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

mean to say that when you told us there was nothing in that pocket, you didn't know that there *was* something in it?"

"I certainly did not. And furthermore—"

"One moment! You admit that you left no money or jewelry there? So that what *was* there wasn't your property?"

"Why," said Hollister, vaguely apprehensive. "If I knew exactly what's in your mind—"

Ferguson reached out to the desk, and took up from the blotter a number of small articles.

"Three rings, four pins, two watches and a billbook," he catalogued, watching Hollister hawkishly. "Can you explain how they got into your trunk, if they're not yours?"

"Why—they might have been dropped—"

Ferguson smiled acidulously.

"It's not easy to drop jewelry clear through the shell of a trunk and have it land in a fastened compartment, Mr. Hollister."

The brisk young man who had accosted Hollister in the lobby couldn't restrain himself longer.

"He burned a letter in the fire just before I got him, Mr. Ferguson."

"Oh, he did, did he!"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The manager interposed nervously: "Well, well! It's simmering down, isn't it? Go ahead, Ferguson, go ahead—get on with it!"

Ferguson glowered at Hollister.

"*Now,* Mr. Hollister—are you ready to tell us where this sudden prosperity of yours came from? How is it that since Monday you've blossomed out as a—what is it?—city correspondent to nobody? We've looked you up, Hollister—and I guess we've got your number! V-e-r-y easy! A week ago you were broke—overnight you're a nabob! One day chasing a job; next day at the Aspinwall, and damn the expense! And you can't explain how these valuables got into your trunk while *you* were shouting about being robbed yourself?"

Hollister, too addled to recall that, as a matter of fact, he hadn't professed to have been robbed at all, stared at the big detective.

"You haven't any statement to make to us?"

"No!"

The Scot turned to his young associate. "Go outside and telephone Mr. Hartwell's house, Sam. We've got to have him for the prosecuting witness." He put his hand on Hollister's shoulder. "I'm going to hold you, Hollister, and—"

Hollister knocked away the hand.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Keep that to yourself! What do you mean by trying to manhandle me? What's this whole row about? What?"

Ferguson got between Hollister and the door.

"Grand larceny—that's what! Mr. Hartwell notified us at ten this morning he'd lost his wallet, and we searched your room again at two and found it with the rest of this stuff, right where you put it—in your trunk. And we found something else that was reported lost. An old game, Hollister—to cry thief so's to swing suspicion away from yourself. It's a thousand years old. You ought to have thought of something modern. We're not hayseeds here! Three rings, four pins, two watches and more than a hundred dollars in cold cash—Hollister, that's Sing-Sing!"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

X

WHEN Hollister heard the house detective bark at him: "And more than a hundred dollars in cold cash—that's Sing-Sing!" he was, to his own astonishment, fully in control of his nerves. The first shock of the accusation had passed over; Hollister was sustained and soothed by an unfaltering trust no less surely than if he had known the origin of the quotation. He was supremely confident that wherever he was next to be recorded as a guest, it wouldn't be at the best-known country seat on the Hudson.

If he had to, he could summon the notary to prove that his residence at the Aspinwall was a logical outcome of his contract; he could summon a regiment of his classmates to uphold his character. But he was uncomfortably certain that any publicity given to the nature of his task would destroy his value for it; and he hadn't been on intimate terms with a salary long enough to have lost his affectionate regard for a drawing account. He could extricate himself from either predicament, but look what it would cost him!

He smiled unconcernedly at Ferguson, and at the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

manager, who was righteously appalled at his effrontery.

"In plain English, that's Mr. Hartwell's book, and you're trying to accuse me of *stealing* it?" he demanded.

"We *do* accuse you!" said Ferguson. "And of the rest of the stuff."

"All right. What's next?"

"For you? The Tenderloin police station."

"Fine! And then I'll be up before a magistrate to-morrow, and either discharged or held for the Grand Jury. Isn't that so?"

"That's it."

"And if the magistrate doesn't choose to detain me—what then?"

The detective and the manager regarded him incredulously.

"That's so impossible that you're wasting time—"

"*If* he doesn't," said Hollister, "this is what'll happen—a good many people in New York who've gone to school long enough to know how to read printing will have a pretty nice story served up to 'em with lots of details." He told off the items on his fingers. "One—it's as easy for a guest's room in this hotel to be broken into as it is for a needle to go through burlap. Mine was—and now you're try-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ing to prove that I've got into somebody else's. That's all the worse for you, because people don't care very much about sleeping in a houseful of sneak thieves. Two—the management, without any legal authority, just simply takes upon itself the right to visit a guest's room and search it. You haven't even pretended to have a warrant, have you? I'm not so sure—if I'm discharged by the magistrate—that I haven't a very decent case against *you,* Mr. Ferguson. Anyway, it won't help your reputation. Three—suppose, just for fun, I *can* tell—after I have figured it out—who was in my room while I was eating breakfast, and why he slipped all that junk where you found it? *You're* not a judge—I don't have to tell *you*—but I'm not afraid to tell your magistrate. And incidentally, suppose some of that stuff isn't exactly my own property, but I had it as—as custodian—or trustee. Where do you think *you* stand in the question of larceny? I know it's trespass anyway. You may think you can hush it up because you advertise—but *I've* got a better pull than that! *I've* got a relative in the biggest advertising *agency* in the world—and I rather imagine I can get anything printed I want to!"

The big Scot laughed scornfully, but the manager wasn't taking any chances.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Of course," he said hurriedly, "of course, if you can *prove* anything—well, now, *can* you prove anything?"

"I'm perfectly willing to talk to a magistrate, if I have to. I don't care to say anything to you except that you're wrong. You claim that something else besides that wallet has been identified. By whom?"

"*I'm* not on the witness stand," retorted Ferguson.

"Neither am I, but I'm willing to be, and perhaps you'll have to be! It looks as though it might get amusing. I don't suppose you'll object to my using your telephone, do you? Oh, you haven't anything to worry about; I'll do it here where you can listen."

The manager flurried, shifted the responsibility.

"How about it, Ferguson?"

"Better let him do it, sir," grudged the detective.

From the desk-instrument, Hollister called the Harvard Club, and luckily caught his friend Kirby on the wing. He said enough to bring Kirby at top speed, and rang off. Five minutes later the two supporting members of the cast arrived simultaneously—Kirby, diminutive but lowering, and Hartwell, aggressive but outwardly calm. They were admitted and seated in grim silence; Ferguson rather ostentatiously locked the door. The manager drummed nervously on his blotter.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Well, well!" he said. "Let's get somewhere!"
Ferguson motioned toward Hollister.
"He's the man to do the talking."
"First," said Hollister placidly, "I'll just give an outline to my friend here. That won't take long."

It took so short a time that it paralyzed Kirby. He blinked at Hollister, and at Ferguson, and at the disarmingly sorrowful Hartwell, shook his head, moistened his lips and finally remarked, hardly above a whisper: "Whew!"

"I agree with you," said Hollister. "Well, Pete, I just wanted you to come in to tell these people what you know about me; but before that, there's one thing that does sort of bother me. I didn't care to go into the thing before *I* had a witness, too. Mr. Ferguson here says he found this bill-book in my trunk. Mr. Hartwell says it's his, and he lost it last night. I want to ask Mr. Hartwell if he usually carries *two* bill-books?"

"No, I don't," said Hartwell. "And I want to go on record now, gentlemen, that for many reasons this is a terrible revelation to me—terrible! When I was told where this money was found—I couldn't believe my senses. I sincerely hope there's a mistake—this young man is personally known to some dear friends of mine."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"It's his, fast enough," said Kirby, inspecting the wallet. "I've seen it often—I remember it—initials and all."

"Yes, and he had it with him last night!" said Hollister. "But what I want to know now is where Mr. Hartwell saw me last?"

Ferguson turned to the lawyer. "Where was it, sir?"

"In the grill at about half past nine."

Hollister nodded.

"We don't quarrel about *that*. But if you don't carry two bill-books, Mr. Hartwell, and you last saw me in the grill—and you paid your check out of that bill-book, when you were way down at the lower end of the room and I was right where you left me at the corner table—*how* do you think I got it away from you? With a magnet? Or did I burgle your house last night and get it there?"

Hartwell's eyes were popping.

"I didn't say I paid my check out of this book—"

"No—but *I* say so. I think the waiter might remember it, too. You were so mad you started out without paying at all, and the waiter chased after you for a tip, and you dropped your wallet, and he picked it up for you, and you swore at him, and paid at the desk, and didn't give the waiter anything but

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

a couple of nicknames. I think he ought to remember *that* sort of tip—don't you?"

Hartwell was inclined to flounder.

"It's possible I dropped it again—"

"Ah!" said Hollister. "Then your argument *isn't* so good, is it? I might have just found it, and then I'd be under an obligation to return it to you, wouldn't I? If I didn't try to return it, I'd be as guilty as though I'd actually taken it. *That's* your case, is it? Well—I stopped in at your office this afternoon. I doubt if your switchboard operator'll lie about it, because she made the entry on your office record with an indelible pencil. Besides, I telephoned to you later from a place where they keep all the information about outgoing calls. Are you going to swear that even if I did find your book, and have it in my room, I didn't try to return it? As a witness, Mr. Hartwell, you haven't much to say, have you?"

Hartwell's mouth was clamped tight, as with a muzzle. Ferguson and the manager glared, aghast. Kirby snickered. There was a long blank pause.

"I think that eliminates you, doesn't it?" went on Hollister with grave politeness. "I mean, as a prosecuting witness? And the same waiter you swore at yesterday might also recall a few of the

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

things you said when you were going out. You weren't very ladylike, you know. And then my room was entered—you might bribe him of course, but you won't have much chance, because if I'm going over to the Tenderloin station to-night, he's going too. Voluntarily, I think. He used to be at a club of mine, and now and then I used to give him more generous tips than you do—oh, you *might* bribe him, but I'll take the long end of ten to one on it. Now, I'm not trying to threaten *you*, but if we're going to talk about circumstantial evidence, I can make just as wild guesses as you can. So isn't this where you make a graceful exit?"

Hartwell rose, and turned vindictively to the manager.

"Everything considered," he snapped, "I'd make a fool of myself to prosecute. There's no doubt about *that!* He can probably prove he's either been to my office, or telephoned, and that covers him. I haven't got a leg to stand on. You've certainly made hash out of this! But even if I am—eliminated—*you* go on! You say you found a whole pile of loot in his room. Friend or no friend, he's got to explain *that!* It looks bad—rotten! You get any one of the others to start proceedings, and I'll be on hand. I don't care whether my crowd knows him

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

or not, if he's guilty I'll put him where he belongs! If he isn't, he's got a sweet young time to prove it. I'll have to leave that bill-book for one of the exhibits—"

"Please, Mr. Ferguson!" said Hollister quickly. "You've got to play safe to insure *yourself*, now! I'd just see to it, if I were in your place, that Mr. Hartwell doesn't go down to the grill if that same waiter is on duty. Even an odds-on favorite at one to ten loses once in a while, you know. And I need that witness, and so do you. Won't you just have him sent up here to make an affidavit? Or see that he doesn't talk to Mr. Hartwell. His name's Mike —he's short and red-haired, and he came here about October from the Harvard Club."

"That's reasonable," said Kirby. "*I'm* in favor of it."

The manager, hesitating until he had a curt nod of permission from Ferguson, gave the necessary order by telephone. Hartwell, irascible and captious, picked up his cane.

"You think you're pretty smart, Hollister," he said, "but the time's coming when you won't. And as for *you*—" He was addressing Kirby. "You'd better be a little more careful about your associates."

"Jim," said Kirby quietly. "Ned Ballin and I

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

have known this man for ten years. He's all *right*. There's a big mistake somewhere, and we're going to find out what it is. You lay off for a while."

Hartwell gestured to Ferguson.

"You can get hold of me any time. I'm not through with this case by any means. All the soft soap in the world can't make me shield a crook. I'd suggest you call an officer, and make the charge petit. You've got grounds enough for that, any way. Under the circumstances, I can't prosecute. He's protected himself against *me!* But you send for me when you want me, and I'll come. That's all." He unlocked the door and went out stormily.

In the verbal vacuum, Hollister smiled at the manager.

"Now let's take up the rest of this collection—I don't know anything about it. I haven't anything more to say about it. I told you my room was upside down, and you saw it. There was a bromo-seltzer I never ordered—that's proof enough that *somebody* was in there! That bar-pin you discovered yourself. The other things—by the way, who lost the ring you said had been identified?"

"A Miss Rexford," said Ferguson stonily. "And as for that drink, there's no record—"

"Indeed!" flashed Kirby. "May I see the ring?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

He rotated the trinket in his hands, and all at once began to laugh.

"What's the joke?" asked Hollister.

"Why—it might be hers—but if it is, I don't think a lot of her taste. May I see the other things? Thank you." The three watched him narrowly. He replaced all but one of the articles on the manager's desk. He hugged his knees, and expanded hilariously.

"Some class to your detective bureau," he complimented Ferguson. "Those two watches are exactly alike; two of the pins are exactly alike; two of the rings are exactly alike. Your guests must have hit a thirty-nine-cent bargain sale. And if Miss Rexford thinks this ring is hers—look! He reached out to the window close beside him, and dragged the stone down over the pane. He dug viciously. He handed the ring to Ferguson. "Glass won't scratch glass," he stated. "I'm not an expert appraiser, but my *guess* is that that ring came with a package of popcorn at Steeplechase Park. Are you *sure* she identified it?"

Ferguson was goggle-eyed. The features of the big Scot were remarkably distorted, and his cheeks were burning.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Mr. Kirby, she notified us—"

"Are you *sure* she identified it?"

The manager dashed bravely to the rescue.

"She said she'd lost a diamond ring! She said so this noon before we discovered—she described it —she and her friend haven't been in the hotel since—"

"Oh!" said Hollister excitedly. "*Now* I get it. You hadn't any positive identification, had you? You were throwing a bluff—to get a confession out of me, if you could, and—"

"The whole bunch is department store jewelry," said Kirby, driving in the wedge. "The watches are fake Swiss—they're not even gold—they're oroide. They're plated—and—by gosh! One of 'em hasn't even any works! And if Miss Rexford lost a diamond ring, this isn't hers, because it isn't a diamond!"

The big detective sat down with a bang. His breathing was stertorous, and uneven. As he cast about for a final weapon of offense, however feeble, he sighted the bar-pin, which had been somewhat segregated.

"How about this?" he managed huskily.

"That?" He tossed it aside. "That's rubbish,

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

too. Let's be constructive. Now I'm here to vouch for Mr. Hollister. I *do* vouch for him. And if you don't know who I am—"

"Call up the governor," said Hollister wickedly.

"Or the president of the Central, or any bank—"

"Cut that out, Phil!—It seems to me, gentlemen, that you've got yourselves in rather of a mess. If you'd taken the trouble to go about this thing decently—"

"If the jewelry isn't worth anything, and it hasn't been—appropriated," interposed Hollister, "and if I'm doing my best to see that Mr. Hartwell gets back the money he lost—"

"You're in Hohenzollern, gentlemen!" finished Kirby.

"I was coming to that—but I think that all I'll ask you to do is to see that I get the affidavit I want from that grill-room waiter, and—"

"But—but," puffed the manager, "when you say that you're implicating Mr. Hartwell! That's—that's impossible! I can't countenance it! Mr. Hartwell is an old, old customer of ours—we know him very well—"

"Not a bit of it," said Kirby hastily. "Not for one second. He simply made a mistake." He nudged Hollister. "The way you jumped on him

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

made my friend here sore, or he'd have been more tractable. He didn't explain about this junk, because it wasn't important enough. Isn't that right, Phil?"

"Chambermaids like it," gulped Hollister. "It's better sometimes than giving 'em money. Only that watch without the works gets *me!* I must be a sucker!"

"And as for Mr. Hartwell's money—Mr. Hollister has made two attempts to-day to see Mr. Hartwell about it. Where does that leave *you?*"

"But he was so evasive!" said the muddled manager. "He was so arbitrary! He didn't deny—"

"I shouldn't have been so quick," conceded Hollister, on receipt of a second nudge from Kirby. "I've nothing against Mr. Hartwell, or you. I was sore on general principles—anybody'd be. You made yourselves entirely too officious. I don't mind telling you now that Mr. Kirby has spotted the *facts.*"

The manager was palpably relieved.

"I'm glad to hear you say that. This has been a *most* unfortunate day. And—if we're coming back to the theory that your room was really entered—"

"Forget it!" said Hollister. "I'm leaving so soon that we couldn't get anywhere."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The big detective had dropped his head in his hands. Hollister touched his sleeve.

"That pin you found in my room," he said. "I'd like to have that, if you don't object. It isn't mine; it probably belonged to whoever rummaged my things. If you *do* object—"

Ferguson acquiesced wearily.

"Take it! I'm through with this case!"

"Thank you. Now can I have my affidavit?"

"The man's outside—I'll have him in," said the manager, eager to please. "Now it's understood that neither of us is to talk for publication—or to any one not already involved?"

"I'm willing," said Hollister soberly. "Provided I get my affidavit that Mr. Hartwell had that book after he left me. I'll keep it for a souvenir."

Half an hour later Kirby and Hollister, surfeited with apologies and recantations, shook hands at the main entrance of the hotel.

"Much obliged, old man," thanked Hollister gratefully. "Say, what on earth *is* this shack? If it hadn't been for you—"

"Oh, piffle!"

"But everybody except you was too blamed excited to pay much attention to the junk, and if you hadn't—"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Rubbish!"

"Well, tell me this: Why in the name of all that's holy did you want to protect Hartwell? If that fat lobster didn't try to frame me—"

"Hush, Phil! Say—*was* your room upside down?"

"Absolutely!"

"And none of those fake things *were* yours?"

"Of course not."

"And you *didn't* find Hartwell's money?"

"No. They sprung it on me just before I phoned you. He's a damned skunk—"

"Hush!" said Kirby uneasily. "Politics! He's after you for *some* reason. I wish I could tell you why. But for the love of Mike, hush! Don't talk —don't *think!*—not until you're out of the state. Politics, dear boy—politics—politics!"

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

XI

NOW and again there are dynamic moments which flog into living flame that spirit of adventure which is the prime heritage from the day that is past to the day that has waited before. There were such moments in the autumn of the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Fourteen. But war itself is a fine inspiration; and many a one who might gladly march to méet his boyhood's dream to the accompaniment of a fife and drum, and daintily-blown kisses, might falter a little, and calculate the cost, and think twice of the creature comforts of the metropolis before he set his face toward the unknown, and went blindly out against hazards which, while they lacked the glamour of chivalry, offered a modicum of danger as a substitute. To any but a young man, splendidly confident, ravished by all the various ramifications of life, an eager romanticist, a fearless wayfarer in the paths of jeopardy, such a career would be manifestly absurd. To Hollister, therefore, it was manifestly desirable.

The first twenty-four hours of his privateering

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

had been electrifying; his sole regret at his sailing orders was that he must perforce leave his newly-acquired mystery behind him. He wanted to stay in New York to imitate the wiles of the ferret. He wanted to patch thoroughly the whole fabric of his first adventure. He wanted to motivate the entire proceedings. This much he had already gathered:

His friend Kirby, although free in the use of his synonyms, was afraid of, or obligated in some way to, Hartwell.

Hartwell hoped to marry Ned Ballin's cousin, and the negotiations had arrived at such a stage that Kirby was already downcast. If there were no formal engagement, it was at least pending.

Hartwell and Miss Rexford were somehow allied, or related.

Hartwell, believing that Hollister was a barrier to some indefinite emprise, was sufficiently interested in his removal to pay cash for it.

Therefore, it wasn't unimaginable that Hartwell and Miss Rexford were involved in the two episodes of Hollister's room. The fact that each claimed a part of the contents of that passport-pocket was significant; and it was quite possible that the incident of Miss Rexford's signs with her waiter had some connection with the intrusion into Hollister's private

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

luggage. But why? And Hartwell, when he couldn't buy Hollister, was willing to sell him. Again, why?

Hollister thought that if he could have remained in the city, he could have found much entertainment and no little mental intoxication in the revolution of this circle about him. He would have needed no Broadway melodrama, no transient best-seller to occupy his ingenuity. But his commission now bound him to Bermuda; and the meager sketch he had received from Joshua Brown led him to assume that a certain degree of galvanism wasn't to be missing from the incidentals of his employment. So that he made ready for the voyage with the fervent prayer that at some not too distant date he would encounter Hartwell and the two girls again. He had something to teach Hartwell, and something to learn from all three of them.

Pursuant to his directions, he didn't tell either Ballin or Kirby that he was quitting New York. He left no forwarding address for his mail. When the hour struck, he merely chartered a taxicab and disappeared within it, to emerge at the dock fully ninety minutes prior to sailing time. He didn't intend to run the risk of any unforeseen delays, and during the southerly progress of the cab he kept

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

his eyes riveted on the chauffeur's neck. He was just young enough, and just visionary enough, to recollect sundry anecdotes of the perfidy of New York chauffeurs; so that he wouldn't have been taken off his guard if, in a restricted alleyway, the jehu had pulled off his false whiskers and stood revealed as a prosecuting witness or a plain-clothes man armed with a civil summons.

Once aboard, he relaxed, dismissed his fantasies, and gave himself up to undiluted anticipation. His stateroom was amidships, on the promenade deck; he feed the room steward liberally, and encouraged him by promising to be a good sailor. The steward bit the silver dollar and spoke of the Gulf Stream; thus indicating the pessimism of the proletariat. These preliminaries accomplished, Hollister demonstrated his foresight by engaging an exclusive location for his deck chair, and by feeing the deck steward. He rented a blanket and saw it placed in the chair. Then he lighted a cigarette and hung lazily over the rail to watch the incoming passengers.

As he had reckoned, there were few of them. To the distressed public, Bermuda was in the geographical center of the war zone, and the high seas unsafe for any whose names were easily pronounceable. Instead of the usual bustle and confusion of sailing

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

day, the pier presented an admirable example of order and dulness. The heap of luggage at the gang-plank never created a problem in transportation; it oozed inboard as soon as the labels were attached. The line of tourists was a line of stragglers; a man here, a man and his wife there; after ten featureless minutes, two women, giggling; after five minutes, another man, with a carton of Mothersill's in his coat pocket and strychnine pills in his interior. There was none of the frenzied joy, or the frenzied sorrow, which Hollister, from his transatlantic travels, had expected; the facial emotion of the passengers could have been duplicated at the runway leading to any suburban train out of the Grand Central Terminal. Hollister gave up in disgust, and wandered into the smoking-room, where he found a native Bermudian of rich complexion, and a vocabulary yearning to be loosed; and there he stayed until Fort Totten was off the starboard quarter, and the atmosphere of the smoking-room was offensive. Thereupon he lunched in solemn dignity, and afterward he vegetated on deck.

He had by this time discovered that the Bermuda packet wasn't even a foster-nephew to a Cunarder. It was more like a tramp freighter carrying passengers to cut down the overhead. The diversions were

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

limited to artistic appreciation of the sea, if any; to hearing, seeing, smelling, and—if the exercise of those functions hadn't blunted the other senses—to reading, talking and eating.

Of artificial means to destroy ennui, Hollister found none at all—not even shuffleboard. Since the passage is too brief to warrant expensive equipment for deck sports, the ragged quoits of a bygone generation hadn't been renovated since Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* and set it in the caves of Hamilton Parish. Besides, there was no one with whom Hollister would have liked to joust. Resignedly he folded himself into his steamer chair, encompassed himself with the blanket and smoked until the terrific moans of an elderly spinster to leeward roused his compassion and sent his cigar drifting down-wind to the sea.

His seat was close to a companionway; presently he knew that some one had ascended the steps and was clinging desperately to the door-frame, and apotheosizing the god of the waters. A fairly heavy sea was running, and the *Devonian* had begun to pitch; Hollister prepared to be diverted by the antics of another amateur to make a landing by means of vigorous tacking. But as the some one didn't gain headway, Hollister was moved to investigate. This

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

brought him into direct communication with the wild eyes of an otherwise meek and colorless man of middle age; a man who, without yielding unconditionally to the prevailing indisposition, was nevertheless in abject fear that he was going to. He clung passionately to the door-frame and gave Hollister the look of a paw-fast animal. Hollister's memory skipped one cylinder and suddenly exploded. He wiggled free from his blanket and steadied himself on his feet. "Why, Mr. Cloud!" he cried cordially. "Where'd *you* come from?"

Ballin's uncle dared the most instantaneous of responsive smiles; his mouth opened and shut with a click; his eyes bulged. As though in full extenuation of his posture and his tactics, he dared one distrustful peep at the rolling waves and shuddered.

"D-down below!" he said, in words unaccented.

Hollister, who in his time had known the friendless sensations which Ballin's uncle was now experiencing, fought off his rising humor.

"Here's a chair right by mine—come on, Mr. Cloud. I'll help you!"

He piloted the unresisting man across a perilous stretch of six feet and deposited him safely. Mr. Cloud emitted an inarticulate murmur, which had in it a faint reminiscence of gratitude, and inhaled very

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

deeply and very rapidly of the curative air. Hollister, realizing the quality of perfect sympathy, didn't bother him—he took his own seat, rewound himself in his rug, and watched the waves roll by; and as he watched he told himself that it was odd—very odd—that from the very inception of his employment, one of Ned Ballin's dinner party had always been in constant attendance upon him. He said to himself that the secret principal of that executory contract must have hired him as a family watch-dog.

In the course of five or ten minutes Mr. Cloud had revived sufficiently to lift his head, and to regard the foreground with less personal animosity. He beckoned weakly to a passing steward, commanded a split of White Seal and a cast-iron biscuit; and when he had assimilated them he more closely approximated the normal condition of mankind. He brushed a malingering crumb from his waistcoat and spoke to Hollister.

"Thank you very much," he said, pulling his yachting cap about his ears. "I stayed below—almost—a *little*—too long." His diction was that of a diffident boy who dreads the sound of his own voice, and so hunts diligently for words, and finds them after agonized search.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Pretty stuffy down there," allowed Hollister.

"Stuffy and—and warm. You're going to Bermuda, too, are you?"

Hollister, who loathed the obvious, would have replied to a younger man: "No; I'm just taking a subway express to Times Square," but in deference to the age of Ballin's uncle, and the kinship of Ballin's uncle to Ned Ballin, he replied: "Why, yes." For the life of him he couldn't help adding, "Are you?"

Mr. Cloud nodded several times, so that his senatorial whiskers blew sidewise and lent him an appearance of great rakishness.

"Yes, I am. I—thought I would. Well—how are you since we—saw you?"

"Fine," confessed Hollister. "How are you?"

"Excellent," said Mr. Cloud, in a burst of confidence, after giving the matter proper consideration. "Where shall you—stay?"

"Why, I'd thought of going to a hotel." He obeyed instructions and didn't say where. "And you?"

"To the Hamilton. It's very—it's so very convenient." He began his expositions as though reticent, and finished them as though he had impulsively decided to make a clean breast.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"You're going to Bermuda, too, are you?"

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Convenient to what, Mr. Cloud? I've never been there, you know."

"Convenient to everything." For a horrible second Ballin's uncle looked both surprised and despairing; and then he took heart again. "To town—to Hamilton."

"I haven't decided where to go yet."

"Try the Hamilton. It's very—convenient." He relapsed into silence and Hollister mercifully held his peace. At length Mr. Cloud gathered impetus and remarked brilliantly: "Convenient to town—and the shops—everything."

Hollister didn't laugh.

"The trip *is* a bit rough, isn't it?"

"Rough!" echoed Mr. Cloud, showing pale terror in his blue eyes. "Wait until we hit the Gulf Stream to-night. I—two years ago I fell out of my bunk. It was the top one, too."

"Ouch! That couldn't have been pleasant."

"No—you're right. The worst of it was that I—well, I almost broke Mr. Hartwell's back."

"*Whose* back?"

"Mr. Hartwell's. We had a cabin together."

"Oh!"

"Mr. Hartwell and I had a sort of partnership—

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

we have one now—in common. We came down here for a week—to talk in peace." Mr. Cloud was gazing at Hollister as though to secure absolution for this sin. "He's a—very capable executive."

"I might have guessed it."

"He has a very powerful will."

"Yes, I imagined so."

"And he's a man of very sound financial ideas."

"He seems able to safeguard his own interests."

"Quite true. I should rather be on his side than —on the other."

"Probably most men would," said Hollister, busied with retrospection.

"You know—Ned told you perhaps—that he's practically engaged—to my sister-in-law?"

"Is that so? Well, he surely deserves to be congratulated," said Hollister.

"Yes. He's much upset at this—separation."

"What separation is that?"

"Why—*this!*"

Hollister caught his breath.

"You don't mean—*she's* with you!"

"Certainly. She and Miss Rexford."

"And—not Mr. Hartwell?"

"No. He's in town."

"Nor Ned, nor Pete Kirby?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"No."

"Just you three?"

"That's all. We're coming down for a month." Hollister was both stupefied and thrilled. Just the three of them! Two days aboard ship—and a month in Bermuda! Time to talk to Ballin's cousin; time to talk to Miss Rexford; time to talk to Mr. Cloud! Time to play detective—to learn all that he was aquiver to understand. And—Ballin's cousin was on board! He composed himself with difficulty.

"It's queer, but—I didn't see you at the dock."

"We were very late. Mr. Hartwell thought we'd missed the boat. And, come to think of it, I don't remember seeing your name on the list. Mr. Hartwell kindly got a copy for us—often we have friends."

"They must have been careless at the booking agency," said Hollister. "I'm all here." He looked out over the tossing waves, gray and chilly. "It's a great afternoon, isn't it?" he said rapturously. "Wonderful!"

Mr. Cloud's eyes bulged and he was temporarily petrified.

"Y-yes," he said, hopeful since his reprieve. "Y-yes—if you think so."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

XII

IT WASN'T until the following day, however, that Hollister caught his first glimpse of Ballin's cousin. In the meantime she hadn't appeared at dinner, nor had she gladdened his heart by her subsequent presence on deck. But at ten o'clock on a sunny November morning, Hollister, coming into the home-stretch on his self-inflicted constitutional of a dozen laps, descried a dainty figure in the bows, and after a little wary skirmishing and scientific reconnoitering, he strode confidently forward and lifted his tweed cap.

"Mrs. Cloud?" he said.

Her pleasure at the congress was no less obvious than his; so that her welcome was doubly delightful to him.

"My brother-in-law had told me you were on board," she said. "So I knew I'd see you sooner or later. But what a coincidence!"

"Isn't it!" he agreed happily.

"We missed you in New York. I thought you'd deserted us for the West."

"No," he corrected. "I said I *might* be sent west.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I said I might be sent anywhere. And then I was sent to Bermuda." He wondered how much she knew of the occurrence at the Aspinwall, and what her analysis had been. "But I don't believe I'll find half so much action down there as I did right in the city."

Her profile was toward him, so that he couldn't be certain if her expression changed appreciably.

"Really? I thought the Aspinwall was stupid!"

"Once I went over a powder mill," said Hollister irrelevantly. "It needed paint and shingles and a glazier and a gang of carpenters—*but!*"

Ballin's cousin laughed softly.

"The only tingle I had in a fortnight was when I thought our room had been robbed. Had you heard about that?"

"*No!*" said Hollister. "Is that a fact?"

"For a while we thought it was. Miss Rexford missed a diamond ring and a pin, but a maid found them, and the manager sent them back to us—at least the ring. The pin she never recovered."

"Is that so? Was it a valuable ring?"

"Oh, yes, indeed—a Tiffany solitaire. It was worth three or four hundred dollars. But it was found the same day. The pin wasn't worth anything, but I'd just given it to her, and she was sweet

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

enough to be more anxious about that than she was about the ring."

"Oh!" said Hollister. "So she got her ring back, did she?" He explored his waistcoat pocket to make sure that the bar-pin was still safe.

"Oh, yes. And the little pin I gave her was just seed pearls and little sapphire chips. So *our* excitement didn't last long."

Hollister realized that if she weren't actually ignorant of his recent star-chamber session, she was a very workmanlike actress. Her look to him was superlatively frank and honest. But the ring Kirby had tested against the window-pane hadn't been a carboniferous product! It had been paste!

"My own experiences weren't exactly that disquieting," he said; "but they were swift enough for *me*. How is it that Ned isn't with you?"

"Oh, he may run down later; he's thinking seriously of it. I hope he does."

"So do I," said Hollister. "Ned's one of the finest fellows I ever met in my life. We were together a lot in Cambridge, you know. And the worst thing anybody could ever say about him was that he never had hard luck enough to be awfully altruistic. He didn't get the point of view of the under-dog. Pete Kirby used to tell him that what he needed was a

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

peck of disaster and the mumps on both sides at the same time. But he certainly has played in luck."

She wasn't altogether pleased at this.

"Don't you think you might have misjudged him, Mr. Hollister?"

Hollister leaned both elbows against the rail and gloried in the fine stinging spray against his cheeks.

"Do *you* think so?"

"Well," said Ballin's cousin, peering ahead at the diving bow, "perhaps you didn't understand Ned. Very few people do. He's ashamed to wear his feelings on his sleeve. And, besides that, he's the proudest man in New York. Why, to see him now, you wouldn't suppose that Ned had a worry in the world!"

"No—because I'm sure he hasn't."

Her smile was enigmatical.

"Then you *did* misjudge him. Ned isn't the happiest man I know."

"But who is? Unless, of course, it's Mr. Hartwell."

Ballin's cousin started perceptibly; and into her eyes came a fugitive light which had its disturbing influence on Hollister.

"Why should you say that?" she asked in an undertone.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Hollister bowed gravely.

"Am I precipitate? I understood from Pete Kirby that Mr. Hartwell had every reason to be the happiest man you know."

She looked at him with misgiving, while the color flooded her cheeks. He realized, without lowering his gaze, that both her hands were gripping the rail more tightly than the motion of the ship required.

"I—I can't pretend not to know what you mean, but—it isn't true! It isn't true!" Her eyes were suddenly dimmed; she turned away from him, and left him speechless, and contrite, and damning his impertinence. He coughed needlessly and thought of various speeches of emendation he might make. None of them seemed adequate. He looked at the girl, whose aspect was alarmingly pathetic. How could he ever, even insensibly, have connected her with guile or chicanery. Why, she was the most transparent child in all the world! And she cried at the mention of Hartwell! Hollister loved her for it.

He shrank from the compulsion of calling her "Mrs." He couldn't force himself to do it. He dodged the prefix and said haltingly: "I'm awfully sorry . . . only I didn't know it was like that. I thought Kirby said . . . if I've made an ass

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

of myself, why I'll go and jump overboard, if you want me to—only *please* don't feel so badly about it! I take it all back—"

Ballin's cousin finally got control of herself.

"It's—it's s-so silly of me—"

"Nothing *you* do could be silly."

In payment for that he had the shadow of a smile; the merest quiver of the lips upward at the corners; but still a harbinger of sunshine. Notwithstanding, he knew instinctively that the morning was spoiled for him; that Ballin's cousin wasn't a girl to unmask her emotions before a comparatively unknown young man. He knew that it was a matter of minutes before she would terminate the conversation; he didn't expect that her excuse would be the untimely arrival of Miss Rexford. But Miss Rexford, good-humored and vivacious, was tramping healthily around the cabins de luxe; and Ballin's cousin, tarrying only until her companion had reached the rail, murmured a futile falsehood and fled incontinently.

Miss Rexford, cheerful and energetic, spoke hearty greetings and said that she also had heard from Mr. Cloud that Hollister was a fellow voyager.

"But it didn't surprise me," she affirmed. "I'm

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

getting old and resigned. Nothing surprises me any more."

Hollister laughed absently, for his thoughts had pursued another girl out of sight—the girl he now knew in his heart to be beyond suspicion.

"By that sort of logic," he argued, "I must be a mere infant. I'm beautifully surprised by almost everything that happens."

Miss Rexford nodded indulgently.

"Let's walk—shall we?" They joined the thin line of promenaders and caught step. "Why, if I ever let myself be affected by quick changes, I wouldn't be here—I'd be in an asylum. Forty-eight hours ago we were bound for Palm Beach. Twenty-four hours ago we'd settled on Hot Springs. Then out of a clear sky—Bermuda."

"*Into* a clear sky, isn't it?" He was blocking out a subtle campaign which would result in her telling him what he most wanted to know.

Miss Rexford affably took the correction.

"So you see," she continued, "I couldn't be very much astonished when I heard you were on the *Devonian*. I haven't time nowadays to react to these suddennesses."

"*I* react so fast I'm dizzy." He resolved to let Miss Rexford wander into ambush.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Although I must say," she went on, "that I understood you were going west instead of south. Something new, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid I'm getting out of my depth," said Hollister. "I hadn't any intention of going west."

Miss Rexford put on speed to pass a swaying couple who had left their center of gravity behind them in Manhattan.

"What *is* the use," she said, "of beating around the bush? I mean—for you and me. I hoped I'd have a chance to talk to you alone, because there's heaps of things you don't appreciate yet. I can do a lot for you, if you'll let me; and you can do a lot for me—and it won't hurt either of us."

After a prolonged quiescence, during which he rejoiced with exceeding thankfulness, Hollister said: "I'm in deeper, Miss Rexford. I'm over my head."

"Oh, don't!" she exclaimed impetuously. "I'm not a schoolgirl—and I wasn't born in Hackensack, either. Are you going to tell me that you're following Mrs. Cloud around because you're in love with her?"

Hollister exclaimed aloud, and stopped in his tracks. His expression was ludicrous; his attempt at denial stuck in his throat and he yammered feebly.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The ambush—to mix metaphors thoroughly—was on the other foot!

"Why, you—why—why, that's the most staggering—"

Miss Rexford laughed lightly.

"Let's keep on walking, shall we? You see, I knew as soon as I saw you at the hotel that you'd be pretty young. I've had a lot of fun studying you. Why, I know what you're going to say almost before *you* do!"

"That's very—interesting," stammered Hollister. He had recovered a large fraction of his poise, but he was still vibrating from this most recent puzzle. He hadn't dreamed that any one could possibly take him for a traveling Lothario. "Well, what *do* you think I'm going to say next?"

Miss Rexford looked at him under her lashes.

"It's about time," she judged, "for you to get indignant—and injured."

"Well—I'm moderately indignant. And if you want the prophecy fulfilled, I'll be injured."

She took his arm to save herself from a loss of balance, and released it to save a loss of dignity.

"But I thought," she said, "that if we really could understand each other, it might save a lot of bickering. I'm willing to be just as outspoken as

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

you are. We might as well—everything's so plain anyway."

"What's plain?"

Her smile wasn't nearly so conciliating.

"Well—if you keep on temporizing, I'll certainly have to take it that you don't want to talk things over."

"I can't talk about a truce when I haven't even begun a war," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, I want to be friendly to every one—especially you." The final touch was an afterthought; but it had its effect.

"Now I can begin to believe you. Tell me, did you take this trip instead of going west this week?"

"As I've already told you, I never had any idea of going west."

"You mean there wasn't enough in it for you?"

"If that's your interpretation, I won't dispute it."

Miss Rexford showed her commendation.

"Well, that's business. I can't criticize you for that. But how did you know *we* were coming to Bermuda? From Ned Ballin?"

"No. As a matter of fact, I didn't know you were coming until I met Mr. Cloud on deck."

"Nonsense!"

"It happens to be the truth," he said rather coolly.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Can you look me straight in the eyes and say that?"

Hollister established the proof.

"I'm not in the habit of lying about inconsequential facts," he said.

Miss Rexford sighed gently.

"Either you're a wonderful prevaricator or else you're frightfully ingenuous," she said, tempering the indictment with a gay little laugh. "Why *did* you take this boat?"

"It was the first one I could get."

"Ned didn't tell you—or Mr. Kirby didn't—that we'd taken passage on it?"

"No one told me."

"If I could possibly believe a word you're saying—"

"Come!" said Hollister, seizing his chance unerringly. "That ought not to be so hard! Why, the White Queen trained herself to believe at least one impossibility a day!—and I've believed much more impossible things about you."

"You *have!*"

"Surely I have. For example, I've believed that you know the son of a duke in disguise."

"What?"

"By all means the son of a duke. Lots of sons of

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

dukes make strange bets—support themselves for a year or something of that sort. Read the magazines, Miss Rexford. Because I can't imagine you bowing to a waiter unless he *was* the son of a duke—can you?"

Miss Rexford gave an involuntary little gasp.

"To—a waiter! Did you say a *waiter?*"

"I hope I did," said Hollister. "That was what I tried to say."

"But—that's so utterly *ridiculous—*"

"So utterly ridiculous," said Hollister, "that it made me quite capable of believing that *any*thing could happen. That's what I've been driving at. I never did like that waiter. He has a nervous affection in his left eye. It opens and closes at queer times. It got my goat. But of course, if his father, the Duke of Diddlebock, disowned him, and he—"

Miss Rexford slowed to a halt, and Hollister naturally stopped, too. They had been walking aft; they paused in the shelter of a lifeboat and fought out an optical battle of short duration.

"It only goes to show that we'd better understand each other *now,*" said Miss Rexford. "There's no use flubbing around at cross purposes like this. *Is* there?"

"No. I subscribe to that, all right."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Then answer me two questions—"

"By all means!" he covenanted. "But let's clear up one point at a time. You explain why you're on winking terms with a hotel waiter, and then—"

Miss Rexford was perplexed.

"Mr. Hollister, I'm not going to be angry at anything you say. There's something back of it. I know you wouldn't deliberately insult me. And it may be that you feel the same way about me. If that's so, we can be friends very soon. But don't make it *impossible* for me to work with you—you've asked something I can't answer. I can't do it, because there isn't any answer. I *haven't* done anything as—as disgusting as you describe! It's absurd on the face of it! And if you think—"

"You dispute it? When we breakfasted together, and Mrs. Cloud and I were getting up, that man didn't give you some sort of signal—and you didn't return it?"

"No, I didn't!"

"I suppose you didn't advise the management that you'd lost a ring, either?"

"Why, I—yes, I did. I lost one—I missed some things—but the chambermaid found them."

"Oh, she did! How sure are you that the chambermaid found them?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I'm sure that was what the manager told me. My things came back through the office."

Hollister explored the recesses of his waistcoat pocket.

"You didn't chance to lose a bar-pin, did you? A little sapphire and pearl pin? I think it was one Mrs. Cloud gave you the night I met you; and how was it that you didn't report *that* loss to the office?"

"Why, I— How did you know—I lost it?"

"Because," said Hollister with alacrity, "it's my very great privilege to return it to you with my compliments—and no hope of a reward." He held out the pin to her. She took it dazedly. "And although nothing surprises you," he pursued, "you may like to know where I found it—on the floor of my room at the Aspinwall. So if you're anxious to hear me answer your questions, suppose you answer mine first. How did it get there?"

Miss Rexford's pupils were very large.

"Is *that* true? You found that pin—in your room?"

"It is."

"Will you play fair?"

"That's what I'm trying to do."

She hesitated.

"Well—I don't *know* how it got there. That's

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the honest truth! You see, it was either stolen, or I lost it, that very morning. It has a bad clasp—see? I put it on before breakfast, and then it was gone. I don't understand how it could possibly have got into your room. I don't understand it at *all!*"

Hollister grinned.

"Want to hear my theory?"

"Surely I do."

"All right—here goes! You know what a frame-up is?"

"Why—yes, in a way."

"For some reason," said Hollister, "your friend Mr. Hartwell doesn't like my style of beauty, and for some reason he wanted to hinder me for a few days. What he thinks I am, I don't know. But when he couldn't hire me to get out of town, he just naturally figured he'd keep me too busy ducking to have time for anything else. So he tried to frame me. He took his own bill-book, and some jewelry—some of it he borrowed from you—and he had it planted in my room, so when it was found, I'd look like a cheap crook. And as nearly as I can make out, your waiter with the bad eye was wig-wagging you that the plant was made—and then you told Hartwell, and he tipped off the management. The house detectives raided my room, and there you are! For-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

tunately for me, the scheme didn't work. And even more fortunately, your diamond ring is paste, or I *would* have been in trouble. Now I don't expect you to tell me all about it, but if you'll simply explain why your friend Hartwell is on my trail, I may tell *you* something."

Miss Rexford had lost a moiety of her color.

"You said—my ring is paste? And it was found in your room, too?"

"It certainly is, and I can prove it."

"Now—listen!" implored Miss Rexford. "I want to have all this smoothed over. From the very beginning. So let's start there. On my word of honor, I lost that pin and that ring the same morning. I telephoned down to the office about the ring. The pin—well, that wasn't worth enough to complain about, so I didn't. The ring came back—that night—but the pin didn't. They told me a maid found the ring and took it to the office. Now, about Mr. Hartwell. I met him only three weeks ago. I'm not a friend of his. I'm chaperoning Mrs. Cloud, so of course I've seen something of him. All I know about his private affairs is what he's discussed in public. I haven't the slightest knowledge of how those things got in your room, and I'd swear to it on a stack of Bibles as high as the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Woolworth Building. Now for the waiter. As a matter of fact, I'm a sort of secretary for Mrs. Cloud, too. I pay small bills for her, and things like that. He was simply thanking me for the tip I'd given him, and if I did anything back, it was nothing but the thing anybody does after being thanked. You incline your head. If he winked, I didn't see it. That's absolutely all there is about it. Absolutely!"

"Then *what* did you mean," he asked quizzically, "by saying that we've got to have an understanding?"

"Merely that I'm Mrs. Cloud's companion, and I'm looking out for her. That's what I'm paid for. If you told me enough so that I felt safe, I wouldn't put any obstacles in the way of your seeing her sometimes. But one or two people who know how you were living a week or two ago wondered why you were suddenly interested in us. And I told you perfectly frankly that I'd heard that you were hunting for an heiress. So if you *did* have any real business connection, I wouldn't bother about you; but if you didn't, I might have to protect Mrs. Cloud and make sure that you couldn't see her alone. That's all."

"How is it you happened to ask me if I was going west—to Vancouver or Seattle?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I might just as well have said Denver or Spokane. It was pure chance."

Hollister shook his head in doubt.

"It certainly is a coincidence."

She looked at him whimsically. A faint light glowed in her eyes, and dulled.

"You—you talk as though you think I—I'm fibbing to you."

"I merely said it's a coincidence, Miss Rexford. Another one is that half an hour ago Mrs. Cloud told me what a fuss you made about losing a pin she'd given you. Now you say it wasn't worth mentioning. And the ring you *did* mention was paste!"

Miss Rexford wilted.

"It's not the easiest thing in the world to—to have to swallow anything like that."

Hollister saw that she was crying, and his first sensation was of revulsion. The sunny morning had already brought him one feminine shower, and he wasn't particularly desirous of another. He wondered dumbly if Mr. Cloud would also cry when they met in the smoking-room.

"I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings," he said bluntly. "But you wanted to talk—so I talked."

Her shoulders were shaking dangerously.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"If I only had *one* f-friend—I could talk to," she sobbed. "Everybody else has—and I'm all alone—and you th-think I've done something w-wicked—I *know* you do—"

Hollister cleared his throat.

"I merely asked questions."

"B-but—how can I *help* it?"

Her hand was working fitfully on the rail. Hollister, wishing that he had the colossal impudence to tell her to buck up and not act like a child, adopted the traditional method of calming a girl in the first stages of hysterics. He patted that hand, and said incoherent phrases, each containing a request not to mind anything. His index finger encountered a high-set stone; and at the contact, Hollister was alert and expectant. He bent lower, and drew in his breath with a sharp intake. The solitaire Miss Rexford was wearing wasn't the one Kirby had tried against the glass of the manager's window. The stone was larger, the setting was different.

"Gosh!" he whispered.

Miss Rexford sniffled feebly and gradually became calm. Hollister ceased his massage and waited patiently for the next step.

"There!" said Miss Rexford, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief composed of five cents'

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

worth of linen and five dollars' worth of lace. "Aren't we silly, though?"

Hollister grinned to find himself included in the characterization.

"Oh, not so very," he decided.

"You know—I'm awfully upset about—everything. You wouldn't believe *half* I could tell you—and I've just been silly, that's all. Why, anybody could tell from *looking* at you that *you* aren't horrid—and I don't know why I've made such a fuss this morning. Only I *do* have to look out for Mrs. Cloud. Can't we forget this whole thing and start in over again—to be friends?"

"That's what I want to do," said Hollister. "I've assumed from the start that—that whoever stole those things from you was hunting in my room when he heard a noise, and lost his nerve and skipped—dropping his plunder. I hadn't any right to give *you* the third degree. But I did want to know about Mr. Hartwell—"

"Let's not talk about him any more, please. I'm tired. Let's walk."

Straightway he was conscious of a great change in her manner toward him. At the outset of their walk, she had been direct, outspoken, practical. Now she had suddenly veered about; her attitude

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

was wholly feminine; and more than that, she assumed in her next few remarks the air of a slightly superior person in conversation with a young boy. She washed her hands of the whole subject of their earlier talk, and refused to protract it further. Hollister was enlivened, and at the same time resentful —and he judged shrewdly that she had attempted to pump him, and, having failed, found little further attraction in him. Also, she wasn't quick enough on the trigger to extemporize; and when she was cornered, she followed the line of least resistance, wept, and changed the subject. But—wouldn't the natural thing have been for her to leave him at his first insinuation? How many other girls would have remained after that one volley? Why had she remained? That was what flabbergasted Hollister.

But she said she wanted to be friendly; and in a few minutes the two were seated in adjoining steamer chairs, talking more or less at random, and disconnectedly. They were engaged in a discussion of no moment, and Hollister was secretly bored, when Mr. Cloud came unsteadily around the cabins and tottered to anchor before them.

Mr. Cloud had got his sea-legs, and he was willing to talk about them. Furthermore, he was willing to smoke a cigar as a declaration of his independence

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

of Poseidon. He asked Miss Rexford if she were opposed, and like the majority of men who propound this query, he was completely taken aback when she feared that temporarily she was. But she said solemnly that she adored solitude, and she freely presented Hollister to Ballin's uncle, and told them to go and smoke in the room consecrated to that particular habit. For herself, she would be quite happy if provided with a tablet of paper and a stylus.

The smoking-room was close by. Hollister borrowed a block of thin paper from the incumbent, and gave Miss Rexford his own pencil. He arranged her rug, hoped she was comfortable, won a smile of thanks and joined Mr. Cloud, who was still boasting loudly of his immunity.

It was perhaps three-quarters of an hour afterward that Hollister, having assisted Ballin's uncle below and turned him over to the ship's doctor, went to resume his tête-à-tête with Miss Rexford. She wasn't where he had left her; she wasn't on deck. The blanket was in her chair; the block of thin paper and the hard drawing pencil were resting among the upper folds. Hollister picked them up, and was conscious that the top page of the tablet bore deep indentations, caused by the necessarily firm pressure of the lead to counteract the motion of the boat.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY