

*For these bonds worth millions,
Warburton intended to sacrifice
his honor and his home—little
realizing his wife also
had her plans*

"My bonds, damn you," growled Steve

The Wild Man of Cape Cod

By FRED MacISAAC

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FROM the wreck of his father's great fortune, there remained to Steve Cobb one possession of real value—a block of an early issue of Cobb Concrete Company bonds. Valuable as they are to Steve, they are even more so to William Warburton, present controller and owner of the Cobb Company. Warburton anxious to possess this single holding, is willing to buy or procure it at almost any cost and by any means, fair or foul.

Warburton sends his "trouble man," Frank Hutton, to obtain the bonds, who is accidentally killed by Steve, during their desperate fight. Leaving his shack, Steve swims out to sea late at night with Hutton's corpse. On returning, he finds that his place has been ransacked. And the bonds have been removed from their hiding place! Steve makes his way to the Warburtons' home, attempts to retrieve the bonds, and is surprised by Warburton, who almost shoots him; but Steve man-

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ages to leave unharmed—without the bonds.

Meanwhile, Hutton's body has been found, and the Massachusetts authorities begin an investigation. The police try to arrest Steve and he fights them off; but in the midst of their broil, Steve and his assailants are surprised by the appearance of an unknown group of ruffians, who knock out Steve and spirit him away.

When Steve regains his consciousness, he realizes that he is on the yawl, Emerald, owned by Jack Clews, friend of Mrs. Warburton. Steve learns that Clews and Mrs. Warburton have the bonds and they proposition him to dispose of the bonds through them. But he will have none of their double-dealing, jumps off the boat, and swims back to shore.

Steve is in Cobbport when he accidentally encounters a small band of kidnappers who are making off with Warburton's daughter, Lucinda—a charming young girl to whom Steve is attracted. Steve follows the kidnappers in a car, rescues Lucinda from them, and sees that she is in safe hands. Steve returns to Cobbport—with the police of the state on his trail.

CHAPTER XX.

TWO HEROES ARE REWARDED.

LUCINDA Warburton awoke in a strange bed in a hotel in Plymouth.

There was a nurse in starched white sitting by her bedside. The sun was pouring in through two large windows which were open so she could hear the roar of the surf piling up on the beach without.

The nurse was bending over her instantly.

"How do you feel, Miss Warburton?" she asked anxiously.

Lucinda smiled up at her. "Not bad. I have a slight headache and I'm hungry." She shuddered. "How did I get here? Where is this place? Where are those horrible men?"

"They're gone. Everything is fine. You're in the Pilgrim Hotel. Your father is downstairs waiting to see you."

"I thought maybe it had been a nightmare. Was I actually carried off?"

"You owe your rescue to two splendid police officers," said the nurse. "The whole story is in the morning papers."

"They pulled me out of my bed and took me into a car and I knew I was being kidnapped," said Lucinda sitting up and much excited. "As we left the estate I saw General Burton and Steve Cobb. I

yelled at them and the men choked me and then they gave me chloroform. I suppose it was chloroform."

"You were unconscious when the officers found you," explained the nurse. "There was a terrific battle, two of the criminals are dead and two are badly wounded. One of them escaped. He's a murderer. The whole police force of the State are in pursuit of him. Imagine two policemen attacking five desperate criminals."

"I kind of hoped that Steve Cobb would rescue me," said Lucinda plaintively. "He's so big and strong—"

"Steve Cobb! Did you say Steve Cobb?"

"Yes."

"But he's the murderer. The head kidnapper."

"You must be crazy," said Lucinda. "Steve wouldn't kidnap me. He doesn't like me enough." She grinned wryly. "And how can he be a murderer? Steve wouldn't kill anybody. Besides, I saw him on the road with the General."

"I don't know anything about this General, but most likely he was the 'lookout'," said the nurse knowingly. "Criminals always have a 'lookout.' He joined them after they chloroformed you."

"I'd like to see my father," said Lucinda. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"I'll go fetch him," replied the nurse crossly. "I guess you must be delirious."

There was an interesting scene taking place in the sitting room of the suite taken by William Warburton on the floor below. The Mayor of Plymouth was there and the manager of the hotel and the local chief of police and officers Nutley and Brown of Plymouth County.

Officers Nutley and Brown were the pair who had taken Lucinda to Plymouth after being disarmed by Steve Cobb. They were a couple of shrewd Yankees who had been deeply humiliated by their treatment and in no mood to blazon to the world a true narrative of their experience.

They knew that they would be dismissed from the force if they confessed that they

had been put to flight by a single crook, but, as officer Nutley pointed out as they drove along with the unconscious Lucinda between them, there were no witnesses of their disgrace.

"Nobody's going to believe that thief," said Nutley. Here's a kidnapped girl and if she wasn't awful rich, she wouldn't have been kidnapped. Them yeggs back there don't know what struck them, judging by the way they got bowled over. What's to stop us from claiming we did it?"

"This big fellow."

"We take the girl to a doctor and go back and straighten things up there. Take the wounded kidnappers in as prisoners. We cleaned them up, see. This car thief came along and beat it when we recognized the stolen car. We couldn't chase him because we got the girl to think about."

"When he's pinched he'll tell a different yarn."

"It's two against one. What have we got to lose?"

THEY picked up a doctor a few miles along the road who accompanied them into Plymouth. They returned immediately to the scene of the battle and to their delight found their weapons where Steve had dropped them in the ditch alongside of the dead and injured kidnappers. Thus fortified they went back to Plymouth, told their tale and were now reaping the benefit. An alarm had gone out for the fleeing car thief, as a result of a phone call from the doctor's residence and the description given was recognized by the wounded State officer Noonan at Cobbport as the murder suspect and fugitive Steve Cobb. That Cobb was wanted for murder gave the cops assurance in their version of the affair.

"You may admit the newspaper men," said William Warburton as he rose from his chair. Immediately the door was opened and there filed in three reporters and two camera men.

"Take seats, gentleman," said Mr. Warburton in an urbane manner. He had returned to his residence after two

hours of aimless driving about Cape Cod roads to be informed that Lucinda was safe in Plymouth after a heroic rescue. He had packed a bag and started immediately north. He was arrayed in sharply creased English flannel trousers, and a natty blue coat. He was freshly shaved, and his ruddy color and mustache gave him the appearance of a benevolent aristocrat, a master of men and money and he was about to do something most unusual in the type he represented, something requiring an audience, reporters and cameras. He was going to give away money.

"Gentlemen," he said, "a dreadful outrage has been committed. My only daughter was torn from her home in Cobbport by dastardly criminals, drugged, and an attempt made to take her to some criminal hangout in Boston. In these days of lawlessness and unrest, of banditry and brigandage, the only protection to honest people is the police. At times it seems as if the police are an inadequate instrument of defense.

"It gives me all the more pleasure to testify that upon this occasion they have been magnificently efficient.

"The kidnappers were pursued by officers Nutley and Brown, two young men following a dangerous profession with stout hearts. They overtook five armed bandits and unhesitatingly attacked them. When their guns were empty they fought on with a motor jack and their fists. They killed two of the criminals, severely injured two others and only one escaped.

"Thanks to them my beloved daughter is safe upstairs, sleeping like a child." His voice trembled. "I shudder to think of what her fate might have been. How many kidnapped persons have been slain by the miscreants into whose hands they have fallen. My gratitude to these brave policemen is beyond expression.

"Words are inadequate. And words cannot repay these men for what they have done for me. I have here two checks for one thousand dollars each. They are yours, Messrs. Nutley and Brown. Thank you and God bless you."

He handed the checks to the delighted officers and sat down, his feelings overcoming him. There was a clapping of hands. The fortunate policemen pocketed their money and departed. From their standpoint, so far so good.

One of the reporters rose.

"I'm Hammond of the Boston *Herald*, Mr. Warburton," he said. "There are features of this affair which puzzle me. May I ask you a few questions?"

"Certainly, young man," said Warburton benignly.

"There were five kidnappers," he said, "but one of them was traveling in a stolen Packard roadster, the others were in a touring car."

THE officers explained that. "This man was accompanying them in an extra car in case of accidents. When the touring car had a blow-out, he drove up alongside to help them change their tire."

"I understand that. He fled down the Cape and escaped somehow. But State officer Noonan says that the description given of him answers to that of Stephen Cobb accused of murder in Cobbport."

"So I'm informed."

"I went to school with Steve Cobb, Mr. Warburton. I can't see him either as a kidnapper or murderer."

"Frankly," replied Warburton. "I'm astonished myself."

"He is the son of Ezra Cobb who formerly owned the Cobb Concrete Company which you now control."

"I don't see the point of your questions, young man."

"From what I gather, this man, Hutton, he is accused of killing worked for you."

"That's true," said Warburton whose urbanity rapidly was evaporating.

"What was the message he was taking from you to Steve Cobb, sir?"

The mayor rose. "Really, Mr. Warburton, I must apologize for this questionnaire. I hope you don't think I knew when I requested that reporters be admitted—"

But Warburton was in control of himself.

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"I have no objection to answering that question. I sent Hutton to offer Mr. Cobb the post of sales-manager of the reorganized Cobb company."

"Say," cried Hammond excitedly. "Then you respected Steve. You wanted to give him his old job back."

"Right."

"I'm hanged if I see any reason for his killing a fellow who brought him good news."

"Nor do I," said Warburton dryly. "I think the charge is absurd. I don't know how Hutton met his death, but I feel confident that it was not at the hands of the son of my old friend Ezra Cobb."

Hammond gazed triumphantly at the other reporters. "Now ain't that something?" he demanded. "Say, Mr. Warburton, you're okay. Much obliged."

After necessary amenities with the other visitors, Warburton was left alone and wiped away sweat which had broken out on his brow. He was much mystified at the apparent connection of Steve Cobb with the kidnapping since.

CHAPTER XXI.

WARBURTON GETS A SHOCK.

IT was the first time in Warburton's career he had to call in a murder monger—Hutton had always done his dirty work—and the kick back had been frightful. Fifty thousand dollars would have gone into criminal hands for the theft of the bonds and the assassination of Steve Cobb, and failing in their job they had intended to make him pay fifty thousand for the release of his daughter, perhaps twice that much. And he would have paid.

It was to his interest to have Steve Cobb at large rather than in police hands which explained why he had answered the reporter's questions. But Cobb at large was a menace. Cobb dead before Warburton had the bonds in his hands was unthinkable—as part of an estate, they would be tied up for months and Warburton and Company couldn't stand a delay of months.

The nurse entered. "Miss Warburton is awake and wants to see you," she stated. "Coming."

He followed her upstairs. Lucinda, blooming like a rose and smiling, lay on the bed half sitting up against her pillows.

"Father," she explained. "I'm so glad you're here. Were you horribly worried?"

"I almost expired of anxiety," he replied, taking both her hands and gazing fondly down upon her. Warburton loved his daughter as much as he could anybody except himself and he was tremendously proud of her because she was beautiful.

"The nurse told me the most preposterous thing," she declared. "She said Steve Cobb was identified as one of the kidnappers."

"That's what the police say."

"It's absurd. I saw them. There were four men. We passed General Burton and Steve Cobb as the car turned into the beach road and I shouted for help. I saw the General first—Steve was in the shadow and before I could call to him, they covered my mouth."

"A man answering Cobb's description accompanied them in another car," he informed her, "that is according to the police. He took to flight when the officers attacked his companions."

"Why do you hate him?" she demanded with a curious sparkle in her eyes.

"My dear child, he hates me. He harbors rancor because I beat his father in a business battle. He broke into my house, made love to my wife—"

"I don't believe it," she said bluntly. "He's not like that. I know."

"But you heard Diana say—"

"I don't believe a word she says about anything. Father—why do you put up with that woman? She doesn't love you—she treats you horribly—"

"Lucinda—there, there, dear, you are strained and nervous. Some other time we'll discuss Diana. I've made friendly overtures to this cub and I've been insulted for my pains."

"Either it wasn't Steve Cobb in the other car or if it was, he was trying to rescue me," she said firmly. "They have no right to accuse him of being a kidnapper. And what did the nurse mean by saying he is a murderer?"

"An attempt was made to arrest him for the murder of a man named Hutton, an—er—employee of mine and he was taken from the officers by outlaws, members of a gang he belongs to according to the State police."

"The Mr. Hutton who was at the house the other night? Is he dead?"

"His body was found at sea the next day, dear."

"Why are they persecuting Steve? He is the most harmless person—"

"He assaulted me in my own house, Lucinda," said her father sternly.

"But it was because you were going to shoot him, because you thought he and Diana—"

"We must cease this discussion. Are you able to return to Cobbport today?"

She nodded. "I'm all right. I can start any time. Father, I've a feeling I'd still be in those men's hands, if it had not been for Steve."

There was a flicker in Warburton's eyes. "Look here. Are you in love with this fellow?" he demanded.

"Certainly not!" she exclaimed angrily. "He's absolutely hateful but—but—if I were in trouble, he might be grand."

The nurse came into the room. "A phone call for you, sir, from Woods Hole. Will you take it here?"

He hesitated. "No, switch it to the apartment below. We'll start back in an hour or two, Lucinda, if you feel up to it."

"I'll be quite up to it," she replied.

Warburton went below and picked up the phone.

"Warburton speaking," he said. "Who is this, please?"

"John Clews, Mr. Warburton."

"Clews, eh? How did you know where I was and what do you want?" he demanded gruffly.

"Phoned your house and Mrs. Warbur-

ton said you were there. Regarding what I want, I have bonds to sell."

"Communicate with my office in New York. I'm vacationing on Cape Cod."

CLEWS chuckled. "Cobb Company first issue, six per cents. Interested?" he asked softly.

Warburton gripped the back of the chair against which he was standing until the knuckles turned white. "You mean—"

"Precisely."

"Er— May I ask how they came into your possession?"

"As legitimately as your possession of the Cobb Company, Mr. Warburton."

"If you can show a clear title, I am interested."

"Have they caught this murderer Cobb, yet?" asked Clews with apparent inconsequence.

"I don't know."

"Let's hope they don't. I'm sailing into Cobbport this afternoon. Will you be at home at eleven this evening?"

"Yes. Care to state your price?"

"Half of everything you've got," said Clews and hung up the receiver upon a man who looked as though he were going to have apoplexy.

Warburton sank slowly to a chair.

Clews, the yachtsman, owner of the green yawl Emerald which had been entering and leaving Cobbport for several days and apparently had no business there. Clews, the unscrupulous broker and promoter. How had Clews learned of the existence of the bonds. A leak in the Warburton office? Nobody but the auditor and himself knew the peculiar features of the bonds, not even his partners? The presence of Steve Cobb in the village had brought Clews there as it had brought Warburton.

Had Hutton secured the bonds from Cobb and had been waylaid and knocked on the head by Clews? That would explain why Cobb had broken into Warburton's house—he had missed his securities and assumed that Warburton had stolen them. It was a plausible theory.

Warburton clapped his hands together

with a loud smack. Why, it explained the rescue of Cobb from the police. The men from the yawl. With Steve at large to prove ownership, Clews couldn't sell the bonds. Had he forced Cobb to make them over to him? Remembering the solidity of Steve's jaw, Warburton doubted that.

It was probable that Clews was bluffing. Cobb was a fugitive and, if he had made a deal with the broker, he would have remained in the yawl to avoid arrest. Instead Cobb was roaming the countryside, stealing cars, mixing up with kidnappers. If, in the small hours of this morning Cobb had been seen outside Plymouth, he certainly could not be on board the yawl at Woods Hole.

Warburton lighted a cigar and walked up and down the room. The game wasn't up. Clews, backed by Cobb, would hold out for millions and Warburton would have to pay. But if he could get the securities away from Clews, and one of these Cape Cod officers shot Steve Cobb, the house of Warburton and Company was stronger than ever before.

With all his speculations regarding the source of Clews' knowledge, it never occurred to William Warburton to suspect Diana. He knew that Clews was an acquaintance of hers but he was not aware that she had been visiting the yawl. He had been sound asleep when she slipped out in the night before and had been awakened half an hour later by the hundred year old General Burton who was insistently ringing the doorbell.

HE had to get back to Cobbport as soon as possible. He phoned downstairs.

"Tell my chauffeur to bring the car round," he commanded, "and send up my bill."

If there was some way of reaching an agreement with Steve Cobb. He remembered the vehemence of Lucinda. She was interested in the fellow. Cobb must reciprocate if the child had any foundation to her theory that he was concerned in her rescue. Why not? The lad was decent

and came of a fine family. Suddenly he blushed.

There came back to him the words of a dead man found floating on the surface of the Atlantic.

"You figured you had a couple of vamps to sic on him. Which do you use, your wife or your daughter?"

He ought to have shot the scoundrel dead in his tracks, only he was very useful. He deserved what had happened to him the same night, the hound.

After a minute, Warburton phoned downstairs. "If they are still about, please send officers Nutley and Brown over here," he requested.

"The car is here, sir."

"Let it wait."

It was a very different sort of Warburton whom the heroic policemen encountered when they entered the scene of their recent triumph.

"I want no nonsense and no lies from you fellows," he said harshly. "A witness of the affair of the Cape Cod road has turned up."

The alarm and embarrassment of the officers was all Warburton needed to inform him that their report of the rescue of Lucinda was incomplete.

Officer Brown shot a glance of terror at Nutley. Nutley's face grew red and he shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

"You may keep those checks and what you tell me will be in confidence," said the financier. "But I want the truth. Speak out."

Brown looked beseechingly at Nutley. Nutley coughed loudly.

"We had to do it, sir," he pleaded, "or we'd have lost our jobs."

"Tell me exactly what happened and tell the truth."

"You won't let it go no farther, sir?"

"No."

"Well, the fact is, when we came up, this big feller had knocked out all four of them. He hit them with the motor jack."

"That's what I thought. Go on."

"He told us who the lady was and asked us to take her to the doctor.

"Just then I noticed the Packard he was driving and it was one that had been stolen down near Hyannis. I asked him about it and he pulled a gun. Thinking he had rescued the girl, see, we didn't have our guns in our hands. Well, he took them away from us and made us drive on with the lady.

"When we come back after him we found our guns where he had thrown them and Joe and me, we decided, seeing he was a crook—"

"To pose as a couple of heroes," Warburton sneered. "Get the hell out of here."

He went upstairs to Lucinda.

"Child," he said, "I've just got the truth out of those policemen. Your friend Steve stole a car, gave chase to the kidnapers, attacked them single handed—"

"Oh, father," cried Lucinda. She flung herself at him, kissed him violently and burst into tears. He stroked her hair.

"He's a most remarkable young man," he said. "I agree with you that the murder charge is absurd. In fact I have a notion who did kill Hutton. I have no objection whatever to your friendship with Steve Cobb when his reputation is cleared up."

"You are the most adorable father in the world," she exclaimed.

Warburton had the grace to color.

"Ready to go now?"

"Uh, huh," she said, wiping her eyes. Her face lengthened. "Trouble is he is very nasty to me. He's perfectly rotten." Suddenly she smiled. "Just the same, if he chased those criminals forty miles and fought four of them on account of me, probably he thinks I'm pretty nice at that."

"Of course he does," said Warburton.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNDER THE EAVES.

STEVE COBB woke up in a bed about the time Lucinda Warburton was awaking from her drugged sleep in Plymouth. He had slept so heavily that

it was hard to resume the business of being awake. Sunlight was pouring through a small circular window and for a moment he thought it was a porthole and he was back on Clews' yawl, a prisoner.

During the past forty-eight hours his physical exertions had been tremendous and he had had almost no rest. By the brightness of the sun, he judged it to be mid-morning. He stretched luxuriously, yawned and sat up. He grinned as everything came back and he recognized his bed chamber. He was in the topmost attic of the Ezra Cobb residence, now the home of William Warburton. In this attic, rubbish had been accumulating for thirty or forty years.

The place was half filled with old trunks, with boxes, and broken furniture. He was laying in a four poster bed but one of the posts had been broken off. The mattress was made of straw and there was no bedding but Steve had covered himself with an extremely dusty rug he had pulled off the floor. There were cobwebs across the window pane. There were cobwebs on the walls and ceiling, and there was a musty aroma. He sneezed and dust came out of his nostrils.

The events of the night came crowding back, the battle in his hut, the incidents on the yawl, the six mile swim, the theft of the car, the kidnapping of Lucinda, the terrific fight on the Plymouth road, the leap to the New York boat, his departure from it and his arrival in Cobbport.

"No wonder I was tired," said Steve aloud. He wasn't afraid to speak out. This attic was under the eaves of the huge house—it was a storeroom, probably not yet discovered by the Warburtons, and nobody was in the least likely to visit it.

As a child, Steve had played in this funny old attic. There were all sorts of interesting things in the trunks; junk, of course, but interesting to an inquiring boy.

He got up and peered out of the high circular window from which there was a view of the port. The yawl hadn't returned.

By this time the whole state of Massachusetts was looking for Steve Cobb, but

about the last place in which the police would look would be the home of William Warburton.

He had secured admission to the house shortly after sunrise by the same kitchen window through which he had entered before and he had made his way immediately to Mrs. Warburton's chamber. Diana would know where the yawl had gone and if and when it was coming back. But the room was empty and the mistress of the house had gone. He knew she had returned just before the kidnapping of Lucinda and she must have sailed away on the yawl within an hour or two. It looked as if she had finally departed from the bed and board of William Warburton.

Her bed had been turned down and rumpled as though she had lain in it for a brief period and Steve had an almost irresistible urge to lay down upon it and rest. He was about finished physically. Half an hour or an hour's rest would do so much for him. He moved toward it and had strength to stop. If he closed his eyes he probably wouldn't open them for many hours and then he would find himself in the hands of the enemy. But he must sleep. He couldn't go on.

And suddenly he remembered the attic, remembered there was a broken down bed up there. It was most unlikely anybody would go up there and it would never occur to search Warburton's house for the man accused of killing Warburton's friend.

There was no lock on the door of the attic, but he lifted a heavy trunk and pushed it against the inside of the door and he had had a delicious sleep, five or six hours at least. Unfortunately there was no running water in the place and he couldn't wash. Stripping he gave himself a dry rub and massaged himself as well as he could and felt refreshed. He was, however, ravenously hungry. Nothing could be done about that. It would be madness to show himself. And he had to hide in this place until night.

He went back and lay down on the bed. His reflections were bitter. The predicament in which he found himself was the

result of having parked his brains and indulged his muscles since his arriving at Cape Cod. Having in his possession property of great value, he had been too indolent to put it in a place of safety.

On the other hand, if the bonds had been locked in a vault, his own life would still have been in danger. Steve had no close relatives. If he died the bonds would go to distant cousins who would have gladly sold them to Warburton for what would seem a reasonable offer.

HE hadn't thought much about the manner in which he would use them against the despoiler of his father—in fact the philosophy of General Burton had so numbed him that he didn't think about them at all. Warburton's anxiety to eliminate their menace had stirred things up. It had amused Steve to refuse the man's offers to purchase—he expected to have a lot of fun watching the fellow wriggle and stew.

If only he had called in Chief Eben Cobb, told the truth about the death of Hutton and put the bonds in the bank next morning—well, there was no sense in worrying about his mistakes. Tonight he'd take the field again. Maybe the yawl would return. He wondered how Lucinda was. Probably all right and more beautiful than ever—funny how that kid had got under his skin, made him forget everything except her peril. Had the kidnappers been taken to a hospital?—of course they had—if he had killed them all, death would have been too good for them. How had the chauffeur and his girl friend come out. He hoped the poor devils wouldn't lose their jobs.

Steve was asleep again, sleeping more heavily than ever. Many hours passed and he slept on. He didn't hear the turning of the doorknob, nor the effort to push open the door. He didn't even hear the trunk slithering across the floor. When he slept, he slept.

What woke him was a warm moist softness against his lips. He opened his eyes and looked into a pair of amazingly beauti-

ful dark ones. There was a flushed lovely face close to his and a weight on his chest.

Steve sat up so suddenly and violently that Diana Warburton was flung backwards. Their foreheads had come into collision and one of her hands covered her left temple.

"You brute!" she exclaimed. Then she smiled. "You adorable brute!"

Steve looked about wildly. She was alone. The trunk had been pushed away but the door had been closed. He grinned wickedly.

"Taking advantage of me, eh?"

"Such a surprise, sweetheart," she murmured. She wore a house dress of black with yellow trimming.

After all, he thought, he had come to this house to find this woman and squeeze information from her. Daylight had imprisoned him in this attic and fate had sent her to him since he couldn't go in search of her.

"Listen, you beautiful thief in the night," he said grimly, "cut out the sentiment. You're as cold blooded as a fish and as unscrupulous as a hyena. How did you happen to come up to this attic?"

She smiled. "I love attics. I've been intending to explore this one for days."

"Where were you last night?" he demanded. "Where's the yawl?"

"My dear boy, I'm so glad to see you. I almost died when you jumped overboard. I didn't believe anybody could reach the shore. Why did you treat us like that, Steve? We're your friends. Your only friends."

"Yes? Have you heard from Lucinda?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, the brat's all right. She's in her room below. She's babbling about your heroism."

"She is? How did she know I—"

"No other human being could possibly have attacked four armed men and smashed them to pieces. I positively adore you, Steve. I worship you."

"Yeh. Suppose you hand over my bonds."

"Your bonds?" she asked as though astonished.

"Stow that. You and Clews stole my bonds. They were no good to you without me, so you kidnapped me from the police. After Clews had me knocked on the head and thrown overboard, he would get together with your murderer of a husband and do business."

"STEVE," she cried. "You're mad! Why all we wanted was to have you work with us. Why, I love you."

"Pshaw, you love Clews and your husband, for all I know. You're a thoroughly selfish and wicked woman and I've had enough of your nonsense. Give me my bonds."

"I haven't got them," she said sullenly.

"Then Clews has them."

She didn't answer.

"Where's the yawl?"

"I left it this morning in Woods Hole."

"Humph. You're not home much."

"As little as possible," she said shortly.

He eyed her malevolently.

"Why don't you beat me?" she demanded. "I'd love it."

Steve rose from the bed and walked to the door and pushed the trunk in position against it.

"All I have to do is to scream," she stated coolly.

"You're playing with Clews against your husband," he replied. "So you don't want me to fall into Warburton's hands and you don't want the police to get me. Go ahead and scream."

She placed her hands behind her head, pushed herself over on the bed and leaned back against the wall. She smiled at him bewitchingly.

"I love being up here alone with you," she said ardently. "Why should I rouse the household?"

"You beat the world!" he cried, perplexed and not unmoved.

She stretched out her arms.

"Obey that impulse. Come over here and kiss me, beloved."

"I'm much more likely to choke you," he said angrily. "Now you listen, Diana. Your husband is responsible for my father's

death. I'll make no truce with him. If I ever saw scoundrel, Jack Clews is one. I'll do no business with him. And, knowing you as I do, you couldn't vamp me if you were ten times as attractive."

Diana pursed her lips suggestively. Steve turned away his head. The hot blood coursed through his veins. A man may hate and despise a woman but acknowledge her physical charm.

"You remind me of a fox telling the hounds where they get off," she said sardonically. "Don't forget, my friend, that you killed a man and are wanted by the police. We have your bonds. Without them you can't injure my husband. You haven't money enough to hire a lawyer. The bonds are negotiable. I doubt if you could prove ownership. Anyway, if Warburton buys them from us, retires them as of six months back, and produced evidence that you sold them to him at that time, the word of a condemned murderer won't be believed against that of William Warburton. You're on a spot."

STEVE gazed at her sullenly. He recognized the logic of what she said. Unfortunately Mrs. Warburton didn't know when to stop talking.

"Steve," she said. "You're young and magnificent but you're a bit stupid. Clews is an old acquaintance and you remember the other night on the yawl—there's no sentimental relationship between us. I owe him nothing. I learned about the bonds. I made Clews accompany me to your house that night and I sent him to rescue you from the gangsters Warburton imported to take you to New York where you could be tortured into doing business with him. He went in because he saw money for himself. We don't need him. Suppose you and I form a partnership. We'll leave here tonight, phone Warburton that we are together and make him pay us a million, maybe more, for the bonds."

Steve's smile was bland. He walked to the window, took down the long knotted rope which hung on a nail beside it and to serve as a fire escape.

"What on earth are you doing?" she demanded. "Listen to me."

STEVE pounced upon her. One big hand covered her mouth and pressed her down on the bed. He pulled the handkerchief from her belt, pried open her lower jaw and thrust the handkerchief into the mouth. While her eyes hurled darts of hate, he ripped away the hem of her dress and made use of it to gag her after which he bound her securely with the rope. When she was unable to move hand or foot he looked down on her contemptuously.

"So you're in a position to double cross Clews as well as Warburton," he observed. "That means that you have the bonds. And I've a hunch that you've hidden them in this attic. That's what brought you up here."

During the next two hours Cobb worked methodically while the wretched woman followed his progress with her eyes.

Searching the place was a prodigious job. There were at least a dozen trunks full of every sort of rubbish, including many articles that brought to Steve memories of his childhood. There were half a dozen big boxes, innumerable small packages and bundles. When he had gone through all of these, he sought for loose boards in the floor and found none. Finally he lifted the squirming Diana off the bed and laid her on the floor after which he tore the old mattress apart. Not a nook or cranny of the attic he knew so well missed inspection. Finally, with a sigh, he abandoned the search. He had been wrong. The bonds were not there.

She wore a thin dress with little chance of concealing a bulky object and he passed his hands over her and decided they were not on her person. By her wrist-watch he saw it was five in the afternoon. If not in the attic they must be hidden in her chamber.

He had to go down to the second floor walk the length of the house and if he escaped the eyes of a servant, risk being caught for the second time in his wife's room by Warburton.

"I'm going down to rip your pretty bedroom apart, Diana. I don't suppose you wish me luck," he said.

She made inarticulate sounds denoting rage and her eyes flamed. Steve laid her on the torn mattress, pulled away the trunk, opened the door and stepped out. There was a narrow hall and staircase. He descended cautiously and reached the second floor. The hall was empty and he went along to the main corridor which also was empty. Without encountering anybody he reached Mrs. Warburton's room, pushed open the door and entered.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LUCK TURNS.

THERE were dainty feminine touches about a room which had been furnished for a man in the heavy fashion of a past generation. There were no hiding places, secret panels, wall safes and such devices—the bonds would be in drawers of the dresser, the bureau, in boxes or bags or hidden in the mattress.

Steve's methods were those of a man in haste and who had no regard for the feelings of the owner of the establishment. He pulled suitcases and hat boxes out of the closets and dumped their contents on the floor. He took down and inspected each gown and dropped it on the floor of the closet. He pulled out every drawer, overturned it, thrust his hands through the disordered piles of lingerie and toilet accessories. He removed the mattress from the bed and inspected it for sewn up slits.

When he was finished, the room presented an appearance which beggars description. With a sigh of disappointment he stood in the middle of the room and surveyed the havoc which he had created. Nothing doing.

He glanced out through the window and stiffened. The green yawl Emerald was in and picking up her moorings.

His eye wandered and saw on the top shelf of one of the closets a paper box which had been invisible from the closet

itself. With a mutter of excitement he rushed into the closet and pulled down the box. It contained a pair of dance slippers done up in tissue paper. And it was then the door opened.

"Mrs. Warburton," said a woman's voice, "I want to talk to you."

Lucinda. He heard Lucinda exclaim at the appearance of the room and he emerged from the closet.

"Steve Cobb," the girl cried shrilly. "What is the meaning of this?"

"You'll find your stepmother in the attic, Lucinda," said Steve with a mad laugh. "All bound round with a woolen string."

He rushed to the window and pushed up the screen.

"Steve," cried Lucinda. "I don't understand. Steve, I want to tell you—"

"I have to see a man," Steve tossed over his shoulder as he went through the window, ran down the sloping porch roof, hung by his hands and dropped upon the lawn. Lucinda was leaning out the window, speechless with astonishment and bewilderment and she saw a streak of white tearing towards the water's edge.

Steve was in the water. He yanked off his sneakers, unloosened his belt and slipped out of the duck pants. He pulled off the sweater and wearing only the trunks in which he had come ashore the previous night, struck out for the yacht.

While it may appear at times as if Steve Cobb acted as rationally as an infuriated bull, his determination to board the yawl was not entirely unreasonable.

He was forced out of his refuge by the appearance of Lucinda. Lucinda had caught him, apparently, robbing her mother's room. She would summon her father, call the servants, make a search for her stepmother and perhaps summon the police.

Outside the house he was in territory where everybody knew him and knew he was wanted by the officers. On board the yawl was Clews with the stolen bonds in his possession and this was probably the only chance left to recover his property.

Since Diana didn't have the bonds, Clews must have them.

He didn't fear the crew of the yawl. If he could slip on board, he'd rush those fellows and smack them right and left before they recovered from their surprise. Daylight hampered his chances but he never bothered much about chances. All he regretted as he slid swiftly through the sea was that he had discarded his pants before removing the kidnapper's revolver which was in the right hand pocket. However, immersion in water for five or ten minutes was apt to make it useless.

The crew of the yawl had made fast to the mooring as he approached and apparently paid no attention to the head of a swimmer approaching from the direction of Warburton's. Steve approached the yawl at the stern, found no dangling rope to enable him to board her at that quarter and swam round to the starboard side where he found the ladder.

It was a short swim and for Steve, not in the least fatiguing. He pulled himself up swiftly but as his head appeared above the rail, he was seen by a uniformed seaman who shouted at him.

"Hey, there, you can't come aboard."

Steve swung a leg over the rail and the sailor rushed him. Steve leaped upon the deck, ducked a right swing and brought up his right against the seaman's chin. He jumped over the body of the fellow, plunged toward the companion and appeared suddenly and unexpectedly in the cabin.

JACK CLEWS, who was sitting at a writing desk on the port side, glanced up and uttered a startled exclamation and then a gasp as a pair of mighty hands grasped his throat and pulled him out of his chair.

"My bonds, damn you," growled the wild man. Clews could only make a choked sound. Bang! The yacht captain had fired from the hatchway. "Got him," he shouted excitedly.

For luck had abandoned Steve Cobb. The luck which had kept him out of police

hands, which had enabled him to escape the bullets of the kidnappers and the shots from the revolver of Hutton had done all that could be expected from it.

Steve toppled over sidewise, carrying Jack Clews to the carpet with him. His bulk crashed heavily but his hands released their grip and Clews struggled to his feet.

"Damn you, you might have hit me," he sputtered. He gazed down upon the giant and a slow smile spread over his face. "Much obliged, at that," he said. He dropped to his knees beside the unconscious man and looked for the wound.

"Creased him," he said looking up at the skipper who stood nervously beside him. "His head's so thick I'm surprised he noticed it."

The bullet had skidded across the top of Steve's head, causing a scalp wound and stunning the man but no serious damage had been done.

"Top hole," exclaimed Clews. "Couldn't ask anything better."

"I'm glad I didn't kill him," said the skipper with a sigh of relief. "It looked like he was strangling you, sir."

"That shot was heard, so I'm glad we haven't a corpse on our hands. Tie him up. He'll be conscious in a few minutes. Put chains on him. The big gorilla looks as though he could break a rope cable. Chain him and stick him down the hold. I'll go on deck and tell any hick cop who feels called upon to investigate that I took a shot at a sea gull. How did he get aboard?"

"Swam out, sir. Lawson challenged him and he about broke the swab's jaw."

"Get some chains and shove him below. Hurry up."

Clews went on deck and seated himself in the cushioned wicker chair at the stern. "What a break," he chuckled. "Right back where he started from."

He gazed reflectively across the port upon which the sun was beginning to set and which was causing flames, apparently, to dance on the windows of Warburton's big house.

"Right into my hands," he muttered.

"And the whole damn game is in my hands. Bill Warburton will howl to the high heavens, but he'll pay through the nose."

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWO WOMEN.

IT took several moments for Lucinda Warburton to recover from her dismay and her anger. Being a young woman who liked to dramatize things, she had been setting the stage as she rested in her chamber for the big scene with Steve Cobb. She was going to watch until she saw him loafing on the beach, his giant frame recumbent as usual.

And Steve would be able to loaf by tomorrow, for her father had promised to do something about the preposterous accusation of murder against him.

She was going to come upon him and touch him with her shoe, just as she had done the first time she saw him. He would open those great eyes of his and grin up at her and then she would make her speech.

She would apologize humbly for all the nasty things she had said to him and tell him she forgave him for the mean things he had said to her and then explain that she had learned all about his stupendous heroism in rescuing her from the criminals.

It would be in character for him to tell her that he would do the same for anybody and it didn't mean a thing, but Lucinda would smile upon him bewitchingly and say:

"Steve, that's nonsense. You did it because you love me and I want to tell you that I reciprocate your feelings for me."

She was a little vague as to what would follow but it included being squeezed in those big arms and being kissed like the first day only much more passionately.

In the meantime she proposed to tell Diana Warburton what she thought of her for pretending that Steve was her lover and how despicable was her treatment of her husband. With this purpose she had boldly entered her stepmother's room and there

was the unspeakable Steve Cobb committing not only burglary but vandalism.

It meant that he couldn't be the white-souled knight she had built him up to be. It meant that there was something between him and Diana after all—and a quarrel had taken place and this was his revenge, perhaps. What had he said about her step-mother? In the attic, all bound up with a woolen string?

Had they been meeting in the attic? It was too awful to contemplate. But what had he meant?"

So Lucinda went up the attic stairs and pushed open the door and there was Mrs. Warburton laying upon the old bed which had no sheets or blankets and had a mattress which was almost in shreds. And she was bound all right but with stout rope and there was a gag in her mouth.

Lucinda rushed to the woman and unfastened the cloth around her mouth, saw the end of a handkerchief protruding from the mouth and pulled it out.

"What has happened?" she demanded.

Mrs. Warburton made pitiful sounds but nothing distinguishable. Lucinda whose tender heart caused her to weep at the plight of the woman she hated, endeavored, clumsily, to untie the knots fastened by the strong hands of Steve Cobb.

"Get a knife, you fool," said her step-mother thickly. "Those ropes are killing me."

Lucinda ran towards the door.

"Don't tell anyone," called Mrs. Warburton, but Lucinda slammed the door behind her. In a moment she was back with a hunting knife from her father's room and with a few slashes set the prisoner free.

Mrs. Warburton rolled over on her face, and shook with heavy furious sobs.

"Who did this awful thing?" demanded Lucinda who seated herself beside the suffering woman and stroked her hair. She had to repeat her question three times before she got an answer.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Warburton sullenly. "I came up here out of curiosity and a man pounced on me. I didn't see his face."

Lucinda's eyes flamed. "I did," she said. "It was Steve Cobb."

"It wasn't. How could it be?"

Mrs. Warburton was sitting up. She grasped the girl by the shoulders. "You must be crazy. It was a burglar."

"It was Steve Cobb," said Lucinda. "He told me you were up here all bound around with a woolen string."

"Damn him," cried Diana passionately. "He'll pay for this. How he'll pay for this!"

"So he was your lover, after all. Why did he maltreat you?"

Diana's eyes narrowed. "Will you promise me not to tell this to your father?"

"No."

"All right," said Diana venomously. "We spent the night here. And he demanded money. I refused. He tied me up and went down to rob me of what cash there was in my room."

LUCINDA grew pale as death. Steve had been searching Diana's room, tearing things apart in his eagerness to find something. Suddenly her eyes sparkled with anger.

"You lie!" she cried. "You are a wicked contemptible liar. Steve didn't spend the night with you."

"I'm telling you he did."

"And I know he didn't, because it was Steve Cobb who saved me from the kidnappers away up near Plymouth at two o'clock this morning."

With this Lucinda walked straight out of the room.

Diana gazed at her retreating back malevolently. The little fool was in love with Steve Cobb.

Cobb, no doubt was in love with her, which explained his Sir Galahad attitude toward herself.

Well, he was a monstrosity of bone and muscle with no more brains than an ox. She didn't love him any more; she hated him. She would love to see him tortured. If they sentenced him to death, she would like to see him fry in the electric chair.

It was absolutely certain that Lucinda

was going straight to her father with her tale. It was most unlikely that her fascination over Warburton would survive this situation. She crossed the room and peered out of the window. The yawl was back.

The time had come to throw off the mask, walk out of this house for good and cast her lot with Jack Clews. And she had better get going before her husband intercepted her.

Diana left the attic and hastened to her room, entered, and emitted a wail of anguish. All her possessions tossed about. Everything scattered over the rug. Her best dresses a heap on the closet floor. Perfumes, ointments, beauty helps of every description in a helter skelter melange.

The devastation here actually hurt her more than her outrageous personal treatment at the hands of Steve Cobb. Her lips moved. She was silently cursing him.

Recovering from her first shock she set to work to pack what she wished to take with her. She'd go to the Inn at Hyannis with her luggage and notify Jack of her whereabouts. Warburton would balk at sending her goods out to the yawl. She was packed in half an hour and then there was a knock at her door. She opened it. Her husband stood there. There was rage in his eyes, menace in the expression of his mouth. She tossed him a glare of defiance.

"Going somewhere?" he asked with heavy irony.

"I'm leaving you, William," she said sullenly.

He nodded. "For five years I've put up with your effrontery. It's time you went," he said bitterly. "I'll contest a divorce suit. I have plenty of evidence of your infidelity. You'll never touch a cent of my money."

Diana laughed nastily. "I'm leaving you, my dear, because the way things are shaping up, I don't think you are going to have

any money. In fact I wouldn't be surprised if you found yourself in jail."

He lifted a clenched fist. "You hussy, what do you mean?" he shouted.

She laughed even more nastily. "I married you for your money. You have nothing else to recommend you. I think your chickens are coming home to roost, William. I suppose you'll let me have a car to take me to the Hyannis Inn."

He controlled his temper with difficulty. "It will be a pleasure," he stated. "Good by and good riddance."

TEN minutes later a Warburton car carried away Mrs. Warburton and a dozen bags and boxes. In Cobbport she stopped long enough to write a note to Steve Clews and hire a boatman to take it to the yawl. As she rode out of the village she did not observe a shriveled and gnarled old man who leaned on a stick and who was standing beside a small, shabby but pretty little girl.

"That's Jezebel," said General Burton. "Take a good look, Myra. Them kind of woman has raised ructions through the ages. Don't you never grow up and get to be like her."

"She's beautiful, though," remarked Myra Sears. "And I'd like to have clothes like hers."

"Those are the wages of sin, Myra."

"Oh, General what do you think 's become of Steve?"

"No news is good news," said the old man. "But the orders are out to shoot to kill if he resists and Steve won't surrender. Where is this state detective staying?"

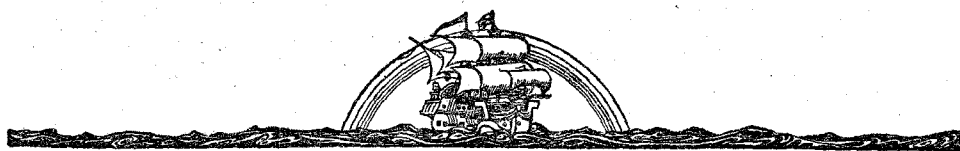
"At Mrs. Joshua Loring's house."

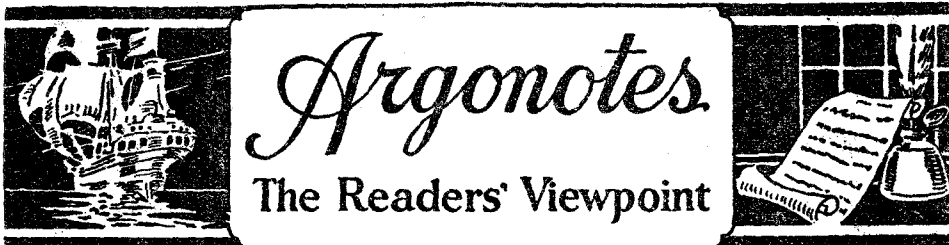
"We'll be going up there."

The girl grasped his arm. "Oh, General, I'm afraid."

"Tenshun. Forward march," commanded the General.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.





A FEW frank criticisms:

Kansas City, Mo.

You have certainly placed a difficult problem before your readers when you ask them to pick out the best story of 1934. I know that what you want is frankness and not soft soap, and so I will tell you what I really think. Being what may be called an omnivorous reader, I have read the *ARGOSY* ever since I was eleven or twelve, and I am now twenty-seven.

After long and careful deliberation, I have given first place to George Challis's "The Naked Blade." I feel almost blasphemous in doing so because another fine story by that Titan of authors, A. Merritt, was also published in *ARGOSY* last year. But it was only at rare intervals, in "Burn, Witch, Burn!" and in "Creep, Shadow!" that he was the Merritt who has bewitched me for so many enchanting hours in the past. And so, until you are again your former self, Merritt, *au revoir!*

Challis's "Naked Blade" is almost as good as his story, "The Splendid Rascal." Need I say more? And although I am almost heartbroken to say so, honesty compels me to confess that his *Tizzo* stories are not nearly so well worked out as these other two. Even so, they are much better than the average fiction.

"The Barbarian," by Mason, was one of his best. Max Brand is a very prince of story tellers, but he has met an equal—the author of the

Montana Kid stories, Evan Evans. To my mind, the only competitors these two doughty Western writers have are Mulford and Ernest Haycox. Tuttle can, and does, write some humdingers, but he doesn't hit the spot as well as the others, except in his comical short stories, which are the most uproarious I have ever read.

Loring Brent is an in-and-outer. His "Sapphire Death" was super-plu-perfect; and then he went and wrote "The Kingdom of Hell," which was a hell of an effort after his masterpiece!—Burroughs' first *Tarzan* and his first Martian stories were magnificent; but now he seems to have one plot and one only. Otis A. Kline, who writes in a similar vein, is able to equal Burroughs' better efforts.

I remember Fred MacIsaac very charitably as the man who wrote "The Mental Marvel," and a delicious novelette of Paris. Outside of these two really good stories, I have only an impression of a very busy automatic typewriter. Murray Leinster wrote a novel last year about war in the future. I cannot recall its title, but it was very, very good. Newsom, Surdez, and Carse turn out uniformly good work; particularly the first two. Theodore Roscoe has written some excellent tales, but somewhere there seems to be something lacking which keeps him from being a top-notch writer. Don't misunderstand me; he is far above the average. George Bruce's work in *ARGOSY* has been splendid; I can stand all of it that

WHAT is your idea of the best story (of any length, from short story to serial) published in *ARGOSY* since January 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which, in the opinion of the editors, give the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others, the magazine will reward the letter-writers with twelve full, yearly subscriptions. We don't want mere praise; we are interested in finding out exactly what stories you like best. Nor do we care about your literary style or skill. If there is some story that you liked so much that it stands out in your memory above all others, that is the story we want you to tell us about. It isn't necessary for you to read every story published in *ARGOSY*. You will have just as good a chance to win one of those twelve subscriptions if you read six of the stories published as you would if you read them all. But we must know *why* you liked the story you choose as best.

Letters selected by the editors will be published from week to week, but not all letters published will receive subscriptions.

Make your comments as long or as short as you wish, for mere length will not be considered. Put down all your reasons, however. Then address your letter to The Editor, *ARGOSY* Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City, so that it will reach us not later than August 1st, 1935.