



Paul held up his hand but the 'hogs went on yelling



# Sandhog

By BORDEN CHASE

**U**NDER the river, down in the muck, with the threat of death hanging continuously over their heads, ready to spring at the next thrust of the shovel, always waiting . . . to crush, to maim, to kill. . . . So work the sandhogs, a tough breed of men, fierce and proud.

Such a one was Bert Saxon, risen from the ranks of the mucker to tunnel-superintendent for that graceless dilettante among engineers, Paul Touchet, who preferred a Mozart sonata to any reality of life or work that you could name.

Kay McLane was of the sandhog clan, too—but she'd broken away, sickened with the misery and tragedy of the sandhogs' women's lives. That is, she thought she had, until she re-met Bert Saxon, and their boy-and-girl-sweetheart love sprang up again between them. She'd met Paul Touchet, too—and the two men symbolized the clash of her desires. Bert, the life she'd left but which fascinated her still with its strength, its constant threat of peril. Paul, the life she was trying to grow into, cultured, urbane, charmingly superficial.

Paul plans to submit bids for the new East-River tunnel, but because his financial

circumstances are in one of their chronically difficult periods, he is forced to take into partnership one Gus Blaucher—a crude, wily, unscrupulous grafter and climber. Bert Saxon refuses to have anything to do with any job that Gus Blaucher has any part of.

**B**ERT'S opinion of Gus Blaucher and of the conditions under which Blaucher's men work is borne out when there is a slide on Blaucher's Fulton-Street excavation job.

It is Blaucher's practice to employ strictly union labor—but for the delicate subterranean operations, he is quite as apt to use unskilled above-ground hands. It is one of these hands, unused to sandhogging, who has, by his inexperience and carelessness, precipitated the Fulton-Street cave-in.

And only Bert Saxon's yeoman rescue-work gets three of the four entombed men out alive. Kay McLane, who has impulsively accompanied him, watches, fascinated, feeling again the old thrill, the old despair, of the sandhog's woman.

Later she and Bert walk through Brooklyn's late-night streets. Bert, half jokingly, proposes to her. Kay is confused. She does not know how to answer.

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One of Bert's sandhog-friends passes them on the street. He makes some joke about Bert's evening clothes. "Better take care of that suit, Saxon. They cost five bucks a night to rent."

PERHAPS it's Bert's mood. Perhaps an accumulation of moods and half unconscious thoughts. At any rate, that jesting phrase touches off a spark in Bert. In a flash, he suddenly realizes the helplessness of the sandhogs at the mercy of shrewd crooks like Blaucher. He, Bert Saxon, is on Easy Street—while they, who work and sweat and die, under him . . .

He determines then and there to help the sandhogs organize—to help them fight. It is a decision which is to change the whole course of his life—one which, having made, he is never to go back upon.

## CHAPTER IX

### UNION HALL

A WIDE green lawn sloped gently toward the waters of Long Island Sound. It was tree-bordered, rimmed with red-brick walks that wound through rose gardens and beds of varicolored flowers. August sun colored the waters of the Sound and warmed the breeze that was welcome after the heat of the day. A squirrel raced from a tree to investigate with beady eyes the couple seated beneath a striped awning on the terrace.

Paul Touchet stirred the ice in his tall glass, twisting it slowly around and around as he watched Kay offering a broken cracker to the inquisitive squirrel. She was wearing a summer dress of white linen. Her hat was a crownless straw and her jet hair showed as a small black cap above the wide brim. As always, she was neat, flawless. Even after a day of New York's summer heat there was a crisp freshness about her. Paul thought he had never seen a woman with the chameleon-like qualities of Kay McLane. At the theater or under the lights of a fashionable club she appeared as a creature made for the night. Yet under the harsh light of a summer sun these same qualities gave way to another set, equally attractive but entirely different.

Paul thought of the crispness of fresh

mint and the tinkle of ice against cool beaded glass when he looked toward her. But when he looked off across the Sound to where his boat was moored, he remembered her as she had been earlier in the day when they raced the wind across the water in a smother of flying spray. That had been a different Kay. And Paul wondered if ever he would meet them all.

Now she was silent. Her hand was extended toward the squirrel and Paul looked gratefully at the soft curve of her arm. He liked beautiful things. Liked to see them. Study them. And for weeks he had been studying Kay McLane. Today was one of many spent at his summer place on Long Island. They had motored out, gone for a two-hour sail on the Sound and returned to sit on the wide terrace until Kay had decided what she would like to do that evening. As yet she had given him no hint, and Paul wondered.

"Why so quiet?" he asked.

The squirrel scampered off at the sound and Kay tossed the cracker to the lawn. "You've scared him. One more minute and he'd have eaten from my hand."

"Don't we all?"

"Not quite."

"To the best of my knowledge I've never seen a male creature refuse. Most of us fight for the privilege."

"Thank you, darling," she said lightly.

"I wish you'd forget to smile when you say that."

"When I say what?"

"Darling." He lifted his glass. "I've been trying for two months to give meaning to that word."

"But I do mean it," she smiled. "You *are* a darling, Paul."

"I'd make a marvelous husband."

"Are we going through that again?"

"I suppose not," he said. "I make it a rule not to propose more than three times in the same day. You've had your share, I think. . . . Once and for all—why won't you marry me, Kay?"

"Because I'm very happy as Kay McLane."

"Any other reasons?"

"A few."

"Is Bert one of them?"

She twisted her glass, making wet circles on the blue enameled table. "I haven't seen Bert but that once at your apartment."

"He hasn't phoned you since?"

"No."

"Well, that adds up with the rest," said Paul. "The man is out of his mind."

"Why do you say that?"

"Oh, I've told you before, Kay. This nonsense at the union—refusing to work for me, giving up his suite at the hotel and moving to Brooklyn. It's ridiculous—all of it."

"But what does he say? Has he given you any reasons?"

"Not any better ones than he gave you that night. He's simply become a fanatic. And proof of his madness is the fact he hasn't called you. If I knew Kay McLane were in love with me, I'd camp on her doorstep twenty-four hours a day."

"Perhaps I'm not in love with him."

"I wish that were true," said Paul slowly. "But I'm afraid I recognize the symptoms."

Kay looked off across the waters of the Sound. For a time Paul watched her in silence.

HE wasn't a fool. He'd met a great many interesting women, attractive women. He'd known love in most of its stages and had enjoyed playing at it. Because he was entirely satisfied with his present mode of life he had not encouraged any of the affairs—refused to allow them to become serious. And yet with Kay—

They had known each other less than a month and Paul realized he was more in love than ever before. And with this knowledge came realization he needed her. He wanted Kay to be his wife.

Bert Saxon was his danger. Paul realized that when Kay told him of the evening they had met after years apart. He had listened quietly and decided Bert would have to step lively to win this match. For a time he expected Bert to follow the usual routine. Dinners, theaters, week-ends at

the seashore—there would be a scramble for Kay's time and a fight for her attention.

He liked Bert. They were friends. He wanted Bert to continue as his friend. But he knew enough of the world to realize this might not be. Should Kay decide to become Mrs. Paul Touchet—well, that was in the future.

But things had not gone as he planned. His own attack had been launched and he had waited for Bert's. But the tunnel-man had not even called Kay on the phone. There had been no appointments, no dinners. Not so much as a word in over two months. At first Paul was pleased. Then worried. When Bert came to his office he had talked only of the men or the job now in work. When Paul mentioned Kay there had been no answer. And then Paul noticed a change in his friend.

When he again suggested Bert work as superintendent, should he and Blaucher bid in the new East River job, Bert had bluntly told him to go to hell. Since then they had seen little of each other. And now Bert and the sandhogs were driving to completion the subway tunnel in lower Brooklyn. It would be finished this week. Not at a profit. But that was Paul's fault. His carelessness in sub-letting contracts had cost him a fortune. Some of this loss the men had helped to regain by rushing the work. He hadn't asked for it. Hadn't so much as hinted. But as the reports came in it was obvious Bert and the men were trying to save something out of the smash.

Paul was grateful. He tried to tell Bert one evening but had received no answer. Then, almost as though he did not want to take advantage of a napping opponent, Paul had told Bert he loved Kay and intended to marry her if possible. Bert had listened quietly. Once Paul noticed a flare of the old light that came to Bert's eyes when fight was mentioned. The tunnel-man started a laugh, lifted a hand as though in protest, but said nothing. After that Paul had never mentioned Kay again.

As summer ebbed he realized he was fighting a losing battle. Kay was kindly, interested, generous with her time and

happy in his company. But always the shadow of Bert followed them. And today, as she looked off across the blue water Paul played his last card.

"Would you like to see him tonight?" he asked.

"Bert?"

"Yes."

"Not particularly."

"Let's be truthful," said Paul. "You know what I'm trying to do, Kay. I love you and you've known that for weeks. But I'm fighting shadows—competing with a phantom. For some fantastic reason you've glorified Bert Saxon—set him up as a god. Perhaps because of that foolish childhood romance. Perhaps for some other cause. Whatever it is, you're holding it as a shield before you. When I talk, you compare my words with the echo of Bert's. My promises—my plans—everything I suggest is measured against the half-forgotten dreams you shared with him. When you look at me you see him standing at my side—"

"Paul, please don't—"

"Let me finish, Kay," he insisted. "I don't mind comparisons if they're fair. I'm only too happy to meet the competition of any man made of flesh and blood. But good Lord—I can't fight a wraith!"

"And you suggest—"

"That you see Bert. See him as he is—a man. A good one, I'll admit. Big, fine, honest—but nevertheless a man."

She thought a moment. "That's fair enough, Paul—let's do it. Perhaps you're closer to the truth than you suspect, or—than I suspect, rather."

Paul reached across the table and patted her hand. "Good feller," he said. "We'll drive to the city, have a bite to eat on the way and picked him up at the hall."

"Are you sure he'll be there?"

"Positive. There's a meeting tonight. I got my notice yesterday."

She laughed. "Your notice? Are you a sandhog?"

"Didn't you know?" he asked. "I've carried a union card for years. Whenever I drive a tunnel I go on the inactive list—no voice at the meetings and no vote. Other

times I've as much to say as your kid brother or Bert or any of the hogs."

"You're an odd man," she smiled. "And a pretty swell sort of one, too. Almost—I hope your experiment is a success."

THEY drove to a small roadhouse in Manhasset. Paul chose the wine with care and his conversation drifted from one casual topic to another. Not once during the meal nor on the drive to town did Paul mention Bert. Sometimes, as they spun along the smooth roads of Grand Central Parkway, he sang, or whistled quietly. Other times he turned to Kay and smiled—but said nothing. There was a long quarter-hour on the Queensboro Bridge. Then they cut across to Eighth Avenue and rolled south. Paul left the car at a nearby parking station and they walked to the union hall. A small group of sandhogs was gathered about the door of the five-story building on Forty-second Street. They smoked and talked quietly, nodding a greeting to others who went into the narrow doorway. Kay recognized some of them—there was old Barney O'Hara who had worked with her father years ago, Johnny Novasky the heading-boss who smoked a pipe rank enough to kill a lesser man, Marshy Maybe, the small twisted Englishman who had been blown through the face of a tunnel yet lived to tell of it. And standing near the curb she saw Terry Reardon, smiling and spitting as he twisted a cud of tobacco in his cheek.

All of the men nodded or waved to Paul. Some called him by name, laughed and asked if his dues were paid. Kay received her share of stares. When recognition came to a man he quickly smiled and touched his hat. There were whispered exchanges and soon Terry came toward her with his hands outstretched.

"Hello, little one," he said. "'Tis bad company you keep. But I'll forgive you this once for the dresses you sent young Helen. They were beautiful, Kay girl. She's the pride of the block."

"They weren't much," said Kay. "I hope they fit her."

"And what was that remark about bad company?" added Paul. "Could you be meaning me, Terry?"

"That I do," said the miner. He nudged Kay gently. "Look out for a man what wears whiskers on his upper lip. He's not to be trusted."

"But I do trust him," laughed Kay. "He promised to get me a seat in the hall tonight."

Terry's face was grave. "Are you serious?"

"Why not?" said Paul. "We've come to get Bert but if the meeting isn't over we'd like to go in."

"Over?" said Terry. "'Tis just started. It may last hours."

"So much the better," said Paul. "Be a sport, Terry—speak to the sergeant-at-arms and he'll let Kay go in."

"That's not so easy," said Terry doubtfully. "Wait here a bit and I'll see."

He went into the hall and others of the men followed. Soon Kay and Paul were left alone in front of the building. The night was young and the backwash of Times Square had not yet drifted across Eighth Avenue. Summer had quieted the midtown section of the city. A small group stood under the marquee of a picture house at the corner, reading the titles below the stills. A newsboy called of war and strikes and the latest murder. Across the street and farther west some people walked up the low steps of the church where Father Duffy had listened to the troubles of New York's children. Actors, fighters, thieves, thin-lipped touts and hard-faced women had climbed those steps with troubled eyes to return carrying a word of hope.

Kay watched the traffic streaming past and thought how right it was the hall should be here. Men who drove tunnel in the far corners of the world must gather somewhere. England, France, Belgium, South America and over the edge of the earth in China and Australia—all these places and many more knew the sandhogs. A thousand men, Americans working at a native trade, and their meeting place was just off Times Square.

Practical reasons set this place, Kay realized. More tunnels were driven here, larger tunnels. It was a central point where work was more plentiful than in any other city. But she liked to think New York was the real home of her clan. It was her home. One she loved. And the rush and hurry and life of its streets was symbolic of the work of the tunnel. Danger was here. It walked the streets and hid in the shadows. It was part of the city as it was part of the dark tubes beneath the city's rivers. But tonight Kay thought little of that. For the first time in weeks she was conscious of a feeling of satisfaction. She was going to see Bert. Talk with him. Hear him laugh and feel his hand upon her arm.

Paul seemed to sense the trend of her thoughts. He stood quietly, smoking one cigarette after another until Terry hurried across the sidewalk and paused beside them. He looked at the sandhog.

"Any luck?" he asked.

"'Twill be all right for both if you keep very quiet. Tonight is a big one—you'll see soon. Your old friends are going to have a lot to say."

HE motioned to them and started up the stairs leading to the union hall. Paul took Kay's arm and wondered if she would realize he had come early with a purpose. He wanted her to see this meeting. Word had come to him Bert would speak. Rumors—odd whisperings by the men that something was in the air—had reached his office. No one was sure what it was. Nothing was definite. Paul had long since decided to be present but in his anxiety to be with Kay he had forgotten. Now chance had played along with him. And the fact Kay was a McLane had made it possible for her to get into the hall.

At the entrance to the long room where the meeting was held they were stopped by Jack Creadon, the sergeant-at-arms. He was a heavy-set man with long arms and wide hands. He asked for Paul's union book, inspected it carefully and handed it back. He smiled at Kay, patted her shoulder and pushed back the door. A wave



of warm air surged out. Tobacco smoke and the peculiar odor of grouped men in a low-ceilinged room. Paul leaned toward Kay and put his lips to her ear.

"Sure you want to go in?"

"Very sure."

"There are two seats in the last row," he said, pointing. "Over near the window on the right."

"Go ahead. I'll follow you."

The union secretary was speaking from a raised platform at the far end of the hall and the eyes of the men were turned toward him. A small group standing in the rear squeezed back against the wall to let them pass. Paul nodded and whispered a quiet hello to some, shook hands with a miner he had not seen in months and finally came to the empty chairs. He motioned to Kay and she seated herself beside him. Her eyes searched the group on the platform and Paul saw her smile when she located Bert.

The contractor lit a cigarette and glanced along the rows of silent men. Their faces were grave and Paul sensed tension in the air. The sandhogs were waiting. They listened to the secretary's report, went through the routine motions of accepting it and edged forward on their chairs. Paul saw Jack Fynn, the business agent of the sandhogs, step forward. He was dressed, as were the others in the hall, in his best clothes. His hair had been combed and his face was bright from soap and water. He cleared his throat and faced the men.

"There's been some complaint," he said, "about that Jersey job Blaucher is doing."

A dull rumble of assent lifted and there were voices that said, "You're right, Jack." Paul drew hard on his cigarette and hooked an arm about the back of his chair.

"He's pulling the same old tricks," Flynn continued, "and right now I don't think there's much we can do. I've spoken to him—told him he wasn't living up to the contract. But he claims he is."

"He's a liar!" cried a mucker.

"I'm on that job," said another. "There's a man from a labor local workin' alongside me."

"'Tis time we taught him a lesson," cried a tall, bull-necked man who stood when he shouted.

Paul recognized the speaker as Martin Duffy, a heading-boss second to none in the trade. The man was old in the tunnels and had worked on each of Paul's jobs. Quick with his tongue and quick with his fists, Duffy seldom missed an opportunity to fight. Right or wrong he spoke his mind, and seldom lowered his voice to do it. He stood now and glared at Flynn. The business agent lifted a hand to silence him.

"Time enough for that, Martin," he said. "We want no trouble with the big job starting."

"Big job be damned!" cried Duffy. "If there isn't one excuse there's another. I say 'tis time we taught Gus Blaucher a lesson. Pull the job and tie him up!"

Argument followed. There was quick discussion along the rows of seated men. Some stood and shouted opinions. Big Jerry Harkness, the union president, pounded his gavel and yelled for order. The voices dropped and silence shut down. Austin O'Rourke, the secretary stepped forward on the platform.

"I've been to see Blaucher," he said. "We're to meet again next week and talk things over. We don't want trouble now, men. Jack is right—the big job is important."

"Every job is important!" cried Duffy. "Big or small, Blaucher must know he's dealing with the hall."

"Will you be quiet, Duffy?" cried O'Rourke.

"I'll not be quiet! I'm right and you know it."

"You're *not* right!"

**A** GAIN voices were lifted in argument. Paul leaned closer to Kay and smiled. He saw her sitting stiffly, eyes straight ahead and lips closed tightly. She was looking past the men at the front of the platform and Paul knew she was watching the tall superintendent who leaned against the table and whispered with Harkness, the president.

"Like it?" he asked quietly.

"I thought it might be like this."

"You've only heard the beginning," he smiled. "Wait until Duffy really starts to read the riot act."

"Is he right?"

"That's open to argument," said Paul. "And before long you'll hear plenty from both sides."

"Is that the reason for the meeting?"

"It *was* the reason. But something bigger has come up. The men are waiting. Do you notice they're hardly interested in what Duffy says?"

"What is it?" she asked. "What's going to happen?"

"Wait," said Paul. "We'll know in a moment. Bert is coming toward the front of the platform."

Even as he spoke a hush fell upon the meeting. The president's gavel sounded against the first complete silence of the evening. Duffy had opened his mouth to speak. He glanced at Bert, closed his mouth and sat down. The men leaned forward. Some rested their arms on the seats ahead of them and cupped hands to their ears. Paul stepped on his cigarette and smiled as his friend looked out over the crowd of waiting men.

## CHAPTER X

### SWAN SONG

BERT'S face was grave as he faced the sandhogs. His arms were folded and he stood quietly looking out over the hall. A man coughed. Nervously. A chair scraped against the floor and a heavy foot scuffed. Bert lifted a hand.

"You all know," he said quietly, "that I'm no longer working as general superintendent for the Touchet Construction Company. Until that job was finished I had no voice in this hall. Now it's done—and the secretary has restored me to active membership. I've asked our president for a few moments of your time. In them I may say some things you won't like to hear. Do you want me to say them?"

He smiled. And an answering grin came

to the faces of the men. Paul looked about and recognized a tenseness in the group suggestive of something very familiar. He tried to recall where he had seen men gathered to stare upward with that fixed look of quiet expectancy. Then he knew. It was as though he were seated in some giant arena where a fight was to be held. An important fight. One that might crown a new champion. One that would be fought to a finish. And when Bert had joked it was as though the champion had clowned for a moment while waiting for his gloves to be laced. The men were friendly, but waiting. They wanted to hear what was coming next. Bert's grin drifted from his face and he stood square-footed before them.

"From the time I was old enough to handle a shovel," he said, "I've earned my living in a tunnel. And it's been a good living. Much better than any man of you facing me tonight. When I started at ten dollars a day, Johnny Novasky was a heading-boss drawing down a hundred—when he worked. Tonight, I see him there in the third row. He's still drawing down a hundred—when he works. But I'm getting five hundred and have been offered six. Within a year or two I can demand a thousand—and get it."

The crowd murmured and Paul looked questioningly toward Kay. Her eyes were wide in surprise—a surprise that mirrored Paul's feelings. Throughout the years he had known Bert Saxon he had never known the sandhog to brag. But tonight Bert was standing before his clan and boasting. Swaggering, would be the better word. He was looking down on the sandhogs and telling them he was a success. Paul leaned forward as Bert started to speak again.

"It's true," he said. "All of you know it. All of you have watched me step along and make money. And not once during the years have I found any jealousy among you. In fact, you were glad to see me climb."

"Don't be too sure!" cried Duffy.

"Oh, yes you were, Martin," laughed Bert. "There's not one of you who hasn't patted my back and wished me well. You're a great crowd—swell guys. But you're

fools!" He lifted his hands to stay the growing storm he had started. The smile went and his eyes narrowed. "I mean it," he said. "You're fools! You sit back and watch me climb—you watch others climb—but have you ever thought of yourselves? Have you ever stopped to realize you are getting the same pay today you got ten, fifteen, twenty years ago? Have you done that?"

Paul touched Kay's shoulder. "Perhaps we'd better go," he said. "Lord knows what might happen tonight after that."

"We'll stay," said Kay. "Please, Paul."

Paul shrugged and shook his head. He glanced out over the crowded hall and saw men's shoulders weaving. The mass was in motion and surged slowly like the surface of the water when a storm gathers. Bert's head was up. He was pointing to Martin Duffy.

"You, Martin," he said. "For years I've heard you stand up in this hall and make speeches. You've argued for this and you've fought for that. Others have done the same. But what have you been fighting for? Do you know?" He laughed then. A short, sharp laugh that bit like a curse. "The answer is: No! You don't know. You'll never know until you wipe the mud out of your eyes and see what's going on around you."

**H**IS voice dropped and he crowded the platform edge as though to impart a confidence. "If Gus Blaucher were in the hall and heard us argue, he'd laugh until the fat under his chin nearly choked him. He'd hear a thousand men fighting about things that don't amount to a snap of the fingers. He'd know you were doing just as he wants you to do. He and the other contractors want you to fight. The trick is older than labor. I've been on jobs where there was no hot water for the showers at shift time. But don't you suppose the contractor knew it? Don't you suppose he realized you'd complain? And then he cut the men in the gangs—deliberately violated part of the contract with the hall—don't you suppose he knew you'd raise the roof? Of course he did! And when you finally

sent Jack Flynn to him with a list of complaints, he beefed and yowled and made a great concession. He gave you back exactly what you had started with. And you went into the tunnel laughing. You'd won! Sure—you'd won. But what the blazes had you won?"

He turned then and walked to the table where a large pitcher stood on a tray near a glass. He filled the glass and put it to his lips while the men in the hall murmured. Paul looked sharply at his friend. Here was a Bert Saxon he had never expected to see. A man who was playing with words as a great musician might with notes. That first swaggering statement had accomplished its mission. It jolted the men—brought them to the edges of their seats in surprise. And while they listened Bert had put his finger on the core of their trouble. Now they wanted to hear more and Bert was making them wait.

"What is it we're all working for?" said Bert at length. "We can talk about the craft, pride in our work, the closeness of the clan and the bond of labor. Fine words. They look good in headlines and roll well from the mouth of a speaker. But boil them down and what have you got? Hokum! Words, and nothing else. You know, and I know why we work." He pointed to Terry Reardon who had gone forward to sit in the first row. "You, Terry—when you finished up today and stopped at the window for your pay envelope were you thinking how grand it is to work only with brother union men? Were you thinking of the glory of labor? Were you thinking of any of the oil you read in the papers? Not a bit of it! You were wondering if Helen could squeeze out a few dollars to get those new shoes she wants. If you could spare the price of a trip to Coney Island with your daughter. Perhaps you remembered a pipe you'd seen and wondered if it would come out of the pay envelope this week. And you, Duffy"—he pointed to the scowling Irishman—"you were wondering about your boy. He's been going away to school and next month vacation will be over. Can you send him back? Will there be enough



money? Will he grow to be that great doctor? That's what you thought of when you drew your pay.

"But you forgot it when you came into the hall tonight. You wanted to pull a job in Jersey because men of another local were crowding in. Gus Blaucher had thrown a fistful of mud in your eyes and you couldn't see your boy any longer."

He looked along the rows of men and picked out others. Paul heard him call a mucker by name, tell of the man's dreams, his troubles, the many things he'd planned. And as he listened Paul realized Bert was drawing the men closer to him. Making each sandhog in the hall feel Bert Saxon was aware of his personal problem. It was oratory of the most subtle kind. Not the blustering, grandiose ranting of commercial spellbinders. But an intimate, homely talk by a man whose family was the oldest in the clan.

At times there was a laugh—some funny incident Bert mentioned to point up a fact. Then, while the laugh was still on their lips he spoke of Dan Hannagan lying in a hospital waiting to die while his wife and youngsters haunted the altars of the church. He told of families whose men had gone one by one into the tunnels. Some had returned with twisted legs and sightless eyes. Others had never returned. Those who were left sat facing him in the hall. He told of the closeness of the clan. Brothers, uncles, cousins working in the same heading. The long slender thread of family that bound them with ties stronger than that of craft.

AS Bert spoke Paul was conscious of a feeling of defeat. It was as though he listened to the history of a dying race. As a spectator, one who sat as a man alone, he could picture a group of gallant men who had faced an enemy with courage and patience. But the enemy was too strong. Too relentless. They couldn't win. Couldn't even hold what little ground was left to them. Each day they gave one step. Then another. Fighting—always fighting. But powerless against a ruthless enemy.

Who or what this enemy was, Paul

didn't know. Nor could he guess what the men of the clan were fighting. But as Bert's words came to him over the heads of the gathered men he learned of defeat and the hopelessness of further struggle. His throat was tight and at times his teeth fastened on his lower lip. He turned to Kay and found her white-faced and taut. She was leaning forward with her head turned slightly that she might not miss a single word. Her nostrils flared to the slow steady rhythm of her breathing. Paul doubted if she knew he were in the hall—if the men were there. She was listening to Bert with a concentration that shut out all other sound and thought.

Motion came to the clan. Turbulence and a restless swaying of heads and shoulders. Men swung with the words of the quiet-voiced man before them. They laughed when he laughed. When he paused there was utter silence. As he told of the wrongs done to them a low rumbling swept the hall like the voice of a gathering tempest.

"These things are true," he said. "You know they're true. But they are also things of the past. And that past is over—finished—dead as yesterday's sunset. This is today. And it's a new day. We're going to forget those little two-cent quarrels with the contractors. We're going to laugh them off as though they didn't exist. And then—we're going out to get the one thing that can change all this. We're going to demand it. And we'll get it! The contractors will pay us with money for the flesh and blood we pour into their tunnels. Money! Did you hear that! *Money!* It's a rotten, stinking thing, they tell us. It's vile and low and the cause of this world's troubles. Sure—they tell us that. But who are *they*? Do you know? If you don't, let me tell you! *They* are the ones who have the money! *They* are your contractors—your bosses!"

Quick anger brought Paul to his feet. His eyes were hard as he faced the platform and lifted his hand for recognition. Those in the rear of the hall turned to stare. A hand touched his arm but Paul shook it aside.

"That's wrong, Bert!" he cried.

An angry murmur arose as the men turned to stare at the contractor. There were lifted arms and clenched fists.

"Put 'im out!" yelled a miner.

"That's Touchet," cried another. "What's he doing here?"

"Another lousy contractor. Put him out!"

Bert's arms lifted. "Quiet, men," he called. And the voices were stilled. "I didn't realize we had guests in the hall—didn't think they were permitted."

"Guest, be damned!" cried Paul. "I'm a member of this local and my dues are paid! I've a right to my say."

"As a union member—or a contractor?" asked Bert.

"Either way you wish to put it."

"Sorry," laughed Bert. "They don't mix. If you'll talk as a member I'll be glad to turn the platform over to you in a few minutes. As a contractor—"

A GIANT miner moved toward Paul. He was smiling but it was a grim smile. He pointed to the empty chair and looked steadily at the contractor. "Sit down, Touchet," he said. "We'll hear from you later."

Kay's hand touched Paul's arm. "Please sit down, Paul," she said quietly.

Paul dropped into his chair and turned to face her.

"It isn't right, Kay. Bert has no reason to make a remark of that kind. I'm a contractor but I've never pulled any of that stuff about money being vile. Whatever the men asked for, they got."

"But tonight you're not a contractor," she said.

Paul's eyes were wide. "Great grief! Has he got you, too?"

When silence came to the hall Bert stepped forward from the table and smiled.

"And now, with the exception of one man in the last row, I guess we all think pretty much the same about money," he said. "The question is—how are we going to get it? And for an answer, I'll take you back to the words with which I started this talk. I told you that I, and a few others,

had been successful. I told you we'd made money and would make more. But is it because we know more about our trade than the rest of you? Are we better tunnel-builders? Partly, perhaps. But not all of it. The real cause is that we are business men. And the contractors are business men. We speak the same language and use the same words. And as a result a few of us make money. The rest of you mug along—swinging your shovels, building your tunnels, sweating your guts out over the muck pile for the same old wage year after year.

"When contractors fight and go into court, do they try to represent themselves? When this local walks into a court battle does it send a miner to talk with the jury? Not a bit of it! We hire lawyers—and so do the contractors. Is there a mucker working in the emergency hospital at the tunnel-shaft? Not at all! That's the place for a doctor. Would you think of sending a man from the iron into the face to drive a shaft? Of course not! Each to his own trade—the rule is older than man. But when it comes time to talk of money, make contracts with your employers, set the wage scale and the hours of work—what do you do?"

Bert stared at the men as Paul had seen him do when a mistake had been made in the tunnel. Accusation was there, but with it a certain tolerance and understanding. Paul had always admired this trait in the superintendent—admired it even now. It brushed away any resentment a heading-boss might have when told his gang was slowing down. It sent men to the shovels with a smile and a determination to do better work. And now the effect was similar. Men waited for the answer they already knew. And Bert gave it to them.

"Each year at election you pick out a man to represent you—your business agent," he said. "And what are the requirements you've laid down for this job? Honesty—long years at his trade—a certain amount of personality and the ability to make friends. But do you demand that he be a business man? Not at all! Is Jack

Flynn a business man? Or is he simply an honest, likable, hard-working sandhog?"

**A**GAIN the crowd rumbled. Faces were turned toward the rear of the platform where Flynn was seated. He was grinning and nodding his head in agreement. He pointed to Bert, mutely telling the men to listen and learn. Bert turned and walked toward him. He put one hand on Flynn's shoulder. The business agent caught his hand and shook it. And the sandhogs cheered as they beat the palms of their hands together.

"There's no hard feelings about this," cried Bert. "Jack and I have talked it over and he's with me all the way. As a heading-boss there isn't a better man in the clan. As a business agent—Jack is still a swell heading-boss."

There was laughter then. Even Paul felt the humor of the situation and turned to grin at Kay. Low-voiced comment ran through the crowd and there was more laughter when Flynn lifted the pitcher and playfully measured the distance to Bert's head.

"And now we come to the question," said Bert when quiet had been restored. "Every big contractor in the trade is going to submit his bid shortly for the new East River tunnel. In figuring this bid he must know the union scale of wages—our scale. He takes this into consideration when he sets his figure, and it is only fair to submit it to him immediately. When I asked Jack Flynn what had been agreed upon as right and just, I found the old scale had been submitted. I read the proposed contracts and found them carbon copies of the ones we've used for years."

He turned to the table and lifted a few sheets of paper. He held them up. "These are the proposed contracts, men," he said. "And this is my suggestion as to what should be done with them."

He ripped the printed pages once across, folded them and tore them again. Then he tossed the fragments into the air and laughed. Laughter followed his. There was a stamping of feet and a pounding of fists

against men's shoulders. The sandhogs cheered. Yelled. Jerry Harkness, the president, banged his gavel and called for order. Kay turned to Paul and amusement was in her eyes. The contractor frowned and shook his head.

"Wait," he said quietly. "This is only the beginning. If Bert says what I expect him to say, he's digging his grave with a shovel in both hands!"

"What do you mean?" said Kay quickly.

"Wait," said Paul. "You'll understand."

"But don't you agree with what he's done?"

"That's beside the point, Kay. For a time he had me guessing—walked me right into a trap. He knew I was here—knew it the moment I came in the door. And like the clever ape that he is, he used me."

"You believe that?"

"Darn right, I do."

"But what is he driving at?" she asked.

"What is he leading up to?"

"Failure," said Paul dully. "Complete and utter failure. Something's happened to Bert and made him a fool. In a few moments I think you'll agree."

When Bert had again wet his lips from the glass on the table he lifted an arm and waved it for silence.

"We're all interested in this new job," he said. "We all hope to work on it. And unless I'm very much mistaken, one of the contractors who will finally bid it in is sitting in the last row of this hall. *One* of them. His partner isn't here. His partner wouldn't dare come here. And that partner is Gus Blaucher!"

**E**VERY man in the hall turned to stare at Paul. Some rose from their seats. Most of them simply sat and stared. Nothing was said. But Paul felt accusation in the eyes that watched him. There came a quick desire to answer—to defend himself and tell the reason for the new partnership. He wanted to explain. But as he looked toward Bert Saxon that feeling passed. Bert, crafty in his new role of demagogue wanted Paul to speak. And whatever he might say would then be

turned against him. Paul leaned back in his chair, folded his arms and grinned. The men turned again to face Bert.

"We all know Paul Touchet," said Bert. "A grand guy and a swell boss. Most of us have worked for him and there have been mighty few complaints on his jobs. In return, I think he will agree that few contractors have received so much work for their dollars as he. So that makes us even all around. But in hooking up with Gus Blaucher he's bringing someone into the trade who doesn't belong. Blaucher is a cheap, doublecrossing rat and we know it. As Paul Touchet's partner he becomes a tunnel-builder. And he'll bring to the tunnel all the slimy tricks he's learned. Knowing this, I again insist Jack Flynn is not the man to deal with him. And Jack, as you know, agrees with me."

He paused and turned slowly to look across the men. "Will you let me take his job?" he asked quietly. "Will you appoint me business agent? Will you let me help to draw up new contracts calling for higher wages?"

Thunderous agreement came from the sandhogs. Each man in the hall was on his feet—cheering, yelling, stamping his feet. Only Paul and Kay remained seated. Kay's face was flushed and eager. She had been carried along with Bert's words and she was beating the palm of one hand rapidly against the other. Paul's hands were still. He was slumped down in his chair, staring at the floor. Kay turned and shook his arm. She lifted her voice above the riot of sound to question him. He didn't answer.

"Paul!" she cried again. "What's wrong?"

"Everything," he said, leaning close to her ear. "He's done just what I expected. Don't you understand? Don't you realize what's happened?"

"No—not exactly."

"Bert Saxon, general superintendent and tunnel builder is dead. He committed suicide just now. Bert Saxon, penniless labor-leader, agitator and crusader has taken his place."

Kay's eyes were wide. "I—I hadn't thought," she said. "It all sounded so wonderful—so fine—"

"Words," said Paul. "In that man's mouth they become whips. But get behind them and see what he's done, Kay. A few moments ago Bert Saxon was headed toward the top. No man has ever come faster in the construction world than Bert. No man is better equipped to continue. If circumstances had not forced me to hook up with Gus Blaucher—Bert Saxon would have been my next partner. Together, we'd have rolled up a fortune. Even without me, Bert was headed toward real money. Someone—Martin & Ranger, Midland, or one of the big firms—would have taken him in. It had to happen."

"And now?" said Kay.

Paul laughed shortly. "He's gone over the fence and joined the other side. He'll fight us and we'll fight back. His future is gone and he's headed for oblivion."

CONSTERNATION twisted the corners of Kay's mouth. She caught Paul's arms and held them tightly. Looked into his eyes. "Stop him, Paul," she said. "Please—please stop him. Make him realize what he's doing!"

"Stop him? Why should I?"

"Because he's your friend."

Paul rested an arm across the back of Kay's chair. It was as though they were alone rather than in a group of a thousand cheering men. His lips were close to her cheek when he spoke and his voice was sharp.

"Kay, I was afraid this might happen. I've felt it coming for weeks. And as Bert's friend—I'm sorry. But as the man who hopes to become your husband—"

Kay's lips were thin. "I think I understand, Paul."

"Can you blame me?"

"No." Her voice was dull. Flat.

Paul turned away. Kay had said what he wanted but the sound of the word was unpleasant in his ears. It wasn't right. Nothing was right. The whole scheme of things was twisted and bent. Bert Saxon

didn't belong on that platform. He wasn't cut from the cloth of martyrs, Bert was a builder—perhaps the greatest of all time. His place was in a tunnel where steel and iron were forming a roadway beneath a river. Or bending over a set of blueprints whose intricate lines expressed the dreams of master craftsmen.

Paul remembered the night they had sat together in his office studying the plans of the new tunnel. A thousand problems were hidden in the curves and angles set down by the draftsmen. They must be solved, figured and priced before the bid could go in. And Bert had laughed as he pointed to each with a heavy blunt finger—laughed and told Paul the answer. Before this there had been other nights when the two men worked long hours in a silent office—planning, figuring, taking the kinks from a job under construction.

Paul recalled a time when a surging river had threatened to sweep away the work of months. Bert had raged, then. Twin fires flared in his eyes as he led the men into the heading. Shovels and sledges had sung the song of the tunnel. Men had worked and some had died. But always in the front where danger was greatest worked Bert Saxon. And he had won. He had beaten back the river and saved a tunnel.

And so it had always been. Through the years Paul had come to depend upon this giant friend. When a foolish contract or a thoughtless bid had threatened the fortunes of his firm, Bert had talked with the men, asked them for speed. And a miracle of construction would follow. True, he had been well paid. But money was no measure of the bond that had grown between them. And now Bert wanted to destroy all this. For the sake of a foolish ideal he was about to put an end to a career that had promised greatness.

Paul stood up. The movement was involuntary. He wasn't conscious of the voice that yelled for recognition—hardly knew it for his own. A vague force was driving. He wanted to help Bert—save him from the results of his own folly as Bert had so

often done for him. Bert was his friend. And that friend was making a mistake.

"Mr. Chairman!" he cried. "Mr. Chairman! I'll take those few minutes Saxon offered!"

## CHAPTER XI

### TWO MEN

VOICES were stilled and the sandhogs turned to look at Paul. Some laughed and pointed. Others jeered. Paul stared them down and continued his demands for recognition from the chair. Bert, standing at the forward edge of the platform, saw him. He lifted his arms.

"Quiet, men!" he cried. "Gus Blaucher's partner wants to speak."

Laughter and catcalls followed his words. There were cries of, "Put him out! We won't listen!" A few voices lifted in angry protest. On the whole, the attitude of the men was one of good-natured rebuke to a well-liked member. Paul Touchet had always been a friend of the sandhogs. He was the only contractor allowed to hold a union book—one earned through months of work on a shovel when he decided to learn the trade in his youth. As Bert had said, there had never been a quarrel between Paul and the men. Now they were inclined to dismiss his protests with a laugh.

Paul lifted his voice. "As a member of this local—not as a contractor nor partner of anyone—as a member in good standing, I'm entitled to a voice in this hall!"

"Sure, you are," laughed a mucker. "Tell 'em all about it, Touchet."

Bert grinned at the men and held his hands out, palms down in a request for silence. Jerry Harkness pounded his gavel and the voices were stilled. Paul stepped into the aisle, turned once to look at Kay and found her watching him. Her eyes questioned him. He smiled and shrugged his shoulders as though to say, "Well—here goes." Then he winked slowly and turned to face the platform.

"Far be it from me," he said quietly, "to find fault with Bert Saxon's speech. It was one of the finest ever made in this hall to



my knowledge. If he said some things with which I don't agree—that's of little importance. But as a member of the local I'd like to ask one question. May I, Mr. Chairman?"

"Ask it," said Harkness.

"Saxon has told you he makes five hundred a week. He's told you he will soon be offered double that amount. And he's right. If I bid in that new job I'll gladly pay him a thousand to work for me. But—is this local able to pay that amount to its business agent? Can you meet my figure?"

There was silence for a moment. Men turned questioningly and looked at those beside them. A low muttering started and soon argument broke out in a score of groups. Bert's laugh brought order. It was short. Sarcastic.

"Have I asked for a thousand?" he cried. "Jack Flynn's pay was a hundred and fifty. I'll take the same!"

The men in the hall shouted. The noise that came from their throats rolled as a wave across the room. Heavy feet stamped and arms waved. And through it, Paul stood smiling—staring at Bert Saxon. In the contractor's eyes was the look that comes to the duelist when his opponent has made a mistake. He stepped forward as though to lend weight to the thrust that would finish the fight.

"You'll take a hundred and fifty?" he said. "If that is true—what are we to think of the words you've been using? A moment ago you told us *money* is the most important thing in the world. Something we all want. Something we all work to get. You claimed the money in a man's pay envelope is the only thing that sends him into the tunnel. You've proved each of us works for one thing only—*money*! And that's great! But—what about yourself?"

"I've made plenty," said Bert quickly.

"Sure you have," laughed Paul. "And a dozen contractors are willing to pay you five times as much as the union can. Why won't you accept it?"

"You know why I won't work for Gus Blaucher!"

"I'm not talking about him. What about

Martin & Ranger? What about Midland, or the Johnston Construction Company? They'd give you seven hundred—any of them. Why don't you take it?"

"Are you sure you don't know the reason, Paul?"

"I'm sure that I *do*!" cried Paul. "And what's more, I believe what you said a moment ago—each of us is out to get all he can. We all want money. I do. These men do. And so do you—Bert Saxon!"

"Are you trying to say that—"

"That as business agent of this local you'll find a way to make twice, three times, perhaps ten times more than I or any other contractor could pay you. Hell—you could afford to take the job for nothing! It's the softest racket in the world!"

PAUL walked to his seat and sat down. He was white-faced and his lips were thin. But he winked to Kay and rested a hand upon her arm. Her eyes questioned him as the voices of the sandhogs lifted in rushing crescendo—muttered whisperings that gathered in volume. Miners looked at their calloused hands. Rubbed their cracked and bruised knuckles slowly against the heavy palms. Muckers and iron men leaned close and asked low-voiced questions. An occasional curse came from a whispering group. And through it Bert stood facing them from the platform. His head was up, his legs wide spread as though to take the shock of a punch. The smile was gone and he swayed slightly, hunching his shoulders as a man would to flex the muscles of his back before an exchange of blows.

"I'll give you the lie on that, Paul," he cried. "You lie as you talk—and you know it. Name the day or the place any Saxon took a penny in graft and I'll turn in my book this night."

Paul got to his feet. "Every man in this hall knows the Saxons," he said. "We know what they've done—know their record and their history. Until now the name has stood for everything fine and right in the tunnel trade. I bring no accusation

against you, Bert Saxon. As you say, I can't name a time or a place where you ever took a dishonest nickel. But tonight you've made two statements. They don't agree! Which of them do you want us to believe?"

"Believe that I'm going to give everything I've got to bring a change to the trade of building tunnels," Bert answered. "Believe that I'm going to use all of the tricks I've learned from contractors in a fight for the men of my clan. Believe that—and tell your friends." He paused and looked out over the rows of silent sandhogs. "As for you men of my local—ask yourselves why Paul Touchet, contractor and business man, is here in this hall tonight trying to discredit me."

Paul laughed. "That's right, men," he said. "And then ask yourselves if Paul Touchet has ever doublecrossed you, failed to meet your demands, refused to pay union scale or employ union men on any of his jobs. Talk it over. Reason it out. But don't let yourselves be tricked by the smooth words of a man who would like to sell you out!" He caught Kay's hands and drew her erect. "Come on, Kay," he said quietly. "It's time to go."

Silence walked with them to the door. The sergeant-at-arms twisted the knob and stepped aside. Paul took Kay's arm and led her down the stairs to the street. He said nothing until they had reached the corner of Eighth Avenue. Then he turned to the white-faced girl beside him and smiled.

"How did you like it?" he asked.

"I don't—I don't know."

"Didn't think it would be like that, did you?"

"No. I didn't."

"I don't believe any woman can understand what fools men make of themselves when they huddle together in a large room to talk," he said. "Let's forget it and have a drink while we wait for Bert."

"Wait for Bert?" she said in surprise.

"Sure. He'll be along in a few minutes."

"But—I don't understand."

Paul chuckled and led her into a small

café where there were tables set in dimly-lit alcoves. It was a half hour before show-break and there were few people at the bar or seated at the tables. A white-coated waiter took their order and Paul passed his cigarette case to Kay. She took one with hands that were not quite steady. When the waiter set two Martinis before them Paul lifted his in jesting salute.

"Will you drink to a pair of perfect fools?" he asked.

"You and Bert?"

"Yes."

"No," she said quietly. "But I'll drink to a pair of gallant gentlemen."

"Thanks. But I think my name for us is the better."

She rested an arm on the table and looked into his eyes. "What's it all about?" she asked. "For a time I thought I understood. While Bert was talking he made it so clear—so simple. The men needed a leader and he offered to take the job. Then you told me what it would mean to him. For the moment you seemed pleased—"

"I was," said Paul. "You see, Kay—I love you. I'm conceited enough to believe you'd marry me if it were not for Bert. When I saw him stepping out of the way it was natural for me to be pleased."

"Then why—"

"Why did I fight him?" he laughed.

"Yes."

"I've told you the reason. Because I'm as great a fool as Bert, I suppose. Because I couldn't sit quietly and watch my friend dig his own grave."

"Do you believe the things you said?"

"Not at all. No more than I believe half of what Bert said."

"Then what is it all about?"

"Politics," he said. "Bert has suddenly been bitten by the crusading bug. He wants to better the conditions of the men. As their business agent he can get them more money than they've ever dreamed of—more than any man who works with his hands. In order to get Jack Flynn's job he had to put on a political hate-fest—give them the old hokum and work on their sympathies."

"And you really think he can help them?"

"Think? I know he can. Bert knows tunnels, costs, figures and contractors. He'll be the toughest business agent ever to demand more money for his local. And as a result there will be strikes, riots, broken contracts and broken heads. When it's over and the smoke clears away Bert Saxon will be blacklisted by every contractor in the trade. He'll never build another tunnel. Then, a day will come when the union will forget him—forget the things he's one for it. And Bert will go back on a shovel to work in a drift as a miner."

Kay lifted her hand and put it to her eyes as though to shut out the picture Paul had drawn. She leaned against the table edge, pushed back her drink and looked up.

"And because Bert is your friend you tried to prevent this?"

"I suppose so," said Paul wearily. "Friendship covers a multitude of sins."

THEY were silent for a time and Kay studied the man across the table. She had never thought of Paul as she had seen him tonight. She recalled the manner in which he played for a weak spot in Bert's attack. Paul's answering thrust had been swift as the stroke of a master swordsman. Bitter. Cold. A stroke that whipped away the dream castles built by the sandhog. Doubt and distrust had grown with Paul's words. She had seen it in the faces of the men. When he spoke she heard a deliberate and cold-blooded business man tearing to shreds the reputation of an opponent. It was merciless. Cruel. For a moment the steel had shown through the velvet glove. And Kay wondered if she would ever know the many sides that went to make up the man who sat facing her tonight.

Now he had tried in few words to make clear his position and explain what had happened at the meeting. Kay knew he was wondering if he had won—if Bert would be stopped in his headlong rush toward destruction. If this had been accomplished Paul was one step further from

his dream of marriage with Kay. And she was that much closer to Bert. Foolish thoughts, perhaps.

She loved Bert. And she admired Paul. But Paul didn't start a tiny pulse beating in her throat as did Bert's merest laugh. Paul's voice didn't send her eyes questing in search of a wide-shouldered, smiling giant whose hand on her arm brought a warmth to her breasts. And even as she turned these thoughts in her mind, she knew she was waiting to see Bert again.

Paul knew it, too. He nodded his head in silent understanding when Kay's eyes brightened. Bert was coming toward them. His long stride carried him quickly past the other tables and his hand was heavy as it thumped against Paul's back.

"Hello, you murderer," he said. "Isn't it bad enough to call me a crook without coming to my favorite bar to celebrate?"

"Sit down, sucker," laughed Paul. "We've been waiting for you. Kay thinks it's time you bought a drink."

"Not here," said Bert. He rested his hands on the table and grinned at Kay. "Let's bounce over to the Astor Roof and gather up some breeze."

Kay looked at Paul. "Shall we?"

"Why not?" he answered. "It's about two minutes in a cab and Bert can pay the bill. The loser buys champagne tonight, too."

"Great," said Bert. "Get ready to dig down."

"What?"

Bert's laugh was loud. "You'll find out," he promised, and drew Kay to her feet. "This fellow Touchet never won an argument in his life. He's a pushover, Kay."

Kay looked at him gravely. "I'm trying to remember," she said, "just where I've seen that homely face before. Your voice is familiar but I'm sure we haven't met in a great while."

"Oh, you must remember me," he laughed. "I'm the guy that saved his nickels to take you to the movies when we lived in Detroit."

"Have we met since then?"

"Once," said Bert wryly.

"Of course," agreed Paul in mock seriousness. "He's the fellow that takes little girls out to play in the mud when they're dressed in evening gowns."

"Oh, yes," said Kay thoughtfully. "Now I recall. He breaks up pleasant evenings, gallops around in ditches and then disappears."

Paul had paid the check and they were walking toward the street. Bert lifted his arms as though to defend himself from a shower of blows and ran to the curb. He hailed a cab and opened the door.

"You win," he said. "I'm the guy."

Kay wondered at his mood. It was light, cheerful. Once again he was the Bert Saxon who had insisted upon jazz at a dignified musical. His laugh was the same as it had been when they had met for the second time in one evening at Paul's apartment. Certainly, not the Bert Saxon who had walked with her along the Brooklyn waterfront looking off into the sunrise as he talked of the men of his clan. Nor was it the man who had swayed a thousand tunnel-builders to the rhythm of his words. All trace of seriousness was gone. When he walked with them across the hotel lobby and handed her into an elevator his conversation was that of the smart New Yorker out for an evening's pleasure.

The head-waiter recognized him and quickly took a *Reserved* sign from a floor-side table. Then clapped his hands, called to the waiters, bowed and showered service and attention upon the group. The orchestra leader waved his baton toward Bert in a friendly gesture. And the Broadway crowd at nearby tables called cheery hellos or lifted their glasses in greeting.

"You order the dinner, Paul," said Bert. "Kay and I will try out the floor. And be sure to order champagne."

He took Kay's arm and started toward the dance floor. As he passed Paul's chair he caught his friend by the shoulder and shook it. Paul looked up. Smiling.

"Do I pay for it, too?" he asked.

"Absolutely."

"They gave you Flynn's job as business agent?"

"On a silver platter, my friend. All tied up in pretty blue ribbons."

"In that case," said Paul, "I think I'll order a side-dish of ground glass for you. Or perhaps a little arsenic in the gravy."

## CHAPTER XII

### AND ONE WOMAN

HE BECKONED to the waiter and Bert grinned broadly as he hurried after Kay. The floor was not uncomfortably crowded and Kay was pleasantly surprised to find Bert a good dancer. There was a light sureness to his step that told of smooth flowing muscles. The arm that circled her waist was firm but not too tightly held. A slight odor of tobacco clung to his gray-tweed suit and as Kay lifted her head she was conscious of that clean, soap-and-water scent so pleasantly a part of well-washed hair. When he caught her studying him he smiled. And Kay noticed his teeth were white and even. Everything, she thought, about Bert Saxon was as she wished it. He was a man's man, yet every woman at the floorside tables turned to follow him with her eyes as they danced past.

"Do you come here often?" she asked.

"I used to. Too busy, lately."

"Were you surprised to see me at the hall?"

"Very much. I thought you told me you were through with the clan—wanted to forget all about sandhogs?"

"I meant it," she said.

He turned and headed toward an open spot at the corner of the floor, guiding her past a pair of youngsters too absorbed in themselves to watch the direction of their dancing.

"You're a funny girl," he said.

"And you're a funny man."

"Think so?"

"Of course," she smiled. "A half hour ago you and Paul were at each other's throats. Now you're apparently the best of friends."

"Oh, that—" He avoided the youngsters again. "Don't let that worry you. If he

bids in that new job I expect to fight with him every day of the week. But we'll probably be the best of friends in the evening. I might even borrow his boat to use on our honeymoon."

"Are you and Paul going to be married?"

"Smart girl," he laughed, and deliberately bumped into the youngsters. "I'm talking about us."

"Oh—we're going to be married?"

"Didn't you know?"

"No," she smiled. "Silly of me, wasn't it?"

"Very silly. I thought you knew we were going to City Hall in the morning to get the license."

"Aren't you mistaking me for some other girl?"

He held her at arms' length and studied her carefully. Then he drew her close and rested his lips against her ear and whispered to her.

"No mistake," he said. "You're the girl."

She drew away, tilting her head back to smile at him. Then she studied him as he had done, pursing her lips and creasing her eyes.

"Sorry," she said. "You're not the boy."

"A dollar will get you ten you're wrong."

Again he kissed her ear.

"Oh, Bert be serious," she said. "You're acting like a fool and everybody is staring."

"Let 'em. The men are envious and the women are admiring the way you've fixed your hair."

"They probably think we're crazy, you loon."

"Let 'em think," he said and held her closer.

The music stopped and she stepped away as he lowered his arms. They were on the far side of the floor and as they walked between the couples Bert leaned close.

"That was really a proposal," he said. "I haven't the nerve to go through with one of those bended-knee affairs. This was the only way I could get it across."

She said nothing but turned to look at

him thoughtfully. He was smiling but deep seriousness was in his eyes.

"Will you, Kay?"

They were close to the table and Paul stood and drew back Kay's chair. She thanked him, seated herself and looked squarely into Bert's eyes. Slowly she shook her head, then looked down to see what Paul had ordered as the first course of their meal.

"Been arguing?" asked the contractor.

"Not at all," said Bert. "Merely looking into the future."

"I wouldn't, if I were you," said Paul. "Not if you're actually going through with that job."

"As business agent?" said Kay.

"Yes. Bert's been handed the keys to the city. The hogs are suckers for a smooth tongue. He waited until we were out of the hall and then double-talked them into believing him."

"You didn't," said Kay. She looked quickly at Bert.

"Sure I did," said Bert. He lifted a spoonful of melon and nodded his head in approval at the taste. "But what's that to do with looking into the future, Paul?"

"Let's forget it."

"Not a chance. I want to know what's wrong with my future. Personally, I think it's going to be very interesting. Kay agrees with me. She's going to share it."

"Really?"

"Don't believe him," laughed Kay. "I turned him down cold."

"For the moment," said Paul wisely. "But you'll undoubtedly change your mind before the evening is over."

"For the first time today," said Bert, "we agree on something. Now—can you find anything wrong with the future?"

"A great deal," said Paul. "Perhaps I shouldn't say this. But in fairness to Kay—and to Paul Touchet, I will."

"Never overlook Paul," laughed Bert.

"Why should I? Especially, when I believe Paul would make the better husband for Kay."

"Does it make any difference what I think?" asked Kay lightly.



"Not at the moment," said Paul seriously.

KAY laughed. She wanted to keep the conversation in a jesting mood. There was something in Paul's eyes that warned her he would not step aside without a last effort. And beneath Bert's smile was an earnestness more apparent for the lightness of his speech. Both men were keyed to tautness and Kay wanted to break this tension. She lifted her glass of cool *Rheinwein* and held it before her.

"Here's to the present," she said. "We'll drink to the future when it comes. And I've been told it never does."

No sooner were the words out than Kay realized she had said the wrong thing. Paul's eyes lit and he lifted his glass to touch the rim to hers. Then he turned and rang the glass against Bert's.

"To the present," he said, and touched the wine to his lips. "Let's forget that a labor leader's future is apt to be more concerned with blood than with good Rhenish wine. Let's forget that a change in leaders brings a change in methods. That strikes and riots and broken heads are the commodities he deals in. That men will starve and freeze and die at his command. That a thousand men will be at his side through the day, but that at night he walks by himself."

Bert's face was grave as he listened. His glass was rock-steady—held between fingers that were blunt and calloused. He touched it to Paul's, then lifted it higher.

"Yes—let's drink to the present," he said evenly. "But let's not forget the future when the men of my clan will come into their own. Starve and freeze and die, they may. And at my command. But they've starved before—they've frozen before—and many have died in the tunnels they've dug for you, Paul. And if I walk alone at night—as walk alone I may—at least I'll walk with my head in the stars, close up to the God I trust. He sent a Son to the world down here to help the fools He'd made. Perhaps—perhaps He'll help me, too. Perhaps—and I think He will."

Paul's voice was low. "They killed the

Son He sent," he said. "Have you forgotten that, Bert?"

"Forgotten it?" Bert's eyes were bright as the sparkling wine he held in his hand. "No, Paul—I haven't forgotten."

Kay saw him staring off into space. That strange far look was in his eyes—the one she had seen when they had walked from the riverfront and Bert had pointed to the lifting sun. His hand lowered the glass and he pushed it aside. She saw his wide chest lift and fall in slow and rhythmic motion as though it were an effort for Bert to breathe. His words seemed to hang above the table where she could hear them time and again. "With my head in the stars"—it was the dreamer speaking with metered phrase, unconscious of the poetry of his words.

Facing him, Kay saw a man who looks at a friend with the sign of death on his forehead. Color had drained from Paul's face and the hand that held the glass trembled so the bright wine spilled and wet the table. Sorrow, compassion, a helpless yet wistful hope—all these things and many more Kay saw in the expressions that touched Paul's face. And turning to look again to Bert, Kay read the sign with eyes that were suddenly misted.

What it was, she didn't know. There was no definition—no tangible mark. But it was there. And seeing it she knew a sensation that was strange to her. She wanted to mother Bert. Protect him. There was an urge to step forward and place herself between the man she loved and this danger that threatened. As in a dream she heard Paul talking—telling his friend of the many leaders who had walked this path before him. Of the disappointments, trouble and eventual disillusionment that must come. She heard him picture the career of a demagogue—fights, prison, beatings and poverty. And she heard Bert laugh.

For a time the three ate as strangers. Little was said, and when the waiter poured champagne the pale golden wine was a mockery. Kay twisted the thin stem of the glass between her fingers and

watched the tiny bubbles swell upward to burst on the surface. Then she pushed back her chair and stood up.

"Dance with me, Bert," she said. "This is my favorite waltz."

Bert grinned. "I like the idea, but what about Paul? Aren't you forgetting our host?"

"Paul won't mind."

"Of course not," said Paul, and looked wistfully at Kay. "Kay and I have danced a thousand times while you were worrying. Perhaps it's time for you to dance while I worry."

"Rather morbid, aren't you?" laughed Bert as he took Kay's arm. "What's happened to our party? I thought this was to be a celebration of my new job."

"It is," said Paul. "Enjoy it."

**B**ERT pushed Paul's shoulder and walked with Kay to the floor. She leaned back against his arm and lifted her eyes to look into his. "Do you remember the first time we danced together?"

"Sure I do. In Detroit when your father took us to one of the sandhog picnics. I stepped on your toes and spoiled your new white shoes."

"I didn't mind."

"Not even a little bit?"

"Not a tiny bit," she said softly. "I got up early the next day and cleaned them."

"You did?"

"Yes. I was putting them out on the back porch to dry in the sun when they brought my brother home."

"Oh," said Bert quietly. "You mean when—"

"When he was killed?" said Kay. "No. This was in the morning when his wrist was broken. Later, when he heard the police were clubbing the men he went back. I went with him—ran after him."

"You were a great kid, Kay."

"I saw him when he climbed up on a box to talk to the strikers. A fight started—I don't know how. Then I heard a gun go off and Terry was—"

"Don't talk about that now," said Bert. "That was years ago."

"I can still see him there with the blood on his face and my father bending over him. And when Steve Hartley picked him up the bandage on his wrist was all unraveled and it twisted about Steve's legs."

"You mustn't think of such things. Not now—"

"How can I help it? You can't forget sights like that. It was the same when Uncle Will tried to talk with the men who were taking the strikers' places in Boston. A policeman told him to stop—threatened him with his club. Will grabbed the club and—and later in the week mother had to make over one of her black dresses for me—so I could go to the church when they buried him."

"For God's sake, Kay!" cried Bert. "Did we come here to dance?"

"I'm sorry," said Kay. "But you asked me to marry you and I thought you might like to know my reasons for refusing."

"Are those the only reasons?"

"Aren't they enough?"

"But I mean—if—" He danced slowly with her along the rim of the floor until they came to a corner near the orchestra. "It's not anything personal? If it weren't for those things you'd—"

"Perhaps."

Kay felt his arm tighten about her waist. And with the pressure came the knowledge of her power as a woman. Deliberately and with conscious effort she used it. She moved closer—leaned against Bert's chest. When they turned she brushed her cheek softly against his, remembering the subtle fragrance of the perfume she had touched to the tips of her ears. Her lips parted and she looked into his eyes. She smiled. A slow, provocative smile. Gently, and with infinite care, she moved her body closer to his. Her head was high, now. Men turned to stare and she was careful that Bert see them. Some smiled. Kay dropped her eyes, to lift them again to look at Bert.

"Like me?"

"Very much," he answered.

"Proud of me?"

"The proudest man on earth."

She laughed and squeezed his hand. The music had stopped but Bert signaled quickly to the orchestra leader. The music started again. Bert's arm drew her toward him. She moved in, using each of the many tricks she had learned over the years. That had been fun. But tonight she was in earnest. Plying a trade that was born with woman. Making a man want her. Making him forget there was anything else in the world but the woman he held in his arms.

And soon she knew she was winning. Bert's breath was warm upon her cheek. His arm was cruelly tight. When she lifted her lips and smiled he dropped his own against hers and kissed her—forgetting the smiling couples who watched, forgetting the music, the dance—everything but Kay McLane.

"Kay—you do love me?" he whispered.  
"More than anything in the world."

The phrase was old and worn to shreds. But as she said it with her lips close to his it was as though the words had been born that night.

"You'll marry me?" he asked.  
"Whenever you say."  
"This week? Tomorrow?"  
"Tonight, if you wish."

BERT swung her from her feet and held her at arm's length. Kay was tall, almost of a height with Bert. But there wasn't a tremble in the powerful arms that held her. The orchestra leader, sensing that again the age-old question had been asked and answered, turned quickly to his men and the horns flared the first few bars of Mendelssohn's wedding march.

Bert laughed then. It was a loud laugh that carried so much joy that it found echo in a score of throats. Couples at the nearby tables stood and clapped their hands. Some, who knew Bert, lifted their glasses and called him by name. Carnival spirit caught the crowd and they cheered. And through it all Kay stood smiling, one arm about Bert and her eyes lifted to his.

"Thanks a million!" he cried to the crowd. "But I can't imagine how you guessed."

He started across the floor to the table where Paul sat smiling, and a grinning waiter poured fresh wine. Hands reached out to shake his, to pat his arm or punch him playfully in the ribs. Women looked at Kay and shook their heads jestingly, or winked and wished her luck. Bert caught Paul by the shoulders and shook him.

"You were right," he said. "Kay's changed her mind."

Paul's hand went out. "The best of luck, Bert," he said. "She's much too good for you. In fact, I don't know any man but myself who could do her justice."

"For that, we won't name our first son after you," laughed Bert.

"Our first?" laughed Kay. "Such ambition!"

"When is all this going to happen?" asked Paul. "I mean the wedding and all that sort of nonsense."

"Just as soon as we finish this drink," said Bert. "I think there's a fellow in Philadelphia or Connecticut that stays open all night."

"Bless you, my children," said Paul. "But why not wait until morning and make it legal?"

"Think we can wait until morning?"

"I'll try," she smiled. "And while we're at it—I mean this waiting business—let's finish that toast we started earlier in the evening."

Bert's eyes clouded. "What do you mean, Kay?"

"To the future," she said lightly. "A future in which there will be no room for anything but happiness."

"Drink it down," said Bert and lifted his glass.

Paul's eyes met his. "I'll drink to that, Bert. And I'll drink to the day when you are to become my partner."

"Bottoms up!" said Kay and drained her glass. "And another to the day when you two build a tunnel to Europe."

Her laugh was high, feverish. It was as though she would pick up Bert and carry him along with her on the crest of a rushing wave. She mustn't let him think.

Mustn't let him realize what he had done. And Paul was helping her. She had caught the eagerness of his words, seen the quick realization that leaped in his eyes. He was standing now, one arm about Bert and a glass to his lips. He drank the wine and took the bottle from the waiter's hands.

"And here's to the bride—a long life of happiness amidst the luxury she deserves. Jewels for her fingers, beautiful gowns and fine furs. Winters on the Riviera and summers in New York with a successful husband." He laughed and spilled wine into the glasses. "To Kay Saxon—the wife of the world's most capable builder!"

Bert's glass shattered against the table edge.

"Hold it, Paul!" he said quickly. "You're off on the wrong track, I'm afraid."

The bubble was bursting but Paul tried to carry the tempo set by Kay. "Wrong track, nothing!" he laughed. "With Kay as your wife, Bert—nothing can stop you. I'm no fool, and I know enough not to fight a winner. When you start bidding in jobs you'll run every contractor in the country ragged. But right now—before you bid in your first job—how about a partnership?"

"Grab it, Bert," cried Kay lightly. "Sign him up and I'll be the witness. Make it a fifty-fifty proposition or we'll dig up our own capital and put the Touchet Construction Company out of business."

"Fifty-fifty, it is," said Paul. "When the most successful dressmaker on Madison Avenue talks of digging up capital, I know she can do it."

Bert opened his mouth to object but Kay got in the first words. "You're right, Paul," she said breathlessly. "I was offered a quarter of a million to finance a place on Park Avenue by old Julius Garfinkle. And when—"

"Just a minute, Kay," said Bert firmly. "What's going on here?"

"A business deal. We're forming the Touchet and Saxon Construction Company. Or shall we call it the Saxon and Touchet Company?"

"Call it neither," said Bert.

"Oh—you're going to be my competitor, are you?" grinned Paul. "Won't hook up with the man who gave you your first job as superintendent?"

"Quit it—both of you!" said Bert. "If you're trying to give me a good time—thanks. I like a joke but I think you're carrying this a little too far."

Paul was serious. "I'm not joking, Bert. I mean every word I've said."

"So do I," said Kay. "If you need capital to get started, Bert, there are a dozen people who will trust my judgment. They know I don't make mistakes."

"You're making one, now," said Bert. "I'm not going to be a contractor. And you know it, Kay."

"But why not? The money has to come from somewhere and you're a tunnelman."

"Certainly," agreed Paul. "Beautiful wives are expensive propositions. If you don't believe it, ask some of the men at the Sportsmen's Club. Harry Bellamy married a friend of Kay's and had to build three new hotels to support her. He used to own six but found they didn't bring in enough to keep the wolf from the door."

"Stop being an idiot, Paul!" snapped Bert. "Just because we've all had a few drinks is no reason to act this way. I'm not going into the contracting line—and that's final!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### DREAMS ARE FRAGILE

"I won't work, Kay," he said harshly. "I've taken a job and I intend to keep it. All this nonsense may be amusing but it's not getting us anywhere."

"You mean you're going to work for the union even if—"

"I mean just that."

"But Bert—you can't. It isn't practical."

"No?"

"Of course not. After all, I've worked hard and built up a successful business. I started with a few dollars and lived in a furnished room. When money came, I

learned to enjoy the things it could buy. I think I'm entitled to them."

"No doubt of that," said Bert.

"You've seen my home—met the type of people I enjoy being with. Do you blame me for wanting to continue my life along those lines?"

"No."

"And we're both smart enough to know what will happen if I make five or six hundred a week in my business while you get only a hundred and fifty in yours. Those things don't last. For some reason, they never do. It isn't right and I'm sorry. But I didn't make the rules and I know I'm not big enough to change them."

Paul nodded wisely. "You're sensible, Kay," he said. He lifted one of the small pieces of glass that had broken from Bert's hands. For a moment he looked at it.

Bert stared at the cloth. "Making it kind of tough, aren't you, Paul?"

"Just telling the truth. And Kay agrees, I'm sure."

"Naturally I do," said Kay. "I've seen it happen so often." She rested a hand on Bert's arm. "Oh, I know it sounds mercenary and cold. But we do want to be happy, Bert—we've a right to be happy. And if we use the sense and knowledge we've acquired through watching life—I know we can be happy."

A stubborn look had come to Bert's eyes. His jaw was set hard and he leaned forward.

"In other words—if I expect you to marry me, I must go out and make a thousand a week?"

"Not necessarily," said Kay. "There's no specific figure. And it doesn't have to happen within any set time. But—"

"But you expect it?"

"Don't you think I should?"

Paul reached for the wine bottles and filled the glasses. "Let's stop acting like kids," he said. "Bert will be making more in a year than you can spend in a lifetime, Kay. He can't miss."

"Thanks for the effort, Paul," said Bert. He laughed, and the laugh was cold. "It looks as though you and Kay have been

trying to keep me out of trouble. Saving me from a fate worse than death, or some such hokum. I didn't get it at first. But now I do."

"Bert—" Kay's hand was tight on his arm.

Bert shrugged it aside. "I think—in fact, I know you're both sorry for me. Want to help me." He turned and caught Kay's wrist. Held it tightly. "Is that it, Kay? Is that why you were willing to marry me?"

"You're talking like a fool!"

"Oh, no I'm not! And you, Paul—you want me as a partner? Like hell, you do! You're playing the part of the good friend—trying to keep me out of trouble. And you're a grand guy. A swell pal." His words came faster and he kicked back his chair. "But I don't want your sympathy—don't need it!" He pushed Kay's wrist away and stared at her. His voice was pitched high, strained and taut. "I don't want sympathy from you, Kay. I asked you to marry me because I love you—thought you loved me. I don't want you to be sorry for me."

He was standing now and his hands were gripped about the back of the chair. His knuckles were white and the wood creaked under the strain of those wide hands. Kay's breath caught in her throat as she looked into the face of the man above her. Blue lines were sharp against the whiteness of his forehead. They pulsed and beat. His jaws worked as though he were finding difficulty in drawing breath between his dry lips.

"Don't be sorry for me," he said again. "No—don't be sorry." He backed away from the table. Stared at them. "I don't want sympathy—don't need it! Not from you, Kay. God, *no!*" He laughed. A broken, twisted echo of that great laugh that was part of Bert Saxon. "That's funny—funny! You're—you're sorry for me—"

HE turned and hurried to the door of the roof. His laugh mingled with the low whirl of the violins. People turned to



stare, then looked toward the girl who sat with her head bowed upon her arms. Paul had stood—put out his hand as though to stay his friend. Now he seated himself and touched Kay's shoulder. His voice was soft. Filled with understanding.

"He'll come back," he said gently. "Not tonight, perhaps. But soon—when he's thought and reasoned with himself. He'll come back."

Kay lifted her head. Tears had started the mascara and Paul dabbed at it with his handkerchief. Then he held the square of linen to her nose and said, "Blow." Kay tried to smile. She took the handkerchief and touched the corners of her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Paul," she said. "I'm acting like a fool again."

"Like a grand girl," he said. "One of the finest I've ever met."

"I wanted to stop him," she said. "I thought he'd realize—"

"He will, in time."

Kay shook her head. "No, Paul—it's over."

"These things happen," he said. "At the time they have a way of seeming very important. Perhaps the most important moments of our lives. But then morning comes—and night. Next week or next month you and Bert will be smiling as you recall the waiter's amazement when Bert broke the glass."

"Thanks, Paul. You're a lovely liar."

"Smile when you say that word, gal," he laughed.

She looked toward him and smiled. It was a twisted, sorry smile. And Paul caught her hand and held it tightly.

"I know how you feel, Kay," he said. "It hurts—hurts like the devil to see a dream broken. But dreams can be patched. Honestly they can."

"Not this one."

"Oh, yes it can." He turned and looked toward the doorway where Bert had walked. "Keep loving him and he'll come back."

Kay looked at the quiet-voiced man beside her. There was patient understanding

in his eyes and he was smiling. And as she looked, Kay realized that not once during the evening had Paul tried to turn to his own advantage the twists in the sorry affair. He too, had asked her to be his wife. Yet his response to her attempt to change Bert's decision had been immediate. As a friend Paul Touchet had met every requirement. Now, when the average man might have tried to play upon her emotions, Paul was holding aloof. His complete dismissal of defeat—the casual manner in which he had listened while Bert told of her acceptance, and now his understanding sympathy did something to Kay that Paul had been unable to accomplish with months of attention and flattery.

Perhaps it was emotion. Kay didn't know. She didn't care. She was hurt and tired. And beside her was a man who appeared to understand and know the answers to her questions. He put her arm through his, walked slowly with her to the elevators and said nothing.

And Kay was grateful. Never had she been so at ease with a man before. Never had she found such perfect understanding. But was it only this? Was Paul simply a friend who could be trusted? Or was she seeing him for the first time in his proper light?

"You're a fine person, Paul," she said slowly.

"Thank you, Kay."

"You deserve a good wife."

"Do I?"

"Yes," she said. "One who will realize her husband is one of the finest men on earth."

Paul walked with her into the elevator.

"Careful, lady," he said quietly. "You'll have me asking that same question again."

"Will I?"

"I'm afraid you will."

"Perhaps—if you wait a few days—the answer may be—"

"You're tired, Kay," he said softly. "Tired and your mind is all mixed up. We're not going to talk any more this evening. I'm going to take you home."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

# Third Classman

By PAUL R. MORRISON

Author of "Fourth Classman."

West Point after  
taps has sounded



Time: Autumn  
Place: West Point  
Weather: Chilly

CADET CORPORAL Baird Quinton clicked through the guardhouse vestibule and halted to inspect the white-gloved, white-crossbelted cadets of the punishment squad. He glanced along the wide-spaced, single file that tramped wearily back and forth across the graveled ground in front of the guardhouse—West Point's famous Area.

It was not the late afternoon, autumn sun that set a frown on his face; rather, it was the sudden realization that as an of-

ficer of the guard it was his duty to report his friend, Ward Michaux, for talking in ranks. Ever since Quinton became a third class-

man with corporal's chevrons and Michaux—his predecessor by one year—a second classman with a clean sleeve, a coldness had grown up between them, blighting a friendship that dated since boyhood.

In a low voice, Michaux threw the traditional information to a plebe, who, under compulsion, strutted exactly six paces ahead. Said Michaux: "The AB degree, Mister Dumbguard, may be acquired at West Point at any time before graduation. Even by a blasé plebe like you."

"Yes, sir!" Plebe Stuart Cruse, III, from Boston, sir! acknowledged in a throaty whisper.

"But," Michaux continued, "in the case of a plebe—especially a wooden one like