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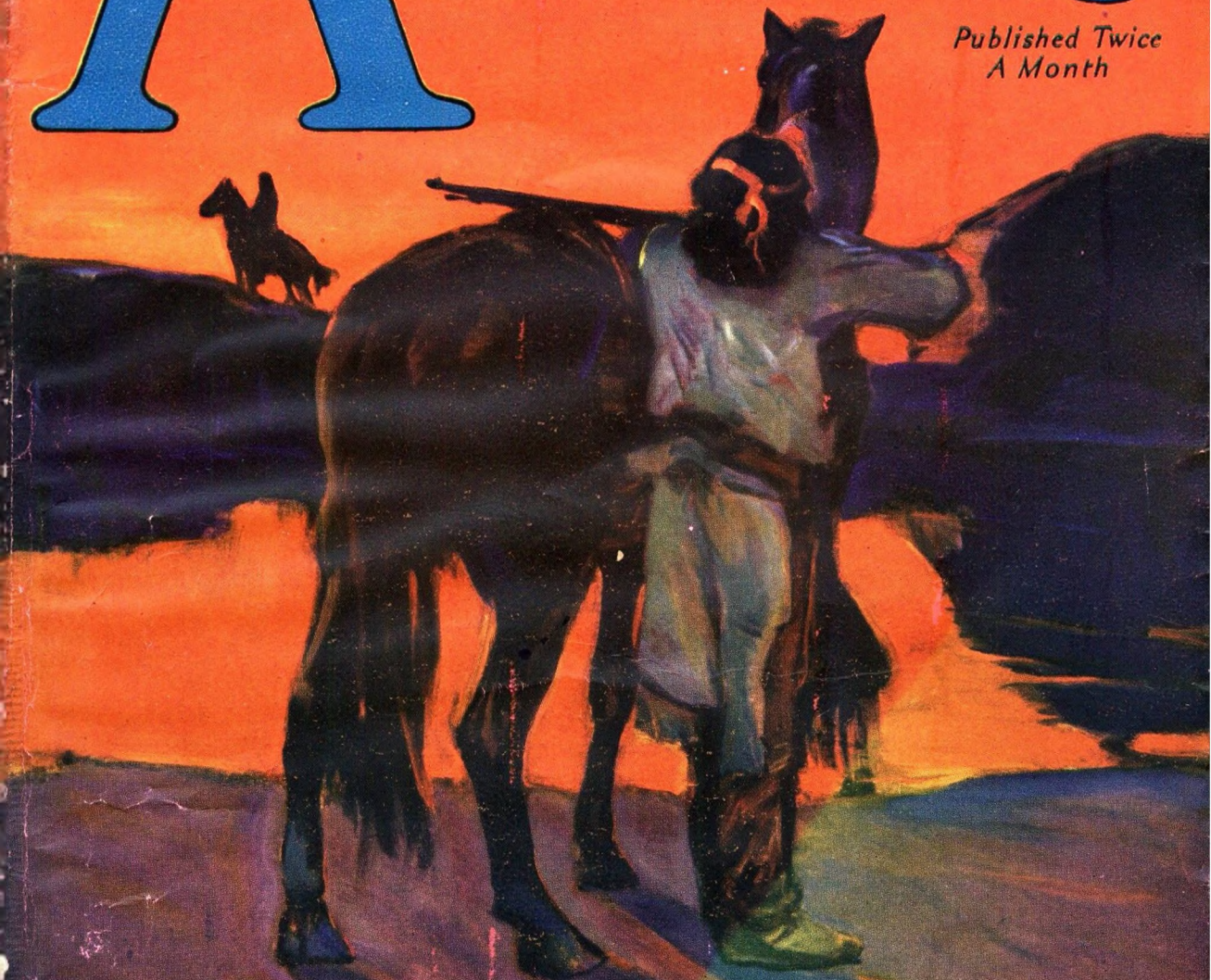

The Gun Notchers

A Novelette by Hugh Pendexter

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CONTENTS

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A Novelette of the Outlaws

CHAPTER I

THE CALL OF GOLD

DAN WATTS was not actuated by any feverish optimism when he left Iowa for the gold fields of Colorado. Like many another youth, he had taken the long trail because a pretty girl had looked elsewhere. Arriving in the mountains, he soon ceased dreaming of acquiring millions and returning home to make the fickle young person feel sorry. During the westward trip it had been gloomily pleasurable to picture himself as rather a tragic figure. The task of discovering gold among naked heights and down in lonesome, unlovely gulches soon reduced him to homesickness. Being red headed and having blue eyes, he should have been a great optimist. Had any of the frenzied grubbers had time to study him and become acquainted with him he might have received much pity. He soon discovered that if he pined away and died in Colorado, the world's pulse would not skip a single beat. But he did have pride. He had publicly told his friends he never would return unless his venture were marked with success.

He decided he would leave Colorado, but that he would not travel east.

The country ahead is always more alluring. He met with an old vagabond prospector, ragged, unwashed and hun-

of the Apache Trails

The Gun Notchers

By

HUGH PENDEXTER

gry, who paid for his several plates of beans with rare tales about the lost country of Cibola and its seven cities crammed with gold. This vast treasure house was in Arizona, the ancient explained. From a lofty height he had looked down on the plain, had seen the tall walls of one of the fabled cities, had found ancient gold ornaments on a dead Chiricahua Apache, who had penetrated one of the golden cities.

This was more to Watts' notion of procuring gold. No digging, no sluicing, no tipping over heavy rocks; but just an array of the pure article from which he could help himself. He commenced working south, questioning people as he traveled.

Almost overnight he discovered that many people knew all about the lost cities. Each had an explanation for not having profited by his knowledge. In short, Watts invited information from every rock ribbed liar, whether stage driver, soldier, or miner. And yet, in Iowa, Watts was no one's fool. At Fort Union he heard disquieting tales of Apache ferocity. At Las Vegas an Army officer informed him that the population of Arizona was ten thousand and that the Apaches were killing twenty settlers a month on an average, or half the ordinary mortality of an army.

Watts blinked his blue eyes rapidly and almost instantly decided to forego

Arizona and proceed to Santa Fé and learn what New Mexico had to offer. As every one in the East had heard much about Santa Fé, he almost made himself believe it would be like going home.

As far as he could see, on entering the town, it consisted of a low, flat collection of mud structures. The streets were narrow and ugly, and there were whole squares walled in by mud bricks, each square consisting of many rooms, all opening on a central court. His feverish eyes took note of a dozen gardens and found the remainder of the landscape gray and bare.

There was but one hotel for Americans, the Exchange. When he dismounted from the lumbering stagecoach the earth seemed to rock, and he walked like a drunken man. He burned with heat and shivered with cold. Mountains wabbled and the people in the streets seemed to be rolling, instead of walking. The hotel was a one-story structure, filling a square. Through the middle of the square was a line of box-like rooms containing the kitchen and dining room and separating the stable and poultry run from the big open court.

Watts dragged himself inside and collapsed on a lounge near a stove. He awoke to find himself in bed and with ancient Spanish doctor dosing him with laudanum, and exclaiming:

"*Caraja! Los nervios! Tres dies y noches en carroza!*"

It was "nerves" from more than three days of continual rocking and swaying and lurching. For eighty hours Watts had suffered in the coach, with only about nine hours of sleep, caught in fitful snatches. Thanks to the laudanum and other doses, he slept the rest of that day and throughout the night. In fact, it was noon when he crawled from bed and dressed. As he started to investigate his surroundings he heard loud cries from the central court. His inclination was to disrobe and return to his bed, for the noises were very discordant, and he found that he was physically very weak.

Conquering this desire, he stepped to the door and looked out. A white haired man with long white beard, with two other shaggy, desperate looking creatures, were eating at a table. Besides the food there were bottles and a jug before them.

"She's a trim little *poblana*. She's the gal for my beaver!" cried the aged one as a little Mexican maid brought big black dates to the table.

The ancient swung her off her feet, kissed the top of her head and gave her a silver dollar.

"Thank you, señor," she gravely said.

"Bully for old Missoury! Three cheers for the United States of Ameriky, where the eagle always screams!"

The speaker's friends rallied and made deafening sounds. One enthusiast discharged a revolver. Watts heard the whistle of lead and heard the bullet plunk into the plastered wall above his head. Very weak, and still wabbly of gait, he advanced to the table and coldly said—

"You nearly shot me."

The man, burned by sun and wind to a rich mahogany, stared at him curiously for ten seconds. Watts felt the impact of the two others' gaze and found it difficult to meet and hold the third man's boring eyes. The latter said:

"Calhoun Jerdan never comes near shootin' nobody. When he's on the shoot for business he hits what he aims at. So you're a liar."

Despite his weakness Watts promptly hurled himself on the speaker, and the stool tipped and both fell to the hard packed mud floor and revolved rapidly. Watts struck feeble blows on his opponent's shaggy head and felt the clutching grip on his throat slowly tightening. Just as all was turning black the pressure ceased and some one was splashing whisky in his face. He remained quiet and heard the Son of the Eagle demand wrathfully—

"Cal Jerdan, what you mean by pitchin' into a poor little sheep like that?"

"Clay Bonset, be careful. How'd I know he wa'n't a stingin' wasp? Didn't he tackle me?"

"He fell agin you because he was too weak to stand. Besides, he's an American

—ain't you, younker?" He shook Watts by the shoulder.

"None of your damned business. When I get some strength back I'm going to chew that lout to ribbons."

Jerdan, leaning forward and cupping his ear to catch the weak defiance, nodded his head in approval and told his friends:

"Just as I said. A stingin' wasp. But he oughter be in bed. Hi, younker, you're goin' to sleep a bit an' git your strength back. Then we'll strip and stand on a handkerchief and fight it out with Bowie knives."

"You want to get me back in bed so you can kill me when I'm asleep," protested Watts. "I'd rather die awake."

He laboriously came to his knees and fell against Jerdan, his weak hand essaying to find the man's throat. Jerdan, with rare histrionic ability, fell over and gave an excellent imitation of a man choking to death, and huskily called for help.

"You young unhuman devil!" growled Bonset. "You've manhandled that poor cuss enough."

As he spoke he gently released the weak grasp and picked Watts up in his long arms and carried him to the room and placed him on the bed. Then he was calling to the girl to prepare and fetch chicken broth and some wine.

MOTIONING for his companions to retire, Bonset squatted beside the youth and gently told him:

"It's your cussed temper that weakens you, Lawdy, but I'd hate to hate folks like you do! I'm Clay Bonset, mountain man till they begin makin' tall hats out of silk in place of beaver. What's your handle?"

"Dan Watts. I want to get up and find that big loafer."

"Course you do. But by this time he's ridin' hotfoot for hell'n Arizony. You gentle yourself. You drink the chicken broth an' half a glass of wine, an' sleep. When you git your strength back we'll smoke an' talk."

The girl appeared with the broth and wine, and the old mountain man proved to be a most gentle nurse. He did not tiptoe from the room until the young man was sleeping soundly. He told his friends:

"Have to wait a bit afore pullin' out. That younker will git his throat cut *pronto* if he's left here alone."

"What can we do with him?" asked Jerdan.

"Mebbe he'll hanker to go back East. We'll cross that ridge when we come to it."

"Seems to have fightin' guts," remarked the third man, who was small and slight, soft of speech, and as deadly as an Apache lance.

"He's got the right spirit, Old Hoss. What say we prospect him a trifle afore pullin' out? Can't leave a real American to slide into trouble down here all alone."

"Of course he won't git into any hot water if he trails along with you, Bonset," dryly remarked Jerdan.

"When I tuck a child under my arm he's safe. He'll git better fast. You two pull out ahead. I'll trail along an' catch up."

"Oh, we ain't in no hurry," said Old Hoss. "You need a guardeen as much as the younker."

Jerdan called for liquor, and the three made merry and remained in that benign state until late at night. One might have expected that Bonset would have had difficulty in navigating after all his potations, but when the bout was ended he stole into the boy's room as noiselessly as a Comanche. Watts was breathing easily. The old man touched his face and forehead and found it damp with perspiration. So gentle was this reconnoissance that the sleeper was not disturbed. Like a shadow, the mountain man left the room. He was up early next morning and learned from the help that the young American was much better and very hungry. Bonset entered the bedroom and found Watts dressing. Without any preface he asked—

"Where you driftin', partner?"

"I don't know. Anywhere to get out of this country."

"Prospectin' a trifle?"

"I haven't enough brains. I'm the greenest greenhorn that ever was fool enough to come West. Where's that loud mouthed fellow I had trouble with?"

"No, no, that won't do, my lad. Quit dancin' that scalp. The *alcalde* will put you in jail till you can give bonds to keep the peace. An' down here they have a knack to forgit all 'bout any one that's in jail. Calhoun Jerdan is sober an' mighty sorry. We're startin' out to find some gold. If you can cool your hot blood you can throw in with us, share an' share alike."

"He thinks I'm a coward—"

"Shush! He ain't got brains enough to think. But he's a good feller. You'll like him. When you made game of his shootin' it well nigh busted his heart. This gold huntin' mayn't be to your likin' at all. Pretty fair show for trouble; Injuns, you know."

Watts shivered and feared his visitor would notice his disquietude. He replied haughtily—

"Who cares for a few native savages?"

Bonset ruffled his white whiskers and peered closely at the defiant face. He decided it was not play-acting. He countered with—

"You know how 'Paches act up when they come upon a lone white man?"

He rapidly told some of the terrible things that happened to a traveler caught off balance. In concluding he said—

"Prob'ly be better if you go back home."

"I'll not go home," was the decisive reply. "The folks laughed at me for poking off to this godforsaken country. But they shan't laugh at my coming back empty handed. Take me along with you."

Bonset brooded over the proposition for a bit and then said:

"If you'll keep cool an' shake hands with Calhoun Jordan. We can't have any fightin' inside the outfit."

"If he's satisfied, I am," shortly replied Watts. Then, suspiciously, "But if he thinks I'm crawling out of a fight I'm ready for him. We'll step out and settle it."

"Er-huh? What's your fav'rit weapon?"

"An ax, such as they use back East in felling trees. I'm a dabster with an ax."

"Good land! See here. You stop sending up war smokes. Jerdan an' Old Hoss feel friendly toward you. A fine spirit to want to go a-choppin' of them up with a big ax! 'Mericans must stick together down here. We'll go out an' gnaw victuals together, an' you be sunshiny."

Embarrassed and a trifle defiant, Watts was inclined to hold back, but Jerdan advanced smiling, hand outstretched, and greeted:

"Mighty glad to hear you're trailin' along with us. We need another good man. The boys tell me I met you yesterday. I must been uncommon drunk. I don't remember it. Put her thar." Their hands met.

Watts was hungry, and he had an idea how much a hungry man could eat. He had seen pioneers in Iowa dispose of food. But his jaws ceased masticating as he watched his companions devour enormous portions of various Mexican dishes. Jerdan noticed his amazement and said:

"Oughter see us feed when we're hungry. Clay an' me ate half a buffalo one afternoon up on the Salt Fork of the Arkansas. Tough, but nourishin'."

Watts nodded. Nothing could surprise him after the performance already witnessed. When the meal was about finished he gave a low cry of surprise and started from his seat, his blue eyes blazing. Bonset clamped a hand on his shoulder and pushed him back into his chair and demanded—

"What's bitin' you now?"

"The man who just went into the room across. He insulted me up at Las Vegas because I wouldn't give up my seat on the box. Driver joined in with him. He tried to climb up and get at me and I gave him my boot between the eyes and down he went. We drove off as if the driver was scared."

"What sort of a lookin' *hombre?*" asked Old Hoss.

"Funny looking. Shiny, stub toed boots. Funny little round felt hat, tipped over the left eye. And a long tailed frock coat. I'd laughed if I hadn't been so mad."

"Keep him here," growled Bonset. "I'll do some trailin'."

"Sounds like Bige Reid," mumbled Old Hoss.

"His kind, anyway," grimly agreed Jerdan; and he placed a Navy revolver on the table close to his right hand.

"What's the matter?" queried Watts.

"Nothin' much," said Old Hoss. "Bige Reid's a killer. Got thirty-two notches. But he don't usually bother with any folks except his own breed—that is, if they ain't hurt his feelin's."

"I must have hurt his face," mumbled Watts. Then he threw up his head and defied. "Let him come at me! I'd rather die than to be picked on."

"Hush, hush!" cautioned Old Hoss. "Never tell trouble to hurry up. It comes fast enough an' stays a long time without any welcome."

IN THE meantime Bonset had tapped at a door across the court. It was opened and swung back. The occupant was hidden from view with the exception of his right hand, gripping a revolver, and one eye peering around the edge of the door.

Clay Bonset, with hands clasped over his head, said quietly:

"If you be Bige Reid, put up that gun. I'm Clay Bonset. My two partners are waitin' outside."

"Drop your hands, Bonset. I ain't packing any fight to you. Close the door. Now what can I do for you?"

"It's like this. We're herdin' a sick younker. Been crazy in the head for some time. What the Injuns call *heyoka*. He's gittin' better. He remembers kickin' or strikin' a man who was tryin' to climb to the box of a stage. When he see you he reckoned you might be that feller."

"Damnation! I've chased way down here to find that cub and wipe him out."

"Exactly. But you didn't know till now he's been *heyoka*. So you've wasted your passage money if you bought a return ticket an' plan to rub him out. Come here! Take a peek at that table out there." Bonset opened the door a trifle. "That's the boy. He's been sick. Tackled me an' tried to kill Calhoun Jerdan. Took three of us to throw him an' git him to bed. Old Hoss is with us. Boy ain't a gunman. Can't fight only with his hands. What say? Toss in with us an' punish some liquor, or come after some of our gun fight?"

Reid, standing in the doorway, stared with blazing eyes at Watts.

"Same brat!" he exclaimed softly. He also noted the six-shooter on the table and took account of Old Hoss, who had one hand in his lap. "Sick and crazy, you say?"

"Give us all a ring rassle afore we could bed him down. What you opine?"

"If he's sick, or been sick, I've wasted my time and money," grumbled Reid. "And my guns sag mighty heavy in my belt."

"Let 'em sag. No man on earth, not even Bige Reid, can rub out that younker without followin' him *pronto*. The three of us are some humdingers."

"Bonset, I'm not fool enough to go after any of your gunplay," said Reid. "If I'd known he was out of his head I'd saved my time and money. This trip's nearly busted me."

"I'll stake you for stage fare and eats to Las Vegas, or you can throw in with us on a minin' deal."

"I don't like to work."

"But you can when it means a rich strike, an' you can live at ease forever more. You can be a partner."

Reid's small eyes glistened. He was neither miner nor gambler. He had lived on the best because all resorts feared his guns. Nor did he have to ask for anything. Food and the best of liquors and tobacco were urged upon him. Loans were negotiated by the simple process of letting it be known that his cash was low. He often varied this process by patronizing the tables and taking his winnings, but

having his losses "charged". He was a deadly parasite, and those who catered to his needs believed they were buying an excellent form of life insurance. Being a killer by trade, he seldom troubled those who did not belong to his own class.

His victims usually were of his own kind, and his vanity often prompted him to travel long distances to challenge the boasted supremacy of some rival. For years, during the taming of the West, he and his class were tolerated, perhaps because they were self-exterminating.

"I'll throw in with you," he decided slowly. "I can't go back and explain why I didn't fetch back the cub's hair."

Bonset led the way to the table, holding up his hand, palm outward. Calhoun Jerdan whispered to Old Hoss:

"It's all right. They've smoked peace terbacker. You be perlite as a gospel slinger, younker. You was sick. You don't remember nothin'—"

"But I do. I remember—"

"Shut up! This *hombre* is a stranger to you. He's killed thirty-two men, every one as tough a lad as hell ever whelped—Howdy, Bige. Where travelin'?"

"He's throwin' in with us to the gold mines," broke in Bonset. "He'll do his share of workin' an' fightin'. Takes a fifth. Bige, this is our new man, Dan Watts. Been sick. Crazy's a loon."

Reid slid into a chair and stared fixedly at the young man and asked—

"You don't remember me?"

"Seems if I do."

"Just like it was a dream," interposed Old Hoss quickly.

Reid nodded sullenly and commenced a voracious attack on the food. Watts, his head filled with terse descriptions of the man's evil prowess, watched him furtively and failed to detect any fear compelling qualities. The man was apparently half starved. His small, round felt hat was absurd, and his stubby boots gave him a short, faltering step. Being less than medium height, his long tailed coat would have made him a laughable figure if not for his terrible record. Watts began to lose something of his skepticism once he paused to dwell on the man's terrible record. He pictured thirty-two men, stark in death. He glanced around the courtyard and estimated the number of small tables the victims would fill. Then he pictured them stretched out in a row. It seemed incredible that this stunted being could be the terrible engine of destruction that had put an end to their viciousness, or usefulness. That he was implacable when pursuring the quarry was proven by his coming to Santa Fé.

The meal finished, the mountain men became busy with preparations for an immediate departure. Watts did not know whither they were bound except as he heard them speak of the old Spanish mine of Il Defeeno, some eighteen days' journey. He also gathered that this mine, although supposed to be very rich, had long since been abandoned because of the hostile Apaches and Navahos. While horses and pack animals were being brought up, and negotiations were being entered into for horses for the two new members, Jerdan kept Watts with him.

Reid, seemingly disinterested, stood at one side, his small, sharp eyes curiously inventorying his surroundings, the small hat cocked at a more belligerent angle than usual. Truth was he felt dissatisfied at the outcome of his quest. Only the conviction that no one man on earth could survive an encounter with the three mountain men had induced him to withhold his vengeance from the tenderfoot.

A Mexican tore up the narrow street. All except Reid crowded back against the mud wall. Reid yanked off his hat, as the horse seemed about to run him down, and swung it viciously. The animal bolted to one side and would have thrown any but a born rider. The Mexican, much of a dandy in his huge, silver fringed hat, his trousers slashed with red silk, his small shoes weighted with huge silver spurs, and his crimson velvet jacket decorated with gold lace, quickly dismounted. With one hand on the silver haft of a knife, he jauntily advanced toward Reid. The latter, his eyes gleaming with ferocious expectancy, stood with folded arms, his

upper lip slightly drawn back, and watched the angry *caballero*. The latter talked excitedly in Spanish. As he paused the American said—

"Go to hell."

With a lightning pass of his hand the Mexican drew a knife and doubled his arm for a cast. As if by a miracle the killer's hand held a revolver. The report reverberated loudly between the adobe walls of the narrow street, and the Mexican missed step and plunged forward.

"Thirty-three!" Reid announced proudly.

"Damnation! Every one mount and ride!" cried Bonset.

CHAPTER II

NOT ALL WERE WORKERS

THE OUTSTANDING feature of the trip was the sixty miles of arid desolation. The five travelers, by using extra horses they had picked up along the way, pushed through this hazardous strip in twenty-four hours. Reid suffered more than Watts. The mountain men bore all discomforts with the indifference of red men. Reid was in a funk near the end of the journey. He did not fear bad men, or death from any form of violence; but the stark reminders of those who had failed, the skeletal remains of horses, mules, oxen, and even of humans, got on his nerves. He vowed he never would return by that route.

The old Spanish mine of Il Defeeno had been deserted by the Mexicans, who could not stand up under repeated Apache raids. It was considered one of the richest in New Mexico. Americans already were on the spot and the settlement was growing daily.

The mine was at the base of a cliff of quartz. Several tunnels, driven by the original workers, were being cleaned out and extended. An old smelting house and several roofless, crumbling buildings, all located on the banks of a small stream, testified to the antiquity of the place. Several deserted ranches, their buildings much dilapidated, bespoke the Mexicans' thwarted efforts in the cattle business.

The surrounding country was ugly, especially in the estimation of Watts. The ground was shaggy and choked with briers, mescal plants and many varieties of cactus. Several placer claims already were being worked. The first twenty-four hours warned the five partners they must be quick to locate, or be crowded out, for many men were hurrying from Arizona as well as from the four quarters of New Mexico.

Their first night in the district was largely consumed in weighing the evidence of possible success and failure. Bonset set forth the case reasonably when he explained to his companions:

"Ned Harding has the inside here. Town's named after him. He and his friends have taken over the old diggings. They'll be in bonanza."

"Run them out," growled Reid.

"They ain't the kind that can be run out. Besides, Harding is a real man. I like him. First thing for us to do is to locate our claims and file notice of the same with the mining recorder. Harding's glad we're here. He's the *alcalde* of this burg. An army of men are on the way. We'll throw in with him and work for law and order." His gaze rested on Reid as he said the last.

"I'm my own law," said Reid.

"Play your game as you find it, but don't be surprised if you wake up dead. We must git busy in a hurry. We'll move upstream and locate. Harding don't claim his company owns the whole stretch of this quartz ridge. He asked me to open up an old tunnel half a mile from here. So, hurrah for old Missoury, an' let's catch up some sleep."

Within another twenty-four hours the mountain men were convinced that Reid was no worker. After his first breakfast in camp he repaired to a saloon and remained there.

"If he won't work he won't take no profits," said Jerdan.

The four did not wait for him, but went upstream. In the north were dust clouds,

continually rising and advertising man's greed for the yellow metal. East, west and south were similar reminders of hurrying treasure seekers. Five claims were located and posted, one in the name of each man. Each claim was three hundred feet long, with fifty feet on each side for working.

After the notices had been written out by Watts he was delegated to file the same with the recorder. He mounted his horse and rode to the growing town of adobe houses and tents and discovered that the recorder had his office in the Cactus Saloon. Entering this place, well patronized by Mexicans and Border roughs, he found his man at the end of the bar with his recording-book on a barrel. Seated beside him was Reid, smoking a cigar, his felt hat almost obscuring the vison of one eye. He was talking from the corner of his mouth and the recorder seemed to be giving much heed to his remarks. Watts handed over his notices and paid the fees. Reid plucked the papers from the recorder's hands and slowly examined them.

"Looks like you picked out a scrub one for me," he remarked.

"There's no telling what's the best, if there is any best. We hadn't done any work when we located these. You weren't there—"

"I'm doin' more 'portant work here," cut in Reid.

"So we treated you as well as we did ourselves," completed Watts. "It's a partnership so long as every man does his share of the work."

Watts made his retreat as soon as the business was settled and, on emerging from the low doorway, he was nonplussed to observe a Mexican leading his horse away. He caught up with him and clapped a hand on his shoulder and demanded—

"What you mean by taking my horse?"

He wrenched the bridle from the fellow's hand.

With a torrent of curses, among which Watts understood only the word "gringo," the man yanked a knife from his belt. At the same moment Watts caught him under the chin with an uppercut and sent him sprawling. Leaping into the saddle, he would have ridden away had not several of the prostrate man's friends surrounded him. Reid suddenly appeared in the doorway, his well known hat causing the circle to widen, as if to open and let Watts depart. But after a quick glance Reid turned on his heel and stubbed back to the recorder's table. The circle immediately began to constrict. Watts had a gun in his belt, but his enemies surrounded him. He knew he must put on a brave face and do something, or find himself dragged to the ground. And he could not bring himself to draw his weapon and follow up threats with bullets.

A big man came through the gathering crowd, hurling silver braided jackets right and left until he gained Watts' side. His first words were:

"What you wearing a gun for? Didn't Clay Bonset, or Calhoun Jerdan, or Old Hoss tell you how to act up?" Without waiting for an answer he waved his arms, dropped his hands on the butts of two big guns and roared, "*Vamos! Pronto!*"

As if by magic the angry circle was scattered, some diving into the saloon, others running behind it. The big man then explained to Watts:

"My handle is Ned Harding, younker. When you have business down here you'd better let some of the older men come in your place; or else come to me first. I'm the *alcalde*, but that only means I can go only as far as my two guns can throw the fear of the Lord into this outfit. Now you hyper back to your friends. Tell them I wish them luck. Remind Bonset to do what I advised him to do. The old tunnel I spoke of was made a very long time ago. It's choked with small rock. There's gold up there and they're free to go after it. There's a big mob of desperate, gold hungry men coming. I'd rather have your outfit working above me than some of the newcomers. Keep close to your camp and, if the 'Paches don't bag you, be ready to stand off claim jumpers from Santa Fé. The Mexicans won't bother

you much. There's Mexican scum the same as there's American scum. But the last is worst."

Watts was glad to ride off. He reached the camp without further incident and repeated Harding's message.

He's a white man," said Bonset. "No doubt but what the tunnel was started a very long time ago. The workers were killed off, or scared out. We'll git busy on the tunnel afore the crowd arrives. This place is bound to grow."

HE WAS a true prophet. Inside of three days the town of Harding boasted of some two thousand people, all males, used to roughing it in rough places, with the exception of the inevitable dance hall girls, a round dozen.

Among the newcomers were several professional bad men. These seldom bothered inoffensive citizens, if the latter did not obtrude on their attention. Money was not what they lusted for, although they seldom had much in their pockets. Nor were they successful at gambling. But their presence at eating place or bar invariably brought them invitations to partake of the best, the proprietor being the host. This catering to their vanity increased their sense of self-importance. Their one great ambition was to boast of more notches on their guns than could be displayed by a rival. They were a distinct type and only possible during the times which produced them.

The four partners—Reid failing to rejoin them—worked long hours in clearing the broken rock from the ancient twenty-foot tunnel. Bonset gave it as his opinion that the hole had been dug by the Spaniards in ancient days; dug by proxy, the natives having been compelled to do the actual labor. At the end of the hole they found that the excavation widened and gave the idea of a square chamber. It was Watts who offered the reason for this engineering feat by insisting that the workers had tapped an ancient river bed, where the digging was easier.

"I studied geology back home," he told his friends. "This answers the description of a river bed, one that once was on top of the ground. It must have been when the world was much younger."

"Hooray, if you're right, boy!" cried Old Hoss. "An' you tell it like a poetry book. When the world was much younger! I'll bet four bits the white men who dug this hole were some of the first Spaniards to come here from Old Mexico. Hold that damn' torch over so's I can see to fill a bag with specimens. Smoke's blindin' an' chokin' me."

Watts was puzzled to know why an ancient river bed should occasion so much enthusiasm, unless it portended easier digging. He wanted to keep on, but Bonset was impatient to study the signs, and a flour bag of small specimens was taken to the outside. Bonset shaded his eyes against the hot glare of the sun and bent over the specimens. Some of the smaller ones he put in his mouth to cleanse them, being too impatient to take them to water. He held these in his palm and Old Hoss and Jerdan bent over them curiously.

"Dawgone!" gasped Jerdan.

"What's wrong?" asked Watts.

"We be if we lose a minute in fillin' up the mouth of that hole. Old Hoss, you an' Calhoun fill it up for a few feet an' make it look like it never was disturbed."

"Thought we were to dig deeper into the cliff," said Watts.

"We be, lad. We be, but not just yet. See them small pieces of yaller stuff? Almost pure gold. See how their angles are blurred an' worn smooth? Work of water an' friction. Wouldn't wonder if we'd tapped one of th' treasure houses of th' old Aztecs that th' Spaniards killed. If that wan't a pot hole pocket we'll clean up strong for old Missoury."

Calming his emotion, Bonset then rapidly explained how the river once flowed across the country and became the repository of many bits of gold washed down from the hills.

"Then the bottom sort of busted out of things an' old earth had a sick spell,

and yawned once or twice an' swallered the river and humped over it, an' left this ridge of quartz."

Watts nodded and added—

"The alluvial stratum was easily distinguished between the layers of rocks."

"You young book readin' devil! But I reckon you're right. The contact's there, and here's the gold. All we got to do now is work through that rubble of small stuff, the rock overhead bein' so solid it won't give in. We'll timber it if we have to."

Old Hoss and Jerdan ran up to examine the bits of gold and sucked in their breath with a strange hissing sound. The former exclaimed:

"I'll bet this pay streak comes pretty nigh showin' on the face of the rock mighty close to here. Let's start another hole."

"You ding busted old coot, we've just filled one up!" reminded Jerdan.

Bonset nodded thoughtfully and warned:

"If the vein comes close to the surface, or busts through at any spot, we mustn't let on to any one. We'll drive no more tunnels till we learn the worth of what we've already tapped. Younker, you take some this stuff down to Ned Harding an' ask him to name it. Don't show it to nobody else."

With the specimens in a small buckskin bag Watts walked down to the Harding tunnel. All the way his mind was back in a small Iowa town, his imagination picturing the sensation his return with riches would cause. He was brought back to reality by a harsh voice demanding:

"What's up now? What's in that bag?"

Bige Reid stood blocking his way, rocking back and forth on heel and stubby toe, a finger pointing suspiciously at the bag tied to Watt's belt.

Watts quickly replied:

"Nothing much is up. Calling on the *alcalde*."

"What's in that bag?"

"Just some samples of ore."

"Let's see them."

"I was to deliver them—"

Before he could complete the sentence Reid's left hand seized the bag and a knife in his right was cutting the throngs.

"Hi! What do you mean?" cried Watts, his face flushing.

"Shut up! I'm a partner in the outfit. I have as much right to see samples of ore as any one has. Whew! River gold! I'll take care of these."

"I'm to have them assayed," insisted Watts.

"Do tell! Well, I'll save you the bother. I'll git them assayed. Tell Bonset I'll fetch word what they pan out."

With that he turned on his heel and walked toward the mushroom town, the tails of his coat almost sweeping the ground. If one could forget the thirty-odd men he had killed, Reid was a ludicrous figure.

Watts was infuriated and ashamed. Reid was a partner. Not knowing what to do, Watts hurried on to the Harding tunnel and secured a hearing with the proprietor. Harding's brows frowned as he listened to the recital.

"Then he is a partner?" he asked.

"Yes, I suppose he is. That was the understanding in Santa Fé. But he hasn't done a tap of work."

"He will never work. A pick and shovel would poison him."

"I believe he also was to help in standing off claim jumpers," said Watts.

"Your outfit doesn't need his kind of help. And no one has attempted to jump you yet. It was high handed and uncalled for, but I can't do anything. I don't see why Bonset ever took him in for. He must have been crazy."

"Clay Bonset is never crazy, never wrong."

Harding smiled, nodded his head and said:

"Of course not, but you trot back and tell Clay how it happened. Then fetch me some more samples."

"I'll do so, and this time no man takes them from me unless he kills me."

Watts went back and told his story. His friends nodded, but displayed no emotion. Bonset said:

"We'll fit you out with some more

specimens. You done just right, younker, not to have any trouble with Reid. But carry the rocks in your pocket this time—Hi! What you doin'?"

Watts had moved to pick up the camp ax.

"I'm delivering the next lot to the right man," was the grim reply. "As a partner Reid has taken the first batch, but he can't have any more from me."

"Drop that ax!"

Watts obeyed.

"That's better," said Bonset. "Here's some of the same. Now vamoose."

WATTS secreted the gold in an inside pocket and then snatched up the ax, and before either of the three men could detain him he was running along the base of the cliff. This time he reached Harding's tunnel without hindrance and handed over the specimens. Harding examined them briefly and then took them inside a small tent and tested them.

He whistled softly and exclaimed:

"By George! You boys have struck it rich. You're in bonanza all right, if this stuff isn't just one small pocket. I'll have Timlake, the assayer, test it. But it's almost pure stuff. Don't you talk. Just go back to the boys and tell them I'll get a report."

"But Reid has been to the assayer by this time," Watts reminded.

Harding nodded slowly and pursed his lips.

"That's the hell of it," he mused. "And by your own say he's a partner. As *alcalde* I can't have him up for highway robbery. He's bound to make trouble for all of you. Tell Bonset that none of you are to walk away from your camp alone. Reid is getting thick with all the outlaws and desperados that drift into the town. More and more will be arriving every twenty-four hours. Of course my outfit will stand by you. Of course the scum will be licked out of their boots, just the same as they always have been licked, once decent men get started going. But they'll do some rare mischief before they can be snubbed up short. You'd better stick close to the claim. That goes for all of you."

"I wouldn't like to carry that talk to my partners. I'm going to do what I started to do—take the stuff to an assayer."

"And carrying that ax?" sharply asked Harding.

"Yes, sir! I can handle an ax. I'm going to prove I ain't a scared rabbit, even if I get killed."

Harding frowned. It was in his mind to compel the young man to go back to his friends, using his office as *alcalde* if necessary. But he realized the tragedy of a man who loses his self-respect.

"All right, younker," he said. "I get your point of view. Some things have to be done. Go along. Mind your own business. Get your assay quickly and hustle back to your friends. If any one asks you where you got your specimens you can say you came from me."

Grasping the ax firmly, Watts continued on his way to the new town. It had doubled in size within the last twenty-four hours, and from the north and east and west were clouds of dust announcing the coming of more outfits. The one straggling street was lined with tents, shanties made of packing boxes, and the few original adobe structures with new roofs of canvas.

The many newcomers were noticeable, and he saw not a few of the type who never labored. He saw nothing of Reid, and the crowd was so thick none noticed him and his ax. Above the heads of the milling throng he glimpsed a sign painted on a strip of canvas. It read: "Timlake, Assayer."

He worked his way to this and was compelled to wait for three men to be served. Once he stood before the box, serving as a table and had put down his specimens, the assayer gave them a sharp glance and exclaimed:

"Two bonanza strikes in one day! I've just assayed some rock that's identical with this. Great scott! This will be the boom town of the last fifteen

years! We'll have all Colorado pouring in on us."

"My name is Dan Watts. I'm with the Bonset outfit. Did Reid bring the other specimens you speak of?"

The assayer hesitated. Watts added—

"They came from the same claim as do these."

"He spoke of his partners, but did not name them. Is he one of your outfit?" Watts was forced to reply in the affirmative.

"Then there is no need of my going into these very thoroughly," said Timlake. "In fact, it takes no lengthy examination to see they are almost pure gold. I found Reid's to be that. I'll write out what I assayed for Reid. You know Reid pretty well?"

"Better than I wish I did."

"I'm an assayer. I'll assay rock for the devil if he has the price. I can't even discuss folks. A customer is a customer. Notice any change in the weather, Mr. Watts?"

Watts shook his head. The brassy bell of the heavens was ever the same since he arrived in New Mexico.

"I think we're about to have a change." Timlake said softly. "Tell your friends there's a change in the weather coming. Tell them Timlake said we're in for a storm period."

The wall of the tent stirred behind him. With a startled expression he slipped a hand under top of the box and wheeled about. The canvas was raised, allowing a view of a larger interior, enclosed in canvas, and a brown haired, brown eyed girl entered. Withdrawing his hand, Timlake rather querulously said—

"What is it, Beth?"

"Some one threw this inside the tent. It has your name on it, father."

As she spoke the girl produced a letter from her apron pocket and handed it to the assayer. Watts studied the girl. She appraised him openly. Neither of the two noticed the gray pallor overspreading Timlake's face as he broke the seal and read the contents of the paper.

"Anything important?" asked the girl.

Timlake thrust the missive in his pocket and shook his head. Then he said:

"Watts, this is my daughter, Beth. Daughter, this is Dan Watts. He's another white man it's safe for you to speak to."

The girl smiled demurely and made a little curtsey and ducked under the canvas partition and was gone before the young man could find his tongue and say a word. He would have departed had not Timlake delayed him by leaning over the box and whispering—

"I've assayed some mighty poor stuff in my life, but never did anything pan out as bad as this."

"What's the matter with you? Your face looks gray. Are you ill?"

"Here!" The voice was sunk to a whisper. "You're honest. Ned Harding never would have any use for you and your friends if you were not. Read that."

Watts gazed at the paper thrust into his hand. In scrawling handwriting was the demand:

> A thousand or the girl. Price goes up five hundred every day. You will be told when and where to pay. Some one will ask for it.

"But what does it mean?" asked Watts as he handed back the paper.

"Some one's trying to run a bluff on me," murmured Timlake.

"The writing refers to your daughter?"

"Of course. It's a threat. I pay a thousand or some one steals my girl. If I was fool enough to hand over a thousand they would come back for two. They'd milk me of every dollar I own, and my daughter would be in as much danger as ever."

"Abduct a young woman in a busy place like this?" scoffed Watts.

"There's many here already, and more coming, who would consider it child play. Would to God there was a strong, honest outfit pulling out for the north today. I was a fool to fetch her down here. But her mother is dead and she wants to be with me."

"It's what you said, a bluff?" insisted Watts.

"No! They mean it. Damn them! Even if I paid they'd try it. You can't buy mercy from a tiger. I don't know what to do. If I pull out I'll be overhauled. This place gets worse every day. If anything happens to me—"

"Hush! You're losing your nerve." Watts was surprised to find himself speaking like a mountain man. "The answer is very simple. Before it gets dark take the girl to Harding's camp. Tell him everything. Take her as soon as possible. Then move your tents. She would be perfectly safe at our camp, but there are only four of us and some of us have to be at work all the time. Harding has a large force. He can surround her with honest fighting men."

This very sensible advice brought the drooping head up.

"What a fool not to think of it! Harding's pure gold. He has a strong outfit, See here, Watts, will you stay here till I get back? I'll make it mighty quick. I want to arrange for Harding to send down an escort."

Watts nodded and gripped his ax more tightly.

"Not that they'll try any game just yet," added Timlake. "If they see me going out they'll think I'm after the money."

"Have your daughter come in here if any one enters your living tent. Better have her in here, anyway. She'll be here when you return," said Watts with a mountain of assurance.

Timlake ducked under the dividing canvas and in a few moments the girl reappeared, her eyes friendly.

"My father's an awfully busy man," she said. "He wants me to keep office till he comes back."

"And I must wait for him to return. Do you like it down here?"

"I like any place where my father is."

They talked a bit disjointedly, in the ancient way of young people becoming acquainted, their rather trite remarks serving as cloak for their silent appraisals. After deciding that Watts was an honest, likable young man, the girl said:

"I like you. You're dependable."

"I surely hope so, Miss Beth. Poor, simple, but honest." And for the first time since beginning his Southern trip Watts smiled widely.

They were chatting freely when a man entered and stood back of Watts. The latter, without turning, surmised that the newcomer did not meet with the girl's approval. Her expression changed instantly, and with a little bob of her head she retired to the living room of the large tent, dropping the canvas behind her.

Watts wheeled and found himself facing Reid.

"What you doing here?" rasped the killer.

"Getting an assay for the company. What you doing?"

"None of your business, you scut. Where's Timlake.?"

"None of your business. Keep your hands away from that belt or I'll lop a leg off."

Reid glanced down and saw the blade of the ax in line with his shin. He also noted the brown, muscular hand closed tightly around the handle. He knew he could draw a gun and kill the youth, but he feared it would be at the expense of a horrible wound.

"By God, I'll kill you some day!" he whispered.

"Maybe, but not this morning, nor in the camp unless you want to fill a noose. Harding and his outfit are keeping tabs on you. So are Clay Bonset and his two friends. You can dodge a lot of trouble, but you can't dodge them."

Reid glared balefully for a moment, then turned and stared at the canvas wall. When he faced about his expression had lost much of its blood lust. He even attempted a smile.

"It's the heat," he frankly confessed. "I never oughter come down here. Blood's b'iling from the heat. Git heated up over nothing. You're perfectly safe so far as I'm concerned."

"It's the heat," gravely agreed Watts. "I never talk up North as I talk down

here. Up there I never tote an ax around to kill folks if they bother me. Just let them have the inside of the walk and dodge trouble."

"Well, well. It's lucky words can't hurt a body."

"Just a way of blowing off steam," Watts agreed.

Reid glanced at the dividing canvas wall and said:

"Reckon I won't wait. Just wanted another copy of the assay Timlake made for me."

"I'll tell him when he returns," said Watts.

With a sidelong glance at the ax Reid stubbed his way out into the glaring sunlight. Watts squatted on his heels, half expecting a shot through the canvas. He was in that attitude, his ax swung back over his shoulder, when Timlake entered.

"What's the matter?" asked the assayer.

"Reid has been here. We had some words. I feared a shot after he left. How did you make out?"

"All right. Harding will send some men to move all our belongings. But I saw Reid on my way to Harding's."

"He wanders around quite a bit."

"He wandered across my path," Timlake whispered. "Wanted to borrow a thousand dollars."

"Jumping hop toads! Can he be in it? And what did you say?"

"I told him I'd have to check up at the tent before I could give him an answer. He must have come in here to wait for me. I told Harding, also. Four of his men are outside the tent now, to see nothing happens until they come to move us up close to the tunnel."

CHAPTER III

THE REVOLT OF REID

THE SHIFT of the Timlakes to Harding's camp close by the tunnel was so quickly executed that none, aside from the few involved, knew of the change until the tent and furnishings had been moved to the new location. It was all finished before Watts returned to his friends.

The mountain men were much interested in the talk he brought them, Bonset was quick to decide.

"Reid hasn't any share in anything we uncover. He has his claim, if he works it. If he doesn't work it within a reasonable time we will take it over."

"He thinks he owns in everything that you find," said Watts.

"His thinking is crooked. He shows it by wandering from his trail. He should have stuck to bein' a bad man, a killer. Now he mixes up all sorts of badness with the simple business of gatherin' notches for his guns. I placed him wrong, or I'd never taken him in. Well, the girl is safe and Timlake's all right if they don't catch him out alone somewheres."

"Ned Harding told him in my hearing to keep close to his tent and away from the town," said Watts.

Calhoun Jerdan plucked a gun from his belt, spun the cylinder and testily announced:

"This is a lot of foolishness. We never stood for no such nonsense from Utes or Blackfeet. Why should we stand it from that long-tailed runt. I'm takin' time off to go down an' cook his goose."

"Harding is the law down here," warned Watts. "He says for us to sit tight and leave it for Reid to make the first move. Then we'll be acting in self-defense."

"Yeah," growled Jerdan. "Give that cuss the first move an' we'll be hearin' Heavenly music. I'm smellin' a gun fight."

"Calhoun, don't git ahead of me when I'm follerin' a big warpath," snapped Bonset.

Old Hoss squinted his eyes and stared at the rapidly growing town. New tents were going up even as he looked. He pondered a bit and then said:

"Th' face of natur' seems to have changed. War's 'bout to bust upon us. Danny mustn't go to town alone any more."

"Of course not," agreed Bonset, speaking before the young man could protest. "An' none of us will walk alone in any wide places. We'll come to a showdown mighty soon. That will be *mucho bueno.*"

Jerdan lighted an ancient pipe and sent smoke to the four winds. Then he announced—

"I bring a talk."

"What's your talk?" asked Bonset.

"We must keep clear of the tunnel an' work only on the claims for awhile. We'll be havin' comp'ny. If the claim ain't worked, they'll know the gold comes from the cliff."

Watts was disappointed to hear this, as he had visioned a quick cleanup from the ancient river bed. But his common sense indorsed Jerdan's advice.

"The talk is good," admitted Bonset. "We'll tear up our claims a trifle, beginning with mine."

Work was commenced immediately, but as they labored there was always one of the four watching for the coming of Reid. Two feet down fine gold in scattered specks was washed out, and another three feet caused Old Hoss to exclaim:

"This would pay bully enough, even if there wan't any cliff or tunnel. I'm gittin' a hundred colors to the pan."

The small pieces of free gold had somewhat dampened Watts' ardor for placer mining, but he was quick to catch the enthusiasm. He was awkward with the pan, but by patience and practise he soon caught the trick of it and was proud to show Bonset the residue of glittering, minute particles.

"It'll run over a doller," appraised the leader. But go at it with more vim."

When they paused to eat the midday meal Calhoun Jerdan confessed:

"I'm mighty uneasy. I'm hankerin' to prospect the cliff up along to see if that contact shows on the face."

"If it does, it does," said Old Hoss. "It'll be waitin' for us."

"Not if Reid an' a band of camp bummers come up here an' find it an' claim it."

Bonset combed his fingers through his white beard and weighed the matter thoughtfully. He said:

"No band of four men can claim everything in that big hunk of quartz. We've tapped the old tunnel an' we have these claims. If we try to hold too much we'll have the whole settlement agin us instead of a few six-shooters. No one suspects what we do. We'd best stick right here mighty close an' work like the devil. Prob'ly we're bein' watched this minute. But even if they notice the choked mouth of the tunnel they'll never guess what's in our minds about it breakin' through the face of the cliff."

"Two men out there on horseback have been riding back and forth for some time," said Watts. "I thought they was racing."

Bonset shaded his eyes and stared through the heat haze at the distant riders.

"Mexicans," he decided. "Can tell by the way they keep their legs swingin'. Just like an Injun."

"They're spyin' on us," said Jerdan.

"For once you're right," agreed Bonset. "An' they've seen four hard workin' men diggin' up a claim." Before the meal was finished and the dishes washed—by Watts—the two men had raced back to town. In a short time a horseman came riding along the base of the cliff.

"He's one of Harding's men," said Old Hoss.

The rider galloped up to the partners and, without dismounting, handed down a paper to Bonset, explaining:

"From the boss. No answer."

He wheeled and rode back.

The message was brief.

> Reid is coming to see you. As *alcalde* I rule he can work his claim, but has no interest in anything else. If he fails to work it within the time limit, jump it, and I'll back you. Miss Timlake wishes to be remembered to young Watts.

Reid was coming; coming with thirty-three notches on his guns. The man and his ghastly history were filling each man's mind for the moment.

"You fellers keep your eyes peeled. I'll do the heft of the talkin'," said Bonset. Then to Watts, "You deceitfulin' young hound, you been mixin' up love with minin'."

"I've seen her only once," Watts protested sheepishly.

"What's your face on fire for, like it was the sun?"

Watts, much embarrassed, was trying to think of something adequate to say, but Bonset shaded his eyes and stared northwest, the direction of the town, and warned:

"He's comin', boys. Can tell by the way he flops his arms. Homeliest cuss on hossback I ever see."

Watts could vaguely make out a bobbing figure, the heat waves making the object shimmer; and he could not understand how the old man was able to identify the rider, let alone observe any flopping of the arms. Bonset said: "You all keep to work. I'll be washing a pan at the crick. Bein' so hot I naturally have my guns off, layin' on the bank."

IT WAS thus that Reid found them when he came up and dismounted. His gaze was quick to pick out Watts, and the expression of his eyes was angry. He advanced with short, hitchy steps. A quick side glance noted Bonset's guns on the bank. The four men straightened and ceased their labors. Jerdan saluted:

"Afternoon, Reid. Took a ride to see if your claim's still here?"

"As a partner I come to find out how things are going. I have a right to know."

"Surely," drawled Bonset. "But we ain't runnin' any pony express to your favorite *vino* shop to keep you posted. You got some news ahead of us when you took over the first samples an' had 'em assayed."

"I was within my rights," replied Reid.

"Mebbe yes, mebbe no. But that's gone by. It stands like this, Reid. We took you in as partner. We took young Watts in as a partner. You don't have any more right to take specimens from him than you do to take 'em from me."

"I wanted to be sure no one robbed him. Too rich for a boy to be toting."

"Well, he sure didn't have 'em after you took 'em," spoke up Calhoun Jerdan.

"I had them assayed, and I have fetched the report." He handed over Timlake's original report, and rocked back and forth on his heels, his thumbs hooked in his belt, and waited.

"Neighborly of you," said Bonset. "Just what Danny fetched. You ready to go to work?"

"I'm doing my share. I'm keeping gunmen from jumping these three claims."

"That's mighty noble of you, Reid. But you hark to this talk. I've raised a ghost lodge and made some new medicine. My medicine tells me you're a partner if you do your share of the work here on your claim. When we want any of your gunplay we'll give the word. And here, not in town, is the place for you to be contagious to bad men. You strip off that long coat an' muckle down, an' wade in this crick an' get wet an' muddy, an' use a pan, an' you git a fifth of all the claims pan out. If you stay in town you git nothin' of what we pan out. Even in town you'll still own your claim till the time limit is up, an' we, or somebody else, jump it."

Reid's lips twitched convulsively. His eyes became slits of venom. With an effort he controlled his voice and asked—

"You mean you've thrown me out?"

"I mean you're throwin' yourself out. There's your claim. If you want gold, work it. You fetched Timlake's assay, but you don't return the rich specimens. You've been well paid for doin' nothin'."

"That's the point," replied Reid. "I don't give a damn for that lousy claim."

"Runnin' better'n a doller a pan," broke in Old Hoss.

"What I want is my fifth in your new diggings, where gold comes in chunks, like the samples I took to Timlake."

"These are our diggings," said Bonset. "We staked a claim for you. You ain't interested enough to even try it out."

"The poorest, rottenest claim of the lot," said Reid, his voice sounding flat and colorless.

"Here's four others. Pick out any one an' we'll swap it for yours," promptly countered Bonset. "An' you seem to forgit you can have a fifth taken from all the claims if you'll do your part of the work."

"I ain't here about any claim. I want to git my hooks in our hidden diggings where you pick it up in chunks."

"Then it's too bad you wan't here when we made that little side trip."

"I shall find it before I've finished," said Reid.

"You might ask Timlake to make a guess where the stuff come from. He ain't so handy to town now, but you can always find him at Ned Harding's camp."

The man's eyes glittered. He understood Bonset's meaning. He ignored it, however, and said:

"I gave you the assayer report on the only thing I'm interested in. I came here as a man of peace. You refuse to treat me as a partner. Now I have this to say, once and for all; I'm fifth partner in anything you four men find, and—"

"Like hell you are!" roared Jerdan.

"And I've split up my fifth among four other men. They will insist on their rights. And they are not men that can be fooled, or put off."

Bonset's patience and guile left him. He exploded loudly:

"Fetch 'em along, you hoptoad. Fetch 'em up here an' we'll shoot the whole kit an' caboodle of you out of your boots. And now you toddle back to your hoss an' vamoose, or else strip off that long tailed coat an' buckle down an' do some honest work. I mean *pronto.*"

As he spoke he leaned against the bank, resting his hands on the two guns. Without a word Reid stubbed back to his horse. After he had mounted his horse he called out—

"That ain't the brand of talk to make to a thirty-three notch man."

"I'll do better next time, Reid. I'll say it with lead."

The desperado rode away, swinging his feet and legs like an Indian. Watts ceased working and told Bonset:

"That's the way to talk to such scum. You said a lot I was hankering to say."

"You keep your yawp closed when Reid's around, son. He's been smokin' war terbacker with some of his own kind. He reckoned he might run a bluff on us. He means some rare mischief. Men of his kind are losin' out up North. Colorado won't bide 'em any more. As the country fills up his chances of livin' without workin' grows thinner an' thinner. He must make a strike soon."

"Has he a right to sell four-fifths of his claim?" asked Jerdan.

"He does if he works it, but no four-fifths of what he might take down from all the claims. But he won't work for ten-doller pans. It's the lost river gold he's after. He must know it comes from the cliff. Boys, we have our work cut out. Watts, you clean out enough loose rock from that tunnel to give a depth of four feet. That ought to be enough to shield a man from any bullets not shot direct into it. Old Hoss, you ride down to Harding's camp an' buy, or borrer, a double-barrel shotgun an' some buckshot. Go now. Jerdan an' me will keep on pannin'."

Watts could not perceive any advantage in partly uncovering what they had taken pains to conceal. He remarked as much.

"Dodgast it! Must I explain every little thing to a boy lunkhead?" groaned Bonset. Then lowering his voice and speaking kindly, he explained, "It's like this, son. If five men come ridin' an' shootin' it's your job to stand in the mouth of the tunnel an' rake 'em with buckshot if they try to cross a line between the tunnel an' this claim. Or if they start a fuss without comin' between us an' you, you're to shoot—to kill. Got guts enough to do that?"

"You bet I have—and a very willing heart," said Watts.

And he was away to excavate sufficient rock to provide a niche for himself when

the time came for him to pour fire into the ranks of killers.

"That's a mighty bright notion, Clay," murmured Jerdan.

"It'll keep him out of the worst of the fighting, Calhoun. I only hope he won't git excited an' shoot us."

"You really think Reid will fetch his friends up here?"

"Sure of it. I'm hopin' he won't try it in the night. That would be messy for some of us. He's as tricky as the devil. Had to be to pot thirty-two men, not countin' that Santa Fé Mexican."

The men panned for the rest of the day, the results varying. Bonset insisted that they had five-ounce diggings. After supper the fire was extinguished and, unknown to Watts, the old mountain man arranged for a watch to be kept throughout the night. Watts was dog tired and rolled in a blanket early in the evening. When he awoke the brassy sun was up and Old Hoss was gone. He asked questions. Bonset told him—

"He's gone to town to spy out the land."

"They might kill him. He shouldn't have gone alone."

"Old Hoss always has come through." He shaded his eyes and gazed toward the town. "Here he comes now. Can tell him by the way he sets his hoss, sort of sloppin' over sideways like he was goin' to fall off. Bears most of his weight on one stirrup. His left leg has to be favored since a Ute bullet busted it."

OLD HOSS arrived in time for breakfast. Watts was intensely curious, but took his cue from Bonset and Jerdan and asked no questions. Old Hoss finished his breakfast, blew smoke to the four quarters, to the earth and sun, loosened his belt and finally reported—

"There's goin' to be rare doin's."

"Er-huh?" softly prompted Calhoun Jerdan.

Old Hoss took his time, like an Indian. After a minute's pause he continued:

"I see that murderin' critter an' four other murderin' critters. Two of 'em are Texas men, long, lanky cusses with hair down on their shoulders. Look like trouble hunters. T'other two don't dare go back to Arizony. The five of 'em was makin' for to ride."

"Comin here, of course," said Watts, his nerves tingling at the thought of a fight.

"I opine so, younker," said Old Hoss.

Bonset ruffled his beard and glanced significantly at his friends. Then he bruskly told Watts—

"See if you can climb up the cliff ten or a dozen feet an' spy out the land."

Watts eagerly ran to find a place where he could make the ascent; and Bonset told his friends:

"He mustn't be in this. Looks like a big path that's comin' to us. But how'n sin can we sidetrack him till after the fight's over?"

"Easy done," quickly replied Jerdan. "Write a few lines in Spanish, askin' Harding to keep him there till the fuss is over. He can't read Spanish."

"I don't reckon he'd try to read it even if it was in English. Younker ain't a bit nosey that way. You write it, Jerdan."

After some twenty minutes Watts returned, walking leisurely.

"He ain't seen nothin'," said Old Hoss.

He guessed rightly. Watts had secured an elevated perch, but had discovered no signs of the five horsemen. Bonset produced the folded paper and said:

"So long as the coast's clear you take this white man's talkin' paper down to Harding. Tell him how things be up here, an' then do just as he says. Take a hoss."

Watts nodded and promptly set off on his errand. He found Harding at the mouth of the tunnel and delivered the message. Harding read it slowly and cast a quick glance at the bearer. The latter was staring at the tent of the assayer.

"Stick around here for a bit, Watts. I don't just know how to answer this," said Harding.

"It's necessary that I be going back quite soon," said Watts.

"Your friends want you to do this er-

rand right. What's your rush to get back?"

Watts told of the impending attack. Harding nodded, saying:

"That's all written down here. But I don't reckon anything will come of it. Stay here a minute."

He walked over to Timlake's tent and found the girl on the shady side, sewing on a dress. Her father was in his office, she said.

Harding entered the smaller compartment and found Timlake figuring. He told him of the contents of the note and the conditions at the camp above. In concluding he said:

"Bonset insists the boy be kept here. He's impatient to go back. Ask Beth to use her influence to hold him here. Too bad if he should be rubbed out in a fight. He couldn't be of any help to them. I'll go up if Reid makes a play. Time that nuisance was planted."

"I'll drop a word to Beth and then go back with you to get him. You wait here." He was gone but a few minutes and was smiling when he returned to report, "The young lady has great confidence in her ability as a decoy. If there's a fight he'll miss it."

The two men, talking seriously of the growing wickedness of the new town, walked to the tunnel, and Timlake greeted Watts in a very friendly manner. He told him among other things:

"Beth's alone just now and lonesome. Run over and say good morning to her. She's on the west side of the tent."

"I'd love to," said Watts. Then he told Harding, "Please let me know when you've written your answer."

"First shot out the gun, young man. Trot along."

The girl greeted the messenger with genuine graciousness and began telling him she missed her books.

"We brought a few and I've read them ragged," she ran on as he sat down beside her and gazed in awe at the gay, flower-besprigged dress her nimble fingers were deftly putting together. "I've read 'Foul Play' by Charles Reade five times."

The title reminded him of the pending crisis.

"I like it a lot," he agreed. "And I like all of Charles Lever's stories. I think I've read every one."

"Too much careless living. Too much drinking and scamping," she criticized.

The talk ran on, matching novel with novel, and with each eager to become better acquainted. An hour passed before Watts sensed the lapse of time. He suddenly jumped to his feet, saying:

"I'm mighty sorry, Miss Beth, but I must be going. It's very important that I get back to my friends."

Her face flushed as she realized the trap might not hold.

"Oh, sit down and help me. This gown is mighty important. I'm bothered in getting the lace on the neck. Hold it just so."

He dropped on his knees, his eyes troubled even while appraising the unconscious grace of the girl and the serenity of her brown eyes. She talked with pins in her mouth as she fixed the lace to her liking and basted it in place, and canted her head to get the effect.

"I'm afraid that won't do," she decided. "I'll try it again."

"Really, Miss Beth, I must be going. My friends need me. It's very important. At any other time—"

"There will be no other time," she told him quietly. "Here I am marooned down in this dreadful place, and I meet a decent young man I would like to talk with. You have no idea how lonely my life is."

He was forced to wait until she had finished, but she ran on and on, giving him intimate glimpses of her girlhood and describing with rare charm her experiences in various gold camps, or wherever her father's work took him. When he paused for lack of breath he told her:

"You'd never desert a friend. I can see that."

"I hope not. I'd die first."

"I knew it. And I have friends who may be booked for a lot of trouble. I must be there—"

"Oh, please don't go."

"It's mighty hard. Especially when you'll put me on your black list for doing what I know to be my duty."

"Nothing can induce you to wait here a bit longer?"

"It's worth more'n anything I've been through. But I must go. One of those times when a fellow must go."

"I'm sorry." She rose and gathered up her work and gave him her slim hand. "You'll make a rare friend. You're not on my black list. Just stop and tell my father I could not do the work he asked me to do. He must do it himself."

He bowed and left her, hurried back to the tunnel and repeated the girl's words to Timlake. The assayer and Harding exchanged glances, and Harding said:

"You'll have to wait a bit for me, young feller. Time seems to be mighty precious to you all of a sudden."

"My friends may be attacked at any minute, Mr. Harding. I must be there."

"Damnation! Maybe it's best that way. At least they never can say you have a yellow streak and want to pass the buck. Here, I'll write it now."

He pulled out a notebook and wrote in Spanish:

> I can't hold him without throwing and hog tying him. Even the girl could not hold him. He says it's a time when he must go. I believe he is right. Too fine a spirit for me to kill. I'll come up with some men if we see any horsemen making for your camp. As *alcalde* I'll jail the whole outfit.

Mounting his horse, Watts galloped along the base of the cliff. He saw no signs of horsemen, but he believed there was danger threatening his friends, as none of the three was given to sounding false alarms. When halfway to the camp his nerves received a decided jolt as he discovered five men riding toward him from the west, as if to cut him off. They appeared to have suddenly emerged from the earth. He could only explain this unexpected materialization by assuming they had traveled south from the town in the shelter of an arroyo, or dry river bed, and thereby kept parallel to his line of advance without being seen.

Now, apparently, they believed they were close enough to intercept his flight. He lifted his mount into a faster pace, striving to pass the point of intersection if the riders held to their course. The three pounded on, coming in at right angles, and two took a longer line to intercept him farther south if he managed to pass the trio. Only one of the men was recognized by Watts, and he was quick to identify him by his awkward seat in the saddle and the small round hat, miraculously keeping its place despite the movement of the galloping horse.

Watts headed the three men when they were a pistol shot away. He heard the staccato bark of a gun but gave no heed. The two men racing along the diagonal were holding his attention. He was conscious of shots being fired by those in the rear, and fancied he heard the whine of bullets. Pulling his gun, he opened fire on the two horsemen a bit better than abreast of him. He aimed to hit, but had small hopes of scoring. His bullets went wild but brought no return fire. The shooting carried to the camp, however, as shown by the sudden appearance of his friends.

THE TWO horsemen slowed down and turned directly into the trail to rejoin Reid and his companions. Watts waved his hat and his friends ceased their advance and began falling back to the claims.

Coming to a plunging halt in their midst, Watts cried—

"It's Reid and his shooting friends."

"We rather guessed that," growled Bonset. "But what'n hell you doin' back here when I told you to tend to business with Harding?"

"Here's the answer to your note. I had to be almost impolite to get it, as he was mortal slow."

He handed over the paper and Bonset, with one eye on the enemy, read it rapidly. Thrusting it into his pocket, he gazed admiringly at Watts and said:

"Younker, you're all wool and two yards wide. Git the shotgun an' hive up in the

mouth of the tunnel. Stick there. Rest of us will fall back a trifle. If any of them war bonnets come within range, plug 'em. All right, boys. Spread out. Keep covered the best you can. Don't give a inch of ground. We'll make the grand old eagle scream. Hurrah for old Missoury!"

Watts secured the shotgun and ran to the tunnel. One would have to pass abreast of him to attack, or be attacked. If the mountain men held their ground such a maneuver would be unlikely.

At his post Watts thrust his head forward long enough to behold four horsemen. The fifth had disappeared. The quartette seemed to be conferring. Finally one of them waved his hat and, with open hand held high, slowly rode forward. Bonset called out:

"You're in good shooting distance now. That's plenty near enough. You got a bag of talk?"

"We own equally with Bige Reid up here. We come to look over our property. Why do you shoot at us?"

"Why did you shoot at the young feller?"

"We didn't. We wanted to ride in with him and talk with him. He didn't seem to hear us, or see us. We fired into the air to git his 'tention."

"You're a poor liar," said Bonset. "If you can't shoot any better'n you can talk you'd better turn tail an' vamoose."

"They're up to deviltry, pard. They're talkin' to gain time," warned Jerdan. "Reid's lit out."

"Then he must rode north, huggin' the face of the cliff. Looks like he's left 'em in the lurch."

"But he don't dodge fights," insisted Jerdan. "It's some damn' game. Tell that fellow to vamoose, or chaw lead."

Bonset hurled his defiance, couched in picturesque profanity. The man seemed to be grieved. He asked—

"You mean we can't see Reid's claim after we've paid good money for a share in it?"

"If you, or any other long haired galoot is burnin' to see Reid's claim he can come in alone an' git an eyeful. Belt your guns, come along, one at a time."

The man turned to his friends and called out:

"Boys, you heard that. Sounds sort of harsh."

As he spoke he cantered back to join them. A shaggy giant of a man lifted his voice and yelled.

"Let's give 'em hell. Ride over 'em an' trompl e 'em into the ground."

"Three cheers for old Missoury!" defied Bonset.

The Texan leader gave an order which the defenders of the claims could not hear. Instantly three men started in a circling movement, the leader remaining motionless until the three were south of the camp and opposite his position. The leader waved his ragged hat. The three wheeled and faced him and, widely spaced, rode abreast toward him. The leader threw aside his hat and, with the reins between his teeth, a .44 in each hand, clapped spurs to his mount and shot ahead, his long hair streaming like the tail of a ragged comet.

"Look out for t'other ones!" shouted Bonset as he advanced to receive the charge of the lone horseman.

Watts, dancing up and down in excitement, decided none of the fight would be brought abreast of his shelter. When he beheld Bonset dropping on one knee and saw Old Hoss and Calhoun Jerdan turn to resist the charge of the three mounted men, he quit his retreat and ran out into the open. The *flash-flash* and instant *boom-boom* of the Texan's guns, and the banging of Bonset's Navy colt marked the quick termination of one section of the murderous assault. For the Texan weaved drunkenly and pitched head foremost to the ground.

Bonset came to his feet and beheld Watts standing between him and the position taken by Jerdan and Old Hoss. He tripped the youth off his feet and snarled—

"Git to hell back to the tunnel!"

Watts, lying on his stomach, pushed the shotgun ahead and fired at the horseman

on his left. Struck by the shot, the horse reared violently and pivoted, and Bonset shot the rider twice before he struck the ground. The other couple were now upon the defenders, shooting with both hands. Watts fired the second barrel of the gun at the man who seemed about to ride him down. The horse bolted sidewise, and the rider, dragged by the stirrup, bounced from side to side as the maddened animal furiously raced to the west. The third man was shot from his seat by Old Hoss.

Bonset quickly became the executive again. He ordered:

"Bury these men. Picket their hosses out to graze. I'll report it to Harding, the *alcalde*. Reid had a yaller streak after all his blowin'. He didn't dare take the ride with his pards. Danny, you mount your nag again an' hustle down an' tell Ned Harding what's happened."

Watts nodded and ran to get his horse. He paused, however, and reloaded the shotgun. He did not believe Reid had had a yellow streak, and he was very loath to meet that individual unless well equipped with lethal weapons. His trend of thought was entirely different, now that he had withstood the brunt of battle. His heart continued pounding from his reactions to the fight. Yet he felt a strange uplift, a consciousness that he had met the test and had acquitted himself with honor. He kept living over each phase of the fight as he rode north.

He was instantly on the alert and had his horse close to the cliff when he beheld five horsemen racing madly toward him. He swung from the saddle, cocked both barrels of the shotgun and made sure that his revolver was in place. As the men drew nearer he saw that the group of riders were workmen from Harding's mine. He vaulted back into the saddle, waved his hat and rode on to meet them.

"Where's your friends? Wiped out?" cried the leader of the band.

"My friends are all right. Four dead men to be buried. Did you hear the shooting?"

"We heard it faint-like. We was too far away. Reid rode in hellytilarrup. Said roughs was raidin' you folks. Harding was away to town. Foreman sent us up. We knew it was all ended, one way or t'other, when the shootin' stopped. Dawggone too bad we had to miss it. Just our damn' luck. Well, I s'pose we ain't needed."

"Many thanks, but we cooked their dish. I'll ride back with you, as my boss said for me to tell Mr. Harding all about it. He'll be back from town soon?"

"Prob'ly will be there ahead of us."

The men asked many questions and Watts furnished vivid bits of description. When close to the camp the leader of the posse said:

"Younker, you must 'a' been there to see all this. What part did you take?"

"Oh, I used the shotgun, scared a horse into rearing and swinging around so Clay Bonset could nail the man in the saddle. That's about all. None of us was hurt any."

Harding had not returned. Watts decided to visit the Timlakes and wait. It thrilled him to know that this time there would be no need for him to hurry. He whistled shrilly as he drew up to the tent, but no one came to meet him. He did not believe the girl was displeased because he had refused to tarry. After a second shrill whistle he passed on to the opening of the assayer's office, lifted the flap and stepped in. Instantly his blood was frozen by the spectacle of Timlake on the ground, dead, or insensible. His head was bleeding.

Picking up a pail of drinking water, he splashed some on the man's head and then felt for his heart. It was still beating. Leaping over the short counter, he ducked under the dividing wall and called the girl by name. The pretty new dress was on the big rug, one sleeve torn out. Two chairs were overturned. The west wall was slit from top to bottom. Watts at once reconstructed what had happened. Reid had decoyed the men from the tunnel by sending them to help the miners. The absence of Harding made the second part of the plot easy to carry out. The killer had felled Timlake with a murderous blow and then had abducted the girl.

"Inhuman devil!" groaned Watts as he staggered from the tent.

CHAPTER IV

REID DEALS A HAND

AFTER telling the workmen that the girl had been abducted Watts raced his horse back to the claims. The men had observed his mad riding and knew something unusual had happened.

"Why don't you talk?" yelped Old Hoss the moment Watts reined in.

"An' climb down off that nag," added Calhoun Jerdan.

"Mount! Mount!" cried Watts. "Miss Timlake's been stolen by Bige Reid! Her father was knocked senseless. I found him bleeding from a wound in the head. The girl's gone! Reid quit his friends when they came to attack us and went back to steal her!"

"Steal the girl while Hardin' an' his men was right there on deck?" scoffed Bonset.

Then Watts forced himself to a semblance of composure and rapidly filled in the details of his dramatic narrative.

"That sounds different," conceded Bonset. "He must sure have gone south. But God pity the poor child if he manages to travel very far."

The three men lost no time in saddling and mounting, and Bonset, now speaking almost gently, ordered:

"Jerdan, you'n' Old Hoss strike west till a mile beyond the town. Then swing in a half circle to the south, keeping quite a distance apart. Me'n' Danny will maneuver likeways, ridin' south for some miles, an' then strikin' west. Reid's makin' for Arizony, or old Mexico."

"No," disputed Calhoun Jerdan. "He's after money. He don't want the girl. Just money. He never will pull out for Mexico, or Arizony. He's got a place where he can hide the girl while he hops back here an' asks for ransom."

"Who'll he leave the girl with while he's visitin' her pa?" asked Old Hoss.

"I ain't no fortune teller. I can't see everything first card out the box. I—"

"Too much damn' talk! Ride!" roared Bonset. "Hardin's men will be comin' up to take the job off our hands."

He struck spurs into his horse and leaped ahead. Watts, less quick, galloped along behind him. The two were making almost due south. When five miles from the claims Bonset lessened his pace and permitted Watts to draw abreast. Pointing to the southwest, he cried—

"See it?"

"See what? Reid?"

"No, you ninny. Would I be pullin' in if I got my peepers on that skunk? I mean the smoke from that mesa."

"I can't even see the mesa."

"That low blue an' yellow cloud. That's the mesa. Tableland. There's a smoke."

"Then Reid must have gone into camp," exclaimed Watts, and he urged his horse to a faster pace.

Bonset quickly overtook him and shouted:

"It's a 'Pache signal smoke. 'Paches have seen something up north here. Seen Reid mostly. They're signaling to another band."

Again he slowed down and swept his keen old eyes over half the horizon. Then he yelped:

"I see it!" And he pointed toward the southwest. "See that second line of smoke? Very thin."

Watts could see nothing but the haze of the heated heavens. Twisting his head, Bonset pointed to the southeast and cried:

"Third smoke down there. Two end smokes answerin' the middle smoke. God help the poor girl! Reid don't know nothin' 'bout Injuns, or Injun signs."

Then he was off, crowding his horse to top speed. He rode with his chin hugged against his chest, his hat blown off, his ragged hair streaming in the breeze.

Watts, thundering along in pursuit, also lost his hat, and his red hair was like a fiery torch. After half an hour of mad riding Bonset drew rein. When Watts came alongside he quietly explained:

"I'm a poor ol' fool. No sense in sp'ilin' our nags. We've got to come back. Yet them smokes tell us we need to hustle. But the Injuns mustn't catch us ridin' tuckered out hossflesh."

"But Miss Beth? Miss Timlake?" groaned Watts.

"Son, we can't help that girl if we kill our hosses. Them smokes are some distance away. Some 'Pache lookout has spotted something up north. They can see a hell of a distance. Reid's hoss, if carryin' double, can't travel like we have. He don't know the country very good; has just a general idee. Chances are he ain't seen any smoke. If he has he don't know what it means. He must have a 'dobe shack somewhere out here, where he can leave the girl. He had this all planned out. He set the four Texans on to fight us. He sends Harding's men up to help us. He knows Harding is in town. An' I'd say he must have some one to leave her with, while he goes back as bold as brass an' dickers for her return to her pap. We'll swing to the west to meet Jerdan an' Old Hoss. If they ain't found any trail we'll ride back north, keepin' some distance apart and combin' the country as we go. We've got to be lookin' for some broken down ranch buildin'."

Watts wallowed in the black depths of despair. The ominous penciling in the many tinted sky meant that a host of red raiders were sweeping up from the south to spoil any chances of a rescue. At Fort Union he had heard a soldier say that an Apache lookout could detect troops in motion at a distance of forty miles. The mesa in the south appeared to be within easy riding distance. The smokes indubitably proved that the red watchers had seen something. Lost river gold and cliffs of gold meant nothing to him. He could only see Beth Timlake's gay dress, with one sleeve ruthlessly torn away. And his hatred for Reid was so intense that he gladly would have attacked him with bare hands.

Again Bonset slowed down and permitted his companion to draw closer. He said:

"There's a fourth smoke ahead in the west. If Reid rode farther south than this he's a goner. Hope he saves a shot for the girl."

Watts was nearly overcome by the horror of it, by the implacable savagery of it. For a moment he reeled, as if stricken by the sun, and almost toppled out of the saddle.

"I won't have it that way!" he shouted. "Miss Beth's alive and all right. We're going to find her and take her back. We're going to kill Bige Reid."

"If your medicine is telling you that, then it will be so," said Bonset, whose simple faith included a firm belief in red "medicines". He nodded his head in confirmation of his own words, and mumbled: "*Taku wakan. Wakan witshasha.* That's what he is. Along of his red hair, I reckon."

The two came to the western end of a low mesa and looked down into a shaggy, broken country. Even as they paused to study the faint outlines of an old *hacienda* in the distance, they saw a tenuous wisp of smoke rising from the sage south of the ruined structure.

"I have it!" cried Bonset. "It's the answer to the smoke riddle. 'Pache scout down there found something. He's callin' for help. T'other smokes are answerin' him. Reid an' the girl must be behind the walls of that deserted *hacienda*."

"Ride! Ride!" cried Watts, and he lifted his mount into a mad gallop and gave no heed to the dangers of the broken slope of the tableland.

The old mountain man raced along beside him and brought the horse to a convulsive halt by clamping his fingers over the poor beast's nostrils.

"Dern you, Danny, you're makin' me see red with your damn' foolishness," he grated. "That rancho's five miles from here. Want to kill your hoss out here? Want to ride up an' be killed by Reid, or some skulkin' Injuns? We'll work softly through this broken country. If Calhoun Jerdan an' Old Hoss don't happen down this far we stand a slim show."

"We either take the girl back, or I stay down here," said Watts.

"You derned, red headed hothead! Reckon I planned on goin' back without her?" snarled Bonset. "We've got to be sly, an' git contagious to the maker of that smoke an' rub him out. That's our first job. Then, afore half a million red devils can come tearin' along, we've got to git inside that *hacienda*, find the girl, if she's there, an' streak back north. Call me a coward ag'in an' I'll swear at your hoss."

"Please don't mind what I say," said Watts. "I'm fair crazy with the hideousness of it all. If we can save Miss Beth it doesn't matter what happens to us."

"Not a damn' bit, pard. We're one in thinkin' that. Like what you told the girl down at Harding's camp. It's a time to go. A time when a galoot just has to go, an' to hell 'bout comin' back. Now you quiet down. Them Injuns in the south ain't comin' way up here in a jiffy. It'll be some time, mebbe some hours. All depends on how far they'd come afore we see the signals. That means only a few of 'em at the rancho. It must be a small band, or it wouldn't be callin' for help to catch one man an' a little girl."

WATTS began to consider this version of the situation, but Bonset interrupted his line of thought by gesturing for him to give heed to something else. The significance of this caution was lost on the younger man until Bonset cupped a hand to his ear and cocked his head and listened. Watts quickly followed his example. The reports of six-shooters, speaking rapidly, came to their ears. It was a rippling blur of detonations at first, and ended in two shots spaced some seconds apart.

"Reid!" exclaimed Bonset. "He's there an' at work. Holed up by 'Paches. The painted devils ain't got to the girl yet, I'll warrant."

"Please God we find her safe!" whispered Watts.

Bonset eyed him in a strange fashion, then smiled and said gently:

"You've got guts. We've found her. We've found him. Found one of the fightin'est gunmen in the West. An' he's hidin' behind stout walls. An' we've found a parcel of snaky 'Paches atween us an' him. If we git by the 'Paches, Reid most likely will pot us."

"I don't worry about that. If Beth is with him and unharmed everything is all right, now you're here to dip in."

The old man's face grew hot at this praise. Also the boy's faith in him touched his heart. He reminded—

"An' more 'Paches are comin' on the jump to be in at the finish."

"If Miss Beth is unharmed everything is all right. The reenforcement won't arrive in time."

"Younker, your medicine sounds mighty strong," said Bonset. "Now we must stop the 'Paches already on hand from killin' Reid afore we chip in. I'm aimin' to rub Reid out with my right hand gun."

"You'll do that," said Watts. "The horrible part was never to find any trace of her."

"Damme if you ain't *wakan*," exclaimed Bonset with ferocious gusto. "Must be your red hair. I've seen the medicine work from the Blackfoot country down to the Mexican line, an' it never lies. First time I see you I reckoned you was plumb *heyoka*. Now I know you are *wakan witshasha*. It's just a question of time. A race atween us an' the 'Paches ridin' up from the south. Just depends on how long it will take us to git inside to Reid."

The gunfire broke again, sounding closer and even more rapid.

"Lawdy, but he's givin' 'em hell 'n' repeat." And there was genuine admiration in the old mountain man's voice. "An' we're almost upon the battlefield. No redskin ever handled .44's like that. Must have an extry brace."

Bonset, now sure of his direction, increased his pace. In the south the smokes continued to ascend, but the smoke over the rancho was fading. Bonset feared the Indians had completed their work, and

each moment he expected to hear the triumphant cries of the savage victors.

"The fighting has stopped," panted Watts, as he found himself nervously exhausted in anticipating what lay at the end of the path.

"Light an' keep a grip on your bridle so's the nag don't bolt," ordered Bonset. "If you're catched afoot down here you'll travel by night. Reid has been rubbed out, or the Injuns have drawn off."

"Then let's hurry, or he'll mount and ride again."

"Stop that chatter, you young redhead. Ain't we doin' our best? We can't ruin our hosses."

Suddenly they saw the walls of the *hacienda* just ahead, showing above a growth of cactus. In the clear air it looked to be much nearer than it really was. Watts would have broken into a run if not for the horse. A few more rods and Bonset came to a halt and in a low voice ordered:

"You stay here an' hold both nags. I'll scout ahead."

His voice was peremptory, and Watts did as bid without any remonstrance; but he felt chilled and weak as he stood there and waited. It seemed an interminable time before he heard the soft step of his companion. Bonset was running on his toes, and his approach through the bush startled his companion.

"Hop into the saddle an' foller," barked Bonset; and he mounted and spurred toward the *hacienda.*

Watts kept at his heels. Of a sudden they broke through the last screen and came to the beginning of what had been a few cleared acres of arable land. At the north end of this were the broken walls of the ranch-house. Instead of making for it Bonset swung south of it, calling over his shoulder:

"Dead Injuns right ahead. Watch out they don't scare your nag."

Without further warning Watts came upon a scene of savagery and bloodshed that appalled him for a moment. At first he saw only the dead Apaches scattered through the scrub. Bonset skirted these and then Watts beheld Bige Reid. The man was lying face down, his arms extended straight ahead, a Navy revolver clutched in each hand, a Bowie knife stabbed into the ground close by his right hand. He had died as he had lived, fighting.

He presented a terrible spectacle, having been stabbed to death by several lances, and yet if any of his foes had survived they had fled the scene. He had not been scalped, and Bonset insisted he had killed his last foes while dying. The great egotism and tenacity of the man were in the figure 10, scratched in the ground beside him, but there were thirteen dead Apaches, killed by guns and the knife.

"Think of it! Forty-six humans he's sent over the long trail, countin' these reds an' the Mexican."

"The girl! Miss Beth?"

"We'll soon know. Had to make sure no enemy was hidin' here. Inside the wall an' use your eyes."

They entered by a breach in the south wall. A portion of the roof had fallen in. Some of the rooms opening upon the bush grown court and situated on the north side were intact, some were roofless, and others had big gaps in their walls. Bonset began at one end of the north side and Watts at the other. It was Bonset who found her. His low voice brought Watts on the run, his face drawn with terror of what he might behold.

The mountain man was standing on a heap of fallen rock and sun dried brick and on a level with a small opening that gave into a room on what had been the second story. Bonset crawled through the opening and Watts quickly followed him. They found Miss Beth, gagged and tightly bound. In a thrice she was free. She pointed to a crock of water and managed to swallow a few mouthfuls. It was a minute before she could speak. Bonset, realizing that time was all important, retreated through the hole and climbed to the top of the south wall to reconnoiter for approaching foes.

"He? Where is he?" feebly gasped the

girl through her swollen lips as Watts bathed her head.

"Dead. We must leave here at once. Can you stand?"

He helped her to her feet, but it was several minutes before she could step unassisted. All the while she was repeating:

"What a terrible man! He went out to meet them alone. What a terrible man! I heard them fighting. I expected a savage to find me any minute."

"At least, I'll thank God that he knew how to handle six-shooters," said Watts. "He killed them all. Thirteen of them. And they speared him to death. He must have killed the last of them while dying. We heard the last two shots—a few seconds apart."

She toppled over against him. He held her erect and urged:

"Be brave. We must leave this place on the run."

"My legs are numb. My feet are asleep."

"Exercise. You shall ride a horse. Other Indians are coming."

"Then we are not free," she groaned.

"As good as free," he encouraged. "They are far away."

He took her hand and led her toward the hole in the wall, intending to assist her down into the court and place her on a horse. The two were met at the opening by Bonset, who carried four guns thrust through his belt. The old man's face, covered by the white beard, could reveal nothing, but his eyes glittered ominously. He ordered abruptly—

"Stay where you be."

"We must ride for it at once," insisted Watts.

"Stay here. Have your gun ready. Here are some lances."

He tossed the weapons through the opening and directed, "Stand at one side an' spear 'em when they try to come in. If they climb to the top of the wall knock 'em loose with bricks, or spears."

"Why can't we run for it?" demanded Watts.

"Too late. They're here."

"We'll never escape," whispered the girl. "I'm brave now. Tell me the truth."

With an attempt at an encouraging laugh Bonset answered:

"Git away? Course we can. This fuss won't 'mount to shucks. Just long enough to give our nags a breathin' spell. I see two hosses Reid brought down. Danny, they are in brick shed outside at the north end of this side of the court. If I'm kept busy overlong make for the nags an' run for it. Miss Beth, stop your frettin'. 'Paches are goin' remember this day as long as they live. They're comin' slow through the bush. I must be goin'."

HE DESCENDED the pile of broken masonry and stole outside the court. He had planned to carry the fighting to the savages instead of waiting for them to enter the court. He knew the silence was puzzling the raiders. He could hear guttural exclamations and faint calls from different quarters of the bush. They had left their horses at the edge of the jungle mass in the hollow where Reid had died. They were puzzled as to why the maker of the signal smoke did not call out to them.

Bonset returned to Reid's last battlefield without being discovered. He silently collected a dozen long lances and took his stand behind a stately mescal that was heavy with beautiful velvety flowers, and which was flanked with luxuriant bush growth, the species of which had been brought from the North. Bonset knew water must be near to cause the imported vegetation to thrive, and a close search revealed a thirty-foot well, filled to within ten feet of the covering.

A *riata* and a rusty tin pail were added to his discovery. With his ears standing guard against a near approach of the foe, he gently lowered and filled the pail and after drinking placed it behind the mescal. In his heart he doubted if he could survive the impending attack, but he did not intend to die, tortured by thirst, as Reid must have died. Like coppery wraiths the Apaches would filter through the

growth and sweep through the ruins of the *hacienda*.

He told himself:

"Danny's smart. Injuns won't know they're here. If worst comes he'll have brains 'nough to save a shot for the girl."

He inspected his weapons and those taken from Reid for the last time. The first alarm was the faint stirring in a small patch of barley, and as Bonset raised a lance a rabbit hopped into view.

"All right, *muchacho*," he murmured. "Keep watch for me."

The rabbit, not detecting any life in the motionless figure, advanced a few feet and then sat up and wrinkled its nose. Bonset believed it had caught the scent of blood. Like a flash it wheeled and vanished into the barley.

Almost at the same instant a savage suddenly stood on the edge of the little glade, his eyes round with horror and amazement as he beheld the array of the dead. He wore a shirt of buckskin, in colors of yellow and blue to represent the earth and water, or sky. At the shoulders were bunches of feathers, referring to the bird life, and the round circle on the breast was a symbol of the sun. From the half length sleeves and from the sides of the shirt hung human scalps. Bonset knew other similar noiseless figures were close about him, although none of them yet had discovered his presence.

This first intruder remained motionless, glaring at the dead white man and the dead braves. Bonset slowly drew back his arm, the hand gripping a lance. The savage opened his mouth to cry out to his mates, but paused as a huge spider ran in front of him and stopped. Raising his lance, he glided a step ahead to exterminate the bloated, poisonous insect.

Bonset mechanically repeated the adjuration of the Sioux, when killing a spider, his fluttering lips repeating—

"O grandfather, the thunder beings killed you."

This was to ward off bad luck from the family of spiders. The butt of the Apache's lance fell, and at the same moment he was riven through the heart by the missile hurled by Bonset's strong and skilful hand. The Indian was dead before he lost his balance.

A low whirling noise, like that of a rattlesnake's warning heard at a distance, caused Bonset to make ready for another cast. Ten feet away a painted face and neck emerged from a tangle of gorgeous flowers. This man had heard the noise of his companion's fall and was calling to him. Then his small black eyes beheld his companion and the still forms of those slain by Reid. He sounded a quavering cry of discovery and went down, choking out his life with a long lance through his throat.

Bonset had decided he would not fall back. Reid had not done so. To retreat inside the *hacienda*, unless called there by a shot from Watts' gun, would simply mean transferring the conflict too closely to the girl's hiding place. Now, as if by magic, a dozen heads came into view. Then several others were stealthily advancing through the tangled growth. The first to behold the slaughter patted his lips in amazement, yelped loudly, then barked from pain as a lance bit deep into his thigh. His companions bounded forward, and Bonset commenced shooting.

The sight of the slain Apaches and the surprise of the mountain man's attack confused the Indians for a bit, long enough for Bonset to fire a string of six shots. Carrying three of the lances, he rapidly and noiselessly gave ground and gained the southern wall of the *hacienda*. The screams of rage, intermingled with exclamations of awe, disturbed the quiet of the place for a brief moment. And then came the silence of the dead.

Bonset would have been more at home fighting the Sioux, Blackfeet, or Utes. These Southern creatures were more like snakes and shadows. They were nowhere, and then they were at one's side. Suddenly there came a chorus of discordant cries and howls, and the sounds of a general advance. These alarms were at the right of Bonset's position, and he was puzzled. He saw furtive forms stealing through breaches in the wall. None

seemed to sense his proximity. He glanced back toward the hiding place in the north side of the *hacienda*. An exclamation of horror escaped him. He believed young Watts must have gone insane. A dark spiral of smoke was rising from the young folks' hiding place. Its sinister smudge rose high to stain the heavens.

"Good God! He's gone *heyoka*! He has killed us!" groaned the mountain man.

And forthwith he claimed the Apaches' attention by pouring an enfilading fire into them in an effort to halt and divert the terrible line. It was like target shooting for the first three shots, and then no moving object could be seen.

Squatting on his heels, he began reloading his empty weapons, his eyes darting from side to side. Each second he expected to discover a copper face close to his own. The truth was that the dead men in the opening near the well, the silent slayer of several of the men, the smoke signal from the ruins and this last unexpected attack puzzled and frightened the Apaches. They believed each gruesom factor was part of a cunning trap. For that reason only they halted their advance on the new smoke and took to cover to consult by signs and low whispered speech.

Several minutes thus passed. Some believed the first smoke, calling them from their fastness, had been a decoy. Then they decided to ignore the smoke from the *hacienda* and to concentrate the attack on the unseen assailant. The signal was given.

Bonset retreated closer to the ruined wall. He passed through it and made for the tumbled masonry near the ruined chamber. Before he could reach the last goal he was discovered. He was showered with arrows and lances and a few bullets. He raced to the adobe wall of a smokehouse and paused long enough to break off an arrow, flopping from the muscles of his back, and to tie a handkerchief around his forehead so as to protect his eyes from the blood now flowing from a scalp wound.

"Damn it, grandfather spider! The thunder beings killed you," he howled.

SEEING but one man, and believing he was shouting his death song, the Indians broke cover and raced to see who should tear off his scalp. He piled up four of them with deadly precision before the mad rush ceased. All was quiet again. Bonset glanced about to take stock of the situation. He was exposed to attack on two sides. The wall and roofless chamber protected him on the north side unless a savage should succeed in securing cover behind some of the fallen masonry.

One young brave, thirsting for glory, essayed to secure that advantage, and disappeared below the opening of the young people's retreat. Bonset did not see the arm and hand thrust through the opening, but he heard the crack of the gun and jerked his head about in time to behold the brave leap spasmodically into the air.

"Three cheers for old Missoury! Hooray for the 'Merican Eagle!" he shouted.

Almost instantly he was answered by the beautiful words—

"Three cheers for the United States Army!"

This stimulant came from the western end of the south line. There was the sound of snorting, crashing horses. Then came the welcome roar of .44's, and more frenzied cries. The savages fell back in confusion, moving parallel to Bonset's position. Bonset opened fire on the flitting figures to keep the enemy out of the court. He yelled like a madman. From the chamber came young voices shouting defiance and the detonation of young Watts' gun.

The Apaches at first endeavored to make it a fighting retreat, but the tribal gods had deserted them. Bonset yelled in several Sioux dialects and was answered in the speech of the Crows and Cheyennes. Thoroughly befuddled by these evidences of a strong relief party, the Apaches ceased all efforts at self-defense and made for their horses on the southern edge of the tangled growth.

Bonset leaped upon the wall and shouted: "They vamoose, boys! Give 'em hell!"

Old Hoss and Calhoun Jerdan burst

through a clump of acacia, each well blooded by wounds on chest and head. Old Hoss spat out a tooth and tentatively examined a hole through his cheek. Jerdan improvised a sling with one hand and his teeth to support a broken left arm. He reined in and grinned broadly at the gory spectacle presented by his friend. Old Hoss plunged on after the foes, who were now in full retreat. The old man proceeded only far enough to satisfy himself that the enemy was gone for good. When he returned to the court he jeered at Bonset—

"You had to have help to rub out a few hundred snaky 'Paches!"

"His Injun name oughter be 'Little-man-who-went-alone-an'-had-to-make-smoke-call-for-help," added Jerdan.

"You derned fools, I never sent up any smoke talk," roared Bonset. "I'd die afore I'd ask you whelps to lend a hand. What you mean by rammin' in here when I was countin' coup on the whole damn' outfit? Scalp your own dead an' leave mine be."

"Huh! Didn't make a smoke? Of course you made a smoke, you old liar. Who did make it if you didn't? We'd hunted hell'n' all over fer the two kids an' was turning back when we see your smoke."

Bonset pointed at the roofless chamber and said:

"There's your smoke maker. I told the young idiot to keep low. "Watts by this time was through the hole and helping the girl to emerge.

"Gad!" gasped Old Hoss. "Our medicine sure was good to us!"

"Come with me and see how the gun notcher finished," invited Bonset. "Only decent thing he ever done." And he led them to the scene of Bige Reid's last fight. Pointing to the numeral 10 scratched in the dirt, he said, "Think of that cuss rememberin' to keep his score up to the last shoot!"

They hurried back and found the young people eager for an immediate departure. Bonset, when all were in the saddle, publicly confessed:

"I'm an old liar. It was Danny's smoke, callin' you two scuts here, that saved us."

They returned to Il Defeeno.

The claims proved to be richer than the cliff gold. What had been thought a long streak of tiny nuggets proved to be but a pocket; and where the signs showed on the face of the cliff a few blasts revealed nothing. Watts waited until the claims were cleaned up, and his share of the gold had been sent North by the stage, before he sought the girl and told her:

"I'm going back to Iowa. I want you and your father to go with me. I have enough for all of us. We can get married at Fort Union. Are you willing, Beth?"

"Like Barkis, I'm willin', Danny. Father's willing to live East, or Middle West; and your wife will have money of her own. Here comes father now."

Watts went to meet him, and began:

"I want to marry your daughter. I have nearly a hundred thousand dollars, which is enough to—"

"I'd be glad to have you for a son-in-law, Danny, if you didn't have a cent," interrupted Timlake. "I'm tired of going from camp to camp as an assayer."

Watts then visited his three friends. He shook hands with each and stared into each weathered, kindly face, and the tears came to his eyes. His voice was broken as he told them:

"I shall never find three friends like you. I shall never forget I owe my wife to you. I shall always remember how you chipped in and helped me when I was sick, discouraged and almost crazy. I never shall—"

"Shet up, you damn' little red headed trouble maker!" thundered Bonset.

Throwing his arm across Watts' shoulder, he nodded his head, but did not speak. His companions shook hands in silence. They disappeared that night, and reports had it that the town of Harding witnessed the prize drunk of all the ages. Back in Iowa Watts fancied at times, when alone on his farm, he could hear Clay Bonset shouting, "Three cheers for old Missoury!"

Of Animal Musick

A Story of Old Italy

By F. R. BUCKLEY

TO THAT good, merciful and forgiving Lord Antonio, Duke of Canovi, from his sorrowful, humble servant, L. Caradosso, in the manner of an apology, these:

SIRE:

I was not aware, until I awoke this morning with a vile headache and was informed of the matter by Giuseppe Nardi, that I had indeed thrown the flagon; and even now I can scarce believe (though God knoweth I was never an artillerist) that if I did fling it, my aim was so bad as to shower your Highness with wine and to knock two teeth out of your Grace's noble brother.

I have informed Nardi that the object of my hurling was merely the minstrel at that time entertaining the company; and have set forth the question whether it is likely that at my age of seventy, and after thirty years of guard-captaincy at the best courts, I should end my days pelting princes with tableware. To which Nardi hath responded (looking down his nose in a manner that would make me ill) that actions speak louder than words; and that in any event I had no cause to toss pots at the singer.

Sire, it was visible, from the inattention of the said Nardi to the explanation which I offered to him, that it was his intention to misrepresent me to your Grace—after the manner of treasurers when speaking of soldiers; which is why he may return to your Highness with a tale of being locked in a room while I write this. The room is the most comfortable afforded

by this miserable inn; and if, as he allegeth, I used him last night as a shield between my escape and your Lordship's arquebusiers, surely being tied in a chair should be no hardship. And in passing, Nardi's account of my departure from the banquet leads me to counsel your Excellency to look well to the spirit of the guard. Had I commanded them, they would have fired, treasurer or no treasurer.

Alas, my head aches; I foundered my horse by making him carry double; the tavern hath no wine fit to refresh me this blackest of mornings; and it seems that in the confusion I rode away from my farm at Costecaldo, instead of toward it. Yet, rather than forfeit your Lordship's favor, and put him to the trouble of hiring bravos, I take a firmer grip on the pen and proceed with the story of Simone de' Neri, Bartolomeo il Bianco, and the four-times accursed and miserable pretender, Arturo Sacco.

It was of him, be it remembered—of Arturo—that the minstrel was singing at the time of my mishap with the flagon; and unless I deceive myself, he had just described this Sacco, this calf's head, this cleaned fish, this wisp of effluvium, as a pearl among captains, who in progress toward nobility and the acquisition of lands had met and destroyed in fair combat the combined forces of Simone and Bartolomeo.

O wretch! O squalling liar! O miserable embroiderer of perjury at second hand! Simone and Bartolomeo defeated by *that*—when I was Simone's lieutenant. I will tell your Lordship the truth, and he shall judge whether I had provocation to toy with my mug handle.

Sire, in the winter of the year 1537, this Sacco who now calleth himself a count and suborns singers, was a captain of freelances, wintering in Rometia. I call him a captain because I would give him his full due, and he was principal officer of his troop. Of the fact that this said troop was no larger than a sergeant's command in the forces of Simone and Bartolomeo (both of whom were in the city) I say nothing; nor do I allude, out of pity, to the poverty stricken condition of the troop. Many times during that winter did Simone protest to Bartolomeo, and Bartolomeo to Simone, and both of them to Arturo Sacco himself, that if a man's men were mounted on crowbaits, and their armor tied together with string, it was more likely due to the commander's misfortune than to his fault. If, for instance, as they further admitted, this Sacco had red hair, red eyes, knock knees, and an incapacity for liquor which brought him the scorn of such full blooded nobles as were likely to hire troops—blame should be placed on the said Sacco's parents, rather than upon himself. With my own ears I have heard Simone make these observations to nobles, whenas they were bargaining for freelances; and I know that Bartolomeo did the same. Your Grace shall hear how they were repaid.

It was a pleasant winter, that one; with a good and profitable season behind it and, by all appearances, a still better year ahead. I will not trouble your Highness with details of politics long since dead and gone; suffice it to say that the nobles thereabouts were covetous as heart could wish and that Simone and Bartolomeo had come to an agreement. The covetousness assured us employment on one side or another of the disputes between the covetous; and the agreement certified that our peaceful following of our trade of war would not be troubled by too much killing.

BETWEEN them and disregarding Arturo Sacco with his scarecrow patrol, Simone and Bartolomeo owned all the *condottieri* within a circle of fifty miles about Rometia; so that if one prince hired one, his opponent must of nature hire the other. Our agreement provided that the attempted entry of any other band of freelances into the district should be opposed by the troops combined; there were no guards or household forces of sufficient strength to cause us more than the ordinary grief; and altogether we rejoiced

over our prospects for the year 1538.

In the midst of which rejoicing (which, since it was cold weather, we were carrying on with a large fire and mulled wine) who should come to the three of us—Bartolomeo's lieutenant being excluded for a reason which will appear—but Arturo Sacco, with devil a sole to his shoes. We offered him drink, but he would not take it; all that he required, it seemed, was alliance with us and participation in our treaty. At which demand we gaped one at another—all except Bartolomeo's lieutenant; I did not mean to say that he was excluded from the room. Nay, he was there; he was there, but he did his staring in the direction of Sacco.

"Bartolomeo," says Simone, "was this good wine thou boughtest?"

"Indeed, yes."

"It tastes well," says Simone in a dazed way, "and since I put the poker in it myself, I know it was well mulled. Can any one have dropped potions in it, think you?"

"Nay," says Bartolomeo. "Our pots have not been out of our hands."

"Then it is very strange that it should give one delusions," says Simone, looking into his flagon and washing the liquor about. "Wilt thou believe, Bartolomeo and Luigi, that a moment agone I could have sworn I heard our little brother Sacco proposing to join us as co-captain?"

This was a play in which they took much delight. Now they laughed heartily, and so did I, God help me! Only Bartolomeo's lieutenant did not laugh—he and Sacco. I saw their eyes meet.

"It was no delusion," says Arturo in his squeaky voice. "I did propose alliance. And—"

"With thy thirty-seven men?" says Simone, open eyed.

"Thirty-six. One deserted this morning. Nevertheless—"

"And thy weak head?"

"It is a weak head for wine," says Arturo, "but it hath other capacities."

Again he glanced at Bartolomeo's lieutenant and met his eye.

"But with regard to reason," says Bartolomeo, drinking, "meseems the said headpiece is not of much use. Into what matter did it lead thee—no longer ago than a month? Seeking, as is natural to mankind—hup! your pardon—a mate for the winter, didst thou not select from the whole city Madonna Giovanni Sala—"

At this, Messer Sacco got to his feet with a suddenness I should not have expected.

"—and, having done so, pass the time by reading books with her until her father (God rest his soul!) had an apoplexy at thine impudence?"

"I am not here to discuss the Madonna Giovanna," says Arturo Sacco through his teeth—they were irregular, and he made a hissing noise. "Nor will I have thee—"

"Ha?" demands Bartolomeo, cupping one hand about his ear.

"I will not allow thee—"

Forthwith, and with a roar like a bull, Bartolomeo hurled his flagon to the ground and sprang up. Having been long before the fire, he had forgotten the taking off of his sword and the hanging of it from a nail in the wall; and, flinging himself upon Ser Sacco, he reached first of all to his waist. There was a dagger there, but of course on the right side, not the left; and his moment's fumbling gave us time to seize him. Nevertheless, he got the knife free, and it took all our strength to keep him from murder.

"He will not permit me," bellows Bartolomeo. "He will not permit me! Death, fury and damnation, let me cut his heart out! I'll have no more of the—"

"My Lords!" says the host, who had come in trembling. "My Lords, have mercy on a poor man. The watch will be here. Hath something annoyed your Lordship?"

Bartolomeo, his face crimson and his eyes starting out of his head, was still struggling to get his dagger arm loose; but for some reason this question calmed him almost to the point of clear speech.

"Aye," says he, relaxing. "I have been annoyed, fellow—by vermin."

Since he was glaring at Arturo as he

spoke, the landlord also looked; and, I doubt not, took in at one innkeeper's glance both the fellow's sobriety and the state of his clothes. It was not to be expected, with such evidence before him and his knowledge of the sums we spent, that he would be overpolite with the stranger; but it was not, in my opinion, respectful to the military that he should call ruffians from the taproom and have Arturo flung into the street. I said nothing at the time, because of Bartolomeo; but later that night, I pushed him down his own cellar steps, and threw all three ruffians into the kennel in their turn. Ah me! The brave days!

Ah me! The brave days!

WELL, as God pleased, spring came early that year, and it was not long before we were away from Rometia and about our business. I was sent, for the purpose of making an agreement to the court of Luzio de' Pazzi; where, succeeding in my mission, I had the misfortune to slip during an argument with the guard lieutenant. So that (the consequent wound in my lung having enfevered) I was in bed at Cialdoni during all that spring campaign, and most of the summer; during the heat whereof both Simone and Bartolomeo rested their troops in Rometia; and I do not know under just what circumstances these commanders gained acquaintance with Madonna Giovanna Sala. But when I returned in the autumn, certes they both knew her; and moreover Simone seemed reluctant to depart for our new engagement—a hasty little affair on behalf of the Count Michele Bertaldi. I could not understand his unwillingness, considering — ha-ha! — that Bartolomeo had refused to take service with our opponents. Against a mere handful of guardsmen and a rabble of citizens, meseemed we should earn our money easily; but Simone, no doubt of it, was unpleased.

The matter was made clear to me on the very evening before our departure—in that very tavern room, as it chanced, where the name of Madonna Giovanna had first been mentioned by Arturo Sacco. Now Bartolomeo, lounging before the empty fireplace in undershirt and hose, spoke of Arturo; remarking that after such a summer as he had had, he must be woundy sorrowful to see winter come again.

"Though he is better dressed than he was," says Bartolomeo—quite forgetful, in his good humored way, that ever he had drawn sword on the man. "I saw him yesterday at the house of Madonna Sala, and he had new shoon."

"He there?" says my captain, looking up angrily.

"Why, yes," says Bartolomeo with a yawn. "Reading books. He is often there. I think she feeds him. He is a bookwise sort of fellow, and she is the like, and I am not; so why should I grudge her his company—sometimes?"

At this, Simone began to blink rapidly.

"Thou might better," says he in a tone of great danger, "grudge her his company than mine, as thou dost."

Bartolomeo, who had been tilted back on two legs of his chair, let all four touch the floor and stared at Simone.

"Better grudge her his company than thine?" he said. "Who grudges her thy company? So long as it be not too frequently given and thus attract talk."

Simone, whose habit of anger was just opposite from Bartolomeo's, now became exceeding pale and began to tremble.

"Not too frequently given!" says he, almost in a whisper. "And who art thou to say how many times I may see her?"

Bartolomeo was still calm, but the red was starting to rise above his shirt collar.

"To be frank with thee, Simone," says he, "I have some hope of wedding the lady. I—"

"Wedding the lady!" Simone stood up, and with such sudden fury as I had never seen upon him before, flung his chair into a far corner of the room. "Wedding her father's money bags, rather, before he's cold in the grave!"

Bartolomeo also arose. The blood was well up in his cheeks now; but still he contained himself.

"Simone, Simone, art thou drunk? Am I the man to do such a thing?"

"Art thou the man to send me off on a campaign, and sneak out of it thyself, for no other purpose than to be near her in my absence?"

Now Bartolomeo was flushed to the hair line.

"Mad or not, speak not thus to me, Simone de' Neri," he said through his teeth. "Thou knowest that the money offered was not sufficient. Did we not consult together and decide that—"

"And it was because of our agreement that thou didst refuse the employment?"

"Thou knowest it!"

"Liar! It was so that—"

But of course Bartolomeo il Bianco was not the man to await more words after that first. Neither he nor Simone was armed, so that for some minutes they battled with their hands—actually falling to the floor and there writhing, until for very shame I went and fetched their swords from behind the cupboard. Even so, it was with difficulty that I persuaded them to loose grips and fight like gentlemen—if they must fight; for which proceeding there seemed to me very little reason. Aye, when the swords were there for them, they preferred for some minutes to roll about the flagstones, careless of who might gape at them from the doorway; trying to strangle one another and poking for eyes with their thumbs.

AT LAST I tore them apart, gave each his sword; and, finding time at last to lock the door, said that I would prescribe terms of combat. Terms of combat! I might as well have proposed rules for a fight between two mad bulls. Nothing would satisfy either, but he must have the other's blood—his life blood; and it was my opinion, as I watched them storm hither and yon about the dim room, cutting and slashing in a shower of sparks and with a ferocity that took no account of science, that most like both would win—or lose; both die, I mean. I could not, at that time, understand the reason for such savagery, because I had never seen Madonna Giovanna Sala—I saw her later, and then many things became clear to me. Beside wealth, she had beauty peculiarly suited to the engendering of madness—large brown eyes and red lips moist with promise. Also, and as shall be shown hereafter, she had wits of a kind not common even among men. Alas! Alas!

Simone had a high style of fighting, very inconvenient in that low vaulted room. Bartolomeo fought low, mowing for the hamstrings, and Simone, when calm, understood him very well. Having spent three head cuts upon the ceiling, my captain was beginning to recover his coolness, and Bartolomeo was beginning to make use—for the first time—of his point; in other words, each was about to kill the other without remedy, when there was a thundering at the door, and a voice upraised in a command that the combat should stop.

"In the name of the Duke Guglielmo of Rometia!" bawled the watch lieutenant. "I summon you to cease!"

There was a new edict against brawling; its penalty was death, and Guglielmo was no respector of persons; yet they fought on regardless, and when I made toward the door to unlock it, one sent a cut within an inch of my ear, and the other all but pinned me to the paneling.

"Blow me this lock off," shouted the lieutenant. "Hi, Paolo! Advance your match. Against the keyhole, fool. Now!"

The lock flew across the room; the door crashed open under the thrust of a dozen shoulders; and in rushed the watch amid a cloud of powder smoke. One, until I knocked him down and took his two handed sword, seemed eager to arrest me; five or six others seized Bartolomeo and Simone. And had difficulty in holding them, too, so furious raging they were.

"Money hunter thyself!" gasps Bartolomeo.

"Liar! Dog!"

"Ah," says the watch lieutenant, who knew them both. "Ye two, fighting! Partners at each other's throats! Fie, fie."

"No partner of mine," snarls Simone.

"As for fighting," says Bartolomeo, "we will see as to that—later. I defy thee, Simone de' Neri. I renounce thy friendship and the agreement between us. Tomorrow I join Filippo de' Carafaggio."

Filippo was the noble we were engaged to fight; and who, having forces which he esteemed strong enough to deal with us, had offered Bartolomeo the low price which he had refused. Now Bartolomeo was in a frame of mind to fight for nothing, if necessary; and I foresaw heavy trouble in store for us. Simone, accepting the opposite command in the knowledge that he would not be opposed by Bartolomeo, had made a scandalous bargain. We stood to lose all that we had gained in the spring—and our lives as well.

The watch lieutenant looked from one to another and stroked his chin.

"Well," says he at last, when both the captains had called foul names to the point of breathlessness, "which shall it be? Shall I put ye both under arrest; or will ye promise to keep the vendetta outside the city walls? They tell me the new hangman is very rough."

There was delay about the promising, because neither would speak first; but at last the promise was given; and I saw Bartolomeo no more until our troop and his, together with the levies of each side, faced each other that bright sharp morning in the Val del Aggio. It was November, and there had been a frost to harden the ground; excellent fighting weather. The sun, though high in the heavens, was of a reddish tinge; so were the leaves. I mentioned this to Simone, who, with his eyes on Bartolomeo across the valley, said aye, and that soon the ground would be red also. And he shivered like an autumn leaf himself, that feels the touch of the wind that shall bring it to the earth.

To such a student of things military as your Grace, I need not detail all the maneuvre of that battle—which indeed is famous far beyond its deserts. It was important, as marking the end of that war; it was even decisive in a sense, since both the disputant nobles were killed; but from a soldierly point of view it was contemptible, being indeed no more than a duel between Simone and Bartolomeo with the armies thrown in for good measure. I have heard young captains—there was one at your Lordship's table, but I held my peace—explaining just what Simone hoped to gain by charging with his cavalry all a-straggle; and what weighty plans Bartolomeo had when he launched his counter charge against our left flank only.

VERILY, to him that hath, to him shall be given; so a man be already famous, even his blunders shall be accounted unto him for genius. Simone charged raggedly because his lust to slay Bartolomeo would not let him wait while the troop dressed; and Bartolomeo's counter was lopsided because fury made him forget to give the command to his left flank squadron. And that was the order of the day; blunder after blunder and murder atop of all. There was no use, after that first botched encounter, in trying to fight in organized fashion, and according to the decencies of war. Half of our men had gone straight through Bartolomeo's lines, and were trying to fight their way back; and when out of the other half I tried to draw together a column to deliver some semblance of a charge, I found two hundred enemy in my rear. These charged us, and there was a mêlée. All over the field, indeed, and for all the rest of that dreadful eight hours, men fought as we fought there by the river—each man hewing and hacking and stabbing at his neighbor without plan.

Even the by-charges of which so much is said nowadays were entirely senseless—and I say it that led the most brilliant of them; and after a time I abandoned even these attempts to bring order to that bloody chaos. Strategy was a dead letter; there was nothing to do but kill; and I killed. Every one that had not our plume I rode at and slew if I could; and the time came when for very weariness I paid little

attention to the plume. By degrees my eyes lost power to distinguish sky from earth, the trees from the grass, or one man from another; all were red, red, red, and whatever moved, I struck at.

Until of a sudden, it was evening; and instead of being ahorse in hell, I was lying in golden sunlight near the door of a tent made mostly of patches. But I did not think I had been dreaming; nay, nay; my wounds—eight of them—were instant testimonies to the contrary. From without, moreover, there arose continually the low sound of groaning, in such volume that I sickened at the heart and let my eyes close again. The lids, indeed, seemed to be made of lead; I could not raise them even when some one strode past me into the tent and, by the slap and jingle, saluted.

"Well?" said a sharp voice that was familiar and yet strange. "Hast found the other?"

"Aye, Captain. He was in the same heap as Bartolomeo, but deeper."

"Take a detachment of our own men and bury them at once. Are the troops paraded?"

"Yes, Captain."

"I will speak to them now. Dismissed."

Another slap and jingle, and the man stalked past me again. I had just got one eye open, and noted that his back armor was fresh and undented, when three voices, speaking severally with that other in the tent, made most things clear to me.

"Well, I go," said the man who had spoken before; and as he said that, I knew him.

This was the voice of Arturo Sacco—yet changed. Aye, changed. It had a ring in it now; the ring of triumph.

A woman's voice replied:

"Wait. Bartolomeo and Simone are dead; but there remains this Caradosso. What of him?"

"I think," said the voice of another man, "that he is dead too."

Whereat the woman came and bent over me; and I opened both eyes and gathered those particulars of Madonna Giovanna Sala which I have heretofore given to your Grace.

"He is not dead, Arturo," she called; and with her arm behind my shoulders raised me so that I sat on my pallet.

Aye, aye; I did not appreciate it at the time, but I can always say that once I had my head on the Black Countess' shoulder.

Sacco, shabby as ever, was standing in the midst of the tent. He held a parchment in his hand; and behind him stood Pietro, Bartolomeo's lieutenant. Both stared at me; and then looked at one another—much as they had done that night in the wine shop.

"Well?" says Sacco; and he meant, should he kill me.

"'A's popular with the men," said Pietro doubtfully. "What does the lady think?"

"I could keep him as lieutenant under me," says Arturo; at which, despite my weakness—or perchance because of it—I began to laugh.

It was painful, because of the lance wound in my throat; and worse pain was to follow it. Ser Sacco, by long bearing of ridicule, had become intolerant thereof—and is so to this day. Why else should he send forth singers to lie about his exploits, when he is prouder of the true story than of all the sword won victories he claims? I have heard that he hanged a man for laughing when he fell from his horse. Now he took me by the shoulders and shook me till my head rolled.

"Aye! Son of a donkey!" says he savagely. "What is there to laugh at?"

"Two lieutenants," says I; meaning in a troop of thirty-odd men.

He understood me; and with a snarl pulled back the tent flap so that I could see across the plain. A bowshot away, their battered armor gleaming in the yellow light; some ahorse, some afoot, some lying by force of wounds on the blood stained ground, were the survivors of that day's battle—our men and Bartolomeo's both; with Arturo's wretched detachment—spick and span by comparison—at their head.

"Mud head!" says Arturo. "Knowest thou who commands those men? I! I! I! All mine, as I have meant they should be since before yon Bartolomeo had me thrown into the gutter. Aha! Only the method was not then decided; he would have done well to listen to me. So would thy captain, that pretended to think me mad. Ha-ha! Where is he now? The gallant Bartolomeo and the brave Simone, who swaggered after the rich Madonna Giovanna—where are they? She was my wife, understandest thou? We were married secretly before her father died."

He went on, very much in the manner of a madman, while I stared at him dazed; not so much by the pains that were racking me, though these were bad enough, as by realization that heaven and earth could contain such a man without rushing together and crushing him. He talked of the trap he had set, and how he had put Bartolomeo and Simone at each other's throats; and at last laid hands on my shoulders again, to shake me into comprehension of his abilities.

"Cease, cease, Arturo," says his wife. "The troops await thee, without."

My head had rolled on her shoulder until I was looking into her face. Aye, she was a fit mate for him. Her lips were red—as if with blood. Her eyes were black—like the water in a hidden well.

When, from without, I heard Arturo's squeaky voice telling the troops that since they were leaderless, he would add them —add them!—to his own forces, I made an effort to arise and stab him; but it was not to be done with the strength remaining to me; I awoke four days later, in a peasant's cottage; the troop had gone.

And that, with my humble service to your Grace, is why I flung the flagon; a hasty deed yet not, may your Lordship agree, without some excuse in the memories of an old man. I am not of a froward or rebellious nature; I know that God in his wisdom hath put jackals into the world as well as lions; nor do I protest his decree that often, while lions fight, the jackals should slink off with the prey.

But they should not sing.

Kissing your Grace's hands and once more humbly craving pardon,

—LUIGI CARADOSSO

JIMMY THREE EYES

A Story of the Java Seas

By R. V. GERY

THE second mate knocked his pipe out on the rail and looked forward where the watch monotonously sang out "*Ham dekhta hai*" now and then, much as if lookout was a matter of indifference to him. The *Levuka* was stamping down the Red Sea, and we should be in Aden tomorrow; and it was hot, even for that locality, which is to say that it was —well, hot. Sleep was something to shrug over, and Challis and I were swapping lies by the main hatch, waiting anxiously for the little breath of coolness that comes before day, when it might be possible to drink beer and not have one's skin incontinently throw it out.

"Phew!" I said, wiping the sweat out of my eyes.

Challis leaned back against the rail, a glimmering figure in his white drill. He began to talk, in that immense bass voice of his that has in it some of the sea's undertones and half the experience of the world as well.

"Yes, it's hot," he said. "Perishing hot. But if you really want heat, the Sunda Sea's the place, round about the tail end of Java. There was a fellow there with me once—" He broke off and looked over to starboard, where a lurid thunderstorm flickered and raged ineffectively over the sea.

"Proceed," I said. Challis rumbled in his throat and began. . .

THAT lightnin' [he said] reminded me. There was a storm like that one bankin' up when Jimmy Three Eyes come aboard. The old *Barracuda*—I was Third on her—was rollin' along, eight knots an' hour and chance the rest, out of Batavia for Perth, and we was making in t'wards Bali Channel, in a lump of a sea and with a glass falling quick enough to scare the liver out of you. Wasn't much wonder, neither; you could see the trouble comin' down on us over the land a couple of miles away. Meredith, that was master then, 'adn't any wrong ideas about it; we'd seen everything clewed up or battened down shipshape, McPhail in the engine room was blasphemin' like a Scotchman for more steam, and Meredith himself was on the bridge, with an eye mighty well peeled, as you've got to have in them seas when there's a kickup comin'. Never see one there? Well, you ain't missed a lot.

Somewhere about seven bells it must have been, the lascar on the forepeak sings out, and there's a light low down ahead. Meredith rings to slow, and looks over the side. The light flickers reddish and smoky, and by and by Meredith swears a little and says:

"Coir torch. It's one of these damn' Malays."

Well, in those seas they've a trick of comin' alongside in a *prau* and trying' to sell you fish, or fruit out of the woods, or even land crabs; I've seen them. They're a nuisance, and no wonder Meredith was a bit snorty, with him wanting to make a lee in Bali Channel soon as might be. Still, he keeps her to slow a couple of minutes, and we runs close to the light; and next thing we hears is a fellow hailin' us in English.

It ain't very usual, bein' hailed in English out of a *prau* at midnight in them seas; and besides, there was a nasty jump of a swell runnin', as I b'lieve I said before, and them *praus* ain't much to handle in that kind of stuff. So Meredith, he stops her, and whoever it is comes alongside and I turns a lantern on 'em.

Them it was, because there was two of them. One fellow comes up the ladder and looks round at the top.

"Captain about?" says he.

"I'm third mate," I tells him. "Captain Meredith's on the bridge. Wantin' anything?"

You get kind of used to funny things down there, but this chap, swayin' in the lantern light, made me stare a bit. He was pretty well mother-naked to begin with; a tall, well built fellow, with a fair mustache and blue eyes; and by the Holy Fly, an eyeglass! Them things are as common in the Java seas as icebergs. I gazed at him.

"Lemme see Captain Meredith a moment," he says, very precise. "There's a little job for him round the corner."

Meredith's come down off the bridge by this time.

"Well, what is it, sir?" he asks, none too pleased at bein' held up, but starin' at the man same as I was, and no wonder. "I'm in a hurry."

The man snaps his eyeglass out of his eye and begins to polish it, automatic, kind of, on the tail of what was left of his shirt.

"Sorry I stopped you, Captain," he says. "There's a boat gone ashore about four miles along; Frenchman I think she is. Maybe you'd give a hand takin' passengers off, for if I'm not mistaken—" he cocks an eye over his shoulder— "she won't be there by morning."

He speaks English in a way that only comes from one sort, and Meredith looks him up and down.

"And who may you be?" he says.

Three Eyes—we got to call him that, failin' anything better—grins.

"Doesn't matter," he says. "You wouldn't be any the wiser. I'll con you along to the wreck, if you like, straight away. There's not much time."

It's a fact there wasn't; the thunder was rumblin' and boomin' in the hills, makin' up its mind which way to start, an' the heat was somethin' to curl your hair. I could see the sweat runnin' down Three Eyes, makin' channels in the dirt on his skin.

Meredith rubs his chin.

"Yes, I suppose so," he says. "It's damned inconvenient, I don't mind telling you, and I'm risking my boat on the word of a man who won't give his name. So don't expect any particular friendliness from me if this is a spoof."

The man laughs at him.

"Spoof?" he says. "No, it's too hot for practical joking. Besides—" he looks over the side—"this sea's not exactly as smooth as Henley, either."

'Twasn't, wherever Henley may be; it must have taken some smart work to get a *prau* through it at all.

"Come on, then," says Meredith. "You better be with me on the bridge and they'll get your boat and crew aboard." He seems to think of something sudden. "How about a drink? You look as if you might need it."

Three Eyes chuckles.

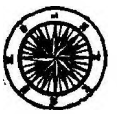
"Excuse me," he says. "I'll be with you in a moment. But I'd better see my—er—crew, aboard. She doesn't understand much English."

She, mark you. We hoists her aboard, *prau* and all, and I'm wondering just what kind of a pretty-pretty she's goin' to be, havin' read them yarns in the magazines of fellers livin' on the beach round about those seas with native princesses and queens and such-like. But she's just one of them yellow women, cross-bred Malay and Chinese, I guess; and ugly enough to make a man seasick.

Three Eyes says something to her in Malay, and she grins and nods and sits down comfortable in the scuppers; but first she hands over to Three Eyes a big old wicker jar.

"Rum," says Three Eyes to me. "Have some? A—a little weakness of mine. So's the lady," he says, seein' me staring at her.

Well, being on duty and with a bit of trouble ahead, I wasn't drinking. But Three Eyes pulls out the bung, tilts the thing up to his mouth and has a good one. Then he goes up to the bridge, eyeglass and all, as dignified as you please.



MEREDITH changes course as the man tells him, and in awhile he sends for us on to the bridge and gives us orders about the boats and so on. The storm's still shilly-shallyin' off over the land, but it's clear enough 'twon't be long before it's down on us.

"There's water pretty close in to the wreck, by all accounts," says Meredith. "I'll run her in, close as I can, and you'll each take a boat and nip in and out quick. About how many passengers'd you think there were?" he asks Three Eyes, that's standin' by the wheel.

"Don't know," says the man. "I'm not a judge of these matters. But by the row they were making, I'd say plenty."

Meredith gives the wheel a twist, just as the man says—

"There she is!"

There she was, maybe a couple of miles ahead, a long row of lights, and Meredith whistles.

"Liner," he says. "We've our work cut out. But," says he with a grin, "pass the word to the crew we're on to the biggest job of salvage in these seas for years—"

And with that we went back on deck.

Goin' round, lookin' to the boats and so on, I got to thinking quite a piece about Three Eyes, as you may b'lieve. One thing was sure enough; 'e'd seen better times. There was a trick he had of talkin' that told a lot, and the eyeglass, altho' it looked silly enough thereabouts, meant a lot more. I figured out in the end he was an English dook, or somethin' of the sort, gone to the bad. There's a

lot like that down there, although they don't as a rule act like this chap did; wreckin's more their line under the circumstances.

Meredith runs the *Barracuda* very slow and cautious within a quarter-mile of the wreck, burns a flare an' drops anchor in ten fathom water. There's the devils own bobbery goin' on on the Frenchman, shoutin' and carryin' on scandalous. Meredith calls down to us to get away and sends the quartermaster along with a revolver for each of us; panic's a nasty business to handle.

My boat pushes off, and I tells the lascars to row *jehannum ke marfik*, and we drives over the swell toward the reef the Frenchman's tried to climb up, seemin'ly. We'd not gone fifty yards before I see Three Eyes standin' up in our bow.

" 'Ere!" I calls to him. "What are you doin' there?"

He waves to me across the lascar's backs.

"It's perfectly all right," he sings out. "Bit of excitement, an' all that. Besides," he says, "there'll be a bar on board; sure to be—"

Well, 't'wasn't any use arguin' with 'im. And in a minute or so we bumps into the Frenchman' side, with a squealin' crowd of women leanin' over the rail, and callin' to be rescued so's you'd hear it from here to Suez.

Three Eyes jumps on board like a cat and vanishes in the mix-up; and after a while I manages to get some sense into the people, and we takes a boatload of women, one by one—and a noisy bunch they were—and pulls back to the *Barracuda*. Meredith takes 'em inboard and starts quietenin' them down; and we're just about pushin' off for another trip when who comes over the side, climbin' like a monkey, but Three Eyes' yellow missus. She flops into the bow and grins at me.

"Hi!" I says. "Gen'lemen only, this trip. You *imshi* off back again up that ladder!"

'Course it wasn't any use talkin' to her, for I don't believe she'd ten words of English; and anyhow she'd her mind made up to come with us and we'd no time to waste over her. So in the end I left her where she was and we started back to the Frenchie.

On the way we passes the other three boats, loaded down to the gunnels, and the first mate sings out to me that this was the last of the passengers, and I'd better start in gettin' off the crew, and look pretty *jeldy* about it at that. There was a feel in the air I've only come across down in those parts before a real snorter; kind of as if the whole world was goin' to chuck a fit in the next two minutes; electric, I guess.

WE GETS across to the Frenchman, and here's the crew, sure enough, lined up along the rail, very disciplined, but scared, and I didn't blame them, seein' where their ship was. One by one they drops into the boat, and then I looks for Three Eyes. No sign of him.

"Lushin' in that bar, prob'bly," I says to myself. "Well, here goes to get him out of it, wherever he is—" And with that I shins up the side and over the rail.

You never see a bad 'un comin' down on you, eh? It's worth seein', once.

I stuck my head over that rail, and here it is, swoopin' at us, thousand mile an hour, a white, drivin' line of cloud an' rain an' lightnin'. One blink at it's enough for me, and I dives headfirst for the nearest deckhouse, finds a swingin' door and lands up on the floor inside just as the storm hits us, yellin' and howlin' like all the devils in cinders.

I pass you me word it picked up that vessel, an' bumped 'er down splosh on that reef, so's you could hear the teeth in her rattle, as you might say. As for the Frenchies along the rail, where they got blew to God knows; my boat's crew, boat and all, went to glory in that first blast, and we never saw stick or shred of them again; and Meredith on the *Barracuda*, with steam up an' all, got blown end across end halfway to Celebes before he could take a pull in her.

As for me, I was too busy picking myself up to wonder about anything very much for a minute; then I looks round and first thing I sees is this here Three Eyes, sittin' at a table—it was the bar I'd fallen into, seemin'ly—drinkin' Scotch out of a bottle, eyeglass an' all. He's quite sober enough to recognize me and waves his hand very genteel.

"Hullo," he says. "Come in. Quite a racket outside, eh? Any one hurt?"

"My boat's crew blown to crikey," I tells him. "An' most of the Frogs out o' this hulk's company as well. That's all, so far."

"*Tchk!*" he says, and hands me the bottle. "That's a pity. But you got the women off?"

"They're on the *Barracuda*," I says, "wherever she may be. That is, all except your own lady—" for I suddenly remembers the yellow woman.

He jumps up, very agitated.

"You don't mean to tell me," he says, "that she's—"

"She came over with me last trip," I tells him. "Last I saw of her was climbin' over the rail outside here—"

And at that the door opens, and in she comes, lookin' more like a yellow scarecrow than ever. She's drippin' with rain and seawater, and there's a cut over one eye where the edge of somethin' had caught her; but she shows her teeth at Three Eyes, and believe me, you never saw such a fuss as that long, polite speakin' ragamuffin makes over the poor old trout. Almost made me blush, it did, sittin' there neckin' the whisky bottle, an' thinkin' of me own little sideslips in the way of these kind o' women.

Three Eyes goes on pettin' and comfortin' the woman and don't take no notice of me for awhile. Outside, the storm's carryin' on fit to bust, gettin' strength from itself, the way they do; and I could feel the vessel tremble and shift now an' then on that reef, which wasn't anyways comfortin', seein' she'd prob'bly a hole in her you could build a house in, and there was all kinds of deep water in the lee of the reef. What with the whisky and one thing an' another, I began to feel like sayin' my prayers.

And then, down at the end of the room, a door opens and there's a white woman standin' framed in it.

What happened that night's a good deal mixed up in me mind, as you may imagine, but I c'n see that woman now. I'm not any great shakes at describin' 'em, an' she wasn't just my kind neither—too big and overpowerin', sort of; an' besides, she wasn't in any ways young, you could see in a minute. But she'd been a dinkum high stepper in her day; that was sure enough, for all she was strained and scared lookin' in the doorway there, with big rings under her eyes, and some sort of dress hangin' on her.

She stands there, lookin' blindish at Three Eyes and the yellow woman an' me.

"Left behind, eh?" I remember thinkin' to myself. "Well, here's another one to get out o' this mess."

Well, Three Eyes turns his head over his shoulder an' sees her. An' she sees him. An' she turns white's a ghost under what's left of her paint; an' Three Eyes jumps like he's been shot dead.

"Jimmy!" says the woman.

"You!" says Three Eyes, an' laughs like a frog croakin', an' the silly glass pane drops out of his eye. "You!"

The woman's pulled herself together a little and now she comes slowly down the slantin' floor, starin' at Jimmy with her big ringed eyes. Jimmy puts the yellow *tom* down and gets to his feet, facin' 'er; and that storm outside goes on yellyhooin' and carryin' on in the rigging and round the deck houses, something wicked; and I sits there, lookin' as foolish as I felt, I've no doubt.

IN A MINUTE Jimmy Three Eyes puts up his glass again and looks at the woman with a little smile playin' round the corners of his lips.

"It's a long time, Ada," he says quietly. "Let's see; ten years, isn't it?"

She stares at him straight on, as if she was rememberin' somethin' that happened

long ago. Maybe she was, too. Then she gives a tinkle of a laugh, as if she was thinking of something that didn't amuse her a lot.

"Ten years, Jim," she says. "Ten centuries. And now," she goes on, "that I've found you again, even here, we'll forget it all, shall we, and start over again, Jim? It's your duty to look after me, anyhow—"

She comes toward him with her arms open, and croonin' in her throat, like them actresses can. Matter of fact, an actress she was, as I found out subsequent; and by hooky she showed it then.

Three Eyes waits for her and his eyes are smilin' although his mouth's turned hard and bitter. He fends her off with one hand.

"I think you've forgotten something, Ada," he says.

She stops and drops her arms to her side.

"What do you mean?" she says.

Three Eyes doesn't say anything for a minute, and I can see he's thinking hard. Then he turns to the woman again.

"I hate to remind you, Ada," he says, "but what d'you suppose I've been doing since you let me down ten years back?"

The ship's quivering now, every few minutes, as if some one hit her with a whip; and by all sounds outside the wind's gettin' fiercer and fiercer. In the room Three Eyes is lookin' at the woman, eyeglass in his eye, kind of pitying; an' behind him on the floor is the yellow *tom*, quiet and obedient as you please, although she's fly there's something in the wind, judging by the way she's sizing up the white woman.

"Let you down," says Ada, sudden, and there's a scream in her voice. "Let you down? Why, you—" She doesn't say it, but it's easy seen what she means. "You married me, didn't you? Never mind how it happened, or what happened after—you married me, and you're liable to keep me; and keep me you shall, Mister the Honorable—"

Three Eyes stops her with his hand, and there's things in his eye not nice to see.

"Enough!" he snaps, and there's no actin' about it. "I've forgotten that name, anyhow, thanks to—some one I know. And anyhow, Ada my dear, I don't agree with you; quite simply I don't agree with you, and there's an end of the subject. You managed to break up my life, Ada darling; and I've mended it again in a way. And you can be sure enough I'm going to let no one break it up again!"

He puts his hands on his hips and the yellow woman crawls to his feet; trust her, she knows what's up as well as if she understood every word of it all.

The other one's gone ash-color now, an' she's shakin' like a leaf.

"So—that's it, is it?" she says slowly. "Well, there are ways to make you do what I want, Jim; unpleasant ways, too. And trust me, when we get out of this I'll take them. You don't fool me twice—"

Three Eyes laughs again, gentle-like; and no doubt he's going to tell her a thing or two for her own good, but just then it come—what I'd been waitin' for all along.

The wind seems to jump all at once at us, solid as the side of a house. There's a shriek like an engine whistle, a gratin', grindin' noise as if most of the ship's plates was bein' torn loose—which they were—and the floor begins to tilt with us, quicker and quicker. We're slipping off the reef.

I makes one jump for the door, havin' a preference for bein' drowned in the open an' not like a rat in a trap; and what happens in the next two minutes I'm sure I can't tell you, except that there was a lot of salt water in it and the wind pretty near took my head off.

NEXT thing I know I'm hanging on to the cleats of a hatchway, top of one of the deck houses, with all ten fingers and toes. I'm just wondering what's happened, after all, when there's a long hand comes out of the water, or what the wind left for water, and here's Three Eyes with a woman under each arm.

"Give's a hand," he gasps, and I reaches out, and between us we gets all three of them on to the coaming. Both the women is pretty well full of water, but there's a dryish spot now and then and in awhile they comes to.

"Lovely things, the powers of nature," says Three Eyes, fumbling for the cord of his glass. "I wonder just precisely where we are—"

There wasn't much doubt about that. The ship had slithered bodily off the reef and gone handily to the bottom, with a bit of her top-hamper showin' above water; and it was there we were perched, until such time as the pounding of the sea knocked it to bits under us. A pleasant lookout, I don't think.

I looks round, and b'lieve me there's not much to look for. A mile away, maybe, was the land, I knew; but between us and it the sea was hammered flat by that wind; flat, and white like cream. Over the reef and what was left of the ship it broke in roarin' sheets; and every once and again an extra big one would come shoutin' down on us, and we'd have to hang on like leeches. In ten minutes my fingers was numb and pretty well hauled out of their sockets, gripping the coaming with one hand an' the white woman with the other. Three Eyes had the yellow one, and somehow I wasn't surprised.

"Those in peril on the deep!" he sings out to me suddenly; and I thought he'd got religion in that pass. But no; he was only sort of laughin', and I see his white teeth gleamin' through his mustache—heard 'em chatter, too, for it was growin' dooms cold.

"A very suitable sentiment," he says, "although it's in the sea and not on the sea for us, I think. Any notions about this, Mister Mate? Doesn't seem exactly likely to last long, does it?"

Funny thing, nerve. Here was I, a trained seaman, rough an' well fed, strong, and sober enough in my habits; and here was this scallywag, brought up like a prize pup, for sure, and about half soaked with rotten booze, an' slack from livin' on Bali Island beach—enough to make any one slack that is, for there's might little except *fei* and land crabs to find to eat there. But now he was lookin' straight at death an' grinnin' at it; and I—well, less said about me the better, I guess. I was afraid.

"Maybe it'll quieten down in a bit," I says, more for somethin' to say than anything. These winds do, I know; but it was the sea we'd to fear, and that'd last for hours yet.

"And maybe not," answers Three Eyes.

"Coward!" says the white woman in my arm. "Coward, to say that! Isn't it bad enough, without making it worse?"

"Why, Ada," says he, "I thought you were—I didn't know you could hear me."

"Naturally not," Ada yammers. "You're too occupied with that black wench there—leaving me, your wife, to a common sailor!"

'Twasn't any place to start an argument in. The woman struggles up on her knees and looks across where Three Eyes has the other sheltered by his body.

"You're giving her the best place!" she screams. "My place. What's she to you, anyhow—a common, dirty, black woman?"

Three Eyes answers her in the teeth of all that hell's broth of wind and spume.

"More to me, Ada, than ever you were. More than you'd ever know how to be in a thousand years, my dear."

He stops a moment, half choked by the driving wind and water.

"Listen to me, you two," he calls to us. "My name's James Alastair—no, I won't give you it all—and we're all of us going to die in about ten minutes or so. Take me to witness, before my Maker, that Ada, once my wife, is my wife no longer, nor has been for ten years and better. And take me to witness further that this woman here I hold under my hand, for most of that same ten years, has been a wife, and more than a wife to me; and that as wife and husband we die together. And may the Lord have mercy on us all!"

Theater? Yes, maybe; but not on that reef, with the white seas drivin' over us.

Well, for a minute there was a silence, and I began to try to pray, but nothin' would come but bits out of the "Sailin' Directions" an' "Ship's Articles" an' so on; and then a little lull fell.

The woman's been quiet, shudderin' in the crook of my arm; but now she wriggles loose, all on a sudden, an' slides across the streamin' hatch to old Three Eyes.

He's attendin' to the yellow one, an' don't see her until she's across him.

"Out—out, dirty black thing!" I hear her scream. "Give me my place!" And she tears at Three Eyes' grip round the woman's shoulders.

For a second the three of them struggle there, all in the whirling water; an' then a great milky wave grows upon us, an' comes down like a hammer on the hatch.

And when it passes I'm alone . . .

CHALLIS cast a meditative eye over his shoulder at the thunderstorm, now sweeping south parallel to our course. He lighted his pipe again, like a practised spinner of yarns, as he is; turned, and leaned with maddening deliberation on the rail.

That might be the end [he said]. But it wasn't. I lay there for what seemed a year, wet, half frozen and scared out of my fifteen wits by the terror of that place an' what I'd seen. And then once again come that long hand out of the water, and I takes a hold on it, an' braces myself against a cleat. And here's Three Eyes, and again there's a woman on his arm—the yellow one.

He swings up on that hatchway, an' blows the water out of him. He's a pretty sight by now, b'lieve me, an' the yellow *tom* ain't any better. I thought she was dead, but I was wrong—can't kill them banana skins with a sledge hammer!

In a minute 'ere she wakes up, an' begins to jabber Malay at Three Eyes, fifty mile an hour.

"Good for you," I says to 'im. "Got one o' them, I see—an' the best one, at that."

He looks at me, an' starts to say somethin', when 'ere comes a swirl o' long black hair, an' a glimpse o' the other woman's white face, driftin' past in the rushin' water. Three Eyes swears under 'is breath, an' before me or the yellow woman can lay a finger on 'im, overboard 'e's gone again.

"That's the end of you," says I to meself, for the sea was a caution. The yellow woman starts in howlin' as if the end of the world was come.

"Tain't no manner o' good carryin' on like that," I says.

"That won't get 'im back."

Well, nor I didn't think it would. I reckoned 'e was gorn for keeps. But damme if 'ere 'e don't come, in a minute, a-ridin' on the slope of a wave like a bloomin' porpoise. An' 'e's got t'other one!

"You damn fool!" I says.

'E glares at me.

"That'll be enough o' that," says 'e, very short. " 'Elp me empty 'er out."

Between the two of us we got most of the water out of the woman, an' after awhile she opens her eyes, an' looks about 'er.

"Where am I?" she says.

Three Eyes sits back an' fumbles for 'is glass on the end of 'is silly little cord.

"With me, Ada, I'm sorry to say," says 'e, kind of bitter. "I'm afraid you'll have to put up with it for awhile, too—at least until we can get out of this."

She looks at 'im with 'er great big eyes, an' even then I could see she'd been a mighty fine woman in 'er time.

"Who pulled me out of the water?" she asks, turnin' to me. "Was it you?"

"No," I says, "it wasn't—and I don't mind tellin' you it'd take a great deal more'n your sort—"

Three Eyes whips round on me.

"Kindly shut your damned head!" he snaps. "When your comment's wanted, Mister Mate, I'll ask for it."

Well, there wasn't much to say to that kind of talk, an' we'd enough to worry

about, thank you, without startin' a row about nothin'; so I don't say any more. Three Eyes reaches across an' collars hold of the yellow woman's hand; an' the other goes on lookin' at him an' her, odd, an' doubtful.

At last she says, kind of strained—

"Was it you, Jimmy?"

Three Eyes don't say nothin', an' I answers for 'im.

"Yus," I says, "it was 'im—an' it's more than I'd do—"

Three Eyes leans across, an' by the Lord, 'e fetches me a welt in the jaw I c'n feel yet.

"That'll teach you," says 'e, "to curb your silly ignorant tongue, you—" an' 'e don't call me any pretty name.

Now 'Enery Challis ain't the sort to stand for much of that stuff from any one, woman or no woman; an' I was just haulin' off to sock 'im one back, when the yellow woman cries out, an' I looks over me shoulder.

'Ere it comes—the father an' mother of all waves, ten piled in one, or that's what it looked like. We'd just time to 'ang on a bit tighter when it hits us, an' next we knew was, we were under water.

I thought it was all up with us, but in a while we seemed to move upwards towards the air. I'd got tight 'old of some one, an' it was the yellow woman; for I felt 'er strugglin' an' fightin' like a she-cat as we come out an' breathed again. There wasn't any sign of Three Eyes an' his white woman.

It was smoother where we were—the wave had carried us slap off the vessel an' in towards the land a piece—an' I was wonderin' just what chance we 'ad of makin' the beach, when 'ere's a door comes floatin' to us. Twasn't any shakes of a door, matter of fact—off of a cabin or somethin' like that—but there was enough room for two on it, or maybe three at a pinch. I 'auls the yellow woman on it, 'owlin' very pitiful.

"Come on, ducky," I says. "This is better'n nothin' at all."

She just spits at me like a cat, an' then she lets a squeal out of 'er you could 'ear in Hongkong.

There's Three Eyes an' the woman—the white one—driftin' down on us again, an' by the same token they're pretty nigh done. More floatin' than swimmin', an' I see Jimmy's got an arm out of commission—took a crack under water, no doubt.

"Hell," I says to meself. "There ain't any room on this here hooker for all four of us."

Nor there was. Three Eyes grips the edge of it, an' it tilts an' mighty near spills us into the drink. 'E looks at me, and at the yellow woman. Then 'e lets go, an' down the two of 'em goes, Ada clingin' to 'im like a leech.

They comes up, maybe five yards away, an' Jimmy's out—*mafish*—finish. 'Is 'ead's dropped an' 'e ain't fightin' no more.

The yellow woman there with me makes to jump after 'im, but I grips 'er by the waist; no sense in losing any more lives, I thinks.

"You stay 'ere," says I, an' starts to go over meself.

An' then Ada—she's about all in too—pushes Jimmy into me 'ands, stares at the yellow woman with 'er great dark eyes—Gawd, I c'n see 'em yet—an' quietly lets go.

We never saw 'er again. Jimmy an' the banana skin an' me drifted ashore, all among the landcrabs, an' there we was for a week until the Dutch sends a coast-guard boat round, an' we're rescued. Leastways I was, for Three Eyes stopped there with 'is yellow woman; and every day they'd go down to the beach, lookin' for what might be throwed up there. An' I don't know which 'it me 'ardest—the yellow *tom*, a-clingin' to Jimmy's arm, or Jimmy 'imself, watchin', watchin' the sea . . .

It's a funny world— A damn funny world. And now isn't it just about time for that beer?

A Novelette of the Rhodesian Bush

By L. PATRICK GREENE

"GET your man, dead or alive, Sergeant. But get him."

That's what the O. C. said to me when I left headquarters on this case. Reckon the old turkey cock had been reading one of these red blooded tales of the Canadian Mounted. Hell! That sort of talk's maybe necessary in a land where the thermometer don't show above zero. But not in Africa.

Maybe the sun and the bloomin' heat stews the starch from us an' puts a crimp in our morals. Or we've got, maybe, a more charitable way of looking at things.

The sun, now. It affects men's brains—an' I don't mean sun stroke. It makes them do things an' say things that ain't noways in keeping with the men they really are. I've seen brave men act like dirty yellow rats; I've known cowardly skunks come up to scratch on occasions when they had every excuse in God's world for showing the white feather.

Blame it on the sun, the heat, the loneliness, the stinks—Africa's full of them; an' mighty few pleasant—an' the fact that nobody cares a cuss what a white man does, as long as he remembers he's white, in this black man's country.

WITCHCRAFT AT HOOLÉ

I've just written my official report of the case. This is to please myself; it's a sort of answer to anybody who might say I have acted like a fool.

Curse this pest hole! That's what I often say. An' not because of the heat an' a yellow sun that blazes in a sky that looks blue—but it's black, if you can understand what I'm driving at. You can't see into it. It's got no form, no depth, no realness, if you know what I mean. Heat, sun an' blue-black skies! I was born an' raised in Arizona. I ain't a stranger to the sun. But there ain't no comparison with that one an' the one that sneers at you in Africa.

It makes me laugh when I think of that official report of mine. "To, officer commanding" and all that. Then, "Subject: 'Case of Witchcraft at Hoolé'". If I'd thought of it sooner I'd have headed it, "Subject: 'Greater love hath no man—" an' all the rest. And I'd have put one of these question marks at the end of the tag.

You'll get my meaning later.

I'm on my way back to headquarters with two weeks' hard trekking still before me. An' I'm sitting in me shirt sleeves in a rest hut which ain't had an occupant other than snakes an' lice an' such like since the cattle guard was down here last year. An' outside, inside the pole stockade, my horse an' pack mules are tethered. An' a police boy is keeping a big fire blazing an' muttering charms to keep away the blasted lions which are prowling about outside. An' if you can see any romance in that, or thrill of danger, hop to it.

It was at Bulawayo I first ran across

Dalton and Canly. I was only a trooper then. But hell! I was sure stuck on myself. An', with due modesty I says it, there was some excuse for it. I stood six foot an' was fit to fight my weight in lions. An' I was good looking in them days; before my nose was smashed; before a hundred doses of malaria muddied my eyes an' painted my skin a dirty yellow. Since then I've been through hell frontwards an' backwards a good many times. An' them sort of journeys scar a man, body an' soul . . .

Now where was I? Funny way I keep rambling on like this. You might think I was sitting in my easy chair back at headquarters. An' if I casually remark that I just been out and blazed five rounds into a yellow skunk of a lion that'd tried to leap the stockade an' got wedged between the poles, I'd be set down as a liar. Only, I just been an' done that.

But this business of Canly and Dalton. It was at Bulawayo; at the Bodega; an' at night. The bar was pretty full of men trying to satisfy a natural thirst made unnatural by the drouth, the red dust which filled the air an' their own misfortunes. Farmers, gold diggers, an' traders—they was all hard hit; no more than a stride ahead of ruin. An' a fly was the cause of it all. The niggers call it the fly flea of death; the vets have got a long Latin name for it that sounds pretty but don't mean a thing to me. But the niggers' name! That told the story. When the tsetse fly's about there's death too. Say, at the time I'm speaking of you couldn't get the stink of dead cattle out of your nostrils.

And when men are losing money instead of making it; when a rancher sees his herd sicken an' die, him not being able to do a damn' thing to stop it—why, tempers get tender, give you my word.

THERE was quite a few of us police fellows in the bar. An' we hadn't ought to have been. The town had been put out of bounds for the time being. A wise move, all in all. There was no love lost 'tween the civvies an' the police. The uniform was like a red rag to a bull to a lot of 'em—the farmers specially. An' you can't blame 'em. You could hardly expect 'em to kiss an' buy the man a drink who had just got back, like as not, from shooting all their cattle.

An' maybe that's why us guys from the police stalked about with chips on our shoulders. We didn't like shooting a man's cattle. But we was a military force. When we got orders we obeyed them. So we resented the way we got treated, an' of being called cattle murderers, an' of having the dirty tricks of a few tagged on to all of us.

I ain't sure to this day how it started. Perhaps it was no one thing, but just all of the things lumped together.

A big clumsy hulk of a Cornish miner called me a damned Yank. An' I was quick tempered in them days. I didn't know he was trying to be pally with me. I got a pretty hefty kick still in my fist—but it's soft stuff to what it was then—and the cousin Jack got it full strength on his jaw. They wasted a lot of good liquor on him afore he came to.

Well, that business caused a bit of a disturbance. There was talk among the other miners of taking me out an' *sjamboking* me. But the other chaps from the police sort of rallied round me an' pretty soon we all lined up at the bar again. But we hadn't added to our popularity. Not so's you'd notice it.

An' then one of the townies, a trader named Anders, who'd got a bit of a dirty reputation with the women, gets off a line of talk that Aggie didn't like. An' Aggie! You won't find her equal in a year's hard trekking. Pretty as a picture; blue eyes, golden hair and an innocent appealing sort of look about her. Hell! How a man gets the spoor tangled up when he tries to track down a woman's character. Not, mind you, that I'm suggesting Aggie wasn't straight; according to her lights, she was as straight as a bullets' flight—and as deadly.

"Give us a kiss," Anders said, leaning over the bar an' swaying the way drunks

do. "Give us a kiss, Aggie, an'—"

And he said some other things. Sure, he was drunk—the poor fool.

"A kiss!" says Aggie slowly. "Why certainly. How do you like this one, you rat!"

She was holding a tumbler in her hand an' quick as hell she rapped it hard on the counter. Before the broken pieces had dropped to the ground she jabbed the jagged part she still held into Ander's face.

Lord! I ain't hankering after a barmaid's kiss.

There was a bit of a row. Anders had a lot of pals, men of his own kidney. They wanted us police to arrest Aggie for malicious injuring—but we wasn't having any. Hell, we thought we was being gallant gentlemen protecting a weak female. We said Anders was drunk and fell down an' cut himself on the glass he was holding.

Then Deempster, a big Dutchman, a transport rider, started boasting about what he'd done in the Boer War. He always did when he was drunk. But this night he was, maybe, worse than usual. Hell! He was bitter. He'd just had his last team of trek oxen—eighteen of 'em—shot. Maybe that's why he spoke about things he'd kept quiet about before. When the drink's in the tongue's loose. No doubt about that. And this Deempster, now, he was shouting about what damned fools all *roineks* were; an' how the Boers had beaten 'em every time they went up against 'em, an' could beat 'em again. An' that all *roineks* were liars an' thieves; an' that he'd shot wounded men in cold blood after a battle and would do it again.

It was that which seemed a bit too thick for some of the chaps. They began shouting at Deempster, telling him to dry up. But he didn't take any notice an' ranted on. An', presently, he went too far. I ain't stating what he said. That don't matter now. But as soon as the words was out of his mouth everybody in the bar got after him. Like a lot of angry hornets, give you my word.

AN' THEN, sort of suddenly, the row let up a bit an' there was a slim, curly haired youngster—about my own age he was—as handsome as hell, standing up on the bar counter shouting for order. An' he got it. He'd got the kind of voice that got what it wanted.

"What's his name?" I said to somebody who stood next to me.

"Him? Oh, that's Tom Dalton. He's a hard case, if there ever was one. Good sort, but life don't go fast enough for him so he's always riding it with spurs on. You'll know him if you stay in Bulawayo long. Him—and his twin."

"Got a twin, has he?" I said. "Well it needs two like him to make one man."

I ought to have known better. Size alone don't mean a damn' thing. Look at the honey badger. I've known a lion to give one of the little devils the right of way.

But I was young then. An' green. An' I says—

"Is his twin here?"

"Naturally," this feller I'm talking to says—he was a butcher by trade; a big, red faced man. "They're always together. Thick as thieves they are. Arh! An' prime pals they are, too. A damned fine pair, if if you ask me. Dalton's got the brains an' the push. An' Canly the brawn an' beef."

"Canly," I says. "Ain't they brothers?"

"No—no relation. That's Canly."

An' this butcher chap pointed to a fellow standing beside the bar. I hadn't noticed him before. But that, I reckon, was because Dalton held the stage. I don't know as I've ever seen such a powerful looking chap as Canly. He made me look small. Big an' strong, but slow.

By the way he kept looking up at Dalton you could see he thought the world of him. And Dalton looked at him the same way. I remember it made me feel kind of lonely. Like I was looking at something I'd never experienced. There ain't anything finer in life than a real friendship between men. It beats all this woman stuff. You know, sometimes folks snigger when they see two men pal

together. But nobody I ever heard of ever sniggered at Dalton an' Canly. Hell! You don't laugh at friendship like theirs was. You close your mouth an' wonder.

I pushed my way through the men who were crowded about the bar, trying to get nearer. I wanted to know them two.

An' Dalton says:

"Look here, you chaps," an' his voice spoke of a soft upbringing. It had, even I knew that, generations of what the Limeys call "the ruling caste" behind it. I've met others with that voice. Generally they riled me; I resented their air of superiority. That "my good man" tone. You know what I mean.

But Dalton. He was different. He didn't rile me at all.

I got up to the bar counter after a bit of elbow work which cost me some curses an' black looks. An' Dalton looks down at me an' says—

"Howdy, Yank!"

Funny the way he spotted me right off like that. Maybe he'd heard me talking earlier.

An' then he says, raising his voice a bit:

"Look here, chaps. Deempster is drunk and he's had a lot of bad luck. Well, that goes for the lot of us, I think. At any rate, it doesn't excuse Deempster's filthy boasts and insults. But, because he's drunk, I think we should give him a chance to apologize. How about it, Deempster?"

And Deempster roared out a lot of Boer curses and finished up with:

"To hell with you slim lying *roineks.* I spit on you all." And he did spit at Dalton.

I sure admired the way that fellow handled himself—an' the crowd. They were ready to lynch Deempster then. But Dalton's eyes held 'em.

Slowly he took a handkerchief from his pocket an' rubbed his cheek. I noticed his face was white when he took his hand down. For a moment I thought he was scared. An' then I noticed his left hand was resting on Canly's shoulder, gripping it hard. But for that, I reckon Canly would have lashed out at Deempster there and then.

Then Dalton said quietly—

"Well, Deempster, as you don't see fit to apologize I'm going to give myself the pleasure of thrashing you."

An' he pulled off his coat an' shirt.

Then there was a commotion. A hell of a commotion, believe me.

There was Deempster laughing like he'd gone mad, an' boasting what he'd do to the little *roinek;* an' men shouting at Dalton, saying they weren't going to stand by an' see him butchered by a big hulk like Deempster.

AN' THEN I heard Canly speak for the first time. A soft voice he had; almost like a woman's. An' slow, with a drawl something like a Texan's; only it got more music to it, if you know what I mean. Made you think of a lazy flowing river.

Yep, a soft voice he had; but, somehow, it was full of his bigness, if you know what I mean.

"Well, mates—" he said. I ain't trying to write down the words the way he said 'em. They was foreign sounding. I learnt afterwards that he hailed from Devon. That don't mean a hell of a lot to me.

"Well, mates," says Canly. "You've heard what young Tom here says. An' I reckon he's right. Deempster's got to apologize, or fight. But it don't seem hardly right that Tom should go up against him. 'Twouldn't be a fair fight at all. So I'm going to take his place. An' that's fair, surelee."

An' that let loose a hell of a jabber, believe me.

Well, we cleared the barroom—it was plain two big men 'd want all the space going—an' made a ring of sorts. An' we shouted an' argued at the top of our lungs; an' Aggie an' the barmaids was screaming about how it'd be murder for Dalton to fight; an' Deempster was bellowing that he'd fight the little *roinek* an' no one else.

Every once in awhile I sneaked a look

to where Dalton and Canly stood. They were in a corner arguing. An' I see Canly nod his head like as if he was agreeing to something against his better judgment.

An' then a loud voiced, greasy haired chap who called himself "Honest Abe" began laying odds, an' that increased the row. Hell! Abe was getting bets from everybody. It made me laugh the way he juggled the odds.

An' then Dalton and Canly stepped into the ring, both stripped to the waist. And Dalton says:

"Jack here says it's not fair for me to fight Deempster. He thinks the Dutchman ought to be given a chance." There was a laugh at that. "And so—" he paused and, believe me, for a minute I felt kind of sick; like a kid that's found his dad telling a lie— "And so," Dalton repeats, "I've agreed to give Deempster a chance. He can have his choice—to fight Jack, or me, or anybody else in the room who's ready to stand up against him."

Man, I was stripped and in the ring inside two, three seconds. But, at that, there was others before me.

But we didn't have a look in.

"The little *roinek*," Deempster bellowed.

Well, that was that.

Two Dutchman seconded Deempster; Canly and me—hell! I growed when he picked *me*—was in Dalton's corner. An' Aggie was just behind us.

There's no point in going into details about the fight. It was a one sided butchery.

Dalton, mind you, was only small by comparison. But he was in good condition and muscled like a thoroughbred. And he had brains—fighting brains. It was him that ordered how the fight should run. And, man, at what speed. In and out—one, two, rat-tat. With Deempster roaring like a mad bull. If he'd reached Dalton with one of his swings Dalton's head, I reckon, would have parted company with his body. But Deempster, he was so slow an', when they landed, Dalton wasn't there!

Pretty soon Deempster was nothing more or less than a chopping block. He couldn't do anything but bellow an' swing wild an' take his punishment. An', believe me, he took a lot. His eyes was bunged up, his nose spurted like a fountain, he'd lost a tooth or two an' big angry red patches showed on his hairy skin.

Maybe Dalton got a bit careless. Maybe he wanted to finish it off quickly. He closed in an' then Deempster pulled a dirty foul. We all saw it. He brought up his knee and jabbed Dalton in the groin. Dalton doubled up and pushed his face into one of the Dutchman's swings.

An' Dalton staggered back across the ring and flopped unconscious in his corner.

There was a riot then, if you like. Deempster standing all groggy in the middle of the ring shouting boasts and curses with two or three of his crowd patting him on the back. But the rest of the lads yelling foul an' worse things than that.

AN' THEN Canly gets up and walks slowly toward Deempster.

"You dirty swine!" he said slowly.

Deempster put up his hands. He might as well have used a paper shield to keep off a bullet from an elephant gun. Canly's fist thudded against his jaw and the Dutchman went down. Hell! His fall set all the glasses on the counter a-jingling.

The other Dutchmen—they weren't runts by any means—closed in on Canly. An' there were blows, an' bodies flying through the air—they tell me Devon men have their own style of wrestling: it's a man's style. An', presently, Canly was the only man standing in the ring. He waits a bit to give anybody who wants to a chance to have a go at him. Then he comes back to the corner where I'm trying to bring Dalton round.

Dalton's full length on the ground, his head in Aggie's lap. An' the girl's crying over him an' patting his cheek an' calling his name.

Canly glared at her. His big arms came between her and Dalton.

"You," he said, "go an' tend to your bar." And he picked Dalton up in his

arms and carried him out of the room.

Me, I followed, carrying their coats and things.

I caught a look of Aggie's face as I went. Hell! I don't know who she hated most at that minute—Deempster or Canly.

We went to one of the upstairs rooms and worked over Dalton. Pretty soon he came round, sat up and grinned at Canly—he didn't seem to see me.

"I'm all right now, Jack," he said. "But what happened? I thought I had him beat."

"You did, Tom," Canly said and told how the affair ended. And Dalton grinned like a kid.

"You shouldn't lose your temper, Jack," he said. "Now let's go down and show the boys I'm alive."

They both dressed, Dalton slowly. He was still a bit groggy. And then he saw me and laughed.

"What's the idea, Yank?" he asked. "Dancing in a ballet or something?"

And then I remembered that I was stripped to the waist; an' felt foolish, an' I'd forgot to bring my kit along with theirs.

We all laughed and Dalton suggests we stick together for the rest of the night. I agrees. I was anticipating some more fun. I didn't think it likely the Dutchmen were going to take their beating laying down.

"Well, come on, Jack," says Dalton.

But before they went they both got their revolvers—big, clumsy Colts—from their kit bags, and buckled them about their waists, under their coats.

"Hell," I protested. "No need for that. There'll be no gun play. This is Rhodesia. We're civilized."

"Maybe, Yank," said Canly. "But Deempster isn't, and—"

And he told me stories about the Boers —the bad ones.

We went down to the bar again.

Believe me, it sounded like all hell was let loose. Everybody was shouting. Arguing about bets, mostly.

And still I don't know exactly what started it but, all of a sudden, every man Jack in the place was fighting everybody else.

Tables were smashed an' the legs used as clubs; chairs flew across the room; glasses an' bottles crashed.

There was no rhyme or reason to it.

You'd see two men hammering at each other an' then stop an' have a go at somebody else.

Naturally we waded in an' did our share. An' then somebody smashed a beer bottle over my head an' I figured that was my cue to depart.

SOMEHOW I crawled to the bar counter and watched from behind it. An' a man had to watch hard, else he couldn't duck the things that was being thrown.

There were whistles blowing an' pretty soon, I knew, the town police'd show up.

Then, here an' there, I saw a knife flashing red. All of a sudden a nice friendly little scrap had turned into a murder feast.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Canly and Dalton standing on the outside edge of the crowd. They had their revolvers out. They was talking together.

An' I saw Deempster thrashing toward 'em. He had a table leg in one hand, a bloody knife in the other.

There was a gasping noise right near me. An' there was Aggie, crouching on the floor, peeping over the bar counter. In her hand she held a dinky little pearl handled revolver.

Mind you, I saw all these things in flashes. My brain wasn't functioning clearly an' I was kind of slow.

There was some revolver shots. Three or four man sized reports, and a womanish sort of one right close by me.

The lights went out—the two big swinging lights—an' I jumped on Aggie an' wrestled with her.

For a bit there was hell in the darkness. Shouts, curses an' police whistles.

An' then almost silence; save for a woman sobbing an' groans of pain. I was sitting on Aggie else I reckon she'd have screamed aloud. The hellcat bit my hand.

Then somebody struck some matches an' somebody brought some more lamps

Lord! The place looked like a shambles.

Men sprawling about everywhere; most of 'em only knocked out. But one was staring at the ceiling—an' that was Anders—with a knife sticking through his ribs. Deempster, he'd got his too. There was a bullet hole smack in the middle of his forehead.

An' the place was most empty. Most everybody had taken advantage of the darkness to beat it.

But Canly an' Dalton stood just where I'd seen them before the lamps went out. They still held their revolvers in their hands.

Course, the town police arrested them. Hell! They're good at that sort of thing—arresting when the trouble's over—for the murder of Deempster: he being the only man killed by a bullet.

An' them two. Well, they looked at each other, smiled and—

"I did it," says Canly.

"No. I did it," says Dalton.

An' the town police scratched their heads an' don't know what to make of it. You see two shots have been fired from both guns an' both men had been having trouble with Deempster.

"I did it," says Canly.

"I did it," says Dalton.

An' me. I laugh loud. I'm *sitting* on the one that did it, I reckon. She struggled an' gurgled. But I wasn't letting her talk. Not unless there was no other way.

"Keep quiet, you little fool," I says, knowing what she wanted to say. I drops her pretty popgun into the tank thing where she rinses her glasses. It's full of sudsy water.

An' then I gets up from behind the bar an' I goes to where the police are standing with Dalton an' Canly.

And says I:

"Neither of these men did it, you fools. If you'd got the brains of a louse you'd see that Deempster was shot with a small caliber revolver. An' these lad's revolvers ain't small caliber—not exactly they ain't."

An' that gave the townies something to think about. They examined the hole where Deempster's dirty soul creeped out back to its Maker. The police doctor helped 'em. Held an autopsy on the spot. An' they see what I says's true. An' some scatter to look for the man that carried a gun the small bullet'd fit.

The others—they wanted to know what in hell Dalton and Canly lied for. The fools ought to have known.

"I did it," says Canly.

"I did it," says Dalton.

Each thinking the other had.

Then the town police wanted to know who I was.

And I told them and they nabbed me for being indecently clad and inciting rioting.

I got fined a weeks' pay on the first charge, an' got off on the second. I was able to prove—with Canly's and Dalton's help—that I did my best to stop the row.

And that's true of Dalton and Canly. God knows what would have happened if they hadn't shot out the lights.

But, what I mean, that shows you what friends them two was. "I did it," says one. "No, me!" says the other.

An' they never did find the man who killed Deempster.

II

I SAW a lot of Dalton an' Canly after that affair at the Bodega Bar. They both sort of took a shine to me an' we had some good times together, all in all.

They ran a ranch—it wasn't what we'd call a ranch in Arizona—about twenty mile out of Bulawayo an' I used to go out an' stay with 'em; whenever I could get leave, that is.

An' I always used to wonder at the understanding between them two. I reckon, now, if you could have lumped them together, made one man of 'em, if you get my meaning, you'd have produced a god. And I ain't meaning to be noways blasphemous. I'm saying that what one man lacked the other had. Lumped together an' they was without a flaw.

Taken separately, they had flaws

aplenty. Naturally. They was human. They was men.

Canly had a weakness for the bottle; an occasional drunk, if you know what I mean. He had no time for women an' he was sort of contemptuous of niggers. Almost hated 'em, you might say. An' them three traits can become big faults if they ain't watched.

Dalton, he had a weakness for women. He hated booze; an' he liked fooling about with niggers—hearing them talk their lingo, finding out about their history an' their religion an' all that.

An', I'm saying, them three things can be just as big faults as Canly's if they ain't kept under control.

You might say it's funny that them two men, so different in every way, should be friends. An' I answers that their friendship kept a sort of balance between them.

Dalton, maybe, with a bit too much breeding. Sure—it's possible. Canly, one of the what the Limeys call "lower order".

Dalton, a rapier in build, made of best quality steel. Canly, an oak bludgeon, guaranteed not to bend. Dalton quick to make a decision; his mind and muscles all quicksilver. Canly, slow on the uptake — mentally an' physically — but sure.

What I'm saying now is how well them two men get on together.

There was nothing I didn't like about my visits to the Dalcan ranch. The naming of the place, so they told me, almost caused a row. Dalton wanted it called Candal—because C came before D, if no other reason. An' Canly insisted on it being Dalcan. They tossed to decide, an' Dalton lost. That ain't, maybe, sounding important. Only it shows, I reckon, their attitude. What I mean, each trying to put the other first. Even in little things.

Say, I've seen them two under all sorts of conditions. Seen 'em ruined—all their cattle was shot just after the affair at the Bodega, because of the plague. An' I did the shooting! I've seen 'em sick—you can't dodge fever all the time; I've seen 'em busting with health.

An' I've seen 'em face a lion's charge—and a rogue elephant's, which is a thousand times worse. An' I've seen 'em face a crowd of gin maddened niggers who'd got it into their fool heads that Lobenguella had come alive again to lead 'em against the whites. They didn't do a thing to them niggers. They brought 'em to heel like a pack of yellow curs. Weapons? Canly used his fists an' Dalton his tongue. That's all. But Canly's fist was one heman's, outsize. And Dalton's tongue . . . Hell! I'd knocked about Africa more than a little afore I joined the police, an' I reckoned there wasn't much about niggers I didn't know. But what I knew was no more than the ABC of it compared with what Dalton knew. He, if you know what I mean, could get into their brains.

I wouldn't be exaggerating any if I said that what Dalton an' Canly did that day prevented a bloody rebellion. But what they did to the niggers wasn't one, two, three, to what they did to the lousy swine of a white man who supplied the niggers with gin.

I didn't *see* what they did to him. Not officially, anyway. All I did was to hold a sort of an inquest over the body an' report that he'd been killed by drunken niggers. An' I'm thinking that my report was sort of right.

Well, there you are. I've given you enough dope to go on. You can paint your own pictures of them two. Sure, I know I ain't said anything about their looks—color of their hair an' eyes, or the shape of their noses, or whether they had white, even teeth the way them heroes in books have. I reckon looks don't matter. I've seen chorus men who looked like world beaters. Come to think of it, I knew one who was. But that ain't neither here nor there.

Say, us Mounties can't call our souls our own. I was all set to stay the rest of my time at Bulawayo. An' then, one day, without any warning, I was transferred an' sent to an outstation, as far from Bulawayo as was possible an' still be in the country.

Men don't write to each other; they

ain't like women thataway. Men reckon if so be they meet again they can pick up where they put down, or not. Anyway, they ain't going to be offended with each other because they don't write.

Well, there you are. Weeks passed, an' months, an' years. An' I don't see them two in that time, or write to them, or hear from them.

Sure, I think of 'em frequent, but not so frequent as the time goes by; an' I hear about 'em occasionally from chaps I run across as I knock about the country. I hear all sorts of things. An' I believe the yarns that fit in with my memories of them two an' discard the rest. Reckon that's human, ain't it?

An' so, in time, Dalton and Canly kind of faded away to a corner of my mind which I only tapped when I was feeling kind of blue an' out of sorts. They was a sort of comfortable reserve, if you know what I mean. I told myself that any time I got fed up with the police job, or got in a jam, I could go to the Dalcan ranch an' the boys'd say—

"Howdy, Yank!" and things'd be just as if there hadn't been any years in between.

Not, mind you, that I'd have you think for a minute that I had many blue spells or felt lonely often—though God knows, if there's been any dirty case to be solved, they've always shoved it on me. When they wanted a survey of the Eastern Border, that was me too. I didn't see a white man for six months—save a few Portuguese an' I ain't counting them—on that trip. An' I suffered some, believe me. Lions an' lice was my chief worries. Funny how I'm always lumping them two pests together. An' why not? They both get in their best work at night.

Well, there you are. I'm transferred from one place to another. My time expires an' I sign on again. An' more years slip by.

I get promoted an' reduced. I don't take overkindly to discipline. Promoted again, I was a sergeant-major for three months an' recommended for a commission.

I'm only a sergeant now. It's a rank that just about suits me. A sort of compromise, if you know what I mean. An' if you don't: well, anyway, being on an outstation I get a more or less free hand, an' if I get drunk with one of the boys I don't lose caste. Not a hell of a lot, anyway.

All in all, you might say a lot of water has passed under the bridge; enough, almost, to wipe out any real memory of them two, Dalton and Canly, I had. Not that I'm ever likely to forget that night at the Bodego an' hearing:

"I did it," says one.

"No, I did," says the other.

That's the sort of thing that'd stick up above a God's flood of waters. Like the spire of a church, if you get what I'm driving at.

III

FOUR weeks ago I was recalled to headquarters.

An' I goes wondering what's in store for me. Wondering what one of the many things I'd done had come to the ears of the O. C. I didn't know if I was to be promoted or reduced to the ranks. I deserved both.

But once at headquarters I soon knew. Told off for special duty again. That's what it was.

They were getting worried about the way the niggers was acting up down in the Matopas. Nothing exactly they could put their hands on. Rumors about an *umlimo* who was egging the niggers on. That's all they told me. An' me, I was to go down there—in mufti, the O. C. said, because the uniform was likely to make a nigger keep his mouth shut when it ought to be opened, an *vice versa*—an' see what it was all about.

"An'," the O. C. finishes up his routine instructions, "if you find, Sergeant, the damn' fool native witch doctor who's posing as the *umlimo* or the voice of the *umlimo* an' inciting the niggers to rebel, get him dead or alive. But get him."

"Dead or alive, sir," I says, gives him a snappy salute and exits.

Say, I ought to have anticipated things. What I mean, things don't stand still, not even in Africa. And Bulawayo has grown quite a bit. It's blamed civilized now. Streets an' banks an' monuments. An' a theater, an' tea shops, an' a hospital. It ain't the same town I used to know. Shop windows showing the latest things from Paris an' stylish fits for gents. My Lord!

Of course the Bodega was still there—at least there was a place called the Bodega. But it wasn't the Bodega I knew. The men I saw in there all had their coats on an' wore stiff collars.

Me, I didn't feel at home in the *dorp*. It seemed strangulated, if you know what I mean, and as artificial as hell. The only thing natural I struck was a wind storm which raised the red dust of the streets. But I'm blamed if they didn't have a water cart come out, whilst the wind was blowing, to lay the dust! An I've known what it was to pay a dollar for a bath in that same town.

What got me most was the fact that none of the old-timers seemed to be on hand. Or, if they was, why then they'd go so darned civilized an' upstage that they preferred not to know me, an' let on they'd forgot that night in the Bodega.

I couldn't find anybody who knew anything about Dalton and Canly.

"Dalton? Canly?" they'd say. "The names sound vaguely familiar." An' then they'd refer me to somebody else.

I got sick of asking. There was no point to it anyway, specially as I planned to make the Dalcan ranch my headquarters whilst I did my investigating.

So I reported to the O. C. at Bulawayo an' got what he could tell me of the lay of the land. Wasn't much. I'm thinking he sort of resented an outside man coming into his district to solve his problems.

Damned upstage he was. Give you my word.

Well, I got into my mufti—reckoned on disguising myself as a prospector—an' made tracks for the ranch.

WE ARRIVED—me an' the two police boys; an' there was nothing military about our appearance, believe me—one night just afore sundown.

An' hell! I felt like a kid who'd been slapped in the face by his mother.

At that I ought to been prepared for things, long before I got to the homestead.

They had three thousand acres of land, all fenced, in them other days. Ah! An' well fenced—that was one of the few things they used to boast about.

But there wasn't much fence to be seen now. Only rotting posts an' strands of rusted wire.

Hell! A man couldn't tell which side their holding was on. It all looked wild, uncultivated land. Yet they'd had over a thousand acres cleared even when I first knew 'em, and at least a couple of hundred under cultivation.

As for cattle, there weren't any to be seen except one or two scrawny cows that a nigger'd be ashamed of owning. Sure, I know their herds were shot during that East Coast cattle plague. But they recovered from that. I remember the bank advanced them money which put them on their feet again.

An' as I got nearer the homestead buildings I began to remember more an more of the things I'd heard about these two an' hadn't believed.

But them memories didn't make sense, somehow. I reckoned there'd be better explanations than them.

An' then we came in sight of the homestead buildings. Hell! As I remembered 'em they was something to be proud of. They was nigger huts—I'll grant that—but somehow they'd got a look of a softer, easier clime about 'em. What I mean, the thatching—Canly did it—wasn't nigger work. I've seen the same on pictures of English cottages. An' there was real windows, with curtains to 'em, an' paved walks up to the doors, an' flower beds.

I'm telling you there was a comfortable orderliness about the place that made a man feel good. Made him feel rested, at home, if you get what I mean.

But now, well, I'm saying them huts was nigger huts an' let it go at that.

Nigger huts—an' abandoned ones at that.

The thatch was all mangy; holes stuffed with bundles of rag, anyhow. The windows busted, the doors broken, no flower beds, no orderliness—just plumb desolation an' the stinks of uncleanliness.

There was three or four mangy goats about the place, a scattering of hens; a mongrel dog or two.

A big fat nigger woman came from one of the huts and emptied a basin of dish water on the ground.

She stared at me, grinned, jabbered a greeting of sorts, then went back into the hut.

An' me, I was sort of relieved. I figured that Dalton and Canly had pulled up stakes an' that this was none of their doing. Sure, I was disappointed at not seeing 'em, but better that, I thought, than seeing 'em amongst this filth.

I was all for passin' on. I had no intention of putting up at that place. Reckon I've already said that I ain't partial to lice.

As I say, I was for going on; would have gone, except, just then, I heard one hell of a row from the other hut. A noise like as if somebody was throwing crockery an' furniture about. An' a man shouting, an' then revolver shots.

Naturally I take cover an' watch. Me, I'm not one of these heroes. A bullet'll kill a hero just as soon as it will a coward. An' I couldn't see that my death was called for anyway. So, as I say, I hid behind one of the huts—an' my two police boys hid behind another.

The row continued, only more of it.

And that big nigger woman came busting out of the hut an' ran like hell away from the place. Screeching like a wet hen she was. Made me laugh.

An' then—God! It got me like a blow in the wind!—a man came from the hut. A big man, and his bigness made the dirt he lived in all the dirtier. He had no shoes on an' only ragged remains of trousers. His shirt was torn an' stained. His face—it hadn't known a razor in a dog's age. An' his hair . . .

He held a revolver in his right hand. He fired at some creature he saw, but he missed. Sure he missed. You can't kill a ghost animal with a bullet from a revolver. Say, the way I look at it, only your mind can destroy the things your mind creates.

An' this chap—he knew he'd missed. An' he cried aloud like a kid that's afraid of the dark. An' he threw his revolver at the thing he saw, then slumped down in a heap an' hid his face in his hands.

I knew it was safe for me to go up to him then. An' I did. An' I stood looking down at him for a minute or two, listening to him sobbing with fear. An' saying things!

An' then, at last, I touched him on the shoulder.

"Canly," I says. "Canly!"

He looked up at me then. But he didn't see me. All he saw was the "things".

Suddenly he leaped to his feet and lashed out at me. No, not at me. At the things he saw. But I'd been expecting that—I'd handled men sick, like he was sick, before—an' got in my blow first.

It landed on his jaw an' he went down an' out.

Yep. As I said before. There'd been a lot of changes since I'd last seen Canly. You can sum 'em up, I reckon, by the one thing, that I'd knocked out Canly with one blow of my fist.

And so I stayed that night at Dalcan after all. An' I'm saying that it was about as different to what I'd been looking forward to as it could well be.

Instead of living high, hot baths, luxury you might say, grub fit for a king, I got—hell! What does it matter about them things. I'm an old-timer. I've lived hard and, I reckon, happiness ain't spelled for me by the softness of a bed.

But what hurt most was not having the boys to talk to and swop memories with. You remember how I said I'd expected it to be—

"Hello, Yank!" they'd day, an' then

we'd carry on as if there'd been no years in between.

Instead of which I sits in a dirty hut, lighted by a stinking oil lamp. An' there on a bed—or what had been a bed—was Canly, twisting an' turning, an' shivering with fear, an' blaspheming, an' seeing things.

Man, I spent that night picking pink eyed rats with green and yellow stripes off his bed and chucking them out the doorway.

An' I'm saying that was the longest night I ever spent—an' the blackest.

OH, WELL, the sun had to rise sometime. Not that it made things look any brighter or cleaner. I'm telling you I was sick; felt all the time as if somebody had sneaked up on me an' given me one in the solar plexus—but not hard enough to knock me out. What I mean, my morale was all groggy an' needed only a little thing to push me over for keeps.

But I pulled myself together. A dip in the river helped a lot. At least it cleaned my body—an' it felt damned dirty, give you my word, after a night in that hut—an' a clean body helps clean a muddy spirit. An' mine was muddy. Couldn't be elsewise after listening to the things I'd listened to.

But there you are.

I was a policeman. I'd got a job of work to do. An' I couldn't afford to have sentimental feelings about friends. I couldn't hang about to nurse Canly. On the other hand it suited in with my plan to stay at the place; to make it my headquarters. Sure, it suited me best to have the place like it was an' Canly like he was. As I figured it, the niggers wasn't going to be suspicious of a white man who lived in a hole like that. They'd figure him beneath their contempt. They might even boast to him about what they planned to do. An' that's no wild bit of imagining. Say, a white Kaffir gave warning about the '96 rebellion. His nigger woman had told him. An' he went round an' warned the settlers—but they wouldn't believe him. They thought he was telling a yarn in order to cadge a drink, poor devil. More pity, though, for them who didn't believe him!

Say, I'm glad nobody saw me. The way I acted an' dressed an' behaved whilst I was working on this case. Like a white Kaffir I was, give you my word.

In the daytime I'd mooch off, looking like a B.S.D. An' I'd visit all the native *kraals* I came across—no matter how small they was—an' beg for beer an' grub, an' pretend I couldn't speak more than two, three words of the lingo.

It wasn't an easy rôle to play, not by a long shot. It ain't easy for a white man to grin foolish when niggers curse him, or pity him, or treat him with contempt. It ain't easy for a white man to run like a licked cur with niggers chasing him an' pelting him with filth.

An' I put up with all them things, an' worse. But if I kept my mouth shut, my ears was open. An' I heard things. Nothing definite at any one time, you understand. Just a word or two here. This man's boast and that one's. At one *kraal* I'd heard something about a big *umlimo* at another about the cave of the voice. At one *kraal* the headman boasted about the death which 'd roll down on the white men out of the hills . . .

An' by this an' that I was beginning to get a picture of the pot of rebellion which was being heated somewhere an' which, pretty soon, was going to boil over.

An' whether it'd scald the niggers or the white men—I'm saying that was my job to direct.

Not an easy job, give you my word. No. Damned difficult. An' there was no other way of doing things. If you understand me, any one of them *kraals* might have been the center of things. Any one of the niggers I spoke to might have been the *umlimo*, the big witch doctor who was stirring up trouble. But it was noways simple to find out. Force wouldn't do it—you can't use force on a whole nation of apparently peaceful folk. An', on the surface, they was that. Say, one

day a Mountie on routine patrol came to a *kraal* whilst I was there. A *kraal*, mind you, where I'd heard some damned nasty boasting an' threats. Ah! And I knew the young warriors there all had *assegais*—and some had guns.

But the way they treated that Mountie! Lord! You'd have thought butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. Sure, they was most humble. An' they asked him to send me away because, they said, I was a bad example to their youngsters who'd get to thinking all white men was like me.

And he sent me away. God! The things he called me, and me having to take it all without any comeback . . .

BUT I discovered things, I'm saying. An' at night when I got back to the Dalcan I'd sift out what I'd heard an' check it up with what I could get from the police boy who had been on duty that day. Believe me, it was a pretty mess. I got a lot, too, from that fat nigger woman. Chiefly about Canly.

An' Canly?

Well, I couldn't leave him out of things. I reckoned he was part of my responsibility. Not officially, mind you. Officially, he was only a down and out settler; a booze fighter; the sort of man decent folk turn up their nose at an' say disgraces the white race. The sort of man, he was, I'm saying, that I pretended to be on my trips about the country, collecting information about this pot of trouble that was stewing over some witch doctor's fire of rebellion. That was the sort of man Canly was to me officially. But, man, I always reckoned to be something more than a policeman—or less. Have it anyway you like. Anyway, I couldn't forget what Canly had been.

An' so I left one of my police boys to look after him whilst I was away. And at night time I sat in his hut and nursed him like he was a sick baby. I'm saying he was that.

I didn't get much sleep them nights, believe me. I've never know the horrors stay so long with a man. Not, mind you, that he was violent after that first night, but his brain seemed to have gone. He saw things that frightened him. He'd hide under the bed covers and whine. An' between whiles he'd talk. Lord! How he talked. Mostly stuff which had no sense or meaning to it. But, sometimes—oh, well, sometimes what he drooled about fitted into the stuff I'd heard in the *kraals*. An' sometimes it was about Tommy Dalton.

From bits here an' there in Canly's ravings, and from what the woman told me, I was able to piece together a story of sorts which explained why things were as they were. I never did get the whole story an' reckon I never will. But seeing as what I did get sort of corresponded with the rumors I heard, and hadn't believed, I reckon it's the true story.

Aggie— Hell, if I'd guessed what game she was going to play I'd have given her up that night at the Bodega. Or put a bullet in her. Reckon that would have been best.

Aggie, the Bodega barmaid. I said what she was like when I was telling about that scrap. An' I more than hinted that she hated Canly an' was sort of soft on Dalton. An' I ain't trying to make excuses for the boys. I'm just stating facts. Only you've got to bear in mind them flaws I spoke of way back.

Well, I'm saying Dalton didn't have a chance; neither did Canly. What chance has any man got when a woman makes a play—specially when the said woman's got the brains to pick out a man's weak points an' plays up to them.

That's what Aggie did. I ain't going into all the details. I don't know 'em. But the results. That's something else again.

Say, she got Dalton crazy about her. An' she married him. God knows why. But she did. That was a rift in the lute, if you like. An' she went to live out at Dalcan an' she encouraged Dalton in his hobby. Used to ride off with him visiting the *kraals*, leaving Canly to do all the work.

An' that wasn't her only line. Not by a long chalk.

She gets nigger women to do the housework instead of the boys Dalton and Canly had trained. There was women all over the place, if I properly understood Canly's ravings. An' I've said how he hated women—an' niggers. An' she gets a lot of booze out to the place an' encourages Canly to drink. Not that he had ever needed any encouraging. He had a weakness for liquor. But before she came on the scene he'd kept it under control—Dalton helping him. An' now . . .

You see what she done? She fed the flaws in each of 'em. An' whereas in the old days they'd have leaned on each other, now she came in between them. But Aggie was no leaning post—not for them.

God knows why she did what she did. For love of Dalton, or hate of Canly; or to satisfy her own conceit, I dunno. But what she did!

I understand she's out of the country now. If she's wise she'll stay out. I'm saying if I ever run across her I'll give her one of her own special brand of kisses. An' I ain't a vindictive man.

Naturally things soon began to go wrong at the Dalcan. What with one of the partners mooning about the *kraals*, studying nigger life, an' the other lapping up booze, an' Aggie milking the place dry—running up bills, selling the stock an' so on—it didn't take long before some of the traders began to worry about their accounts.

An' still no matter how things had changed Aggie couldn't touch the heart of their friendship. Not by a long shot she couldn't. An' I reckon she knew it. Reckon that's why she played the dirty trick she did. Yep, run a cold deck on 'em, she did.

This way:

She let Dalton go off alone one day. An' she gets Canly good an' drunk. He got blind to the world. The nigger wenches put him to bed an' Aggie bides her time—waiting for Dalton's return.

Hell, the trick's been played before; and it'll be played again.

When Dalton returned that night he found Aggie in Canly's hut an' he thought what Aggie wanted him to think. Only, he didn't act the way she planned. Not he. She expected him to put a bullet through Canly an', after a time, forgive her.

Instead, he tells her to go to hell, writes a letter to Canly—an' departs. I reckon he must have been a little mad. No doubt about it.

An' Canly—when morning an' a sort of soberness comes to him, he finds he's all alone. Aggie's gone—taking with her everything she could lay hands on—an' there's only a short little note from Dalton to tell him what it was all about. At that I reckon he didn't understand fully.

The letter—I found it in his tin trunk—said:

> Jack:
>
> As she's chosen, she's yours.
> Good luck, old man.
>
> —TOM

Naturally Canly didn't understand what it was all about at first. He was dazed, you understand. But one of Aggie's nigger women—she wasn't fat in them days—the only one who'd not gone with the others, told him all about it. An' Canly went mad then, I reckon.

He did everything he could to find Dalton. He went off on long trips alone. An' coming back to the ranch, having found nothing, he'd booze. That was all that was left for him to do.

That nigger woman—well, she stuck by him. Sort of mothered him, if you know what I mean. Else, I'm thinking he'd have passed out. God knows why she did it. I ain't trying to understand the ways of women—white or black. Canly treated her like a dog. Whenever he was aware of her existence he beat her. As far as he was concerned she didn't live. Canly, I'm saying, hated women and niggers.

Well, that's the story I was able to piece together from Canly's ravings and what the woman told me.

It made me do a lot of cursing, believe me. An' maybe, you're sayin', it don't have any bearing on this case I've been

working. It's a fact none of it appears in that official report I've written—Subject: Case of Witchcraft at Hoolé!

IV

ABOUT that case now. Believe me, when I was sitting up nights with Canly it gave me plenty to think of. Hell! The things I'd learnt. Say, I knew there was a witch doctor, somewhere in the hills, who was preaching bloody rebellion. I knew he'd got the warriors all with him. What I mean, he'd convinced 'em that he was the Voice of the Great Spirit, an' they was ready to do anything he said. Sure. An' they believed, when the time came, when he gave the word, that they would sweep the whites off the face of the earth. An' at no risk to themselves, because the witch-doctor had made a strong charm which'd make the warriors invisible.

An' the appointed day was drawing near. How near, I didn't know.

I'm saying that hell was getting ready to boil over.

Look—I'll put it bluntly.

In that Hoolé district, scattered about in the *kraals*, I'm estimating that there was at least five thousand able bodied males—fighting men, if you get me. And every man of 'em was ready to go on the warpath as soon as the word was given by a witch doctor who lived, like as not, in one of the caves in the hills. And I'm saying if a man wanted to hide in them hills, ten thousand men couldn't find him—except by luck.

Yep, a signal—maybe the lighting of a beacon, say—would put five thousand warriors on the warpath. An' there'd be bloodshed and torture and— Warfare ain't civilized; but when an African nigger goes on the warpath, it's worse than hell. Say, I know. I've been through one rebellion.

An' in this case, naturally, the rising wasn't confined to the Hoolé district, but, as I understood it, the niggers was going to rise everywhere. The word 'd come an' a houseboy, say, in Gwello, would drop the pot of tea he was handing to his white "missy" an' bash in her brains—if he didn't do worse—with the first weapon to come to hand. Well, duplicate that a thousand times, and write your own ticket.

Well, I sent back word to Bulawayo, telling them the little I knew. Not that there was much they could do. They couldn't anticipate things an' start killing all the niggers. They could only wait an' be on guard.

I grew damned old in them few days. It was up to me. If I could find that blasted witch doctor an' prevent him from giving the signal, there'd be no rebellion.

All I'd got to do was find the witch doctor! Hell, looking for a needle in a haystack would be kid's work compared with what I had to do. I've always thought it'd be sort of easy to find that needle, anyway, if a feller had one of these, now, magnets.

But I had no magnet to help me. An' I didn't know how long I had to search.

The word might be given tomorrow, or next week; or next month. It might be given as I finished the peg of whisky I'd poured out for myself. That's the way I thought—got blamed jumpy, believe me—as I sat in Canly's hut at nights. Say, that thought about the whisky got me so strongly that I didn't drink it at all. As if that could have stopped a stinking witch doctor from beating a tom-tom, or lighting a beacon!

I'm saying that worry over the case an' no sleep hardly—me sitting night after night with Canly—got my nerves all jumpy. I was beginning to see things and hear voices.

An' on this night—no, it was in the gray of early morning—somebody came to the door of the hut. I heard, I'm saying, the patter of naked feet. An' the door opened an' some one looked in. I didn't see him clearly; reckon my eyes was heavy with sleep.

An' then the door closed an'—there was no one there.

Dreaming? Have it that way if you like. But listen to this. I ran out of the

hut, yelling for my native police boys. One came on a run; the other we didn't find for quite a bit. He was hidden under a *mapani* bush. There was a knife sticking through his ribs.

No, I reckon I wasn't dreaming. I got back to the hut, meaning to have some skoff, an' a clean-up, an' then soon as the day broke see if I couldn't pick up the spoor of that visitor. I'm thinking, too, that if I hadn't have been awake when he called there'd been another knife through my ribs. I reckoned that I'd got pretty close to this witch doctor during my wanderings, and he'd got suspicious an' decided to put me out of the way before I upset his plans. That's the way I figured things. An' believe me, I was pleased some. I reckoned I was getting warm.

I went back to the hut. There was a surprise waiting me.

FOR SEVEN or eight days, mind you, Canly hadn't hardly been in this world at all. He'd ate what grub was given him, an' he'd slept; as far as I knew he hadn't done much of anything else, save talk in a sort of delirium.

But when I went into the hut he was dressing himself. Say, I near as not howled like a kid to see him. He was tottery on his legs and had a dazed look in his eyes, an' his lips trembled. An' me, remembering the figure of a man he had been, an' seeing what he was now—well, as I say, I nearly wept.

But, my Lord! It was a miracle he could get up at all—him having just been through what he'd been through.

But then he'd been more than mortal strong, and I'm thinking his constitution had pulled him through where another man would have pegged out.

At that, I could see that it was his will what was keeping him on his feet. Nothing else.

He glared at me when I entered. But he didn't seem to see me.

"Best get back to bed, Canly," I says softly.

He shook his head, definitely.

"I got to find young Tom," he said. "I got to find young Tom."

But he wasn't talking to me.

"You don't want to go now, Canly," I says. "You're ill, man. You're sick. You get back to bed."

And then he looked at me an' saw me, an' *knew* me.

"Yank!" he said, an' held out his hand.

He gripped mine. I was surprised at the power of his grip.

"Yank," he said again, sort of brokenly.

An' he fingered his lips an' looked round the hut. Then he sort of flopped back on the bed an' his his face in his hands.

Me, I had a big job of work on. I couldn't waste any time. But a man's got to eat. The nigger woman—she cooked me some food an' made some coffee. She was a good cook.

An' as I ate Canly pulled himself together an' he asked me questions. Wanted to know what I was doin' there. An' he tried to lecture me.

He thought I was the sort of man I looked. But when I told him about my job of work he whistled. He understood, all right. Canly knew niggers, even if he hated 'em.

An' I tried questioning him, but that didn't get me anywhere. His mouth was closed about himself an' Dalton. Maybe if I'd had time I could have got him to talk. But his affairs—well, I'd got something more important to be thinking of.

My police boy saddled my horse an' brought it up to the door.

I went out just as the sun was rising.

I swung up into the saddle, an' then Canly comes to the door. He had the coffee pot in his hands.

"Where you going, Yank?" he asks.

I tell him about the murdered nigger an' the man I'd seen.

"I'm goin' to follow his spoor, Canly," I says. "Maybe it'll lead me to what I want to find. S'long. See you later."

"Wait a bit." He scratched his head. "What date is it, Yank?"

I tell him an' he nodded sort of understandingly.

"It's my birthday, Yank, today. And Tommy—he always used to light a bonfire on my birthday."

An' he gulped down all the coffee that was in the pot. Hot, it was, an' black.

"I'm coming with you, Yank," he said.

I had no time to argue with him. Specially as my police boy—he'd been casting round for spoor—gave a yell to call my attention an', bent almost double, set off at a jog trot across the *veld*, heading for some nearby *kopjes*.

"You stay here, Canly," I said, an' spurred after the native.

But I looked back an' I saw Canly running after me. An' I saw the nigger woman collar him an' try to hold him. I could hear her trying to persuade him to go back to bed. An' I saw him lash out at her with his fists. She dropped like a log an' he came on.

"The man's mad," I thought. "Poor devil." But I couldn't waste any more time on him.

I caught up with the police boy an' we went on together at a pretty good pace, him hanging on to one of my stirrups.

He is a good trekker, that boy, give you my word. I'm no slouch myself when it comes to following a spoor—man's or animal's—but this police boy of mine, I reckon he could follow a spoor blindfolded better than I could with my eyes open.

We passed close by two or three *kraals*. But there was no one stirring. African mornings are apt to be cold an' a nigger likes to stay close till the sun warms things up a bit.

We don't say much. I've got too much to think of. An' the nigger—he needs all his breath for running. But there was something he said which made me gasp and lean way down over my horse so's I could get a better look of the spoor he pointed out to me. The spoor we was following.

There are sometimes when a man can't believe the things his eyes tell him. It was like that with me then.

"You talk like a fool," I said to the nigger.

I wouldn't admit that he could tell from the faint marks we were looking at whether we was following a white man or black.

An' on we went. Me with something else to think about now.

On we went, I say, following the spoor which headed in a bee line for the hills. Occasionally I'd look back to see Canly trailing after us. Where he got the strength from I don't know. I'm stating facts.

We came at last, the nigger and me, to the foot of the *kopjes*. An' there for a bit we lost the spoor. The ground was rocky and strewn with boulders, you understand.

I dismounted an' cast about, helping my police boy.

We were still searching for the spoor when Canly caught up with us.

He didn't say nothing. He went on blundering up the *kopje* an' we, I don't know why, followed him. I reckon I was playing a hunch. A hunch that almost made me sick.

But then, this is Africa; an' the sun, an' the fever—it plays hell with a man.

I say we was following a trail of sorts. It wasn't much better than a goat trail. But it was enough for me. I ordered the police boy to go back to my horse an' wait for me.

I made sure he understood, then I spurted an' got ahead of Canly.

V

IT WAS hot climbing up that blasted *kopje* an', for all that I'm hard as nails—having lived clean an' never mixed my drinks—I sweated like a bull. Maybe it was fear of what I was going to find opened my pores some. I've noticed that when fear gets a man he sweats easily—or not at all.

But up an' up I went, climbing over big boulders, looking up all the time lest somebody hidden above, maybe, should roll a boulder down on me, starting a landslide. An' if I checked my pace a bit, if I wanted to halt so's I could straighten up an' rest my aching back, there was

Canly hard at my heels forcing me on. I felt if I didn't, he'd trample me underfoot. Nothing, I figured, would stop him. It was like as if some engine within him was forcing him on.

Once he tugged at the rifle which was slung over my back. I don't know why—maybe because I was glad to get rid of its weight—I undid the strap an' let him have it. He grunted a sort of thanks.

We got to a place where the path ran around the *kopje*—looked as if it had been cut out of the rock, an' it was no more than a foot wide. A steep rock wall to the right; a drop, sheer down, of a couple of hundred feet on the left.

An' then a nigger appeared suddenly. Seemed to come out of the wall of rock, he did.

A big, powerful man, he was, give you my word.

He had a bundle of *knobkerries* in his hand an' he meant business. I'll say he did.

It was too late for me to do anything.

He hit at me with a *knobkerry* an' all I could do was throw up my hand to ward off the blow. I did, nearly. Lord, I felt a fool. I thought—but what does it matter what I thought in the little time between the starting of that blow an' the time it landed on my temple?

What I chiefly thought was—

"Hell, I've failed."

That blow knocked me up against the wall—I'm glad it didn't send me the other way—an' I slid to the ground sort of paralyzed, waiting for the next blow to come. It would, I figured, paint the rocks with my brains.

I heard the nigger yell, I saw him rush forward—I couldn't close my eyes. An' then, Canly—I'd forgotten him—came into the picture.

He sort of dived forward an' tackled the nigger about the knees, jerking him off his feet. Then he straightened an' swung the nigger out over the precipice an' let go.

Say, that warrior hurtled down like a Catharine wheel.

"Good work, Canly," I said; an' then I found I could close my eyes.

When I opened 'em again—and they wasn't closed, I'll swear, more than two or three minutes—Canly had gone.

I crawled to the edge of the path an' looked down, fearing that's where Canly had gone. But there was no sign of him. Only of the nigger. An' he was a huddled heap as lifeless as the boulders he was sprawled on.

Say, it's funny how a job will drive a man on. Me, I wanted to curl up an' sleep; I had no interest in nothing.

An' yet—well, I staggered to my feet an' goes on. No more than a step or two, an' I come to what looked to be a wide crack in the wall of the *kopje*, wide enough for a man to hide in. But it was more than a crack. It was a passage that led back into the heart of the hill.

Say, I began to tingle; an' that wasn't the result of that crack on the head, neither. I figured I was getting near to the ends of things.

Hell! I ain't remembering a great deal of that crawl of mine along that passage-way. I must have been dazed, else I'd remember more of it.

What I do remember is three times falling over the bodies of dead niggers. Each one had had his head bashed in. And each one was where the passage had bent back on itself. I figured the niggers had been put on guard at them points. But who killed 'em?

Canly, of course. I found that out when I caught up with him. He was crawling on hands an' knees. He was pretty well all in, I thought. But he wouldn't let me get past him. I remember I tried to argue with him, but he wouldn't listen. He put his finger on his lips an' said to hush just as if he was talking to a kid. An' he was right, at that. Believe me, that was no place or time to get wordy.

HAVE you ever had one of them dreams where you walk an' walk, down a lane, say, that's got no ending, knowing that if you stop something hellish 'll happen? One of them dreams where

you're conscious of nothing but the fact that you've got to do the thing you're doin' an' go on doin' it forever.

Say, sometimes I find myself wondering if that trip through the hills wasn't one of them dreams. But I've got evidence on my body to prove otherwise.

There's a wound in my thigh—not much of a one—but it hurt an' bled a bit at the time. It'd have been worse—worse? Say, I wouldn't be writing this if Canly hadn't got the nigger whose *assegai* made that wound.

I got a bump on my head. That was when a blasted avalanche of boulders was rolled down on us. Canly was most near buried alive in the loose stuff that followed. I dug him out; an' that was a sort of a dream, too. I remember feeling like a darned ant in the bowels of the earth. But it wasn't a dream. Broken nails and sore fingers tell on that.

Yep, the whole business was like a dream.

But all dreams come to an end. There's always a waking up to bring relief—sometimes it's a relief. Sometimes you'd rather go on with the dream. Sometimes the waking up brings you to the end of that long lane, an' it's a worse hell than if you'd stopped on the way.

What I'm saying is that me an' Canly came at last to a place where the passageway ended; it opened out into a small crater at the top of the *kopje*, just as the sun was setting.

There was some boulders just about the opening, an' me an' Canly hid behind 'em.

I'm ready to believe I slept a bit. Must have done, 'cause the next I remember I thought for a bit somebody had pulled a black curtain over the top of the crater. An' that, in a way, is what had happened. What I mean, it was night.

Canly was breathing heavy beside me. I shook him, but he only grunted.

Funny how the mind works, ain't it? I'm saying that my first consciousness was of the blackness of night. The next—say, that crater was all alight. Alight with the torches carried by a hundred niggers. They was *indunas* and headmen of *kraals*. I recognized some of 'em.

An' next I heard a voice. It seemed to come from the sky. I was ready to believe that for a bit until, looking upward, I saw a man standing on the rim of the crater. And, as I looked, somebody handed him a lighted torch. He held it before him like it was a sacred symbol, if you know what I mean.

An' I saw by its light that he was standing beside a beacon which, when it was lighted, would circle the crater with a crown of flame.

An' the man!

He was a witch doctor. Say, I've laughed at the way witch doctors get themselves up. Sure, an' I'll laugh again. Horns tied to their heads; fish bladders in their hair, their faces an' bodies smeared with ash paint. An' the way they caper about. Hell! I've laughed myself sick over 'em.

But I wasn't laughing at this one. I was ready to believe he *was* the mouthpiece of the Spirits. I'm saying that he had a personality, if you know what I mean, which forced itself upon you.

He made me think he was more than human. I was ready to believe he could do all he boasted of doing.

An' he said—bits here an' there I heard; didn't get it all; there was too many tomtoms throbbing:

"I have made the charm. You are in the hands of the spirits. No harm can come to you. Tonight is the time appointed. Tonight, now, the fire shall be lighted. The fire of the circle. Give praise then to the spirits."

An' he stood silent for a bit, hands upraised, whilst the men down in the crater shouted like men gone mad.

An' then he said—

"It is now time."

And he made ready to light the beacon.

An' I remember giggling an' saying to Canly—

"You're goin' to have your birthday treat after all."

An' then, as if that had cleared away the darkness, I understood. Yep—an'

I remembered my job. But what to do? What could I do? There was a hundred niggers between me an' the witch doctor, an' a wall of rock to climb. An' Canly had my rifle.

I tried to rise to my feet, but Canly held me. I tried to shout, but his hand closed my mouth. An':

"Quiet, Yank," he said. "Would you come between friends?"

An' he stood up.

"Tommy!" he shouted. "Tommy—don't do it, boy!"

Say, there was a rush of niggers toward us. *Assegais* rattled on the rocks, the steel blades striking off sparks of fire. One struck something soft an' I heard Canly groan.

"Stop!" At the witch doctor's voice, the warriors halted. Then the witch doctor said, and it was Tommy Dalton's voice, "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

An' Canly said:

"It's me, Tommy boy. Me an' Yank. We've come to take you home."

There was a little pause.

And then Dalton spoke again. In English, this time. He spoke slow, as if he had forgotten the words.

"I have no home save this one. I have no people but the black ones. There was once a man named Dalton—Tommy Dalton. But he is dead. There lives now only the white *umlimo*, the Voice of the Spirits."

HE WAS mad, I'm saying. He'd played with the fire, an' it had destroyed him. What I mean, Tommy Dalton was a nigger all but the color of his skin. That's what I meant when I said his flaw—his interest in niggers—was a mighty serious one if it wasn't watched.

An' Canly says again, soothing, sort of:

"Come on, Tommy boy. Come along."

"Jack!" Dalton called back. An' I grinned; I nearly cried. I'm saying all their old friendship was in his voice then.

"Jack," he said. "I've been a fool. I—"

"The fault was mine, Tommy boy," Canly says. And Dalton takes him up quick—

"No—mine, Tommy."

Gosh! I felt good. It was like old times.

"Come on, Tommy," Canly said again. "It's getting late an'—an' today's my birthday."

An' Dalton laughed.

"I'd not forgotten, Jack. Look, I've built your bonfire. I'll light it an' then—"

He stooped down.

"No," Canly shouted. "No, Tommy. It'll mean bloody rebellion. It'll—"

I reckon something must have cracked again in Dalton's brain. When he spoke it was in the nigger tongue.

"I am the Voice of the Spirits. As the Spirits order, I perform. The fire must be lighted."

Hell! He was bent over. His torch was flickering about the base of the beacon.

"Tommy! Tommy!" Canly shouted. An' he sobbed aloud. An' then a rifle shot brought sense an' civilization to that savage place.

An' echoing the shot was a wild scream as Dalton's body toppled down into the crater. The torch in his hand made me think of a falling star.

Before it reached the ground, it went out. Before it reached the ground the torches of the niggers were put out an' the place was in darkness. Ah! An' the wailing of the niggers; echoing in the crater, it was like as if the earth mourned. From somewhere, me an' Canly found strength to get to our feet an' fight our way through the darkness to where Dalton fell. Fighting, hitting an' kicking the naked bodies of mourning warriors. None barred our way, except as in the darkness we stumbled against 'em.

Somehow we found Dalton's body.

I heard Canly cry.

"Tommy boy. Tommy, I had to do it."

An' then I don't remember anything else for a long time. Guess I was relieved that there'd be no rebellion an' was able to remember how tired I was. I'm saying that I slept.

Sunrise woke me, an' I was all alone in the crater.

Just near me were the bodies of Tommy Dalton an' Jack Canly. They was holding hands. I'm liking to think they spoke an' cleared up things before they died. I'm saying they was friends.

I buried them. I covered them with all the beacon wood that was on the rim of the crater. I toppled it down on them.

That's all there is.

There will be no rebellion. The bullet that killed Dalton proved to the niggers that no charm could make them invulnerable to a white man's guns. And the *umlimo* was dead. The Voice of the Spirits could no longer talk to them. Say, niggers all over the district gave up their weapons of their own free will.

The police doctor at Bulawayo told me Canly couldn't have done what he did, him having been as sick as he was. This doc says that a man what had had the "horrors" that bad would be as good as dead. He said a lot of stuff about lowered vitality, an' no pulse . . .

Well, I don't know about that. I've said what happened.

I'm saying that friendship was Canly's strength. Somehow it carried him along to save Dalton; kept him on his feet until he could pay the last tribute of friendship.

I mean death!

An' that Bible tag now:

"Greater love hath no man than this: That he lay down his life for his friend." That one.

Canly *killed* his.

Well?

An' now I've got to go out an' shoot another lousy lion.

A Tragic Little Tale of the Holy Land

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

Captain Schumann

ONCE a girl told Captain Schumann that she was two years older than she actually was. And for being told this unusual lie, Captain Schumann, of the German Imperial army, had to fight like a hunted beast in the Turkish army; had to risk his life heroically and foolishly; and had to die.

His story made such an impression upon me that once, on a dark slope of the Sinai Peninsula, I beheld his own personal ghost; and the ghost of his tragedy haunts me to this day.

Sometime in August, 1915, when I arrived at the city of Aleppo, after six months steady fighting against the Russians and Armenians in the Caucasus, I came across a tall, handsome, young officer on the veranda of the German Military Casino. He wore, like myself, a Turkish uniform, and seemed anxious to be my friend. I exchanged a few words with him and, having a previous engagement, departed. He seemed a little disappointed at my brusk leavetaking after his friendly overtures, and I made up my mind to take the first occasion to show him that my seemingly inconsiderate conduct had been unavoidable. He had the perfect German military carriage and manner, but he seemed to be ill at ease, somehow.

That evening, as I was passing the time over a bock of beer with Baron Von Wolfsburg, a major in one of the Kaiser's crack cavalry regiments, I saw my opportunity to be civil to Captain Schumann. As he strolled near our table, I greeted him cor-

dially and he approached. Following the custom among German officers, he introduced himself to Von Wolfsburg and asked for permission to sit down with us. This I naturally granted at once.

As soon as Captain Schumann sat down and took off his *kalpak*—as we all did when we were at the Casino or in our quarters—the baron rose without uttering a word and passed to a neighboring table.

Schumann flushed very red, the veins on his forehead became swollen and purple, but he said nothing. Then for awhile he talked about the topic of the day—Mesopotamia, where the gallant Turkish Colonel Nuri Bey had defeated, at Ktesiphon, General Townsend, Commander-in-Chief of the British expeditionary forces in the Irak Front, forcing him to take refuge in the *kasaba* of Kut-el-Amara, on a horseshoe bend of the Tigris River. Feldmarschall Von der Goltz Pasha was expected any moment in Aleppo, on his way to take over the command of our Sixth Army, while General Aylmer was advancing slowly at the head of about thirty-five thousand British and Indian troops along the left bank of the Tigris to relieve Townsend.

Captain Schumann rambled on, apparently at ease but making a visible effort to retain his serenity. He might go with Von der Goltz's forces along the Tigris, or he might be sent into Egypt. It did not matter which to him; but he showed an evident desire to get into action once more as quickly as possible.

Then Captain Schumann, speaking in Spanish—which he had learned perfectly while acting as a member of a German military mission to Chile—told me the reason for Von Wolfsburg's contemptuous gesture. He had been summarily dismissed from the German army because of a scandal involving him and a young society girl of Berlin. The girl had told him that she was eighteen, when she was really only sixteen, and that had made all the difference in the world to his superior officers. It was one thing to have a love affair, and quite another to take advantage of an innocent girl of sixteen. The Germans have exact ideas, and Schumann was damned.

Luckily for Schumann, the War had broken out soon after his disgrace, and he was allowed to reenter the army as a common soldier. But he was not sent to the Front. That, with his ability and his knowledge of warfare, would undoubtedly have brought him very soon to his former rank, for when a nation needs the services of intelligence and courage, she must take them where she finds them. But Schumann had offended grievously against the etiquette of officers by the mere fact of believing that a girl was eighteen instead of sixteen. He was put to do chores in the training and prison camps, to carry trivial messages about one hundred dozen pairs of boots or five hundred pounds of sausages and, worst of all—after about a year—to stand guard at the entrance of public buildings in Berlin.

Now, Captain Schumann, who besides his position in the army, was a well known man socially, had met Enver Pasha, the Turkish war minister, either at Monte Carlo or at Constantinople, several years before, and they were on very friendly terms. So when Enver saw a familiar and distinguished face standing guard at the main entrance of the Berlin war office, he stopped to scrutinize it. Schumann, always a stickler for the military proprieties, remained at attention and gave no sign of recognizing his powerful friend. But the pasha came closer and pronounced his name in an amazed and inquiring tone. A soldier must answer questions, so the former captain admitted his identity. Enver asked him to come to his apartment that evening.

IT WAS as a result of the interview that followed that Schumann was taken into the Turkish army and given his proper rank. A few weeks later he was fighting at the side of Colonel Von Kress Bey, distinguishing himself for bravery—recklessness, Schumann said—in that

chivalrous commander's great raid on the Suez Canal. During that campaign Schumann was repeatedly mentioned in the *Tages-Befhel* of the expeditionary army. This, however, in no way relieved his painful ostracism by all the German officers in the Turkish army. None of them acknowledged his salute or took any notice of him except that strictly required by the business at hand.

It was probably his knowledge of my foreign birth and background that drew Captain Schumann to me. I was the only officer who had really taken a friendly interest in him, and he was starving for society. At any rate, during the two weeks that I spent in Aleppo at that time, we were constantly together, and we became good friends. And when I left for northern Syria to assume the post of inspector general of the great S.O.S. center of Mamoureh-Kadmeh, I managed to get him assigned to my staff.

We both fought at the orders of Von der Goltz Pasha at Kut-el-Amara, where I had occasion to observe that Schumann, while carrying out his orders with the precision and honor of a soldier, was really seeking a soldier's grave more than a soldier's glory. He fought recklessly and exposed himself on every occasion when the nature of his duty did not make his personal safety crucially important to the safety of the army as a whole. That is, if he received instructions to make a frontal attack at the head of a company, he would charge in the front rank and not spare himself a single risk. But if he was sent on a delicate mission where his personal report was essential to the development of some plan or the deciding of some move, he could be depended on to take all the measures necessary to get back safely with his report.

I have never encountered a clearer embodiment of the conflict between personal desire and military honor than Captain Schumann. He wanted to die in action. Life had beaten him with an unaccountable accident; and he was through with life. But he would never allow this despair born desire of his to jeopardize the success of his comrades, even those who despised him.

Having observed this quality in his character, and wishing to preserve his life, I took every occasion that offered to place him in positions where his duty was contingent on his safety. And he never failed me. He was, however, a very keen man, and he understood my motives. He did not hesitate to tell me so in his straightforward manner. He was grateful for my intentions, he said, but he did not appreciate them. I told him that I assigned to him the tasks he complained of because I knew of no other man in the army on whose honor and ability I could rely more than on his.

Captain Schumann was with me during my military governorship of the Coast of Palestine, and while I was second in command of the garrison of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Transjordania. During the first and second battles of Gaza, in which I was acting as chief of staff of our cavalry, Captain Schumann executed difficult reconnoitering commissions with complete success. After that, he obtained a transfer to the forces operating on the Sinai Peninsula, and I had to say goodby to him regretfully, knowing that I was seeing him for the last time.

Shortly after that, Colonel Von der Kress Bey summoned me to his headquarters at Tel-es-Sheriat, on the Sinai-Palestine Front, and entrusted me with the command of *montaka comandane*, Turkish military governor of the Sinai Peninsula. One of the first thoughts that came to my mind was that in this position I might come across Captain Schumann once more. It seemed as if fate was leading me to hound the brave captain out of his death.

After remaining for one day as the colonel's guest, I returned to Bershebah, where the left wing of our line lay entrenched, in order to organize the flying column, or desert corps, mounted on *hedjins*—fleet war camels—with which I had been ordered to break through the British lines and to invade the Sinai Peninsula for the purpose of frustrating a

third battle of Gaza then being prepared by Field Marshal Lord Allenby. Naturally I had no opportunity to make inquiries as to Captain Schumann's whereabouts.

I remember distinctly that during my stay at Tel-es-Sheriat I had remained thoroughly on the water wagon, on account of an inflamation in my right ear caused by the bite of one of the innumerable poisonous insects that infest the Palestinian desert.

At about six, one afternoon, when the slanting rays of the brick red sun were cooling on the sands and gave the light a violet hue, Tasim—my orderly—and I reached the summit of the low range of naked hills which separate the dusty plains of the Wadi-Sheriat from those of the Wadi-Sabah, on which the little hamlet of Bershebah is situated. Only then I realized that I had forgotten my riding whip in Major Malmann's tent, whereupon I ordered Tasim to ride back and fetch it, while I alternately walked and trotted my Circassian pony down the mud road that wound its way, slanting, toward Bershebah. I could see the lights of the village in the distance, clean and brilliant in the darkening air.

As I advanced, the ruts in the road-bed grew deeper. Rains had softened the mud and the heavy wheels of our artillery had cut through it deeply. My pony had to pick his way carefully. At one of the sharp bends, I stopped to look abstractedly at the outlines of the Austrian artillery camp, which loomed ghostly in the hazy distance. All of a sudden, and following on no conscious train of thought, the sad eyes of Captain Schumann appeared to me, as he said goodby a month before, smiling gratefully but evidently relieved that my supervision had come to an end.

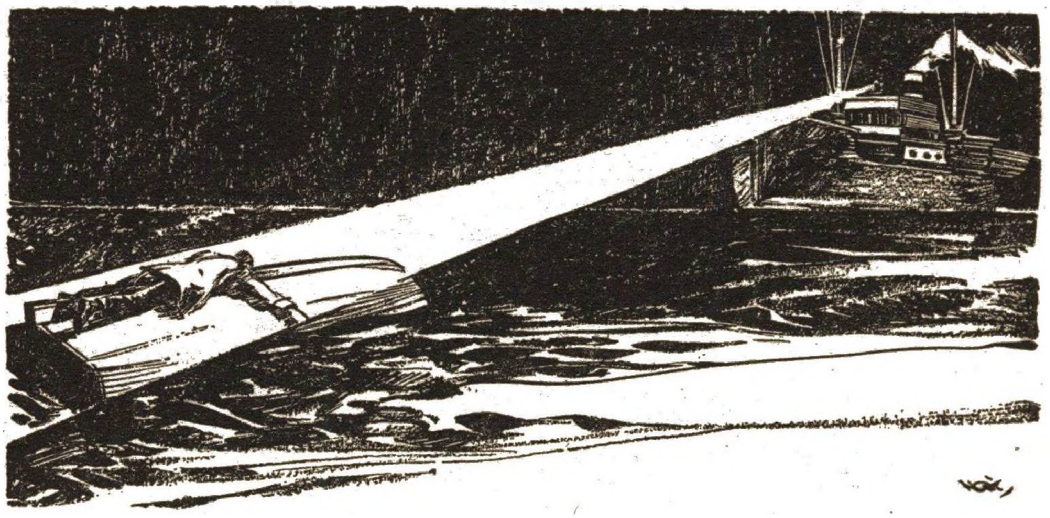
Then, with a startled cry, I pulled back the reins of my horse, to prevent it from running down a lone soldier standing inert in the middle of the road. He was dressed in a uniform that I knew to be olive green; he stood straight in his long boots, looking fixedly ahead, his arms hanging limp at his sides. Over his smooth shaven, deathly pale face, hung a shock of blood soaked hair.

"Who goes there?" I cried; but before I had half said the words, I recognized Captain Schumann!

As I loosened the reins, my horse stumbled and threw me on the mud near the edge of the road. For a while I remained lying on my face, stunned. Then I managed to recover my senses sufficiently to lift my aching body on my hands. Right in front of my face was a wooden contraption which, on closer scrutiny, proved to be a ramshackle cross rising out of the low mound of earth where I had fallen. I flashed my light on it and could read distinctly in fading black paint the words.

Hier ruhen die sterblichen Reste des Hauptmann Schumann—Here lie the mortal remains of the late Captain Schumann.

Here, through a perfectly normal psychic process, Captain Schumann had informed me that, in spite of all my good intentions to thwart him, he had beaten me; he had got away with his own death on his own terms.



THE GOAT

A Father's Gallant Sacrifice for his Wayward Son

By RALPH R. PERRY

THERE was but one dim light on the bridge of the freight steamer *Miraflores*. It shone from the binnacle into the watery blue eyes of the Goat, throwing into relief the drooping corners of his slack lips and accentuating the expression of ineffectual and uncomprehending protest that fifty years in a brutal world had stamped upon the weak good nature of his countenance. The light caught on the gnarled hands, with black, broken nails, which grasped the steering wheel; on the Goat's slatternly clothing and towsled gray hair. The second mate on watch, lolling in the moonlight out on the starboard wing of the bridge, grinned maliciously.

The Goat's eyes were fixed on the compass card, but no glint of intelligence indicated that they followed the shifting lubber's point. If he was steering the course it was through instinct developed by years at the helm, not vigilance; but with the sea glassy and the moon radiant, Mr. Millan did not care. Ordinarily he would have growled an order to "Mind your hellum!" and been too preoccupied to enjoy the Goat's guilty start, his involuntary cringing at the harsh tone, his hasty stoop to see the compass more clearly with his near sighted eyes.

For ordinarily the spell of duty that begins at midnight and endures till four is no sinecure for mate or steersman. To stand on the bridge alone, sensing the ponderous rush of the ship from blackness into blackness only by the tremor and heave of the deck underfoot; to peer hour after hour into dark space, watching for the pinpoints of light which reveal,

none too soon, the approach of another vessel; to know that the responsibility for the safety of the ship and her sleeping crew is undivided—all combine to make an officer impatient with slovenly steering.

But that night the moon was so clear and the sea so smooth a child might have stood watch. The mate's need was amusement, and where the Goat was, fun of a sort lay at the tip of a man's tongue.

"You, Goat!" Millan barked, and grinned to see the little man flinch as though the words were a blow. "You're a point off your course! Steer east-nor'-east and stop dreaming about that fine son of yours. If he's your boy he's got to be no-account."

The Goat's lids narrowed over his pop eyes. His weak chin squared.

"You lie—" he began.

"I what?" Millan interrupted silkily.

"You never saw Tim, and I am steering east-nor'east," the Goat mumbled, swallowing a lump in his throat. "My Tim's a regular clipper of a lad, and he's proud of his old man just the same. Every time we make New York he takes me around to shake hands with all his buddies.

" 'Here's my old man that's been all over the world,' he says. "He's swell, Tim is, and his gang's swell, too. They don't have to work every day, but you ought to see them spend money."

"What do they do?"

"They find a job now and then and scoop up a couple of grand," the Goat parroted. "Why, my boy Tim is so swell he makes me put on a clean shirt every morning when I'm ashore."

"He'd have to make you. You're the dirtiest sailor afloat," jeered the mate. "What was you shifting your helm for if you was on the course, hey?"

"I dunno."

"Now, don't get huffy," the mate advised. "You ain't got no brains; that's what's the trouble with you. Been going to sea all your life and yet you don't know enough to lower a boat properly unless a mate stands alongside giving you orders. You ain't got no brains, have you?"

"No," muttered the Goat, and leaned sulkily over the binnacle. "But that don't give you no call to run my son down," he added after a moment. "He's a regular clipper of a lad. Wears silk shirts every day—"

"Aw, come off! I've heard that yarn before," Millan scoffed. "You're a dirty, undersized runt, and no good as a sailor. If you've got a son eighteen years old, which I doubt, it stands to reason he's just like you. Probably washes dishes in a lunch car."

"Tim ain't nothing like me, I tell you!" the Goat cried fiercely. He had told them all so often, so many times, and still none of them would believe. "You lie!" he burst out, and then shrank behind the wheel in dread of the mate's reprimand.

Millan only laughed. Kid the Goat about his son, and he would use fighting words, little and puny as he was.

"I lie when I say you're a dirty runt?" he inquired.

"Maybe I am," the Goat admitted. "But that don't give you no call to run my son down. He—"

"Shut up a second," said the mate. He half turned and bent his head, frowning in the effort to identify some faint sound from the stern. "Must be those two passengers that came aboard just before we sailed. Why don't they sleep instead of jawing?" he muttered. "All right, I'm a liar," he resumed cheerfully, addressing the Goat. "But tell me this; if your kid's a swell and trails with a swell bunch, how come he can be proud of you?"

"I dunno."

Millan was silent, listening intently.

"Honest, I don't, sir," the Goat continued. "Maybe it's because I brought him up. His ma died when he was born. I had to go back to sea, o' course. I put him in a charity nursery, then a charity school. Every time I made port Tim would beg me to put him some place else. I'd have him dressed clean and show him the ships he'd work on, like daddy did, when he got big enough. And I bought him what he asked for, too," the Goat bragged. "Now he's takin' me about. A

clean shirt every day! Here's his picture, Mr. Millan. Come ashore with me when we make port again, and see if he ain't a fine lad."

THE MATE took the soiled snapshot from the sailor's fingers and bent over the binnacle light. He started and glanced up into the Goat's face.

"Where did you say Tim was?"

"Back in New York."

"Yeah?" Millan grunted, peering at the picture again.

He started to speak, but changed his mind, although the second glance convinced him that his impression was not a mistake.

Tim was not in New York. From the pasteboard in Millan's fingers smirked the likeness of the man whose voice he had heard quarreling, the lad the first assistant engineer had nicknamed Thompson Willie when he boarded the *Miraflores* so hurriedly just before sailing time. With Tim had been a big man who panted and whose face was the color of cheese. Both kept looking over their shoulders toward the docks . . .

"Ain't Tim dressed swell?" asked the Goat proudly.

"His gang does a job and gets a couple of grand, eh?" Millan mumbled.

If Tim's present companion were a sample of the swell gang, the mate could guess what those "jobs" were. Stickups, loads of hootch, rackets of the more dangerous sort.

He thrust the snapshot roughly into the Goat's fingers and strolled out on to the wing of the bridge. It was a shame. The Goat was such a trusting, inoffensive simpleton it was a dirty shame to take advantage of him. And why was Tim aboard? He would have sworn the lad and his companion were running away. The *Miraflores*' skipper had stuck them for a thumping big passage price, knowing that if they were criminals he could hand them over to the police when the freighter docked. Tim must have known the Goat was on the *Miraflores*. Why had he picked that ship as a refuge? What would happen when the two met?

The sharp clatter of a heavy object falling to the deck made Millan twist about.

"Mind your helm, you!" he barked at the Goat.

He left the bridge on the run, dashing down the deck in time to snatch up the .38 caliber automatic pistol which had been tossed through the porthole of the passengers' room just as the door opened and Tim's companion, in socks and undershirt, slouched out to retrieve it.

"That's mine," the passenger growled, holding out his hand.

Millan hesitated. The moonlight on the passenger's face struggled with the yellow glow of the cabin light behind, preventing the mate from seeing more than a pair of hulking shoulders and a bullet head. The surly huskiness of the voice, however, and the manner in which this man had boarded the ship, made the mate hostile.

"Passengers ain't allowed to carry gats," he retorted.

"Since when?"

Millan thrust the weapon into his coat pocket.

"Since I said so. If you got any yawp, see the skipper tomorrow."

The mate rose on his toes as the big man moved forward belligerently, but before the two came together an arm reached through the door and caught the passenger by the shoulder.

"Lay off that, Stein. Don't be a fool!" said a voice that was young, yet hard as flint.

Stein turned on his heel. The door slammed behind him. Millan waited a moment, but the light in the cabin was snapped out and he decided to go back to the bridge. No ship had been sighted during his absence. The Goat was peering into the binnacle, and after a hasty glance in his direction Millan leaned heavily against the bridge rail, staring over the glassy, moonlit sea with vacant eyes, thinking.

The soft black shadows of the mast and

shrouds swung back and forth across the deck in a monotonous pattern. Overside the moonlight lay in a silver band on lazy, oily swells and heaved and sank like the flanks of a sleeping monster, but never broke into ripples. The *Miraflores'* rigging creaked faintly. There was a sibilant, barely audible purr of hot gasses in the smoke stack; and the muffled clang of a shovel dropped far below in the stokehold made Millan start.

"Say, has your kid ever done one of those jobs?" he asked abruptly.

"Not yet. He just helps the others, so far," the Goat apologized.

"Did he ever ask you to get stuff for him abroad? Jewels or dope?" the mate persisted.

"No."

"No, likely not," Millan ruminated under his breath. "You ain't got the brains."

He stared ahead into the milky, luminous pall that lies over a moonlit sea; the radiance which seems so soft, and yet which blinds the lookout's eyes and makes the watch officer uneasy lest something should suddenly take shape out of it. With an abrupt movement Millan bent and unlaced his shoes.

"Keep an eye ahead, once in awhile, you," he whispered to the Goat, and tiptoed off the bridge to the door of the passengers' room, against which he laid his ear.

He hoped to hear nothing, or at most the regular breathing of sleepers, but there was a low mutter in the darkened cabin which made the mate touch his waist to make sure the pistol was handy. By straining his faculties he discovered he could overhear.

"Yeah, jaw away! Talk, talk, talk," Tim was saying. "What does it get you? Blame everything on me, and jaw some more! It's a good thing I did throw away your rod, if you want to know. The whole crew would be on deck in thirty seconds if there was a shot."

"Well, you said your old man was aboard this ship and he'd see us through," snarled Stein. "Where is he? I ain't seen him. I thought he was the skipper. What does he do? Pass coal? I'm puttin' you wise, kid, we *gotta* get off this ship! The bulls will trace us to the docks. They'll wireless—an' then what?"

"Aw, button up that yellow streak! It's waving," retorted Tim with chill composure. "Did I ask you to croak Slim? Did I yawp the bulls would get us sure, and step on the gas for the waterfront? No! What did you want to bump Slim for anyway? He wouldn't have dared to snitch if you'd told you'd put him on the spot."

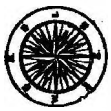
"Well, I thought he was reachin' for his heat," Stein growled. "We gotta get off here, I tell you. Get out in a boat and get picked up. We can tell some kind of yarn a bunch of dumb sailors won't get wise to, and if the dicks wireless here, they'd get the word we was drowned at sea."

"I'm game," said Tim sharply. "We got to find my old man first, though. He's been a sailor all his life. There ain't nothing he don't know about the sea."

Outside Millan rose and tiptoed back to the bridge. A grim smile was on his face. Gangsters, eh? Fresh from a killing, trying to escape the dragnet by taking to a ship.

The mate chuckled as he relaced his shoes. The whole scheme was fatuous, but the proposal to launch a boat from a freighter steaming nine knots an hour was folly. Tomorrow the *Miraflores* would receive a wireless from the police, and the skipper would lock the two men in their stateroom. That would be that. Pretty tough on the Goat, poor old gullible dumbell . . .

With elbows on the bridge rail, Millan fell into a brown study. The empty ocean ahead, the weaving black shadows on deck, the slosh and hiss of the sea under the bow, all the calm routine of watch keeping, united to dull his senses to his immediate surroundings. The Goat had told everybody about "that regular clipper of a boy of his." That was the trouble. Still, if Millan worked things right he could spare the old man the worst part of the shock.



THE HOUR was almost two o'clock. Nearly time to relieve the wheel and lookout. The Goat would go to the crow's nest and would not be on deck again until the following noon. The arrest would take place in the morning, and the Goat might be kept from learning who the gangsters were until the *Miraflores* docked at Liverpool. There the old man could sneak ashore and hide his shame among strangers. Tim and the Goat were fond of each other, all right . . . Must be something in this father and son stuff . . .

A tiny sound interrupted Millan's reverie. Only a single, dull click—but the noise was unfamiliar, not caused by the ship or the sea. It was the sound of a coat button striking wood, the sound that would be made by a man who was creeping, with infinite precaution, up the ladder which led from the deck to the bridge.

In one swift moment the mate crossed to the ladder's head and crouched, hidden behind the canvas bridge screen. He did not want to expose himself by leaning out to see who was below; but while he waited, holding his breath, a glance toward the stern disclosed that the passengers were attempting to put their wild scheme for leaving the *Miraflores* into effect. The light, ten-foot wherry carried just aft of the bridge had been unfastened and hung loose in its davits, swinging gently to the slow roll of the ship.

Millan took the risk of peering around the screen. At the foot of the ladder crouched Stein, an iron belaying pin in his fist.

The mate gripped his pistol. In the stillness the safety catch clicked; then he rose into the bright moonlight with the automatic leveled at Stein's head.

"Drop that pin, buddy," he growled. "Hey, Goat! Fasten the steering wheel and step out here. Bring two pairs of handcuffs."

From Stein's slack fingers the belaying pin fell to the deck.

"That's well, buddy," said Millan with grim approval. "No sense in acting rough. Where's your sidekick?"

The second mate half expected that Tim would try to hide now that the attempt to escape had failed. To his surprise a wiry figure crawled at once from beneath the lifeboat. Tim got to his feet coolly and folded his arms.

The boy was short, like his father. The shadow of a rope made a black band across his face, concealing his expression, but the poise of the head revealed self-confidence and nerve.

Stein had begun clawing at his coat and now raised his hands filled with bills that showed yellow, even in the moonlight.

"Two thousand bucks if you'll turn your back five minutes!" he pleaded.

"You're wasting wind, Stein," said Tim.

"Ten grand," the big gangster said.

Millan smiled, and the other must have seen the change of expression, for the hoarse voice rose to a muffled scream.

"You needn't think you'll get it, anyway. I'll chuck it overboard."

"You're yellow, Stein," Tim whispered contemptuously.

He moved forward one step and stared at the mate with cynical curiosity. His eyes were level under straight thick brows, and under the steady gaze Millan blinked and looked away.

"Just what do you think you're going to do?" Tim challenged instantly. "If you step off your perch down on to this deck—well, Stein may be afraid of your gat, but I'm not. I'm a passenger walkin' around the deck for air, see? Have you got nerve enough to bump me? I—think—*not!*"

The pistol in the mate's hand did not waver.

"I'll risk it," he growled. "Will you be handcuffed quietly, or shall I whistle for the crew?"

"Crew!" Tim jeered. "You've a man at the wheel and another in the crow's nest! Don't make me laugh."

"You, Goat! Bear a hand here!" the mate called.

"Lower the boat, Stein!" said Tim.

The level eyes dared the mate to interfere.

The big gangster was fumbling awkwardly with the boat tackles when the Goat finally appeared on the bridge. Instantly the sailor dropped the handcuffs and started to push past Millan to get down on to the deck.

"Tim," the Goat called in delight. "How'd you get aboard? It's my boy, Mr. Millan! See—ain't he a regular clipper of a lad?"

"He's all of that," growled Millan, who admired nerve.

"Don't come down, dad," ordered Tim sharply. "Better go back to the wheel."

"All right," the Goat agreed. "I won't come down. You come up here and meet Mr. Millan. I was going to take him ashore to see you—"

"Shut your face and pick up those irons," ordered the mate.

"What for?" grumbled the Goat, bewildered and crestfallen.

"Murder. Those two murdered a man this afternoon. That's what for."

The Goat caught his breath.

"You ain't joking me, Mr. Millan? You're always kidding me about Tim—"

"I'm not. Snap the irons on both of them; Tim first."

The Goat's flaccid face turned gray. The weak lips trembled, and the pale, near sighted eyes moved slowly from the pistol in Millan's hand to the figure of Stein, who slouched by the tackles in an attitude that shrieked guilt. Tim still stood erect, but his head was lowered so that the Goat could not see his face.

"The shore's full of land sharks. Tim might've got into bad company, but he never murdered nobody," the Goat whispered. "He was proud of me; had a clean shirt every day—"

"Pick up those irons and snap into it!" Millan snarled.

The Goat stooped slowly. His hands trembled as they groped for the handcuffs; he sighed as he straightened up and stepped forward with a queer, diffident air of resolution. His breath hissed as he filled his lungs; then with a shambling rush he threw himself head foremost at Millan's back. The shock hurled the mate down the ladder to the deck six feet below. Taken wholly by surprise, Millan did not even raise his hands to break the fall. He struck heavily and lay motionless.

The Goat clambered stiffly down the ladder.

"That's mutiny. I'll go to jail," he said. "But I know you never done nothing that was wrong, Tim. Why did you loose that wherry?"

"We've got to get off the ship somehow," Tim muttered. "I'm in bad trouble. There was a man killed in a speakeasy. I was in the room and I thought the cops might blame me—"

"Sa-ay, this bozo'll come to if we don't get going!" Stein interrupted. "A guy was goin' to blow our racket to the district attorney and we had to bump him off, see?"

"Tim was just in the room. He had nothing to do with it!" retorted the Goat fiercely. He frowned as part of the truth dawned on his slow mind. "I've met you ashore. You're one of Tim's swell friends, but you're a damned land shark that's got him into trouble."

"Can the chatter and get going!" Stein growled.

The Goat disregarded him.

"Tim," the old sailor pleaded, "you ought to shake that gang. You ought to go to sea like your old man. You're smart. You'd be a mate in no time. Will you do that for me, lad?"

"Maybe. You've got to get me out of this jam first," Tim answered. "You can launch that boat, can't you? We're not too far out to be picked up, or row back."

"I dunno how far out we are." The Goat paused in uncertainty. His voice fell. "I wish I was smart, like Mr. Millan. He could tell you."

"You can launch the boat?"

"I'll try," said the Goat dubiously. "We're steaming awful fast, Tim. Usually the ship is stopped when a boat is put over, but if I rang the engine room to slow down the skipper would come on deck to see what the trouble was."

"That won't do," Tim decided. "I've got to get off, dad. Got to."

The Goat looked down at the creamy white water tearing past the ship's side in the moonlight and shook his head.

"Get in, then," he muttered. "I just wish you was a sailor like me. Tim. Then you wouldn't be in no trouble."

THERE was not a ripple on the surface of the sea as the Goat swung the wherry over the ship's side. Tim sat in the stern; Stein crouched tensely in the bow. In the soft, unreal light, in the silence, in the atmosphere of security and peace that is brought by a calm sea, the Goat's simple mind had no more than a dim realization of the desperate feat of seamanship he had undertaken. In all his years at sea he had never troubled his head with anything save what he was ordered to do, and those tasks were usually of the simplest. Tim wanted to leave the ship and had chosen the wherry. That was enough for the Goat.

He lowered away until the keel of the wherry was an inch or two above the rushing sea.

"You!" he called in a penetrating whisper.

Two anxious faces were upturned, looking pale and unearthly in the moonlight.

"Unhook the falls as soon as the boat touches water," the Goat instructed.

Then, as was proper, he let the falls go with a run, jumped from the rail and slid down the forward fall, intending to drop into the wherry and take an oar before the boat left the ship's side.

He slid into cold sea water and sank deep.

The propellers thundered in his ears. Their suction tore at him and passed; their wash flung him to the surface in the *Miraflores'* wake. As the wherry touched the sea it had been carried aft like a chip. Stein and Tim had managed to unhook the falls, but the boat had broached, filled and rolled keel upmost. The Goat rose within ten feet of the struggling pair, seized Tim and guided the lad's fingers to a firm grip on the keel. The old sailor could swim a little. Neither of the others could keep their heads above water.

"I'm drowning!" Stein screamed.

He caught hold of the bow and started to climb on to the boat's rounded bottom. The light wherry tipped and sank under his weight. At the stern Tim was lifted up until he could see above the endless rolling procession of smooth silver swells to the black bulk of the *Miraflores*, steaming inexorably away. Then the boat rolled over, and he was flung into the water. He gave a choked cry for help—and sank.

The Goat caught him by the shoulder and pushed him back against the side of the wherry.

"Get down!" the old sailor gasped to Stein. "The boat will only hold up one, that way."

"Get down hell! It's every one for himself."

"Let Tim on the keel. You and I can hold on to the sides and float."

Stein only caught the bow and made another effort to climb upward. The Goat began to pull himself along the gunwale toward the panic stricken gangster.

"I've given Tim—everything I could," he panted as he got within arm's length. "Mr. Millan will be back—but it may be a long time—and the boat will only hold —one."

"Hey, look out!" Stein screamed.

Both the Goat's gnarled hands closed on the gangster's throat. A back lunge pulled the big man off the boat. Relieved of its burden, the wherry rocked and rose high out of the water. Tim caught the bow and began to pull himself along the keel. Five feet away Stein and the Goat thrashed in the water. A fist rose and fell, but the grip of the gnarled hands could not be broken.

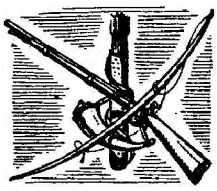
Slowly the Goat pushed the bigger man under. Stein grappled with him, but the Goat made no effort to break the clutch of the drowning man. To the end the old sailor's hands never slacked their grip on the gangster's throat. For an instant

the moonlight flashed on the Goat's wet face as he craned his neck for a last gulp of air. The slack lips were resolute; the weak, bewildered features serene. Without groan or cry the Goat was drawn under water. He had done his best. He had freed his Tim from the shackles of the land, and left him safe.

The ripples on the water disappeared. Minutes passed, but no head broke the shimmering surface of the sea. Neither man ever rose again.

With a shudder Tim tore his eyes away from the spot where the Goat had disappeared. Far away the lights of the *Miraflores* were swinging in a circle. Millan had recovered consciousness and was bringing the ship back.

"The old man wanted me to turn sailor," Tim gulped to the moonlight and the sea. "I guess I can. The bulls haven't much on me. And I guess I want to. Jees, the old man was a swell guy. He was scared of nothing!"



BOONE TURNS WEST

By HAROLD WILLARD GLEASON

WHITHER will ye turn, now the days of blood are over,
Now the smoke from white chiefs' lodges clouds the moon?
Will ye till the soil, or will ye, still a rover,
Sleep beneath the stars, Dan Boone?

Will ye fell the forest, build yourself a steading,
Raise ye stalwart sons and daughters mother-calm,
Tend your flocks and herds where redskinned foes were treading,
Spreading flame and hate, fear and harm?

Will ye dream content amid your quiet meadows,
Growing rich and old on land ye helped to clear,
Dwelling in the past of memories and shadows,
Ghosts of vanished fame, Pioneer?

Ah, your heart would ache for days of dread and daring,
Hours in leafy ambush, trails where danger lies,
Savage guile to match, still nights by bark-flame flaring,
Slumber 'neath the peace of the skies!

Never could he bear the moil of towns, nor molder,
Year on placid year, by fields his valor blessed;
So at sixty years, long rifle on his shoulder,
Silent Daniel Boone turned West!

Concluding

BELOW ZERO

A Novel of the North Woods Loggers

By HAROLD TITUS

YOUNG John Steele Belknap quit his father in high dudgeon when he told John he wasn't yet ready for the Kampfest job, that John had been awaiting for years. The reason, which Old Tom Belknap did not divulge, for his decision, was that he knew at last that Paul Gorbel, the manager at Kampfest, whom John had sized up as a crook, was just that; and before Old Tom would let his boy go on the job he wanted to clean up the mess himself.

Under the name of Steele, John went to work for Ellen Richards of the Richards Lumber Company, running the job as superintendent. And his suspicion that Paul Gorbel was the man behind all the unscrupulous tricks that were slowly forcing Ellen Richards to the wall, was quickly confirmed.

The night the Richards barns were burned John found the body of a man in the ruined building, by whose side was a jug that had contained gasoline. And when the sheriff investigated and reported that the man was in the employ of Gorbel at Kampfest, John laid his plans for trapping Gorbel, who was blackening the name of his father and ruining the girl he loved.

But Gorbel had another card to play. He had his stenographer write a letter to Ellen Richards, revealing that her superintendent was Old Tom Belknap's son; so John had to quit the job just when

he was lining everything up. John went to work under Gorbel at Kampfest.

Gorbel did not desist in his efforts to get rid of John. But his plans went astray when Marie, his stenographer, who was tired of his empty promises to marry her, got the son of Tom Belknap aside and talked. She told him of the lumber company to which Gorbel was diverting the best of the Kampfest timber, billing it as cull stuff and pocketing the money. And she told him other things that strengthened John's case against Gorbel for arson—the burning of the Richards' barn.

John got in touch with the sheriff, put all the evidence into his hands and left the rest to him. Late one afternoon the officer dropped into Gorbel's office with a warrant.

"I'm glad I'm sheriff of this county, Gorbel, to take back to jail, a firebug—a skunk!"

But Gorbel was not to be taken so easily. Just as the sheriff reached for him Gorbel fired; and as the officer toppled to the floor, Paul Gorbel was out of the door, sprinting through the snow.

CHAPTER XVIII

TRACKS

JOHN BELKNAP entered the boarding house, late for supper.

He had located a room for rent that suited him and arranged to move on the morrow. He had talked to McWethy, confiding a part of his suspicion against Gorbel, drawing from the man one or two leads that might aid in building up the case. He had visited, after closing hours, with the young cashier of the Bank of Kampfest, paving the way for following up the story of double-dealing there that Marie had told him. Now that Gorbel had fired him, he would push every angle relentlessly.

As he passed through the office the manager hailed him.

"Long distance's been tryin' to get you all afternoon from Shoestring," he said. "And Nat Bradshaw was here, lookin' for you—oh, not over half hour ago—" glancing at the clock.

"Did Nat drive back?" John asked.

"Search me. He seemed sort of—sort of glum, I guess. Didn't visit like he usually does."

John stood a moment, irresolute. Men were coming from the dining room.

"I'll look up and down the street for him," he said. "Likely the call was from him."

He stepped outside. The thoroughfare was showing some indications of life after the supper hour. He walked to the corner, looked toward the mill and could see a team standing tied before the B. & G. offices.

It was the sheriff's team, he saw, as he came close, and laid a hand on the cheek of one horse while he scanned the building. The windows were blanks, reflecting only the lights from stores across the way.

McWethy approached.

"Mac, have you seen Nat?" John asked.

"No; that's his team, ain't it?"

"Yes. He's in town, was looking for me."

They stood, looking at passers, speculating as to the sheriff's whereabouts.

Inside that darkened office Nat Bradshaw, breathing painfully, heard voices drifting into his consciousness as through a dream. He was cold. His feet were numb with cold. His hands felt lifeless. The only warmth about him was the burning, rankling spot in his breast and, as he tried to move, a fresh spreading warmth ran down his side.

He roused himself, fighting off the chill and the inner darkness which was fuzzy, like a soft fog. The voices were close outside there; men standing, talking—men!

He tried to call out but choked, and his throat filled with fluid. He strangled and reached an uncertain hand upward. The fingers found a leg of the overturned chair and gripped there. It took a special thought to make each separate finger function in that grasp. He pulled on the

hand, he shoved upward with the other elbow. He raised his torso slowly, painfully, breath bubbling at the effort, until his eyes were above the level of the window still.

They were standing there, John Belknap and one he could not distinguish; standing talking, looking up and down the street. He tried to call out again, but his voice was drowned in that stuff which made his breath rattle.

He struggled against his weakness more determinedly. One hand was propping his body up. He let go the chair and groped the desk top with the other. Fingers tipped over a heavy inkwell and the fluid ran down his sleeve. He fumbled for it again, clumsily, painfully.

They were going now; those two outside were moving away—off somewhere, leaving him, when he needed men. A sort of rage swam upward. It was not like young Johnny Belknap to walk away from a man in a fix.

The fingers had the inkwell. He drew the forearm up and put all the strength he had into the throw.

The heavy chunk of glass struck the broad window pane; with an explosive crash it shattered and with a rasp and a tinkle big sections of it came sliding down, some of the fragments jingling about the sheriff as, gasping, he sank slowly back to the rug his blood had stained.

At the crash, John and McWethy turned sharply.

"Gosh! Somebody busted that window!" the mill foreman exclaimed.

Instinctively both looked across the street to locate the source of this minor destruction. No one was there who would have flung an object to smash the glass. Men were running toward them, attracted by the sound. A small boy ran across the road, wallowing through the drift.

"Busted!" he shrilled. "Hey! Lookit!"

He had stooped, picked something from the snow, and held it up as John reached his side.

"Inkwell!" John said and, with the object in his hand, looked up at the window, brows drawn.

A group was gathering, questioning, exclaiming.

"That came from inside, Mac," John said quietly. "It was thrown through the window—and there was no light in there. Come along!"

McWethy at his heels, John ran up the steps. The outer door was unlocked but as he tried the knob to Gorbel's private office the latch resisted him.

"Gorbel?" he cried sharply. "Gorbel, you in there?"

He held his head close to the panel as McWethy gestured for silence to those who had followed.

"Gorbel! I'm coming in unless you speak!"

John strained against the door and thought he heard something like a moan.

"Get back!" he said abruptly. "Give me room!"

He shoved them aside, poised and flung his shoulder hard against the door. The lock gave and let him headlong into the darkened office.

"Somebody here!" he cried sharply as he saw the overturned chair, the figure on the floor. "Where's the light? Somebody hurt—here!"

THE ROOM brightened as McWethy turned the switch.

"Gosh, it's Nat! He's hurt!" The mill foreman spoke shrilly. John knelt quickly beside the sheriff, heart racing; he felt a wrist, put the other hand on the cold, wet forehead.

The head turned slightly beneath his hand; the eyes opened stupidly, dully.

"Nat! Nat, what happened?" John cried.

Nat seemed to be struggling to gather weakening faculties.

"You're hurt, Nat! Who did it?"

He leaned low as the lips worked.

"Johnny! Johnny, you came—back!"

"Yes, I'm here, Nat! What happened?"

"Shot me," Bradshaw whispered. "Shot me. Warrant's in my—pocket, Johnny. The stomach didn't have—alky in it.

He shot—" A paroxysm of strangling broke the words and John wiped a crimson stain from the lips.

Panting, the sheriff gripped John's arm tightly.

"Listen; you're—deputy, now. Warrant's in my—pocket. Take my gun. Gorbel shot me when I—told him he was under—under— Understand, Johnny?"

"I've got you, Nat!" Then, over his shoulder, "Call a doctor, quick!"

He leaned low to the sheriff again as a man snatched up the telephone on the desk.

"Nat! You have a warrant for Gorbel. You came in here to serve it and he shot you down. I've gotten that. Do you remember how long ago it was? What did he do?"

The brows on the suffering face were high arched as the man fought for breath and strength. He panted through open lips and his fingers worked on John's arm.

"Whistle time—minute or two—after. Don't know where he—went. Up to you—Johnny. Nev' mind—me . . ."

"We will mind you! That's the first thing we will mind, Nat!"

"Doctor's coming," McWethy whispered hoarsely. "On his way. He was at the drug store."

"Hear that, Nat? Doctor's almost here. The minute he gets in I'm after Gorbel." He drew a pistol from Bradshaw's pocket and deliberated a moment, kneeling there, the sheriff's head on his knee. "Mac, call the jail at Shoestring and tell them. Send word up and down the line that Gorbel's wanted."

He saw the stares on the faces about him; incredulous, shocked looks.

"Nat had a warrant for Gorbel's arrest on a charge of arson, for planning to burn out the Richards camps," he explained bitterly. "And now there'll be another warrant, so help me heaven!"

He addressed McWethy again:

"Get a team out on every road from town. Phone every B. & G. camp and tell 'em to report Gorbel if they see him, or they stand a chance of taking a trip with him. I'll go to his rooming house the minute the doctor comes and—"

"Here he is!"

The physician was shouldering his way through the group, a young man, cool and collected in emergency.

"Don't stop at anything, Doctor," John said, pillowing Nat's head back on the rug. "Spend any amount that will help in any way if this case has got you stopped. You men stand by to help the doctor. Then report to McWethy."

He was gone, then, running out of the building, along the street through the falling snow, around a corner and thundering up well swept steps.

No, Mr. Gorbel was not at his rooming house; he had not been there since noon. His supper was waiting . . .

Look for the woman! The phrase was flashing through his mind as he ran along the street, passing men who ran in the other direction, toward the offices, scene of tragedy.

He rounded the postoffice corner and flung himself up into the storm house where he had stood with Marie Varnell and listened to her story of Gorbel's duplicities.

His fists beat upon the door until the glass in it rattled. He heard a voice calling sharply, wanting to know who it was. He entered to confront the girl who stood on the stairs, a hand at her cheek, lips parted in something like terror.

"Where's Gorbel?" he asked sharply.

"My Lord, how should I know? What's happened? He came in here like a —like he was crazy! He said everything was all off and for me to get to hell out of town and instead—and he gave me a dirty fifty dollars and said it was . . ."

SHE WAS sobbing and he went up the steps to grasp her extended hand and shake it.

"Steady, Marie!" he said. "I'm looking for Gorbel; I've got to find him."

"And the big bum wouldn't listen!" she screamed. "He gave me a lousy fifty dollars and said to get the hell out of

town as fast as I could or they'd be after me, too!" She laughed shrilly. "He said I was in it, that they were—"

John grasped her other hand savagely.

"Hold your tongue!" he cried sharply. "Hold your tongue, Marie!"

His roughness had effect, shocked her out of the mounting hysteria.

"There's nothing at all for you to be afraid of," he said, trying to make his voice sound reassuring. "I just want you to tell me what happened, Marie, and where he went."

She wiped her eyes with a wrist.

"I'd been buying some things and was a little late getting home," she said unsteadily. "He came up the walk behind me on a run. He scared me, the way he looked. Oh, Mr. Belknap, it was awful! His face was white and his eyes—his eyes . . ."

She shrank away, almost falling; he caught her around the waist and held her so.

"All right; he can't hurt you. Just tell me everything."

"What's he done?" she begged. "Have you got it on him? I never saw a man look like he looked!"

"I know! I know! But what did he say and do? Give me your story first, then I'll tell mine."

"He said it was all off between us. Everything was off, was what he said. He couldn't talk straight. He kind of stuttered. He swore awful and said I was in the jam along with him and they'd be after me and to get the hell out of town as fast as I could before they nailed me. I didn't do anything but what he told me to do, John! I didn't get a dime of what he got; all I knew about what was going on was what I guessed and made him admit.

"But it scared me so. He wouldn't listen to me, wouldn't tell me any more than that. He grabbed his skis out of the storm house where he'd left 'em yesterday and beat it off across the tracks. I tried to make him come back, but he didn't even look this way. Oh, what's happened, Mr. Belknap?"

"He shot the sheriff. Probably killed him."

The girl drew back, freeing her hands, pressing palms to her cheeks and gave a long, shrill scream.

Footsteps, then, as the deaf woman of the house came bustling from the kitchen.

Neither of the two on the stairway heeded her amazed face, her voice lifted in bewildered query.

"Steady, Marie! Which way'd he go? Just where'd he cross the tracks? Tell me that. Hang to yourself a minute longer."

But the girl was past giving him further aid for the moment. Slowly she sank to the steps, head falling backward. He gathered her in his arms, swung down into the living room and laid her gently on a couch, while the old woman hovered over him.

"There's been trouble at the office," he shouted in her ear. "Marie isn't implicated, but hearing about it made her faint. Look after her, and I'll be back!"

He had left the front door open when he burst in. The light from the hallway streamed out into the storm house. A shovel was there, a broom. A pair of skis stood against the wall and, in a far corner, snowshoes. He grabbed them up and leaped down the steps, searching for tracks in the new snow.

They were easy to find under the street light. He saw where a man had crossed toward the railroad; saw where another had followed and turned back. That was Marie. Easy to follow, the trail was, but already filling in with the light, large flakes. He wallowed through the deep snow between the street and the railroad tracks, bending low to be sure he trailed this man. He saw where he had stopped, where skis had been dropped into the snow; where they had been scraped about as the straps were adjusted, where they had slid off to the northward . . .

John paused a moment, looking about, remembering what he had said to McWethy. Everything had been done that could be done in Kampfest. Men

were on watch in all directions; the deputy sheriff had been warned; old Nat was being given every care at the hospital.

It would avail nothing to squander even a moment to tell what he had now discovered. The important thing was to have some one on that rapidly disappearing trail. Gorbel knew the country intimately; he could head for any one of a hundred places unknown to John, hide, wait out a careful combing of the territory and, perhaps, make good his escape. Another, familiar with the forest, might guess his destination, but it would be only a guess; and here was a trail, something surpassing guesswork, but a trail being hidden more effectively each moment.

He was jamming his toes into the harness, whipping the straps about his ankles. He stood up, wriggled his feet and started, bent low, moving at a swift walk, eyes on those depressions in the snow.

The man had gone straight north, through a strip of chopping, across a little lake and into timber on the other side. His skis had made deep grooves in the snow mantled buckthorn where he left the ice, and the twin poles had jabbed deeply to speed him along; but in the timber, with the trees shutting out even what faint light the night afforded in the open, John could scarcely make out a depression inches deep.

He went as quickly as he dared, stooping now and then, and with a bare hand feeling the snow before him for the betraying marks, more than half filled. Gorbel was going faster by far than he was; each fractional mile that intervened between them put an additional handicap on the trailer.

Misgiving and doubt commenced to rise within him; his mouth went dry as an appreciation of the odds in this night's somber game grew, but he could not turn back. Snow might fall even faster and, by the time he had returned to town for lantern or flashlight or aid, the trail would be wholly lost. But if he kept on he might even work out of the storm; and so long as he was certain of Gorbel's direction, even though he lose it eventually, he had gained something.

He entered a thick growth of hemlocks where his eyes were of little aid, but of a sudden his rackets commenced to sink deeper into the soft going. It was a decided change and he retraced his way, groped forward and found that he could detect the trail beneath him by the feel of the snow that skis had packed. He went on, shuffling along, feeling sign with his feet, and when he emerged from the gloom of the thick conifers he saw where snow had been knocked from stiff brush. All about twigs and branches were accumulating their thick coating of flakes in the quiet night so that they blended with the white background, but a man, crashing through the protruding branches, had knocked them bare again and they showed dark against the ground covering.

He was not through yet, not shaken off. The trail, his sense of direction told him, was swinging a bit to the westward, keeping to the open where skis would ride better, crossing a wide chopping coming up to second growth where he could see those creases in the unmarked snow, and the barren brush that had been disturbed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WILDERNESS CAMP

LAST month, an assured, crafty schemer, intent on ruthlessly feathering his nest; last week a panic stricken coward, clinging to the hope of unwarranted gain; tonight a fugitive in flight from his kind, casting possessions behind him, intent only on that pitiful sort of liberty that is the meager lot of the escaped offender against society.

Escape was the only thing that mattered to Paul Gorbel this night. Escape from the processes of the laws, escape from the gates that, he knew, hungered for him.

His self-control had cracked back there in the office where, for so long, he

had planned and plotted. He had jumped from the frying pan to the fire in that one insane second when his mind was centered only on dodging one charge which, with clever defense, might not even have been proven against him. He had shot without desire to kill, intent only on the horrible fear which rode him.

But he had cast his die. He was far outside the pale of decent men now. He was fleeing from men, blindly at first, with thought only of putting distance between himself and others.

To go northward was natural for a man seeking solitude. In other directions railroads and towns would be encountered. In this direction, though, only the wastes of Lake Superior lay and somewhere along its rugged shores or in the wide swamps inland he could find safe hiding.

Only that was in his mind as he strapped on his skis and started at high speed. But a man's memory plays queer tricks in times of stress, renders service in odd manners. Why he should think of anything that he had cut out of his life was beyond explanation; why his mind should go back to his talk with the cruiser late in the afternoon was beyond accounting. But he did think of that as he raced on, looking over his shoulder from time to time, cocking an ear to listen as he crossed choppings or threaded standing timber. He thought of his cruiser, perhaps, because the man had come in from the northward that day, with his casual story of having stopped at Wolf Richard's cabin in the trapper's absence.

An inspiration, it was, which surged through Gorbel's heart. Wolf's camp was the only habitation out there; the only habitation in all that country about Kampfest where travelers were turned away. For years men had known that when old Wolf was at home none was welcome to pass his threshold except Ellen Richards; he had denied shelter to men and to women in savage weather. He had threatened with his rifle men who had insistently begged. His was a place to shun, a camp where succor was not available.

But Wolf was gone now. He was out in the Caribou deer yard, forty miles away, the cruiser had said. He would stay there, too. Snaring or driving out timber wolves, come to fill their winter-empty bellies on the easy living afforded by yarded deer, is not a day's work. The Caribou was a big country; the wolves would move from place to place, suspicious, wary, but they would not leave at once before the advent of a lone man.

Richard's cabin, then, was sanctuary for a man who fled the law. Doubly so: going there would throw trailers off the scent; he would find a chance to rest; would take food and ammunition and anything else he might need for a long period of hiding. He could lose himself in great swamp fastnesses, perhaps; he could wait out the first feverish pursuit, keeping close to his temporary abode. Then, when the heat of the chase cooled, he could make his way westward around the head of Superior and off into Canada.

He was not an old man, not even in his prime yet. True, he would start with his hands again, but he had started so once and if it had not been for his avariciousness he would have possessed much of the things he wanted. He would not lose his head again. He would not play his cards too strongly. He would keep himself within the law next time.

"The law, the law," he whispered. "Within the law. Always, within the law."

He ran a bit until the strain on his heart, already heavily taxed by excitement and terror, forced him to walk. He looked over his shoulder every few strides, as he had looked ever since mounting his skis. He came from timber to a clearing and a man stood before him. He stopped, with a gagging sound.

"Who's that?" he asked, voice breaking. "Who're you?"

No reply. He laughed shrilly. The man was a fire blackened snag. He went on, fingers working in his gloves, cold sweat making his skin clammy. Minutes

later he halted again, thinking he saw some one running off to the right, circling to get in front of him; but it was nothing, a trick of his eyes, of his inflamed fancy.

"Hang on to yourself!" he growled shakily. "You've lost your head once tonight. That's enough."

But he whimpered aloud as he thought of that moment of panic back there in the office. He could see the spurt of fire, hear the pistol report; could hear Nat Bradshaw's breath catch and see his great hulk sagging to the floor, and it did him no good to determine to keep his wits. They strayed, stampeded. He had shot a man down; he had killed a man. No regret for the deed, no remorse for having taken life came to him—only a sense of the further peril in which it had involved him.

The snow still fell, covering his tracks. He took a little comfort in that. By midnight his trail would show only faint traces; by morning, if the wind blew even a breath, this light snow would shift and obliterate them forever.

HE DID not reckon that a man was already on that trail, coming slowly, painfully, groping at times with only his feet to find where a fugitive's weight had made two parallel, narrow strips of firmer footing in the loose snow. No, he did not even guess at such a far fetched circumstance; no more than he dreamed that as he left Shoestring behind him a lone girl was striking a match in Wolf Richard's camp, looking about a bit nonplused and then, with a sigh, searching for kindling to build the fire that would make this place, though otherwise untenanted tonight, wholly habitable for her.

The permanent abodes of solitary trappers almost without exception fall into one of two categories—the meticulously clean or the impossibly filthy. To the first belonged that of Wolf Richards.

In this living room, direct evidence of his calling was missing. A rifle and a shotgun, greased rags stuffed into the muzzles, stood upright in a rack. On the shelf above a store of ammunition reposed in orderly boxes and beside them were a half-dozen worn books. The oilcloth on the table against a south window was figured in blue. Dishes and cooking utensils were nested on shelves beside the cook stove.

The floor of pine had been much scrubbed. The one bed in the corner, with blankets gone, was covered with a tarpaulin, neatly tucked about the tick. The woodbox was filled, supplies ranked in a cupboard above it. A broom hung from its nail, a sharp ax stood behind the door.

An oil lamp with a glass shade painted blue gave light and, with the fire going, the place took on an air of comfort, of solace for the troubled girl.

She put a kettle on and, unhooking the plank door at the end of the room, entered Wolf's fur loft, a windowless chamber, filled with animal scents, and dragged from it a cot. Her own blankets were on a shelf before which hung a curtain of brilliant red calico and while water heated she made up her bed, as she had made it many another time when coming here to spend a night with the old recluse.

Lighting a lantern she went out to the root cellar, shoveled snow from before the entrance and secured vegetables. Then to the spring for water. Returning, she carefully swept out the snow she had tracked in. Wolf might return at any moment now, and since her childhood she had been most careful to conduct herself when with him in the manner of the best of housewives. Otherwise the old fellow would be scolding. It was the only point on which he had ever reprimanded her; in other matters what she did won his indulgent approval. She could not hold a man when she grew up, he used to say, if she did not learn to pick up after herself and keep the home neat and cheery. As she put the broom away she remembered the words and her heart was wrenched. It seemed as if the world agreed that the one thing a girl lived for was to hold a man. But how can a girl hold a man when

the one man she had ever wanted to hold betrays her confidence?

Good camper that she had been taught to be, accustomed to her uncle's comings and goings at any and all times, she was decidedly restless at finding herself alone in the cabin tonight. She had come as much for the odd solace which being with Wolf gave her as for escape from a stifling environment; and to find him gone was a distinct disappointment. She stopped now and again as she made her meal to listen, hoping to hear his shrill hail come whooping and ringing through the darkness when he approached to see a light shining from the windows of his camp.

But she heard no shout. The night was very still. Down in the swamp a cat screamed once and, standing in the doorway after she had washed her dishes, she thought she heard the distant cry of a hunting wolf; otherwise, silence.

Ellen began to wish she had stayed in town. She tried to tell herself that she was developing nerves, that she must get hold of her emotions and be guided by reason. Out here, twenty miles from the nearest habitation, there could be no cause for this feeling of apprehension which was rising—rising. She was not of the breed of women that fears isolation and loneliness.

But even as she argued so, tears welled into her eyes.

She lay down on the cot, head propped on one hand, and stared at the rectangles of open draft in the stove, bright orange from the fire within. Her brows were gathered as she fought against the weight which tugged at her heart.

Sleepless nights were in her immediate past; harried days had taken their toll. This afternoon, she had walked a dozen miles through soft going and her body was wearied. She dropped her cheek to the blankets for just a moment; if Wolf did not come soon she would undress, bolt the door, fill the stove with wood and prepare to spend the night alone. Just a moment— And sleep came as Gorbel, two hours away from that lonely cabin, cursed at the thinning of the snow, at the faintly blurred stars which began to appear in what had been a void above him.

CHAPTER XX

GAMBLERS FOR TIME

ELLEN woke with a start.

The room was cold; her body was stiff, but it was not the chill or the aching of her muscles which startled her from deep sleep to wide consciousness.

Not these. Rather, the careful, slow creaking of a door hinge.

She lay perfectly still, gathering her faculties. Her face was in shadow, for the lamp was behind her and the stove had long since ceased to glow through the cracks between its castings.

Wolf returning? That was the first possibility which presented itself to her clearing consciousness, but immediately she reasoned that a man does not enter his own home with stealth and caution.

A man was there, outside. She could see his fingers clasping the door's edge, could make out a side of his face, probably watching her.

"Who is it?" she cried sharply, sitting up and swinging her feet to the floor.

He hesitated, and she could see his fingers twitch.

"Who is it? What do you want?"

She was standing, then, covering her fright.

The door moved and Paul Gorbel half reeled into the room.

"It's I, Ellen. And what do I want? What do I want? I—I came for you! That's what!"

He drew a hand uncertainly across his eyes and a wretched smile twitched at his drawn lips as he felt his rallied self-control slipping away, strength oozing through his very pores.

"For you," he repeated, and his voice was a croak.

Over an hour ago he had come to a halt at the crest of the burned ridge which swept downward to the swamp where Wolf had built his cabin, the first

objective in his flight. He had stopped with a gasp—and then groaned. Twin rectangles of light showed down there, windows in a building, a structure which he had counted on being unoccupied. He had gambled everything on finding the place deserted and well stocked with the supplies a man would need for the bush in winter, ready for his taking. And some one was there!

He looked about him a bit wildly, at the dark wall of swamp, at the bald ridge on either side, back at the way he had come. He was without food, without more than a pocket knife as a device for procuring food and warmth because he had dropped his pistol back there in the office after his finger had pulled the trigger and drove him away from men and food and shelter.

To retrace his way southward was an impossibility; to the east and the west lay uninhabited country and, even had logging camps or trappers or settlements been in either or both directions, he would not have dared show himself. To retain his hold on liberty he must keep out of sight. This place was the only depot of aid and now, occupied, it must be passed by.

But a man can not endure the wilderness in winter without food, or the means of procuring food. He must have an ax and blankets; he should have utensils to make the food he could take palatable. And Paul Gorbel was all but empty handed.

His knees shook and his breath came and went in light, sobbing moans. Wolf Richards there—back home; a man who was impossible of approach, even had a traveler been free to approach any human being.

Wild possibilities raced through his brain. He might wait until those lights went out, wait until Wolf slept, steal into the house and take what he needed. He laughed at himself for the absurdity, the childishness of the plan. The man's sled dogs would tear him to bits. If he had a gun to shoot them down one by one, he could also shoot Wolf. One more slaying would be nothing.

He wondered why the dogs had not started up their clamor. He had been this way before and on each occasion the beasts had set up a tremendous din long before he was so near. He closed one eye, striving by that gesture of concentration to still his swirling brain. If Wolf were home, his dogs would be home; if dogs were there they should be raising the dead by now.

Perhaps the occupant of that cabin was not Wolf Richards at all! Some one else had stopped there tonight, as his cruiser had been there last night. Relief, with that thought, and on the heels of relief, dismay again. Any one there, any one who knew him, any one observant enough to remember and to describe him would present a fatal hazard.

He started cautiously forward, wondering if the dogs might not be there after all, ready to begin their devilish barking. He stopped, looking back sharply, as he fancied he heard a sound behind. On again, down the slope. He stood a long interval at the edge of the timber, less than a hundred feet from the cabin, watching, listening. No dogs were there; Wolf could not be home. This was some other person . . .

The soft snow covered all sounds of his progress. He could see snowshoes standing against the log wall, a single pair, he thought; if so, only one must be encountered. As he approached the window he held a glove over his mouth because he could not control the stuttering hiss of his breath. He edged along the building to the window, bending forward because of the high banked snow, to see through the half frosted panes.

His heart stopped as he saw her lying there on the cot, and then raced wildly on again. Ellen Richards, the girl behind all this. The girl he had desired and, finding her impossible to possess, the girl whose property he had attempted to acquire through the scheming and treachery which had brought him to the status of a fugitive. He sank to his knees, gloating.

He wanted revenge, in this moment.

Wanted to make her suffer for the suffering which his fevered mind traced back to her now. He would break her pride, her heart, her life, as his pride and heart and life had been shattered! He had been so honest in desiring her at first; he had been so driven by his impulse to have and hold her that its frustration had driven him into this blind alley. And as he reasoned so his want of her became stronger than his aching for vengeance. He wanted her—wanted her.

He looked up at the stars, mouth working. Why not, then? Why shouldn't he take her, the last thing remaining of the life that was behind him? Why couldn't he take her, savagely, ruthlessly, by physical force, driving or dragging her with him into this new phase of existence which lay yonder—somewhere?

GORBEL rose to his feet, a-tremble with this new purpose. It was not good for a man to step out into the unknown alone. He could take this girl with him and ease his suffering by watching her suffer; he could have her near him, some one familiar, some one desirable, to love, to badger, to work for. Impulse after impulse surged through him, conflicting one with another, piling up the resolve about which all centered. He drew his belt tighter with a swaggering motion. A splendid gesture, this, taking Ellen Richards with him!

But after he had entered, after he had revealed himself to her, after he had made his first declaration, doubts began to riot. She did not know what had happened back there in Kampfest tonight, but she would know some time. He had left town, his way unknown to any other, and now he had put himself into Ellen's hands. She was against him, had been bitterly against him for months. If he should fail in this; if he should not be able to drive or drag her . . .

And that was why his voice weakened, why his fingers fumbled at his chin, why his eyes roved restlessly as he told the girl he had come for her and she only stood there, apparently unafraid, suspicious, hostile.

Apparently unafraid, yes, but her courage was solely a matter of appearance. Beneath that exterior she was a-quiver with apprehension. The advent of Gorbel here would alone have been enough to upset and alarm her; but coming as he did, with strained voice, with stammering speech, with that hunted look in his eyes and the declaration that he was here for her gave Ellen a new appreciation of the intensity of fear.

But she could not show that. She needed her resources, unhampered by panic, needed her strength, needed time. Time!

"I came for you, that's what," he ended and, legs suddenly weak, sank into a chair.

She stood a moment, eyeing him, mind groping for possible strategies that could be used in such an emergency.

"For me, Paul?"—gently, wanting to sooth and humor him until she could determine what it might be that had driven this well poised man so far. "And how did you know I was here?"

He did not answer. She stepped past and closed the door, which he had opened. A wild impulse to leap outside, to put on snowshoes and run from him assailed her, but she drove that back. He was weakened, shaken, but that collapse might be only for the moment and with him in possession of anything of his normal strength, she would be helpless in attempted flight.

"How did you know, Paul?" she repeated.

"Eh? Know—know? How did I—" He looked up and some of the old craft came into his face for the moment. "I knew. Never mind how!" He gave a strained laugh. "I knew—"

"But it's so late. You—you look cold; you must be tired. Have you eaten?"

"Eaten?" He licked his lips and stared hard at her as though the words were scarcely intelligible. "Eaten?" He shook his head. "No, not since—not since before— No. I haven't eaten."

"Well, I'll get you something now. I'll fix you a supper, Paul."

He grunted and sat there, staring hard at the table before him, brows drawn as if trying desperately to remember something.

Ellen replenished the fire; she went to the cupboard and took coffee from a shelf, watching him, letting fear come into her face when he could not see. Her hands trembled. Time! She needed time!

The coffee pot was on before either spoke again.

"Wouldn't you like bacon?" she asked. "Wouldn't bacon—"

"You're back of it all," he said quietly. "You're back of it all, you know. If it hadn't been for you, it'd never have happened—any of it."

"Well, can't we talk that over after you've eaten?"

He looked up at her, lips loose.

"Trying to put me off, eh? Don't want to talk about it—that's how you feel." He unbuttoned his coat with a swaggering movement. "Well, you'd better—you'd better talk it over. You're responsible for it all. If it hadn't 've been for you I wouldn't have—wouldn't have done it. I wouldn't be running away now; he wouldn't be lying there. I wouldn't 've shot him if it hadn't been for—"

"Shot him, Paul?" Her interruption was shrill with terror. "Shot who? Who did you shoot?"

She stood against the table, one hand at her cheek, drawing rigidly away from him.

"Who did you shoot, Paul?" she cried.

He laughed.

"Guess!" he said. "Guess. Only I didn't; it *looks* as if I did, but I didn't. They'll think I shot him; they'll find him there in my office and I'll be gone, but I didn't shoot him and the snow covers trails and they won't know. Let them think. I'll be gone with you—out yonder, somewhere, to begin again.

"If it hadn't been for you and that hounding Belknap. The kid'll think I shot him. Damn him, he'll know, like he knows everything else!"

He rose, trembling, breath rattling in his throat.

"He'll *know*, like he knows everything else! He'll know, like he knew I was outsmarting his father! He knew it wasn't his father but me who was driving you out, didn't he? He knew I showed him up to you, didn't he? And he wouldn't stay licked, wouldn't stay down! John Steele! Ha-ha! Galahad, I called him and he said he was—somebody else. John Steele!"

HE LAUGHED again, swaying a bit, struggling for self-mastery.

Ellen's brows were drawn incredulously, her lips parted, her eyes dark with confusion, amazement. She summoned all her guile and spoke.

"I sent him away, Paul," she said. "I fired him when I found out who he was."

"Yes!" He stepped close and she could see the madness flickering deep in his eyes. "You fired him! I knew you would; I fixed that, I did! He couldn't explain that, the fool! He couldn't keep on. And then he came to me and dared me to put him to work and I did, and he walked into the trap and out again. He walked into two traps, and out again without a scratch!" His hands were working and his words slowed. "Without a scratch! And all the time he was closing in, closing in. It wasn't Bradshaw who did it; the poor dumb fool never 'd have suspected me. It wasn't Bradshaw. It was Belknap! But Bradshaw won't serve that warrant—no warrant for arson! It's a serious charge, arson! They'd have sent me away for it. Belknap would! It's better to 've shot him down and get away instead of spending years in prison for arson? Isn't it, Ellen? I didn't lose my head so badly, did I? Smart, wasn't it? Smart to—smart to keep free!"

He looked about slowly, still like a man waking from a bewildering dream.

"Of course, Paul," Ellen said, trying to hold her voice steady, while her heart cried out to go on, to question him, to learn more of the things he had only suggested; those amazing, revealing things which, even in this moment of peril, sent warmth flooding her to replace the weight

of cold which had hung about her heart since that day when she convinced herself that the man she had come to love and had known as John Steele was another.

She put the temptation aside. Time would explain fully if she could extricate herself from this circumstance in which she had found herself.

Gorbel sat down heavily and drew a hand across his eyes in that weak gesture for clarity.

"Of course," he said. "We can begin again somewhere else—you and I." He looked about. "Grub here; guns here; blankets, axes . . . We can hide out. I can hide out, and you'll go with me. I won't be cheated out of everything! Belknap can't take all there is from me! I'll have you, Ellen! By God, I'll have you at last!"

She retreated swiftly as he rose and stepped toward her, stripped for the moment of even her front of fearlessness.

"Stay back!" she cried. "Don't come near me, Paul!"

He stopped with a sorry laugh.

"Still hate me, eh? Well, you'll get over that." He brushed his eyes once more. "What'd I say, just now—a minute ago? What'd I say about Belknap? Mustn't believe it, Ellen. A man gets upset—says things he doesn't mean. Lies! I'm—I'm tired, Ellen. I don't know what I'm doing."

Through her contempt and fright a wave of pity went surging. He did not know what he was doing, did not know what he was saying! A strong man, Paul Gorbel, gone to smash in an emergency of his own creation, buried beneath the ruins of his wicked hopes.

"Of course you're tired," she said. "You've come a long ways. Take off your coat and cap. Sit down here by the fire."

He let her help him and, seated again, he spread unsteady hands to the warmth of the stove.

"Where's Wolf?" he asked after a long silence.

Ellen speculated swiftly, came to a quick decision.

"He'll be back any time. I was waiting for him when you—"

"Don't lie to me!" he cut in sharply. "I know where he is; miles away, after wolves in the Caribou! He won't be back for days." He grinned devilishly as he saw her confusion. "No, he won't be back for weeks, maybe. That's why I came here. Nobody'll know I'm fixed to wait it out in the swamps. Nobody'll know I've an outfit and—and you . . ."

He rose again.

"It's you, I want! You're behind it all. You'll pay, now, Ellen. You'll—"

With a sharp hiss the coffee boiled over and he turned quickly at the sound. The girl, detecting the break in his concentration, snatched at the opening it rendered.

"Here's coffee for you, Paul. Sugar? There's no cream."

He sat down heavily, head in his hands.

"Black!" he mumbled. "Just black."

She poured a great cup of the scalding beverage and he took it clumsily from her. "Careful," she said. "It's hot."

He appeared not to have heard, just sat there with the cup in his hands, staring at the floor. After a time he sipped and he grimaced at the heat. He waited a long time and the girl, standing apart, watched him and watched the clock, listening to the rapid, merry ticking as the piece tolled off the seconds, the minutes. Time!

It was what she needed most; time to work away from this hazard, and then time to unravel the confused skein of statement and suggestion which this man had displayed to her. John Belknap fighting for her? Old Tom Belknap innocent of the things she had believed against him? Warm, she was, at the suspicion, warm and a-thrill, even in that hour of acute danger.

HE DRANK the coffee slowly; she filled the cup again. He appeared to be oblivious of her presence for long intervals. His hands, under the stimulant, ceased to tremble so violently and she thought that perhaps this device for gaining time might work against her.

He drank three cups, scarcely speaking, and another half-hour was gone.

"There," he said, setting the cup on the hearth with a clatter, and rising. "Better, now." He eyed the girl closely. "Where were we, eh? We were— Oh, yes— about you. You're paying; you're paying for not loving me! You've scorned me, you had him wait outside your office and throw me out. Well, he isn't here, now." He advanced. "He isn't in call tonight! He's back there, wondering where the devil I am—and the snow covered my trail."

Ellen retreated as he came forward, heart pounding in her throat.

"Paul!" she cried weakly, but he did not seem to have heard.

"He won't know; you can't call him!" He seized her wrists in his cold grip and drew her close. "We'll leave here together, you and I; just you and I, and—"

"Let me go!" she cried, fighting against his hold. "Let me go, Paul!" She tore one hand free and struck at his face with it, in a paroxysm of fear. "Let me *go*, I say!"

She staggered backward and would have fallen except for the table, as she broke from his hold.

She stood there a moment, one hand on the oil cloth, the other at her throat, watching him. Then, like a flash, she whirled and flung herself against the outer door, tearing it open, crossing the threshold in flight as he cried out and leaped forward.

The girl's strength was no match for his. He caught an arm and dragged her back into the room.

"None of that!" he said evenly. "None of that, Ellen! You've eluded me for long, now. That's over. We're here together—alone."

She circled the room to a far corner and stood there, hands behind her back, while he dragged the table along the wall and placed it against the door.

"There!" he said. "There we are!" He smiled oddly. "I've things to do, Ellen. I'm going on. I've got to get an outfit together. Can't have you running off while I'm busy."

He stood a moment, fingering his chin, looking at her narrowly. Then he laughed.

"I'm going on," he said tensely. "And you're going with me! You're the one thing I've wanted that I didn't get. I almost had all the rest but you. I never came near having you until now." He laughed again, dryly, mirthlessly, excitement in the sound. "And now you've got to go! You've got to go, you see! I can't leave you here, to go back and tell them. I can't harm you, Ellen—I never could harm you—unless you try to get away again."

The girl was fighting for her self-possession, for the use of all her faculties, driving back panic, smothering apprehension. She had no strength or capacity to devote to such emotions now; she needed everything at her command to use in combat with this man.

"Where, Paul?" she asked. "Where are we—where are you taking me?"

"That would be telling!" He snapped a thumb and brushed his eyes, struggling for self-control, as she struggled. "That would be telling. Besides, I don't know. I don't know where we'll go. Away from here, when it's safe to go—anywhere."

"And when?" she asked evenly.

"When the outfit's ready," he muttered.

He went to the cupboard, opened the doors and surveyed the contents. Salt, tea, sugar he took down and carried to the table. He eyed the utensils, next, picking up kettles one by one, examining them, selecting one of the lot eventually, placing it also on the table. A frying pan, a tea pot.

He stood a long time, after that, head cocked, as if listening. His lips moved now and again, but no sound came from them. The girl watched him closely, but he seemed for that protracted interval to be unaware of her presence. He stood, and she waited, unmoving, thinking that she must scream from the suspense; but just at that instant when it seemed that she no longer could hold back sound, he moved and began sorting knives and forks from the box on a shelf.

Flour, next, and other articles, until the

end of the table was heaped with them. After this he started rummaging, peering under the bed, tearing aside the calico hanging at one end of the room to paw over the deep shelves behind it, muttering to himself.

Then, as if he had just remembered that he was not alone, Gorbel asked—

"Where's he keep his pack-sacks?"

Ellen gestured toward the fur loft and tried to speak. The words would not come; the inspiration, the hope, throbbing in her heart, choked them back.

"In there," she finally said.

He passed her, approaching the door of heavy planks, fastened by a stout iron hook, and stopped. For a moment he stared at the door and its fastening, then looked at her.

"You bring the lamp," he said almost gently. When she hesitated he repeated the words with contrasting harshness and his eyes flickered with that insane fire.

WITHOUT response she moved to obey, and he watched her walk to the table, lift the lamp in both hands. He stood aside, shoving the door open to the cold room, and she passed within.

A single pack-sack was hanging from a rafter and he took it down. Ellen started to move out into the other room.

"Wait," he said, and with a queer chuckle went first. "Now you may come," he remarked when he crossed the threshold. "That hook—it'd hold a person in there a long time."

He had seen the opportunity as Ellen had seen it. Oh, upset as he was, Paul Gorbel's mind still pursued its function of guarding his own interests above all else!

He dropped the sack to the floor and surveyed the room a moment, again apparently oblivious of Ellen's presence. Then he walked to the gun rack and took down the rifle.

She had replaced the lamp on the table and stood where he had dropped the pack. Its straps were sprawled across the floor and her hand sped into her pocket, seized the knife there, held it behind her back while she opened the blade. Gorbel raised himself on tiptoe to view better the ammunition on the shelf and the girl stooped cautiously, set the blade against a strap and slashed. The leather strand fell, parted at her feet.

Time was what she needed now; time and daylight. She watched the clock, ticking its way through the growing hours, marking the death of night. Her heart tripped faster than the clicks of the mechanism. Doubts surged and stormed through her consciousness but she tried to drive them back, waiting for the sun.

He selected rifle ammunition, muttering to himself. He gathered his plunder in a pile on the floor and reached for the pack-sack. The dangling strap caught his eye and he cursed savagely.

"Rivets?" he demanded. "Where are the rivets? Where does Wolf keep 'em, eh?"

"I don't know, Paul. I'll—I'll look."

"Look, then!"

She began to look, searching in those places where she was certain rivets would not be kept, using up minutes, counting even seconds so spent as precious. Wolf might come, some wayfarer might come; but daylight would surely come. A girl can take strength from daylight, can command resources which darkness makes unavailable.

Gorbel began to search too, throwing things from shelves, dumping a trunk upside down on the floor, hurling the articles it contained from the heap one by one.

He looked up at the clock and cursed.

"No time to fool!" he snarled, looking at her and wetting his lips, desire mingling with that mad fear in his eyes. "Got to be going, you and I!"

His look chilled her and she turned her face away, making motions toward searching in the table drawer.

Gorbel found the rivets on a small shelf behind the door. He repaired the cut strap of the pack-sack and began stowing the appropriated supplies in it. He had found jerked venison and chewed on a chunk hungrily.

"You must eat," Ellen said, hot with inspiration.

"Eat?" He stared at her, gathering his brows as though the words had ambiguous meaning. "Oh—I'll eat this. I had coffee—the first you'd ever cooked for me."

"No, Paul. If you're going across country, if you're taking me with you, we must eat. We can't take the trail on just coffee, Paul."

"No—not hungry. Haven't eaten since—since God knows when. Yesterday morning, perhaps. Not since he came, the fool. Ah, Baxter bungled! The horse, even, couldn't get him! He'll be coming sometime. But it snowed; snow covers tracks."

The girl made a great clatter with utensils.

"The bacon's in the fur room. Will you get it?" she asked.

Cunning showed in his face.

"That's a stout hook," he mumbled. "Bacon would taste good. You get it."

She took a knife from the table, a long, thin bladed knife; she picked a flashlight from her own pack as he crammed blankets into the one spread on the floor; she went quickly through the door of heavy planks.

Bacon hung from a peeled log that lay across the rafters, but it was not at bacon that the girl looked. Her breath was quick; she gaged the length of that stick. Eight feet, probably; four inches through at its smaller end; stout, slow growing cedar.

The fur room itself was the width of the cabin, but barely six feet in depth. The far wall, like the others, was of stout tamarack logs. She dropped the knife, reached upward, rolled the peeled cedar across the rafters until one end was clear, pulled on it, brought it sliding down.

Gorbel had turned to look.

"Here!" he cried. "Here, you—"

He was getting from his knees to his feet, lunging toward her as she put her shoulder against the door and brought the pole bouncing to the floor. She shoved the far end against the bottom of the far wall, she hugged the other in her arms and swung it in a brief arc, crying out as she set it with a thud against the plank of the closed door, throwing her weight on it.

A greater weight came against the door as she dropped to her knees, and she heard his breath burst from his lungs at the shock. But the prop she had dropped into place held. It held there as she cried, cracking under the strain.

He struck the planks with his fists.

"Open that door, Ellen!" he shouted thickly. "Open it, I say, or I'll beat it down."

He stopped and she could hear him breathing as he listened.

"Open that door, I tell you. I can get in if you won't!"

Yes, she knew he could get in, but breaking down the door would take time—time—the most precious thing she could win.

He tried to break through by lunging with his shoulder again, and failed. He retreated, muttering.

"Stay there, then," she heard him say, "until I'm ready."

She cowered in the darkness, hugging the log which propped the door tightly, sobbing now and then, shuddering, listening to him move and mutter. He crammed the blankets into the pack, thrust smaller articles into their folds, grunting, breath hissing through his teeth, pausing now and again to listen for sounds from the girl, for possible sounds from outside.

And miles back there John Belknap stopped and straightened, pressing hands to the small of his back, aching from the hours of travel in a stooped posture.

Constellations arched above him now, unscreened by clouds. It had stopped snowing long ago. A breath of breeze touched his face and in the east was the first faint herald of dawn.

CHAPTER XXI

MAN TO MAN

PAUL GORBEL hefted the ax carefully. The pack-sack was strapped shut; the rifle, its magazine filled, lay across the table.

"One more chance," he panted. "One

more chance for you to come out. I'm coming in, then!"

The girl did not reply. He swung and the ax edge bit deeply into the hand hewn pine planks. She cried out then in fright, but put more of her weight on the post which blocked the door. His blows fell rapidly, seeking the point of greatest resistance. High up, he struck, ax just grazing the lintel and with each impact the door leaped in its seat and the prop Ellen held jolted despite her hold on it.

He stopped, panting, and reeled a bit. Panic had taken not only strength of mind but strength of body; panic and lack of food and sleep and the night's long flight.

"Open it," he panted. "It's only a matter of time—"

Time. She could hear the clock ticking, ticking, checking off the seconds, the minutes, counting out the hours of darkness. It must come daylight soon . . .

He swung the ax again, assaulting the bolts that indicated the position of the upper hinge. He took his time, swinging deliberately, putting all the force he could summon into each blow. The door began to give a bit under the driving, a space showed between the planks and the stopper. Success gave him strength now. He struck the harder, the faster; the barrier was yielding, sagging inward.

With a sob the girl clutched at the post which slipped as its good angle of purchase was disturbed. She could not get it back into place between blows. She removed her weight from it, tried to shift it. The door, sagging on the lower hinge, tilted inward.

She was up then, backing from him as he stood in the lamplight, long knife in her hand, the other spread across her breast.

"Don't come in here," she whispered. "Don't come in here or I'll—I'll do the only thing you've left me to do."

"Do what?" he asked.

"Anything that will keep you away from me. I'm not going with you, Paul! I'm not leaving this camp!"

"Not leaving?" He brushed his eyes with a hand and laughed. "Not leaving, eh?"

For an interval he stood staring at the girl back there in the shadows. Behind him, the windows were going gray as night yielded to the coming dawn.

"Not going," he whispered, and plucked at his chin with trembling fingers. "Of course you're going."

He strode forward, then stopped as, with a cry, the girl flashed the long blade at him. He recoiled, cursing.

"I could kill you!" he snarled.

"You could, of course!"

"You think I won't?"

"You might. But I'm not leaving this camp."

She had made her choice—the choice of the lesser evil; she did not want to die—she feared death—but to surrender this small advantage she held was the last conscious thing she would do.

He backed away, keeping his eyes on her, out into the other room, out toward the table, extending a hand to grope.

"You think I wouldn't, eh?" He fumbled for the rifle. "You think I wouldn't shoot you down? Well, think again! Leave you here to spread the word? Leave you alive to get back and spoil my twenty miles of covered trail. Today, they can trail. Today a trail'll be an open book."

He looked out into the coming dawn. A light breeze stirred, the stars were gone; thin cloud streamers in the east glowed a lemon color.

"Today it won't snow and—"

He crouched then and his head thrust forward. She heard a ragged breath whistle through his lips as he crept, catlike toward a window, rifle at ready, and she heard the safety click open.

"Belknap, eh?" he muttered, and in the tone was something of savage joy. "Belknap, after me—"

He straightened slowly, spreading his feet. Out yonder, coming down the slope of the old burning toward the swamp was a man. He came swiftly, eyes on the trail before him, a trail now being obliterated by the stirrings of the early breeze. He did not look up; he swung forward with

long strides, intent, with something relentless in his very posture.

The rifle butt slipped to Gorbel's shoulder; his cheek pressed the worn walnut of the stock.

And then the girl was leaping forward, screaming, dropping the knife she held, hurling herself upon him.

Her hands touched his sleeve as the gun roared. She all but knocked him from his feet.

The man swore sharply. He wrenched at the rifle as she grappled for it.

"No, no!" she cried sharply. "No, no! You shan't! You shan't!"

And as he swung her about, almost lifting her from her feet as he wrested the weapon from her frantic grasp, she lifted her voice again:

"Stay back, John! Stay back!"

Clear and shrill, that voice, and she caught breath for another warning scream but Gorbel's palm, hard over her mouth, shut it back. She felt the rifle ripped from her fingers, heard it thud to the floor. Gorbel gathered her in his arms, held her close, ran with her the length of the room and threw her, sprawling, into that dark, windowless chamber. He seized the door, dragged it shut on its sagging hinges and slipped the heavy iron hook into its staple.

He staggered back to where he had dropped the gun, snatched it up and aimed through the shattered window. He had the barest flicker of a man disappearing behind the fringe of timber, could see his tracks where he had run desperately down the slope for the only shelter afforded. He shot again and once more the girl screamed.

OUT THERE in the open burning the sound of that shot, the whine of the wild bullet piercing the air high above his head, stopped John Belknap in his tracks.

He looked, then, for the first time, closely at the swamp edge and saw the snow banked structure nestling behind the fringe of spruces.

He was in a vast area of snow covered country, without stump or tree of sufficient proportions to shelter his body. He whipped Nat's pistol from his pocket, a foolish gesture, and as he realized the futility of giving battle to a screened adversary, as his heart leaped in alarm, he heard a girl's voice lifted. The sound was muffled, but he caught the last words clearly.

It came again, sharp and clear; and then it was cut off abruptly.

Stay back, he had been warned. But why stay back? A quarter of a mile of open lay back of him and before he could cross the sheltering ridge to the southward he would be made a sieve by even the most inaccurate of marksmen.

Shelter was in only one direction, straight on toward that cabin from which his life had been attempted, and he began to run in great, leaping strides—running toward danger to escape danger. At any leap, now, he might be hit. He could not hear the muffled sounds of scuffle within the cabin, could not know that he had seconds of safety. He took the only chance open to him and ran until blood roared in his ears. He hurled himself forward, going far off balance, dived for the screening trees and as he dropped forward, prostrate into the snow, another rifle shot crashed, the bullet clipping a bare birch twig from its branch, in line with where his head had been.

He wriggled through the snow, close in to the cover; he rolled over as the rifle spoke again; he came up against a stump, snuggling close to it, blessing its thickness, and lay quivering in the snow.

For an interval the silence was profound. The breeze had dropped and not a leaf stirred. Only the hammering of John's heart broke that immaculate, terrible stillness.

And then, as his pulses slowed, he made out an odd, indistinguishable sound coming from the cabin. It rose and fell, stopped; began again. Then another, a man's voice, cursing sharply; then a shot.

On that the girl screamed again. His name.

"John! John Belknap! Are you hurt?"

He stiffened at the muffled sound, raised his head in an ineffectual effort to see through the thick growth before him.

"Not hurt!" he cried. "Not hurt!"

The rifle crashed. A bullet tore through the screen of boughs to his right. Another snapped above his head, a third to the left; a fourth went into the stump before him with a heavy sound. Then silence once more.

A woman—a woman who knew him—had given warning; a woman who knew his name and identity had screamed to know of his welfare . . . What woman? He could not recognize her voice in that strained, wild tone, but it could be only one.

"Ellen!" he shouted.

Her answer came from the close confines of the fur room—

"John—John are you all right?"

"Right!" he yelled, raising himself a bit so his voice would carry better. "Is it you, Ellen? Where are you?"

Again the rifle, shooting savagely, aimlessly. Six times, shot after shot, until echoes came ringing back.

"Right!" he shouted again. "Where are you?"

"Fur room—at the east end. Stay safe!" she called. "He has lots of ammunition and is at the window!"

Another voice, then; a ragged, muffled snarl of warning. Gorbel was cursing the girl as he stood peering through the window, waiting for a movement outside while he stuffed cartridges into the magazine.

And on the sound John hunched to his knees, rose to a nearly upright position, pistol in his hand. He could see, now, through the upper branches; he saw a movement within, a shadowy, indistinct movement, and fired. A pane of glass shattered, the figure within shifted quickly; he shot again and his ball tore through the other of the two windows he could see.

John dropped again for shelter and cried out:

"Stay back, Gorbel! I'll drill you, so help me!"

He pressed his body against the stump but the man inside did not reply with words or gunfire. Ghastly silence descended again.

Inside, Gorbel dragged a box behind the stove and sat crouched over, rifle across the cold lids, waiting, watching, licking his lips now and again.

The clock ticked on. Somehow, noon came.

"Hold the old heart, Ellen!" John cried. "They'll be coming!" Again the rifle spoke. "Don't worry! Safe as a babe in a cradle!"

But he was worrying. When darkness came it might bring any one of countless unexpected things, and while he had come for Paul Gorbel, this matter of Ellen's peril was now his paramount concern.

Noon, then, with clouds swimming up from the west; and one o'clock, with their first outriders obscuring the sun. Two . . .

"They'll be coming! He can't get away! I've the east window covered every second!"

Another shot and John, on the echo, sprang up to seek cautious sight of the man. He had had ten cartridges in the automatic; now six were gone. He might need those four.

Three o'clock and four, and the coming gloom of an early, clouded night.

Inside the cabin Gorbel was eyeing his pack. He worked it toward his place behind the stove and, eyes still through the window, fumbled with the straps. He took out all but two of the blankets; he removed a part of the supplies. A man, going as fast as he must go, necessarily travels light. Still, a man can not face winter empty handed.

Snowshoes hung on the wall and he took them down, setting them soundlessly against the window at his back. He licked his lips, straining his eyes toward that strip of timber, waiting. The moment darkness came he would break for it.

JOHN BELKNAP was no longer behind the stump. He had wriggled around it, frightening a hare from where it had spent this day with the noise of men and their weapons so close, and the frost white creature darted through the thick growth before him. He crawled on, over a fallen tree, through low branches until, screened himself, he could see the cabin, with night descending on its small clearing. At this point he lay still for a long time, straining to listen. He had removed his snowshoes.

At first he could make out the spruce tips beyond the ridge of the camp; now they were merged in the gloom. After that he could still see the individual window panes for a time; then these also blurred.

He rose among the branches. He gaged the distance: twenty paces, no more. He bent low and ran for it.

Without snowshoes he sank thigh deep at each stride; he floundered, he wallowed, expecting each instant to see a tongue of orange leap at him, to feel lead tear his body. His only hope was that he would not be crippled before he could return fire. To open on him, Gorbel must expose himself and John was ready to shoot at the first sign which might show. He could not, during darkness, protect Ellen from outside; if he could remove Gorbel's menace from her he knew that the girl could shift for herself. What happened to him was of secondary importance.

But the rifle did not speak. John hurled himself into the soft snow close to the building exultingly. He was safe! He was close enough to hear everything. His battle would be infighting from now on.

He stilled his breathing, shoved the cap from one ear and pressed it against the logs. Sounds from within indicated hasty movement. He heard feet cross the floor, carefully, quickly. Silence for an interval and then other sounds: a jolting, a brief scraping.

These did not come from the floor, he knew; from the northern side of the building, rather, and he hitched himself along on his knees and his left hand, holding the pistol ready for action. He reached the corner and paused, head low above the snow bank. Then, carefully, he looked around the building.

The sounds were more frequent now, a bit louder; the jolt, the rasp, a creak of wood on wood. Gorbel, he determined, was opening a window in the north wall and even as he made up his mind to that, the sash slid backward, gritting on ice in its groove.

Wait, now, John told himself! He thinks you're back there in the brush; he's making his getaway as fast as he can; it won't be long . . .

Nor was it. A laden pack-sack came out, rolling soundlessly into the drift; snowshoes next, tossed so that they remained upended. And then a man's leg appeared, and a man's hip and half of his body and a rifle swung outward as Gorbel heaved himself up on the sill.

John raised himself, strained and tense. His left hand, across his breast, was on the corner of the building. He thrust the other, with the pistol, forward. But even as he made the movement, preparing to cover Gorbel, a foot gave as old crust, buried beneath the new snow, yielded, and he pitched forward. He let go his hold on the logs; he tried to save himself, but he went on down, both hands plunging into the snow.

It was soundless. Gorbel had not seen. But his pistol, John knew, was useless for this emergency, barrel choked with snow. There was no time to draw back now, because the man there was showing himself through the window, hitching himself outward, holding the rifle under his right arm.

With a strangled cry John rushed, bare handed, toward him.

Gorbel was in the act of settling his right foot into the snow, already drawing the other upward, but as John Belknap charged him, he caught the window frame in a fresh hold, ducked his head within and swung the rifle across his breast.

The barrel struck the building, delaying him for that fateful instant, and before he could retrieve it John had both hands clamped on the weapon, was shoving his body against Gorbel's leg, trying to pin it.

Neither spoke, but breath was beaten from each by their struggles. John had a fogged impression of hearing Ellen scream as he strove to clamp Gorbel's thigh against the logs and to wrest the gun from him. He could not do both. The other, with purchase inside, was throwing his body from side to side to add his weight to the strength of his arms. The leg was slipping away and John knew that one of two things must be done: let Gorbel draw that leg inside, or relinquish his hold on the gun. And that last must never be. His own life was directly at stake now.

He let Gorbel get inside, but he clung desperately to the rifle as the other braced his feet on the wall and wrestled. He was drawn close against the building, some of his weight went from his feet at the pulling. He gave up resisting, concentrated on retaining his hold. It was man to man, now, and inside or outside the building the odds lay only in the differences between their strengths and agilities and wills.

Up over the sill he went, scraping the wood; on into the building, knees thudding to the floor. He drew his feet under him as Gorbel, making strange, animal-like sounds in his throat, dragged him the length of the room. Then he was erect, and instead of resisting Gorbel's pull, he shoved the man with all his strength. Reeling backward, Gorbel crashed against the fur room partition, breath exploding from his chest at the impact.

John tried to hold him there, a knee in his groin, while he twisted at the rifle. He felt the other's hold slipping. He wrenched the other way and Gorbel slid adroitly from the pressure of John's body. They swung to the middle of the room, and the stove went over with a crash as they reeled into it.

Ellen Richards's knuckles beat frantically on the hooked door which held her prisoner, and her voice, raised in screams, mingled with the stampeding of those heavy feet.

Around the room again and then, with a jerk and a swing into which he put every ounce of his strength, John swung Gorbel from his balance. The man's right hand slipped in its clutch, came free, but as John whirled to make his claim to the rifle secure, Gorbel's foot tripped him and he fell while the gun went clattering across the room.

He was on his knees in a split instant, but he did not grope for the weapon. He could see in the gloom the other floundering across the floor and fell upon him, striking savagely, seeking for a hold on the throat. An up-drawn foot drove into his stomach and he was thrown free.

THEY clinched and a knee drove into John's groin with a sickening shock. He hung on, face pressed into the hollow of the other's shoulder until the brief nausea ebbed. He was lifted from his feet and flung from side to side as a mink, teeth fast in a dog's throat, might be shaken.

A chair went over and Gorbel tripped. He threw one hand to the wall for support and John drove him down—down to his back on the floor, with young Belknap's weight and strength on top of him; but he would not stay down.

They were up again, locked once more in the darkness, and John could feel the ragged come and go of the man's breath, hot on his cheek.

Toe to toe, slugging with all their strength, the impacts of fists on flesh sounding like the beating of meat with a stick, they stood.

And then Gorbel was on John's throat. How he got the hold the boy never knew. He tore at the locked grip and could not break it. He drove his knee upward with a snap like that of a saw mill "nigger" and though the force lifted Gorbel from his feet his throttling hold did not weaken.

Things were going black. Going black,

with a rasping buzz in his ears. He couldn't let that happen.

He let his legs go limp, he sagged to the floor and as Gorbel dropped to one knee he put the last of his consciousness into a blow at the man's face, flopping over even as he struck. He was free, then, with sweet air flooding his throat and lungs, with the roaring gone from his ears; but as he shoved with his palms on the floor Gorbel kicked, kicked hard at John's head and with a cry and gasp, Belknap was thrown across the floor and against the far wall.

Gorbel bounded the two strides down the room, threw himself to his knees, reached the boards and with a curse, snatched up the rifle.

John knew what was happening. He knew, weakened as he was, that the other had not sought escape but that he was after a conclusive and immediate finish to this conflict. He heard the safety click as he spread his hands to lift himself; he heard Gorbel's cackling, crazy crow of triumph as his own fingers fastened on an ax helve.

An orange streamer leaped toward him; the log above his head splintered; Ellen, on the other side of that partition, screamed just once.

And then he had the ax in his hand, had his eyes on that vague hulk swaying on its feet; was lifting himself to his knees and swinging the ax all in one movement. He let it go, with a jet of breath bursting from his lips, and on the second shot the tongue of flame leaped for the ceiling and before its concussion had died that blurred figure yonder was toppling—crashing to the floor.

John was on Gorbel's limp body with a scramble. He had the hands crossed on the small of the man's back, pinned there by a merciless knee as he stripped his own belt from his waist. He felt the other struggle slightly as he took the first hitch about those hands, but it did him no good.

Gorbel might curse and threaten and thresh the floor with his body. He was bound tightly, securely. He was through!

CHAPTER XXII

THE BOSS OF KAMPFEST

JOHN found Ellen cowering against the wall. He lifted her slowly to her feet.

"It's all right, Ellen," he said gently. "It's all over."

She stared, bewildered, into his face.

"You, John?" she asked, trembling violently. "You? I heard the steps coming toward the door and I was afraid, John . . . I was afraid."

He led her out into the lamplight, which revealed the wrecked room, Paul Gorbel, bound hand and foot in a chair, leaning forward, sobbing, straining with futile efforts against his bonds.

The girl drew back, almost in collapse, now that need for courage was gone.

"Don't be afraid," John said. "He can't get away."

Gorbel looked up at that. A great bruise showed on his jaw where the ax head, thrown as a last resort, had found its mark. He stared at them with eyes which were like those of a pain-crazed animal.

"That's what you wanted!" he croaked. "That's what you wanted—" nodding at them as they stood, John supporting the girl by an arm about her shoulders. "That's why you came, eh?"

"No, Gorbel. I didn't know, or it would have been why. I came with a warrant that Nat Bradshaw tried to serve."

"Bradshaw! A warrant—yes! I'd forgotten that . . ."

"And there'll be another for you by now. For murder, maybe, Gorbel."

"Murder!" Gorbel's voice was a croak and he wrenched his wrists against the stout, unyielding belt. "No, no! That can't be! No murder! It was a mistake, I tell you, Belknap! Mistake, I tell you . . ."

They did not hear the opening of the door, did not see Wolf Richards's amazed and truculent gaze sweep his room with its wrecked stove, the smashed chair, the littered floor; did not see him stare at Paul Gorbel or at them.

But as he stepped in and stamped snow from his feet they sprang apart, wheeling toward him.

"'S all right!" he yelped. "'S all right! Don't mind me, young uns! Hell to pay here, I see! Place ruint! Paul Gorbel under my roof where I'd never have him. Tied up, too, which means somethin'. Come home to find my camp full of folks an' ruint like it's never been. But 's all right! Nothin' matters but what ails you two, for sure! Nothin' else matters a-tall!"

IT WAS noon when that strange procession made its way into Kampfest, John Belknap in the lead, Wolf Richards behind him, dogs and toboggan with its bound and bundled burden next, and Ellen walking in the trail they made.

The town swarmed about them until John had to call on others to clear the way.

By one o'clock wires had commenced to sing and the next morning's newspapers told the story in bold headlines for Harrington to read in the Belknap Lumber Company offices, for others to read the world over—some in a Paris hotel.

Harrington could not get John the first dozen times he called because the boy, with Ellen in the corridor outside, sat at the bedside where Nat Bradshaw fought for his life.

"Tell them I'll answer no phone calls," he whispered to Ellen. "That goes until Nat is—until a change comes."

And so other telephone calls had time to be made, even calls which spanned the ocean; and more time for more editions to tell more of the story, because Ellen answered questions patiently, painstakingly.

It was evening before the doctor, who had leaned over the bed with such concentration for so many minutes this time, straightened with a sigh.

"Well," he said, "it looks like a go!" He smiled.

"You mean he's going to make it?" John whispered.

The other screwed up his mouth and hemmed softly. The head on the pillow moved; the eyes opened and looked up at them, blinking.

"Course, Johnny," Nat whispered. "Sure thing . . ."

And then a boy could be free to ease a distracted central, to sit in the hospital office and converse on Harrington's methodical plan of conversation.

"I guess the newspapers had it all, then," John said, after he had listened patiently. "I'm all right; Nat's going to live; we're all set here, and I guess you've spent enough on tolls."

"Tolls! Wait until you see the toll bill for a talk I've had with your father today!"

"What! You talked to— Is he back in this country?"

"Back nothing! He's in Paris and read the bulletin in the *Herald's* edition over there. A son of Tom Belknap can't put on a stunt like that and not get on to the cables, Johnny! He got me by the telephone and, luckily, the afternoon editions were coming off so I could give him some detail.

"He says, first, that he's on his way home on the next boat. Next, he wants me to read you a letter that he left with me to be opened in case—well, in case a cathedral fell on him, was the way he put it. Here goes. Ready?"

"Shoot!"

"It's dated in December, the day he left. He wrote it just before you came in from Witch Hill, I guess.

" 'Dear Johnny: If you read this it will be because the doctors overlooked a lot of shakes and blow-downs when they cruised my insides two weeks ago. I've kept my mouth shut about being under the weather; time enough to worry folks when there's a cause, especially your mother. They tell me that three months of rest will put me spry again. I hope they're right for a lot of reasons, but only one of them frets me much.

" 'This is because if I hit the grade for the last time now you are going to beat me to finding out just how big a monkey I've been made in the Kampfest operation. Yes, son, things are wrong up there. I

guess you were right in your estimate of Gorbel. For over a year I've been certain that a plenty is being put over on us. I can't run it down now; that is a job for a well man. I'm going off to get well so I can fix what I broke.

" 'If there's one thing I've prided myself on it was the picking of men. I took Gorbel on, first, because he had a hold on just the layout you and I needed for the big job and, second, because—spite of all of you—he looked good to me. Opposition made me bullheaded.

" 'There are some men who can admit mistakes, but a Belknap hates to. When we have to, though, we want to do it ourselves and not have somebody else finding out what fools we've been. Besides, any man with a son like you wants to be able to turn over the works to him without any messes to clean up. I don't even want you to guess that there's a mess until I get it fixed up. Then I can tell you and save my face. That is straining a point, perhaps, but if you ever have the sort of a son you should have—such a son as you are to me—you'll get the idea that the admiration and respect of a boy will keep his old dad dusting to be worthy.

" 'The thing that I especially want to keep is the look that used to be in your eye when I used to drag you by the hand around through mill yards and along skid roads. You were only about hoppergrass high, then. You'd get hot in summer and cold in winter; the flies would bite you and you'd be tired and hungry. But it was always all right with you. Anything I did was all right. You believed in me. For you, I was durned near infallible and able to do anything I set out to do. I've got to hang on to that, Johnny; it's the real treasure I've had in life.

" 'You'll be in soon. For the second time I'm going to steer you away from Kampfest. It's going to break your heart and mine, too. But you're not going to show it; neither am I. The reason is that we're Belknaps and the breed doesn't show hurts or affections much. It feels a lot, though, and so if the doctors are wrong and you have to get your explanation this way, please believe that I'm hurting you so I can have a chance to wash the clothes I've dirtied and by doing so keep your respect. A Belknap has never yet yelled for help; a Belknap has never yet held a grudge.

" 'And above all, you must realize this: that an old man has a devil of a time playing up to what a father of a son like you should be. I'm so proud of you it keeps me awake nights. Good luck; God bless you.' "

Harrington paused.

John blinked his eyes and cleared his throat with a brave, long *hur-r-rump!*

"I'll—I'll," he began. "I guess I'll be damned!"

"But you should have heard him cheer, clear across the Atlantic, when I told him what the afternoon papers said, about all the double-crossing you'd forced Gorbel to confess. I think, John, he'd been crying a little.

"And he said for you to stay right there in Kampfest and run the job, and that he was coming to ask for a chance to help—that's just what he said—to ask for a chance to help—as fast as boats and trains can bring him. Says that he feels fit as a fiddle and had already booked passage two weeks earlier than he'd intended.

"You can use your own judgment, of course, but I don't know as I'd make any important changes until he gets here."

John reached out for Ellen's hand.

"How long will it take him?" he asked, commencing to smile.

"Why, not long; ten days, say."

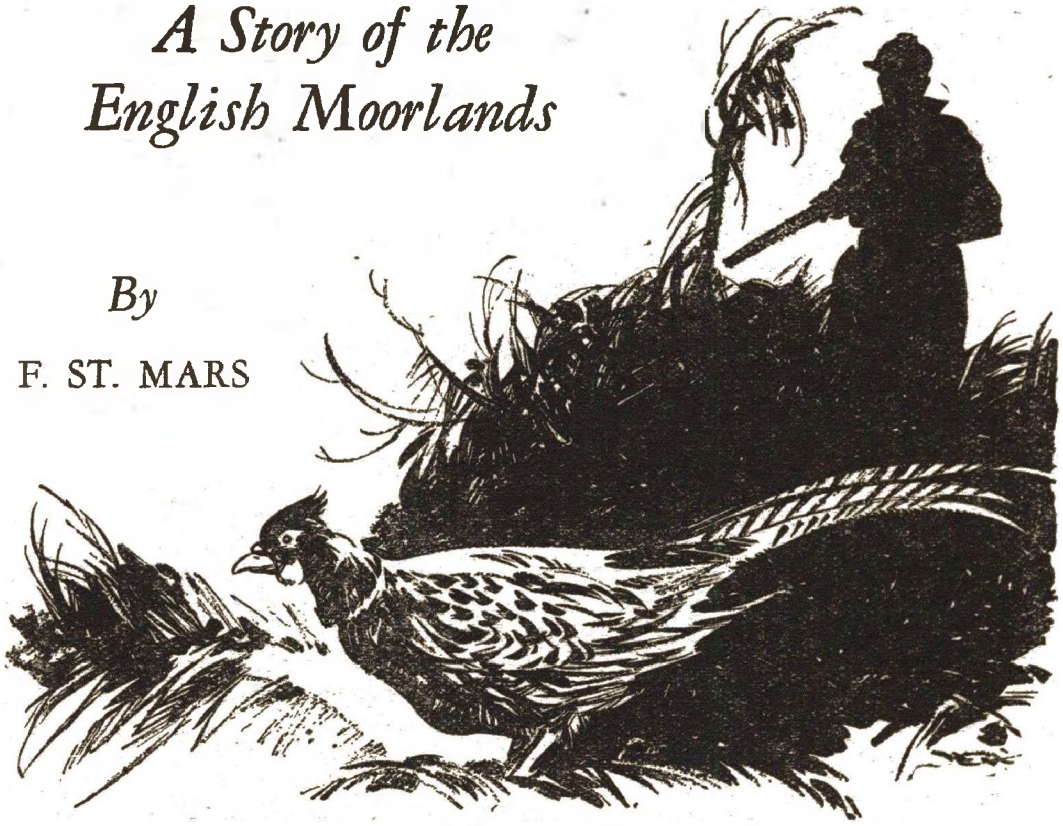
"Ten *days!* Don't you call that long? What's that?"—leaning closer to the phone as the wire went bad for a moment. "Oh—the job! Sure, the job can stagger along for ten days without any changes. But there are other things, up here, Harrington, so important that they make the job look like a joke. And ten days? Man, for these other things, ten days is ages . . ."

THE END

A Story of the English Moorlands

By

F. ST. MARS



The BRONZE IDOL

THERE walked a golden sovereign in the sunshine, and it was only worth half a crown. Moreover, to get it, you would have to expend a cartridge which cost twopence. Nay, more, for already cartridges had been expended upon it, but it was still there. In all the pride and pomp of its uniform it flashed there: metallic helmet gleaming green, blue and purple; scarlet cheek guards; tunic, orange-red, purple, yellow, brown, black and green, reflected and positive; long train of eighteen divisions, of which the middle one was the longest, and snow white necklace—the whole effect being generally of bronze surmounted by a green "winged hat," as Mr. Kipling would say, such as the Vikings wore. My, what a regalia for a king!

And he was a king, too, in his way, ruler, with other kings, of many thousands of acres of the greatest empire in the world, though really only a bird, the above being, on my word, simply and truly the colors of a fine old cock pheasant, who had cost a pound to rear, under a hen, and now was worth a bare half-crown of any man's money.

Kings, however, have enemies; assassins are abroad at every hour of night and day, and though big, bronzed, six-foot police with guns, and in livery of velveteen, were patrolling their king's realm night and day, they could not always keep him shadowed, he being a wayward and capricious monarch.

With proud, haughty stride he strutted across the clearing, and all the little erring

sunbeams that had escaped through the branches combined together to make him a wonder and a glory under his palace roof of amber and pink and purple and bronze, supported by a thousand gray columns and carpeted with gold. Yet in such a setting our king was not conspicuous. Rather he harmonized in his robes with his surroundings, for every hue in his magnificent robes was duplicated somewhere or other in his palace, save one. There was no white there, not a touch of marble anywhere; and the white circlet on his neck, which was the Order of the Dragon, and proved his ancient Chinese descent, was conspicuous therefore. *It*, and not the bird, caught the wandering eye on the instant and held it. There lay the danger. That white was a fine mark for the assassin's eye.

Suddenly there rang through the shaded, arched chambers of state the quick, sharp challenge of a sentry. Another took it up, and a third, till the silent, columned halls fairly rang with the thrilling alarms, as, one after the other, they hurried by, the blackbird guards of the outer gates, in uniforms of jet with daggers of pale yellow, to the place of the original challenge.

At the first sound the king among the bushes turned to a carving in bronze—head up, one foot up, immovable, rigid. Once he blinked an eye, in that odd, wise way some birds have. It was necessary. Otherwise you would not have known he was alive.

Meantime the guards of the outer gates increased the racket and drew nearer. The alarm, whatever it might be, was approaching.

The king, without moving, glanced up, but the bushes met overhead in a thick basket work. Even he, past master at the game as he was, could not rise—though he might come down—through that. He would have looked behind, for even a king may run—and few as well as he—but the sudden soft chiding of a little wren told him there was danger there also. Nothing remained, therefore, but to freeze where he was and trust to luck. He froze accordingly, and as he did so he noticed that whereas there had before been three rabbits in sight, feeding off hazel leaves, now there was none. They had vanished like smoke.

Like smoke, too, came the assassin, soundless, sinister, almost seeming to swim along. Only its eyes, the cruel, yellow-green orbs with the vertical black slit, showed at all plainly. The rest was a shadow. But shadow or not, it was a cat, and the king knew it, as who of the woodland folk does not?

Then the king did a clever thing, but you must please yourself whether you call it intentional or not. Very gradually, so gradually that I defy any one to have seen that he moved, his head sank. His neck shut down telescope-fashion, after the manner of birds, and the white collarette, the Order of the Dragon, the one conspicuous thing about him, faded and went out. As a matter of fact, the other neck feathers had shut down over it.

What followed was strange and awkward. Although he was bolt upright, save for his neck, the cat did not see him at all. She walked right up to him and, suddenly, within twelve inches, started and crouched motionless. She had smelled him!

THE KING was wonderful. He moved as much as a stone. He kept his head grandly, though the strain must have been almost unbearable. The guards of the outer gates were cursing aloud overhead, and a page, in doublet of salmon-pink and white, and soft leaf-brown, which was a chaffinch, rushed up to help them. I don't know whether they saw the king. I doubt it. The cat certainly did not; though she was so near and looking straight at him, she did not see him.

Then she did.

The king had moved, blinked an eye, tightened a feather, or something. It was ever so little, but enough. The spell was broken, and the cat drew back and flattened, without saying anything.

Next moment, with a rush, she charged, and then—and then . . . I like to think

of what the king did then. I should like some members of Parliament to have seen what the king did then.

The cat was aware of something resembling a shrapnel shell, with feathers and legs and spurs bursting in her face, but she was aware too late. It was so utterly unexpected that she had no fraction of time to prepare against it, and those who misjudge character in the wild, like the beloved of the gods, die young.

She felt as though an electric spark touched her twice on the face and once on the chest. Then she invited herself out of that attack gone wrong by the undignified but quick expedient of rolling over sidewise—while the king danced a royal Highland Fling on her ribs, it seemed—up on to her feet, and away. She had no wish to go back and renew the argument. She had reasons, two on her face, one on her chest, and some small affairs along the ribs, red, angry reasons, growing redder and more angry every instant—though you never would have believed if you had not seen them, how hard a pheasant's spurs, with a good lusty old cock behind them, can strike.

As for the king, he ran to clear ground—where, be it whispered, I guess he knew as well as you and I that he could rise if the cat came again—and flapping his wings, crowed like the boastful old rascal he was, crowed like a good 'un; while in the silent intervals, from afar through the woods, the black guards of the outer gates could be heard escorting, not at all quietly, the assassin from the precincts of the palace.

Thereafter the king stalked to his banquet. Among a horde of blue and gray wood pigeons, but newly arrived from the continent, he scrambled, in most unkingly fashion, for beechmast and acorns. After, out into a field he strode, passing on the way a nest with an egg in it, erected high on four sticks, which was so obviously not a place that any but a mad bird would build in, that one felt no surprise on learning that the egg was the bait to a trap set by his own bodyguard—but we call 'em gamekeepers—for the entertainment of that most beautiful person, the jay, who might, in a fit of absent mindedness, mistake a royal pheasant's egg for—well, an acorn, shall we say?

The field was a stubble, where, a month or two ago, he had feasted at ease on plenty, but this evening was obliged to take what the sparrows had left of the gleanings. And do you know how much the sparrows leave? About as much as is left of a "fag" end when the street arabs have finished with it. This field, however, became distasteful to his royal self after, hearing a rustle, he lifted his head and beheld the gleaming eyes and shark-like snout of the biggest, boldest, baldest old devil of a rogue rat he ever imagined or dreamed of, turned toward him, watching.

An inspection of a devastated bumble bees' city in a bank, that a field mouse had raided; a stroll round the spot in a quiet "ride" where his bodyguard should have put his food an hour before, but where his wives—not more than eight; and his children—but that's the king's business, anyway—and two carrion crows had been and gone again before him; a lazy scratching at an ants' nest, which gave up a few ants' eggs; and a leisurely inspection of a ploughed field, far too much inhabited for his taste with thirty-three circling, wheeling gulls, nine fat partridges, and a rook, where he discovered some wire worms which he consumed. And then he was discovered by a hen sparrow-hawk, hunting at the speed of forked lightning, who nearly consumed him.

After his round for supper, the king, being a very thirsty king, repaired to a stream to drink, but was careless and forgot to look behind him when his beak was down. The result was a long, lean, leggy, reddish body shooting over a last copper bar of sunshine near at hand; a blow that knocked him head-over-heels into the shallows, and a madly desperate leap upward on whirring wings—mind, he had had no warning to prepare him to act—out of reach of a grinning lurcher dog, across whose slobbering jaws he could see one of the most beautiful and cherished of his own tail feathers reposing.

FROM a great height he volplaned on his short, rounded wings, down the length of the serried pine hangar, crashed into the dark depths of the wood in a manner that seemed sheer suicide to an outsider, and came to rest on the scented carpet of generations upon generations of pine needles beneath. For three minutes he remained like a bird carved out of lacquer, then he walked away, moving quietly and by devious paths, to a certain oak; paused a moment, crouching and, with a whirr and a shout that told all the wood where he was, flew up to roost on a low bough.

A lean, dark snout, with glistening nose, the reddest of lolling tongues, and fangs that shone like new worked ivory, shot out of a bramble tangle close at hand, regarded him with keen, intelligent eyes for a moment, and shot back again. The snout had come forty seconds too late. Its owner knew the fact, but, being a fox, its owner also made a mental note of the place, pheasant kings being, as he knew, rather conservative about selecting the place for their royal couch.

The pheasant did not see, or perhaps he did. I do not know. Anyway, he must have laughed, if he did, at the sudden soundless fading away of the fox, and the rather less soundless appearance of one of his velveteen clad bodyguard a few seconds later. But the fox had forgotten one thing, two things, two reminders that he had passed that way—one a clear impression of his clean paw on a soft place, where a month later the woodcocks would come to probe; the other a scent, not violets exactly, which the keeper noted at the same moment as his eyes saw the footprint.

He grinned and passed on silently; the fox grinned from the heart of a bush a hundred yards off, and the pheasant seemed to have a perpetual haughty grin when his beak was shut and his eyes nearly so. But the one who grinned most of all was the poacher, flat to earth among the nodding, old gold bracken, who had seen them all.

Then night came, sweeping eastward over the treetops, and an owl hooted far away in the gloomy depths of the hangar.

How long the pheasant had been asleep I know not, but he was not half a wink getting fully awake again. Something had done it, though. There was a sound of claws scratching upon bark. He heard it plainly, and felt it too, I think, through his body, for trees carry sound as vibrations throughout their whole length.

A half moon hung poised high above beyond the gaunt branches. Not a thing moved. The stillness was the stillness of a well—dank and cold.

Beyond taking his head out from under his wing the pheasant had not moved. He knew better. He looked like a bunch of leaves as he was, and that was his best protection.

The sound came again—scratch, scratch, scratch. It was coming up, working toward him. If it was merely a squirrel, no odds. But what if it were not?

He craned his neck. He peered over. The gray column of the tree bole, lighted on his side by the moon, ran straight down into a sea of darkness; and up out of the darkness, slowly, very quietly, came a head. He saw the reflection of the moon in its amazingly bright eyes. He beheld the flash of a sulphur-yellow shirt front. And no more was needed. He knew the title of that gentleman in evening dress who called during the dark hours. They had met before once or twice. The visitor was a butcher by trade, official slaughterer to Dame Nature, one not to be trusted by night or day—a long, cruel stoat.

Up went the pheasant's head, out went his neck, down dropped his tail, and the stoat, startled by the movement, flattened instantly to the rough bark against which he clung. His eyes told him now what his nose had been telling him all along. The question was: had he been seen?

There are few things more terrible than the grim determination of the stoat when once he has set his heart on a victim. Risking death by many nasty ways is a trifle to him. Also, all stoats, weasels and ferrets seem to accept falling as part of

their daily life, like washing. And this explains how the stoat came to kick himself off from the trunk of the tree in a last reckless effort to reach the pheasant as he flew. What is more, too, he did reach him, or part of him anyway, and for a few seconds the spectacle of a cock pheasant blundering crazily along through the branches, towing a stoat pinned to his long tail behind him, astounded the night and the moonlight.

Then a feather of that useful long tail—specially designed, I take it, to attract the eye of an enemy and cause him to spring short, and to come out conveniently, like the tail of a lizard, when required—gave way, and down went the stoat, all claws abroad, teeth set, grimly silent, still gripping the feather, crashing headlong through the twigs.

EVERY creature in the wild is the last word in improved design for the life required. If the pheasant had been fitted with the wings of a gull, he would have broken them a dozen times in that blind retreat, and fallen to the many deaths ready waiting for any wounded one beneath. His short, strong, rounded wings, whirring, carried him through, smashing headlong, hoping for the best, till he fetched up in a larch tree, and hung on, dazed and on the borders, it seemed, of a heart attack.

But very strange are the wild folk, and hard to understand from our point of view. This one was asleep before he appeared to be out of danger of being choked by his own tumultuous breathing, which only shows that distress of the body in a bird does not necessarily mean distress of the mind.

The king's rest was, however, short-lived. Another sound awoke him an hour later—the crack of a dead twig, which sounded like a pistol shot in that utter silence. Already unstrung a little, he was awake in a flash, peering down furtively. Not at all anxious to move in the horrible darkness, but half afraid to stay.

He saw a dark form pass underneath. It kept carefully to the shade, and it was followed by another. No eyes were needed to tell the pheasant what *they* were. No wild creature makes so much noise going through the wood. They were men, and not only men, but poachers, one of them the poacher who had watched him fly up to roost.

He saw them make straight for the tree he had just left and, halting exactly beneath the bough that had formed his royal couch, produce a tiny kind of stove. To this they fitted a chimney, a telescopic one, which, when extended and manœuvered into position, would have come close beneath his sleeping form. Then, with guarding hands and a coat to hide it, a match was struck, something within the stove that spluttered was lighted, and a most infernal, acrid smoke poured out of the top of the extended telescopic chimney. They intended, though he did not know it, to asphyxiate him while he slept, and cause him to drop incontinently and helpless into a sack, held ready open beneath for his reception. A plot, this, worthy of even his rank, and one needing but one thing for its successful completion—the pheasant, easily seen by getting him against the moon—and he wasn't there.

He heard the men curse suddenly, moving about to place each branch of the tree between them and the moon.

"I'll swear any money ye like as I seed 'im a-roostin' on that very branch, Bill." The voice sounded plainly enough in the damp, chill silence, though no more than a stage whisper. Then:

"Well, 'e ain't there na', anywhichways abart it," came the angry reply. "O Lor! Look!" A pause; then, "It's 'im as 'as done it, th' beggar!"

They had brought the enraged and amazed stoat, who had returned to the tree to see if the pheasant had had a bed fellow, in silhouette against the moonlight, and he, transfixed with horror at his position, and the acrid, sulphurous fumes hurting his sensitive nostrils, glared down at them motionless. But only for a moment.

Came a swift drumming of feet on the hollow earth, a lean lurcher dog shot up panting, and:

"Billo! Some blighter's abart. The dawg sez so," quoth one of the men.

And they vanished back into the darkness that gave them birth, just as a keeper's whistle blew shrilly among the arched aisles, and the report of a gun sounded, crashing thunderously from somewhere in the heart of the wood.

Followed that till dawn only the whispering, mysterious silence of the night, and the old cock pheasant slept undisturbed, as he—but not we—could.

The day had long since broken; the raw, red sun was up, and the mists were peeling off the hollows like smoke, when the old cock pheasant arose, flew down, flapped his wings—you could hear 'em a quarter of a mile away in that wonderful morning air—and crowed harshly. Dozens of other cock pheasants were doing the same thing, had done the same thing every morning, but how were they to know that this morning was to be different from all other mornings to some, one not to be forgotten easily by all?

The king passed, creeping cautiously and wonderfully low and self-effacingly for so large and gorgeous a bird, to the stream. He was never very far away from water of some sort, by the way, for he was, as has been said, a thirsty king.

He drank, with the clear, limpid, crystal water, that had come unpolluted straight from the chalk downs, flashing like strings of diamonds from the tip of his dainty beak, and his shadow frightened those other shadows, the speckled trout, as he did so.

Then his right eye fell upon something swimming across the stream lower down. It might only have been a water rat, of course, but, on the other hand, it might not. In the wild those who leave anything to chance are not desirable applicants for a life insurance policy, so to speak. Moreover, *do* water rats follow one another in line across a stream? He crouched.

NEXT thing he knew was some beasts flinging themselves upon him in a long, wavy line. He cut one flying with his spurs, and fled, running—there was no room to rise—through the undergrowth, and the enemy, which were small, chased him like a pack of yapping terriers. But they soon gave it up. They were only a family party of weasels on the warpath, and had not the slightest intention of attacking a full blown cock pheasant, only this one happened to be in their path, and they thought he was asleep.

Beech mast, in company with the polite, blue foreign wood pigeons, eggs from an ants' city of pine needles and easily scratched over, and some buckwheat—of which he was inordinately fond—spread by the hand of one of his velveteen slaves in a sunlit, well trimmed "ride," completed his breakfast. Then for an hour or so he indulged in a sun-dust-Turkish bath at the side of a dry bank, with other royalty for company.

After this he made his way to a little old woodland farmyard, where were stacks of corn, but he had the foolishness to dispute rights of feed with a mangy, scarred old buck rat, who suddenly slashed upward with his yellow chisel teeth, in that shark-like way rats adopt, and cut several beautiful bronze feathers, to say nothing of quite half an inch of skin, out of the amazed king's breast. That, by your leave, is what comes of consorting with bad company, and the king disgustedly hied him to a stubble field where, if the local pigs and pigeons and poultry had not gone too far, he ought to find grain. To his scandal, however, he found the place given over to the vulgar last-named, who apparently lived in a house on wheels of their own, that had been dragged from the farm to that spot for their benefit.

However the sight of the burnished pheasant strutting, with kingly but insolent pride, in the blazing sun and the midst of his harem was too much for the irritable barn door rooster, and his evil genius prompted him to crow a

challenge at the stranger within his gates.

And it was answered. Oh, yes, it was answered right properly, and just about as quick as you could—if you can—wink.

There seemed to be no interval between the finish of that "Cock-a-doodle-do-o!" and the arrival of a blazing whirlwind, which knocked that cock bird clean off his molehill (not dunghill) and enveloped him.

It was a dry day and a cold one, and the dust rose around the combatants, conspiring with the whirled-up dead oak leaves to obscure the view of that fight, even from the ten-guinea seats, so to speak, which the hens occupied. Then it didn't. It sank, leaves and dust and all, and—well, the cock pheasant was clapping his short, strong wings, and crowing his strange, harsh crow lustily on tiptoe; that was all. And the barn door cock, the domestic challenger? He? Oh, he was lying all doubled up on the short, sharp stubble, and his side, and the red of his fine notched comb was not anything like so red as his life's blood, that was soaking the ground and soiling the pale golden stalks beneath him. Verily are the spurs of a fine old cock pheasant terrible weapons to fall foul of on a fine October morning.

Then the whistle came. From far out across the blue-gray, gold and brown, and dark green fields it sounded—a long, shrill, metallic whistle. It was answered by another, another and yet others, until at last the very field in which the king's pæan of victory was waking the echoes resounded to its alien note, causing every one of the wild folk to evaporate back into the landscape, and the domestic ones to stare stupidly.

It was nothing—only the gamekeepers driving the pheasants back into their own coverts, in order that they should not wander too far from the guardian angels in velveteens, and foolishly get themselves shot by farmers out rabbiting, make a free meal for the wandering gypsy, turn themselves thoughtlessly into cats' meat, or save the innocent shepherd's dog the necessity of stealing the butcher's bones.

He had been used to those sounds lately, our king, and had rather despised them; but he had never known such furious whistling as that morning brought forth. He turned superciliously and strutted—entirely unhurried, mark you—back into the covert. There the cave-like silence, broken only by the *tap-tap-tap* of a woodpecker hammering his breakfast from wood, and the rancorous voice of a jay on the lookout for trouble, were more to his liking.

Here, for the next hour or so, he amused himself frightening the life out of any young cock pheasant unfortunate enough to get in his way—the covert seemed strangely swarming with them this morning; ignoring the sedate crouching hens with a fine contempt; delving for roots and tubers of rare taste; watching a grinning, agony twisted stoat extended on that modern rack, a steel jawed trap, set for *his*, the king's, good, by those modern inquisitors of his, the gamekeeper guard, to exterminate his assassins—beautiful forms of life all, whose only fault was that, being flesh eaters, like ourselves and the men who slew them, they had to live somehow.

Corn he found in an outlying, woodland enclosed, corn rick, and grubs by scratching under an oak tree, where the wood eating caterpillars had dug vaults in the ground, wherein to become mummy-like chrysalids, and there was a tiny lonely field of mangel-wurzels, wherein he—hum!—quite considerably lowered the population of the grubs of Messrs. Agriotes Lineatus & Co., that precise beetle whose young are better known in the vernacular as wire worm.

THEN a man and a big black dog and a double barrelled gun appeared all together and quite suddenly, and the king, picking up his train, so to speak, crouched and ran low, with proud head well down, all along the row of mangel-wurzels in which he found himself, to the wood, and mighty pleased he was to get there, too. He never rose on wing when dealing with men

if he could help it, for, mind, he was an old bird, and could give you one or two reasons why, if you are a pheasant, you shouldn't.

But the king was no sooner in the wood than his quick sense of suspicion and his ripe experience warned him of a difference. (He hadn't liked the look of that man-dog-gun trio anyway.) The wood was not at all still, as it should be. Away up the hill—it ran up a steep hill, that wood—the pigeons were rising one by one and hurrying away high over the valley, with that staccato clap-clap of the wings which all the wild knows is a sure sign of danger; the rabbits were beginning to move about restlessly, as if something were forcing them where they didn't want to go; the jays had given one wild exhibition of foul language, and shut up absolutely; a hare—what was *she* up to in a wood, I wonder?—with ears flat and eyes a-stare, bolted past, going like the wind. More than one hen pheasant showed like a wraith of the woods, creeping unobtrusively in the same direction, and an old cock came by, crouching, working off to the right, as one seeking a private way out.

Not till our cock saw that other cock there did he show alarm. Then he did. He stood for a moment motionless—erect, listening, and what he heard settled it. *Tap-tap-tap! Tap-tap-tap-tap-tap—tap-tap!* It came from everywhere up the hill, that ceaseless, quiet tapping, and from nowhere down the hill. Twigs cracked. Some one whistled a dog. Somewhere to one side a single outlying pheasant rose like a rocket; there was a pause, during which the whirr of its wings could be heard, growing fainter and fainter out over the valley below, then, from far down at the end of the wood, the single report of a gun, and—the whirr stopped.

About this time our old cock pheasant began to run. All running that we have seen him do before counted for nothing. It was slow by comparison. He raced, fairly raced, like a long bronze streak, head and body and tail all in the same line, not downhill away from the mysterious tapping, but acrosswise, toward the edge of the wood.

He knew perfectly well what to do, for this wasn't the first pheasant battue at which he had attended officially, though it was the first that year. And he had almost forgotten the experience he had learned, though it came back into the little tiny bird brain of him, under his metallic green Viking helmet, in streaks.

The others, save for a few very quiet and cautious old cocks, didn't seem to know what to do a bit, especially the young "this year's" cocks and hens; they were running all ways at once, so to speak, losing their heads with panic—which, among sheep, horses and men is so infectious—and getting in anybody's and everybody's way except the beater's, whose terrifying tapping was drawing slowly nearer at every second, pushing the crowd steadily, almost one might say stealthily, before them.

The king knew from bitter experience—he had a scar on his right thigh to this day to remind him—that anything was better than letting himself be thus driven to the bottom end of the wood, outside which would be drawn up the waiting line of guns. He dashed for the side. He could see it. The light shining through from the fields without was plainly in sight. There was nobody there. He charged on, hope rising within him at every stride, and—stopped so utterly instantaneously that his head and neck seemed to have been literally telescoped through his resplendent body. At the same moment he appeared to have evolved out of thin air a most infernal jangling of bells—the wild folk loathe a bell—and dancing of bunches of golliwog-like feathers suspended apparently in space.

It must be admitted that the way the king picked himself up in that instant—all shaken as he was—and fled frantically in the opposite direction, was worth seeing; only there was nobody there in that place to see him, save for two perfectly daft rabbits, and they were past noticing anything. As a matter of fact he had simply run into what is known as a stop

net, which, as its name explains, was placed there to prevent cunning old cock pheasants like himself from sneaking away in the direction they were not wanted to go.

By the time our pheasant had got to the other side of the wood—he collided with one terrified stoat, one rabbit and a half-crazed young hen pheasant by the way—the beaters and their infernal eternal tapping sticks were not fifty yards away. Then he made a bolt for it, and almost ran into the legs of a boy tapping there with a stick. He had been placed at that spot to act, like the net on the other side, and prevent the cunning old pheasants from sneaking away at that point, because you can not place your guns all round a covert, you know.

That last shock rather did it with the king, and he felt sickish, I fancy. He blundered off into the undergrowth, and stood blinking and looking half dazed. His brain didn't work very quickly, and this last shock had rather cornered him. For a minute or two he didn't know what to do, and all the time those unspeakable tap-tapping keepers were drawing nearer and nearer, and the denizens of the wood —pheasant and rabbit and weasel and jay and stoat and rat—were tearing past him, half crazed with fear and dismay.

Then he took his courage in both claws, so to speak. He was always a high spirited bird at any time, and he had not got victories single handed over a cat, a weasel, a rat, a pet dog, and goodness knows how many domestic cocks and undomestic cock pheasants to his credit for nothing. Moreover, go down to the guns he would not.

He put his head down and, running low and keeping out of sight as much as possible, *he charged straight at the line of beaters* as hard as he could go. It was splendid, and I like to think of him then, as he tore along, his little feet fairly winking, his tail streaming out behind. And as he ran he heard the first whirr of the rising pheasants below, and the first crashing fusillade that met them.

Then he hit the right hand legging of one of the beaters—*smack!* It was only a glancing blow, and would not have mattered, but the man put his hand down among the brushwood, to see what it was, and the king hurled himself at it, spurring like fury. The hand was removed quickly, nicely gashed by his spurs, and with a flutter and a crash, up rose the grand old cock pheasant, right out of the amazed beaters' line.

Bang! Bang!

He saw the little wicked stabs of flame below; he heard the hail of small shot whimpering and hissing all around—a keeper had remained with the beaters in case of anything of this kind happening—but he kept on and on unscathed, rising and gathering speed every instant, till, going like a cannon ball, and far out of any gun shot, he hurtled downwind above the crashing holocaust, where his foolish fellows were being wiped out as they rose close to the line of guns, away and away to safety.

SECRETAS

By CHARLES A. FREEMAN

"*SECRETAS!*"

The sibilant whisper runs through the crowd assembled at the marble topped tables at one of Manila's immense dancing pavilions as a well dressed, silent group of American and Filipino detectives enters. A few men rise and edge toward the side entrances. It is not well for those whose pictures and fingerprints are on file at Secret Service headquarters at the Bagumbayan police station, to be found in public amusement resorts.

But the *secretas* have already located their quarry and surrounded him. The man's garb proclaims his calling to the initiated. Over a blue silk singlet he wears a transparent shirt of pink material embroidered with butterflies. His shirt-tails dangle outside, and his white trousers are stiffly starched. On his bare feet are heelless red *chinelas*. His hair is heavily greased and his fingernails long. He is a typical *suetic*, gambler and bunco artist, who wears the old time native costume in order more readily to attract the attention of countrymen visiting the capital.

Ah! The *secretas* have him now, and he holds out his wrists for the encircling loops of steel.

"Juan Katigbak, wanted for robbing a mountaineer at the Tondo railway station," briefly explains one of the detectives to a party of interested American tourists. "Don't be alarmed. Go on with your dancing. There'll hardly be any more crooks here this evening."

At Bagumbayan, Juan Katigbak will be interrogated by Major John Nevins, chief of the Secret Service and a resident of the Philippines for thirty years. And Juan will talk before the evening is over—*secretas* are not to be trifled with—although the third degree, as Americans understand it, will not be applied.

When the Americans took Manila on August 13th, 1898, the majority of the Secret Service's members were retained. A weeding-out commenced soon afterward, however, and lasted until the body was incorporated with the metropolitan police in 1901. Today the force consists of both Americans and Filipinos and it functions remarkably well, considering the fact that Manila possesses, besides its native and white population, nearly eighty thousand Chinese.

The *secretas* are divided into squads headed by veterans. Their work is frequently spectacular in Manila's Chinatown where opium joints, gambling rooms, morphine injection stations and vice centers occupy the upper stories instead of the traditional underground. In raids scaling ladders are frequently used, the *secretas* being as adept with them as are the firemen.

Not long ago detectives located an opium smoking crowd of Chinese in the lofty belfry of a church. There the coterie was enjoying its *pen yen* in a place where the pungent odor of the smoke would not be noticed. Underground passages can not be constructed in Chinatown because of its proximity to the Pasig River, which frequently overflows its banks.

Among the Manila detectives are a few American "Never Went Backs," soldiers of 1898. But the majority of Americans are younger men who, after serving enlistments in the Army, cast their lots with the Islands. Almost all speak the Tagalog dialect fluently. The general record of the Manila Secret Service is excellent.

MEALS MAKE THE MAN

By JAMES STEVENS

A Rollicking Tale of the Paul Bunyan Country

STOVE LID MALARKEY, chief cook of the Gavin Timber Company's Camp No. 6, was expounding his philosophy of life to a Saturday night visitor. Malarkey was enthroned in his private padded chair, which bulked largely in one corner of the kitchen. In the mellow light of a Rochester burner his billowy cook's cap seemed to swell with the afflatus that was Malarkey's now. Under this crown ideas murmured and glowed. In the presence of Marcus Aurelius Larrity, the ancient bullcook, they rumbled forth in majestic words.

"The sum and center of life, Marcus, is meals," orated Malarkey, in his most pontifical manner. His stare over the steel rims of his specs was solemn and inspired. "Yes, sir, meals make the man. That is a physi'logical fact as well as a philersophical truth, you betcher! The power of provender, Marcus! The vitality of vittles! If men only had the sagac'ty to see it." The cook sighed dolefully, and the white apron that covered his globular

middle was distended alarmingly. "But they don't see it, Marcus. They chase willer wisps. Fantods. Spooks. Apperitions, Marcus. Meals make the man, but they ain't got the sagac'ty to see, and hence more's the pity."

Larrity tried to ease his warped frame into a more comfortable position on his cracker box seat. He ruminated, smacking his withered lips over the stem of a cob pipe.

"Men come to see it at last, they do," he said, nodding wisely. "A man comes to face the fact when he gits past ninety like me, Chief. When he tries to eat with jist gooms, and he gits dispepsy, then he knows how meals make the man, so he does. Yes, sir."

"And on sundry and seper'te occasions," said Malarkey, more cheerfully, "the whole human race accords vittles their proper honor. On Thanksgivin' they do, and on Egg Sunday—"

"I had jist forgot," interrupted Larrity. "It was Egg Sunday I had come to tell you about, so it was."

"And it was Egg Sunday I was meditatin' on and preparin' for when you come in, Marcus," said Malarkey. "One week from tomorrer mornin' the most prodigerous Egg Sunday breakfast ever heard of is goin' to be propergated and persented in this here loggin' camp. For that Sunday is my most special birthday, my fiftieth, my gold annieversary, Marcus. And I aim to perduce a breakfast which will go down in loggin' history along with Paul Bunyan's tamin' of the Big Auger River, the breakin' of the jam on Gerry's Rock, and the spring the rain come up from China. You betcher!"

"One minute, Chief," mumbled Larrity. "I jist forgit. Let me remember and recollect."

Larrity was no doubt the oldest active logger alive. He profanely refused to be pensioned and he did well his light roustabout work as bullcook. Generally Larrity's mind was in the times long ago, when he and old Jawn Gavin were white water buckos together in Michigan. He was always just forgetting the facts of a dim present. But at last he fished out the one he wanted now from among the memories which were his real life.

"Now I have it," he said, unpuckering his face. "A real item of news for you, Chief. One concernin' a stupenjus sportin' event for Egg Sunday eve which will entirely overshadow all the glory you hope for from your Egg Sunday breakfast. It will that."

"Such an evencherality can not be," declared the cook.

"But hearken. On next Saturday night Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory will endeavor to slay and slaughter one another. Yes, sir, Chief, such a sportin' event is fore-ordained by Jupe Gavin and predestinated by Barney Bresnahan, so it is. Stupenjus. Your finest meal will have to take second place to such a fray as that one, Malarkey."

"Elooserdate, Marcus," said the cook grimly.

"Let me remember, now. You know Conk McGlory, of course."

Malarkey nodded. Conk McGlory was the champion faller of the Columbia River logging camps and the top hand of Barney Bresnahan, foreman of Camp 6. Fallers usually work in pairs, but McGlory labored alone and regularly earned the wages of two men. Skidroad poolrooms barred their doors when he came to town. McGlory was six inches over six feet and measured a yard across the shoulders. He would walk right through the barred doors and demand bottles and battles. He had never been known to get the latter. No ordinary logger would tackle Conk McGlory, not even when armed with an ax.

"I know McGlory," admitted the cook. "I point to him with invijious pride. That tree of brawn was made by the Malarkey meals. From vital vittles composed by Stove Lid Malarkey, you betcher!"

"What vittles they must of been that Hels Hagen was made from," said Larrity. "Dear, oh, dear!"

"I've never had the consekence of meetin' Hels Hagen," stated Malarkey.

Larrity volunteered the facts concern-

ing Hels Hagen. He improved them somewhat, as the recital of facts unadorned was foreign to the ancient bullcook's nature.

HELS HAGEN, he said, had been fetched down from Puget Sound by young Jupe Gavin, scalawag heir of Old Jawn. Hagen had reigned for years as king-jack of the Washington woods. He was under six feet, but you needed a choker rope to measure his chest. His fists dangled to his boot tops. He was an ape in calked boots when he worked log booms or topped head spars. Burl a log till the water foamed, then walk the bubbles to the shore. So tough and hard he figured he'd leave his carcass to be worked into ax handles when he died. Shaved with a blow torch. Everybody in Seattle took a trip to the mountains when Hels Hagen came to town. His favorite sport was to grab a policeman by the ears, stretch them down under the victim's chin, and then tie them into a bow knot.

"Enough, Marcus." The cook's rumble was doleful. "Makin' due allowance for your pervaricatin' tendencies, this here Hels Hagen seems to be a man to give Conk McGlory a fight which will make loggin' camp history."

"Harumph," grunted Larrity. The cook's reservation had hit a spot in which he was touchy.

"A hist'ry makin' fray," continued the cook. "One to be storied and sung in thousands of bunkhouse nights. You would expect all my Egg Sunday hopes to be dimmed, Marcus."

"Heh," said Larrity.

"But provender," said the cook, smacking his log of a leg with his slab of a hand for emphasis, "has a potency, Marcus; a potency undreamed of in the philoserphy of fightin' men. And eggs, Marcus, is provender with consermate potentialities."

Larrity's aged mind had roved from his grievance back to the reason for his visit.

"I will tell you how it is, Chief. I heard Barney and Jupe mullin' the business in the camp office. Hels Hagen had jist been brung out from Portland by Jupe to take Mike Reardon's place as high-rigger. Now, young Jupe, as who in camp don't know, is burnin' to get even with Barney for cleanin' him at so many settin's of stud poker. So he has fetched this Hels Hagen down from Puget Sound to pit him agin Conk McGlory, who Barney would back agin a gorilla. Barney is kinder cornered. Skeered of old Jawn, who will have peace in his camps even if he has to fight for it himself and fire his bosses to boot. Barney argied that fact agin the battle. But young Jupe egged him and ta'nted him till Barney agreed to bet five hun'erd on Conk, and the fight is to come off next Sat'day night, one week from now."

"Egg Sunday eve!" By now the eyes of Stove Lid Malarkey had an ominous glitter. "Oh, that is most pernicious, Marcus!"

"And so," said Larrity, his voice cracking under the strain of concentration, "you could cook an Egg Sunday breakfast fit for a camp full of kings, Chief, and the loggers would pay it no heed with such a battle ravagin' all their thoughts and feelin's."

"That battle," rumbled the cook, "is a fatal contingency which has not yet been encompassed."

"You would not blab on the boys to old Jawn," said Larrity, frowning up through wreathes of pipe smoke.

"A most unwar'nted instigation to come from you, Marcus," said the cook with great dignity. "A most unwar'nted instigation."

"I would wish you luck, then," said Larrity. "But I would like to know how else you figger to stop this battle from puttin' the frost on your gold annieversary celebration."

"By the power of provender, Marcus," said Stove Lid Malarkey. "Maybe by eggs, which has a potency all their own. Howsomever and by the old Deuteronomy, Marcus, Egg Sunday is goin' to by my day and its eve likewise!" As

he pronounced the mightiest oath in his vocabulary, Malarkey heaved himself out of his private padded chair. The floor creaked under his tramp. "I am goin' hence to the camp office and begin my consermations," he announced confidently.

"And I may help meself to a bit of coffee and a doughnut while you are gone?" said Larrity, with a smile which was winning for all its toothlessness.

"You may, Marcus. But don't go to dunkin' your doughnut. You can't seem to dunk without dribblin', Marcus, which is to the determent of my scrubbed kitchen floor."

With that, Stove Lid Malarkey rumbled from the kitchen.

IN THE camp office Barney Bresnahan, the Camp No. 6 stud poker champion and bull of the woods, and Jupe Gavin, harum-scarum son of Old Jawn, were discussing the projected duel of the kingjacks. Barney was still ravaged with doubts about the fray. He sat in a chair before the heater, his forearms resting on his legs, his big hands dangling between his knees, and his black eyes scowling at the stove door as young Jupe chattered on. For a time he expressed his grave doubts only by puckering his mouth to the right, cocking an eye in the same direction, and hoisting a stubby forefinger to scratch his neck. At last he held up a hand for silence.

"All right. We've argied enough. I give in, and we'll go through with the ruckus. But just the same you're jammin' me in a hole. Old Jawn'll put me back to tendin' hook if he ever learns we matched them bullies instead of them framin' the fight themselves."

"A-a-aah, forget dad," said Jupe, his boyish optimism running high. "The old chap is tied up in Portland for two weeks with his Elks' committee on some charity program for boys. He wouldn't drop that for anything. Our sporting event will be all over by the time he hears of it, and we'll figure out some way to keep under cover."

"You know, Jupe," warned Barney, "you're due to get three months of hard labor out in camp if you're caught pulling any more of your rowdy stuff among Old Jawn's men. I like you, Jupe. I don't want to see you exiled from your soft office job."

Jupe pretended to address a third party.

"All of a sudden the bull of the woods shows that under his coarse coat and tough hide beats a heart as tender as a woman's. All sentiment, he is. The impending loss of five hundred smackers has nothing whatever to do with his sudden solicitude for the welfare of li'l Jupe Gavin. Nothing at all. Doesn't the sight of him renew your faith in humanity? Behold him there—"

"You be burned and blistered," growled Barney. "Who's afraid? Say, Conk McGlory'll take Hels Hagen apart piece by piece, then scatter the pieces in the river and poison the fish. That five hundred is a cinch. If you're bound to lose it, on we go for hell and halleluiah, as Old Jawn says."

"Right. Settled." Jupe smothered a grin of triumph.

It had long graveled him, the fact that he, the peerless poker shark of his college fraternity, had been so consistently trimmed by this horny handed and unlettered woods boss at two-bit stud. Now he saw his honor and losses retrieved in the coming contest between Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory. He had no doubts. Jupe was too young to have such burdensome baggage.

"Saturday night. One week from now," he said musingly, his eyes shining.

"Monday mornin'. Week from day after tomorrer," said Barney Bresnahan sourly. "Me slingin' riggin'. You heavin' a brush hook. Old Jawn lookin' down our necks and laffin' horsily."

"He's safe, I tell you—"

Jupe's speech was interrupted by the opening of the office door. The floor shook and the furniture rattled as Stove Lid Malarkey marched in. He wasted no time in getting to the point.

"I've heerd," he said frowningly, "about this here Egg Sunday eve fracas you two are promotin'."

At that Barney Bresnahan's leathery countenance was tinged with a grayish hue.

"Holy mackinaw," he said to Jupe, "and if I hadn't forgot about our date bein' Egg Sunday eve."

"Easter, you mean?" said Jupe. "What's that got to do with it?"

"Egg Sunday in Camp 6," explained Barney, "has come to be Stove Lid Malarkey's private property."

"Ridiculous," snapped Jupe, who could never understand the privileges his father allowed the camp cooks.

"Maybe so," said Barney. "But just the same Old Jawn is the star admirer of Malarkey's expensive but elegant Egg Sunday breakfasts."

"Oh," said Jupe, glaring at the cook. "I suppose, then, he'll blab to the Old Man if we don't give in to his funny notions."

"You are a persumpshus young snipe," rumbled the cook, holding up a mighty hand for silence. "Stove Lid Malarkey can take keer of his own troubles. He ain't the man to go bawlin' and snufflin' about 'em to nobody. You betcher."

"He's not a man to be crossed, neither, Jupe, when it comes to a Thanksgiving dinner or an Egg Sunday breakfast." Barney was still without relish for the situation in which Jupe had cornered him. "We'd better call it off. You can't buck a cook of the standin' of Stove Lid Malarkey. It's no go."

"Hedging again!" jeered the Gavin heir. "Scared of Hagen!"

"Him!" Barney snorted. "McGlory would send him back to Puget Sound in splinters. But I've got Old Jawn's orders and my job to think of."

"Now looky here." Stove Lid Malarkey spoke ahead of Jupe. "I ain't spoilin' nobody's sport. I don't want to get that name. But neither am I permittin' anybody's sport to overshadder me and my perfesseion at Egg Sunday time. Now you two hearken. I've got an idy. For long I've been achin' to demonstrate the power of provender, the vitality of vittles, in a big way and a sensashernal style. Here's my opportunity. You put the conditionin' of these here two king-jacks entirely in my hands for the ensuin' week, lettin' all and sundry know it is for Stove Lid Malarkey's glory and honor, for the purpose aforesaid, and I consent to the contingerncy. You betcher."

Barney Bresnahan caught from Jupe Gavin a wink which was pregnant with meaning. That meaning was in his own mind. He understood. His confidence in McGlory was supreme. Jupe's five hundred was in his pocket, he was certain, if the fight could be pulled off with safety for his job. Such safety now seemed assured.

"Chief," he said, with a grandly generous wave of his hand, "nothin' would give us more pleasure than to make this show yours entirely. You shall indeed officiate as promoter, matchmaker and as the trainer to boot."

"And as referee," put in Jupe.

"Hey," growled Barney, scenting danger in this. "You're goin' too—"

"I accept the propersition," said Malarkey, interrupting the camp boss. "I take the respons'bility of makin' this a fight which will go down famously in loggin' history, and by its fame the gold annieversary of Stove Lid Malarkey will never be forgot."

"Whoop!" Young Jupe could not repress his joy.

"Now, then," said Malarkey, assuming his highest chief cook's manner. "Now then and furthermore, you hearken—" he frowned portentously at his audience—"meals make the man. That's the philoserphy I aim to prove to all and sundry. A fightin' man has got to have fightin' meals, just as a workin' man has got to have workin' meals. A fightin' man can't gorge and guzzle and stuff. He needs raw meat, he needs it tough, and he needs just enough to keep him rearin' and ragin' for more. He has got to be carnivorous, a fightin' man has, and fed on raw meat meals; and for the composin' of fightin' meals, as in the concoctin' of workin'

meals, nobody can ekal the talents, the devotion and the perversity of Stove Lid Malarkey. You betcher!"

"Somethin' to that," Barney sagely agreed. "Conk McGlory, he eats like a hawg. His wind ain't what she might be."

"All right," said Jupe brightly. "You shall be the chief cook and bottle washer, along with the rest of it. His celebration in toto, hey, Barney?"

"I'll feed the contestants in private after each reg'lar meal," said Malarkey, "so's they won't be tempted by the prodigerous provender of the workin' meals. Got to get 'em to rearin' and ragin'. That's the idy."

With that the great cook took his departure. Jupe's optimism now glittered and foamed.

"Wasn't that luck?" he chortled. "Played right into our hands. Certainly no blame can attach to us now."

Barney Bresnahan was not so sure. He knew that meals and the making of meals alone filled the circle of Malarkey's interest in life. In regard to the culinary art Barney was a Philistine, however, and he could not imagine a cook possessing cunning and guile. He was ready to take advantage of this simple and innocent cook, protect his job and win Jupe Gavin's gold. Yet he feared that Old Jawn would look through the simpleness of the cook, if he heard of the affair, suspecting some master mind like Barney Bresnahan's. Under Jupe's hard, inquiring gaze, however, Barney's fears were smothered.

"This animated mountain of lard is perfect in his part," said Jupe, as the camp boss continued his silent reflections. "Now we're completely covered. Why the worry?"

"I was a rum-dum to let you jack me into this deal," grumbled Barney. "I'd hate to see Malarkey fired. And even though he is Old Jawn's pet cook—"

"There's more cooks where he came from," said Jupe.

"Not like Malarkey. Even if he is simple minded, he's the man who brings the king-jacks of the Columbia River to this camp. Jupe, you're just a kid. Take an old-timer's advice and let's drop this."

"Not much." Jupe had Old Jawn's determination at least. "I'm holding you to your word. As for Malarkey, we're not his guardians. This was his own proposition, remember."

"All right." Barney shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of resignation. "Malarkey's so simple we've only got to let him have his way, and he'll be a perfect goat. I guess the likes of him was born to serve men with brains like me," he argued, easing his conscience. "All set. Now, then, we got to figger about the handlin' of our champs. You go back to Portland tomorrer night, hey? . . . Now, about keepin' these bullies from chawin' one another up before the big night . . ."

By this time Stove Lid Malarkey had returned to the kitchen. Old Larrity marked the light of triumph shining behind the steel rimmed spectacles.

"What you so kind of glorified about, Chief?" he said. "Where've you been? I jist forgit what you went out for."

"Me, Marcus, I'm all set to plan and project the grandest demonstration of the power of provender that was ever heard of," rumbled Malarkey. "Right now I'm medertatin' on a week of great hunger for Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory."

"Hunger, hey, Chief? I have knowed a few great ones myself."

"This hunger, Marcus, is to be composed by Stove Lid Malarkey. And of course it will be a great one, for he is that kind of a composer. The first hunger he ever created in his feller man."

"And why for, Chief?"

"A man has got to kinder save up for hard boiled eggs," said Stove Lid Malarkey cryptically. "Got to kinder save up for 'em. You betcher."

Saying that, he lowered his bulk into his private padded chair and sank into profound meditation. Larrity slyly dunked his doughnut for the comfort of his "gooms." He dribbled unnoticed. The kitchen czar of Camp 6, the dean and master of Columbia River cooks, was engrossed with a vision of the triumph of his philosophy.

THROUGHOUT the years of their Homeric labors in the big timber, Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory had eaten as they pleased from loaded logging camp tables. The strenuousness of their life had enabled them to gorge at will and yet keep in good health, if not in prime condition. Their appetites had long ago been solidly formed. For breakfast they demanded fruits, cereals, bacon, fried eggs, stacks of hot cakes and slabs of butter. Dinner was not a meal to either man without mountains of potatoes, huge chunks of bread and wedges of pie. At supper they needed fried potatoes, hot biscuits and cornbread, beans and corn, puddings, cookies and cake before they could feel sufficiently replenished with provender.

For a week the cavities of their innards yawned vainly for these accustomed fillings. Tough, stringy steaks, unbeaten, hardly heated, with dabs of gritty spinach, were served to them by Stove Lid Malarkey's own hands. For bread they were offered scant slices of toast. The great cook beamed with benign majesty on each champion, never failing to impress on him the honor he was receiving. It was unsafe to seat them at the same table, but the men were placed so that they could see they were faring alike. It was made obvious to them that it would be an insult to the cook and also a confession of weakness to complain of the diet. Besides, it was proving its worth to their backers, and the bullies themselves were beguiled and inveigled into a faith in it by Malarkey's most sonorous phrases.

Each day the king-jacks grew more haggard and hungry, but each day they also grew nearer in disposition to caged timber wolves. Each night their booms and roars shattered the calm of the bunkhouse.

From his end of the bunkhouse Barney's top hand would boom:

"Me, I'm Conk McGlory. Show me a better man."

From the opposite end the high-rigger would roar—

"Me, I'm Hels Hagen, a herrycane in cork boots."

"There ain't room in a section of timber for two like Conk McGlory."

"Two men like Hels Hagen together would raise cyclones on the land and typhoons on the sea."

"When Conk McGlory drinks he takes proosic acid by the tumbler with wood alkyhol for a chaser. He's got the stummick for that."

"Talk about stummicks! When Hels Hagen eats his heartiest it's on sandwiches filled with concentrated lye."

After two nights of that the loggers threatened dynamite. Barney Bresnahan then bunked Conk McGlory in his office and the bullcook was prevailed upon to take Hels Hagen into his shack. Jupe was delighted when he visited the camp in the middle of the week. He reported that Old Jawn was still buried in the work of his charity committee. Barney was greatly heartened. The cook was playing their game beautifully. The conspirators could see nothing else.

By Saturday night, the eve of Egg Sunday, the hunger honed bullies had a fine fighting edge. Their tempers promised a battle which would transcend all previous epics of logging camp history. Old Larrity had the fight on his mind as he came into the kitchen from the supper table.

"Man, they could lick lions, they could," he said, the excited talk of the loggers still ringing in his ancient ears. "I had never hoped to see a more tremenjus battle than the one—hmm—I jist forgit now—" He paused as he fumbled among his memories. "Ah, yes, the one betwixt Black Powder Delehanty and Paddy the Devil. They fought on a log boom, each bully grippin' sticks of dynamite in both fists. The dynamite was exploded by their blows, but that never fazed them at all, at all. It only heated them the more. They fought for thirteen hours, till all the ribs of both were caved in. They were took to the hospital, and there, lyin' prone, their cots side by side, they managed to get holt of bottles of choloroform, and with them they battled. A dozen others were slayed by the fumes, but Black Powder Delehanty and Paddy the Devil did not even sleep from them.

Ay-hey—ah, yes, it was decided that the one who was out of the hospital first should be called the winner. That was Black Powder Delehanty. Out in eight months, Black Powder was. Ah, the old days, the old times, when men were men—seventy-five year ago when I was a young logger," said old Larrity the bull cook.

"Prodigerous pervaricatin'," commented Malarkey, but with awe.

"What was I talkin' of?" grumbled Larrity. "I jist forgit. Ah, yes. Well, this will be a worser battle, this one betwixt Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory. Celebrated it will be in many a bunkhouse ballad and tale. Ragin' and rearin', they are. And such men, such men! They will smother your Egg Sunday doin's, Malarkey. Ah, your pore gold annieversary! Dear, dear. Too bad, old friend."

"Tomorrer's morn may yet see the name of Stove Lid Malarkey on every logger's lips to the determent of them hellions, Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory," said the cook pridefully.

"Lemme see," said Larrity. "I jist forgit what I was talkin' of."

"Never mind." The cook shook Larrity's withered hand. "You been a true friend to me, Marcus, and you can dunk doughnuts any time you like in my kitchen. Now skedaddle. My philoserphy is soon to meet its final test with the champeens. The time draws nigh for me to show the real power of meals over muscle. You betcher."

Some thirty minutes before the hour to set for the battle Stove Lid Malarkey marched Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory, two ravening timber wolves, into the privacy of his kitchen. Assuming his most remote and august cook's manner, he had refused to permit Barney and Jupe to accompany their men. He was, he informed them, the master of meals, and he needed no direction in the accomplishment of his purpose. The heir of Old Jawn and the bull of the woods acceded to his command, regarding it as the whim of a mind which worked with childish simplicity in the vasty deeps of an animated mountain of lard.

LONG before the zero hour the two hundred loggers of Camp No. 6, with sundry visitors from Camp 5, had gathered for the fray. The stage was set for it in the cookhouse dining room. This was due to a bright suggestion of Jupe Gavin's, and it completed the cook's responsibility for the affair. Barney and Jupe now felt that in any event the fight must be regarded as entirely in the cook's domain.

The tables had been stacked along the walls and the benches placed in rows around the fighting ring. The ring itself had been made by stretching wire rope wrapped in burlap about four pillars in the center of the great hall. Rochester burners hung in a cluster from the rafters, and their tin reflectors showered light inside the ropes. The loggers were burly figures in mackinaws and calked boots. Their voices boomed from the shadows that circled the ring. It was a lusty scene.

Old Larrity, just forgetting about the fight until the last moment, was forced to take a seat on a back bench. He failed to notice five men in overcoats who eased in behind him and disposed themselves, with mutters and whispers, in a row by his side. Larrity peered around the necks of the loggers seated between himself and the ring, and his gaze at last rested on Barney and Jupe, close together on a front bench at the ragged edge of the circle of light. The ancient bull cook listened to the confusion of booming voices and tried to remember what this was all about. He peered and blinked, and in the thick haze of pipe smoke he again visualized the battle between Black Powder Delehanty and Paddy the Devil. That reminded him. Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory were going to fight in the ring, yonder. In a ring and with a referee. There would be no rounds or rests, but the battlers were to wear rigging gloves, and biting, gouging and kneeing were barred. Black Powder Delehanty and Paddy the Devil would have laughed at such milk-and-water fighting.

Then Larrity just forgot the fight and remembered poor old Malarkey. The

cook had hoped so much that his Egg Sunday breakfast would knock the loggers cold and be sung and talked about in bunkhouse nights forevermore. But here it was, Egg Sunday eve, all the loggers were together, and not one was mentioning Malarkey's name. Who, now, were they gabbing about?

Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory. These were the only names sounded by the booming voices. Poor old Malarkey. His gold anniversary, and he didn't have a look-in because—what was it?—ah, yes, this tremendous battle to see who was king-jack of the North Coast timber country— But hearken—

"Conk McGlory'll pick feathers outen him. Once he slew a grizzly with his bare hands—" "Let Hels Hagen get Conk down once. I hear he hurled a whale clean acrost Puget Sound, thinkin' the whale was a butt log." "Yeah, Hels says he did—" "Conk McGlory drives steel calks into his boot soles with his barefist." "Hels Hagen picks his teeth with a anvil prong—"

Yes, sir, all about Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory, those mighty muscled men. Poor old Malarkey, banking on nothing but meals for his everlasting fame. Dear, oh, dear— Larrity became conscious of an argument among some parties in the shadows to his right.

"Be sporting, old-timer," some one was saying. "Don't spoil the fun. You can't show us any hunting to compare with a circus like this."

Profane mutterings subsided with:

"Well, but when it's over, by the old mackinaw—"

Hunting. Larrity's ancient mind leaped back to memories of a great hunting trip he had enjoyed with Old Jawn Gavin in Michigan fifty, or maybe it was forty, years ago. The ancient bull cook mused into the past until he was aroused by a roar from the crowd of loggers.

From the shadows on the kitchenward side of the ring emerged the billowing cap and the bulging apron of Stove Lid Malarkey. On his right towered the mighty form of Conk McGlory. On his left bulked the butt log figure of Hels Hagen. The champions were stripped to the waist. Their middles were garbed in waist overalls which had their legs stagged six inches above the knees. They wore calked boots, the tops reaching the swell of their calves, with the tops of woollen socks protruding in neat rolls. Rigging gloves were on their slab-like hands. They moved ponderously, almost sluggishly seemingly overcome by the dignity of being the center of so much attention. They crawled through the ropes with apparent laborious effort. Stove Lid Malarkey assisted them with hefty shoves. Once inside, they stood and stared owlishly at the shadowy faces beyond the circle of light. Their hairy chests heaved in large breaths.

A hush fell on the crowd. It descended just as old Larrity spoke a few pertinent words of criticism addressed to himself. His cracked mumble was distinctly heard.

"Jist men of boasts and brags. There ain't been men of real deeds and doin's since the time of Black Powder Delehanty and Paddy the Devil."

A cackle of laughter followed this. Larrity half heard his name called by some one nearby, but he paid this no mind. His thoughts were wandering away in the great days of real deeds and doings.

IN THE meantime Stove Lid Malarkey had struck a pose in the center of the ring. His meaty hand waved for silence.

"Feller loggers," he rumbled, in his most thunderous tones, "I have gathered you here as witnersses who are forever more to bear testermony in the promulgagation of my philoserphy, the doctern that meals make the man. You have seen the fightin' meals I have served these here combattens turn them into semblances of curly wolfs. You are now to witness another manerfestation of the power of provender, of the might of meals over muscle, as exemplerfied in the persons of the two champeens of the North Coast timber country when they go into action. Further, deponeth sayeth not. My Egg Sunday

eve demonstration is now ready for procedure."

With that he turned to the antagonists. They were gazing at nothing in particular with strangely sodden stares.

"Hels Hagen, champeen king-jack of Puget Sound!" thundered Stove Lid Malarkey.

The bully blinked owlishly at the introduction.

"Conk McGlory, the champeen ditto and to wit of the Columby River camps!"

McGlory responded with no more than a feeble grin.

"Make ready!" Malarkey roared. "When the gong she rings, have at 'er rough and tumble, only chawin', gougin' and kneein' barred, and may whomsoever has got it comin' to him win!"

Roaring that, Malarkey lumbered to a corner of the ring to strike a steel triangle with a bar. As he strode he glared out into the crowd until his gaze found Barney and Jupe. Even in the shadows the stares they fixed on their men revealed perplexity and doubt. Furthermore, their expressions denoted that they were feeling unwell. Malarkey's rubicund and perspiring jowls spread in his vastest smile as he hammered the gong. He turned to his men, and as he turned hisses and jeers rose from the crowd.

McGlory had made the first swing with the gong's sound. It was by no means powerful, but as it sailed harmlessly by Hagen's jaw it had the force to carry McGlory along with it. He toppled, and thrust his left arm over Hagen's roomy shoulder. With both arms sliding down his adversary's back, McGlory swayed over, rested his chest against Hagen's bullet head, and lolled. There was no other word for it. Fifty jeering loggers used exactly that expression. McGlory leaned and lolled, his knees wobbling, his arms limp, his eyes glazing.

Hagen's ape-like arms went around McGlory's middle, his wrists crossed in the small of his opponent's back, and his huge hairy hands hung as limply as wet mops. Hagen pressed his cheek against McGlory's fuzzy bosom, and he also leaned. Hagen did not loll, as the squat champion of Puget Sound was built for anything but lolling. He leaned, however, as heavily and as soggily as a water soaked piling in a mudflat.

Thus the two champions were propping one another up. The position was not unrestful, and they seemed to relish it. The crowd booed, but they rested on. Stove Lid Malarkey surveyed them, apparently baffled. His great right hand shoved his billowy cap to the left, and he scratched a rosy bald scalp in a gesture of perplexity.

"Break 'em up!" bawled some boxing-wise man from a back bench.

Malarkey was not deaf to the hint. He advanced on the propped battlers. He bore down on them, trying to pry them apart from the top. As his weight burdened the champions, their calks slid. The gap widened between their feet. The slant of each man's legs visibly inclined toward the horizontal. A complete collapse was threatened.

The great cook labored valiantly, changing tactics. He removed his weight from the men, retreated, crouched, lowered his head as much as a man of his ponderous heft could lower it, and forced his mountainous shoulders into the widening gap. This accomplished, he heaved, and became a rumbling earthquake of human flesh. With each quaking heave he emitted a thunderous grunt. The section of the audience at his rear began to whoop and bawl with laughter. From their point of view Stove Lid Malarkey's aspect was a revelation as to the dimensions and contours that may be achieved in the development of man. The revelation was of a nature which appeals to human mirth. The dullest of imagination longed for paddles. The keener wished for boards embellished with sharp spikes. But mingled with the mirth was a profound astonishment at the amazing condition of Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory. As they laughed the loggers also heaved with wonder.

On his back bench old Larrity was dreaming of the delights of dunking

doughnuts in the Malarkey kitchen. What was that mysterious remark the cook had made when he was busy dunking one night a spell ago? Something about eggs —never mind—dunking; nothing so good for a man whose mouth held nothing but naked gooms. Larrity did not hear the growl that burst from beside him:

"What in the name of the tor-dammented timber beasts *is* this anyhow? When I get to the bottom of it, I'll—"

The threat was lost in a sudden yell of joy from the others on the bench. Two of the audience up front had heard the raging voice, however, and in an instant there was only a gap to mark their place on the bench. Some of the loggers nearby switched their stares from the amazing spectacle in the ring to the astounding sight of their camp foreman and the son of their employer crawling between benches toward the kitchen, keeping out of the general view in the shadows on the floor. Then, suddenly, all eyes were staring unblinkingly at the scene in the ring.

STOVE LID MALARKEY had at last heaved Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory apart. Now he bulged between them, his hands beckoning them on. The champions made no move. Conk McGlory tottered, his knees buckling, his eyes squinted shut, his head drooping, as he squeezed his paws against his stomach. Hels Hagen swayed, and he too buckled, squinted and drooped, and his hands—the same hands which, according to the tales of loggers, had stretched the ears of many a Seattle policeman until they could be tied into a bow knot—those same massive hands now covered his front from chest to waist.

For an instant Stove Lid Malarkey sized up the two sagging men. Then he moved into action, ponderously as an elephant and as inexorably. His right hand he spread on Hels Hagen's unguarded bosom. He pushed. The bully of Puget Sound sank like a deflated balloon, inertly rolled over, and lay in perfect quiet. There was no mistaking his purpose. Hels Hagen was going to repose right there until he was packed out.

Then Malarkey's left arm swept around the back of Conk McGlory's neck. He hooked it in a solid grip, yanked, and the bully of the Columbia River camps went down like a felled cedar by Hels Hagen's side. Malarkey marched to the gong. Its clangor was answered by a bewildered silence.

"Feller loggers." Malarkey's rumble was somewhat wheezy after his unwonted exertions. He labored for breath before he went on. "Feller loggers, you have just witnessed the ascendency of meals over muscle. These men I fed into the fightin' semblances of curly wolfs. Then these men I fed into the semblances of angels of peace, the kind you behold on tombstones. Feller loggers, I say no more, except that this here is my celebration of Egg Sunday and the grandest annieversary of my cook's career. It is enough. There'll be no fancy fixin's of eggs at tomorrer's breakfast. I won't have nothin' dim your memory of this here historic night." He waved his hand at the prone champions. "Let sixteen loggers come and carry 'em away!" he thundered. "Licked by the power of provender. Thankin' you one and all, yours truly, Stove Lid Malarkey, master of meals, you betcher!"

With that he turned in dignity and triumph to leave the ring. Over the ropes his proud gaze met the beady glare of Old Jawn Gavin.

"What! What!" yapped the timber owner. "What tom-dam-foolery is this, Malarkey? Where's Jupe? Hey? I know that whelp—"

"All my own doin's, Mr. Gavin," insisted Malarkey. "All mine."

"Yah!" The cook faced such a sneer as only Old Jawn could project. "Don't tell me. I guess you brought Hagen down from Puget Sound. You. Huh-humph! Gal blast that pup! But never mind." Old Jawn motioned with a gnarled hand at four men in city clothes behind him. "It's all right. Friends enjoyed the show. But what's this about no fancy Egg Sunday

breakfast, Malarkey? I brought the brothers out to show you off, Chief, and for a little hunting. Are you going to throw me down? What!"

"Mr. Gavin, sir," said Malarkey, his grandeur returning with his great relief, "you and your feller Elks shall have the most preposterous Egg Sunday breakfast ever concocted, if I have to work all night composin' it."

Malarkey was then effusively congratulated on his unique show by Old Jawn's guests. His rubicund countenance was a shining sun of triumph as he entered his kitchen. There Jupe and Barney faced him. They fairly fawned upon him.

"All is consermated," he informed them. "Peace with Old Jawn, I mean. There remains but the feelin's of Conk and Hels to anoint with healin' ba'm. As presidin' genius *pro tem*, I judge that said ba'm should consist of two hun'erd and fifty apiece from their backers."

There was no argument.

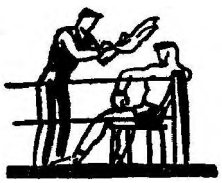
"But how," queried Jupe, before quitting the kitchen, "did you get the champs that way? A man like you, Chief?"

"I don't disserpate my sekerts of the power of provender," said Stove Lid Malarkey. "Good night, boys, and I'll see you all again at Egg Sunday breakfast."

Malarkey sank heavily into his private padded chair. He was meditating on Egg Sunday breakfast when old Larrity ambled in. The ancient bull cook just forgot what he wanted, and he fussed and puttered about the kitchen. He noted a dishpan full of egg shells, and he brightened.

"What was that you remarked about eggs, Chief, when I was dunkin' doughnuts one night a spell ago?"

"Hey?" said Malarkey, rousing up. Then he smiled, a bland, placid smile. "I said, Marcus, a man had to kinder save up for hard boiled eggs. Well, sir, Hels Hagen and Conk McGlory saved up for 'em. And did they get 'em? Four dozen apiece they downed, with me eggin' 'em on. Was there power in that provender?" Stove Lid Malarkey smiled. "You betcher!"



When Radio Came to the Far North

INTERFERENCE

By SEWELL PEASLEE WRIGHT

CONSTABLE BERKHEAD of the Royal Canadian Mounted halted his team of huskies with a sudden word of command. They stopped with ludicrous suddenness, squatting in their traces with tongues lolling out, their breath rising in little clouds of steamy vapor. Berkhead wrung out of his webs, seated himself comfortably on the loaded toboggan and lighted his pipe, his eyes fixed meditatively on the trail behind.

It was a good trail. Two days before he had broken it, heading the other way. Coming back over it had been easy going. He was not stopping because he was tired. He was stopping because he wanted to think.

This was the third trip he had made to the post of Graetz, the free trader, and each time he had come back as he was coming now—empty handed.

It hurt. Berkhead knew, as well as he knew anything, that Graetz was selling illicit liquor to the Indians—and to the whites too, for that matter. Three times he had tried to get the goods on Graetz, and each time Graetz had met him with an expansive smile and invited him to look

over everything carefully. Each time the policeman had found nothing, and each time Graetz had bade him a mocking farewell.

Berkhead was not used to failure. It hurt his pride; the pride he had in the uniform he wore, and the proud record of the Mounted. "The Mounted always get their men." He had tried three times and failed. The corporal's chevron that Berkhead coveted hung on his success in getting the goods on Graetz. He had that straight from the Old Man himself.

If he had not been so sure that Graetz was guilty, it would have been different. But he did know it, and so did Headquarters. Two Indians had killed each other while crazed with hootch. A breed and a white trapper had carved each other up pretty badly fighting over a Cree squaw. They had admitted they were drunk at the time, but refused stubbornly to tell where they got the liquor. Graetz' prosperity alone was proof enough that he had some source of revenue outside of legitimate channels. His place was fixed up with expensive rugs, furniture brought in from outside, a radio, a phonograph with a hundred or so jazz records, a gasoline operated electric light plant and minor luxuries of all kinds. There is money in a well located trading post, but not enough to warrant such luxuries as these. Graetz was the guilty party, all right. But how to prove it without catching him with the goods?

Berkhead considered the matter as he pulled comfortably on his pipe.

"There's only one possible conclusion," he mused. "Somebody's tipping him off. He probably has runners watching from points of vantage. Seems like an elaborate system, but then Graetz is probably making enough to afford to protect himself. Suppose, though, I came through at night, when they couldn't see, and over a different trail than usual? And when they weren't expecting me?"

A sudden light inspiration leaped into his eyes.

"That's the plan!" he exclaimed. "We'll take it easy today, heading out. As soon as it's dark, we'll hurry back and drop in on brother Graetz when he isn't expecting callers. Be something of a day's work, but worth it. He'll laugh on the other side of his remarkably ugly face then. And I'll get those chevrons!"

Berkhead rapped out his pipe on a convenient hemlock, stepped into his webs and spoke to his dogs. There was a satisfied smile on his rather grim lips. Strategy had stood him in good stead before now.

The policeman made camp unusually early that night and fed his dogs lightly. Just in case he was being watched, he made the usual preparations for the night: tied the dogs, put up his tarpaulin, unrolled his sleeping robe, gathered wood for the fire. He cooked himself a good hot meal, washed it down with very hot and very sweet tea and squatted comfortably before the fire, waiting for darkness.

As soon as night had fallen, Berkhead hurried his dogs into harness, despite their growling complaints, and ten minutes later he was headed back toward the post of Graetz, the free trader.

Berkhead left his dogs at some distance from the post, so that they would not alarm Graetz by barking a challenge to the dogs around the post, and hurried on ahead on webs.

It was dawn when he came out into the clearing, and Graetz was evidently just arising, for as the policeman watched, smoke began to pour out of the chimney of the free trader's big, rambling log camp a few feet from the squat, rectangular building that was the store.

The policeman rapped sharply on the door, which was opened almost immediately by Graetz' squaw.

"Where's Graetz?" asked Berkhead sharply.

The squaw, a very pretty young Cree girl, grinned broadly.

"Ketchum in one minute," she replied. "He get up now. You come in, wait?"

A sense of frustration swept over Berkhead. He knew from the squaw's triumphant smile that he would find nothing. He would gladly have turned back into the bush, but he knew that he must face it out

and give Graetz the chance to laugh once more. A moment later Graetz himself came into the room, his shirt still unbuttoned at the throat. He was just pulling his belt tight as he entered.

"Hello, Redcoat! Back again so soon? Did you forget something?" He chuckled. Graetz was a little, toad-like man, fat, swarthy and perpetually greasy. When he laughed or chuckled the loose fold of fat under his chin fluttered like the throat of an alarmed toad.

"Back again," replied Berkhead, making the best of a situation where all the trumps were held by his opponent. "Thought I might catch you napping. I guess I was wrong."

"Take a look around, Redcoat! It hurts me that you suspect me like this," mocked Graetz. "Please find once and for all that I do not deserve your attentions. You'll give my place a bad name hanging around here so much. Men do not like to trade where a Redcoat is always snooping around. You'll hurt my business and I'll have to complain to the Commissioner." The trader chuckled at his own wit.

"You win again," said the policeman shortly. "But don't forget that the game isn't over. One of these days I'll get the goods on you, Graetz, and then—" the policeman made a significant motion, placing his two wrists together in the fashion of a handcuffed man— "when I do, I'll see you get the limit. And that's plenty."

Suddenly Graetz shed his mocking geniality, and he turned ugly.

"You think so, Redcoat? Threaten me in my own house, do you? All right. Now I'll tell you something. You're through, right now. You come meddling around here again and somethin'll happen to you. You've heard of the *longue traverse?* Well, think about it some more. Four times you've been here and found nothing. That ought to satisfy anybody but a damned Redcoat. Now get out—and stay out!"

"I'm going," said Berkhead. "But what I said stands. I'll get you right one of these days. So long, Graetz!"

Before the now furious trader could make any reply, Berkhead had passed through the door and closed it carefully behind him. As he strode back into the bush he could feel vengeful eyes boring into his back, and he would not have been surprised at any instant to have heard the spiteful crack of a rifle. He won to the shelter of the bush safely, however, and heaved just the suggestion of a relieved sigh. A bullet in the back is an unpleasant, messy thing at best.

As soon as Berkhead and his dogs hit the level going on the river, they made splendid time. Back from the river on both sides swept high, rocky hills, over which the going was nearly impossible. The river was the one main route of travel into that section of the country; in the summer it was a canoe route; in the winter its glassy surface was a wonderful trail for dog teams.

"There's Tiny Tim's place," mused Berkhead, as a little snow covered cluster of shacks came into view. "It's not quite noon. We should hit town by dark, easy."

The dogs pricked up their ears as though they understood Berkhead's musings and set out at a faster trot.

Tiny Tim was really a huge blond man of rather childlike mind, as good natured and clumsy as a Newfoundland dog. He kept a rather rundown trading post, which made him a little money largely because men liked Tim and liked to trade with him. Everybody trusted Tim; and what was more the point, with many at least, Tim trusted everybody.

The big trader came down to the edge of the ice as Berkhead drove up.

"*'Jou'! 'Jou'!*" he greeted. "A little warmer, I guess? Well, we can stand it. Have a good trip?"

Berkhead brought his dogs to a stop and shook his head.

"No luck, Tim," he grinned. "Man I wanted is too clever for me, I guess."

Tim studied the policeman shrewdly, his eyes twinkling.

"I'd hate to be him, just the same," he remarked. "I'm bettin' on you in the long run, Berkhead!"

"Thanks. I wouldn't bet a red penny on myself right now."

Tim's loud, raucous laugh rolled out across the river, startling crisp echoes to life.

"Come in and have a bite to eat," he invited, still chuckling. "You need something hot under the belt. Come on," he urged, as Berkhead hesitated. "The squaw'll get it ready in a minute. You'll make it to town easy by dark."

He took Berkhead's arm, and the policeman let himself be led into the camp. The hot meal would be good, and it was just about time for dinner anyway.

Berkhead had met Tim's squaw before. She was a bright eyed, rather pretty woman, somewhat too plump. Sarah, Tim called her. That was not her name, but it sounded something like her rather tongue-twisting Cree cognomen, and Sarah was good enough for Tim.

"Pile some grub, Sarah," suggested Tim as they entered. "And some tea. Make it plenty strong and plenty hot. And quick!"

As Sarah's eyes lighted on the policeman, she smiled; rather an odd, unexpected smile, that roused a faint echo of remembrance in Berkhead's consciousness. The smile was somewhat vaguely familiar.

"'Lo," nodded Sarah to the policeman. "Ketchum quick dinner. You wait, *non*?"

"One darned good little squaw, Sarah," said Tim complacently, as they seated themselves and watched the Indian woman working deftly around the stove. "She's neat as a pin around the house—which most squaws ain't—and she's smart. Got a head on her, Sarah has, and no mistake. Works the radio as well as I do; maybe better. Ever seen my radio, Berkhead?" he added, rather proudly.

Berkhead shook his head.

"Didn't even know you had one," he replied, rising and following his host across the room. "Say, you've got a real set there, Tim!" he went on enthusiastically. "You know, I used to be rather a nut on these things, right after the war. Monkeyed around one in the army for a time. That is a beauty!"

Tim beamed.

"Five tubes," he displayed proudly. "On good nights you can hear everything within three thousand miles."

Berkhead seated himself in front of the set and somehow he got the impression that Sarah was watching him. He turned suddenly and caught her in the act of looking away. The same odd smile was on her lips.

Frowning a little, his mind not altogether on the radio, Berkhead turned back to the set.

"Tune with this one; govern feedback with this," he mused, fingering the two dials. "Simple affair; well made, too."

Once more he had the impression that Sarah was watching him. He wondered why, his eyes roaming meditatively over the panel of the radio. A tiny scratch on one dial, the tuning dial, caught his eye. He examined it more closely, wondering why it was there. It did not look like an accidental scratch. Sarah was still looking at him. He could feel her glance. He could almost see her smile.

Suddenly it came to him—what it was her smile reminded him of.

"Mighty fine radio, Tim," he said casually, trying to hide the triumphant light in his eyes. "I see Sarah's got everything set. Shall we eat?"

IT WAS nearly two weeks later. Constable Berkhead was on the trail again. Less than a mile away was Graetz' post.

The policeman stopped and tied his dogs. As before, he was going ahead on his webs.

He hesitated, scowling. What if he were wrong? His teeth clamped together savagely as he thought of the humiliation of finding Graetz ready for him again. He swung his revolver around to where it would be ready for instant action and pulled off the inner glove on his right hand. The outer mitten would keep his hand warm enough, and it was so large

that it could be flung off, leaving his hand bare for quick and accurate work with the revolver.

Graetz had threatened to shoot on sight, and the little man was just ugly and reckless enough to make good his threat.

Slowly and cautiously Berkhead made his way toward the post. The snow crisped and whined beneath his webs, and the Arctic wind, straight from the ice fields of the north, blew full in his face, whipping the tears to his eyes. The policeman cursed his blurred vision and pressed on more quickly.

The little clearing became visible through the bush, and Berkhead stooped low, peering beneath the snow laden boughs, studying the scene carefully.

Smoke was blowing from the chimneys of both the house and the trading post, and back of the house some dogs, powdered with glistening snow, were barking and fighting.

Berkhead threw back his shoulders and started on again, his keen gaze sweeping restlessly, ceaselessly, over every inch of the clearing, his muscles taut as springs, ready to fly into instant action at the slightest trace of hostilities.

Out into the clearing he walked, a beautiful target against the snow. He had changed his course so that the house was now between him and the dogs, and he was glad that the wind was straight from the north, so there was no chance of their getting his scent and giving the alarm. Perhaps, if he were lucky, he could walk straight up to the house without being observed; the windows were few and small, and the chances of any one's looking out were slim. They were covered with frost, too, he noted; another point in his favor. Berkhead was a great believer in the famed "Luck o' the Mounted." It was almost a superstition with him. Here was another example—

The door of the camp opened suddenly, and Graetz came out, hurrying along the snow trodden path toward the larger building. For an instant he did not see the policeman; his sudden appearance was evidently due to an ill timed coincidence.

"Put 'em up, Graetz!" snapped Berkhead. "I want to talk with you!"

Instead of obeying, Graetz leaped sidewise, jerking out his gun. Despite the danger of the moment, Berkhead's heart gave a little throb of exultation. He had won! There was guilt in Graetz' startled movement.

The free trader fired first, but he was off balance, and his bullet went wide. Berkhead, wiser, had stopped in his tracks as he brought his gun to bear, and before Graetz could fire a second time the policeman's heavy revolver roared.

The gun flew from Graetz' hand and he howled in sudden agony. Blood was spurting from his right hand, running in great dark blotches on the snow.

"Put 'em up, Graetz!" repeated Berkhead, running up. "The next time I'll do more than smash up a hand for you!"

Sullenly Graetz elevated his hands, his toad-like throat fluttering with anger, his eyes smoky with rage.

"Back into the camp now and we'll talk this over," commanded Berkhead grimly. "And no funny moves, or—" he made a suggestive motion with the revolver. "Back up, slowly—that's it. So."

Graetz opened the door with his good left hand and backed slowly through the opening, Berkhead following closely.

Just as the policeman was framed in the doorway something hurtled out from the gloom of the interior; something that flashed wickedly through the air. Berkhead knew what it was—a knife. Graetz' squaw had seen what had happened and was making a last desperate effort to save her man.

Berkhead tried to dodge, but he was too late. The knife struck him full in the left chest. He felt the thud of the impact; even felt the sharp point shear through his parka and tunic. Felt the burning pain of the point in his own flesh. But his revolver never once wavered, and Graetz dared make no dash for freedom.

Quickly Berkhead stepped inside and slammed shut the door.

"That'll be all!" he snapped. The knife, loosened with the sudden move-

ment, clattered to the floor. Berkhead could feel the hot blood pouring from the wound it had made, but realized in the same moment that the heavy clothing he was wearing had saved him from anything more serious than a flesh wound.

Graetz' squaw was crouching against the far wall of the room, her black eyes flashing with hate. The policeman motioned to her with a little jerk of his head, his eyes never leaving his prisoner.

"Come here, you!" he ordered sharply. "Any more tricks from you and you'll go back with your man. Quick, now!"

Sullenly the woman obeyed.

When they were both under the muzzle of the revolver, Berkhead fished a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and held them out toward Graetz.

"Your right hand, please," he commanded. Snarling, Graetz lowered his wounded hand, and the manacle clicked on his wrist.

"Now the other one." Again Graetz obeyed. Berkhead snapped the other bracelet into place and then dropped his revolver into its holster with a little smile of satisfaction.

"That's that," he remarked. "Now, if you can persuade the young lady to fix up your hand for you, I'll patch up this scratch her knife made."

Graetz, up until this moment had confined his remarks to profanity, but now he rattled off a quick command in Cree, harshly ordering the woman to attend him. Berkhead, who understood the language perfectly, added a brief suggestion that she be very careful what she did. There was but one big room and he could watch her every moment. She flashed a malignant glance at the policeman and then turned and busied herself at the stove, putting on some water to heat.

GRAETZ turned to the policeman.

"How did you get up here without me knowin' it?" he growled, and instinctively he cast a fleeting glance at the radio set in one corner of the room.

The policeman caught the glance and smiled.

"Didn't get the radio warning, did you?" he chuckled. "I finally tumbled to that. Tim's squaw is a sister to your squaw, eh?"

"None of your damn' business!" snarled Graetz, the momentary flash in his eyes proclaiming, however, that Berkhead's shot had gone home.

"Her smile was what gave her away, Graetz," explained Berkhead easily. "I stopped in at Tim's going out the last time, and she smiled much the same way your squaw there smiled when I came back that last time. It set me thinking. Then I noted a scratch on the dial of their radio; a scratch that looked as though it might mark a certain setting. That got me thinking some more.

"There is only one main route up into this country, and that's along the river. Anybody at Tim's place would be sure to notice anybody going in. You both had a radio. Now, if somebody at Tim's place would put their set in oscillation, and then set the tuning dial at a certain place, the set would send out a continuous wave like a sending set, that you could pick up easily at this distance. All you'd have to do would be to put your set in oscillation and turn past this wave length once or twice every few hours with your tuning dial. If you picked up a whistle, you'd know there was danger, and could get your booze cached away where it would never be found by any nosey Mounted. And you'd leave it cached away until the whistle couldn't be heard; in other words, until your watcher at Tim's place turned off the set, having seen the policeman pass by on his way out.

"It was a very neat plan, Graetz. In the cities they call that sort of thing 'interference,' and damn it whole heartedly. But you made it pay big—didn't you?"

"Clever, ain't you?" snapped Graetz.

"I'll bet I find booze enough around here this time to put you away for some time," replied Berkhead grimly.

Graetz said nothing for a moment; he sat with bowed head, watching the

thick blood drip from his fingers.

"You fellows have all the luck," he said at last. "What did you do down there at Tim's—set a trap?"

"Not at all," said Berkhead. "Tim gets a lot of fun out of that radio. He hasn't any part in this—I'll swear to that. I just stopped in on my way up here and ate with them again. When Sarah wasn't looking, I did a little tinkering with the set. Held the dial with one hand and forced the tuning condenser around on its shaft. See?"

Chuckling, Berkhead strode across the room and turned on the radio. He noted there was a little scratch on the tuning dial of the set, also, but he turned it twenty-odd degrees higher. The regeneration dial he set at maximum, and lighted up the tubes. For a moment he spun the tuning dial; and then, clear and sharp, a high pitched whistle shrieked from the loud speaker.

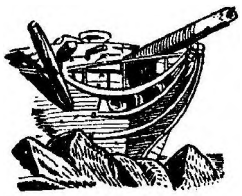
"There you are, Graetz!" he exclaimed. "There's your warning signal—where you never thought of looking for it. The dial on Tim's set is right on the scratch, but, thanks to my little adjustment, it's oscillating on a wave three hundred meters higher than you'd think of looking for it. Tough luck, old-timer!"

A rumble of profanity burst from the free trader, but Berkhead shut him up sharply.

"Cut it out, Graetz," he ordered. "You've had your laugh at me—not once but three or four times. Now take your medicine like a man. And here's the young lady ready to fix up your hand!"

Deftly and tenderly the squaw bathed Graetz' hand with warm water, the steam pungent with the odor of antiseptic. Carefully she bandaged the mangled fingers, while Berkhead looked on with interest. As the squaw finished, the policeman stripped off parka and shirt, all of them bloodstained around the neat slit the knife had cut.

"Now you can patch me up, if you will," he suggested. "And do a nice, careful job of it, please. The Old Man thinks a lot of Constable Berkhead. He's going to give me a corporal's warrant for a Christmas present!"



THE GOOD TIMES

By BILL ADAMS

ASK AN old sailor, a fellow who went to sea when he was a lad, what was the best time that ever he had, and he'll probably have a hard time finding an answer that just suits him. It's so with me.

Looking back to the old days I have an idea that perhaps the best time of all was when one joined his ship for a new voyage. You'd get out of the train at Lime Street Station maybe, and hire a cabby to take you and your sea chest and sea bag down to the ship.

"She's in Salthouse dock," you'd say; and pretty soon the cabby would pull up and you'd see the lamplight shining through the rain on a ship's name.

"There y'are, Captain," says the cabby.

"No, no! That's the *Aberfoyle*," you answer. "Drive on a bit." What a bluff old brute the bark *Aberfoyle* was! Presently you see your own ship's name and, not bothering to go aft to the gangway, jump over the rail and make for the half-deck door. The man who has never seen a gang of brassbounders sitting in the lamplight on the last night in port has missed a picture, for sure. There was comradeship in those good days.

"Where's she bound?" you ask.

And *there you are!* I'm not sure that the best time in a young sailor's life was not that moment when he heard that his ship was bound for some port to which he'd never yet been. It'd be the Colonies, maybe. Or it'd be the West Coast. Or it'd be Frisco, or— Ah, what's the good of talking about it? Before dawn, like as not, she'd pull out with one of the big Joliffe tugs ahead; bound across to New York in ballast to load case oil for China, or bound round the Horn with coal for the West Coast or with general for California, Oregon or B. C.

There'd be a new mate, maybe; and you were pretty sure to have a new second. You'd keep a mighty close eye on them, to see which of the two you liked better, hoping that you'd have the good luck to be in his watch. You'd size up the hands, wondering what sort of crew the old hooker was going to have when it came to beating round the Horn in June. And you'd more than likely see a mighty rummy assortment. I mind a voyage on which, with the exception of a couple of Swedes, there were no two men of the same nationality in the focsle. The only "white man" was a New Zealander. None but Yankees or Britishers were "white men" in the eyes of the half-deck! When he heard some fellow jabbering in a foreign tongue, the eldest apprentice walked up and kicked him.

"English aboard of an English ship!" said he.

A great passage we had that time! How was it that some of those old ships ever did get round the Horn? Or, for that matter, even through Biscay? On that passage if it hadn't been for the apprentices there'd have been no one aboard who could have sung a chantey! But we made it out to B. C. all right, and the first night ashore the eight of us walked into a restaurant and ordered—

"Ham and eggs for three on one plate."

"What's that, sir?" said the waitress.

"Ham and eggs for three on one plate for each of us, barring Tattersall," replied the eldest apprentice.

I wonder, is Tattersall alive yet? He was a grand young sailor, tough as teakwood. But there was one queer thing about him. Whenever we got ashore his order was invariably the same.

"Two eggs and a glass of milk," he'd say.

After he'd finished the two eggs and a glass of milk he'd have the same again. Then he'd have it a third time. He was a temperate sort of chap. Couldn't ever get him to vary that glass of milk! I mind a last night ashore when we went to a theater together. It was "Iolanthe" we saw. On the way down to the ship I led him into a pub.

"What's yours, Tattersall?" I asked.

"A glass of milk," said he.

I can see the face of that Liverpool barmaid yet!

But Tattersall was a rattling good shipmate. He was the worst grouch in the half-deck, but he was always the first man aloft. He passed for second mate before Captain Saul! Many's the old sailor remembers Captain Saul!

"Whatever you do, don't go up before Captain Saul!" we used to say.

But Tattersall did it, and passed.

Just how it happened I never knew, but Tattersall must have gone back on the glass of milk at last. He went into Portland mate of the old *Aristides*, and a few days later he woke in the focsle of a homeward bounder at sea. Shanghaied! I'd like to have seen his face. But I bet he was cock of the focsle.

Speaking of that first night ashore: Having at length comprehended our order, the waitress set a couple of big loaves of crisp French bread on the table and went off to see about the ham and eggs. Looking toward us while they were frying, she saw no bread on the table; and, supposing that she'd forgotten to bring us any, she brought two more big loaves. Pretty soon she looked our way again, and again saw no bread. Once more she brought two loaves. Every one in the place was staring at us, but we were quite unconscious of that.

I don't know whether perhaps the best time in a sailor's life was not when he sat down to his first shore meal after a long passage. But then again there was the day when you hauled in the mooring chains and towed out to sea homeward bound! And then, too, there was the dark night on which you picked up Fastnet light after a hundred and fifty days out!

Speaking of Captain Saul: I know one chap who never would have passed before Captain Saul. He was level headed enough at sea, but while doing his chart work while up for second mate he got rattled and worked his course from B to A instead of from A to B. The answer was the exact reverse of what it should have been, of course. Just as he came to the examiner's desk he saw what he'd done. His heart went cold.

"What's the matter?" asked the examiner, noticing the look on his face.

The examiner let him go back to his desk and work his chart work over. Maybe after all the best time in a sailor's life was when he took the little blue slip from the hand of the examiner!

I MIND a time when my ship was in Frisco for Thanksgiving Day. In those days there were a lot of good people who, thanks to the efforts of the Missions to Seamen—the Flying Angel—took an interest in young sailors. A certain lady who had two charming daughters invited two apprentices to her home for Thanksgiving dinner. They showed up at her house a few minutes before noon. There was no sign of any dinner, no vaguest scent of roasting turkey! And the lady and her daughters wore rather puzzled looks. The lady had meant a seven o'clock dinner. The apprentices had supposed dinner to be a noon meal. A little diplomacy straightened matters out. After a light lunch the

boys were consigned to the care of the two daughters, who took them out and showed them the sights of Frisco. Looking backward a matter of thirty years or more, one of those boys remembers that day as one of his very best.

Then again, what of the time we pulled the Old Man ashore in the gig when the ship was at anchor between Goat Island and the Ferries, waiting a berth?

"I'll be back in half an hour," says the Old Man. "You can wait for me."

And while forgetting all about us, the Old Man stays ashore till supper time we pass away a happy afternoon loafing about Meiggs wharf while our envious comrades, seated on stages slung over the side, chip rust from the old hooker.

And there was the time when the Old Man said:

"You can go ashore if you want to. Be back at the boat at four sharp."

On that occasion, he, for some unknown reason, opened his heart and gave each boy half a dollar. That was the day when, after tossing to see who stayed with the boat, four apprentices, dressed in dungaree shirts with dungaree pants rolled to their knees, with tam o' shanters on their heads and sheath knives in their belts, walked barefoot up Market Street and, quite unconscious of the stares of the Frisco people, went to feast on strawberry shortcake at Clark's on Kearney Street. Was ever a better day?

Well, let's see! The old ship's moored in Salthouse dock once more. We're heaving a line tight on the quarterdeck capstan. Someone's singing.

Leave her, Johnnie,
Leave her like a man.
Leave her, Johnnie,
Leave her!

The chantey dies.

The mate says—

"That'll do!"

Or you're down at the ticket office, buying a ticket by the Harwich boat, the eight of you from the old hooker. And as you come from the office you meet the apprentices of the *Gulf Stream*. She left Frisco ten days before you did. You overhauled and spoke her down in the southeast trades. And along behind the boys of the *Gulf Stream* come the boys of the *Jessie Thomas* just in from the Colonies. You met her south and west of the Western Islands, and for three full days you sailed neck and neck with her. Then, just after daybreak, your jigger topmast staysail halyards carried away and before you could reeve off new ones she crept ahead a few feet. But you beat her in. She docked on the tide behind you.

It's night, and we're all aboard the Harwich boat. She's slipping along at twenty-two an hour. We're traveling second cabin, of course. And down in the second cabin accommodations above the rudder there's a crowd of Germans, Dutch and Belgians. The bunks are arranged in two tiers, one tier above the other. And in the top tier the bunks are arranged four wide. You have one of the farthest in bunks, against the ship's plates. To get in or to get out of it you have to crawl over three perturbed fellows who can't speak a word of English. And you spend the night crawling to and fro. For a time you lie in your bunk and shout to one of the *Jessie's* boys in a bunk beneath you. As he and you decide to get up and go walk the deck awhile, a gang of the other apprentices come below to turn in. You all stand in a crowd, talking and laughing. You've all got good shore 'baccy. At sea, because the Old Man's slop chest was empty, you've been smoking dried tea leaves for over three weeks past. One of the *Gulf Stream* boys has found three bottles of wine in the bunk of one of the foreigners, and has appropriated it. The foreigners can't make you out at all. They think you belong to the steamer and believe you when you explain to them that passengers are not allowed to have wine with them. Was ever a better night?

Morning comes, and you scatter.

"So-long!"

Was ever a better morning?

CHAPTER I

THE PACT

WE WERE on the east bank of the Meuse River, where six of us were trapped in a shell hole. War was to the right of us, to the left of us, before and behind us, and roaring on wings overhead. At this particular crossing of the Meuse a crack Prussian division had resisted Liggett's advance, although the general movement was a German retreat, and here were six of us trapped and practically surrounded.

There was a peculiarly vindictive machine gunner somewhere near us. Every time one of us crawled to the crater of our pit, his gun rained bullets. They could, of course, have attacked and put us to the bayonet. However, they seemed to be content merely to keep us from crawling out.

A Gripping Novelette of Modern Buried Treasure

MYSTERY ISLAND

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

Their contentment in this respect had been going on since the day before, the sixth of November. Our water was gone. I had just given the last swig from my canteen to Private First Class Walter Tremaine, who had fainted from thirst, hunger and the misfortune of having had an ear shot neatly off while peeping over our crater.

Privates First Class Rickshaw and Price were doing fairly well; they were unhit, still had ammunition and were taking an occasional shot at the besieging pill box. Corporal Patrick Shane, on the other hand, was a casualty. Not ten minutes passed without a shell lighting somewhere near our hole, and Shane had a piece of shrapnel in his leg. Little Sergeant Kemp was not hit, but he was sick, feverish. I, Second Lieutenant Edward Froelick, would have surrendered our party hours ago had there been an opportunity. We could gain no purpose here; certainly we could not last through another night of this predicament.

However, there was no one to surrender to except that pill box. We might as well have tried to surrender to a bunch of hornets. Those particular machine gunners were worse than vindictive; they were sore as boils. I think Rickshaw had drilled one of their crew, and now nothing would atone them but our blood.

"Only one slim chance," I remarked from a throat so parched that it pained me to talk. "That's to crawl out after dark and beat it for the river." Then, seeing Shane there on his back, I added, "Of course we'll have to carry Shane."

"I'll crawl," whispered Shane huskily.

But I knew he couldn't. I knew, too, that whether we crawled or ran we'd never get to the river. We were surrounded. There was wire everywhere. We were all as weak as kittens.

Private Price crawled up to the rim and saluted the pill box with another clip of shots. He slid back as the leaden reply splashed dirt down into our eyes. A bomb burst somewhere near and it seemed that the earth rocked. A great, powder stinking fog drifted by. Shells, going and coming, rolled along the sky. We were all dizzy and inclined to see things upside down. Shane told me later that he thought he was on his belly looking down, instead of on his back looking up. For instance, when that rifle grenade came rolling down the inner incline of our refuge, smoking, sputtering, against a

background of smoky sky, it seemed to Shane that it was ascending straight up at him out of a murky sea. He said he was afraid he couldn't reach it; but he did—by stretching he could just barely grasp it—and hurled it downward whence it came.

His feverish brain saw the universe in reverse—actually he threw it upward out of the hole. It exploded just beyond the lip, and again we were splashed with chips of dirt. We swallowed a little more smoke. We flattened a little tighter to the floor of our pit.

We weren't rushed. There'd be intervals of quiet, as far as it concerned the immediate environs, and I'd begin to think the pill boxers had abandoned their position. But I was wrong. Every time I peeped they opened up.

Yet on my last peep I saw something, far in the distance, which looked good. I saw a caravan of German guns, trailing northeast.

"It looks hopeful," I told the boys. "These pill throwers may be standing pat merely to cover the heavy stuff, while it withdraws. Come night, there may be no one left around to resist our escape."

"If we do escape, Lieutenant," suggested Price, "we ought to all meet ten years from today and fight this war over again. What a kick we'd get, bunching together over a keg of beer ten years from now and chewin' the fat about this here heroic stand of our'n!"

Price laughed facetiously, but his idea fastened on my mind. Ten years from now! Suppose we survived. Suppose the six of us met in ten years from this hectic day! That would be on November 7, 1928. Would the world endure that long? Somehow, in this chaotic hour of despair, with the din of war crashing around and about us, I was not at all sure that it would.

We lay about, in the shell hole, for another hideous interval.

Rickshaw broke a silence.

"Ten years from today!"

That was all he said. Evidently the thought expressed by Price had fastened tenaciously upon his own mind.

We began to talk about it. We liked the idea. If by any miracle we survived this trap, why not make a pact to meet in ten years? An odious adventure it was, now, but how precious it would be in ten years! What a thrill we could get living it, in retrospect, again. We discussed it with growing enthusiasm. Even Pat Shane, whose distress was the most acute of all, put in a word of assent.

Finally we shook hands on it. Seriously. In fact, with the most intense solemnity. Rank? It made no difference to us at the moment. The fact that we were three privates, two non-coms and one shavetail officer was of no importance whatever. We were six men, comrades, facing death.

So we made the pact. On our sacred honors we swore, did we survive and did the wheels of time turn forward to that distant date, to meet on November seventh, the year nineteen hundred and twenty-eight.

And then we spoke of a rendezvous. Where would we meet? Tremaine offered his Brooklyn home. Rickshaw objected; he lived on a Texas ranch and that would be the devil of a long way for him to go. Shane was from New Jersey, Price from Dakota. Kemp said it made no difference to him, because he was a traveling man anyway.

The homestead of my own parents, a farm in east Missouri, was finally selected because it was the most centrally located. I gave the address, R. F. D. No. 1, Trimble, Missouri. All five of them took it down.

Again we shook hands around. Again we swore by all that was holy to meet, if we survived, in exactly ten years from that day.

We did survive. Just after dusk the first American Army crossed all those portions of the Meuse not yet commanded—the final stride of victory. Only Price and I were conscious when they took us from the shell hole.

The confusion of rapid military advance,

the Armistice four days later, the fact that we were sorted into various hospitals and rest billets prevented us from any immediate conclave at which we might have perfected with more detail our pact of distant reunion.

I was spared service with the Army of Occupation. So was Shane. So, I later learned, was Rickshaw. Tremaine served six months at a bridgehead on the Rhine. I'm not sure what happened to Price and Kemp.

CHAPTER II

I BUY AN ISLAND

MY OWN homecoming to Missouri was not joyful, for both my parents had passed away in the previous month. With no inclination or fitness for farming, I let the old homestead go to pot and took up the practise of law in St. Louis. Entering the third decade of the Twentieth Century, I found that I had lost all track of my comrades in that last desperate adventure on the Meuse, with the exception of Patrick Shane.

With Shane I kept in fairly close touch. Our pursuit of livelihood lay along somewhat parallel lines, as I became a criminal lawyer and he a private detective practising in Trenton, New Jersey. Shane, in his chosen profession, made more than a common success. His services became more and more in demand and his orbit of activity expanded into more than a dozen States.

It was in August, 1928, that an investigation relating to the criminal collection of life insurance brought him to Missouri. At his first opportunity to relax he dropped into my St. Louis office.

He was a bundle of smiles and energy, as slim, as trim and as boyish as ever. He was still under middle age, handsome, with an engaging manner, and as erect as a drill sergeant on parade.

I felt a little ashamed that my own shoulders were rounding and that I had developed something of a paunch. Shane chided me:

"Too much swivel chair, Froelick. What you need is a long hard hike under full pack."

I admitted that I had been pushing pretty steadily against the collar and that a holiday would do me good.

"You haven't forgotten your obligations, have you?" he asked anxiously. "You're scheduled to be host, you know, to myself, Kemp, Rickshaw, Tremaine and Price on November seventh. Only three months away, Froelick."

Again he made me rather ashamed. The truth was that the old pact made in that shell hole was little more to me than a vague memory. But I could see that to Shane it meant a great deal. He was on the *qui vive* about it. In matters like this he had the romantic sentimentality of an Irish soldier; I could see it now, playing about among the clusters of tiny freckles just under his brown eyes.

He spoke again of that old adventure in Flanders.

"Little old Kemp was a game guy," he said.

In just that vein he referred to the rest. Before he was done I knew I'd be the sorriest cad on earth if I failed to follow up and make good on that sworn tryst.

"Why, of course, Pat," I said, red to the ears. "We'll have to line 'em up. But I guess we'll have to meet here at a St. Louis hotel, on me, of course; because I don't own that Trimble farm any more."

Shane seemed disappointed.

"I was hoping we could reunite on your farm, Froelick," he said. "Out of door stuff, you know, and closer to nature. Better chance to raise a little unrefined hell. Sell the farm, did you?"

"No. I tried to, but with the recent agricultural depression I couldn't. A rocky ridge farm it was, and my realtor couldn't get a single cash bid on it. He said he could trade it, but he couldn't sell it. So I told him to trade it. He came in one day about a year ago and said he was offered another piece of realty for it, bigger than mine, quite as undesirable as mine from the standpoint of a cash sale, but he advised me to take it. Sight unseen, on my realtor's advice, I did. You'll

laugh when you hear what I got, Pat."

"A western ranch?" hazarded Shane.

"No. An island of silt and sand in the middle of the Mississippi River."

"A river island?" exclaimed Shane. "Aren't you afraid that the next flood will wash it away?"

"On the contrary, every flood seems to add to it," I said. "I saw the abstract. It shows an original patent dated 1854, to a Captain Darrow. By metes and bounds and a sketch describing that entry, the area was then eight hundred acres in the shape of a dumb-bell. But the latest survey shows twelve hundred acres, with the slim shank of the dumb-bell filled out so that the island is now a perfect oval. In seventy-four years the island has gained fifty per cent, catching silt and sand from every flood."

"Some island!" commented Shane.

"Yes, it's some three or four miles long and about half a mile wide. The channel's on the Missouri side, although there's nearly a mile of water between the island and Illinois."

"Improved?" inquired Shane.

"As to living quarters, yes. There's an old ramshackle colonial house on the south end, built by the original patentee, Captain Horatio Darrow, in the eighteen fifties."

"Furnished?"

"Yes, after a rude fashion. Bear in mind I've never seen this property, Pat. I had complete confidence in my realtor and took it on his appraisal. I've been meaning to go up there and have a look, at the first opportunity."

Shane slapped his knees with enthusiasm.

"Say, why don't we hold our vet's reunion on your mysterious island? In November, on a river island, there ought to be first class duck shooting. We could have a peck o' fun out there and fight the war all over again with twelve gage pump guns."

A thought struck me which brought a grin to my lips.

"Your term, 'mysterious island', I said, is peculiarly apt. Because that island has a sinister history, Pat, and for half a century has been known along the river as Mystery Island."

"What?" he cried. "Better and better. Lead me to it. Mysteries are my bread and butter, you know. What kind of mystery have you got on your island?"

"Too intricate a one to explain now," I told him. "What worries me is this: how are we going to get word to Tremaine, Kemp, Price and Rickshaw? I've no idea where they live. More than likely they've forgotten all about this decennial 'rendezvous."

"Betcha a silk hat they haven't," contested Shane. "You haven't their addresses, but they took down yours. R. F. D. No. 1, Trimble, Missouri. I think they'll write in, inquiring. You can have the Trimble postmaster forward their inquiries, then telegraph them that we meet on the island instead of the farm."

I was dubious. After a discussion I convinced Shane that the chance was pretty long.

"True," he said, "they may be timid about approaching you after ten years. You were an officer and they were enlisted men. Possibly that might make them reticent after the passing of time. I tell you—I'm a detective, so leave me the job of ferreting out their addresses. I'll get at it through the records of the adjutant general's office in Washington."

We agreed on this and then I suggested that, after meeting on the 7th, we stay over the 11th, the decennial of the Armistice.

"Good!" applauded Shane. "It would be too long a trip for those fellows unless we made a four day jamboree of it. I'll share your expenses as host, Froelick."

By now I was as keen as Shane for the whole program. It developed that Shane was free from his duties for the next two days. Neither did I have any immediate pressing engagements.

"Suppose we run up to your island tomorrow," suggested Shane, "and see what's needed in the way of equipment. Now that you mention a mystery, I'm keen to see the place."

"That makes it unanimous," I told him. "It's only sixty miles upriver to Darrow's Landing, and a good road."

"I've a speedy little roadster," said Shane, "and I'll pick you up at—"

"Make it six o'clock at my hotel."

CHAPTER III

A GUEST HAS COME AND GONE

THUS it was barely after eight o'clock of the next morning that we drove into the little river town of Darrow's Landing. The river was calm and below mean stage and, as Shane and I both needed to exercise our muscles, after renting a boat we elected to be our own oarsmen. By nine we were rowing out toward Mystery Island.

For a starter I was at the oars, and thus my back was to the bow. Shane, seated in the stern, was facing our goal and could see the long, low, willow bound outline of the island.

"If you hadn't told me otherwise," he commented, "I'd think it was the Illinois shore."

"There's as wide a strip of water on the other side as on this," I assured him, "although the channel hugs the Missouri shore. Take these field glasses, Pat. I'm going to recite to you the history of Mystery Island as we row out and you can be picking out the pertinent bits of topography."

He took the field glasses which, incidentally, were the identical article of ordnance I had carried as an officer in France.

"You see the house, don't you?"

"Yes," said Shane, "on the south end where the ground's highest."

"That checks with my realtor's description. Now can you make out a tall walnut tree just west of the house?"

"There's four of them, aren't there?"

"No. Those are pecans. They are in front of the house and could hardly be native vegetation. It's assumed that Captain Darrow planted them seventy-five years ago, either for shade or for fruit. The tall walnut tree's off to the side, Pat."

"I've got it. Why is it important?"

"In the year 1858," I recited, "a steamboat was passing down river at about where we are now. The skipper happened to be looking toward the island with his telescope. He saw the body of the island's then landlord, Horatio Darrow, hanging by the neck from the topmost limb of that walnut."

"So?" exclaimed Shane. "And why was he hanged?"

"Darrow," I informed him, "was a notorious character, a river pirate by repute, although never convicted of any definite crime. He owned the island by legitimate patent. Lived there alone, although he sometimes entertained grandly. For the latter purpose he built a commodious house. Well educated, popular in certain quarters, called himself a gentleman. His boast was that in his youth he had known Andrew Jackson and the elder Harrison.

"Paradoxically, he was a student of the classics and could fire Shakespeare at you as readily as he could blow your head off. His less vicious piracy was merely to ride the St. Louis-New Orleans steamboats for the purpose of fleecing fellow passengers at cards. Times were, however, when he'd board a deck at night, masked, and hijack every purse in sight. His conviction was ultimately inevitable, but it transpired that unofficial executioners got to him first and hanged him on his own island."

"A vigilance committee, I take it," commented Shane.

"There's a doubt as to whether it was a vigilance committee or a gang of rival and jealous outlaws. Darrow was supposed to be rich from his lootings. Many still believe there's a cache of gold coin buried on the island. Anyway, in 1858 a steamboat skipper saw him hanging to a tree. The skipper took some of his crew and rowed to the island. Cutting the body down, they found it riddled with bullets. That emboldens the theory of a rival outlaw gang. The theory is that they found Darrow there alone and tortured him to make

him tell where his wealth was buried. Since they were enraged enough to riddle him with bullets after hanging him, it's presumed that he refused them the information."

"Did they ever find his murderers?" asked Shane.

"No. Although a rival river outlaw, a bitter enemy of Darrow's, named George Zanzibar, was tried for the crime. Zanzibar produced a New Orleans alibi and was acquitted. Later he was convicted of other crimes and died in prison."

Shane relieved me at the oars and I took the stern seat. The island was so close now that I did not need the binoculars to make out its more important features of topography. These I had never seen before, but they had been accurately described to me by my realtor on his trip of appraisal a year ago, just prior to my acquisition of the property. The house at the south end was, I saw, dignified by sturdy columns and the grounds were decorated with five magnificent trees. One walnut at the side and four pecans in front. There was a cleared space in the lower ground at the center of the island, although many willows fringed the shore line.

"After Darrow's death," I explained to Shane, "there was no one to pay taxes on the estate. These taxes are small items, by the way, because, for one thing, the island is not included in any school district. For general taxes it happens to come under the jurisdiction of the adjacent Missouri county. Unpaid taxes accumulated, with interests, and finally a tax title was acquired by a farmer named Ruether.

"Ruether moved on to the island, cleared the willows from the rich, silty soil near the center and raised corn. About every other year high water would destroy his crop. On lucky years he'd raise bumper yields. Ruether was a steady, hard working, unimaginative farmer. With the passage of time his tax title became as good as a patent. Father and son, the Ruethers lived on the island two generations."

"And then what?" asked Shane.

"The young Ruether died a little over a year ago, leaving a childless widow. Naturally a woman couldn't live in such isolation alone, so Mrs. Ruether moved to the mainland. All she knew was farming, and thus she decided to trade her island for a mainland farm, where she could have the protection of neighbors. Actually she had a twelve hundred acre plantation with the richest soil in the world. Mississippi River silt. But people were afraid of it. Banks would not accord it a loan value. There was the bugaboo that it would wash away, or that some flood would destroy all life on it. It was my own realtor who discovered that the house was above the highest known high water in seventy-five years and that the island was growing instead of scouring. Thus it was I who traded farms with Mrs. Ruether."

"The house doesn't seem to be as dilapidated as one would expect," remarked Shane.

"No. Once in the elder Ruether's lifetime and twice in his son's, the house was painted and repaired. A little to the left, Pat. There seems to be a landing inlet exactly opposite the house."

SHANE oared us into the inlet indicated. As we beached we saw that there was a clear path, weed grown but without willows, between us and the house. This cleared approach was about fifty yards wide and gave an unobstructed view of the domestic grounds, which were just at the summit of a gentle slope.

"Have you sent any agents out here during the year of your ownership?" Shane asked me.

"No. Why?"

"Some one's been trespassing, then," said Shane. He pointed to a very plain marking in the mud where another boat had been beached.

"And look at the footprints," he added. "Moreover, the weeds are pretty well tramped between here and the house. At what month of this year was the river at its peak stage?"

"In May," I told him.

"Living in St. Louis as you do," he pursued, "what would be your guess as to the number of feet per month the river level has fallen since May."

I hazarded a guess of three feet per month.

"On that score," said Patrick Shane the detective, "our trespasser beached his boat here about five weeks ago, since the spoor of his landing is about four feet vertically higher than our own."

The idea of trespassers sobered me. It was too early in the fall for legitimate duck shooting. Bootleggers! Gangsters! Who else would be calling in at such a port as this?

"Possibly," mentioned Shane, "some quite harmless rivermen have been here, market fishing for cats. By the way, Froelick, are you armed?"

I wasn't. Shane, it developed, carried an automatic pistol, being licensed to do so by the nature of his profession.

We went up the slope to the house. A giant walnut tree, twice the height of the two-story dwelling, stood just at the top of the slope.

"The scaffold of Captain Darrow," I recalled to Shane.

"But what the heck are these pits?" he asked. "Freshly dug, too. I don't mean they were dug yesterday or today, but they were certainly dug this summer season."

I had by now seen them myself. There were shallow holes dug here and there in the environs of the walnut.

A moment later we passed to the front of the house, which faced north, down the more lengthy vista of the island. It was a vista of some three miles. The far or north end of the island was again a knoll of high ground, the intervening area being low, hardly ten feet above the level of the river. Much of the central area was free from willows, being the land farmed by the two generations of Ruethers. There were no fences.

To our right we could look east across a wide arm of the river to Illinois, a shore on which there was nothing visible but a levee.

"These are the biggest pecans I ever saw," Shane was saying.

He referred to the four huge pecan trees, arranged in a quadrangle directly in front of the house. The quadrangle, we noticed, was not quite regular. The pair of trees farthest from the mansion were slightly closer together than the pair nearest the house. What impressed us at the moment was the magnificence of the trees. While not as tall as the lone walnut, they were far more ornamental.

"Here's a cigaret butt," said Shane, picking one up. "It's not fresh," he added, "but certainly it was dropped here since last winter's snows."

Shane took the lead and we entered the forlorn old mansion built some eighty years ago by Captain Horatio Darrow.

The door was not locked. In fact, it sagged on a single hinge. We pushed through, into a wide hallway dusty and hung with cobwebs. A broad staircase, with half the pickets gone from its balustrade, ascended to the second story. What caught our eyes immediately, however, was the condition of the floor.

Here and there floor boards had been yanked loose, exposing darksome cavities beneath.

We entered what had been an ornate parlor, to the left. Here again we found the floor disrupted, not by decay but, plainly, by hammer and pinch bar. There was the wreck of a once handsome fireplace, where the mantel had been torn away. There was a gaping hole in the ceiling.

"A cut hole," Shane commented. "Froelick, somebody's been tearing this house to pieces, searching for the fortune of that old pirate, Darrow."

"But that's too cold a trail," I protested in bewilderment. "Darrow has been dead seventy years. No doubt there were many adventurers out here the first decade or so after his death, digging for his treasure. But certainly not recently."

"So recently," contested Shane, "that there are no cobwebs across that cut hole in the ceiling, although cobwebs are the rule of the house. It was the same man or

men, no doubt, who beached a boat when the falling river passed a stage four feet higher than it is now. On your own guess, about five weeks ago."

We went through all the rooms, upstairs and down. Havoc was everywhere. A clumsy and poorly organized search had been under way. The furnishings of the house—and these were more generous than I had expected to find—had hardly been touched. It was the walls, floors, ceilings—the house itself—which had been desecrated.

"The Widow Ruether and I traded furniture as well as farms," I explained to Shane. "That saved each of us the expense of ferrying our stuff across the river, and a long haul on land. Old relics for old relics; I think we broke about even. No doubt the widow took the more personal of her heirlooms with her, as was her right."

Later Shane and I went out and explored the entire island. In not one but a score of places we found a series of pits dug by the recent trespasser. There seemed to be no rhyme or rule for these explorations. We even found evidence of them down on the low ground in mid-island, the barrens which had been the old corn land of the Ruethers.

"He was digging," insisted Shane, "for Darrow's treasure. And most certainly by virtue of some recently developed clue. No man would hunt with such energy and dig so many holes, unless he had something hotter than a legend seventy years old."

"It's a blank mystery to me," I said.

On one thing we were agreed. My island would make a crackerjack picnic ground for our soldierly reunion of November 7th.

CHAPTER IV

X MARKS THE SPOT

LATE in the evening we rowed back to Darrow's Landing. Shane opened the rumble seat of his roadster and took out our grips. With these we repaired to the hotel and spent the night.

Next morning, just as we were starting for St. Louis, Shane asked me how much out of the way it would be for us to go by my old mainland farm, the one traded to the widow Ruether.

"Only about twenty miles," I informed him. "But why?"

"First," was his response, "you could leave word with Mrs. Ruether to steer Price, Kemp, Tremaine or Rickshaw out to your island on November 7th, in case any of them show up at the original tryst without giving advance notice. Second, you could leave personal word with the local postmaster to forward their inquiries."

I agreed. So we turned due west out of Darrow's Landing, toward the county seat town of Trimble.

In an hour we arrived at my old farm. We found it deserted. The windows and doors of the house were boarded up. Weeds grew through cracks in the porch. There was not a chicken, dog, or hoof of live stock in evidence.

We left and, turning from the farmstead gate, saw a more prosperous farm just across the lane. Here a farmer was mowing hay in a meadow. We hailed him, and he halted his mower just across the fence from our roadster.

"Do you know where we can find Mrs. Ruether?" I asked him.

"Ruether?" he exclaimed, as though he had never heard the name before.

"Yes. She used to live on the place just across the lane from you. I traded it to her a little over a year ago. By later correspondence I know that she took residence there and started a small dairy with the help of an orphan girl."

"Oh!" exclaimed the farmer. "You mean Mrs. Cranders!"

"Cranders!" I echoed, instantly realizing that I had heard the name recently. Just in what connection, for a moment, I could not recall.

"Yep, Mrs. Cranders," responded the farmer, who still was seated on the mower. "The widow Ruether married a man named Cranders just a month after she took the place. Haven't you heard?

Don't you read the papers? Mrs. Cranders is dead. Just a month ago her ornery husband, Monk Cranders, murdered her. It's the talk of the county. He throwed a fit of temper, one day, he did, and choked her to death. He—"

"Cranders!" cried Shane and I in unison.

Instantly we both recalled the headliner news story of a month ago, the story of a hideously brutal murder, wherein a ruffian husband had choked to death his hard working farmwife.

So the victim, Mrs. Cranders, was the former Mrs. Ruether!

"Yep," our informant went on, "that fellah Cranders choked her, he did, right there in that farmhouse a month ago and he'd orter be hanged. He will be, too, you can betcher life on that. They cotched him with blood hounds. His trial's on right now, in Trimble. They'll hang Cranders. The State's got a eye witness. The orphan girl what the poor woman kept to help her with the milkin', she seen the whole thing. Giddap, Buck, Bess, giddap!"

The mowing machine rattled on down the swath.

Shocked by the news, and without speaking for some minutes, Shane and I drove on along the Trimble highway.

"No doubt," Shane commented at last, "it's the old, old story; wherein a degenerate husband comes home drunk and abuses his wife."

It was the attendant at a filling station in Trimble who told us differently. The filling station was only a block from the courthouse, and we noticed that the courtyard and adjacent streets were parked solid with cars.

While we were getting gas the attendant remarked:

"A rushin' business today. There's a big murder trial on."

"The Cranders case, eh?" asked Shane.

"Yeh. He choked his wife to death."

"Drunk?"

"No. He was cold sober. But he was mad. He was sore as a boiled owl. The woman, he claims, had misled him about the location of some fortune buried on a river island. The only work Cranders ever done in his life was to put in four months digging for that treasure. Then he found out the joke was on him. It made him mad, mad and mean. He found out there never had been a buried treasure. The map was phony."

"Map?" inquired Shane eagerly. "Was there a map?"

"Yeh, but it was phony. It was a plant, a frame. It was made to salt the island for a sucker sale, like you'd salt a gold mine. See? The woman confessed the map was phony, after Cranders had wasted four months' sweat, digging. It made him so mad he choked her. You can hear all about it at the courthouse, if you're interested. How's your oil?"

Our oil was all right and we drove on down the street. I saw Shane's eyes roving from right to left and I knew he was looking for a parking place. I knew he wanted to stop here awhile and attend the trial of Cranders. I was more than willing. Beyond doubt this man Cranders was none other than the recent trespasser on my island. Clearly the murder had to do with the legend of Darrow's old buried treasure. That brought it pretty close to home.

We could find no parking place either in the courtyard or on the street. In an adjacent block, however, there was a wide alley in which only a few cars were parked. Into this Shane drove our roadster and we parked just in the rear of a barber shop.

FIVE minutes later we pressed our way into a crowded courtroom on the second floor of the courthouse. The trial, we found, had been going on two days and every witness had been examined. It transpired that our attendance was opportune, because we were just in time to hear a concise speech of summary delivered by the prosecutor.

"Your Honor and gentlemen of the jury," declaimed the prosecutor, "you have heard the testimony and there can

remain no possible doubt as to the guilt of Monk Cranders."

He pointed a shaking finger toward the accused, who sat between his counsel and an officer of the law. Cranders was, I saw, well named Monk, for he was a small, wiry man with peculiarly ape-like features and long arms. He was a vicious type, with too prominent upper teeth; unshaven, and with a forehead which sloped backward to a cranium bald in the center. He was surly now even under the pall of imminent murder conviction, his hands clenching and unclenching, his eyes like white hot gimlets as they glared at the prosecutor.

His guardian, whether bailiff or sheriff, was a beefy, three chinned giant who struck me as possessing an extraordinary physical power and a very ordinary wit. He could, I am sure, have crushed the pygmy Cranders with a single one of his ham-like hands. Just now he was leaning forward, giving more attention to the prosecutor than to his prisoner.

"Briefly I shall review the evidence," went on the prosecutor, "so that there may be no confusion as to the motive and circumstance of this fiendish crime. You have heard the testimony of Ella O'Rourke, the orphan girl who assisted Mrs. Cranders with the chores of the farm and who was present in the room at the moment of assault. Moreover, Ella O'Rourke had lived there for five months and was thus fully conversant with the nature of the exhibits which have been displayed to you in this trial."

The attorney took a draught of water, mopped his brow from the heat of this sultry August day—although every window was open the courtroom was stifling—and then proceeded:

"We know from many witnesses that Monk Cranders was a parasite; even the defense has failed to show that he ever did an honest day's work in his life. Eight months ago he married the widow Ruether, who had just acquired a farm in this county. Thus Mrs. Ruether became Mrs. Cranders. It became plain that Cranders had married for free board and a roof over his head. He toiled not; nor spun; he lived by the sweat of his wife's brow. She was indulgent; she supported him.

"Cranders was constantly wheedling money from her to spend on his own profligate tastes. One day he noticed among his wife's personal possessions a pair of heirlooms which she had brought with her from a previous residence. You have seen them, Exhibits A and B at this trial."

The prosecutor held up a pair of very ancient pistols, apparently dueling weapons of the cap and ball type. They were mates, except that while one had a pearl butt, from the other butt the pearl covering was gone. I looked about for Pat Shane, but he was no longer at my side. In a moment I saw him farther along in the crowded aisle.

We had entered to find standing room only, every seat and every aisle jammed. I knew that most courts would not have permitted this congestion. I could only explain it by assuming that in a rural community such as Trimble, where every one knew every one else, there would be less tendency to deny the townspeople entrance to a case of such commanding interest as State versus Cranders. It was brought to my mind, too, that here was another striking example of how the rank and file of us will flock, will even pack into the galleries of murder trials, with morbid zeal to attend the most revolting recitals of evidence.

I could see that Shane, from his position well down the aisle, was able to give fairly close inspection to the displayed exhibits.

"Cranders," resumed the prosecutor, "asked his wife about these oddly out-of-date pistols. She, in the presence of the witness Ella O'Rourke, explained their origin. They had belonged to a Captain Horatio Darrow. Adam Ruether, the father of Mrs. Cranders' first husband, had found them in the house of his island farm. As decades passed by, this good old farmer, Adam Ruether, was advised that these pistols might attain some value as curios, due to the colorful history of Horatio Darrow. The older the pistols,

the more they would be worth. For that reason they were conserved.

"The cunning mind of Cranders saw a chance for some ready pocket money. He purloined the pistols. He took the flivver with which his wife delivered milk and started for St. Louis. He hoped to get perhaps fifty dollars for the pistols at a curio shop. He had hardly more than started, however, when a slab of pearl came off one of the pistol butts. The butt screw was so old that it had either loosened or rusted. At any rate there was exposed to Cranders a sheet of chamois concealed within the hollow pistol butt. Burnt on this chamois was a map. The map was nothing more than an oval, labeled 'Mystery Island.' There were no features of topography shown. The oval was quite blank. But there was, beneath the oval, an inscription of burnt lettering, reading:

Copper chest buried at spot marked X.

"Here is the map, Exhibit C."

The prosecutor held up for the view of the courtroom a sheet of chamois about ten inches square. I could see the oval, quite blank, and two lines of inscription beneath. The latter I was too far away to read. I was sure that Shane, closer to the front, was having better luck.

My own attention was breathless; and quite naturally, for here was being displayed in a murder trial that which purported to be a map of my own island estate.

A map actually labeled Mystery Island! A map which suggested quite forcefully that X marked the spot where pirate gold was buried. I found my blood tingling.

THE PROSECUTOR'S very next words, however, cast a damp cloth over my thrill.

"Cranders," he stated, "should have known that the map was, on the face of it, a fake. He should have known that it could not possibly have been executed by the notorious river bandit, Horatio Darrow. Lest it seem that I digress, your Honor, allow me to say that the spuriousness of the map is important because it shows that Mrs. Cranders, victim of the accused, merely told the truth when she enraged the murderer to his pitch of violence. That is all she did—she told the truth. Cranders should have guessed the truth; he would have if his intelligence had surpassed a low, criminal cunning.

"Cranders knew about Darrow's island and about the pirate loot presumed to have been buried there by Darrow. As a perennial loafer along the river front, he must have heard that story hashed over in many a barroom. So he deserted his idea of selling the pistols as curios. A bigger stake now loomed to lure his cupidity. He hurried back to his wife's farm and pumped her for what she knew of the pirate Darrow. We know this because the meeting was witnessed by the girl, Ella O'Rourke.

"Mrs. Cranders did not know anything more about Darrow than is generally known along the river by old inhabitants. Nevertheless Cranders was more and more certain that the chamois map was genuine, a clue to Darrow's buried gold. At spot marked X, said the map. Yet, baffingly, there was no X. The oval was bare. So Cranders assumed that the X was a physical marking on the island, perhaps a cross on the floor of the house, on the foundation, on the bole of a tree, perhaps an upright cross stuck in the ground. Off he went to Mystery Island."

The prosecutor took another drink of ice water and again mopped his brow.

"How stupid of Cranders!" he resumed. "The map itself was labeled Mystery Island. Yet the mystery, if any, only began when Darrow the pirate was found hanging there on the limb of a walnut tree in the year 1858. Prior to his death the island was known only as Darrow's Island. The name Mystery Island was not even coined for it until Darrow was cold in his grave. Therefore this chamois map could not conceivably have been made by Darrow himself. But Cranders, in his lust, failed to arrive at that very simple and obvious conclusion.

"For four months he spent most of his time digging on the island opposite the town of Darrow's Landing. The present owner is non-resident, and thus Cranders was not disturbed. Every weekend he would go home to the mainland farm, badger another grubstake from his wife, then off again to the island. His truancies worked hardships on the poor woman, because he'd always take her flivver, leaving her to deliver milk, cream, butter and eggs on foot. We may take it, too, from the testimony of Ella O'Rourke, that the good woman was heroically devoted to her reprobate spouse. Women, bless their loyal souls, are often that way. And so, after four months, she told him the truth.

"Why, you may ask, did she not tell him the truth sooner? Merely because she was reluctant to drag forth a skeleton from the closet of her first marital connections, the Ruethers. She was reluctant to expose a felony planned, though not carried to successful conclusion, by the elder Ruether. But finally, after four months, her conscience forced her to tell Cranders the truth. She did so in the presence of Ella O'Rourke.

"The truth was this: In the hard times of 1893 the Ruethers were face to face with famine out there on that island. Adam Ruether tried to sell the island. It was unsalable. So he evolved the scheme of appealing to the cupidity of some prospective buyer through the old buried treasure legend. Adam Ruether himself made that map. He himself stuffed it into the butt of one of Darrow's old pistols. He left a screw loose. His scheme was to let some gullible prospect handle the pistol and seem to find what Darrow himself had placed there prior to 1858. For some reason the scheme didn't work; either no sucker was found or, if found, he didn't bite. Next year was a good crop year and Adam Ruether abandoned his scheme of trickery. The pistols were laid aside and gradually forgotten.

"That was the truth about the map. It was divulged by Mrs. Cranders to her husband only a month ago—and Cranders went berserk with chagrin and rage.

"Livid with fury that he had been allowed to dig and grub four months for a will o' the wisp, seeking all that while a phantom treasure, Monk Cranders seized his wife by the throat and strangled her to death. He—"

The prosecutor's summarizing narrative was interrupted by a pistol shot. The packed courtroom became, suddenly, a riotous stampede of shrieking spectators, men and women, pushing, jamming, trampling one another. Had the court burst into a ball of flame there could hardly have been a more stark and frenzied maelstrom of terror.

Shot followed shot. They all came from two heavy guns in the hands of the accused, Cranders. Cranders had snatched them from the obese bailiff at his side, an officer who had become so spellbound by the prosecutor that he had completely forgotten why he was there.

And now Monk Cranders, bent to the stance of a stalking baboon, was backing across the foreground of the court, shooting. His long arms were extended. His wrists pumped alternately up and down. With every downward flip of his right wrist the right gun roared. With every downward flip of his left wrist the left gun roared. Viciously, murderously, he backed, shooting, his steel shod fists pumping in uproarious rhythm. He was like a frontier killer gunman, shooting his way out of a saloon.

CHAPTER V

CRANDERS

NO ONE could get out. But every one did succeed in keeping at least ten feet away from Cranders. The bailiff was winged. So was the prosecuter. The judge dodged behind his rostrum. The jury cringed in its box. Every one else was in a tight press, trying to fight furiously toward the corridor doors.

There must have been other guns in that courtroom than those in the hands of Cranders. Pat Shane, to my certain

knowledge, had one in his hip pocket. He afterward told me that it would have been impossible for him to draw it and help frustrate Cranders, because his arms were pinioned to his sides by the milling crowd in the aisle.

Nor did Cranders occupy more than ten seconds in backing across the room. His goal, of course, was an open window. By the time he reached it he had fired eleven shots. Had he fired into the crowd it would have been a massacre. He fired only at court officials, however, and of all his bullets only two bit flesh.

His back bumping against the window, Cranders hurled an empty gun straight at the foreman of the jury; then, retaining a weapon which still had one charge, he stepped out of that window as though totally oblivious to the fact that he was on the second floor.

By all precedent he should have broken his neck, or at least a leg. Yet the first belated observer to reach the window reported him dodging among the parked autos of the courtyard. It was found later that he had alighted in a bed of geraniums. Patrick Shane was the second observer to reach a window, and he failed to see Cranders at all.

This while I was in a maelstrom of surging humanity. A few moments later, however, the panic stricken crowd burst its bounds and overflowed out into the upper corridor. I was carried with it.

It was fully ten minutes before Shane joined me down in the courtyard. The bulk of the crowd was now in the street. The judge was there, his robe torn, his dignity ruined forever. He was shouting orders, impotently, for the restoration of the criminal.

Citizens were deputized with wholesale prodigality. The environs were scoured, but the earth seemed to have swallowed Monk Cranders. Conflicting rumors were rife. One was that a newsboy had seen a small, ugly, hatless man, presumably Cranders, rush across the street and into a barber shop. The barber shop, on being searched, was found quite empty. The barbers and whatever customers they might otherwise have been serving had gone over to attend the final dramatic session of the murder trial.

Another rumor was that Cranders had hopped into one of the parked autos in the courtyard and driven away.

"I'm glad, Eddie," Shane said to me, "that I locked the ignition of our roadster." He jangled his keys at me. "Let's cool ourselves down," he added, "with a couple of bottles of imitation beer."

We repaired to a drug store.

"After all, Pat," I said, "this is no skin off our backs. But I'd feel pretty cheap if I were one of the head lawyers in this murder trial."

"Same here if I were one of the head detectives," agreed Shane. "The event certainly reflects credit on no one. Well, let's wish 'em luck and drive on to St. Louis, Eddie."

In the alley we found our parked roadster. Shane unlocked the ignition. We got in and drove away, turning south on Main Street to take the St. Louis pike. As we drove out of the picture, the hue and cry was still a buzz-saw of fruitless activity.

"A hoax, after all!" I sighed, when we were well clear of the town.

"What's a hoax?" asked Shane.

"The buried treasure on Mystery Island."

"You think so?" he countered, with a queer smile.

"Of course it's a hoax. At least," I amended, "the map is a hoax. The prosecutor brought that out very logically. He pointed out that the map was labeled Mystery Island, a name which was not coined until after Darrow's death. That point is impregnable, but I have still another. The representation on the map was an oval, which is the shape of the island now. But in Darrow's time the island was shaped like a dumb-bell, two pieces of high ground joined by a thin, low shank. I know that by the abstract. So for that additional reason we may be sure that Darrow did not draw the map."

"You think so?"

His tone baited me. I turned to him

sharply. Shane, at the wheel, was smiling more queerly than ever.

"What would you say," he inquired, "if I told you I'm entirely convinced the map is genuine—that it was made by Darrow."

"What?" I protested. "Impossible! We know that Mrs. Cranders herself confessed that her father-in-law framed it, in the guileful spirit that a man salts a gold mine."

"And did you believe that?"

"Why not?"

"In the first place," argued Shane, "it's unconvincing because it's all out of character for those steady going, unimaginative Ruethers. The Ruethers, father and son, lived on that island for two hard working generations. I can't cast them in the rôle of real estate sharks, or swindlers. As for Mrs. Cranders' confession, I explain it this way: she wanted her husband to stay home. She lied to keep him home. It took her four months to think up a story which would keep him home, but she finally did—to her own doom. It was the woman's story which was a hoax, and not the map. The map, I think, is genuine and in the hand of Horatio Darrow."

"But," I argued, "why didn't he draw a dumb-bell instead of an oval?"

"He had a good reason," Shane insisted, exasperatingly.

He was driving swiftly all the while, staring straight ahead through the windshield.

"You amaze me, Pat," I protested again. "I can't see how you get that way. How do you explain the inscription, Mystery Island?"

"How close a look did you get at that exhibit, Eddie?" he asked me.

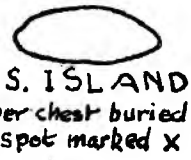
"Fifteen feet, possibly. Why?"

"I was not over eight feet from it," said Shane, "and I didn't see any inscription Mystery Island."

"But the prosecutor said—"

"The prosecutor couldn't read. He was blind. He, and not Cranders, was the real chucklehead in translating the map. Let me stop under this tree a moment, Eddie, and I'll reproduce it for you."

He drew up under a roadside tree. Then, tearing a leaf from his notebook, he made for me the following simple sketch:



"That," he announced, "is a fair duplicate of Exhibit C."

"Well?" I exclaimed, unable to see that he had proved anything.

"Well?" he countered. "Where do you see Mystery Island?"

I pointed to the MYS.

He shook his head. "Neither Ruether nor Darrow would have employed such an awkward abbreviation. As for Ruether, he had nothing to do with it. It never came to light, I'll wager, until Cranders shook it out of the gun. It was put there by Darrow, prior to 1858. Not in spite of your dumb-bell shape, *but because of it.* Not in spite of your MYS. contradiction, *but because of it.* You are hoist on the petard of your own arguments, Eddie. Think! The island is a long, slim oval. The sketch shows a short, fat oval. Why?

"Because Darrow," he went on, "only drew one of the two knobs of his dumb-bell. The central shank had caught four hundred acres less silt then than it has now. Which means that in Darrow's day, at fairly high stages of water there were *two* islands instead of one. Plant this seed in your brain, Eddie. MYS. doesn't stand for anything. But S. stands for South, on land or sea. What Darrow drew and what he properly labeled was: My South Island."

I was confounded. Conviction flooded over me. My South Island!

Of course. Was it conceivable that Ruether had written that? Could the farmer, Ruether, have thought back forty years and imagined two islands, instead of the one he knew? How absurd to attribute the sketch to Ruether! How con-

vincing, on the other hand, when attributed to the pirate landlord Darrow, with his possessive pronoun "my"! S—the natural abbreviation for a man of Captain Darrow's early nautical training. My South Island!

The genius of the solution staggered me.

"It means," I cried exultingly, "that Darrow actually buried a copper chest on my island."

"On the southern half of it," affirmed Shane. "Beyond any reasonable doubt Darrow himself made the map."

"But the cross? The cross which marks the spot? There was no cross on the map."

"We may be sure," said Pat Shane, "that he erected some sort of cross on the ground. Just how and where I cannot imagine at this moment. It's a very intriguing enigma, Eddie."

"Darned if you haven't convinced me, Pat," I said.

"You've convinced me, too, bimbos! Up with your mitts!"

The command shrieked shrilly in our very ears. Shane and I nearly jumped from the car. My head snapped around so suddenly that I almost cracked my neck.

There, standing in the now open rumble seat of our roadster, was the diminutive, monkey-like criminal, Cranders. To me he was a vision of sudden death. I stared. My flesh crept. Cranders! A gun in his right hand waved back and forth, menacing first Shane and then myself. Was that a cold spike of fright which was sticking in my spine? Or was he running me through with a bullet?

"Up with yer mitts, bimbos!" he shrieked again.

He looked scarcely human. His small eyes were coals, murderously ablaze. Just escaped from the sentence of death, his was the desperation which would kill as readily as he could breathe. I flung my hands high and saw that Shane had done the same.

Resistance? Hardly. We were in an awkward position there, sitting in the front seat of the parked roadster. Shane was embarrassed by the steering wheel. Our backs were to Cranders.

Our hands up, he reached over and expertly frisked Shane. In a trice he had Shane's automatic.

"Get out and beat it back down the road the way you came," he told Shane.

So he wasn't going to murder us! I was elated. Shane got out and, with his hands still raised, started walking down the road.

Cranders frisked me and found no weapon.

"You too!" he snarled.

I disembarked with alacrity and followed Shane. Our direction was back toward Trimble. We heard the roar as Cranders started our motor. As we looked around we saw him driving off. We turned and stood there, gaping like fleeced sheep at a wolf, as he rounded a bend and was gone.

Shane's first remark was:

"Dammit! My theft insurance on that car expired last week and I neglected to renew it."

"What doddering boobs he made of us!" I mourned. "You see how he got there, don't you?"

"Yes, he ran through the barber shop and saw a sports roadster parked in the alley. The car belonged to no local owner, he could tell, for it had a New Jersey license plate. Cranders first tried to drive it away, but the ignition was locked. The rumble cover wasn't, though, and he lifted it easily. He got in and closed the lid over him. Obligingly we came along and drove him out of town."

"A wonder he didn't smother!"

"He could open the cover to a half inch crack every now and then," said Shane.

"Looks like we fumbled the ball, Pat."

"Twice," he admitted, staring vindictively at the bend around which Cranders had disappeared. "The other time was when we congratulated ourselves that this Cranders getaway wasn't any skin off our backs. It's different now. I'm skinned raw. I'm all peeved and bothered. I even obliged Cranders by telling him that, after all, the Darrow map is genuine."

That was a fact. We were completely overwhelmed by our dunderheaded folly. All we could do now was to trudge back, like silly asses, to Trimble.

When we got there it was nearly dark. Sheepishly we told our story to the powers that were, and these, themselves cheapened, duped and outwitted, seized upon us as scapegoats. Their immediate charge was that Shane and I, strangers, had been confederates of the escaped murderer. They swore that we'd planned and engineered his flight. We could hardly blame them; in their own bewildered humiliation they were almost as desperate as Cranders himself.

Telegrams from Shane's eastern connections, and from mine in St. Louis, finally convinced them of our integrity. In the meantime Cranders was fleeing fast and far. They never caught him. Shane never did recover his car.

CHAPTER VI

I MAKE A BAD MISTAKE

WE WENT to St. Louis by train. There was a wire waiting for Shane, which called him on an imperative case in Philadelphia.

"I'll be back, Eddie," he promised me. "In the meantime I'm going to set my noodle working on Darrow's map mystery. I'm going to mull over, these next weeks, every conceivable manner in which he could have erected a cross. If I succeed, it will give us a hot program stunt for our decennial reunion on the island."

"Great!" I applauded. "Between fighting the war over again and hunting ducks and digging for pirate gold we ought to have one hell of a time. And don't forget that you've promised to dig up, through the A. G's office, the addresses of Kemp, Rickshaw, Tremaine and Price."

"It's on my heart and conscience," he assured me, as he swung aboard the Philadelphia train.

That was in August. I did not see Shane again until October. Twice during September, however, he wrote me from his Eastern office.

His first letter informed me that his Missouri insurance job would bring him to my part of the country about October 15th. He would have about two weeks' work on it, he said, and then be free; which would make it quite convenient for him to keep our November 7th tryst on Mystery Island.

In reply I reminded him that the island would be a duck shooter's paradise in early November and that he must not forget to bring his shotgun. What about his explorations in the A. G's office?

His second letter reported, with a degree of disgust, that he had thus far had no luck in that quarter. He was finding out that the pursuit of an ex-soldier's address through the Washington records is not as simple a matter as it would seem. However, he expected to succeed. Also he was still confident that I'd hear from our old comrades myself, through forwarded communications.

"And even if these buddies fail to show up," he told me, "I'm coming myself. I want another crack at Cranders. More than that, the mystery of your island is keeping me awake at nights. All this while, Eddie, I'm cudgeling my brains for the location of Darrow's X. X marks the spot. But where the heck is X? There's some simple solution, I'm sure. My mind is liable to pounce on it any day, any hour, any minute."

It was only a few days later that Shane's brilliant mind did pounce upon the solution. When he later explained to me the mental machinations by which he had arrived at it, they seemed to me to be exotic in derivation although convincing in conclusion. The latter for the reason that Shane's conclusion seemed to be the only one possible. Human thought is led and molded by strange fancies. Shane has often told me that deductive reasoning, incompetent to be so led, is not likely to solve a deep mystery.

At any rate the derivative germ of Shane's conclusion was merely that the short fat oval on Darrow's map could, in-

stead of an oval, be more accurately described as the shape of a pecan nut. His next mental lead was that there were four old and stately pecans in front of the house, almost, but not quite, in parallel rows of two each.

The first hasty note of exploration I received from Shane bore an RRPO postmark. Its content merely comprised four sentences scribbled in pencil on a leaf torn from Shane's pocket notebook. It was clear to me that he had been riding along on a train at the moment of inspiration. He had torn out the leaf, jotted down his thought and at the next stop had walked up to the mail car and mailed it to my St. Louis office.

His communication read:

> *Eureka.* Captain Darrow planted two lines of pcs. in the form of an X. Produce the lines of the surviving pcs. to an intersection. That's the spot. That's where you want to dig in, buddy.

Nothing more. Just those few lines scribbled in the form of a memorandum. I became immediately excited, for it was no trouble to understand the arrangement of pecan rows to which he referred. I took a pencil and sketched this arrangement.

Nor was it difficult to understand why only four of the pecan trees had survived. The nearer a person got to the center of the island, the lower the ground. I reasoned, therefore, that high water had killed all those not above the flood line.

And why hadn't the killed trees left stumps? Easy again. Darrow, in the fifties, must have planted these pecan trees as seedlings or saplings, as he would have had to transport them in a boat from some nursery or mother orchard on the mainland. Hardly could they have been of a greater diameter than that of a man's arm. The pecan, I knew, is not a swamp tree. It would not survive hardily under water like a cypress or a willow. Thus only the four trees on the high ground in front of the house had grown to maturity.

The more I considered Shane's conclusion the more I was inclined to believe it correct. Had I not been at the moment exceedingly occupied with an important divorce case, I would have gone immediately to my river island and dug, at the spot marked X, for pirate gold.

As it was, I was forced to remain in town, and two days later who should drop into my office but Patrick Shane? He informed me that his insurance case was taking him to Kansas City for ten days or so. That duty over, he'd be free to go with me to Mystery Island.

He was as gleeful as a boy, all keyed up for adventure. I realized that it wouldn't be fair at all if I essayed the exploration without his company.

We finally agreed to go up there together on the second day of November, five days in advance of the scheduled reunion. We would take along a negro porter and get the old house ready for our guests.

"Speaking of guests," I said, "I have good news for you. One of our four men wrote in on his own accord. His inquiry was forwarded to me yesterday from Trimble."

"Great!" exclaimed Shane. "Which one was it?"

"Price. One might guess that, for it was Price, you remember, who suggested the idea in the first place. A good scout, Price. He's running a hardware store in North Dakota. He wanted to know if I'd forgotten the tryst. I wired him full details and followed with a letter fairly imploring him to come. We can count on Price. Gee, I'd give an eye tooth if we could only line up the other three fellows, Pat."

Shane confessed that he had run up against a stone wall of red tape at the A.G's office.

"But I have another idea," he went on, "well worth trying. *The Legionnaire's Companion*, a weekly published in Indianapolis, runs a column under the caption: Don't Lose Your Buddy. One may insert personals at regular classified rates.

We may be sure that that column will be very widely read all over the United States in the next issue, the last issue before the decennial anniversary of the armistice."

"Naturally," I agreed, "since there'll be scores of divisional and regimental reunions all over the land."

"It's worth a shot," pursued Shane. "Something like this ought to do the trick."

He tore a leaf from his notebook and wrote, in pencil, the following personal advertisement:

> William Rickshaw, Vince Kemp and Walter Tremaine—don't forget your engagement on November 7th. Froelick, Price and Shane will be there with bells on. Wire Froelick at American Annex Hotel, St. Louis. Now, buddies, don't fall down on this detail. It's going to be hot.

Shane handed me the ad and then left hurriedly to catch his Kansas City train.

A moment later I was called to the phone. They wanted me in court right away on that damnable divorce case. Hastily I rang for my secretary.

"Address an envelop to the advertising manager of *The Legionnaire's Companion*, Indianapolis," I told her.

She did so. I took the envelop and put in it a ten dollar bill, since I did not know the exact rates per line. And I was in a hurry to reach court. I then placed in the envelop what I thought was the advertisement Shane had scribbled on a leaf from his notebook, merely marking at the top of it:

> For the "Don't Lose Your Buddy" column in your next issue.

I sealed the envelop and dropped it in the mail chute on the way to court.

It was ten days later when I discovered my colossal boner of boners. I had mailed the wrong leaf from Shane's notebook.

Long after it was too late to quash the ad, I found the true copy in my pocket. What I had done was to broadcast, all over the United States, Shane's theory of the crossed pecan rows. I had deliberately tossed it to the lions. For a medium I had chosen a column bound to be widely and eagerly read, due to the commanding imminence of an heroic anniversary. For an audience I had chosen the largest group of free lance adventurers ever collected on land or sea.

When Shane came back from Kansas City on November 2nd and learned of my assinine folly he gave me the devil. We sent down to the newsstand for the current issue of *The Legionnaire's Companion*.

Yes, there it was, almost at the top of the column.

> *Eureka.* Captain Darrow planted two lines of pcs. in the form of an X. Produce the lines of the surviving pcs. to an intersection. That's the spot. That's where you want to dig in, buddy.

Doubtless the editor had presumed this to be some code among comrades. The five military terms, "Captain", "lines", "pcs." (A. E. F. slang for "command posts"), "dig in" and "buddy" could easily have so misled him. Anyway, here was the ad in bold black type.

"However," remarked Shane by way of comfort, "we've probably lost nothing except the opportunity to insert the correct ad. Because this misdirected effort of yours, Eddie, could only be understood by readers fully informed of the Darrow case from 1858 down through the trial of Cranders. And, considering that the prosecutor seemed to expose the treasure map as a hoax, it wouldn't be taken seriously even by those in the know."

"What about Cranders himself?"

Shane rubbed the freckles under his eyes a moment and then said thoughtfully:

"A river rat like Cranders would hardly read *The Legionnaire's Companion*. There's this, though. Cranders may by this time have taken on some gangster pals. Doubtless his mind is still on that treasure. Fearful to go to the island again by himself, he may have hooked up with a mob. If so, the chances of trouble from your bonehead are increased. But this issue hasn't been out long, Eddie. Let's run up to your island without further delay."

"Telegram for you, Mr. Froelick."

The announcement came from my secretary, who handed the message. It was from a town in Texas.

What was my profound pleasure to read its text?

HAVE JUST HEARD FROM PRICE. WHEN THE ROLL IS CALLED UP YONDER ON MYSTERY ISLAND I'LL BE ALL PRESENT AND ACCOUNTED FOR.
—WILLIAM RICKSHAW

CHAPTER VII

WE TAKE POSSESSION

"WE'RE sure of four out of six, anyway," remarked Shane early the next morning, just after we had arrived at Darrow's Landing.

"I left word at my office," I said, "for instructions to be wired Tremaine and Kemp in case they make their whereabouts known. Good! Here's the commissary truck, Pat."

We saw a truck, in charge of a burly negro, parked on the river front street. I had sent it up from St. Louis the night before, loaded with food, blankets and such other paraphernalia as I considered necessary for a ten days' outing on the island.

Shane and I were now in our old A.E.F. uniforms; a little moth eaten, they were, and my own blouse was uncomfortably tight. It was the first time I had worn it since '18. But the trappings made me feel gay and cocky, at least ten years younger.

On our heads, of course, were the dinky, little blue trimmed overseas caps, Shane wearing his at such an outrageous angle that his left ear was quite obscured. Also, to be fully on parade, we wore complete personal ordnance. I had canteen and automatic Army pistol at belt, and field glasses over my shoulder. I had omitted, however, the Sam Browne and shoulder bars in order to promote the democracy of reunion.

Beyond that, as we marched up the Landing's rather tough and dilapidated river front street, Shane and I each carried a twelve gage shotgun over our shoulders. A number of the inhabitants looked at us derisively askance. I particularly noted the one eyed keeper of what had once been a saloon—and probably still was—who sneered openly and then took occasion to spit tobacco juice in the near proximity of my boots. A little farther on we were approached by a florid constable.

"You fellas are rushin' the season a little, ain't you?" he asked. "It's ten days till the Armistice yet."

I mollified him with a cigar, assuring him that whatever devilment we raised would be out on my own island and would not disturb any one.

An hour later we had chartered a sixteen foot motor boat. The riverman who rented us this boat had many other and smaller boats for rent, and I told him he might expect custom from four friends of mine who were due along in a few days. In case I missed meeting them at the Landing, I gave him the names of Rickshaw, Kemp, Tremaine and Price. He promised to be on the lookout for them and to see that they got out to the island.

We next cargoed our motor boat with the more important supplies, leaving the truck in a garage. There was a crowd of curious loungers watching us all the while. In the van of these observers we noticed the one-eyed and unwashed keeper of the speakeasy—the man who had spat so insultingly close to my boots. It was when we were loading the boat with a half dozen new long handled shovels and as many picks that he said sneeringly—

"Goin' out to dig fer old Cap Darrow's copper chest, air ye?" He then guffawed and nudged a man at his side.

We made no response. A few minutes later we had pushed off into the current of the Mississippi River.

The water was at about the same fairly low stage as in August. Our burly negro helper did the steering, while Shane and I sat in the bow.

"It may be a joke to those old-timers,"

Shane said to me. "But do you know, Eddie, I more than half expect to actually dig up that chest. You may be a rich man before the sun sets tonight."

"Not me," I protested laughingly. "I'm afraid pirate loot wouldn't rest any too well on my conscience. So I've thought it all out, and decided just what to do with that chest of gold, if we find it. It's an heroic occasion, so let's be bloomin' heroes to the end. Darrow's fortune, if any, goes to and for the benefit of disabled war veterans. I'm keen for the fun of digging it up, but after that I'm through with it. No argument, Pat. This pot of gold, if found, goes to whatever official bureau disburses the funds for disabled vets."

Shane made no answer, and I got the idea he approved my decision. Shortly our keel grounded on the mud of Mystery Island.

THE THREE of us set to work transporting supplies to the house. After this was done we set the negro to swabbing out the premises. He was instructed to sweep out all trash, nail down as many of the displaced floor boards as he could find, and in general to prepare the house for visitors.

Leaving him so engaged, Shane and I took two shovels and set off down toward the central area of the island. I am sure that we were both far more keyed up than we cared to admit.

Shane placed himself in line with the two more easterly pecan trees in front of the house, while I placed myself in line with the two more westerly. We advanced north, looking back anon over our shoulders so that we would keep on these definite lines.

And thus we descended the slope toward the center of the island, getting all the while nearer to each other as our courses converged. Here now, on this lower ground, we were on the old corn land of the Ruethers. Naturally that old plowed ground was thickly grown with weeds. But as we came to the X, the intersection of our paths, we saw that the weeds were badly trampled. We saw more. We saw that which took our breath, that which gave us a sinking sensation at the pits of our stomachs.

We were late. The treasure we sought had flown from its earthen vault.

Here, at the exact intersection of the imaginary pecan rows, was a gaping hole, freshly dug. It was a hole about five feet deep and perhaps ten feet across the crater. Four shovels lay about it, and as many picks. These tools were not rusted, although there had been a heavy dew the last two mornings. Therefore we had been beaten by only a day or a night. Some competing treasure seekers had come and gone—to this spot marked X.

"Four of them," Shane was saying. "I see where they dragged a heavy weight along the mud toward those willows along the shore."

"Why do you say four?" I asked.

"I only guess it, by the number of tools. Come."

He was already following the tracks. They were the tracks of men in gum boots. Superimposed as they were, you could not tell the exact number of men. But they had walked closely together, as though dragging a weight. The path of this weight was plainly imprinted in the mud.

Was it Darrow's treasure?

We followed. The spoor led to the willows which fringed the shore. It went through the willows to the water's edge. We followed on. And there, half in and half out of the water, lay a human corpse. It was the corpse of the small, monkey-like fugitive murderer, Cranders.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPY

WHEN we returned to the house we did not tell the negro. Shane had an idea that if we told him there was a corpse on the island he'd quit us in a funk.

"We don't want to lose our man Friday," said Shane, "until he's finished sweeping out the house."

We ourselves took the motor boat and chugged west toward Darrow's Landing.

"The very worst possible luck!" Shane deplored *en route.* "Cranders, once so near the gallows, was afraid to return alone to the island. Yet his avarice was more whetted than ever because he had, while crouching in the rumble seat, heard my dissertation about the genuineness of the map. So he threw in with a mob. Among all those pairs of eyes, one chanced to see your infernal ad, Eddie. Or possibly some friend or connection of one of the mobsters saw it. Anyway they were put wise. Knowing all the rest of the story, the key to X was made clear to them. Either last night or the night before, they came out in a boat. They dug up something at the spot marked X. Dragged it through the willows to their boat. There the others got rid of Cranders. He was dangerous. He was a marked man. So after using him for their purpose they killed him in cold blood. Then off went the survivors with the copper chest."

Plainly that was it. A chill ran to my spine when I considered the ruthlessness of these villains with whom Cranders had joined forces. Certainly not even Darrow the pirate could have matched their malevolence. Tougher and harder boiled than Cranders himself, than Darrow, meaner and more cruelly murderous even than that cutthroat of the fifties who had been arch enemy to Darrow, George Zanzibar. As our motor boat chugged toward the Missouri shore I could only compare their savagery to that of a well known Captain Flint—he who had gone ashore with six men to bury a treasure and had returned to his ship alone.

"I think," Shane was saying, "that one of them limped."

"One of whom?"

"One of the three men who murdered Cranders. From the boot prints in the mud, I got the idea that one of the crooks walks with a limp. And by the way—did you notice?—Cranders was neither shot nor stabbed; he was clubbed to death. A bad outfit to meet up with on a dark night, Eddie!"

Arriving at Darrow's Landing, we immediately looked up the florid constable. Finding him, we reported the murder of Cranders. By good luck there chanced to be a county deputy in town. The constable and the deputy promised to come out to the island immediately, take charge of the body and scout around for further evidence.

Thus as we ourselves chugged home to Mystery Island, the two officers followed in our wake in another boat. For the remainder of that day we were hosts to the law. The officers loaded Cranders' corpse into their own boat and then the four of us went over the island from end to end. Naturally we did not find the murderers. We found no spoor of them except their tracks between pit and shore.

As to our report, Shane merely told the deputy that it looked very much as if these murderers, led by Cranders, had at last dug up the long lost treasure of Horatio Darrow. Having then murdered Cranders, they had escaped in their own boat to either the Missouri or Illinois shore.

It was nearly dusk by the time the fruitless investigations were completed. Shane and I promised to go in next day and answer questions by the coroner.

In the meantime, however, our negro house boy had become aware that murder had recently stalked on the island, and he went into an ashen frenzy of fright.

He threw down his broom, quitting us on the spot. He begged us to take him to Darrow's Landing. We offered this service on the morrow, but that wouldn't do at all. Our Ethiopian friend positively refused to spend a night on this isle of guilt and blood. The two mainland officers offered to take him back with them, but he shrank from riding in a boat with the corpse.

The upshot of it was that the negro, a powerful swimmer raised along the river levees, plunged into the water and swam the mile to Darrow's Landing. We never saw him again.

And thus, with Pat Shane and I its only occupants, the murky moist night of November 3rd descended around and about Mystery Island. Our one piece of luck was that we had held our negro long enough to get the benefit of a day's herculean labor in cleaning the old colonial house. The negro had, we found, performed wonders. His instructions had been to collect and sweep out all trash. This he had done with a vengeance.

We found a heap of these sweepings just outside the back door. It was among this swept trash that Shane, browsing about with a lantern, found a very old and ragged book. He came into the kitchen with it, where I had lighted an oil lamp and was cooking steak and coffee.

"Are you sure," he asked me, "that the Ruethers didn't have any children who might have attended high school?"

"The first Ruether," I answered, "had one son, who in his turn was childless. It's not likely that either of them ever saw the inside of a high school. Why?"

By now Shane had turned to the fly leaf of the dog-eared book. I saw him arch his brows.

"Stranger than ever!" he murmured. "Why, Eddie, this book belonged to Darrow himself. Here's his name, and the date, 1856."

"Why shouldn't Darrow have possessed a book?" I countered.

"But such a book! This is nothing more nor less than a Latin-English dictionary. Who but a student—?"

"But Darrow was a student," I reminded. "Have you forgotten his intellectual pedigree? It was said of him that he could fire Shakespeare at you as quickly as he could cut your throat. A rascal and a scholar was Darrow."

We agreed that the old dictionary was well worth keeping as a relic and I stowed it away in my grip.

We sat up late, on the front porch, smoking many pipes of tobacco and communing with the eery stillness of the night. In our position we faced down the major axis of Mystery Island. Now, shrouded in darkness, willow bound, water bound, soundless, lightless, and yet odorous with the damp, acrid smell of mud and drift and fish, peaceful and yet potentially barbarous, wide open to the starry sky yet locked with frightful secrets, it affected us with all the force of a pagan wilderness.

To our right, toward Illinois, stretched a mile of river width across which shone no light of human habitation. To our left, however, we could easily see the street lamps of Darrow's Landing. Against them we even saw a cluster of moving lights. They were from a steamboat, coming sluggishly down the channel and hugging the Missouri shore.

Shane and I had little to say, each somberly occupied with events both past and imminent. Finally Shane spoke, saying with a sigh:

"Too bad the treasure's gone blooie. A tough break that those crooks glommed it—it cheats us of a big thrill and cheats the disabled vets of many solid comforts."

Suddenly, from the westerly side of the house, there came the hoot of an owl. We jumped, nervously. Shane went to the railing of the porch and looked up. I followed him, half with the creepy suspicion that the night cry was a human voice, guilefully imitating a bird in clandestine signal to comrades in the willows.

But no, it was an owl all right. We could see the bird high against the moon, perched in the lofty walnut—the same tree, possibly even the same limb, from which the pirate Darrow had hanged by the neck, seventy years agone.

We went to bed. The blankets and fresh linens we had brought along gave us a reasonably comfortable rest. Immediately after breakfast we steered our motor boat to Darrow's Landing. The events of this day, November 4th, were limited to our inquisition by the coroner, relative to the demise of Cranders.

When we returned to the island, late in the evening, it was with the balance of the supplies from our truck.

THE night was eventless; there was not even a hoot from the owl.

Next day, November 5th, dawned crisply colder. Shane shot a pair of mallards which flew low over the island. Duck shooting was scheduled to be one of the sports of our reunion program, now only two days in the offing. And so we decided to build a blind, a shooting blind to which water fowls would not be chary of approach.

This we did, on the shore line at the little inlet just west of the house. The blind was built of driftwood and willow boughs, neatly camouflaged. Its erection gave us occupation all through that day.

We retired early. From a sound sleep, at a little after three in the morning, I was awakened by Shane.

"Get up, Eddie," he whispered. "We have visitors and they're not the ones we're looking for, either."

He led me to a north window and pointed down the length of the island. We saw a light, moving about in circles, the flickering light of a lantern. It was down on the low ground toward the center of the island.

We dressed hurriedly. After arming ourselves each with an automatic pistol and a shotgun, we stole from the house. Out there in the night, apparently about a quarter of a mile down the island, the lantern still flickered. It was still moving about in short circles.

Cautiously we went toward it. As we advanced we heard voices. We made out the outlines of three men. They were at, or near, the excavation from which Darrow's chest had presumably been unearthed.

"Get ready for a squall, Eddie," whispered Shane, and then hailed the trespassers.

"Hey, there! What the devil do you want, anyway?"

In an instant the lantern light was extinguished. Then— *Flash! Flash! Flash!* Three shots. They stabbed out straight at us, and I heard bullets rasp through the weeds.

We had carried no lantern ourselves, and thus they had had only Shane's voice to shoot at.

We banged replies with our shotguns. I heard men running, heard them crashing through the willows. We followed; not too rashly, however. When we arrived at the pit we saw a slender pole about fifteen feet in length, lying from lip to lip of its crater. Just at the moment I did not understand why it was there. Shane was moving cautiously on into the willows after the fleeing intruders. I followed him. We heard the dip of oars.

When we reached the river bank we could see nothing at all. There was a cloud over the moon and our eyes could hardly penetrate a dozen yards out into the stream.

"Gone again," exclaimed Shane. "The same crowd that bumped Cranders, I think."

"Why?"

"They parked their boat at the same place and used the same trail through the willows. Also one of them limped. Also there were three of them."

"But why should they come back?" I protested. "They'd already gotten the copper chest."

A thought struck Shane, and he raced back through the willows to the open ground beyond. When I caught up with him he was at the pit and had picked up the long slender pole.

This pole, we saw, was shod with a steel point. Shane struck matches and looked about over the ground. At first we saw nothing. Finally Shane called my attention to a small perforation in the mud, about two inches in diameter. It was only a few yards from the edge of the original shovel dug excavation.

"And here's another," cried Shane. "And another! And another!"

Indeed we found the vicinity of the pit perforated with many small two-inch holes, obviously made by pressing the slender, steel shod rod into the ground.

"Wow!" cried Shane exultingly. "Do you get it, Eddie?"

"Get what?"

"The drift of this clue. It appears now that those fellows missed the copper chest on the occasion of their original exploration. So they came back with a tool, very similar to a sand point with which well drillers sound for water. Their idea was to punch about in the ground until they struck something hard. This island's of silt. There are no rocks. If the steel point hit something hard, deep in the ground, that would be the place to dig. Eddie, old man, those disabled vets may yet get the benefit of Darrow's treasure."

I was hardly convinced. I reminded Shane that we had seen the swath of a heavy object dragged from pit to shore.

"We assumed it was the copper chest," he said. "But it might have been the body of Cranders. Provoked by some jealousy or quarrel, one of the mob could have murdered him here at the pit as easily as at the shore. As for their motive of dragging him to the river bank, that may merely have been to get the body out of this open ground. In the thick willows it wouldn't be so readily found. Supporting that, we know that Cranders was neither shot nor stabbed, but clubbed to death. What would be more convenient for clubs than the handles of four picks and shovels, which tools we found here at the excavation? As for facts, the only two we know positively are these: first, they came here and dug for Darrow's treasure; second, they returned here several nights later to enlarge the orbit of their diggings. That can only mean one thing."

"Yes," I agreed excitedly. "It can only mean that they were unsuccessful on the first venture."

"Too," admitted Shane with a grimace, "it predicts our own failure. Here is an open pit, exactly at the spot marked X, if my theory of crossed pecan rows is any good. The trespassing crooks failed to find it; therefore it looks like there never was a chest buried here at all. Even that's a consolation, Eddie. I'd hate to think of that mob getting it. That would be the last sad blow that killed father."

It was unthinkable that our enemies would be bold enough to return that night. So we went back to the house and got another hour of rest. At dawn we breakfasted, then went down to the scene of the night's adventure.

We took up the long, steel shod pole and sounded the ground with it. The earth was soft and without stones, and thus by twisting, pressing with our combined weights, it was not difficult to force the spear into the sand for a depth of six or seven feet.

We made many soundings on all sides of the original excavation. We bored deeper into the bottom of the excavation itself. We even fitted our spear into the holes made during the night by the shifty trespassers.

Our disappointment grew as the work progressed. We struck no resisting substance which could have been a copper chest. In an hour or so we both conceded that the theory of crossed pecan rows was exploded. Shane admitted wearily that he had simply had a no-good hunch. At all events it was a hunch which had lured Cranders to his doom.

It was our duty, of course, to report last night's lantern party. Accordingly, in mid-morning, we chugged over to Darrow's Landing. There we found both the constable and the deputy sheriff on the main street.

Shane reported, suggesting that a complete checkup be made on all the local boatmen and boats, in order to discover who had gone out on the river late last night. Shane went with the two officers on this round of inquiry, while I sought the hardware store in order to purchase more shotgun ammunition.

As I came out I saw a man with strangely familiar features descend from a St. Louis bus. A moment more and I had recognized my old comrade, Price. Price! Here he was, all the way from Dakota! Here he was, with bells on! That is, he was in complete military dress *de rigueur*, overseas dink cocked on his ear, O.D's pressed to knife edge creases; his puttees and his face shone as did the morning sun.

"Price!"

"Froelick!"

We embraced shamelessly. I then led him down the street for a treat to imitation beer. We were approaching a shop which advertised such wares, when I stopped suddenly. The proprietor of the old, false front, one time riverbank saloon was standing in peculiar pose on his rickety porch. He was a sour looking fellow with one eye—the same who had made himself more or less offensive to Shane and me three days earlier—and seeing him now I elected not to patronize his bar.

I stopped Price, but remained in my tracks staring at the one eyed dispenser of reputedly soft drinks. He did not see me. He was too intently occupied with other visions.

"What's the matter?" asked Price.

"I wonder what he sees out there," I muttered abstractly. For the one eyed fellow was looking through a telescope, the latter directed out eastward across the Mississippi River toward the distant outline of Mystery Island.

CHAPTER IX

DIGGING IN

I STEERED Price into another bar farther up the street. There, over soft drinks, I explained all about the Cranders case, with a few rapid references to the legend of Darrow's treasure. By the time I was done Shane joined us. Shane was overjoyed to see Price.

"Every boatman and every boat had an alibi," Shane told me.

We informed him of the telescope incident and asked if he thought it possible to spy from mainland to island through such a lens.

"Unquestionably," he answered. "It's just a mile, you know. A good telescope lens, such as that in an engineer's transit, for instance, will show a man knocking the ashes from his cigar at a mile's distance. What that fellow could have been looking at out there I don't know. The circumstance is of interest, though, and I'm going to report it to the deputy sheriff."

Shane left us and was gone half an hour. When he came back he said the two mainland officers had agreed on a strategy. The constable would remain in town, watching out for suspicious characters, and keeping an eye on the telescope spying saloon man. The deputy was going to return to the island with us. He would hide in the willows for the next few nights, armed to the teeth, in case the marauders returned. They were murderers and, although their victim Cranders had himself been a murderer, their capture was none the less imperative.

It was Shane's opinion that the deputy sheriff would be wasting his time. He did not think that the mobsters would make a third trip to that twice explored pit, the chance of success there being too dim for the risk.

Nevertheless, the deputy sheriff, a likable young chap named Howard Jones, returned with us to the island. That was the afternoon of November 6th. Deputy Jones said he would sleep by day and stand guard by night. I treated him as a guest, giving him the best bed in the house.

Price was delighted with the island and with the prospect in general. He had brought along a beautiful twelve gage pumper from his Dakota hardware store and was keen to be after the ducks. We stayed up half the night talking over war times and wondering whether Kemp and Tremaine would show up. Rickshaw, by his telegram, was a certainty.

The next morning we saw a boat coming out from the Landing. It brought us two recruits; not Kemp and Tremaine, but Kemp and Rickshaw.

They were in full uniform and high spirits; they made a complete roll call except for Tremaine. Of the latter, Vince Kemp brought sad news. Kemp, by vocation a traveling shoe salesman, had kept in touch all these years with Tremaine. Tremaine, he said, had become a commercial aviator and had been killed in a crackup a year ago.

Otherwise, everything was perfect. We set up a song, "The Gang's All Here," so

ribaldly that I wondered whether Deputy Jones was going to get any sleep.

As for us five war veterans, we were far too busy that November 7th to waste any precious time hunting ducks, or even playing poker. There was too much to talk about, too much revel of reminiscence. Ten years ago that very hour we had together crouched desperately at bay in the turbulent vortex of the world's mightiest battle. There we had sworn a tryst and, except for poor Tremaine, here we were.

Rickshaw, the Texas ranchman, had in ten years grown a mustache which was as red as his hair. In honor of the occasion he had gone us one better, for Rickshaw wore his flat, dish-panny trench helmet. This he refused to take off, even when indoors; from it he wore a short chin strap which only hung low enough to engage his mustache. Rickshaw was tall, lean featured and gangling, an opposite type from ex-sergeant Vince Kemp. Kemp was rotund and so short that ten years ago he had just barely qualified for enlistment. A perfect soldier, though, was little Kemp, then as now. Chin up and shoulders back; chest out like a pouter pigeon's; bright eyed, alert; cheeks rosy and puffed; I could see why Kemp should meet inevitable success as a traveling salesman.

Price was as likable, although slightly inclined to the bluff, luncheon club braggadocio of the small town merchant.

It was a grand and glorious day for all of us, although we hardly left the front steps.

Our alien guest, Deputy Jones, napped through the day and at night went on patrol of the island. The next morning he had developed a cold from the damp nocturnal air. He began to beef about his vigil, saying that it was all poppycock; there wasn't any chance of those crooks being either bold enough or foolish enough to return.

Shane agreed with him.

"And what if they do?" he added. "Here are five of us, good soldiers all, and armed to the teeth."

"Anyway I'm Post Commander of the Trimble Legion," said Jones. "I ought to be home making plans for our local parade. I think I'll blow, fellows."

He did. At noon of the 8th Shane, Kemp, Rickshaw, Price and I found ourselves alone on the island.

Nothing happened on the 8th or 9th, except that we raised a great deal of innocent ruckus, capered through a lot of improvised horseplay, in the kitchen took turns about as cooks and K.P's and slaughtered a great many migratory fowls. Our celebration was to extend over four days, winding up at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month with all the *éclat* we could muster.

And so we horseplayed around through the 8th and 9th. As for the Darrow mystery, I believe Rickshaw and Kemp thought we were pulling their legs. They began winking at each other every time we brought it up. Price was a little nearer to the mystery, as he had at least seen a one eyed man spying toward our island with a telescope; but even Price did not take the buried treasure story any too seriously.

As for Pat Shane, I knew that it was deeply rooted in his mind all the while. However, as far as the Darrow-Cranders affair mattered, the 8th and 9th were perfect blanks.

It was early the morning of the 10th that things began to pop.

Little Kemp recalled that he had brought along in his baggage a silk flag. He suggested we run up our colors, the national colors, the flag of the brave and the free.

Naturally. What an unthoughtful provider I had been to neglect bringing along a flag myself! How could any one hope to celebrate the Armistice decennial without a flag?

So Kemp, just after breakfast, delved in his suitcase, bringing out a very fine silk flag, something like four by six feet.

A flagstaff? We had none.

"Leave it to me," said Shane. "I know the very thing. A nice place to plant it, I should say, would be right out in front, in the center of the pecan tree quadrangle."

He left the house. Ten minutes later, when the rest of us sallied forth with our shotguns to hunt ducks, we saw Shane with his flagstaff. What he had procured was the sixteen-foot, steel shod sounding pole left by the alien marauders on the night of the 5th.

"It's the cat's eyebrows," he called to us, and proceeded to affix the flag.

This done, he selecte d the exact center of the pecan tree quadrangle, squarely in front of the house, and jammed the steel point of the staff down into the sandy ground.

"Hey, there! Fellows!"

It was Shane calling us back, just as Kemp, Price, Rickshaw and I were halfway down to the duckshooting blind.

"Hey, there, you fellows! Come back. I struck a rock."

"You're goofy," I called at him. "There are no rocks on this island."

"That's just it," he said. "No rocks, and therefore this particular rock must be a stump."

"Well, what of it?" inquired Rickshaw.

But we went over and joined Shane. As we reached him he was pulling from his pocket a pencil and that inevitable detective's notebook he carried with him everywhere.

"Ever play tit-tat-toe?" he asked us, with a perfectly straight face.

"I'll bite," responded Price. "Yeh, I've played it. Why?"

For reply Shane drew the following simple sketch on a page of his notebook:

"That was my first theory of the crossed pecan rows," Shane explained as, mystified, we crowded about. "But," he went on, "how much simpler it would have been for Darrow to make a cross with only five trees! Like this."

He sketched:

"Now," pursued Shane, "here at the exact center of the pecan quadrangle, my sounding pole seems to strike a rock—or a stump. At a depth of only a few inches, you notice."

In ten seconds flat I had raced to the house and returned with a shovel. Quickly scraping away a little of the sandy soil, I scratched wood; it was rotting wood, undoubtedly the top of an old stump. Shane opened his knife, dropped to his hands and knees and scratched a few moments on the stump top.

"I'm not sure," he reported, "but I think it's pecan. It's the stump of a mature tree. Now, Eddie, permit me to amend my theory. Darrow planted these five pecans in an X, squarely in front of the house. Decades later, we'll say, the Ruethers found that the center tree shut off the view from the house to the corn field. Also it interfered with wagon haul into what serves the house as a street. Or perhaps the tree died. Anyway they cut the central tree down, grubbing the stump to a point below the surface."

I felt my heart pounding excitedly. Here, then, might well be Darrow's cross. The spot marked X!

I think that Rickshaw, Kemp and Price caught the spirit of intensity which gripped both Shane and myself. Anyway when I shouted:

"Compan-ee! Stack arms and entrench!" we all discarded our shotguns on the spot and raced for shovels.

For the next half hour the five of us dug in a circle around the old stump. As we brought it to light, we became more and more sure it was the stump of a pecan. It was well decayed, although possibly the tree had only been cut in the last several years of the Ruether tenancy.

As our pit deepened, Shane occasionally took a sounding with his steel shod pole around and underneath the stump. It was not, however, until we had nearly hacked to pieces and removed the rotten remains of the stump that he yelled:

"I hit something that don't yield, doughboys! A rock or—"

A rock or—the copper chest of Horatio Darrow!

You may be sure that we worked like inspired fiends from then on. Had we really been entrenching along the Hindenburg Line, menaced by the flower of Prussia, we could not have burrowed in the earth with more diligence. What maniacs we must have seemed to an observer not conversant with our motive.

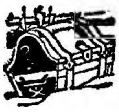
There we were in Army uniforms. Punctiliously we had kept to these trappings, in order to preserve the color and the dignity of our tryst. Yet to an outsider Rickshaw must have looked utterly ridiculous in his trench helmet; I recall that he even had an Army canteen at his belt. He had been intending to spend the morning in ambush with us at the duck-shooting blind, and had equipped himself, quite practically, with this canteen of water. Over my own shoulders were slung the field binoculars, standard Army ordnance, although that morning I had left my automatic pistol at the house.

By far the most military property of our set, however, was the flag. The staff of this Shane had jammed into the ground near the pit, after last using it as a tool of sounding. It waved there now, in the morning breeze, as deeper and deeper into the island soil we burrowed for the copper chest of Darrow.

Shane with the mere handle of his shovel was now being able to sound the hard, unyielding substance which was our goal. Sand caved down on us and we had to widen our pit. By the time it was five feet deep it was of necessity ten feet wide. We were all huddled in it, digging with scant elbow room. The material we threw out rimmed our excavation, like the parados of a trench.

Often and more often our blades rasped upon that hard, unyielding goal of our endeavors. Labored and more labored became our breathing, and faster the beating of our hearts. Pirate plunder—what else? What else lay buried here at the spot marked X?

Finally we exposed it. We had by then been digging two hours. We were hidden from the world. We were as deep as the tallest of us, who was the Texan, Rickshaw. Isolated on an island, absorbed to the highest pitch of tension, we had, for these two hours, given no heed to the world beyond our willowed shores. And now, finally, huddled over it in the bottom of the pit, we exposed the copper chest of Horatio Darrow.



COPPER—beyond a doubt. Sand colored at first view, when Shane scratched it he left a mark as bright as a new penny. In bulk the chest was about a foot deep, sixteen inches wide and three feet long. It was locked like a trunk, or sea chest.

"We'll have to crack it with an ax," panted Shane. "Scoop out a little more on your side, Ricky. You too, Price."

We scooped furiously. Finally we could budge the chest. Then it was free. When we heaved on it it proved to be as heavy as lead.

As lead? Not lead, we were glowingly sure, but gold.

We were all panting from exertion. The chubby cheeks of little Vince Kemp were grimed with dirt. And sweating like Turks we were, even on this crisp November morn.

"Get an ax or something," I said to Price. "We'll crack it open right here."

Price scrambled up to the rim of our pit. The rest of us saw him halt suddenly, saw his jaw sag a full inch, saw him staring pop eyed toward the river.

"Jigger!" he cried. Then—*crack!*

There was a shot. It came from the anchorage, about two hundred yards to the west of us, from the tiny inlet at which boats were moored. A bullet plowed into the loose dirt of our parados. Price fell back into the arms of Rickshaw.

We thought, for a moment, that he was hit. But he wasn't, though his cheeks were pale and his eyes bulging. He gasped—

"There's three of 'em—just beaching a motor boat!"

Shane was already crawling up to the

lip. I saw him peer over and then snatch outward with his hand. *Crack! Crack!* This time two shots. They must have come from a rifle. This time the bullets whanged into our parapet, splashing dirt down into our eyes. Shane was back among us, unhit. In his hand he held that at which he had snatched. It was Kemp's twelve gage shotgun.

"Get the rest of 'em," said Shane tersely. "And be careful. There are three men down at the inlet, and with half a chance they'll cut us to pieces."

By "rest of 'em," I knew that Shane meant the other three shotguns. Four of us had been on our way to the duck blind at the moment Shane had been first trying to plant the flag. Our shotguns lay as we had discarded them not far beyond the rim.

Rickshaw was already after his. He drew fire from the inlet, but came back safely not only with his shotgun but with my own. A moment later Price had retrieved his. Rickshaw then peered over the parapet and bawled:

"Hey there, you guys! Come on and fight!"

The reply was a rattle and a rap—a racket more like the voice of a pneumatic riveting hammer than anything else—save one thing alone.

Save alone one rattling, racketing voice from the deep, dim past, a voice which we hadn't heard these ten years, which swept us back on a magic carpet to the battlefields of France.

We were besieged. A horizontal hail of bullets whirred over our fort of defense. We huddled there in complete consternation, not speaking, hardly breathing, until finally Price said:

"Well? What of it? We're five to three, aren't we?"

Five to three? So impotent was the mention of odds that I'm sure it didn't impress even Price himself. Five to three! In that other pit, that shell hole by the Meuse, we'd been six to one. What good had it done us to be six to one against that infernal—

Rat-rat-tat-tat-tat! Again it rained bullets faster than could have been triggered by any finger of flesh.

Shane took a peep. Sliding back, he reported—

"They're moving it from the boat."

"Where to?" asked Price.

Shane grinned.

"Where else but into that convenient duckshooting blind we were thoughtful enough to build for them? It's two hundred yards. A perfect range for them and a worthless range for us."

"I can't understand 'em having it," complained Kemp.

"Why not?" retorted Shane. "They're 1928 model crooks, aren't they? They use 'em on the Chicago Loop, don't they? Why not here?"

Again the pneumatic hammer rattled down by the shore and bullets skimmed our crater.

"They've set it up now," reported Rickshaw, whose helmet made him the most logical observer, "in that duckshoo—"

"In a beautifully camouflaged pill box," corrected Shane. "It's not difficult to understand, either, the timeliness of their attack. We've been digging two hours. That one eyed spy on the Missouri shore saw us with his telescope and tipped these crooks. The same crooks who murdered Cranders. Well, Price, it was you who suggested this rendezvous and I salute you as a prophet."

"Why a prophet?" inquired Price dumbly. He was answered by a vicious volley from the machine gun. No need to say more. We had met again—after ten years.

CHAPTER X

HISTORY REPEATS

WE'D met, indeed, with a vengeance. History had bended back into an amazing orbit of repetitive circumstance. It shocked us, fairly petrified us, left us breathless. For myself, I felt as if I were groping through the musky cobwebs of a dream. One knows

that dream, that nightmare of a tremendous, aching, stomach sinking peril which impends at the moment, and yet which harks back through a cycle of frightful repetitions to perils long past and gone.

To my surprise, Shane spoke the same thought.

"History repeats," he said dreamily. "What happens has happened and will happen again."

Certainly the invaders lost a big opportunity in not attacking in that first five minutes during which our mentalities were half stunned. As we began to emerge from the stupor, Price, the luncheon club optimist, said:

"Well, what can they do? If they rush us, we'll whittle 'em to chips."

True enough. Had they rushed us, it would have been a fairly brief fight. We had four shotguns and one automatic pistol. We knew that they had at least one rifle and a machine gun. We had everything to gain and they had everything to lose at close quarters.

Shane peeped again to estimate the range, verifying it at two hundred yards.

"Our bird shot would only tickle them at the range," he said. "On the other hand, they know we've got the shotguns, for they saw us grab 'em. They'll siege us, men; it's their only bet. As for my automatic, we could hardly hope to hit at the range oftener than once in thirty shots, if at all. And I've only got about a dozen bullets."

Plainly we ought to keep our ammunition for close quarters. We agreed on this. After that there was nothing we could do except let Rickshaw spy out often enough to make sure they were not rushing us.

"What about beating it for the house?" suggested Kemp.

We were about a hundred and forty yards in front of the house.

"They'd cut us to ribbons," said Shane. "We want to get in the house, of course, for water and grub. Can't do it in daylight, though."

We agreed to stand siege until dark, then race for the house.

Rickshaw passed around his Army canteen and we all took a niggardly drink. As for food, in the emergency we would have to fast through the day. There was, too, a chance of rescue by some visitor from the mainland. For instance, the Darrow's Landing constable might come out to inquire if we had any new clues on the Cranders case.

"Clues!" exclaimed Price. "We got 'em, three of 'em, all too hot to handle." He dodged back from a peep of reconnaissance, as bullets from the machine gun whirred around and about him.

Their strategy of war became plain—to force a surrender by hot siege. We, in turn, could only improve our position by getting into the house.

"And that chance has gone blooie already," reported Rickshaw, slipping down from the crater with his helmet askew. A bullet had spanked on it. "One of those bimbos," he added, "has just circled to the rear of the house, keeping out of shotgun range. He's a tall, skinny guy and carries a rifle. We can bet he's entered the house by the back door. That leaves two of 'em still in the pill box."

We were dismayed. Obviously it would not be easy to take the house, even after dark, with a rifleman entrenched within. Or possibly his journey there was merely to commandeer the food and water keg. As for boats, our own and theirs were together at the inlet, close to the duckshooting blind.

With the house and boats denied us, our last chance would be to race down the island after dark and take refuge among the willows.

"And be hunted out like partridges," complained Rickshaw.

We discussed every possibility, including that of racing down the island after nightfall, then swimming the river to Darrow's Landing. It was discovered that neither Price nor Kemp could swim. More than that, such an escape would mean abandoning the copper chest to the outlaws.

In the meantime there was a horizontal hail of bullets thudding into our parados, at every instance that we showed so much as an overseas cap.

Rickshaw looked at his watch. To our dismay he told us that it was only eleven o'clock in the morning. Yet hardly five minutes later Price, peering out, reported an opportunity for rescue which we hadn't considered at all.

"There's a steamboat coming down the channel," he told us. "It's keeping pretty close to the Missouri side, like all the big boats do, but I was wonderin' if we couldn't figure some way to signal it."

I borrowed Rickshaw's helmet, then took my binoculars and crawled to the lip. In spite of the helmet I took considerable risk of having my head blown off as I trained the glasses on a distant steamboat. It was nearly opposite us, though fully three-quarters of a mile away. After focusing, I observed many extraordinary features about the steamer's deck. It was streaming with many flags. A crowd of passengers on the deck all seemed to be dressed uniformly, in brown. Finally I understood why.

"It's the Navy and Marine Corps," I reported, after slipping back among my comrades. "To be exact, an excursion of Legionnaires going down from Hannibal or Quincy to St. Louis, no doubt to march in tomorrow's big parade."

"Whoopee!" cried Rickshaw. "If they only knew we were here, wouldn't they come a-poppin'!"

"They would for a fact," agreed little Kemp. "They'd make the captain put down a boat and they'd break every leg on deck swarming into it."

"Gosh! If we could only tip 'em a SOS!" wailed Price.

Shane had taken the helmet and binoculars and was peering over the lip.

"Eddie's right," he reported. "It's a Legionnaire's excursion. The deck's jammed with vets in uniform. They see our flag. They hear the shooting. They're waving their caps and cheering. Trouble is they think it's just a decennial celebration."

We listened. The wind was from the west and we could faintly hear cheers from the distant steamboat. The irony of it was galling. I took another peep, and saw that the steamboat was keeping serenely on down channel, close to the Missouri shore. There they went, gaily by, even popping off a few guns themselves—three score of the most sympathetic allies one could possibly imagine.

I watched those distant figures in olive drab waving their caps and cheering. Peering as I was, I was drawing fire from the pill box. I banged two replies with my own shotgun, wasting two shells. Rickshaw had reached out and seized the flag. He stood now on the copper chest on the floor of our refuge and waved it frantically.

But the more he waved the more he but drew the empty plaudits of a distant multitude. The more uproarious our rattle of musketry, the more we but seemed to indulge in an orgy of celebration. The steamboat steamed exasperatingly on downriver, seeing us, hearing us, cheering us, yet never swerving in her course.

"Who remembers the wig-wag?" cried Rickshaw.

The tallest of us, standing on the copper chest, his helmet just topped the parapet. Again a bullet spanked on it and screeched away to the willows. Yet Rickshaw never ceased to wave the flag. He implored us to recall to him the code of wig-wagging.

"You do it with two flags," prompted Kemp.

But that was all Kemp remembered. We had all, in ten years, forgotten the manual of wig-wagging. In desperation Rickshaw tried the Morse code. Four quick waves for an H; one quick wave for an E; one slow wave an L; five quick waves for a P. Help!

But of course it didn't work. Even if he had used the true Army signals with two flags, the chances were that all those vets would have been as deficient in memory as ourselves. On went the steamboat, downriver, getting farther and farther away.

At last it disappeared from our sight.

WE CROUCHED despairingly in our pit.

There, to tantalize us, unopened as yet, lay the copper treasure chest of Horatio Darrow. Pirate's loot, unearthed after all these years! All we could do was to sit on it and cudgel our brains for some ethereal avenue of escape.

"The Army's licked," deplored Rickshaw, "and the Navy passed us by."

"The Navy's got more than one ship," remarked Shane thoughtfully. "I mean there's more than one steamboat on this river. Maybe next time we'll have better luck."

"How do you get that way?" objected Rickshaw. "If we couldn't signal that boat, how could we signal any boat?"

"I don't know," responded Shane. "I was just recalling a fact of history. Seventy years ago there was another scrap on this island. The motive then was the same as now—possession of this copper chest. It was between a tough gang and Darrow, the tough gang trying to make Darrow tell where it was buried. They hanged Darrow. Shot him full of holes. A steamboat captain, looking through his telescope, saw Darrow's body hanging from the topmost limb of a tall walnut. Naturally they lowered a boat to investigate."

"I don't see what that's got to do with our predicament," grumbled Rickshaw.

"Only this," explained Shane. "First, that man sized objects on the island can be picked up from the deck of a steamboat. Second, that if the signal is grotesque enough, it will bring results every time. Fellows, I may be getting balmy. I may be turning into a raving, stark mad idiot. This one dumfounding repetition of events, our being bottled up in a shell hole by a machine gun, may have made me a blooming fatalist. But to save my soul I can't keep away from a fantastic hope, so poignant that it seems almost a prescience of fact, that our own predicament will be recognized from the deck of a channel steamboat."

"Your idea," I suggested, "is to think up some compelling signal. Not a mere waving of flag, or shooting of guns, but something far more challenging. To have this signal ready and to flash it at the next steamboat which passes up or downriver."

"Something like that," Shane admitted broodingly.

But what? Our wits were stumped.

Price looked at his watch. It was only noon.

"A hell of a long time between mess calls!" he complained. Then his optimism came to the surface and he said, "Well, anyway, it was my turn for kitchen police."

"What happens," Pat Shane was murmuring to himself, as he sat there on the chest with his face buried in his hands, "has happened and will happen again."

"Rubbish!" I retorted impatiently. "You're getting mawkishly sentimental, Pat, and I thought you were a practical detective."

"What did you say?" So far away were his thoughts that he did not hear my rebuke.

Ages later and Rickshaw reported—"One o'clock and all's in the well."

There was nothing we could do. Except, of course, to keep from being caught napping. We had to be especially wary because of that fellow in the house. Every now and then he plowed our parados with a rifle bullet. Once we caught a glimpse of him at a front window.

"That gives me an idea," remarked Shane, coming out of his coma, "for testing the power of No. 4 shotgun shells. Will they break a window pane at a hundred and forty yards?"

Rickshaw thought they wouldn't. Kemp thought they would. With me it was a tossup. I wouldn't have bet a nickel either way. Shane aimed over the lip and fired.

"The glass didn't crash," he reported. "Don't know whether I cracked it or not."

"My pumper," said Price of Dakota, "has an extra long barrel. I had it made

to order for prairie chickens. Also, these shells are the best I ever handled in my hardware store. Let me try."

Price fired at one of the front windows of the house. We heard the crashing of glass.

"One might not be able to kill at the range," remarked Shane, "but he could certainly sting a man's nose. I wonder," he added, "why that dumb rifleman don't do his stuff from the second floor. That would give him the advantage of elevation and a whole lot better angle; he could sure make us flatten out against his side of our pit."

Ten minutes later the man in the house himself thought of this advantage. There came a shot from the second floor window. The incident made us crowd to the houseward side of our hole. In such position we were screened, with the penalty of less freedom. We could no longer loll all over our refuge as before.

"Hey, Chick!"

It was a voice shouting from the duck blind down by the inlet.

We listened intently and heard Chick reply from the upper story of the house.

"Whatta you say, Ike?"

"Shoot from the roof, Chick," yelled Ike.

From the roof. That would make the sniper's angle of fire more dangerous than ever.

"Quick!" cried Shane. "We got to build a higher parapet on the house side."

He was tugging at the heavy copper chest. This, fortunately, was as if made for the purpose. Certainly it was bullet proof. Its foot of height would effectively and solidly reinforce our parapet. So the five of us heaved mightily, dragging, lifting, shoving. The chest was, as observed, as heavy as if filled with lead—or gold.

But we got it up there. We shoved it on to the pile of loose dirt on the side toward the house. None too soon, either, for the rifle began spitting at us from the roof and bullets thudded down into the far side of our hole. We had to flatten on the houseward slope and draw up our legs for safety.

Price was peering around one end of the copper chest.

"Chick's up there, all right," he reported. "Got out through a ventilation trap, I suppose. A wonderful target, and here's where a bee stings his nose."

Price stuck out his pump gun and fired six times upward at an angle of nearly thirty degrees. I was looking around the other end of the chest. I saw the rifleman slap at his cheek, then at his neck. I heard him curse. Immediately he climbed down out of sight through a trap in the roof.

A few minutes later we saw him run out from behind the house. Keeping well out of range, he scurried down to the anchorage. His two companions came out of the duck blind and conferred with him. Chick the rifleman was pointing our way, talking excitedly. We knew that it was because of the now exposed copper chest.

"It's whetted their lust," said Shane. "Until now they could only guess we had it. They see it now—pirate loot! Here it lies under the sun, in plain view. Criminy, how their fingers must itch!"

"Yeh, this scrap ought to get hot from now on," agreed Rickshaw.

"One of those three men walks with a limp," I told Shane. "Beyond doubt the trio who murdered Cranders. Another's squatty and fat. Chick the rifleman is built along the lines of our friend Rickshaw."

"What are they cooking up?" wondered Kemp.

"The lame man seems to be boss," I said. "He's talking fast, both with his mouth and hands, obviously giving instructions."

WE WERE not kept long in ignorance as to the nature of these instructions. The lame man returned under the blind and opened up on us with a hail of bullets. We ducked back. In a moment Price, wearing Rickshaw's helmet, peeped and

said that Chick and Fatty were walking toward the house. Chick still had his rifle.

"They've stopped just under the walnut tree," announced Price. "They're chewing the rag. Fatty points toward one of the pecan trees. Chick shakes his head. Ouch!"

Price slid down among us, wailing. One of the machine gun bullets had nicked his ear.

"You get it, don't you?" exclaimed Shane. "They're going to shoot down on us from the top limb of a tree. Fatty suggested a pecan. That would provide a more branchy perch and nearer to us. But Chick shook his head. He had his nose tickled once, and the pecans are even nearer than the house. He prefers the walnut, which is about the same distance as the house. Let's see."

Shane put on the helmet and went up to the lip. He reported that Fatty was now trying to climb the walnut tree.

"But he can't make it. He's not built for climbing a twenty-four inch bole. It's too big for the circumference of his embrace. Now Chick's trying it. Chick, with his long arms and legs, is having better luck. But no, he slides back. He can't climb and pack the rifle at the same time. Let's shift this chest a foot or so, fellows."

We shifted the chest a little more to the southwest, placing it squarely between us and the walnut. Even at that the situation was ticklish. We knew we could hardly screen more than our heads and shoulders from a marksman in the topmost branch of that lofty walnut.

"Chick and Fatty are in conference," said Kemp who was now spying out. "Now Fatty is legging it down to the boat. What's he after? Oh, yes, a coil of rope. What the heck does he want with a coil of rope?"

This was easily understood. Chick wanted the rope, of course, in order to pull up the rifle after he had, unembarrassed by it in climbing, ascended into the tree. We now saw him tie one end of the rope to his left ankle. He left the rifle with Fatty. Then Chick began climbing, slowly but surely, up the huge bole of the tree.

Fatty paid the rope out as he ascended. Chick drew it after him with his foot.

"Price," said Pat Shane, "loan me that long barreled pumper of yours. Load it with six of those superfine shells you were bragging about. I'm going hunting for blackbirds."

"What's your idea?" I asked.

"My idea," he responded, "is that we'll be shot to pieces if we don't draw first blood. It may be only a pin point of blood. At the same time a man slapping at a sting on his cheek is mighty likely to lose his balance and fall out of a tree."

Rickshaw was now reporting.

"Chick," he said, "is now at the crotch of the first bough. He's resting there a moment. Now he's going on up. Away on up. It won't be long now, boys. He's got to go high; if he don't, he won't be any better off than he was on the roof. The bole is smaller now. He's climbing fast. There's a top limb about fifteen feet higher than the house. He's making for it. He's got one hand on it. He's got a leg over. He's astride it. He's reached down to his rope. He's pulling up the rifle, hand over hand, just as he'd pull a bucket up out of a well."

"Let me take a crack at him," said Shane grimly.

He went to the lip, and we saw him take aim at an angle of nearly thirty degrees upward. The machine gun was rattling, but Shane's face was protected in that direction by the copper chest. Bullets, propelled by the lame gunner down at the duck blind, struck dirt all around the chest.

For some reason Shane held his fire. The suspense was too acute for me, so I crawled up to see what was going on. Chick, I observed, was indeed pulling up the rifle hand over hand. As he did so, he coiled the slack of rope on the spread of the branch beside him. Up came the weapon, slowly but surely to the grasp of Chick.

He was a man spurred by lust, for here

lay the treasure chest before his very eyes. More than that, he was spurred by malice for, while on the roof, his cheeks had been stung raw with bird shot. Thus, as he sat astride that high walnut bough, I could see that he was nervously eager to get the rifle and do for us all. So eager, in fact, that he had either forgotten or neglected to remove the rope end which was tied to his own left ankle.

Fatty was there on the ground, shouting advice. The lame man in his pill box was still keeping up that infernal racket so remarkably like that of a pneumatic riveter, or a steam drill. And Chick was high in the tree, pulling up the rifle, allowing the slack of rope to coil on the spread of branch beside him. Such was the disposition of the enemy forces when Shane fired his pump gun six times, as fast as he could pull the trigger.

There was a scream. I could see Chick up there, wavering on his perch and clawing at his face. He lurched, lost his balance, fell. As he fell, he shrieked again. Down he came. He was forty-five feet from the ground; I thought surely he would break his neck.

But he did not. He only fell a third of the distance. He came to a stop with a jerk, head down, in mid-air.

I rubbed my eyes, staring at him. The lame gunner in the pill box must have been staring in like consternation, for his firing ceased. There hung the gangling Chick, head down. Somehow his tangle of slack had caught on the irregularities of the spreading branch on which he had coiled it. There had been paid out to his fall but a scant five yards of its length.

He hung now, thirty feet above the ground, by his left ankle. He was screaming, fighting the air, trying to bend upward. That he collapsed helplessly with every such effort seemed an indication that the jerk of the fall had broken, or wrenched so painfully that it was useless, a bone in his left leg.

All five of us, in excitement, began jumping up and down in our pit. Fatty was still shouting impotent advice up into the tree. I could hear profane cries from the lame gunner at the inlet. It was all a most utter confusion. I saw that the lame man had left his pill box, was limping back and forth, shouting to Fatty.

"Get him down, dammit, get him down!"

But Fatty couldn't get him down. He made a ridiculous effort to climb the tree, ascended three feet and then slid back.

"Dammit, get him down!" bawled the lame man, almost choking with rage.

Rickshaw began peppering bird shot down his way and he limped back into the blind.

But in a moment his head appeared through the willow roof of it; he bawled again to Fatty—

"Get him down, dammit, or else—" He said no more, but pointed with his finger.

He did not point toward us, not toward the dangling victim, but out across the Mississippi River. And now we all saw that which we had failed to see because we had been so utterly engrossed.

Close to the Missouri shore, in the channel, was a steamboat. It was moving downstream very slowly. It seemed to me that it had almost stopped. It did stop. Not only that, but there came three sharp blasts from its whistle.

CHAPTER XI

TREASURE

AHAIL! What else could be the significance of the whistles? I snatched my binoculars and trained them out across the river.

There, on the distant deck, as I focused with palsied fingers, I saw the figure of a man in white, with a vizored cap. Something in the shape of a cylinder was at his eye, extended horizontally our way. A telescope! What was he seeing? What but this grotesque tableau of the walnut? The same which another river captain had seen on a day long gone by—with the exception that this pirate was dangling, kicking, swinging, head downward.

Shane's voice came to me as from afar off.

"What happens has happened and will happen again."

Five minutes later the steamer was lowering a small boat. Ten minutes later Fatty and the lame gunner had loaded their machine gun, and were off in their own motor boat. They made speed, angling away downstream to miss the crew which was approaching from the steamboat. Eleven minutes later Shane, Kemp, Rickshaw, Price and I were taking turns trying to climb a walnut tree.

Whatever the villainy of the dangling Chick, we had no stomach to leave him in his present misery. He was still dangling from the tree by the bone of a wrenched or broken ankle. The blood was to his head. He had almost ceased to kick.

We now discovered that men ten years removed from gymnastic effort can not climb the bole of a twenty-four inch tree. In turn we failed. The day had, in fact, taken a mighty toll of our strength and nerves. As Rickshaw expressed it, we were all shot to pieces. Shane got the farthest up that tree, but even he slid back after an ascension of ten feet.

There came racing to us six rivermen, a captain and five deck hands. They were fresh and they knew how to climb. The most agile of them shinned up that walnut like a monkey. Perched on the loftiest limb, he untangled the slack of rope, paying it out, lowering to us the human pendant which swung from its extremity.

Chick was barely conscious when he struck the ground. Shane explained that he was one of three men wanted for the murder of a certain Cranders and that the other two had just escaped in a boat. A report to Darrow's Landing authorities was imperative. We prevailed upon the steamboat captain to deliver Chick there, Kemp and Rickshaw going along with them to make full report.

Price, Shane and I remained on the island.

We were three men with but a single mind. We did not need to speak our purpose as we began searching about the environs for something in the way of a stout metal tool.

I found an old pinch bar. Shane discovered an old ax with a tape bound handle.

With these we attacked the lock on the copper chest of Horatio Darrow.

Did we live a hundred lives each, I'm sure we could never again experience such intense suspense as prevailed at the moment the battered lid finally creaked open.

Nor, reversely, could we ever know again such poignant disappointment as that which prevailed when we saw what lay beneath. There was a shallow tray to the chest. On it lay no single coin of gold. Gold or silver was not there. No single dollar of money, or ounce of plate, was exposed on the tray of Darrow's chest.

A pair of crossed dueling swords! Exactly fitting from each corner to opposite corner, lay a sword. Two swords in all, crossed. After all this extravagant battling and bickering for Darrow's treasure, it seemed now that we were sold out.

It was Shane who recalled to us the significance of a cross.

"A cross within a cross!" he exclaimed. "X marks the spot! We have not yet explored the lower regions of the chest."

He took out the crossed swords, which were bound rigidly in an X by a sheet of chamois. I remembered that a similar chamois skin had been found in the butt of Darrow's pistol.

"Maybe this one has further instructions," said Shane, and he unwound the chamois, unrolled it, spread it before our eyes. My pulse began to pound again when I saw writing, burned writing, closely lettered in an epistle of some length.

The message was none too distinct, but Shane finally deciphered its heading. He read it:

"To George Zanzibar, Dog and Murderer, Vile & Illiterate Scavenger of Earth & Spawn of Hell."

"Whewee!" exclaimed Price. "I take it that Darrow didn't like this guy, Zanzibar."

"They were rivals and arch enemies," I explained. "Zanzibar was tried for Darrow's murder, though he proved an alibi. They were opposite types, Darrow styling himself a gentleman while Zanzibar was a low life villain of the most primitive type."

Shane now proceeded to read aloud the text of Darrow's message to Zanzibar:

> "Thrice, on dark nights, you have tried to kill me, Zanzibar. When you succeed, Oh vilest of the vile, it is my will that you find this copper chest. I may depend that you will strip away my pistols. These in turn should lure you to the X which marks the spot.
>
> "Then may you hang on the highest hill, Zanzibar, after first begging the hangman to translate for you this message. For you, ignorant felon, can neither read nor write."

Shane paused, scratching his jaw in perplexity.

"All I can make of it," he commented slowly, "is that Darrow taunts Zanzibar for being illiterate."

Price and I were tugging at the tray. It was stuck, and for a minute or so baffled our efforts to dislodge it. My mind was in a fog and quite unable to cope with the motives of this pirate, Darrow. If he had hated Zanzibar, why should he have guided him to this chest?

Now, with a final heave, Price and I brought up the tray. We cast it aside, exposing that which lay beneath.

Again here was no gold, or coin, or plate, or plunder. We gaped. The whole thing was getting more topsy-turvy all the while. Only one thing was explained and that was why the chest had been so heavy.

As heavy as lead, or gold—or books!

Here were books, old dog-eared books! Here lay what must have been the library of fiction with which Darrow had whiled away his solitude on Mystery Island.

Books! There seemed to be about four score of them. A later count, indeed, proved the number of volumes to be eighty-seven. Books!

"Darrow's idea of taunting the illiteracy of Zanzibar!" suggested Shane. "He wanted to enrage and embitter Zanzibar, leave him gold which would turn dross within his mouth. Perhaps bring him to the gallows for a fruitless crime."

All I could say was:

"Well, it's tough luck for the disabled war vets. I'd set my heart on handing them a pot o' gold."

By now Shane had gouged out, at random, four of the old books.

"I'm rather curious," he said, "to learn Darrow's taste in literature. Humph!" He flipped a few leaves and then added, "Here's one that's pretty well known—Prescott's 'Conquest of Peru'."

"A work naturally interesting to a scholarly pirate," I commented.

"Quite so," agreed Shane. "And here's one by Victor Hugo. It's in French. '*Le Dernier Jour d'une Condamné*'. Oh, yes, I've read it. In English it means, 'Under Sentence Of Death'. It's a famous argument against capital punishment."

"Naturally again," commented Price, "the pirate Darrow, himself fated to be hanged, would be interested in a book like that."

I was watching Shane's expression. It had become eager. His eyebrows arched and he began flipping pages rapidly.

"And these," he went on, referring to the other two books he had brought out at random from the chest, "are a couple of first class sea yarns. Again we may justify the taste of Captain Darrow, himself an old seaman. Here's one, 'The Red Rover' by James Fenimore Cooper. Here's another, the greatest sea story of all time, 'Moby Dick' by Herman Melville. By Jehosaphat, men! These books are as rare as a rajah's pearls!"

"Rare?" I exclaimed. "Why, they're common enough. You can get them in any public library."

"Can you?" countered Shane, smiling queerly. He was trembling. I saw him moisten his lips, and then flip more pages of the book he held. "Can you?" he repeated. "You could get them in not more than three libraries of the civilized

world, Eddie. And if you did find them, you'd need a real pot of gold before they'd let you cart 'em away. This Hugo volume was published in 1829. A first edition or my grandfather was a Swede! Gee!" He went on, "This 'Moby Dick' was published in 1851! The Cooper volume in 1828! 'Conquest of Peru', 1847! First editions or my old man was a Dutchman! Gold, did you say, Eddie? Gold!"

"I don't make you," complained Price. "What about gold? I don't see even a Buffalo nickel."

Shane sank limply to the edge of the chest.

"Listen, cheap skates," he explained, "you're as ignorant as that bimbo Zanzibar. Here are four-score books that would make the eyes of every book collector in the world pop out a foot. Gold? Gold, did you say? Why, were this chest packed with bullion, it wouldn't buy, on a cash auction market, even ten of the more rare of these books! Announce them, Eddie, and they'll swamp you with fabulous bids, cabled from London and where not."

We saw it finally. He convinced us. Staggering though the thought, here lay the greatest treasure ever buried by Christian or pirate.

We began taking out the books, one by one. Eagerly we examined the title pages for the dates of publication. Naturally no date could be later than 1858, the year of Darrow's death. They were all old, rare and, as we now realized, precious.

We gloated, for after all the disabled war vets were to get a bountiful gift.

"But here's one," I told Shane and Price, "that I'm going to keep." I was handling a manuscript which wasn't even bound.

"What is it?" asked Shane.

"It's in long hand," I answered, "and by Horatio Darrow. It seems to be a book that he wrote himself, and never succeeded in getting published. It's painfully amateurish," I added, after scanning some of the text. "It's a typical effort of a literary novice. It concerns some adventure that Darrow had in his younger days as a sailor in the Indian Ocean."

Shane laughed delightedly.

"That makes me like him better than ever," he crowed. "Sort of reduces him to a human being. He was like all the rest of us—if we'd only confess—with a literary skeleton hidden shamefully in his closet. By the way, Eddie, what did Darrow call his book?"

I turned back to the first page and read aloud the caption—"Mystery Island."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

THE flying snake again; and for more romantic speculation, the tailed man of Borneo!

Philadelphia, Pa.

Your comments on Mr. W. A. Posey's letter and the contents of one from the lady in the Philippines were interesting enough for me to stop and read twice; then I decided to horn in whether welcome or not.

The green "snake" with the wings and the "snake" that grows in sections may both be the result of a natural mistake. Both parties should look at their specimens and ascertain whether they have eyelids or not, as snakes do not have them but lizards do. Further we might ask the question, "When is a snake not a snake?" The answer, no doubt would be, "When it has limbs, then the snake is a lizard." Now if I don't go further, some one would question my next paragraph, therefore I must add that although no snakes have legs some lizards have two or none!

THE "snake" that grows in sections and breaks apart to order is the glass "snake", a legless lizard found in our southern and eastern states. This queer reptile is constructed so that when an enemy grasps the tail the slightest twitch will part the section from the rest of the body, although their ordinary movement isn't as a rule slight, for they wriggle and twist in every manner. They say that Nature provides for all things and remarkably, so in this case: not only can it slip away from its enemies by parting company with its hind member, but the parted section wriggles and twists just as fast as when connected with the body, thereby giving the main portion time to escape in the grass. Not satisfied with this Nature further provides by causing a new tail to grow! While it is never just as good as the old, it becomes quite long and serviceable if given time.

The, by now, famous flying "snake" is possibly the flying dragon of the (lizard) genus Draco. Have counted twenty-one species in the British Museum Catalogue but suppose there are many more not

listed. About ten of the twenty-one range into the P. I. and half that number found only in the Islands. The Philippines correspondent describes it rather well, although the flying part does not seem right, as this lizard is said to use its wings only after the manner of the flying squirrels, etc.—that is, to help them glide from heights downward. But most lizards are so fast that with the wings outspread and the rapid side to side motion, one is bound to think they are using the wings for locomotion. They are said to glide as much as twenty yards. It certainly would be interesting to know for sure that the cat in the experiment died of the lizards' natural poison or from a toxin caused by the decaying of the dead lizards. It is not listed as poisonous (only three poisonous lizards known—the two beaded lizards of our southwestern States and a near relative said to exist in Burma.

SURELY would like to get a live flying dragon, in fact could use a dozen or so and would be glad to pay the freight on same and something to boot. This goes for any living thing found in out-of-the-way places (if the Editor permits this paragraph, will add my cable address is "Foehljr" Phila).

Has any one seen or heard of the *tailed* man of Borneo? Have a very good reason to believe they exist, and as the tale has been told to me I think they are not on the mainland but on an island somewhere between Borneo and the Philippines.

In closing might add that as long as we are not taught snakology (correct name Herpetology) in school and the majority must depend on fakirs (or fakers) for their information, it is always well to cross your fingers while listening.—A. FOEHL, JR.

AS YOU know, it has always been our policy to refrain from printing letters in praise of the magazine, except in certain special cases; and then not as "fan" letters, but because the praise has bearing on the rest of the communication in question. On the other hand, we have never hesitated, whenever the subject seems of general interest and the exceptions taken well founded, to publish letters of adverse criticism, no matter how severe.

Obviously then, our practise is a little one sided. Diffidence carried to an extreme, perhaps. However, we here in the office are somewhat sustained by the knowledge that the letters of approbation far outnumber the others. And that the majority of those readers who have us over the coals most unsparingly are really attached to our magazine by more than a casual reader's bond. Both kinds of letters are of course welcome, always; but I'm not going to be so hypocritical as to deny we find it easier to sympathize with you when you tell us how fine you find our pages.

ALL of which prefaces a complaint that was recently sent in with regard to the "Ask Adventure" department. Any one at all familiar with our magazine must be aware of the splendid work it has been carrying on for many years. Quietly, efficiently, and with the distinctly personal viewpoint that eliminates all the red tape cluttering up the ordinary "questions and answers" bureau.

It is this personal viewpoint I wish to speak about, for if the A.A. service has any unique quality, it is this one. When you write for information to one of our experts, you know you're going to come in contact with a man; not with an encyclopedia or a question answering automaton. Not only does the expert try to give you the best advice he can, but the most *friendly* advice he can. Which makes it, it seems to me, decidedly more valuable.

Now and again a correspondent will outline to an expert a project he has in mind. He will ask how to go about executing it. That it may be impractical, that to the expert it may sound even grossly idiotic (as conductor of the department in the past, I've read more than one which deserved no milder characterization) does not enter his mind.

What is the expert to do? Shall he give the man the bare measure of advice the man thinks he needs? Or ought he to go further and tell him honestly just what he's up against if he goes through with it? Tell him, if need be, that he's contemplating something that's foolish on the face of it?

The latter doubtless may seem presumptuous to the correspondent, but I think you will agree with me it is more in the spirit of the service, and of the magazine. After you've read the following notes, it would be interesting to hear some other opinions on the subject.

For obvious reasons, I am omitting the reader's name. I make use of this particular letter because it is representative of the sort we receive occasionally about the advice of other experts.

I have received an answer from Mr. Spears and I don't think much of it. What I object to was that he "hated to answer questions like mine" because of the hazard connected with it. I believe he mentioned a 100-1 chance.

Now what I want to know is why it is any of his darn business whether or not I get there or not. I have to pass out some time and I would just as leave be eaten by a nice fish as I would by worms. He referred me to other parties for information, thus sidestepping the whole thing entirely and leaving him a clear sheet if I did fail to show up.

Do you suppose that if I write to these other men they will moralize upon my chances of being washed out or tell me what I want to know? I know you are a very busy man, but damn it, when a man asks a question, he expects an answer, not something else. Anything you may have to say will be appreciated, and the Camp-fire might have a few thoughts on whether a man can take his own neck in his hands or not.

This letter, when sent on to Mr. Spears, evoked from him the following reply:

Inglewood, Cal.

About Mr. ————: I'm enclosing the questions and answers. Sorry he felt hurt. You can see my predicament. A girl wanted to leave the country near Rochester, N. Y., "to work on a ranch—17 years old—having a hard time in High School". I *couldn't* let her go! Two who started down the Missouri, Ft. Benton, were overturned by a ferry-cable —lost everything. Four boys left St. Louis, two died, one crippled for life; the fourth came back—for more! Bad water, typhus. One man wanted to go down Salmon River, Idaho in a canoe. Canyons, rapids, waterfalls—my memory of that wandering water!

I have myself been through the mill—river sucks, sunk in mud, caught by tornadoes (two), faced river rats with a double barreled shotgun, missed the wing dam jumps at Muscle Shoals by less than twenty feet, and have paralleled Feud and Moonshine country highways because warned against bushwhackers (left one place cross-lots through the woods because of a gang laying for me, thinking I was a Federal or Pinkerton).

I give fair warning—that's all!

EVERY once in a while somebody wants to make the Grand Canyon in a CANOE! Boys want to trap Northwest—never slept outdoors over night, even in summer.

My notion of the outdoors is—education. I lay stress on the "working library" for the would-be adventurer. I'm sure sorry to hurt any of the feelings, but the inquiries have to run the gamut of human frailty, error and poor judgment, when they come to me. ————'s project of dropping down the Illinois, Mississippi, going down the South American Coast, "around the Horn" to Australia in a "35 or 40 foot cruiser" is something I'd rather dream about than do! —RAYMOND SPEARS

I AM glad at this time to call your attention to the Buddy Poppy campaign of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The flowers are made by disabled veterans, and the entire proceeds go toward the support and amelioration of the lives of the men invalided in the war.

You can not contribute to a better cause. Wear a V.F.W. Buddy Poppy on Memorial Day!

AT THE last Camp-fire I said we'd let Comrade L. P. Holmes have the last word in our pistol shooting controversy. But both camps—the old-timers and the modern experts—refuse to disarm. Here are two more typical letters:

Pocatello, Idaho

When I read the article in the Camp-fire of the March 15th issue by Dr. Carl W. Wahrer I was exceedingly pleased. He "told 'em" several things about hand guns. Also his readers should remember that he is the best or one of the best all around pistol shots in the United States. One might as well include the world in that and be done with it.

Continental pistol shooting is termed "free pistol" style; it is all slow deliberate fire, and the French and Italians are past masters at it, always beating the Americans. Bear in mind however that a pistol shot like Dr. Wahrer is just as good on rapid and timed fire shooting as he is at slow fire, that he has no "dolled" up arms with set or hair triggers or sights further apart than ten inches. He is undoubtedly a much better all around pistol shot than any Continental slow fire artist.

I AM enclosing an article from a magazine whose veracity is beyond doubt describing triggerless slip guns and their use, and giving you two pictures of them. But we must not forget that this type of triggerless gun is a very recent development, and its refinements make it far superior to any old gun of the "bad man" days which might or might not have had the trigger removed.

There lives in this town a man of the old West who is 66 years old. He owns and uses an old Colt Single Action revolver on which he has removed the hammer notches and bound the trigger back to the rear of the trigger guard. He might as well have re-

moved the trigger as he never uses it. He also happens to be my father-in-law.

In shooting with him I find that I can shoot eight shots from an automatic while he is shooting six shots with his hammer alone, and my eight shots are more accurately placed and better grouped than his six. I can not fire as rapidly as he with a revolver using it single action but I can keep up with him double action. His shooting and my double action shooting would be very fatal for a man no further away than twenty or thirty feet.

DR. WAHRER is absolutely correct: the remarkable shooting of the famous characters of the old West is mostly all bunk. Modern pistol shooters with their wonderful arms of today are far superior to those of the old West. At the National Matches of 1929 two Portland, Oregon policemen shot ten shots at a man sized target at THREE HUNDRED yards, making seven hits, five of which would have been fatal to a man. Think that over. They used Colt Officers' Model revolvers with special rear sights for the .38 S&W special cartridge. You can get full particulars of this shooting by writing the Peters Cartridge Co., and if any man thinks Wild Bill, or Billy the Kid or any of the old-timers could have done that there is something the matter with his "thinker".

NOW another thing. You have two writers, Major Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson and Ared White, who know their stuff about small arms. When either of these two men use small arms in their stories they make no slips and show that they know their guns and how to use them. It gives me a terrible pain to pick up a magazine and read of some gent in a gun fight with a revolver who empties it and promptly recharges it with the extra magazines in his pocket ! ! !

A revolver is always a revolver and not an automatic pistol. While the term pistol is used more or less indiscriminately, a pistol is really a weapon with one barrel and one chamber containing only one charge and a mechanism suitable to discharging it. An automatic pistol has only one barrel and only one chamber and its cartridges are fed into the chamber by the recoil from magazines inserted in the handle. A revolver is a weapon with one barrel having a chamber which revolves and contains usually six cartridges which are fired consecutively by turning the chamber either by cocking the piece with the hammer for each shot, called single action, or revolving the chamber by the trigger alone which is double action.

ANOTHER thing that burns me up is to read of some gallant bird with an automatic pistol in his pocket empty it at his foes, *keeping it in his pocket all the time.* True enough, the man's pocket will burn, but don't try this without being extremely careful or you will have a terribly lacerated thumb from the recoil of the slide. But I wish somebody would try it, because he would find out that he can fire only one or two shots. Either the empty shell will fail to be ejected because of the folds of his pocket and will be thrown back into the pistol and jam it; or the folds of the cloth will catch in the slide of the pistol and jam it.

Now that this is all off my chest I believe I will feel better. This is the first time I have written to the Camp-fire after the fifteen years I have read *Adventure* and suffered in silence while some of your authors have pulled off their wild six-gun stuff.

—C. C. ANDERSON

And the second from William Wells, whose own history goes back quite a bit:

Sisters, Oregon

It's quite a long time since I stepped out into the light but this talk that Coteau Gene and the rest are making about the old time gunmen is interesting and I must take a hand.

Dr. Wahrer of Sacramento is away off in what he says in the last issue of *Adventure*, his viewpoint being that of the expert target shot and his knowledge of the frontier gunmen rather slight.

As for me, I was around Hays, Dodge and Wallace in the old days more than fifty years ago. I've seen Bat Masterson promenading along the sidewalk at Dodge, a doubled barreled shotgun in the crook of his arm, looking for a gent who had declared his intention of seeing Bat planted. And for twenty years I saw plenty gunplay all over the West.

THE frontier code was rather strictly lived up to—give the other guy a chance, then beat him on the draw. It was speed that counted, and the doctor, or any other target shot, would have had no chance, no matter how straight he could shoot, if he was not fast.

And those gunmen practised speed all the time. Accuracy did not matter so much, because most gun fights took place at short range—under twenty feet, sometimes under ten.

The doctor rather makes fun of the fellow who says that he could fan bullets from the hip into a man sized target, close up, at high speed. What good would it do to be able to hit an opponent anywhere you wanted to if the other guy slammed three or four forty-five slugs into you first? Kind of spoil your aim, wouldn't it?

AND the doctor is wrong when he says that most of the killings were done by small weapons concealed in a sleeve or otherwise. That's all bosh. It is true that many of the professional gamblers, careful of the fit of their fine clothing, did not wear belt weapons but had derringers—short barreled, big bore, single shot pistols—in a vest pocket or up a sleeve. This was considered all right, because a gambler sitting at a table would be at a disadvantage if some disgruntled player went on the war sudden, jumped up and whipped out a gun.

Otherwise it was Colonel Colt, worn in a well oiled scabbard and tied low on the thigh where the hand came to the butt naturally, and speed on the draw.

THE doctor compares the frontier gunmen with those of the city killers of today, but as far as I know these last shoot from ambush or jam the muzzle of the weapon into the victim's ribs and that didn't go in the old days—stand up and take your medicine. Tom Horn, and a whole lot more that never got their names in the papers tried this ambush stunt but didn't last long.

Of course the modern weapons are more accurate than those of fifty years ago, but they were plenty accurate for what was required of them, and men don't shoot at each other from a machine rest.

The cartridges for the .44 and .45 Colt frontier model had altogether too much powder—threw too high. Cut the powder charge to twenty grains and they shot much straighter and hit plenty hard enough, and lots of the boys did this.

The .38s and .41s in the .45 frame were better but of course didn't shock as hard.

The cap-and-ball Colt could be made to shoot very straight by experimenting until you had just the right powder-charge and by using a conical bullet heavier than the round ones usually shot.

OF COURSE, all these yarns of how straight Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill and the rest shot are just hot air, and Wild Bill was probably the worst of the professional killers to take a shade the advantage of an opponent.

Another thing, whisky caused three-fourths of the killings, women another large proportion, and when a man is crazy from drink or jealousy he is not at his best in a shooting scrape, whereas the professional killers had to keep fairly sober or climb the golden stair.

A GOOD many gunmen took the triggers from their guns, filed the notches from the hammers, and so on.

Shooting from the hip, either "fanning" or thumbing the hammer, was common, it being considered safer to hit an opponent several times quickly than to wait for a more certain aim. And when anybody talks of a gunman shooting an opponent between the eyes, grin—it just wasn't done. A bullet or two through the body, low down, was plenty and lots easier to do. —WILLIAM WELLS

GOOD fellows, these "Hams". Without doubt many members of Camp-fire already belong.

New York City

Reading of the White-Kruse-Schindler radio controversy in Camp-fire leads me to wonder if possibly the following dope on radio might be of some value to the Camp-fire members?

There is in existence today a world wide fraternity of good fellows known collectively as Radio Amateurs, individually as "Hams", and in their respective countries by organization names, here in the U. S. as the American Radio Relay League and by similar names in foreign countries.

The "big idea" of this gang is two-way communication by means of radio, dots and dashes as well as voice being used. For practise and because they're all good fellows these "Hams" forward, *absolutely free of any cost*, hundreds of messages every day. These messages are collected from neighbors, tourists, travelers, members of expeditions or any one who wishes to take advantage of the service. No guarantee of delivery is made, but the percentage is very high.

TO DATE every expedition that has carried a radio outfit has depended upon the Amateur to put through messages to the folks at home. Almost every Motion Picture outfit that leaves Hollywood today has an Amateur with a portable outfit as part of the equipment. And this same service is available to each and every member of Camp-fire whether at home or in most any foreign country known.

A glance through the "Call Book" which lists the various stations throughout the world shows the Amateur active in every civilized country, about fifteen thousand in the United States and in lesser numbers in the other parts of the world, such places as New Caledonia, Sarawak or Uganda showing only one or two listed.

That's all. The adventurer in distress or one who wants to send a message need but scout around a bit and he'll find a "Brass Pounder Ham" who will gladly do his stuff for him.

73 (A Ham's "Good luck")

—H. E. HURLEY

SEVERAL readers have written in to take Comrade Sandy Ramsay to task for some of his remarks in a recent letter to Camp-fire. We are of course always open to the expression of opinion, but with the understanding that if one of us invites a flaying by speaking unguardedly, he be prepared to receive it. For usually he will, and with dispatch.

Most of the letters are from ex-Service men, of which this one, by Benjamin P. Thomas, adjutant of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, is mildest, and at the same time representative.

Camden, New Jersey

After reading the letter from Sandy Ramsay I have been in doubt as to just what I saw while in that bonny Scotland of his during 1918. He gives the impression that but for the Scotch the war would never have been won by the Allies.

If his contention is true, that the 9th Scots had to stand to with fixed bayonets to keep all the other troops in the front lines, how does he account for the fact that the civilian population of the "tight little isle" were actually starving to death in 1918? I know this to be a fact, because I nearly starved to

death along with them. How does he account for the fact that it was as much as an Englishman's life was worth to be caught alone in Scotland?

THE real fact of the matter is that had it not been for the United States Navy, the civilian population would have quite starved to death, and those brave Scots of the 9th, would have had no ammunition or bayonets either, with which to keep the mutineers in the lines.

Don't let any one kid you that Great Britain was mistress of the seas in 1917-18. If you want to go into statistics, look up the record of the troop ships convoyed by the Royal Navy and the ones convoyed by the United States Navy. Ask any one of the soldiers that had a British convoy; ask any merchant captain who had a British convoy. That would make interesting reading for our "comrade" from Glasgow. Ask the men in the United States destroyer division what answer their commander gave to the ranking British officer when he implored that the wireless from the American ships be silenced so that the German ships would not be able to locate the destroyer divisions at sea. Ask any gob who worked out of Queenstown what happened when it came the turn of the British division to go to sea to relieve the American division coming in after two weeks duty in a howling storm.

Hear them tell of the American ships hastily taking on supplies and water and again heading out to sea after the British refused to face the job. Ask the men who patroled the sea lanes of the North Sea out of Killingholme-on-Humber and out of Eastleigh air station what caused the Germans to abandon submarine activities in that area. Ask them who headed the attack on the mole at Zeebruge, which quieted the submarines forever in that vicinity.

THE American soldier has no need to hang his head for any performance in that fracas. Our good friends, the Scots, as well as all the rest of the Allied troops were glad to see the units of the American Army take their places in the lines. It was no secret that the Allied Army (Scots included) were "bled white".

A desperate plea was made to speed up the troop shipments to France—men and more men, was the cry—and America furnished the men, furnished the ships, furnished the munitions, furnished the food which kept life in the bodies of these Scots.

AND speaking of "Cry Havoc", I personally thought that *Adventure* should never have printed that piece of work. The first duty of a story is to entertain and not to horrify. Even war stories should not do that. The misanthrope who wandered through that harrowing tale should have been buried alive by his Creator.

Adventure has been exceedingly fair to authors who have glorified Britain, and we all enjoy a good tale no matter who is the hero, but *Adventure* is primarily an American magazine, no matter how far around the world it travels. Hence we can look to see stories upholding our own in it, which is no more than proper. When we pick up a British made magazine we do not cavil because the preponderance is British. We take it as we find it, with due regard to the proprieties.

MR. RAMSAY has been decidedly unfair to the great bulk of Americans who gave all they had to help win that struggle which was not of their own making. There are men today in our Government hospitals for whom the war will never end. Eyes gone, minds shattered, bodies broken, and all over the country men who have lost the opportunity which they cheerfully gave up in their prime to go over and fight some other man's war. Today they wander the streets unable to secure work. A war veteran today is in the discard, no one has any use for him but his own kind.

The veteran organizations today are taking care of their own comrades who have lost out in the battle of life. They are keeping life in their bodies, and homes over their heads. No, sir! the American soldier, sailor or marine has no cause to feel ashamed of the actions of the American forces in that or any other war, nor since the war.

I am enclosing a copy of this letter so that you can, if you so desire, send it to Mr. Ramsay with the compliments of some of the Yanks who did not have to have the bayoneted rifles of the 9th Scots to keep 'em on the job. —BENJ. P. THOMAS

ABOUT "Cry Havoc" I have little to say except that judging from the comment it aroused, it was one of the most popular novels we have published in recent years. True, the duty of a story is to entertain; but "entertain" may have a less restricted sense than Mr. Thomas seems to apply to it. Why shouldn't a story do more than amuse? Why shouldn't one occasionally really penetrate and stir, and even wound? If only for the sake of variety, and for a truer perspective of things?

Some stories—good ones, too—deal with the superficial man, men as types. Others (and I daresay these are much more likely to leave their mark on us) treat him as a thinking, feeling, acting human individual. *Corporal Thor* is such an individual.—A. A. P.

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Nicaragua Canal

IN SPITE of the active volcanoes along the proposed route, it seems likely that some day the big ditch will be dug.

Request:—"Will you please send me any information you can on the Nicaragua Canal, and oblige?"
—L. M. JOHNSON, Selma, Ala.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The U. S. A. acquired the right to build such a canal a dozen years ago by what is known as the Bryan-Chamorro treaty, proclaimed on June 24, 1916.

That this canal in good time will be built, whatever its cost, is not to be doubted. The construction of this great waterway in spite of the use of the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua might take ten years. It is estimated that by the time this new waterway was ready for the ships of the world the Panama Canal would probably have long since reached its maximum capacity.

The present capacity of the Panama route could be increased considerably by the expenditure of a sum estimated from $150,000,000 to $250,000,000.

The capacity also could be increased by the use of the canal at night.

Nevertheless there are strong arguments, not all of them military, for an early decision to get the Nicaragua project under way in spite of the possible cost of a round billion.

There have been several surveys of feasible routes across Nicaragua for canal purposes. It was in connection with the question of the right to build a canal across Nicaragua that America and Great Britain came into the collision which was terminated for a time by the much abused and very troublesome Clayton-Bulwer treaty.

The terms of the Bryan-Chamorro treaty are these:—The United States pays Nicaragua $3,000,000 and obtains the exclusive right in perpetuity to construct the canal free from taxation, and to build naval bases in the gulf of Fonseca and on Corn Island, on leases for 99 years. The U. S. A. therefore has the sole right to build and to determine the time of building. Here the two countries have an interest in common that ought to solidify their friendly relations. This expression of Nicaraguan opinion is one of the first results of the good will tour of Mr. Hoover.

Building the Nicaragua Canal will be the setting of one of the most daring engineering projects of all time; one in which man must pit his hand against fever, sharks, and the menace of smoking volcanoes when he blasts a waterway across mountains and jungles of Nicaragua from sea to sea.

On an island in Lake Nicaragua not ten miles from the proposed canal route, stands the ever smoking cone of Ometepe, which erupted in 1925. Ten miles south of the lake's lower end, just across the border in Costa Rica, is the ever rumbling volcano, Orosi, and towering over the northern end of Lake Managua, Mount Momotombo threatens the northern route to the Gulf of Fonseca.

Should any of these volcanoes suddenly become violently active, it might result in a billion dollar canal being put out of business in a very few moments.

It would take from 18 to 36 hours to pass through the Nicaraguan Canal as compared with from 5 to 8 hours required for the Panama Canal trip; at the same time it would clip a day's sailing time from New York to San Francisco, Calif., and about 2 days from New Orleans to the West Coast.

Two harbors would have to be built. At Panama two fair harbors already existed, and a railroad was taken over.

The entire Panama route is about 47 miles long; the Nicaragua route is, or proposes to be, 183 miles in length.

These are the facts, and Uncle Samuel must decide whether he is going to tackle this billion-dollar job. Engineers agree that if the work started at once, that the canal would not be ready for ships to pass before 1940, and the question naturally arises, will even an enlarged Panama Canal be equal to the rapidly increasing commerce?

Under date of Aug. 17th, 1928, it was announced that Secretary Wood had ordered a battalion of engineer troops to sail for Nicaragua Oct. 15th, to aid in the survey of the proposed Nicaragua Canal.

Australia

LIVING conditions are much the same as in America.

Request:—"1. Is an American welcome to Australia, and is there opportunity for a young fellow with experience in mechanical and architectural drawing in that country?

2. Are there immigration laws that might hinder my locating there? What are the laws pertaining to this subject?

3. About what would it cost for the trip to Australia from San Francisco? Or would it be possible to work one's way in there from San Francisco or Los Angeles and what would be the best way to attempt it?

4. I have heard that there is no foreign element in Australia, that only white men and Australian natives live there. Is this correct?

5. Are there many American companies there?

6. What are the living conditions there? The climate?"—ALBERT E. DAWSON, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. Alan Foley:—1. An American is quite welcome in this country—much more so than any other class of migrant. The keen business acumen of the average American is appreciated, but there is some little prejudice against the over-boastful type. There are not a great many openings for mechanical and architectural draughtsmen, although for the past twelve months I have noticed many advertisements for experienced mechanical draughtsmen by a newly formed steel and iron corporation of considerable magnitude. A knowledge of draughtsmanship as applied to the iron and steel industries would be essential. If you possess this knowledge something might develope.

2. There are immigration laws but these would not hinder your entry to this country. They are designed to exclude certain undesirable types. For full particulars write to The High Commissioner for Australia, Australia House, Strand, London, England. You will get the information from there quicker than by writing to this country.

3. The approximate fare from San Francisco is £56 (say two hundred and forty dollars). It is sometimes possible to work your passage, but this possibility is rather hazardous and remote as there are so many desirous of so doing.

4. The native (aboriginal black) population of Australia is very small. The white population is almost wholly of British extraction. The policy of the government is to preserve a ratio of ninety-eight per cent. British stock. The remaining two per cent. consist of any class of desirable white men.

5. There are many American companies in this country. All the large motor corporations are represented here, as also are the great majority of the national advertisers who are to be found, for example, in the *Saturday Evening Post*. The policy out here is to build up secondary industries and to do this it is necessary to raise heavy tariff barriers against foreign importations. As a result many overseas companies are now opening factories in this country so that they can manufacture on the spot and so dodge the tariff. This course is greatly welcomed as it insures the influx of capital and the establishment of new and profitable industries.

6. The living conditions are much the same as in your own country. We are well circumstanced as regards climate. The leading capital cities have much the same climate conditions as San Francisco. They are slightly warmer and the rainfall is rather greater. The cost of living is likely to average out much the same as your own. Necessities are cheaper but luxuries are more costly.

Marines

THE DIFFICULTIES besetting a minor orphan without a guardian, who wishes to enlist.

Request:—"I would like some information on getting in the Marines. What seems to be my trouble is my age. I am 19 but they won't let me in without my parents' consent, and when I told them I didn't have any, they said—'Well, your guardian then.' But I haven't got any guardian either. I had no brothers or sisters, and I have been making my own way since my parents have died.

I tried in St. Louis then, but they wouldn't believe me. I have a pretty good education, and would like to take up something in the Marines that would help me later on."

—C. E. OWENSBY, Chicago Heights, Ill.

Reply, by Capt. F. W. Hopkins:—You have presented a very pretty problem, because the law is very specific in requiring the sworn consent of both parents, or of guardian; and also a birth certificate, or affidavit setting forth true date of birth. No

provision is made in the case where there is no living parents and no legal guardian.

Therefore, you will have to provide yourself with a guardian, legally appointed, in accordance with the civil law of the State in which you live.

I am sure this can be done with no expense or unnecessary delay. You will have to select some reputable citizen of the U. S., who is interested in you, and who approves your entry into the Corps; go with him to any magistrate or to the Surrogate Court: and petition the court that he be appointed as your legal guardian. The court will satisfy itself that the person selected is a fit person to be a guardian, and then can make the appointment. The guardian can then give his consent to your enlistment, and after you *are* enlisted, you will come under the rules for the government of the Navy, and his powers of guardianship will be practically ineffective, and when you are discharged you will be 23, and of course of legal age and your guardianship period will have expired.

You are entitled by law to have a legal guardian, as you are a minor and unconnected in the world, and you will find by consultation with a magistrate that the matter may easily be arranged, at no expense, and without the aid of an attorney.

I believe also that the U. S. M. C. Recruiting Officer will be able to administer any oaths in this connection and notarize documents, so that you will not even have to go to a notary.

You will find the Marine Corps pretty full of activity and novelty and plenty of good hard work—but there will be leisure and encouragement for you to take up the splendid Marine Corps Institute Courses, the same as the I. C. S., free of all cost to you, in such subjects as you may choose, that will improve your education and fit you for a more useful life later on.

I am sure that you can make the necessary arrangements toward getting a guardian who will approve your enlistment. A relative, employer, or landlady might serve in this capacity, or storekeeper, or doctor, who knows you in a kindly way.

Pine Cones

IN YOSEMITE they sometimes measure eighteen inches in length.

Request:—"The writer is desirous of obtaining some information regarding pine cones of an extremely large size which grow on some American pine trees.

I have seen them on exhibit in Oakland, California, but had not time to investigate while there. As I am very anxious to procure a few of these cones, which I want for my collection, I would appreciate very much any information you could give me as to where they could be obtained.

I am only in this country as a visitor and would like to take these specimens back home with me."

—ARNO GREINER, Chicago, Ill.

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—The large pine cones come from the sugar pine trees and yellow pine, and are found in our mountains. I have seen them eighteen inches long in the woods near Yosemite, and also in the Sierra Madre Mountains of the south, fifteen miles from Los Angeles. They occur anywhere the pine trees grow. Search in the books of second hand stores for the little book by Chase on "Coniferous Trees of California," which tells how to recognize all kinds of cones and the tree on which they grow. It is the most reliable book on such trees known to me. I believe the largest cones are from the yellow pines. My copy of the book is about thirty miles from me at present, in possession of another person, who appears reluctant to return it to me.

Medal

THE Victoria Cross is an expensive item for the collector.

Request:—"Where can I get and how much will the following medals cost: Victoria Cross; *Croix de Guerre;* Military Medal; D. S. C.; and D. S. O.?"

—WALTER E. MAGNOLIA, Belle Harbor, L. I.

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—A Victoria Cross would cost from two to five hundred dollars; a *Croix de Guerre* could be purchased for two or three dollars; a Military Medal, a D. S. C., and those of a similar nature, would cost from five to fifteen dollars, and a D. S. O. might be from fifteen to forty dollars. If you are interested in acquiring these, I suggest that you communicate with the following firms: Spink & Son, Ltd. 5, 6 & 7 King Street, St. James's, London, S. W. 1, England, or A. H. Baldwin, 4a Duncannon Street, Charing Cross, London, W. C., England.

Rifle

A MURDER indictment which named the wrong caliber for a Winchester Model 73.

Request:—"I was recently a trial juror in a case in which a man was accused of assault to commit murder. The indictment read 'to wit: with a Winchester rifle, caliber .45-60.' Now the weapon used was shown to the jury, and was a Winchester rifle, Model 73. Having some little knowledge of firearms, especially those made by the Winchester people, I am quite sure that the Model 73 was not made for the .45-60 cartridge. If I am not mistaken it was made only for the following cartridges .44-40-200; 38-40-180; .32 and I believe the .22. I may be mistaken, but I submit the question to you. The accused party was found not guilty. If I am right, the indictment was wrong and would not have held in law anyway."

—J. W. BAKER, Douglas, Arizona.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—You are correct in your contention, that the Model 1873 Win-

chester was not made for the .45-60 cartridge, although the Model 1876, a counterpart of the '73 save for size, was so made.

The '76 was made in .40-60-260; .45-60-300; .45-75-350, and .50-95-295. It was merely the '73 built larger and stronger, and with the lower tang part of the receiver, in place of being separate.

I am fortunate in having specimens of both models, and in both rifle and carbine types, and still consider them good arms as well as history-makers.

Custer's Last Stand

CAPTAIN TOWNSEND doubts that a deserter from the Battle of the Little Big Horn still survives — and straightens out an argument on Major Reno and the Seventh Cavalry.

Request:—"We have been having considerable argument in regard to the last fight of General Custer and, if it is possible, would like some answers to questions in regard to same:

1. Is it possible to get a list of names of officers and men who were killed in the fight and where would we be likely to get it?

2. Does the Government consider that fight a battle or a massacre? A contends it was a battle, as the white soldiers were armed and attacked the Indians. B contends it was a massacre, as there were no white survivors.

3. Is it true that the Seventh Cavalry was punished by 50 years of extra drill and fatigue duty because of the loss of that fight?

4. Were any officers of surviving troops punished?

5. In what way were they punished?

6. What was the charge brought against Major Reno?

7. Where was his court-martial held?

8. Were any civilian employees court-martialed; any private soldiers or non-commissioned officers?

9. What was Major Reno's defense and what was the final disposition of his case?

10. I have heard that the Government took away the standards of the Seventh Cavalry immediately after the Custer fight and did not return them until 1926. Is this true? Assuming this to be true, what did the Seventh Cavalry use as standards during the Spanish-American War and the World War? Are there any regiments in the United States Army that ever did lose their colors or standards?

11. Taking that fight as an example. All the men there were of the same regiment; the smaller portion of them went into the battle and fought to the last man; the rest of the men *did not* go to their assistance. Naturally the stigma reflected on the regiment as a whole. Wouldn't the punishment meted out to the balance of the regiment cast reflection on the men who died on the field of battle? Such being the case, it would hardly seem fair to the men who died to take from the regiment their standards.

12. Would the Government recognize any man as a survivor of Custer's battle beside Curley? By that I mean soldiers, not scouts or other civilians but men actually enlisted with Custer's detachment.

13. Did the Government find all the bodies of soldiers known to have gone into the fight?

14. Would the Government know of any man who deserted at the start of the battle? A knows a man living who claims to have been wounded at the start of the engagement and his horse carried him across the river and he was taken care of by two trappers. After he recovered he never reported for duty but kept going; eventually he came here. He claims he is enlisted under an assumed name. I am told that that name appears on the Seventh Cavalry muster roll of that time. Our Post Commander of the American Legion at that time had him talk to our U. S. Senator. Some questions Mr. Summers asked him he answered readily; others he refused to answer. He bears scars of wounds on his body and doctors say they are gunshot wounds.

15. In your opinion, what would be the best book to get in relation to the foregoing?

16. Was the Seventh Cavalry in any of the fighting during the Spanish-American War? The World War?

17. Did Custer still wear his hair long at the battle of the Little Big Horn?"

—HARRY R. DANIELS, Dayton, Washington.

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—1. I do not know where you could now get a complete list of the 265 persons killed in the Battle of the Little Big Horn. There were civilians and Indian scouts as well as officers and enlisted men of the Army. I have never seen a complete list published.

2. I can not speak for the Government except to say that all War Department publications refer to the Custer fight as the battle of the The Little Big Horn—never as a massacre. It is hard to understand how the term massacre has been so often used in this connection. Custer's troops went into the fight fully armed and intending to kill as many of the enemy as they could. The fact that they were killed instead does not make the affair a massacre. Neither does the fact that no quarter was given by the Indians and that all the men under Custer's immediate command were killed. This was in accordance with the Indian custom and one which was followed in too many cases by the whites.

3. No. The 7th Cavalry was not punished.

4. No officers were punished.

5. See above.

6. No official charges were ever brought against Major Reno.

7. He was never court-martialed. He was, at his own request, given a hearing before a court of inquiry at Chicago which exonerated him. A court of inquiry is an entirely different thing from a court-martial. A court of inquiry can not award a sentence of punishment but can only recommend, after hearing evidence, what further official action, if any, is to be taken.

8. No one was court-martialed as a result of the battle.

9. See previous answer.

10. The answer to all of this question is No.

11. See the previous answer.

12. I can not speak for the Government but I assume it would depend upon how strong his proof was. It seems practically certain that there were no survivors of Custer's immediate command at the Little Big Horn. A number of claimants to this distinction have appeared at one time and another, but none has ever been able to prove his claim.

13. It seems likely that some of the bodies of Custer's men were never found and some that were found could not be identified.

14. All available evidence tends to show that every man who went into the fight under Custer's immediate command was killed. See answers to the two previous questions.

15. The latest and probably the best account of the battle is "The Story of the Little Big Horn" by Lieut-Col. W. A. Graham, published by The Century Co., New York, 1926.

16. No.

17. Yes.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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